

## Research Article

# Public Spaces in Lithuanian Cities: Legacy of Dependence and Recent Tendencies

**Rimantas Buivydas and Almantas Samalavičius**

*Department of Architectural Fundamentals and Theory, Faculty of Architecture, Vilnius Gediminas Technical University, Trakų 1/26, 01135 Vilnius, Lithuania*

Correspondence should be addressed to Almantas Samalavičius, [almantsam@yahoo.com](mailto:almantsam@yahoo.com)

Received 28 June 2011; Revised 18 August 2011; Accepted 18 August 2011

Academic Editor: Andrejs Skaburskis

Copyright © 2011 R. Buivydas and A. Samalavičius. This is an open access article distributed under the Creative Commons Attribution License, which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

The object of discussion of the current paper is transformations of urban public spaces since Czarist Russia's colonial rule up to the period after the restoration of Lithuania's independence. While reviewing the transformations of public spaces (first and foremost squares) of the country's larger cities, the authors noted that this field is distinguished by extremely contradictory tendencies: on one hand, we are dealing with the urban legacy of previous regime as well as its impact on the "physiognomies" of Lithuanian cities as well as hurried often premature attempts to change the earlier function of public spaces simply by eliminating the symbols of Soviet ideology continued; on the other, a rapid campaign for creating new ideological symbols related to independence was launched, which often involved sacrificing the actual function of public spaces and the artistic quality of monuments. It is noted that similar processes took place in the earlier periods of history: whenever the repertoire of certain visual signs and symbols was exhausted, in urbanistic spaces it would be replaced with the visual symbols of the new era and a new structure of a public space. One more tendency of restructuring public spaces has recently become distinct: under the influence of interests of private capital, part of the former traditional city squares with monuments is being converted into parking lots or other uses changing their functions and meaning.

## 1. Public Spaces in the City: Continuity and Change

Public spaces have taken deep root in the urban structure since the earliest historical times. It is sufficient to recall the Greek agora or the Roman forum in order to understand their role in the ancient and classical urban culture. In the Christian Middle Ages public life in European cities was most often concentrated in market squares located next to the Town Halls. These squares sometimes just tiny extensions of the streets served as a site for not only carrying on trade but also announcing the most important news, public executions of criminals, providing ample space for religious, state and municipal festivities, and tournaments. The historical capital of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania was no exception—Vilnius Town Hall Square hosted performances of trained bears, traveling acrobats and comedians, presentations of

semireligious mystery plays during city festivals, and concerts of the city's orchestra on the occasions of various festivities and during Catholic and Russian Orthodox holidays. Vilnius craftsmen and merchants, officers from the Vilnius garrison, clergymen, and university students used to march, and choirs and orchestras used to give concerts on festive occasions not only in the Town Hall Square but also in other public spaces. Various festivities took place during the inaugurations and family holidays of the rulers [1, pages 72–88]. Though the functions of public spaces changed in the course of time, part of their former roles has been retained until our days. In urban development, part of the field of urban space, which is usually surrounded by a network of streets and alleys (untypical of semipublic and private spaces), is called a public space. It is usually considered a factor of consistency and continuity in time and space, as its "lifespan" is much longer than that of the surrounding buildings—the latter can be

periodically pulled down, while the public spaces defined by these buildings remain [2, page 272]. However, it is not only their enduring value or continuity, that is, those aspects that should be related with tradition that is important. Some authors who analyze urban processes specify that in the normative respect spaces are considered public if they are allotted and managed by local authorities and if they are open and can be used without reservations by all members of the city's community [3, page 233]. Renowned architectural and urban historian Spiro Kostof has emphasized the differences between city streets and its public places. According to him "street and quay are primarily places of transit, capturing public life in momentous pauses from a river of people in motion. The public place, on the other hand, is a destination, a purpose-built stage for ritual and interaction. Broadly, the reference is to places" we all are free to use, as against privately owned realms of houses and shops [4, page 123]. He goes on further to suggest that the most essential aim of the public place is "to ensconce community and to arbitrate social conflict" [4, page 124].

The aim of the current paper is to discuss the most distinct and enduring transformations of public spaces in the urban texture of the larger cities that started with the nineteenth century, when the country was ruled by the colonial regime of the Russian empire up to the latest period of social and cultural transition of postcommunist Lithuania in the last two decades. Though public spaces may have lost part of their former significance in the life of contemporary cities, it is still worthwhile to recall a remark once made by the outstanding researcher of the city Lewis Mumford that a change of the entire lifestyle will make us fully realize the social function of the city's open spaces [5, page 83].

Like in other countries of the post-Soviet space, in Lithuania not only public life but also public urban spaces underwent transformation in the recent decades. Lithuania's complicated historical way to independence marked with losses and deprivations made an impact on the changes of the contents, functions, and shape of public spaces. It should be acknowledged that these changes were not always determined by a confrontation of political ideologies (the dominant colonizing one and the opposing one). Various transformations of such spaces were quite often dictated by controversial processes of city development, sociocultural progress, restructuring of the urban texture, consolidation of new needs, interruption of continuity, and so forth. Unfortunately, quite many transformations carried out during the last two decades of independence were due because of the clash of ideologies—or rather resulted from the accumulated national pathos and the rhetoric of the institutions expressing that pathos and the chances to negotiate their future shapes and content through balanced public discussion were few, if any at all.

In the current paper, we do not aim to present or all the more thoroughly discuss a detailed chronology of the development of public spaces of Lithuanian cities. However, we think that it would be useful to analyze the legacy and present tendencies, to comment on contested legacies and ideologies as well as reasons of ruptures in urban texture, as all this exerts a considerable influence on the urban culture of

contemporary Lithuania. Since olden times, market squares of various types (universal, livestock, wood, and fish markets), which existed in the city both as special territories and integral parts of the Town Hall environment, were predominant in the typology of Lithuania's public spaces. With the development and growth of cities, the majority of such places gradually lost the role of commercial spaces and became representational squares located as a rule near sacral objects (churches), important state and municipal institutions, and sumptuous palaces of magnates. They would also acquire the function and shape of recreational squares and city gardens. In the course of time, the functions, meanings, and names of these already transformed spaces changed. The present analysis contains a reconsideration of contested legacies including those of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, period of Russia's imperial rule, temporary Polish takeover of Vilnius region in the 20th century, followed by the Soviet period as well as recent transformations that are due to the rapid ascent of capitalist economy and commodity culture with its consequences on the form, functions, and meaning of public spaces. While reconsidering these issues we have attempted to bridge the local and the global, employing and blending the strategies, arguments and conclusions of urban researchers studying contemporary Western metropolises with the findings and opinions of analysts who study the present transformations of largest Lithuanian cities. The authors of the present research have structured their discussion so as to shed more light on Lithuanian urban policy in regard to public spaces as a reflection of the contradictions and ambiguities peculiar not only to this country but also to a larger postcommunist realm and, yet, containing its local contextual nuances. Reconsidering historical experiences and examples we argue that rivaling ideologies not only have left their marks on spatial arrangement and contents of public spaces but their present exploitation continues to change urban texture beyond the lifespan of dependency periods, most recently exhibiting signs of commodification of social and cultural life.

## 2. Public Spaces as Visual Expression of Ideologies in Lithuania's Capital City

The spatial structure and aesthetic contents of today's Cathedral Square in Vilnius was fundamentally transformed several times in the course of the city's history. Concrete historical data about the original shape of this square go back to the Middle Ages. At that time the structure of this public space was entirely different—it was much smaller and divided into several parts, which were limited by defensive walls and towers, the bulk of the early cathedral, and the walled road leading from the South Gate of the Lower Castle to the Palace of the Grand Dukes, as well as a fragment of the eastern part of the square, which had once been part of the territory of the palace garden. When tsarist Russia occupied Lithuania at the end of the 18th century, the walls and towers of the former Palace of the Grand Dukes of Lithuania fell into decay, and finally were pulled down by a decision of the colonial authorities, and the emptied space turned into a wasteland of undefined configuration, losing its former form



FIGURE 1: Monument to Yekaterina II, Vilnius, sculptor M. Antokolski, 1902.



FIGURE 2: Grand Duke Gediminas' Monument, Vilnius, sculptor V. Kašuba, architect H. Šilgalis, 1996.

and meaning. The only relic of material and aesthetic heritage from that period is the belfry erected on the site of the defensive tower and the cathedral, eventually remodeled into a Classicist structure by Lithuania's most eminent architect Laurynas Gucevičius, completed in 1801. However, the space underwent further reconstruction in 1902, while seeking to make the space more representative and symbolically designate Russia's colonial rule, the imperial authorities built a rather unusually oriented monument (with its back turned to the direction of the main adjoining avenue) to the Russian empress Catherine II (sculptor Mark Antokolski) in the southwestern part of the territory (Figure 1).

Another important period of transformations of the square was the interwar period in the 20th century, when the Vilnius region was occupied by Poland under Jozef Pilsudski. A project designed by two architects—Romuald Gutt and Stanisław Bukowsky—won the competition for the planning of the square and a monument to Marshal Pilsudski. The square was intended to be pretentiously called the Nation's Forum. Though the Polish authorities did not succeed in putting this project into life, a high quality of its spatial compositional solution did not raise any objections of Lithuanian urban designers. When Vilnius was returned

to Lithuania in 1940, the project with slight alterations was implemented in two years, and the contemporary square (now named Gediminas) still retains the same architectural shape. In the newest times, already after the restoration of independence, when the square was given the name of Cathedral Square, a monument to the founder of Vilnius, the Grand Duke of Lithuania Gediminas was to be erected on the square by a decision of the Republic of Lithuania and the municipal authorities (Figure 2). Several rounds of competition for the monument were held in a particularly heated and conflicting public atmosphere, though without much result. Finally, the project of the American Lithuanian émigré sculptor Vytautas Kašuba and local architect Henrikas Šilgalis was chosen with the aim to appease the passions boiling in society. Today most observers agree that it was an unsuccessful, abortive attempt to find an ideological compromise. Already at that time experienced monumental artists forewarned that a mechanically enlarged chamber sculpture meant for the interior (although created with utmost precision) by the well-known artist would not be successfully realized in a large-size square. This is what happened, all the more that the gravely ill sculptor was unable to take part in the process of putting into life the project model and correcting it on site. Another aspect of the monument and the entire square that received a great deal of criticism was the monument's orientation in space and its position. The present monument is located on the central longitudinal compositional axis of the square and faces it by its frontal narrow side. Meanwhile in the project of the Polish architects, a monument to Pilsudski was designed on the terrace at the southeastern corner of the square and had to communicate with the belfry by the principle of transverse composition. Recently another fact has become evident—the monument to Gediminas is not related to the currently restored spacious building of the Palace of the Grand Dukes, though the municipal authorities that organized the competition had been warned about taking this into consideration. Already at that time attention was drawn to the fact that the project of the monument needed to be erected on a special pseudoplatform that could move in all directions [6, pages 133–77]. Thus, the more expressive lateral surface of the silhouette and the frontal part of the monument could have been at least turned to the square, and the monument itself could have been placed on the axis connecting the entrance to the palace and the beginning of the historical Pilies street (Figure 3). It is obvious that such opinions were dismissed due to ideological reasons: part of society and politicians of that time adamantly opposed the idea of restoration of the Palace of the Grand Dukes. The monument's opponents' viewpoint can be at least partially summarized by a remark of architectural historian Algimantas Mačiulis who insists that "The building of monuments in the capital was not very successful during the last decade. There was a great deal of hurry and misunderstandings, and thus mistakes were not avoided" [7, page 65]. However, one chooses to interpret this somewhat blunt and "classicist" remark; it still represents a prevailing critique of the present space design, shared by numerous Lithuanian architectural critics.

### 3. Transformation of Squares during Czarist Colonization

Going back to the period of Lithuania's colonization by tsarist Russia and the process of designation of urban spaces with monumental elements at that time, attention should be drawn to obvious parallels: both the eastern and the western part of Europe saw a boom in monument building. Regardless of the fact that imperial Russia still considered Lithuania a mere province of its "northwestern" region, the tsarist administration tried to insert the key signs and visual symbols representing its power and ideology into urban spaces. Among them was a strange fenced "little garden" of an elliptical plan structure, as if independent of the environment, with a pompous monument to the governor-general Mikhail Muravyov (who bore the nickname "Hangman" for his cruelty) at its center, which was located on the square of the Governor-General's Palace, as it was called at that time, in the Old Quarters of Vilnius. Eventually this somber foreign body was removed from the square on the initiative of the Russian colonial authorities themselves, and the Square of the Presidential Palace acquired its current form in 1940, when Vilnius became part of Lithuania again. It should be noted that the public space in front of the Presidential Palace successfully avoided the erection of a new sculptural icon, and the square itself perfectly carries out the function of a traditional European square.

Another similar case is a monument built in front of the façade of the Town Hall in Kaunas commemorating the Russian victory against Napoleon in 1812, which was later removed. Today, many citizens and specialists would probably agree that the space in front of the Town Hall does not need a "majestic" monument, as the building itself is visually expressive and monumental. In the period of tsarist colonization, an occasional bust of the Russian poet Alexander Pushkin totally clashing with the environment was built on Pilies Street in Vilnius. Interestingly enough, in the interwar period the pedestal of this sculpture was used for a monument to composer Stanislaw Moniuszko built in Vilnius Old Quarters in 1922 [8, page 27].

### 4. The Legacies of Polish and Soviet Rule

Public spaces in Vilnius underwent transformations in the period of Polish occupation as well. Yet, these several projects put into life by the Polish administration and later, after the Vilnius region had been returned to Lithuania, have survived almost unaltered until today. In the Soviet period after World War II, some reconfigurations of public spaces carried out by the Polish authorities were brutally deformed: an original memorial monument designed by architect Gutt in the spirit of Modernism in 1937 and a square meant for various events on the site of Piłsudski's birth home in Zułowo were destroyed.

Restored in 1918, the independent Republic of Lithuania soon lost Vilnius to Poland, and Kaunas became the temporary capital. The country's political, economic, and cultural elite began to accumulate and flourish in that city. Attention to the arrangement of public spaces and planning of new

squares, gardens, and parks gradually increased. The most significant object of this kind in Kaunas was Unity Square. Before 1940, Unity Square occupying a large area contained the dominant War Museum and a complex of Mikalojus Konstantinas Čiurlionis' gallery with the Bell Tower, the Freedom Monument, the Monument to the Unknown Soldier, the Monument to the Perished, ten busts of outstanding state figures, and an expressively arranged system of paths, lawns, and flower beds. According to the historian of architecture Jolita Kančienė, Unity Square in Kaunas became "...a space carrying the strongest ideological meaning, a new city center and its symbol" [9]. In the Soviet period, the structure of the spatial plan of this square was destroyed and the monuments were pulled down. Almost half of the eastern part of the square was cut off, and a new empty square extending northwards was formed, where a monument to Lenin was built by the order of the authorities. Today, the space has been cleared from the Soviet relic of Communist propaganda, but so far has not acquired a new content and is more reminiscent of an empty plain. In the meantime, the monuments demolished before the war were reconstructed in the area in front of the museum building and the garden, which serves as its extension, and Unity Square itself has become a vigorous element of the city's public life and urban culture. In the interwar period, squares and parks containing monuments to the struggle for freedom and independence of different artistic quality and visual accents dedicated to the anniversary of Vytautas Magnus were built in the cities and towns of Lithuania; in the Soviet period many of these objects were destroyed by the authorities. A tendency of restoring these formerly demolished monuments and memorial signs has recently become distinct, which testifies to the importance of collective memory in contemporary Lithuania. As Edward S. Casey has insightfully remarked "A genuinely public place nurtures communal presence and direct communication among its denizens. It also supports *commemoration*, where this term signifies conjoint remembrance whose forms vary from explicit eulogies to artworks, from gathering to watch a parade, to just hanging together" [10, page 79].

### 5. Post-Soviet Monuments and Public Spaces

After the restoration of independence, monuments that stood in public spaces and represented Soviet ideology were pulled down or dismantled—in terms of the common historical experience it is a frequent and understandable phenomenon. Part of these monuments found their way to Grūtas Park, where a unique internationally renowned collection of the heritage of Socialist Realism has been accumulated. On the other hand, the reckless aim to dismantle each and every one of alien monuments does not bear proof neither of society's "coming of age" nor the end of any ideological indoctrination. It is noticeable that quite frequently monuments are merely replaced with symbols of the powers that have held victory over the former ideology, which is quite an archaic phenomenon. Thus, on the site of the Soviet Victory Square in Klaipėda containing a cannon placed on a pylon emerged Lietuvninkų Square with a monument to the author of the first Lithuanian book Martynas Mažvydas, and



FIGURE 3: Steponas Darius and Stasys Girėnas Monument, Kaunas (according to the model of B.Pundzius executed by sculptor J. Šlivinskas, architect M. Šaliamoras, 1993).



FIGURE 4: Lenin's Monument in Vilnius Lukiškių square, sculptor N. Tomsky, architect V. Mikučianis, 1948.

Vincas Kudirka Square in Vilnius replaced the former square of the Soviet general Nicolai Cherniakhovsky containing his sculpture (which was transferred to the general's home city in Russia). In Šiauliai, Lenin's sculpture on Aušros Alley having been eliminated, a square dedicated to the patriotic movement of the so-called Aušrininkai—supporters of newspaper Aušra (Dawn)—a publication which played an important role in national resurgence movement in the end of the nineteenth century with a monument "Aušra" at its center emerged, and in Panevėžys, Freedom Square was built on the site of the former square with Lenin's monument, and a monument to the legendary director of the Panevėžys theatre Juozas Miltinis became its ideological and compositional accent. In Vilnius, the country's "principal" that is, officially the most important monument to Lenin in Soviet Lithuania located in Lukiškės Square was dismantled as soon as the Soviet regime collapsed (Figure 4), and later by a decision of the Seimas (parliament) a representational square of the state of Lithuania with the Freedom Monument was established. Despite the fact that the majority of political and civic communities as well as society at large welcomed this timely and highly symbolic gesture, the future developments of the square as public space were slow and largely ineffective: thought last year Lithuania celebrated the twentieth anniversary of its independence, Lukiškės Square still maintains the same shape it acquired immediately after the removal of the central symbol of the Soviet power.

A somewhat different tendency was represented by the transformations of Ažuolynas Park in Kaunas—a second largest Lithuanian city which performed the functions of country's temporary capital. The park—a spacious, well-attended and unpretentious public space for a number of decades enjoyed by city residents—containing a cozy square of leisure function, a decorative sculptural group of young women of rather generalized sculptural forms and an adjacent fountain with "leaping" streams underwent a hasty process of redesign as soon as municipal authorities decided to remake it into an official site of a monument. As a result its former functions and character were destroyed, and on its site emerged a large-size square with a tall monument to the legendary pilots of interwar Lithuania—its national heroes who attempted to cross the Atlantic

and who, however, tragically failed—Steponas Darius and Stasis Girėnas—at the end of its axis (Figure 3). Contents and functions of this public space having been changed, it was basically redesigned into a stately and official spatial formation, which unfortunately lost its former coziness and attractiveness, and as a result attracts less people. It is obvious that the square after these changes becomes alive only during official holidays and festivities and in general remains a rather empty, peripheral space in the present urban structure of Kaunas' central part.

There are many more public spaces in Lithuania, from which Soviet ideological monuments have been removed, but new structures have not been erected on their site. And the spaces themselves, having lost their former visual accents, have become as if half abandoned, all the more that quite often the functions of such spaces have been left unspecified. Municipalities and specialists (architects, urban planners, sculptors, etc.) do not agree if anything should be built in these spaces at all and, if so, whether it should be structures of conventional traditional forms or works closer to the aesthetic avant garde. There is also a possibility to designate a new political situation by untraditional means (which happened, e.g., with Unity Square in Kaunas, Resurrection Square in Šiauliai, a square on Pylimo Street in Vilnius, where a monument to Soviet partisans and underground fighters was dismantled; a hill in Kryžkalnis near Žemaičių motorway, where a large-scale monument to the soldiers of the so-called "Lithuanian" 16th Soviet division was blown up; a square on Saulėtekio Alley on Vilnius campus—a former site of the monument to Lenin and Vincas Kapsukas, as well as a public space in Druskininkai, which formerly contained a monument to Lenin integrated in the territory, and which is currently used as a square meant for city events, but already devoid of the visual and ideological accent obligatory in the Soviet period).

## 6. Redesigning Squares into Roofs of Parking Lots

Changing the function and physical structure of such spaces by supplementing it with surface and underground functional buildings has recently become more and more

symptomatic in Lithuania's largest cities. However strange it might seem, underground parking lots are quite often designed under public squares in such central cities as Kaunas or Šiauliai. This tendency is quite recent (it was hardly an issue during the first postdependence decade) and mostly due to the role played by the private capital in city affairs. The big business has started to press municipal authorities to pave way to its interests with little consideration of the public opinion or interests of any local urban communities. In the words of architect, Professor Gintaras Čaikauskas who commented on this tendency, "In such undefined situations the position of profit-oriented businessmen is particularly active, as the territories under the question are located in the commercially most attractive urban spaces" [11, page 251]. In the recent years the number of cases when the content of public spaces is treated in a narrow functionalist sense manifesting itself in the aim to convert public squares into roofs of underground parking lots has ominously increased. Business structures interested in potential profit exert financial pressure on municipal institutions. Thus, architectural contests in redesigning such public spaces are held with a plea to construct large-size parking lots either on the ground or beyond the surface. For example, the requirements for the design competition of Prisiškėlimo Square in Šiauliai (the year 2010) included a "a parking space for a maximum quantity of automobiles," the contest for reconstruction of Vienybės (Unity) Square in Kaunas (2008) strongly required from its participants to provide space for underground parking lot (Figure 6). As a result those design projects that were awarded first prize in both competitions contain huge underground spaces for parking, meanwhile the surface of squares in both projects remains flat.

The commercialization of urbanistic policy is becoming more distinct in the spatial structure and positioning of the points of attraction of the larger Lithuanian cities, which results in the rapid erosion of public spaces [12, pages 48–51] and in the marked shifts of urban landscape in general. The relocation of large shopping malls from the outskirts and semiperipheral parts to the city centers have played their role in changing the former character of large city areas [13, pages 101–116]. Particularly scandalous situations have arisen in Lukiškių Square in Vilnius and Unity Square in Kaunas. Led by private interests, representatives of business structures speculatively assert that underground car park facilities under city squares will supposedly solve the problems of traffic flow management and parking, but, instead of seeking to solve major traffic problems, let alone the issues of development of public spaces, they most often aim to satisfy the mercantile goals of construction business. In this context one can recall a successful civic campaign with the participation of 17 nonprofit public organizations of Lithuania, which stopped the construction of an underground parking lot under Odminių Square near the Vilnius Cathedral—a project that was strongly promoted by Vilnius municipal power. Recently there has been a great deal of attempts to initiate the construction of underground car park facilities under Lukiškės Square. In similar cases of lobbying for underground parking lots, the fact that having found themselves in public spaces of the city's central areas, these structures

even more increase the transport concentration in the central areas and their surroundings is most often ignored. This tendency, however, is quite universal and is related to ambiguities of globalization and "late capitalism," to use a borrowing of Fredric Jameson's vocabulary. As was already emphasized by Sharon Zukin, "The common" symbols of public spaces are increasingly derived from the nexus of aesthetic display and commercial culture" [14].

## 7. Is There a Space Left for the Genius Loci?

Christian Norberg-Schulz has insisted in his numerous well-known studies on the importance of *genius loci* in urban environment, drawing attention to the fact that modernity has been wiping out identity of city spaces. He has insightfully noted that "The lack of character in modern-day environment makes it difficult or even impossible to identify, and this therefore becomes one of the decisive factors in the loss of place" [15, page 43–44]. Ignoring the spirit of the place, the so-called *genius loci*, disregarding the historical tradition, and aggravating transport problems makes us doubt such practice of treatment of public spaces. Reckless construction of underground parking lots should also be stopped because of the poor conditions of growth of indigenous tree species: a thin layer of soil from the ground surface to the ferroconcrete ceiling of the parking lot allows planting only genetically modified imported tree species, as the common tree species cannot take root in such locations. In this situation, only two ways out are possible: to plant flowers, shrubs, grass, and small trees above the underground parking lots or to turn them into gaping pseudoconceptual empty spaces, silent and rhetorically inexpressive, not articulating any meaning. The problem in this case should not be understood merely as *indigenous versus alien*, while bearing in mind the fact that historically the presence of a significant mass of trees was characteristic of the structure of such spaces in Lithuania. It is also true regarding the urban structure of Vilnius in which natural element remains visible and important. Already before World War II, Mikalojus Vorobjovas emphasized the interaction of nature and architecture, which should be considered as a typical feature of historical Vilnius [16, pages 1–15]. Besides, trees not only grow in the peripheral parts of public spaces but also harmoniously carve up the structure of such spaces in all zones. Unfortunately, the number of such tree-planted areas is constantly shrinking under current urban policies regarding public spaces. Thus, it would be extremely strange if the municipal authorities tried to convince society of an overabundance of trees and vegetation in the public spaces of Vilnius and other cities. Some examples make it evident that green areas in public spaces have decreased with the aim of replacing them with narrowly understood "functional" structures and expansion of the real estate market. However, such aims often contradict the public interest, which the municipal authorities are supposed to defend, yet most often fail. As Sharon Zukin has insightfully noted, "Today, urban places respond to market pressures, with public dreams defined by private development projects and public pleasures restricted to private entry" [17, page 41]. Zukin's observation, though based on

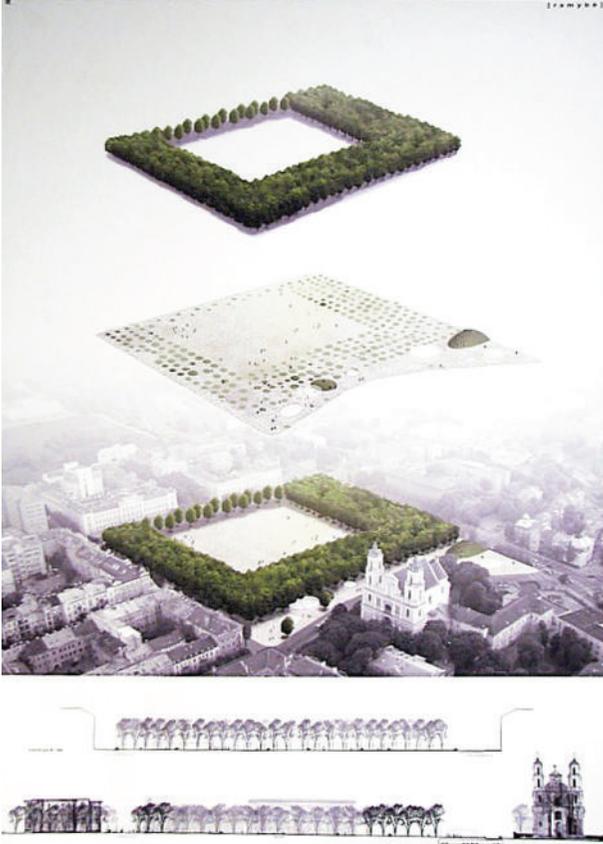


FIGURE 5: Project “Peace”, 2011 authors architect Rolandas Palekas et al. Ist prize in Lukiškės Square resign contest. Includes an underground parking lot.

the analysis of Northern American urban landscapes proves to be applicable to the recent transformations of urban spaces in postcommunist realm and Lithuania, in particular.

## 8. Ambiguities of Architectural Contests

One more important aspect of transformation of public spaces should be discussed—the weakest link of this transformation is competitions for restructuring such spaces. Competitions for restructuring the contents and form of ideologically loaded city squares built in the Soviet period are held on a regular basis, but with far less results than could be expected. As a rule, competitions are organized sporadically, without much responsibility and perspective of the city’s future, and are quite often characterized by a lack of competence and ethics, as well as lobbying interests and bias. It is confirmed by a series of already finished competitions consisting of endless rounds, ambiguous jury decisions, or canceling of results. Quite frequently the competitions are followed by a great deal of criticism in the media, which shows that a desirable consensus between the creators, society, authorities, and business structures is achieved very rarely. Professional sculptors and architects are well aware of the fact that the effectiveness of the competitions largely



FIGURE 6: Architectural project “Equilibrium,” 2008-2009, architects M. Olšauskas, M. Reklaitis, J. Kšivickaitė, I. Olšauskienė. First prize awarded in Kaunas Vienybe (Unity) Square contest. Parking lot is hidden beneath the surface.

depends on the conditions of public spaces under reconstruction. The competitions held in Lithuania during the last two decades have often lacked a clear formulation and detailed explication of tasks and the assessment criteria. The chaos reigning in this field allows the competition organizers, jury members, and the participants themselves to manipulate the results and change the principles of assessment. It was because of these reasons that at least several competitions held during the last decade failed: it happened with the competition for General Vytautas Žemaitis Square and monument in Vilnius, Resurrection Square in Kaunas, and the latest failure was the competition (or, more precisely, a series of competitions) for the reconstruction of Lukiškės Square.

The dialogue between creators and society is often rather complicated in the European context as well, but the post-communist practice of holding competitions reveals that we still lack the public discourse that would not be dominated by political and patriotic motifs, which often influence the results not to the advantage of aesthetics. Political groups often impose their preconceived vision of reconstruction and functions of a public space on the organizers and participants of competitions, thus making original proposals contained in almost every competition suffer. Partly because of these reasons several competitions or their rounds for Lukiškės Square (Figure 5), accompanied by not particularly meaningful discussions, arguments, angry outbursts, and categorical protectionism of one or another project, ended without any satisfactory result [18, page 46], [19, page 4], [20, page 105], [21, page 202]. The highlight of the last competition was a declaration of a group of politicians calling themselves patriots, which required that a sculpture of the Vytis (Equestrian) symbol from the state coat of arms be erected on Lukiškės Square. If this plan is put into life, it will remain to be stated that the will of “a mob of politicians” and a preconceived manipulation of the key symbols and signs have been legitimized in the most important representational public space of Lithuania and its capital, and the artistic form and meaning have been sacrificed to the rhetoric of narrowly understood patriotism. As it has already

happened not once, forecasts are rather gloomy—it is difficult to guess when impressive accents of urban culture, original artistic solutions, and a deeper understanding of the “social contents” of public spaces are going to appear in the structure of Lithuanian cities.

## 9. Concluding Remarks

Today, the public spaces of postcommunist Lithuania, particularly those of representational nature, face a large variety of positive and negative challenges posed by a complex and hardly surmountable physical and mental inheritance of the past, a broken continuity and tradition, present political and economic power games, and other factors of the long-drawn period of liminal transformations; thus, it is not surprising that these spaces often become a territory of various social and cultural tensions and conflicts. One should bear in mind the circumstance emphasized by the historian of architecture M. Christian Boyer that architecture in a city is not merely a spectacle formed by professional city planners and architects; it is closely related to society itself and its collective memory [22, page 32]. Certainly, both individual and collective memory is not free from some vision of the present and past life; thus, it may become and becomes an object of various influences and manipulations; on the other hand, society consists of different mnemonic groups whose views of the past do not coincide and often contradict each other. All that exacerbates a dialogic view of the purpose of public spaces, memory signs and symbols, and their repertory in today's cities. On the other hand, it is important to form the basic essentials of city culture while realizing that both individuals and their associations, political and business structures, and other players of a multilayered and wide urban field must seek a dialogue and consensus based on sound thinking and sensible assessment of the past. The role of municipal authorities is also important in this respect. In the words of British urban analyst Ali Madanipour, “The need for embedding the principles of democratic decision making, for developing visions for people in localities and for enriching the quality of life can be addressed in different ways. Developing public spaces is one of the significant means available to citizens to bring these areas of concern together.” [23, page 186]. Conclusions of this author remind us that municipal institutions should not act in the city as do private companies above all seeking exchange value. Matthew Cormona and his colleagues have recently argued that no matter what control strategy is applied by state or municipal power, in order to be successful, public places need to be attractive, yet “the common reality, however, is that many open spaces are not designed as public places, and are often intended (merely) to show off the buildings or appeal to a select group of people” [24, page 125].

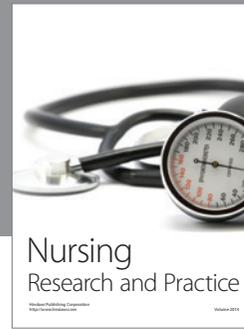
The analysis of the current local tendencies of formation of public spaces and monuments as well as insights of large number of global urban researchers allows us to assert that the shifts in this field in urban Lithuania have been different than one might have expected on the eve of 1990. Through narrow rhetoric of nationalism and state symbolism the legacy of the past continues to dominate. Quite often we still remain prisoners of the habits of thinking and acting formed

in the past, during centuries and decades of colonial regimes and our treatment of public spaces is reminiscent of an immature competition of rivaling political powers. The persistence of politics and most recently politics mixed with the growing power of the local and global market “players” deprive citizens of their full-scale access to public spaces and produce effects on their meaning and use. The city's public spaces are a dimension whose symbols signify the character of contemporary culture, full of tensions and contradictions, the growing pressures of market forces, and the influence of developers' strategies based on neoliberalist assumptions as well as shifts in inconsistent and often contradictory municipal policies regarding the future role of public spaces. As Ash Amin has recently concluded, “through and beyond the consumption and leisure practices, the experience of public space remains one of sociability and social recognition and general acceptance of the codes of civic conduct and the benefits of access to collective public resources. It continues to be an experience that supports building awareness of the commons, perhaps one that falls short of fostering active involvement in the life of a city, but still underpins cultures of sociability and civic sensibility” [25]. Further observations on the future development of public spaces in Lithuania as well as other areas of post-Soviet realm will provide us with more insight into urban culture, or to be more precise cultures in the making, and also into society and communities which articulate their memories, values, and identities in contemporary urban culture.

## References

- [1] S. Samalavičius, *Vilniaus Rotušė*, Vilniaus Rotušė, Vilnius, Lithuania, 2006.
- [2] D. Frick, “Spatial synergy and supportiveness of public space,” *Journal of Urban Design*, vol. 12, no. 2, pp. 261–274, 2007.
- [3] A. Madanipour, *Public and Private Spaces of the City*, Routledge, London, UK, 2003.
- [4] S. Kostof, *The City Assembled: The Elements of Urban Form Throughout History*, Thames and Hudson, London, UK, 2004.
- [5] L. Mumford, *The Urban Prospect*, Harcourt, Brace and World, New York, NY, USA, 1968.
- [6] R. Buivydas, *Architektūra: Pozityvai ir Negatyvai*, Ex-Arte, Vilnius, Lithuania, 2006.
- [7] A. Mačiulis, “Gyvybingos visuomenės erdvės,” *Archiforma*, no. 3, pp. 65–71, 2006.
- [8] A. Novickas, *Atminties Įprasminimas Miesto Aikštėje: Nuo Paminklo iki Patirčių Erdvės*, Technika, Vilnius, Lithuania, 2010.
- [9] J. Kančienė, “Laikinosios sostinės reprezentacinės aikštės,” *Archiforma*, no. 35, pp. 72–80, 2006.
- [10] E. S. Casey, “Public memory in the making,” in *Architecture, Ethics and the Personhood of Place*, G. Caico, Ed., University Press of New England, London, UK, 2007.
- [11] G. Čaikauskas, “Atskirtys visuomeninėje aplinkos sampratoje,” *Urbanistika ir Architektūra*, vol. 33, supplement 1, pp. 251–265, 2009.
- [12] A. Samalavičius, “Vilnius city: urbanism driven by consumption,” *Lituanus*, vol. 56, no. 2, pp. 43–52, 2010.
- [13] A. Samalavičius, “Facing globalization: lithuanian urbanism between postcommunism and postmodernity,” in *Postcommunism, Postmodernism and the Global Imagination*, Ch. Moraru,

- Ed., East European Monographs/Columbia University Press, Boulder, Colo, USA, 2009.
- [14] S. Zukin, *Politics and Aesthetics of Public Space: The 'American' Model*, <http://www.publicspace.org/en/text-library/eng/a013-politics-and-aesthetics-of-public-space-html>, 1998.
- [15] C. Norberg-Schulz, *Architecture: Presence, Language, Place*, Skira, Milano, Italy, 2000.
- [16] M. Vorobjovas, *Vilniaus Menas*, Spaudos Fondas, Kaunas, Lithuania, 1940.
- [17] S. Zukin, *Landscapes of Power: From Detroit to Disney World*, University of California, Berkeley, Calif, USA, 1993.
- [18] K. Šešelgis, "Vilniaus miesto Lukiškių aikštės formavimo projektai," *Urbanistika ir Architektūra*, vol. 2, no. 24, pp. 32–53, 1997.
- [19] M. Baužienė, "Lukiškių aikštės pertvarkai sukliudė užvirusios aistros," *Lietuvos Rytas*, no. 8, p. 4, 2007.
- [20] T. Grunskis, "Diktato architektūra. Lukiškių aikštė," *Archiforma*, no. 24, pp. 102–105, 2007.
- [21] A. Vyšniunas, "Lukiškių aikštė—socialinio užsakymo evoliucija," *Urbanistika ir Architektūra*, no. 32, pp. 195–2004, 2008.
- [22] C. M. Boyer, *The City of Collective Memory: Its Historical Imagery and Architectural Environments*, MIT Press, Cambridge, Mass, USA, 1998.
- [23] A. Madanipour, "Roles and challenges of urban design," *Journal of Urban Design*, vol. 11, no. 2, pp. 173–193, 2006.
- [24] M. Cormona, T. Heath, T. Oc, and S. Tiesdel, *Public Places Urban Spaces: The Dimensions of Urban Design*, Architectural Press, Amsterdam, The Netherlands, 2003.
- [25] A. Amin, *Collective Culture and Urban Public Space*, <http://www.publicspace.org/en/text-library/eng/b003-collective-culture-and-urban-public-space-html>, 2006.



# Hindawi

Submit your manuscripts at  
<http://www.hindawi.com>

