

HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE OF HERITAGE LEGISLATION.
BALANCE BETWEEN LAWS AND VALUES





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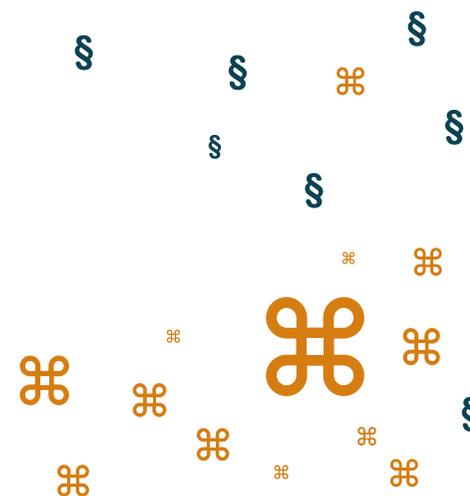
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LITHUANIA - THE STANDARD SETTER FOR URBAN HERITAGE PROTECTION IN THE FORMER USSR?

VILTE JANUSAUSKAITE

The post-war period is seen as an ambiguous time concerning the aspect of heritage protection. The situation appeared to be even more complicated in the Baltic States that had been forced to join USSR. The old capitals were not only the symbols of their independent past, but also did not meet any of the criteria set according to the standards of modern socialist planning. It was not until 1956 when the first conservation project for Vilnius old town was launched after criticism on the demolitions in the Old Town had been expressed by many professionals. The first "Reconstruction project" came into force in 1959 and it's been known in Lithuanian historiography as the first project of this type and thus the model for subsequent ones in the entire USSR. Only thirty years later, together with the emerging Lithuanian National Independence movement, did the criticism towards the Soviet period heritage protection system become audible and public interest in heritage conservation considerable. However the concept of urban heritage and the means of its protection, though discussed a lot, were not embedded. After 1990, it resulted in many different voices ranging from the strict preservation to liberal "laissez-faire" and leaving their reflections both in legislation, planning documents, and the old towns themselves.

The post-war period is seen as an ambiguous time concerning the aspect of heritage protection. The situation appeared to be even more complicated in the Baltic States that had been forced to join the USSR. The old capitals were not only the symbols of their independent past, but also did not meet any of the criteria set by the standards of modern socialist planning. However, Lithuanian historiography remembers Soviet Lithuanian urban heritage protection practice as a success, even as the leader and standard setter for the entire USSR. Thus, in this paper I will try to answer whether this statement is exaggerated or not and how that system encompassing both legal framework and urban conservation projects developed to achieve such status.

To show a little bit of a broader context, one must start with the interwar situation. For most of that period, the current territory of Lithuania was divided: independent Re-

public of Lithuania emerged with its capital in Kaunas while Vilnius and its surrounding regions belonged to Poland. The situation in the field of heritage protection in those two parts of the country was as different as it could probably be. In "Kaunas Lithuania" there was no law for cultural heritage protection and all the institutions created to promote or supervise it struggled due to poor funding, management, etc. The law for immovable heritage protection only came into force in 1940 under the Soviet regime (even though it had been prepared in independent Lithuania). No urban heritage protection plan had even been thought of and only a small number of architectural conservation projects (mostly in emergency cases) had been carried out. In the Vilnius Region the situation was quite the contrary. First of all, the general approach was completely different. The Polish heritage system was quite advanced and holistic: as early as in 1928 the Law for Monuments Protection provided protection not only

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1 John H. Stubbs and Emily G. Makaš, *Architectural Conservation in Europe and the Americas* (Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, 2011), 260.

2 Jolanta Fedorovič, "Nekilnojamojo kultūros paveldo apsauga Vilniaus krašte 1920-1939 metais: lenkiško paveldosaugos modelio raiška", *Lietuvos istorijos studijos* 29 (2012): 91.

for individual buildings or sites but also for historic quarters and towns.¹ Vilnius was declared a “relic” in 1936 and a very complex regulation system was established not only on particular monuments but on the entire central part of the old town.²

It would have been expected for this valuable experience to be carried over in 1939 when the Vilnius Region came back to Lithuania. In fact, this intention only lasted for a few months. As soon as 1941 came Soviet specialists whose task was set to create a real socialist capital according to the Soviet standards.³ No wonder that Vilnius Old town with its narrow courtyards, cobbled streets, and a large number of protected ancient monuments was regarded as an obstacle⁴ rather than a proper capital city. However those plans were interrupted by the German occupation. After WWII the same Soviet city vision was remembered, still neglecting heritage but this time a little bit less dramatic, asking to “combine architecture and history with the principles of socialist planning”.⁵ Moreover, most of the Polish heritage specialists who had been active in Vilnius before WWII expatriated or repatriated to Poland, so not only the continuity of heritage conservation tradition was lost, but also the shortage of architects and conservators became obvious.

In 1950 the MRGD (Scientific Workshop for Restoration and Production) was established (according to central government decision they were established in most Soviet countries, including Estonia), which soon became the main institution regarding heritage conservation including plans or projects for urban heritage protection. Young specialists – architects, historians, engineers etc., originating mostly from rural areas, often with no special academic background in the field of heritage conservation but driven by their enthusiasm and sometimes guided by a few older and more experienced colleagues, had to create the heritage protection system anew.

Despite the fact that Vilnius Old Town was listed on the Soviet Historic Towns List in 1947 and the specialised workshop existed, it had very little if any effect on the planning documents and construction works within the old town. In early 1953 a new general plan for Vilnius was approved that designed two wide highways cutting across the old town.⁶ Next year, the Vokiečių (German) street project that literally demolished all the buildings at one side of the street, was implemented. These processes resulted in huge and even public criticism within the architects’ society. However, it was not until 1956 when the first conservation project for the Vilnius Old Town was launched. This date can be considered as a break point - two competing projects had been commissioned and they offered two completely different possibilities for the future of this part of the city: a Soviet city by the Projects’ Institute or a limited intervention area by the Restorers’ Workshop.

The main problem the restorers encountered was non-existent methodology, i.e. how should the projects be done and what measures should be used to ensure the pro-

tection of the Old Town? It is known however, that already in 1957 a visit occurred to the former Czechoslovakia where two Lithuanian professors from Kaunas Polytechnic Institute attended a conference on urban conservation. They came back and wrote a really euphoric article in professional press describing the wide range of research and complex attitude with a goal to preserve not only individual monuments, but the entirety of architecture and urbanism that had been applied in Czechoslovakian historic towns.⁷ It is as early as then that Czechoslovakia became a model to follow for many years. The head of Vilnius old town reconstruction project famous urbanist professor Kazimieras Šešelgis was also aware of this methodology (a colleague of him even remembered that he had a half illegal copy of one project to be used as a model⁸) but it can’t be confirmed with certainty that there had been more visits before 1956.

The first reconstruction project came into force in 1959 when the restorers’ version was finally approved. Its complexity, holistic approach and innovativeness in the Soviet context are noticeable. For example not only the main monuments, but also their environment and skyline were to be preserved, maintaining “general character”⁹. The project also sought to solve transport, engineering and even some social issues – i.e. to find a compromise between preservation and development or modernisation as it was understood at the time. The Old Town was to be restored in quarters and a few years later detailed projects for the first quarters were initiated.

Since then it’s been known in Lithuanian historiography as the first project of this type and thus the model for subsequent ones in the entire USSR.¹⁰ Moreover at national discourse the whole Lithuanian urban heritage protection system was acknowledged as a leading one. When remembering the past, the architects and bureaucrats of that time still tend to stress the special Lithuanian position within USSR.¹¹ Only Estonians were regarded as equals.

In fact the late 60s presented a couple of arguments to ground this statement. In the republics of USSR the old laws for cultural heritage protection (like the Lithuanian one of 1940) were not valid anymore, so in 1967 in Lithuania at the same time as in Belarus, the new laws of cultural monuments protection came into force (only in Estonia such law had been enacted as early as in 1961). USSR managed to create one only in 1976. All the republics then had to accept this “central” law, but in Lithuania it was still successfully adapted to the local situation and understanding by adding 15 additional articles. While the law of 1967 discussed „complexes of buildings” (this point particularly reflects the influence of the Venice charter) the more recent law already provided a category of “urban construction and architectural monuments” which included historical centres, layout of other residential locations, folk architecture and even landscapes. Following the law a special institution – Scientific-Methodic Council for Monuments Protection, dedicated to documentation and evaluation of possible

3 Marija Drėmaitė, Vaidas Petruelis and Jūratė Tutlytė, *Architektūra sovietmečio Lietuvoje* (Vilnius: Vilniaus dailės akademijos leidykla, 2012), 65.

4 Jūratė Markevičienė, “Vilniaus kultūros paveldo apsauga Lietuvos respublikos (1939-1940), Sovietų Sąjungos okupacijos ir aneksijos pradžios (1940-1941 ir 1944-1945) ir nacistinės Vokietijos okupacijos (1941-1944) laikotarpiu,” in *Vilniaus kultūrinis gyvenimas, 1939-1945* (Vilnius: Lietuvių literatūros ir tautosakos institutas, 1999), 157.

5 Juozas Jurginis and Vladislovas Mikučianis, *Vilnius tarybų Lietuvos sostinė* (Vilnius: Valstybinė politinės ir mokslinės literatūros leidykla, 1956), 38.

6 *Ibid.*, 161.

7 Bronius Janavičius and Henrikas Zvolinskas, “Čekoslovakijos miestų rekonstrukcijos praktika,” *Valstybinės LTSR architektūros paminklų apsaugos inspekcijos metraštis 1* (1958): 113-114.

8 Justinas Šeibokas, interview by Viltė Janušauskaitė, 14 March 2013.

9 Kazys Šešelgis, Justinas Šeibokas and Sigita Lasavickas, *Vilniaus senamiesčio rekonstrukcijos projektas. Aiškinamasis raštas. I tomas. Architektūrinė - Statybinė dalis* (Vilnius: Mokslinė Restauracinė Gamybinė dirbtuvė, 1958), 13. (VRVA, F.1019, Ap.11, B.4385).

10 For example, Algimantas Miškinis, *Lietuvos urbanistika: istorija, dabartis, ateitis* (Vilnius: Mintis, 1990), 82.

cultural monuments, was also established in 1967 even though there was no separate division for urban monuments as they had to be covered by the architectural section.

The second important event happened in 1969 and is especially linked to urban heritage protection – the list of Lithuanian urban monuments of local significance was approved. It consisted of 62 positions and that meant that not only the so-called old towns of national significance (5 at the time – Vilnius, Kaunas, Klaipėda, Kėdainiai and Trakai) were protected, but also a number of smaller and less important towns. An Institute for Construction and Architecture with urban historian Algimantas Miškinis in the lead, started historic research on them as well as to draw the boundaries and buffer zones and to write some general regulations.¹² Still, this work might be considered more as research and inventorisation but its effectiveness in practice remains in question.

In the early 70s new projects for 5 historic old towns, the so-called “projects of second generation” were started. Again, they were based on renewed Czechoslovakian methodology¹³ (there were no real possibilities to learn directly or to apply Western European practices) and included economic and sociological studies. The spirit of these projects was quite modernistic – the authors evaluated the artistic value of each and every building within the old towns by classifying the buildings into 4 categories “as it was done in Czechoslovakia and Germany”.¹⁴ Quite shockingly, from the contemporary point of view they concluded that most of these buildings were “grey and common” (only 0.6% of Klaipėda old town was recognised as valuable, i.e. architectural monuments).¹⁵ For example, wooden buildings were a priori considered of no value. This opened further opportunities for large scale interventions. Another significant feature found in those projects was concern on social issues that would probably be called nothing else but some kind of social engineering today – i.e. relocating inhabitants to obtain a deserved social composition.¹⁶

In 1973 a regional ICOMOS symposium was held in Vilnius. It was dedicated specifically to urban conservation issues in socialist countries. By that time architect Jonas Glemža was already an active member of Soviet ICOMOS (later even elected vice president of ICOMOS). There is little evidence preserved in Lithuanian State archives but it is known that the event was successful and well attended by delegates from socialist countries such as Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, and GDR, as well as numerous colleagues from the USSR (from Moscow alone there were 20 participants, Estonia was represented by 7 people including Fredi Tomps, Dmitri Bruns and Helmi Ūprus).¹⁷ At the end of the symposium a formal resolution praising socialism and opportunities for monument protection (e. g. relocating residents) was declared, created by nearly absolute state ownership.¹⁸ An exhibition of Lithuanian restorers’ works was also or-

ganised and it is generally remembered that their works were well evaluated by the President of ICOMOS Pietro Gazzola himself.

The Monuments Conservation Institute also used to organise local conferences. These were mostly practical – aimed to share experiences between professionals involved.¹⁹ J. Glemža also remembered that every few years there were conferences in each of the Baltic countries to share knowledge within the region. For instance one of them, probably the last during Soviet times, took place in Riga in 1987 and was dedicated to preservation and restoration of complexes of monuments. Various conservation specialists from Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia and Belarus gave speeches that were later published.²⁰ Moreover, some of the most prominent Lithuanian specialists were constantly invited as experts and consultants to other States within the USSR including Russia and Ukraine. For example A. Pilypaitis was invited as an expert to a conference on the reconstruction of Riga’s historic centre organised by the Latvian Union of Architects.²¹ Later on he also consulted the project teams of Vladimir, Kamianets-Podilskiy and Tomsk.²² Lithuanian urban conservation practice was known and recognised not only within the limits of the republic but in neighbouring countries as well (in Estonia it was shortly described as early as in 1960²³). It is thus reasonable to define this period as the zenith of Lithuanian urban heritage protection and its prestige.

However in the mid-80s together with the emerging Lithuanian National Independence Movement, the criticism towards the Soviet period heritage protection system became audible and public interest in heritage conservation grew. The protection mechanism began to struggle and not only because of the slow implementation that was criticised even formally. The basic principles were questioned and specialists had even been accused for methodically destroying old towns.²⁴ Thus the period from 1988 to 1992 was a breaking point again. If in 1959 the Lithuanian model was established and its recognition started, the early 90s marked its failure. During these years the last (half) Soviet project for the Vilnius Old Town was prepared. It represented some really utopian ideas with a main goal to recreate the spirit of the capital of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania.²⁵ On the other hand there was still some social engineering left from the Soviet past. Either way it did not correspond with international trends of the period (i.e. Washington charter) even if Lithuanian specialist claimed it to do so.

Completely different urban heritage objects and completely different attitude towards them were revealed in the late 1980s when 5 soviet urban monuments were listed. The best known of them – mass housing district Lazdynai, built in the early 1970s and awarded the Lenin prize in 1974. The question of protection was presented at the Scientific-Methodic Council for Monuments Protection several times until the goal was finally achieved. The procedure didn’t go smoothly: the chair of the council pressed on that similar objects had been already listed in other republics but some

11 Jonas Rimantas Glemža, interview by Viltė Janušauskaitė, 12 March 2013.

12 Most of the collected data was published in the 11 volumes of the series *Urbanistikos paminklai* [Urban monuments] (1978-1988).

13 Vytautas Jurkštas, *Senamiesčių regeneracija: Architektūros harmonizavimo problema* (Vilnius: Technika, 1994), 26.

14 *Ibid.*, 38.

15 Stasys Prikockis, Nijolė Zubovienė and Vytautas Zubovas, “Klaipėdos senamiesčio regeneracijos projekto problemos,” *Architektūros paminklai* VII (1982): 25-26.

16 Emanuel Hruška, “La fonction sociale des noyeux historiques des villes,” *Ochrana pamiatok - monumentorum tutela* 3 (1967): 39.

17 *ICOMOS konferencijos medžiaga. Organizaciniai klausimai* (Vilnius: Paminklų konservavimo institutas, 1973), 79. (VRVA, f. 1019, ap.11, b.489).

18 Luce Hinsch, *ICOMOS 1965–1980*, (Oslo, 1980), 19, accessed February 6, 2017, http://ip51.icomos.org/~fleblanc/projects/1979-1983_ICOMOS/pub%20icomos%201965-1980%20hinsch/pub_1980_ico-mos_1965-1980_hinsch_e.pdf.

19 For example, Romualdas Kaminskis, ed., *Mokslinė konferencija. Istorijos ir kultūros paminklų tyrimas ir restauravimas Lietuvos TSR 1976–1980 m.* (Vilnius: PKI, 1980).

members expressed doubts whether these relatively new objects required protection at all. One and probably final argument presented by a ministry official was: "if there are no Soviet monuments, there is no list at all."²⁶ However it was only a formality and no effective protection measures have been taken on these monuments until now.

Concluding on the Soviet Lithuanian urban heritage protection system and its leadership in the Soviet Union one might ask - was it true or only a myth? First of all I would argue that there were three contexts embedded in Lithuania: (i) international trends that were usually perceived via intermediaries and often only important on the surface; (ii) Czechoslovakia and other "friendly" republics that were regarded as the "teachers" and acted as intermediaries as well; (iii) the Soviet Union or the "followers", with the exception of Estonia whose specialists were recognised as partners. Lithuanian heritage professionals saw themselves as leaders in the Soviet context but historical analysis and evidence reveals that this statement can be approved only partially and certainly not to the extent it was believed.

Another important point is whether the system corresponded to the international trends and the answer is mostly no. Neither was it adaptable under free market conditions. This gap and sometimes even ignorance could be the reason why it finally failed, because one can clearly see that the concept of urban heritage and the means of its protection, though discussed a lot, were not implemented and the system itself collapsed together with the Soviet Union.

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