FACING THE MODERN MOVEMENT: POST-SOVIET LABORATORY OF MEMORY.
Case of Lithuania.

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Abstract. An objective of the paper: social attitudes towards built legacy of second half of 20th century in post-soviet area. The case of Lithuania was taken as a reflection of the processes in all ex-soviet block. Rather poor quality of construction and materials, saturation with communist ideology and consequently "bad" politicized memories, seems inseparable from Soviet time architecture. However, despite of being "post-soviet" this legacy reflects a certain period of architectural and cultural development and naturally deserves of being listed as a heritage. The paper discloses the recent tendencies implying that successful preservation of this dissonant heritage greatly depends on social attitudes. First of all it means reshaping the collective attitude/memory, i. e. finding a way to neutralize the negative connotations with political past, and to make these spaces to represent the general history of architecture and culture.

Fragility of the local spirit is constitutional not only because of impermanence of the collective memory, but also because of the fact that local spirit is more a process than a constant measure by itself. As J. Jauhiainen claims – "the urban is a continuous search for utopias." (Jauhiainen 2003:131) And obvious, the polemics about spatial development, different conceptions and theories, generates the flow of ideas, which is crucial not only for new constructions, but also impacts on reshaping of any built legacy. However, urban development also inseparable from practical ground: social processes, real estate speculation, land ownership and many other questions, transform the space regardless of any theoretical position. Thus the urban developments are merely the constantly changing watershed between theoretical, or, let's say, utopian attempts and the distopian nature of reality. Continuous coordination of both sides is the presumable destination of any urban practice. The evolution of local spirit or heritage is not an exception.

Among the possible utopian word-views towards contemporary urban development, one can point out the attitude of *preserving development*, when architectural heritage is being treated as abstract expression of collective imagination of every époque. And consequently every period is being perceived as essentially important part of the urban fabric. In such a case urban space is like a book continuously written in spaces. Book in which we can read about the past, and also inscribe our imagination about the future. Book, which could be read in manner K. Kurokawa reeds the Florence: "each building along the street speaks to us, each sculpture engages us in conversation" (Kurokawa 1994). However, while we speak about renaissance or any other early architectural structure – preservation of heritage is a common standard. The dividing line between the vandal tearing of urban book and respectful behavior is absolutely clear. The situation is much more controversial

and complicated when turning towards 20th century. The practice of preserving development there appears as multiply problem from both theoretical and practical perspectives.

The paper also suggests paying attention to specifications of post-soviet conditions. Nevertheless Soviet-time built legacy first of all reflects general problems of Modern Movement as a heritage, with no doubt the postwar architectural development in the territory of the Soviet bloc encounters specific conditions. The phenomenon is interesting both due to the deeper links between architecture and politics, and obvious coincidence of the Soviet rhetoric and attitude of the Modern Movement pioneers. It is also shall be mentioned that although this case study focuses on Lithuania, all the problems listed in the paper are, to one extent or another, typical for the rest of Eastern Europe as well. Theoretical strategies of a socialist society were developed for the entire Soviet Union, therefore, any former Soviet republic as an integral part of the system now have to deal with quite similar legacy. Certainly, the fact shall be considered that architectural and urban solutions of smaller countries (including Lithuania) are considerably more modest if to compare with the huge scale complexes of Moscow and other big cities. However, principles and intentions remain the same.

Towards Utopia: theoretical approach

The idea of preserving modernism is controversial by itself. Some theorists even hesitates can we think about architecture of Modern Movement from the perspective of architectural heritage. For instance, Martin Pawley rise the fundamental question is it fair enough to "convert once-proud revolutionary instruments back into monuments" (Powers 2001:4)? Do the buildings of Modern Movement should be treated as heritage, while these structures (especially in Soviet Union) were created following the principles of Bauhaus, where even "students were not thought the history of architecture" (Forty 2002:199)? From the other side, polemists like Alan Powers, claims that revolutionary function of architecture "does not cease if they [buildings] become absorbed in some process of conservation […] Rather reverse. If they altered, mutilated or demolished, their potential for continuing revolutionary activity would certainly be lost" (Powers 2001:5). As an additional argument in this discussion also could be the notice by Adrian Forty, arguing that widely spread statements about anti-historical nature of Modernism is "only a partial truth, for in another sense – the sense of William Morris – modern architecture was utterly 'historical', for it claimed to be an architecture wholly of the present, embodying the consciousness of the age, such as would be recognized in the future" (Forty 2002:199).

In the context of this paper it takes no particular importance to advocate one or another position (both or them express their own utopias), but these examples are essential while trying to highlight the miscellaneous nature of Modern Movement preservation even in the theoretical level. Thus, nevertheless General recommendations concerning 20th c. heritage claims that "established principles of conservation are a valid basis for the safeguarding and care of the recent heritage" (ICOMOS Seminar on 20th Heritage 1995), nevertheless recent researchers suggest that "consideration should be given to a broader range of sites, including those with associative and context value, that form the systems and networks that are traces and experiences of the processes of modernization, modernity and modernism"

(Uskokovich 2007:1), these arguments have some general and some specific post-soviet limitations.

First of all we can return to the question of history. It is quite obvious that in public opinion buildings of the second half of the 20th century, so-called *soviet modernism*, still do not deserve the quality of historical importance, such as in case of renaissance for instance. Instead of this, soviet time mass-construction edifices are usually treated as inseparable part of our every day life, which do not have any cultural value and in most cases outdated and deteriorated. Consequently any attempt to give for those structures the status of valuable heritage, looks like purposeless voice from ivory tower. From the other hand, the question of historical importance of architectural heritage closely interrelates with much wider phenomenon's, such as the search for a *genius loci* or even the image of the country. And if, lets say Finland declares that Modern Movement is inseparable part of the national memory (Norri 1996) in post-soviet area such a claim would make much less sense. And the problem is not only the lack of such Modern Movement icons as Alvar Aalto, but association with political memories, which do not embody any positive feelings.

There we can draw the parallel with Vitruvius. The less historical dimension important, the stronger appears three underlying qualities of pure architecture: *firmitas, utilitas, venustas.* In the case of built legacy of Soviet time, when quality of *utilitas* mostly manifests in rather poor condition, it determines these buildings and urban structures as unwanted. Thus, nevertheless the question of historical importance presumably appears in Western context as well, in post-soviet world this problem even more demanding. Hence only the deep understanding of historical-cultural importance could give to those edifices some additional value from the perspective of society. An exemplar case could be industrial areas, which reflects sometimes slightly utopian conditions of central planning economy, or military legacy. These structures can by relatively interesting from historical-cultural point of view regardless of architectural expression.

Generally speaking, the significance or value is inseparable from broad socio-cultural meanings of space, or if to remember Ch. Jencks, communicative function of architecture. And there also should be noted, that cultural connotations of rather recent times are much more vivid if to compare with distant past. In fact it means that any kind of valuation of Soviet architectural legacy is inseparable from general attitudes towards the Soviet era. And there we face rather wide range of positions. Starting with nostalgia of soviet times (obviously it is common for part of society which enjoyed privileges during the soviet time) and ending with demonstrative antagonism. In both cases architecture becomes a kind of hostage. Nevertheless the young generation, which have no personal experience of the time, become more and more indifferent for political peripeteias of Soviet times, the decision-makers still have more or less personalized approach. Such a deeply personalized attitude makes rather visible impact on developments and public discussions. Telling example – architects of the Soviet times. Today they are among the strongest voices arguing against demolition the Soviet time buildings. Certainly it gives an undertone of Soviet nostalgia for the whole process.

As a result we face another limitation or implication: preserving the 20th century architectural heritage also means managing with the "bad memory". In other words it is crucially important to understand how architecture expresses ideological meaning and to begin a discussion on how and does it important nowadays.

From architectural perspective can be discussed two major forms of manifestation of Soviet ideology. The most obvious expression: illustrative and

textual treatment of space (starting with places of political purpose and ending with monumental urban developments of Stalinist period). In this case political power speaks as open-coded, literal propaganda of symbols. Particularly telling instances of décor characteristic of "socialist realism" are the first palace of Vilnius Airport (1954, D. Burdinas, G. Jelkinas), bridge across Neris River in Vilnius (1948-1952, V. Anikinas) and others. Obviously these symbols still active, and serves as direct and illustrative allusion to recent history that is sometimes are quite irritating from point of view of society.

After 1955, the direct ideology of symbols was abandoned. However in later decades the ideological aspect remains important. Whereas the West after the World War II refused active ideologism of the Modern Movement, because "modernists in the West could usually not afford to be considered defending 'communist' ideas" (Heynen 2005:10), in the Soviet Union architecture still perceived as a part of utopian Socialist city. Urbanization being closely connected with the principles of the *Charte d'Athènes*, large-scale adaptation of standardized construction elements, absence of private land property turned to the key intersection points of politics and architecture. An intensively propagated socialist city utopia, the scope typical of the projects of the sixties aiming at essential change of an environment providing it with peculiar and radically new quality allowed formation of characteristic features of architecture that incorporated the statements of the prewar modernists being repeated and realized in one's own way. From symbolical palaces of government, stress of ideology was moved towards mass housing. However in practice it was more the vision of Soviet propaganda than the factual social well-being. Telling example mass housing area in Vilnius – Lazdynai, which in 1974 was honored with Lenin's prize for architecture [fig. 1]. Prestigious award first of all was the opportunity to tell the Soviet citizen how great achievements are. However today, without propaganda, these ideological meanings are much less visible.

Figure 1. Mikrorayon of Lazdynai in Vilnius

However today the mikrorayons of mass housing, public buildings that once had a great social and symbolic impact, gradually lose their meaning and instead of being adapted to a new city/town, also lose their physical attractiveness. If to use terminology coined by Arnold Toynbee, what we are witnessing is the process of urban *defacement* (Toynbee 1976:22). Part of the problem in this case undoubtedly lies in the quality of construction and changes in ownership, but it is also related to

the deep discrepancy between the two eras. A typical phenomenon happens when an urban structure developed several decades ago exist in parallel with the new one, for the spaces they occupy hardly have the appearance of interconnecting vessels. In this case, disharmony regarding urban development can be interpreted the direct outcome of political transformations.

Thus, from theoretical perspective such experiences makes the post-soviet space as a kind of memory laboratory where extremely important not only the quality of built legacy, but also the social meaning and memory about these buildings. Without active efforts of memory design (Kelley 2003) the major part of the heritage of the latter half of the 20th century is in danger of disappearing entirely, thus leaving an empty space between historical and modern architecture. The question of meaning and memory appears among the cornerstones in the process of integration 20th century legacy, as valuable heritage.

Facing Distopia: post-soviet reality

The importance of variability of memory and spiritual intensity can be illustrated with current state of 20th century heritage in post-soviet conditions (example of Lithuania). In recent decades we witness pretty intensive transformations of 20th century heritage: starting from demolition and ending with relatively protecting reconstructions.

Nevertheless all the range of socio-cultural contradictions, some of the soviet time examples already has been reconstructed with proper respect. It is paradox, but among the positive examples first of all we should mention Stalinist postwar architecture of "socialist realism", namely reconstructions of railways stations in Vilnius and Kaunas, Vilnius airport and other. On the one hand these buildings are more than fifty years old and already have a certain historical dimension. Neo-historical architectural decoration and tectonics even strengthens this feeling of historical value. On the other hand these buildings of Stalinist époque are saturated with communist symbols. Such a situation provokes abundant discussions about Soviet architecture as architectural heritage. Characteristic example – bridge over the river Nemunas in Kaunas, which was rebuilt in 1948 and reconstructed in 2005 [fig. 2]. After the recent reconstruction the communist stars were eliminated. However such an action still attains a wide attention from mass media. Such exemplary case illustrates how important the cultural meaning and so-called "bad memory".

Figure 2. Bridge over the river Nemunas in Kaunas. Now and before the reconstruction.

Buildings of latter decades are much more integral from cultural point of view. Such examples as café "Neringa" (1959, Arch. A. and V. Nasvy_iai, [fig. 3] without any frustrating ideological accents speaks about achievements of interior design and results of famous soviet Lithuanian architects. Yet, this is probably the only one such an interior in Lithuania, which preserved his function as well as interior design.

Figure 3. Café "Neringa" in Vilnius. Now and sketch by arch. V. Nasvytis (1959)

Another group of the buildings – reconstructions while preserving basic features of architectural shape but losing the function and/or interior arrangement. Depending on how deep is the respect towards primary idea, these reconstructions are treated as more or less successful example of integration of modern ideas. However even the positively treated cases, such as reconstruction of shop "Buitis" [fig. 4] to a certain extent lost their authentic spirit of Modern Movement. It is hardly possible to speak about any other, let's say cultural or historical value, than functionality and contemporary style of interior design. Yet, these reconstructions remain rather acceptable phenomenon while we speak about buildings or complexes that don't express the quality of architectural monument. However in this context could be mentioned another characteristic problem for 20th century heritage – selection. Extreme abundance of built environment during the 20th century certainly requires deliberate selection. In case of Lithuania, the selection is still in the process.

Figure 4. Reconstruction of shop "Buitis" in Kaunas (Built in 1969, arch. V. Di_ius; reconstruction in 2006 arch. G. Kazakauskas)

Also a big group of 20th c. legacy that is still remains in streets of Lithuania – gradual reconstructions and maintenance. In some cases, when building or complex

belongs to one owner, let's say university, architecture still keeps the integral shape. However commonly complexes suffer chaotic development, such as in case of cultural and shopping center "Girstupis" [fig. 5], and obviously lose any specific character of Modern Movement.

Figure 5. Cultural and shopping center "Girstupis" in Kaunas (Built in 1968-1975, arch. V. Di_ius, A. L_ckas. Picture in 1978 and 2008)

Last of all, a visible part of Soviet legacy remains abandoned or unfinished. Telling example: so-called *cultural centre* in smaller province towns. In the Soviet times, buildings of this functional typology acquired particular meaning: they represented an effort to replace the church – a public space that had prevailed in the smaller towns since olden times. However in recent decades, when lost their ideological purpose, many of these buildings are left abandoned. Obviously such deserted places represents past époque from rather negative angle. Especially deplorable the fact that many of these, previously important buildings, are representing quite important architectural achievements. An exemplar case: palace of Sports in Vilnius. The building that is an outstanding example of Soviet brutalism and employs unique hanging constructions for a long years waits for the final decision about the further development [fig. 6]. Some of such important buildings already demolished, or will be in near future, as in case of "Merkurijus" shop, which doubtless embodies prime features of late soviet époque [fig. 7].
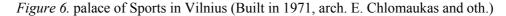
Figure 6. palace of Sports in Vilnius (Built in 1971, arch. E. Chlomaukas and oth.)

Figure 7. Shop "Merkurijus" in Kaunas (Built in 1983, arch. A. Sprindys)

Generalization

Thus, considering the contemporary developments, the main objective is to reshape the attitude towards Soviet Modernism, which is willingly or not, appears as inseparable part of local heritage and identity. The point of departure: to evoke the feeling of continuity in architectural history of 20th c. regardless the time of Stalinism and Soviet conditions; and also to expose the unique decisions made in conditions of central planning economy as valuable and widely interesting phenomena. Such a task enables to see the post-soviet region as a kind of memory design laboratory, where conscious reinterpretation of 20th c. heritage is crucial for saving at least a part of this heritage and including 20th c. as undisruptive part of local spirit.

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