

Reinterpreting Nomadic Heritage in Permanent Large-Scale Architecture: The Case of Bishkek Arena

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ABSTRACT

In the twenty-first century, national identity is increasingly articulated through large-scale public infrastructure, serving as a strategic platform for nation branding within a neoliberal global order. This paper examines Bishkek Arena as a case study of reinterpreting Kyrgyz nomadic heritage within permanent, capital-scale architecture. The central research question asks how the traditional prototype of the Kyrgyz yurt (boz üy) is transformed when translated into the typology of a stationary mass public facility, and what meanings this transformation may produce in official and architectural representation. Employing a comparative architectural analysis across four dimensions—scale, materiality, structural logic (tündük, uuk, kerege), and temporality—the study identifies a separation between the yurt’s traditional form and its original functional purpose, as documented in available design materials and official sources. The findings suggest a transformation from the yurt as a site of lived heritage and mobile spatial practice toward an institutionalized and engineered megastructure. The paper argues that Bishkek Arena may be interpreted as reflecting a distinct post-Soviet mode of spatial nationalism, in which ancestral symbols are fixed into a permanent architectural landmark. The analysis suggests that the project prioritizes symbolic permanence and international legibility over the original nomadic logic of reversibility, potentially reflecting the state’s broader efforts to monumentalize identity in an era of global representation.

Index Terms—Bishkek Arena (Azattyk Arena), World Nomad Games, yurt (boz üy), nomadic heritage, stadium architecture, post-Soviet identity.

INTRODUCTION

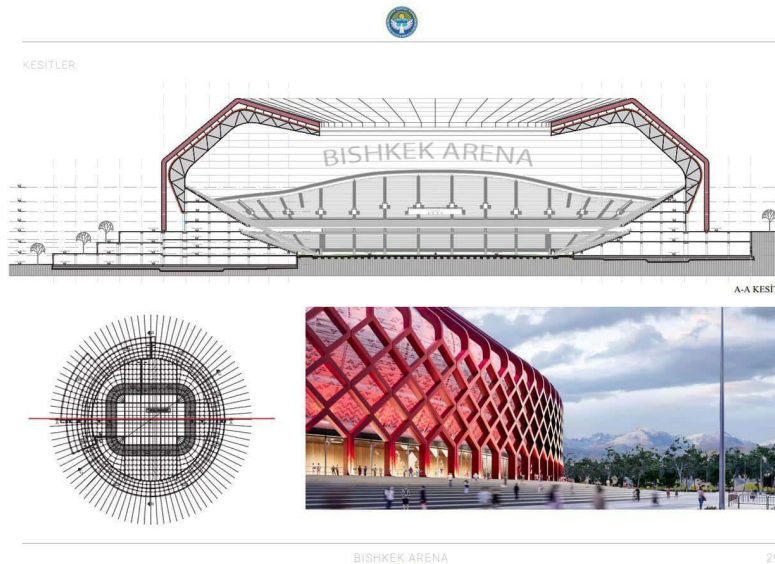


FIGURE 1. DETAILED ARCHITECTURAL FLOOR PLAN AND EXTERIOR FAÇADE RENDERING OF THE BISHKEK ARENA.¹

Following the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, Central Asian states entered an intensive phase of nation-building, during which monumental public architecture became a primary vehicle for visualizing sovereignty and shaping national identity.²³ In this post-Soviet transition, architecture has increasingly functioned to replace Soviet symbolic systems—characterized by standardized functionalism and internationalist aesthetics—with narratives of national continuity. Crucially, this process operates within contemporary neoliberal economic and institutional conditions, where the built environment must satisfy both local ideological needs and global market standards.⁴ In Kyrgyzstan, this transition involves a search for a symbolic and spatial language capable of linking pre-Soviet nomadic heritage—a form of lived heritage historically associated with mobility, reversibility, and non-monumental spatial practices—with modern state priorities of governance, international visibility, and infrastructure-driven modernization.

For many decades, the capital's primary sports venue remained the Dolon Omurzakov Stadium (formerly "Spartak"), a facility reflecting the typological and infrastructural logic of the Soviet period. Over time, however, as global media and international event formats evolved, sport came to be understood as a

¹Sadyr Japarov, "Urmattuu Kyrgyzstandyktar! Borbor Aziyadagy unikalduu eñ choñ futbolduk stadiondun köptön kütkön kurulushu bashtaldy," *Facebook*, April 22, 2024, <https://www.facebook.com/share/1DaKUW6rz/>.

²R. Pomfret, "Central Asia after Two Decades of Independence," in *Economies in Transition: The Long-Run View*, ed. G. Roland (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 400–429.

³L. J. Vale, *Architecture, Power, and National Identity*, 2nd ed. (Routledge, 2008), 112.

⁴B. Anderson, "Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism," in *The New Social Theory Reader*, eds. J. P. Seidman and J. C. Alexander (London: Routledge, 2020), 282–288.

powerful platform for nation branding and cultural representation.⁵ These shifts created a demand for a stadium of a fundamentally different scale, representational status, and regulatory capacity, suited for a state seeking to position itself within a competitive global order.

Within this context, the national stadium project, Bishkek Arena, emerged as one of the most significant sports-related infrastructural developments in contemporary Kyrgyz architecture. The project forms part of a broader wave of state-led symbolic interventions, alongside initiatives such as the presidential complex “Yntymak Ordo” and the proposed “Asman” eco-city development. These projects indicate a strategic transition toward large-scale urban transformations as tools for national representation and international positioning.⁶ Official communication and the project’s association with the 6th World Nomad Games reinforce its role as a representative national space, where nomadic heritage is publicly performed through competitive and media-oriented formats.⁷ The stadium’s peripheral location further situates the project within broader agendas of urban transformation. According to the General Development Plan of Bishkek up to 2050, the city is envisioned to undergo metropolitan growth, with large-scale infrastructure acting as an “urban anchor” capable of restructuring spatial organization beyond the historic core.⁸

A particularly revealing aspect of Bishkek Arena is the incorporation of references to the traditional Kyrgyz yurt (boz üy) within its architectural language. The stadium’s bright red envelope functions as a visual reference to the structural logic of the yurt, translating elements such as the tündük, uuk, and kerege into a symbolic architectural language appropriate to a permanent megastructure. Rather than reproducing vernacular form literally, the project operates through architectural translation, reconfiguring nomadic motifs to function within the representational vocabulary of a contemporary state.⁹

At the same time, this translation introduces a fundamental architectural and cultural tension. The yurt, defined by its mobility and human scale, is here reinterpreted within a typology characterized by permanence, mass occupancy, and infrastructural dependency. While references to nomadic architecture are visually emphasized, the stadium operates according to an industrial logic that stands in contrast to the spatial principles of the lived nomadic dwelling.

Against this background, the central research question of this study asks how the traditional prototype of the Kyrgyz yurt (boz üy) is transformed when translated into the typology of a permanent mass-occupancy facility, and what meanings this transformation may produce in official and architectural representation. As a working hypothesis, the paper argues that yurt-related elements in Bishkek Arena function primarily as mechanisms of cultural identification and international legibility, while the stadium’s structural and operational logic appears to be governed by a separation of the yurt’s traditional

⁵R. Anarkulov, T. Anarkulov, F. Deidieva, and Z. Abdullaeva, “World Nomad Games as a Factor Increasing the Kyrgyz Republic Image,” *Advances in Physical Education* 11, no. 4 (2021): 387–394, <https://doi.org/10.4236/ape.2021.114032>.

⁶Pomfret, “Central Asia after Two Decades,” 405.

⁷A. Sheranova, “Political invention of the World Nomad Games in Kyrgyzstan,” *Kulturní studia*, no. 17(2) (2021).

⁸“Development of Bishkek General Plan,” TAdviser, https://tadviser.com/index.php/Project:Development_of_Bishkek_General_Plan.

⁹A. B. Mamytova, “Traditional dwellings of the Kyrgyz in the 19th – early 20th century,” *International Journal of Experimental Education*, no. 3 (2022): 25–29.

form from its original functional purpose.¹⁰ The study addresses these issues through comparative architectural analysis across four dimensions: scale, materiality, structural functionality, and temporality.¹¹

METHODOLOGY

This study examines the national stadium project, Bishkek Arena, through a qualitative architectural case study approach. This project was selected as a representative example of reinterpreting nomadic heritage within permanent, large-scale architecture due to its national significance and infrastructural scale, and because its architectural concept features explicit yurt-referential motifs, as documented in news articles and records from national football institutions.

Source Selection Criteria

The empirical material for this study consists of published design documentation and visual materials related to the project, including architectural renderings, diagrams, and structural illustrations, as well as publicly available technical descriptions and construction-stage reporting available as of January 2026.¹² These sources are supplemented by official and media documentation addressing the stadium's institutional status and naming,¹³ alongside planning-related materials concerning long-term development agendas, most notably the General Development Plan of Bishkek to 2050.¹⁴ Additional contextual framing is provided by publications related to the 6th World Nomad Games, which situate the stadium within a broader framework of event-based cultural representation and its spatial distribution between Bishkek and Issyk-Kul.¹⁵

Sources were included in the empirical analysis if they met at least one of the following criteria: (a) they originated from official state or municipal bodies (e.g., the General Development Plan, presidential and ministerial communications); (b) they contained verifiable technical specifications, such as reported dimensions, materials quantities, or capacity figures, attributed to project engineering or construction documentation; or (c) they were published by established news agencies reporting directly on construction milestones or official statements. General journalistic commentary or opinion pieces lacking a technical or official basis were not used to support factual claims about the stadium's design or construction, though they are occasionally referenced for contextual framing of the project's public reception. Ethnographic and architectural-historical sources on the yurt were selected based on their standing in the existing scholarly and ethnographic literature on Kyrgyz nomadic dwellings.

Primary analysis is based on close visual examination of architectural and structural documentation, supported by photographic observation of the construction site. These materials are treated not only as

¹⁰FIFA, Football Stadiums Guidelines, <https://inside.fifa.com/innovation/stadium-guidelines>.

¹¹Vale, *Architecture, Power, and National Identity*, 115.

¹²“Adylbek Kasymaliev proinspektiroval stroitel'stvo,” TopNews.kg, 2025; “Novyi stadion ‘Azattyk Arena’,” 24.kg, 2024.

¹³“Stolichnyy stadion ofitsial'no stal ‘Bishkek Arena’,” Open.kg.

¹⁴Kabar News Agency, “Kyrgyz Cabinet of Ministers discuss General Development Plan,” Kabar.kg, 2025; “Development of Bishkek General Plan,” TAdviser.

¹⁵Kabar News Agency, “6th World Nomad Games to be held in two locations,” Kabar.kg, 2025.

technical records, but as representational artifacts through which architectural meaning is constructed. This analytical process enables the identification of key aspects of the stadium's volumetric composition, façade articulation, and roof structure, which are interpreted as the principal carriers of the project's "stadium-as-yurt" representational logic.

Operationalization of the Four Comparative Dimensions

Comparative analysis forms the core analytical framework of the study. To ensure that the comparison between the yurt and Bishkek Arena is applied consistently, each of the four dimensions was assessed using a specific set of documented indicators rather than general impression:

- 1. Scale** was assessed through quantitative comparison of documented height, footprint area, and occupancy/capacity figures, drawing on official project profiles for the stadium and standardized ethnographic dimensions for the yurt.
- 2. Materiality** was assessed through comparison of the documented construction materials of each structure (wood, felt, and reed matting for the yurt; reinforced concrete and steel for the stadium), including reported material quantities where available, and their associated properties of weight, flexibility, and reversibility.
- 3. Structural-functional elements** were assessed by tracing the documented load-bearing and organizational role of the *tündük*, *uuk*, and *kerege* in ethnographic and architectural sources, and comparing this to the described structural systems of the stadium (reinforced concrete cores, steel trusses) as reported in project and construction documentation, in order to distinguish load-bearing function from external visual reference.
- 4. Temporality** was assessed through comparison of documented assembly/disassembly cycles and seasonal use patterns of the yurt with the stadium's reported construction timeline, planned operational lifespan, and maintenance regime.

These characteristics of the yurt are grounded in ethnographic and architectural literature.¹⁶ The interpretation of the comparative findings is situated within Lawrence Vale's¹⁷ political-cultural framework on megastructures and national representation and is further contextualized through Aida Sheranova's¹⁸ research on the institutionalization of event-based heritage within the framework of the World Nomad Games.

Limitations

Several limitations should be acknowledged. First, as Bishkek Arena remains under construction at the time of writing, the analysis is necessarily limited to design-stage documentation and current progress reporting, without access to post-occupancy evaluation, completed interior spaces, or operational performance data. Second, the empirical basis of the analysis relies substantially on architectural

¹⁶Mamytova, "Traditional dwellings of the Kyrgyz in the 19th – early 20th century," 25–29; Klavdiya Antipina, *Dekorativno-prikladnoe iskusstvo Kirgizov* (Frunze: Kyrgyzstan, 1962).

¹⁷Vale, *Architecture, Power, and National Identity*, 115.

¹⁸Sheranova, "Political invention of the World Nomad Games."

renderings, official statements, and media reporting rather than independent technical inspection or primary construction drawings; where sources diverge or figures are provisional, this is noted in the analysis. Third, because renderings and official communications are themselves representational artifacts produced for public and political audiences, they may selectively emphasize certain design features—such as yurt-referential motifs—over others, which is a methodological constraint inherent to any study of a building at this stage of completion. Finally, this study focuses on architectural documentation and representation rather than public reception; it does not draw conclusions about how the stadium is or will be experienced, interpreted, or evaluated by the public, and any claims in this regard are explicitly avoided.

ARCHITECTURAL ANALYSIS OF BISHKEK ARENA

I. Object Profile: The Stadium as an Urban Anchor

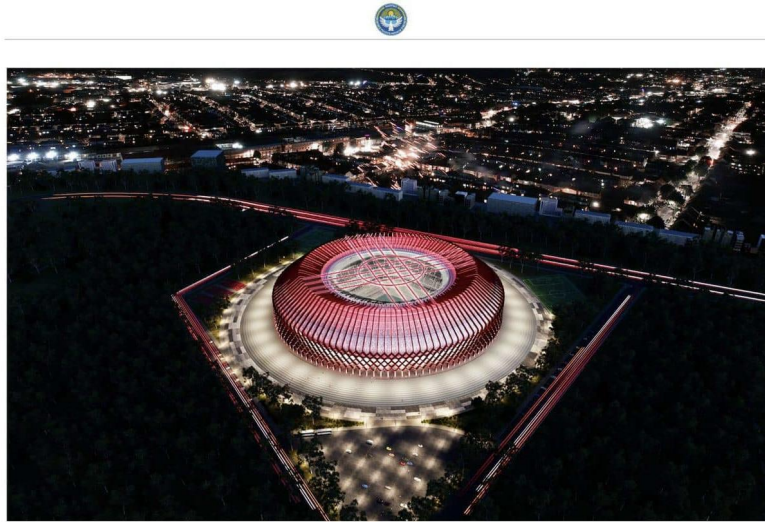


FIGURE 2. THE BISHKEK ARENA AS A MODERN URBAN LANDMARK.¹⁹

Bishkek Arena is a national stadium project in Kyrgyzstan conceived as a large-scale multifunctional sports complex intended to host international competitions and mass public events.²⁰ Publicly available project documentation locates the construction site on the western periphery of Bishkek, in the village of Orok (Sokuluk District, Chüy Region).²¹

The stadium's peripheral location reflects a broader shift in urban development strategy outlined in the General Development Plan of Bishkek up to 2050.²² Unlike earlier periods, when major public facilities

¹⁹ Japarov, "Urmattuu Kyrgyzstandyktar!"

²⁰ "Kyrgyzstan National Stadium," StadiumDB.

²¹ "Bishkek Arena," StadiumDB, 2026.

²² Bishkekgglavarchitektura, Genplan.bishkek.gov.kg, 2024, <https://genplan.bishkek.gov.kg/ru>.

were concentrated in the city center and often served primarily symbolic purposes, the current planning framework emphasizes outward expansion and the use of large-scale infrastructure to support new areas of growth.²³ The Plan identifies peripheral development zones linked to transport corridors and utility networks, creating conditions for the placement of extensive multifunctional complexes outside the historic core. Within this context, Bishkek Arena functions as an infrastructural “anchor”: a project that requires substantial land and technical capacity and is intended to stimulate surrounding development while improving metropolitan connectivity. In this way, the stadium operates not only as a sports venue but also as an instrument of contemporary urban policy and international representation.

The facility was initially referred to as “Azattyk Arena” and was later formally named “Bishkek Arena,” as reported in official and national media sources. Its scale, architectural concept, and construction status are described in publicly available project profiles.²⁴

According to these project profiles, the complex is reported as an eight-block structure with an approximate height of 70 m and a total floor area of around 180,000 m².²⁵ The planned spectator capacity of 51,000 seats places the stadium within the category of large regional venues designed for international-level hosting.²⁶ The functional program is described as mixed-use, combining the main arena with additional service, public, and commercial functions integrated into the overall complex layout. These characteristics suggest an orientation toward international visibility and event-based use in addition to domestic sporting needs.

Project documentation emphasizes the incorporation of yurt-referential motifs within the stadium’s architectural language. Façade articulation employs lattice-based patterning commonly associated with the kerege, while the roof structure is represented through a crown-like central geometry interpreted as a reference to the tündük.²⁷ In traditional Kyrgyz yurt construction, the tündük, uuk, and kerege operate as an integrated structural system supporting assembly, load transfer, and spatial organization.²⁸ In Bishkek Arena, however, project documentation indicates that these elements are not translated into the building’s structural or spatial logic; instead, they are mobilized primarily through external form and visual identity.

The interior organization of the stadium follows the standardized planning logic of contemporary international venues. Circulation systems, seating arrangements, safety zoning, and commercial areas are governed by global technical standards and event-management requirements rather than by principles derived from nomadic spatial culture. As a result, yurt-related references appear largely confined to the building’s exterior envelope and roof silhouette, while the internal space functions as a standardized container for mass events.

²³Kabar News Agency, “Cabinet of Ministers discuss General Development Plan,” Kabar.kg; “Kakim budet Bishkek v budushchem?” Kaktus.media.

²⁴“Bishkek Arena,” StadiumDB.

²⁵“Novyi stadion v Bishkeke: kak idet stroitel’stvo,” AKIpress News, <https://youtu.be/sloocfCkuP0>.

²⁶“Bishkek Arena,” StadiumDB.

²⁷Efor Group, “Efor Group takes on MEP design for Kyrgyzstan’s new national stadium,” Eforgroup.com.tr, 2025, <https://eforgroup.com.tr/news/efor-group-takes-on-mep-design/>.

²⁸Mamytova, “Traditional dwellings,” 25–29.

Public reporting further highlights the industrial scale and technical complexity of the project. Available sources cite approximately 242,000 m³ of concrete and 34,000 tons of steel structures, alongside extensive vertical circulation systems designed to manage large spectator flows.²⁹ The playing field system is described in terms consistent with hybrid turf approaches used in contemporary stadium design and aligned with FIFA technical recommendations and quality frameworks.³⁰ Construction updates as of January 2026 confirm active implementation, including completed reinforced concrete phases and ongoing installation of roof steel structures.³¹

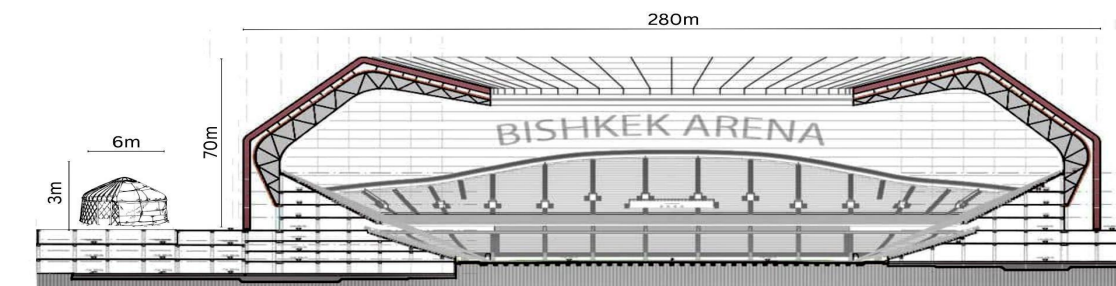
The stadium's role as an internationally facing site of heritage representation is further reinforced by its association with the 6th World Nomad Games. Public information confirms that Bishkek is designated to host the opening ceremony, while the main competitions are planned for Issyk-Kul, positioning the capital as a ceremonial and media-oriented stage for the international presentation of nomadic culture.³² Taken together, the available sources frame Bishkek Arena as a large-scale infrastructure project that combines industrial construction systems with a symbolic architectural language, in which heritage functions substantially as visual representation and branding rather than as embodied spatial culture.

Taken together, these characteristics frame Bishkek Arena primarily as a large-scale infrastructural object governed by industrial construction systems, regulatory standards, and long-term operational requirements. This infrastructural profile provides the analytical baseline for comparison with the traditional Kyrgyz yurt (boz üy), not as a matter of formal resemblance, but as a comparison between two architectural systems shaped by contrasting logics of scale, materiality, structure, and temporality.

II. Comparative Analysis: Yurt vs Stadium

Building on the case study of Bishkek Arena, this section presents a comparative analysis between the stadium and the traditional Kyrgyz nomadic dwelling—the yurt (boz üy). The comparison follows the four dimensions and indicators described in the Methodology: (1) scale, (2) materiality, (3) the functional role of key structural elements, and (4) the temporal model of use.

II.1 Scale: From Human Home to National Monument



²⁹“Novyi stadion v Bishkeke,” AKIpress News.

³⁰FIFA, Football Stadiums Guidelines.

³¹“Adylbek Kasymaliev proinspektiroval stroitel'stvo,” TopNews.kg.

³²Kabar News Agency, “6th World Nomad Games,” Kabar.kg.

FIGURE 3. ARCHITECTURAL VISUALIZATION OF THE BISHKEK ARENA PROJECT.³³

The scale comparison reveals a marked contrast between a family-scale domestic dwelling and a mass-occupancy infrastructural facility. Ethnographic literature describes the traditional Kyrgyz yurt (boz üy) as a compact modular structure whose dimensions are shaped by everyday bodily movement and the practical conditions of nomadic life. A typical family yurt measures approximately 6 m in diameter and about 3 m in height, corresponding to a footprint of roughly 28–30 m².³⁴ This configuration produces a human-scale environment in which domestic activities, social interaction, and symbolic meaning are concentrated within a limited, centralized radius of movement.

Bishkek Arena operates on a substantially different scale. Designed to accommodate approximately 51,000 spectators and reaching a height of around 70 m, the stadium exceeds the vertical dimension of the yurt by more than twenty times.³⁵ Its spatial organization is structured around a FIFA-standard football pitch measuring 105 × 68 m, a baseline that on its own exceeds the entire enclosure of the yurt.³⁶ While the yurt is intended to shelter a small kinship group, the stadium functions as an engineered container for large crowds, regulated circulation, and long-span enclosure.

The significance of this scalar shift lies not simply in numerical contrast but in a broader conceptual tension. The spatial logic of the yurt is based on intimacy, immediacy, and bodily orientation, whereas the stadium is designed as an infrastructural system for managing mass movement and collective presence. Translating the visual language of a mobile, domestic shelter into the form of a stationary megastructure therefore appears to require detaching the yurt from its original spatial and functional logic and treating it instead as a recognizable cultural image.

By enlarging the yurt's form to the scale of a stadium, the project may be read as marking a shift from architecture as dwelling toward architecture as monument. In this reading, the yurt is no longer employed as a means of housing people in the traditional sense, but functions as a symbolic device associated with collective identity at an infrastructural scale. The familiarity of the boz üy form appears to be mobilized to render a large industrial complex culturally recognizable and socially legible. Scale, in this sense, can be seen as one indicator of how nomadic heritage is transformed from a lived spatial practice into an emblematic form of national representation.

II.2 Materiality: From Wood and Felt to Concrete and Steel

The material comparison reveals a shift from a lightweight, regenerative construction system to an industrial regime of material accumulation and permanence. The traditional Kyrgyz yurt (boz üy) is a transportable dwelling assembled from locally available organic materials, primarily wood, felt, and reed matting. Its structural frame consists of kerege lattice walls and uuk roof poles, traditionally produced from flexible local wood species that are seasonally harvested, naturally dried, and manually shaped.

³³ Compiled by the author based on technical specifications from Sadyr Japarov (2024) and standardized yurt dimensions from Yrty Altaya catalog. Scale visualization and comparative analysis are performed by the author.

³⁴“Boz ui — kyrgyzdardyn unikalduu turak-zhaiy,” Sputnik Kyrgyzstan, 2015, <https://sputnik.kg/20150917/1018442844.html>; Mamytova, “Traditional dwellings,” 25–29.

³⁵“Bishkek Arena,” StadiumDB; “Stroitel'stvo stadiona ‘Bishkek Arena’,” AKIpress TV.

³⁶FIFA, Football Stadiums Guidelines.

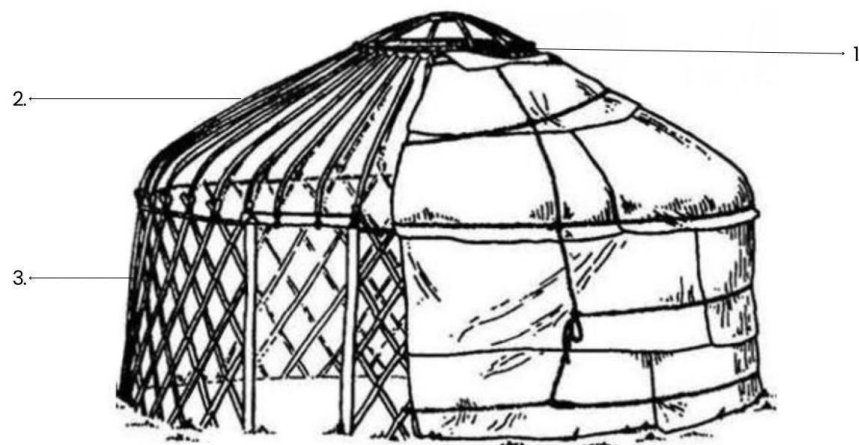
These components are designed for repeated use, repair, and replacement, rather than for permanent fixation to a single site.³⁷

The enclosure system of the yurt is based on felt produced from compressed sheep wool through collective manual processes such as washing, rolling, and drying. This material provides passive climatic regulation, including thermal insulation, wind resistance, and moisture protection, allowing the dwelling to function without a mechanical climate-control system. A typical family yurt measures approximately 6 m in diameter and 3 m in height, covers an area of around 30 m², and weighs about 400 kg.³⁸ Its low material mass and layered textile envelope enable seasonal adaptation through material breathability and incremental adjustment rather than technological intervention. Taken together, these characteristics indicate a construction logic optimized for mobility, reversibility, and cyclical interaction with the environment.³⁹

Bishkek Arena operates according to a fundamentally different material logic. The stadium is constructed primarily from reinforced concrete and steel, with publicly available data indicating the use of approximately 242,000 m³ of concrete and 34,000 tons of steel.⁴⁰ These materials are products of industrial manufacturing processes that depend on centralized production, long-distance transport, heavy machinery, and specialized labor. The construction process follows phased installation and regulated procedures, embedding the building permanently within infrastructural networks and prioritizing structural durability, crowd safety, fire resistance, and long-term operational stability.

The stadium also visually incorporates lattice-based geometric patterns associated with the yurt's kerege; the structural implications of this visual reference, and how it differs from the kerege's original load-bearing role, are examined in Section II.3 below.

From a material standpoint, translating the lightweight wooden lattice of a yurt into a massive steel-and-concrete structure changes its function considerably.⁴¹ What was once a functional and mobile system appears, in this context, to be reconfigured as a largely decorative feature of a permanent megastructure. In this process, nomadic building traditions are not directly continued in constructive terms; rather, they appear to inform primarily the visual style of a modern industrial complex.



³⁷Mamytova, "Tr

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FIGURE 4. STRUCTURAL SCHEME OF THE KYRGYZ YURT (BOZ ÜY): 1-TÜNDÜK, 2-UUK, 3-KEREGE. ⁴²

II.3 Structure: From Functional Frame to Visual Reference

Beyond differences in material composition, the most significant transformation identified in this analysis concerns the operational logic of structure itself. In the traditional Kyrgyz yurt, structural elements operate as a tightly integrated construction system in which load transfer, spatial organization, assembly logic, and environmental control are closely interconnected. Structural stability does not depend on a single dominant frame but emerges from the coordinated interaction of all components, each performing multiple functions simultaneously.

The tündük functions as the primary structural and spatial organizer. It concentrates the roof geometry, receives the upper ends of the uuk, and distributes loads evenly along the perimeter through the radial roof system. At the same time, the central opening regulates daylight, air circulation, and smoke exhaust from the hearth, directly linking structural form to everyday domestic and environmental practices. In this configuration, structural, spatial, and climatic functions are unified within a single architectural element.

The uuk connects the tündük to the perimeter wall, shaping the domed profile and transferring loads downward in a continuous radial sequence. Their number, spacing, and inclination determine both the stability of the structure and the proportions of the interior space. The kerege completes this system by forming a flexible lattice wall that receives roof loads, stabilizes the structure circumferentially, and enables controlled expansion and contraction during assembly. Its folding geometry allows rapid erection and dismantling, making reversibility and mobility integral to the structural logic rather than secondary attributes. In this system, no element functions independently: structure, enclosure, assembly, and spatial order are mutually dependent.⁴³

The most pronounced transformation identified in this comparison occurs in the kerege. In the yurt, the lattice wall is a primary structural component essential to reversibility, flexibility, and rapid assembly. In Bishkek Arena, by contrast, lattice-like geometry appears primarily as an external articulation layer, structurally decoupled from load transfer. It nonetheless remains representationally significant: the architectural reference to a complex, inherited structural system appears to serve an important symbolic function, acting as a visual proxy for technical sophistication rather than a load-bearing element.

Similarly, the organizing role once performed by the uuk appears to be replaced by standardized structural frameworks—steel trusses and supporting systems—designed to span large distances and accommodate regulated crowd movement. These systems operate according to engineering principles optimized for load capacity, safety, and durability rather than for adaptability or spatial intimacy.

This comparison suggests a substantial reconfiguration of structural logic. In the yurt, structure operates as an adaptive system that simultaneously supports, encloses, regulates, and assembles space. In the stadium, structure appears to function largely as an internal technical framework, while culturally legible

⁴² Urty Altaya, “Yurta diametr 9,37 m,” *Catalog of Yurts*, https://urta.biz/catalog/40_yurta_diametr_9_metrov.html.

⁴³ Mamytova, “Traditional dwellings,” 25–29; “Boz ui — kyrgyzdardyn unikalduu turak-zhaiy,” Sputnik Kyrgyzstan.

forms are displaced onto the representational surface. Structural functionality and symbolic meaning are, in this reading, separated—marking a shift from architecture as an integrated construction system toward architecture as a layered composition in which heritage operates primarily through visual analogy rather than constructive continuity.

II.4 Temporality: From Mobility to Permanence

The temporal logic of the traditional Kyrgyz yurt (boz üy) is closely tied to its material and structural organization. Designed as a mobile dwelling, the yurt follows a cyclical model of use defined by repeated assembly, disassembly, relocation, and seasonal adaptation. Its lightweight wooden frame and felt enclosure allow the structure to be erected by a small group of people within a short time and dismantled without damage to either the components or the site. Temporality in this system is not linear or accumulative; it is repetitive and reversible, embedded in rhythms of nomadic movement and environmental change.

This cyclical temporality also has a social dimension. The act of assembling the yurt is a collective practice associated with reinforcing social bonds and shared responsibility. Structural knowledge is transmitted through participation rather than specialization, and the dwelling is continuously re-produced through use.⁴⁴ Time, in this context, may be understood as renewal rather than permanence: the yurt exists through repetition rather than endurance.

Bishkek Arena operates within a markedly different temporal regime. As a large-scale stadium constructed from reinforced concrete and steel, it is designed for continuous presence, long-term operation, and infrastructural permanence. Its construction unfolds over multiple years, involves large numbers of specialized workers, and depends on industrial production chains and heavy machinery. Once completed, the building is not intended to be altered, relocated, or reassembled; instead, it is expected to be maintained through regulated cycles of inspection, repair, and technological upgrading.⁴⁵

The stadium's temporal logic therefore appears linear and accumulative. Material mass, infrastructural integration, and regulatory frameworks fix the building to a specific site and embed it within long-term urban development strategies. Unlike the yurt, which adapts to seasonal and environmental change through movement and material adjustment, the stadium is designed to maintain internal stability through constant energy input and engineered systems. Time, in this sense, is managed technologically rather than spatially.

This shift in temporality has implications for how nomadic heritage may be understood in this context. While the yurt expresses time as a recurring and adaptable process, Bishkek Arena presents time as permanence and institutional continuity. By monumentalizing nomadic forms, the stadium may be read as signaling the endurance of the nation-state, and as transforming a once flexible architectural system into a fixed symbolic reference. In this shift, temporality can be seen as one lens through which heritage moves from lived practice toward a more stable architectural image.

⁴⁴Mamytova, "Traditional dwellings," 25–29; "Boz ui — kyrgyzdardyn unikalduu turak-zhaiy," Sputnik Kyrgyzstan.

⁴⁵"Adylbek Kasymaliev proinspektiroval stroitel'stvo," TopNews.kg; "Development of Bishkek General Plan," TAdviser.

Feature	Traditional Yurt (Boz Üy)	Bishkek Arena
Height	~3 m	~70 m
Footprint / Area	~30 m ²	~180,000 m ²
Capacity	Family dwelling	51,000
Materiality	Organic / regenerative	Industrial / engineered
Temporality	Mobile / demountable	Fixed / permanent
Climate Control	Passive	Engineered systems

TABLE 1. COMPARATIVE SUMMARY: YURT VS. STADIUM (BASED ON SOURCES CITED IN SECTIONS II.1–II.4)

Taken together, the comparative analysis suggests that the transformation of the Kyrgyz yurt into the architectural language of Bishkek Arena is not primarily a matter of formal resemblance, but a broader reconfiguration of architectural logic. Across scale, materiality, structural functionality, and temporality, the yurt's integrated, adaptive, and reversible system appears to be substantially displaced by a permanent, industrial, and infrastructure-dependent regime. While visual references to nomadic architecture remain legible, their original constructive, environmental, and social functions appear to be detached and reassigned to representational surfaces.

As a result, the analysis suggests that nomadic heritage is not reproduced here as a living spatial practice, but reconstituted as a symbolic framework embedded within a contemporary megastructure. The stadium may therefore be interpreted not as an enlarged yurt, but as an architectural translation in which cultural memory is stabilized, monumentalized, and aligned with the representational needs of the modern state.

DISCUSSION: FACADISM AND NATIONAL IDENTITY

The findings of this research suggest that Bishkek Arena is not best understood as a continuation of nomadic architecture, nor as its straightforward functional modernization. Rather, the stadium can be interpreted as a deliberate reinterpretation of nomadic heritage within the framework of a modern, institutionalized state. In this reading, elements of traditional Kyrgyz culture appear to be transformed from lived spatial practices into stable and legible symbols embedded within large-scale infrastructure. Bishkek Arena may therefore be understood as functioning not only as an architectural object, but also as a cultural and political statement produced within a specific historical moment of contemporary Kyrgyzstan.

At the center of this transformation lies a possible shift from “heritage as a way of life” to “heritage as state representation.” In traditional Kyrgyz society, the yurt (boz üy) was neither a metaphor nor an abstract emblem of identity. It was a practical system of living shaped by mobility, seasonal migration, pastoral economy, and environmental conditions; its form, materials, structure, and temporality were closely tied to everyday life.⁴⁶ The yurt existed through use, repetition, and continuous adaptation rather than through permanence or monumentality.

⁴⁶Mamytova, “Traditional dwellings,” 25–29.

In the case of Bishkek Arena, these same elements may be understood as detached from their original functional logic and re-coded as visual references. The yurt no longer operates as a space to be inhabited, assembled, or dismantled; instead, it becomes an image—monumental, recognizable, and legible within a global media environment. Heritage, in this reading, is communicated through architectural form rather than experienced through practice.

This shift corresponds to a broader logic of contemporary nation-building, in which architecture functions as a tool for stabilizing identity. Large-scale public buildings translate cultural memory into permanent material form, potentially enabling the state to present itself as historically grounded, unified, and continuous.⁴⁷ In the Kyrgyz context, this logic is closely connected to the ideological framework known as Ungu Jol (“The Main Path”).⁴⁸ Ungu Jol emphasizes a return to roots, spiritual continuity, and historical memory as a foundation of national stability. Tradition, within this framework, is framed not as something to be revised or transformed, but as something to be preserved, protected, and made visible. Bishkek Arena aligns with this orientation insofar as tradition does not appear to be revived as a lived practice, but rather stabilized through architectural form. The stadium may be read as exemplifying the stabilization of tradition: heritage appears fixed into a canonical image that can be remembered and displayed. The architectural reference to the yurt becomes, in this sense, immobile and permanent—potentially losing some of the qualities of mobility and adaptability that once defined nomadic culture.

This separation between exterior symbolism and interior functionality can be interpreted through the lens of architectural facadism, a concept analyzed by Lawrence Vale⁴⁹ in the context of national representation. In this framework, cultural references are concentrated in the visible outer layer of the building, while the internal space is shaped by globalized infrastructural norms. Nomadic heritage thus appears to operate less as a lived spatial practice and more as a representational device. The yurt-inspired imagery of Bishkek Arena appears oriented toward visual recognition in media representations and international broadcasts, supporting processes of cultural branding rather than the continuation of vernacular constructive traditions.

The relationship between architecture, ideology, and sport is also relevant to this process. Within the Ungu Jol framework, sport is framed as a means of cultivating a “healthy national body,” collective discipline, and shared energy. As the largest sports facility in the country, Bishkek Arena may be seen as a spatial embodiment of this logic, operating as a site where national belonging is staged and collectively experienced. This dynamic is especially visible in the World Nomad Games. While the Games revive traditional sports, they simultaneously transform these practices into a highly mediated, standardized, and globally legible spectacle.⁵⁰ Just as the World Nomad Games translate nomadic culture into a global event format, the stadium may be seen as translating the yurt into a monumental infrastructural image.

⁴⁷Vale, *Architecture, Power, and National Identity*, 112.

⁴⁸Kyrgyz Republic, President, On the Doctrine “National Spirit — World Heights,” Decree No. 369.

⁴⁹Vale, *Architecture, Power, and National Identity*, 112.

⁵⁰Sheranova, “Political invention of the World Nomad Games”; A. Maksüdünov, “Economic and socio-cultural impacts of the World Nomad Games,” *Economy of Region 16*, no. 2 (2020): 586–596.

This emphasis on visibility also reshapes the relationship between space and time. As a well-known Kyrgyz proverb reflects, a people cannot exist without history, just as a land cannot exist without roots.⁵¹ This traditional aphorism serves as a conceptual reference point for the study. In the context of Bishkek Arena, it may be read as acquiring a literal architectural dimension: the stadium appears designed to visually and physically “root” the state in its nomadic history, rendering that history permanent and materially present. By monumentalizing the form of the yurt, the project may be interpreted as seeking to satisfy a cultural requirement for historical continuity as a foundation for national legitimacy.⁵²

A notable tension emerges from this reading. Nomadic culture was historically defined by mobility, impermanence, and adaptability. While the yurt was, in a physical sense, an anti-monument, ethnographic and architectural literature suggests it held considerable sacred and social significance. The stadium, by contrast, embodies permanence, control, and long-term presence. Accordingly, while the project may be seen as attempting to “root” the nation through monumentality, this analysis suggests that it may also work against the core association of those roots with mobility—an interpretive tension that this paper considers central to understanding the project.

Ultimately, this discussion supports the central hypothesis of the research: Bishkek Arena may be interpreted not as an “enlarged yurt,” but as an architectural translation of nomadic heritage into the language of permanence, infrastructure, and state representation. This translation reflects, in the analysis presented here, the current stage of nation-building in Kyrgyzstan, in which tradition appears to be stabilized, sport institutionalized, and architecture used as an instrument for the visual and spatial consolidation of national identity.

CONCLUSION

This study suggests that Bishkek Arena does not represent a straightforward modernization of the yurt, but may instead be understood as its architectural reinterpretation, and in certain respects, its symbolic substitution. The analysis indicates that while the stadium visually references nomadic forms, it largely detaches them from their original logic—mobility, reversibility, and environmental integration—replacing these with the industrial permanence associated with contemporary state infrastructure, based on the design-stage documentation available at the time of writing. The analysis suggests a strategic structural decoupling: the yurt’s engineering appears not to be functionally replicated but rather translated and mobilized as a claim to engineered authority—a symbolic gesture that, in this reading, elevates the representation of Kyrgyz heritage toward a more technologically legible register.

The decision to foreground the integrated structural system—the *tündük*, *uuk*, and *kerege*—can be read as a deliberate move to project technical and cultural authority. By scaling this engineering logic to a much larger size, the project appears to seek an association between Kyrgyz heritage and technologically advanced construction. The available evidence suggests that the state sought not only a symbol, but a structure capable of spanning approximately 70 meters of vertical space while retaining legible ties to

⁵¹Kyrgyz proverb, translated by the author.

⁵²Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983), 178–185.

nomadic form. The yurt, among available nomadic prototypes, offered a structural vocabulary that could plausibly be scaled to a monument of this magnitude.

However, this reading points to a notable architectural tension. In seeking to satisfy a cultural requirement for historical continuity, the approach analyzed here may risk reducing to a static, fixed image a culture that was historically defined by movement. Furthermore, while the original yurt was an anti-monument in its physicality, ethnographic sources suggest its *tündük* held considerable sacred and social significance. The stadium, in this analysis, appears to substitute that inherited symbolic role with the material permanence of reinforced concrete and steel. By translating the mobile yurt into a stationary infrastructural anchor, the project may be seen as prioritizing the preservation of a recognizable visual image, potentially at some cost to the mobility that originally defined nomadic spatial practice. Bishkek Arena illustrates, in this respect, a broader tension in which the Kyrgyz past is historically associated with the open landscape, while its architectural future is increasingly expressed through the material permanence of large-scale state infrastructure.

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