

Lithuanian code: Captures of history in Vilnius cityscapes

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The article analyses the monuments that capture history in Vilnius cityscapes. Monuments for historical personalities and events are material for the construction of identity. Supported by knowledge of history books and tourist guides they construct identity both for inhabitants and visitors. On the other hand, they are spotlights pointing to history moments, reminding about some and keeping in silence other events and personalities.

Like in other countries that experienced change of powers and occupational totalitarian regimes, cityscapes of Lithuanian towns, especially of its capital Vilnius, experienced destruction of Lithuanian monuments and erection of symbols of occupational powers. After restoration of Lithuanian Independence, the Lithuanian capital, as well as other cities and towns, is going through the processes of re-Lithuanisation.

Key words: urban representation, visual culture, symbols of history, cultural heritage

Monuments as mirrors of power

Monuments were symbols of power long before the contemporary world has gone through processes of visualisation accelerated by visual media, such as TV or the Internet. According to George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (Orwell, 2005) the rewriting of history follows any change in power structures. A change of political power is generally followed by a change of symbols in the territory. Some of those up-buildings or depositions just demonstrate power and attitudes towards previous regimes or personalities, others are built or ruined for identity construction reasons.

For a long time the analysis of symbolic places, buildings or monuments had been

carried out by historians of art. The reasons were matter-of-course. Construction of new identities for places with a changed power (assimilation of occupied countries, formation of loyalist attitudes, extermination of previous identities, etc.) was carried by the political power with no public discussion.

“A city (usually Rome) built on the ruins of its past, with history accumulating but not quite adding up, is a constant analogy for the unconscious in Freud” (Highmore, 2005: 4), states Ben Highmore in his *Cityscapes*. We may say that each country or city that has ever been occupied stands on its partially unconscious history. “A place is a geographical space that is defined by

meanings, sentiments and stories rather than by a set of co-ordinates” (Hague, Jenkins, 2005: 4).

As selective memory after a crunch (Berger, 1963), authorised power, influenced by new discoveries in history, new knowledge of professionals of history and culture, attitudes and opinions of social movements and organisations, brings forgotten facts and events into processes of identity construction through scholastic subjects and either building or reconstructing the symbols in symbolic or at least visible places. These symbols create identities. “Identity requires a narrative of continuity” (Neill, 2004: 10). This continuity is constructed by bringing up to a new light the past as a basis for the future.

Considering that “culture ... is not so much a set of things – novels and paintings or TV programmes or comics – as a process, a set of practices” (Hall, 1997: 2), analysing the change of symbolic places after the fall of the Soviet regime in Lithuania we will focus not just on the change, but on the discourse that follows it, i.e. on “the production and exchange of meanings – ‘giving and taking of meaning’ – between the members of a society or group” (Hall, 1997: 2).

In the contemporary world, “the present assault on memory, with the constant bombardment of commercial images eroding a sense of continuity between past, present and future, that can lead to pessimism concerning the possibility of the construction of meaningful identities” (Neill, 2004: 10) does not detour historical symbols. Most of them are commercialised in conscious-

ness and adjusted to the needs of impressions rather than reflections of the past.

Historical symbols are an object of influence. Although they have a historical narrative and interpretation behind them, the viewer may not necessarily know it. “One is more and more dependent on and subject to visual material. Unless that material is understood, and unless an account is given of how that understanding has been arrived at, that material’s power and effectiveness operate without our knowledge, or behind our backs” (Barnard, 2001: 4). “These images are never transparent windows on to the world. They interpret the world; they display it in very particular ways” (Rose, 2001: 6).

“The fall of communism in 1989/1990 has led not only to the establishment of new political systems and ideologies, but also to significant modifications in the visual self-representation of the respective states in Eastern and East Central Europe” (Bartetzky, 2006: 451). Vilnius is not an exception from the rule. Re-establishment of history hidden or even negated by Soviet powers was followed by visual self-representations of our own history, the present image and visions for future development.

Capital cities are usually the first ones to undergo changes that represent a political change. The share of recourses for a capital reflect the conviction, common to both politicians and scientists, that an “important factor for the public perception of a state is the symbolic design of its capital city” (Bartetzky, 2006: 452).

It should be noted that not necessarily all historical events and personalities important for occupational periods were important due to their activities that sup-

ported occupational regimes or harmed the occupied countries and nations. That's why the re-establishment of history and its symbols does not remove all monuments built during the Soviet occupation. As Arnold Bartetzky in his article *Changes in the Political Iconography of East Central European Capitals after 1989 (Berlin, Warsaw, Prague, Bratislava)* notices, "the famous photographs of demolition actions could blind one to the fact that most of the monuments from the communist era have survived the political change. The demolitions were usually limited to sculpted symbols of the Soviet regime ... and to statues of the most hated communist idols ... Most of the statues of Stalin had been destroyed much earlier, in the years following the dictator's death" (Bartetzky, 2006: 464).

Continued, reconstructed and overthrown symbols

The narratives of continuity are supported through State patronage over cultural heritage. The Department of Cultural Heritage under the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Lithuania registers and supervises monuments of cultural heritage. Databases of cultural heritage are constantly updated. They include various types of cultural heritage units, including monuments, objects of urban heritage, places of historical events, etc.

Discussions regarding the preservation of cultural heritage have usually pragmatic interests of building trade. Urban heritage is usually situated in the centres of towns, places that give highest benefits for building companies. Data of Department of

Table 1. *Objects of cultural heritage*

<i>County</i>	<i>Population¹</i>	<i>Monuments of culture²</i>	<i>Objects of cultural heritage protected by state³</i>	<i>Cultural heritage under basic institutional legislation^{4, 5}</i>
Total	3384879	1821	8337	9296
Alytus county	178955	127	415	505
Kaunas county	677284	293	827	1381
Klaipėda county	379472	165	1518	834
Marijampolė county	182587	68	516	403
Panevėžys county	287119	138	705	897
Šiauliai county	353713	138	1054	1076
Tauragė county	128679	167	389	449
Telšiai county	174573	90	558	757
Utena county	174743	273	835	780
Vilnius county	847754	362	1520	1132
<i>Vilnius city municipality</i>	<i>554409</i>	<i>51</i>	<i>1003</i>	<i>1034</i>

¹ Department of Statistics to the Government of the Republic of Lithuania, downloaded September 7, 2007 from <http://www.stat.gov.lt/lt/pages/view/?id=2151>.

² Department of Cultural Heritage under the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Lithuania, downloaded September 7, 2007 from <http://www.heritage.lt/edis/index.html>.

³ Department of Cultural Heritage under the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Lithuania, downloaded September 7, 2007 from <http://www.heritage.lt/edis/index.html>.

⁴ Dependence of 48 cultural heritage units was not named.

⁵ Department of Cultural Heritage under the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Lithuania, downloaded September 7, 2007 from <http://www.heritage.lt/edis/index.html>.

Cultural Heritage under the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Lithuania show that recognised units of cultural heritage are not distributed evenly.

Despite objective data, cultural heritage and monuments in the capital are more seen and seem to be more numerous to naked eye.

The Royal Palace

The broadest discussion in the Lithuanian media touched the Royal Palace. The discussion started with pros and cons for reconstruction. The importance of the symbolic meaning of the Royal Palace destroyed by the Russian empire in 1801 was contraposed to the lack of information both about the exterior and interior design of the palace. The cellarage was received as the only authentic remain.

The foundation in support of the Royal Palace was founded on August 23, 2000. The discussion about the reconstruction was tight. However, the most influential political parties of the time decided to support the reconstruction. The reconstruction of the palace started on May 10, 2002, although for a few years it was followed by discussions which parts of the Royal Palace had to be reconstructed and what the palace should look like. The discussion covered architectural decisions starting from reservation of the cellarage and building a contemporary glass building over it up to rebuilding the palace following its design for missing parts. The latter idea is under implementation now.

The most recent discussion on the palace is the destiny of the Schlossberg House. After the Royal Palace had been destroyed,

the merchant Schlossberg got a permission to build his family house on the remaining cellarage. The house included the remaining wall of the palace. The contemporary discussion concerns the symbol of Lithuania vs. an authentic although later house.

Historical monuments

The monument to Grand Duke Gediminas was erected in 1996 by the design of the sculptor Vytautas Kašuba. Gediminas, Grand Duke of Lithuania, who ruled from 1316 to 1341, is considered to be the founder of the city of Vilnius. Until now discussions about the monument continue. On July 6, 2003 a monument to Mindaugas, King of Lithuania, was opened near the National Museum.

One of the central passages, Vokiečių Street, begins with a monument to Barbora Radvilaitė, the queen of Rzeżpospolita – the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth.

In 1999, a monument to Jonas Žemaitis-Vytautas, the Lithuanian Resistance leader, general of Lithuanian resistance partisans and chairman of Movement of Lithuania's Struggle for Freedom, was opened by the Ministry of National Defence of Republic of Lithuania.

Golgotha monuments

The first reconstructed monument among those destroyed during Soviet times was Three Crosses. Built in 1916, Three Crosses were destroyed by the order of Soviet authorities in 1950. In 1989, three white crosses were rebuilt in their original place on the Hill of Three Crosses in the Kalnų Park.

By Gediminas Street, near the former KGB building, a monument to the Memory of Victims of the Genocide was built in the very beginning of Independence.

Monuments to artists

One of the most discussed monuments to artists is the monument to A. Mickevičius, erected in Vilnius in 1984. The poet who wrote in the Polish language and stressed that his fatherland was Lithuania, always raises discussions between Lithuania and Poland. The most recent proposal by Polish organisations, described in one of the main Lithuanian newspapers (“Lietuvos rytas” (18-11-2006), was to carve the poet’s name in Polish characters on the monument.

Most ardently discussed for removal was the monument to A. Pushkin. The monument was removed using the arguments that the surroundings of the Castle Hill need archaeological investigation.

After World War II, there were built monuments to writers P. Cvirka, Žemaitė, Lazdynų Pelėda. After the fall of the Soviet regime, there were discussions on the removal of the monument to P. Cvirka because of his procommunist attitudes. Later, like other gifted procommunist writers, P. Cvirka remained in the school programme of literature, and discussions about his monument’s removal stopped. The monument to Žemaitė is covered for the reconstruction of the square. All three monuments are in central places, except monument to Lazdynų Pelėda which is far from the main passages.

Monuments to other prominent personalities

In the years of Independence, monuments to prominent personalities of other ethnic groups were built as well. While monument for Rabbi Elijah ben Shlomo Zalman, the Vilna Gaon, was followed by discussions in the media, the monument to Zemach Shabad, a prominent doctor and an active community member, was built without the subsequent discussions in the press.

Monuments of Soviet regime

Discussions on the monuments of leaders of the Soviet regime after getting independence were not intensive. The broad agreement that those monuments had to be removed did not raise any question whether any of those were to be left. The monuments of V. I. Lenin (Lukiškės square), V. Mickevičius-Kapsukas (Rotušė square), I. Cherniakhovski (Savivaldybė square between the Government palace and Gediminas Street) and other less known communist party activists and Soviet partisans were removed with a wide support. The only discussion that followed the removal was the future of the monuments. Two main proposals were re-fusion of the statues and their exhibition in a historical museum.

Reconstruction of squares after removal of Soviet monuments

After the removal of the statues, Lukiškės, Rotušė (City Hall) and Savivaldybės (Municipality) squares remain empty and else unchanged. In the Savivaldybė square, where in the Soviet times a monument to Cherniakhovski stood, a monument to

V. Kudirka – author of the Lithuanian national anthem – is planned. Although the reconstruction of the square was planned at the beginning of Independence, it did not start. The reconstruction of the Lukiškės square has started recently. Currently, the local government and artists discuss the model of the reconstruction, which is planned to include a monument to fighters for Lithuanian freedom and will represent Lithuanian history since the Kosčiuška rebel in the 18th century until the recognition of the independent Lithuanian state in 1991.

The reconstruction of the Lukiškės and Rotušė squares raised discussions that deal with financial rather than symbolic aspects of the purpose of the squares. Discussions in daily newspapers and other press concern the organisational aspects of the reconstruction of the Rotušės square as well – the protracted reconstruction and its inconvenience for citizens, visitors and businesses around the square.

Conclusions

- The setting of re-Lithuanianization monuments for a decade had been surroun-

ded by broad discussions inhibiting the processes.

- The reconstructed re-Lithuanianization monuments, such as the Royal Palace, raise discussions on the symbol of Lithuania vs. an authentic although a later house.
- The capital of Lithuania – an example of religious tolerance during religious wars in Europe, still used in the universities of Vatican – does not have any monument to one of the most religiously and culturally tolerant historical personalities – Grand Duke Vytautas, although there is a monument to one of those most intolerant in European Jewish history – Rabbi Elijah ben Shlomo Zalman (the Vilna Gaon).
- It should be noted that not necessarily all historical events and personalities important for periods of occupation were important due to their activities that supported occupational regimes or harmed the occupied countries and nations. That's why the re-establishment of history and its symbols does not remove all monuments built during the Soviet occupation.

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LIETUVOS KODAS: ISTORIJS FRAGMENTAI VILNIAUS MIESTOVAIZDYJE

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S a n t r a u k a

Straipsnyje analizuojami Vilniaus paminklai kaip praeities reprezentacijos. Paminklai istorinėms asmenybėms ir įvykiams pateikia identiteto konstravimo medžiagą. Palaikomi istorijos vadovėlių ir turistų vadovų, jie kuria valstybės identitetą tiek miestiečiams, tiek ir miesto svečiams. Kita vertus, paminklai atkreipia dėmesį į istorinius įvykius ir asmenybes, vienus primindami, kitus palikdami užmarštyje.

Kaip ir kitų šalių, kurios buvo okupuotos ir kuriose keitėsi valdžios, Lietuvos miestuose, ypač Vilniuje, buvo naikinami lietuviški simboliai bei statomi okupacinių valdžių monumentai. Atkūrus nepriklausomybę, Vilniaus, kaip ir kitų Lietuvos miestų, miestovaizdyje mažėja okupacinių valdžių ir daugėja Lietuvos istorijai svarbias istorines asmenybes ir įvykius ženklinančių paminklų.