

Palanga's Modern Architecture on the Way to Heritage

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Abstract – This paper discusses particular aspects of the development of cultural identity through diverse, multi-layered architectural heritage and argues that by combining architectural expertise with community engagement the inclusive modernist heritage collection can be created. The research is based on the case of Palanga resort. The paper focuses on the issue of creating a list of cultural heritage of Palanga town as a coherent and continuous architectural collection and discusses the approaches to be used in engaging communities into the process of heritage making.

Considering the post-colonial society and its multiple relationship with the built environment of that time in Lithuania, the changed needs and requirements, and today's high commercial interest, it is essential to find effective ways for the protection and further development of heritage of the recent past.

Keywords – Community engagement, heritage list, late modernism architecture, modern heritage, Palanga's architecture.

INTRODUCTION

Soviet occupation in Lithuania (1945–1990) coincided with fast processes of urbanization, while the agrarian society was transformed into the industrial one. Therefore, the architectural heritage of that period in the people's consciousness is primarily associated with the legacy of the Soviet regime. The buildings and cities of the time were designed by local architects and planners, built by local constructors and presently are used by contemporary society and are part of their identity. The problem of modernism heritage preservation or "heritage-making" emerges due to the post-colonial society and its multiple relationship with the built environment of Soviet period, the changed needs and requirements for the buildings, and today's high commercial interest.

Research is based on the example of Palanga resort. History of Palanga as a health resort goes back to the second half of the 19th century, but today's cityscape is largely the result of the Soviet-era development. The town is one of the most intensive construction sites in the country in our days. Therefore, recent heritage often becomes an object of negotiation between developers, municipality, architects, communities and heritage protection authorities. It seems a perfect case to discuss actual challenges of such heritage.

The aim of the paper is to create the most effective action plan for protecting the diverse, multi-layered heritage of Palanga and discuss the guidelines for further development of Palanga cultural (architectural) identity. This will be performed by accomplishing two main tasks. The first is to research and evaluate the architectural legacy of late modernism in Palanga by applying expert judgment and in accordance with authorised heritage discourse – AHD [1]. The second task is to anticipate and shape

the guidelines for implementing the inclusive modernist heritage in Palanga. It will be achieved by applying various participatory techniques and practices, educating, activating and involving specific community groups.

I. AUTHORISED HERITAGE DISCOURSE OF THE LATE MODERNIST ARCHITECTURE IN PALANGA

The Palanga architecture in the National Cultural Heritage List (further the List) mainly comprises examples of the second half of the 19th century and the first half of the 20th century. Just two buildings represent the architecture of the second half of the 20th century. Nevertheless, such a list of heritage objects only partly reflects the stages in the town development. For a more coherent collection of Palanga heritage, it is relevant to discuss a few more samples of the mid and second half of the 20th century architecture. Paradoxically, but the experience shows that even after being listed as cultural monuments many objects still remain neglected or are being altered due to obscure conservation strategy, and lack of human and financial resources for their management. Therefore, there are some doubts whether the development of the List is effective.

Obviously, it is necessary to find the most effective although sometimes unusual ways to protect and further develop the town's cultural (including architectural) identity. In order to provoke a discussion on architectural legacy of recent past, the Architectural Fund invited architects, heritage management officials, members of research and local communities to a cycle of excursions exploring the architecture of Soviet period in Lithuanian towns, including Palanga in 2013 [2]. In 2012, a co-author of this paper published a research [3] where he explained the idea of architectural collection as a systematic approach to act in the field of heritage protection. Later, the collection concept was promoted in national and international architectural press [4], [5] and scientific conferences by authors of this paper, expecting a broader discussion on the prospects of modern architecture. Here architectural collection is treated as a coherent and continuous set of buildings, reflecting different stages, typologies, authorship, artistic tendencies in architecture and culture of the town.

By purposeful research and monitoring, a highly precise architectural collection may be formed in Palanga resort. It could be formed not only of the listed cultural heritage objects, but also of a certain reserve of objects. It is strongly believed that it may mobilize the institutions in charge, local and vocational communities to focus on the responsible process of fostering architectural heritage and its sustainable use.

The trends in Palanga architecture are represented in the List mainly by the examples of the second half of the 19th and the first



Fig. 1. Rest-house “Žilvinas”, Kęstučio g. 34, 1968, architect Algimantas Lėckas [Photo: Liutauras Nekrošius, 2012].



Fig. 2. Apartment house “Žilvinėlis”, Birutės al. 44, 1970, architect Algimantas Lėckas [Photo: Liutauras Nekrošius, 2012].

half of the 20th century – namely, by 16 villas, 17 residential houses, two hotels, a pharmacy, spa building, ship rescue station, bus station, manor homestead, school, two churches and four chapels. Two the most prominent examples of the 2nd half of the 20th century have been taken into protection in recent years.

One of them is an early architectural design work by Algimantas Lėckas – rest-house “Žilvinas” (Kęstučio g. 34, 1968, Fig. 1) – is exceptional for its sophisticated reinforced concrete. Memorable sophisticated reinforced concrete structure (structural engineer Kęstutis Augustinas) and architectural concept meets the main ideas of Paul Rudolph, Kenzo Tange or Louis Kahn. The second stage of the complex apartment house, today

known as “Žilvinėlis” (Birutės al. 44, 1970, Fig. 2), in its architectural expression is closer to Dutch gridiron structuralism ideas. Both buildings are owned by the state, but presently are on sale. Commendable that before the privatization “Žilvinas” was included in the List, valuable qualities, character and level of significance were identified, however the unique “Žilvinėlis” building was not given proper attention.

The second example of architecture of the 1960s on the List is the pavilion of the summer reading hall of the National Martynas Mažvydas Library (Vytauto g. 72., 1965, Fig. 3) designed by then chief-architect of the town Albinas Čepys. Postmodern tribute to De Stijl geometry – timber skeleton, built from local



Fig. 3. Summer reading pavilion of the National Martynas Mažvydas Library, Vytauto g. 72, 1965, architect Albinas Čepys [Photo: Liutauras Nekrošius, 2012].



Fig. 4. Bookshop and café "Ražė" pavilion, Vytauto g. 84, 1967, architect Ramūnas V. Kraniauskas [Photo: Liutauras Nekrošius, 2012].

material by local carpenter Juozas Auželis, contrasted the processes of construction industrialisation and building standardisation of those times, but was well-timed with ideas of regionalism. It is important to mention another project by the same architect – exhibition pavilion (Simono Daukanto g. 24) – which was built using timber collected in woods after hurricane in 1968. When the competition for new construction on this site was held in 2009, the majority of the participants (4 of 5 mentioned projects) were in favour of preservation of the pavilion. An important role in the town's architectural identity plays another pavilion, which is a fascinating example of critical regionalism – the building of

bookshop and café "Ražė" (Vytauto g. 84, 1967, Fig.4) designed by Ramūnas V. Kraniauskas.

Taking into consideration the growing role of school buildings in community (change in the state policy from isolated educational institutions to community centres) and absence of architectural objects of the 2nd half of the 20th century of such typology on the List, the following two educational institutions may also be included in the List – the music school designed by architect Irena Likšienė (Maironio g. 8, 1981, Fig. 5) and former youth centre designed by Gintautas Petras Likša and I. Likšienė (now the primary school, Virbališkės Takas 4, 1985, Fig. 6). These buildings are distinctive examples of late structuralist trends in

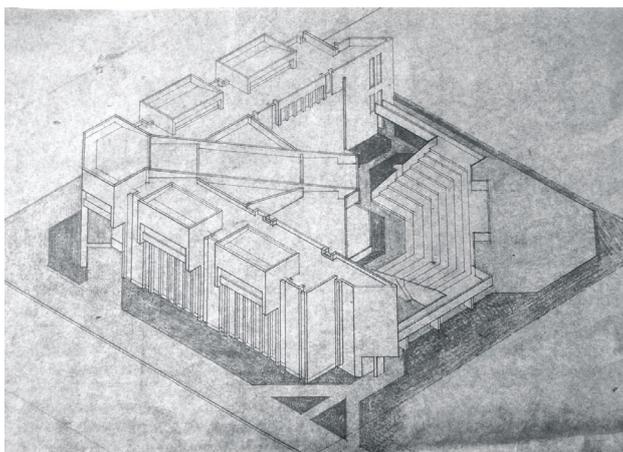


Fig. 5. Stasys Vainiūnas Music School, Maironio g. 8, 1981, architect Irena Likšienė, axonometry [Picture: author's private archive].

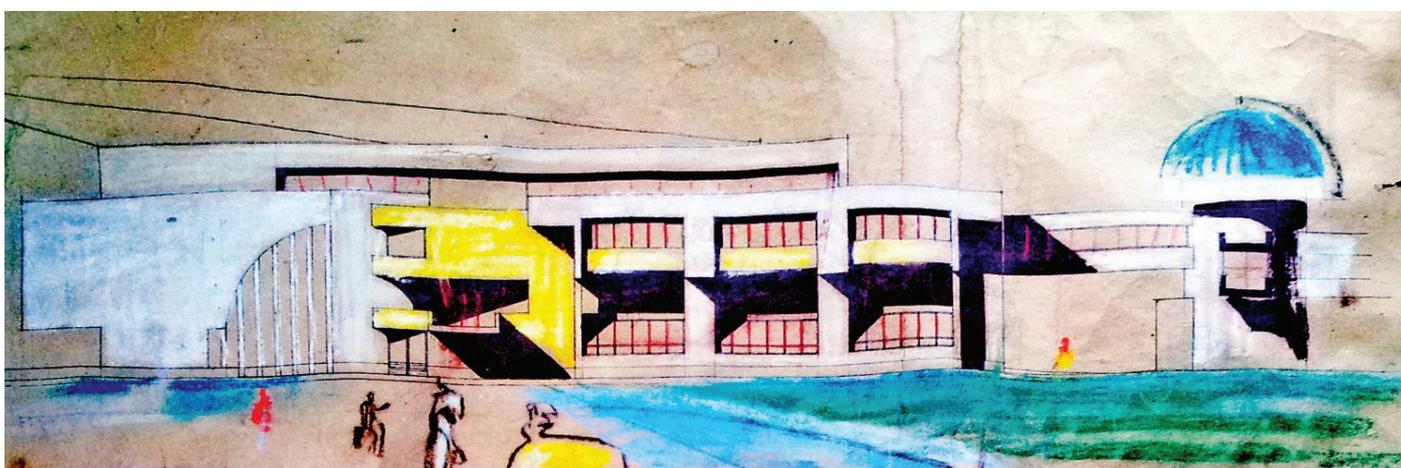


Fig. 6. Former youth centre, now a primary school, Virbališkės Takas 4, 1985, architects Gintautas Petras Likša and Irena Likšienė, a sketch of the South façade [Picture: author's private archive].

architecture. At present they are managed by the local municipality, maintain their initial function, are in good physical state, and have retained initial qualities of space and volume structure, use of materials, environment and purpose.

Aiming to cover wide range of functional typology, exclusive attention has to be paid to the building known as "Komprojektas". Palanga was the only town of such size in the country, which had its own architectural institution for so called "communal design" (Gintaro g. 30, 30A, 1988) designed by G. P. Likša and I. Likšienė. The building contained not only working space for architects and engineers, and an event hall, but also a dormitory for employees. Architect Likšienė remembered that they were allowed to use building elements just from the catalogue of prefabricated units. They were creating the original building by using the standard elements and named such artistic approach "the Lego principal". The "Komprojektas" is an illustrative example of human creativity in the conditions of industrialisation and standardisation and planned economy.

During the developments of the 60s and 80s, the townscape was radically influenced by the buildings inherent to mass rec-

reation function – rest-houses, sanatoriums, entertainment and health centres. The so called "Brezhnev villa" (presently, hotel "Auska", Vytauto g. 11, 1977, architect Juozas Šipalis), late structuralist rest-house "Šiaulių Tauras" (Vytauto g. 116, 1983, architect G. P. Likša), and postmodern romantic image of rest-house "Pilėnai" (Birutės al. 23, architect Vikis Juršys, Fig. 7) were successfully accommodated to the needs of a contemporary hotel and their initial architectural values were saved. Nowadays these hotels and the previously mentioned "Komprojektas", Ražė", exhibition pavilion and "Žilvinėlis" should be paid special attention to preserve their architectural values and form a certain reserve for the List.

Buildings from the 50s to 80s were developed according to the legislation of the former USSR, prevalent political and artistic trends, as well as conditions of the planned economy and state ownership. After essential transformations of socio-cultural context, this group fell short of the contemporary consumers' needs and requirements. Therefore, many of them have been significantly changed (e.g. children's sanatorium "Palangos Gintaras", Vytauto g. 30, 1972, architect Romualdas Šilinskas, or



Fig. 7. Rest-house "Pilėnai", Birutės al. 23, architect Vikis Juršys [Photo: Liutauras Nekrošius, 2017].



Fig. 8. Coffee shop pavilion "Banga", J. Basanavičiaus g. 2, 1976–1979, demolished in 2015, architect Gintautas J. Telksnys [Photo: Arūnas Baltėnas, 2005, source: Navickienė E., Vaitys L., Karpavičius E. *Architektas Gintautas Telksnys*. Vilnius: Artseria, 2005].

critical-regionalist rest-home by the National Academy of Science, now "Cuprum" apartment house, S. Daukanto g. 15, 1982, architect Vytautas Dičius and Leonidas P. Ziberkas), demolished (example of the original concrete plastics, coffee shop pavilion "Banga", J. Basanavičiaus g. 2, 1976–1979, demolished in 2015, architect Gintautas J. Telksnys Fig. 8), or are abandoned (e.g. follower of Habitat'67 – rest-house "Guboja", Jūros g. 65A, 1976, architect Rimantas Buivydas, Fig. 9). There is little probability that within the context of the on-going reconstructions traditional acts for enrolment on the List could somehow contribute to the conservation of values of the only functionalist new town – *Vanagupė* resort (architects A. Lėckas, Saulius Šarkinas, and Leonidas Merkinas).

Nevertheless, the identified architectural, urban and landscape values of objects and analysed possible forms of their conservation (ex-situ and in-situ) could become the basis for a scientific study of modernist architecture and urban planning in Palanga resort. Based on their design material, the initial concepts of such objects should be identified and their present and future transformations should be analysed.

However, an expert assessment for the successful heritage protection is important but insufficient. Community understanding, cognition, identification, and recognition is essential. We must strive for inclusive heritage.

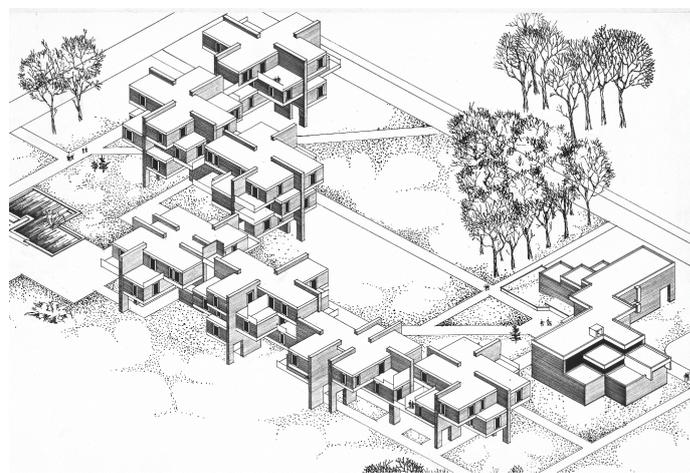


Fig. 9. Rest-house "Guboja", Jūros g. 65A, 1976, architect Rimantas Buivydas, axonometry [Picture: author's archive].

II. GUIDANCE FOR INCLUSIVE MODERNIST HERITAGE IN PALANGA

The situation of legacy of Modern Era is different than with other architectural heritage mainly because the time between a building's creation and its protection has never been so compressed. The legacy of recent past was identified as important and the inclusion of the 20th century heritage in heritage lists started.

The enlisting of modernism icons was accepted as rather normal phenomenon, but a lot of critical remarks can be heard about the more diverse and widespread modernism heritage "there is so much of it", "we don't like it", "it's too hard to deal with". In many areas, the 20th century structures dominate the urban landscape, and for older generations these structures are a living but not necessarily positive memory [6].

The recognition of a broad range of heritage, expressed as "all at once heritage is everywhere" [7], changed, the attention has shifted from expert assessments of iconic architectural buildings to the assessment of community-based heritage. The modern heritage preservation is more and more based on a balanced heritage recognition, when the voice of the communities (inclusive heritage, participatory and democratic approach) becomes important next to the expert assessment (exclusive heritage, elitist and hegemonic approach).

In such a context of becoming the modernism heritage it is important to identify how to involve the community into the heritage process, what methods and tools can be the most suitable; what part of community can be easiest to involve, which community groups have the greatest potential for modernist heritage making.

Foreseeing the development of the inclusive modernist heritage and the guidance of community engagement, it is essential to note that Palanga is not a traditional city – it is a historic resort near the Baltic sea, often called the summer capital of Lithuania. Every year the city is going through two different (opposite) periods. The passive period lasts from September to May, when mainly locals (15,500 residents) remain in the city. And the active period is during the three summer month when more than 300,000 holidaymakers and tourists come to Palanga for longer than one-day period. During long weekends the amount of one-day tourists sometimes grows up to 200,000. According to such a structure of city life, the concentration on the best vacation experience of the visitors diminishes the opportunity to create an inclusive community culture. The local community is small, fragmented and poorly identical with the cultural heritage. *An elderly group, and intellectuals* feel a sentimental value of modernist heritage and perceive in general the importance of culture for the society development. *Younger generation*, mostly consisting of *school communities*, have potential and interest to identify the modernist legacy. *Local and foreign tourists* form a specific part of the Palanga community.

While modernism was seen as an important tool in social reform, the listing of modern heritage has been driven primarily by the *architectural community*, and was focusing initially on architectural value. The "newest" modernist heritage objects in Palanga were widely recognised by architects but the process of listing gained momentum just after the *local seniors' club* took

an initiative to promote the legacy of prominent architects Albinas Čepys and Algimantas Lėckas.

Lack of public support has sometimes hampered efforts to list modern heritage successfully [6]. This insight can be fully confirmed by the case of Palanga – a failure story of the demolition of the "Banga" restaurant, built in 1979 by architect Gintautas Telksnys (Fig. 8). This object was about to be included in the heritage list, Lithuanian architects' community tried to protect the valuable object, but the city administration obeyed the owner's desire to build something new. The local community did not react to this destruction, despite the fact that this building was considered as a distinctive city symbol of that time.

The common heritage practice testifies that strategically designed listing efforts including education and awareness-raising components usually reduces the indifference or even the opposition of the community, and the listing process becomes more successful. In order to enhance the communities' understanding of the heritage, various kinds of media can be used.

The growing recognition of intangible heritage [8] forms an important part of the significance of heritage. And these intangible heritage values, perceived by community's members, are intertwined with material resources, identified mainly by experts [9] and make clear references to social history. The recognised multiplicity of associations with built heritage (pluralism of heritage) might be better reflected *through narratives* [10]. There are few conscious actions to reflect the modernist identity of Palanga via media, writing informative messages and historical papers about the past life of the Soviet-era Palanga, but the local community need the support in this activity.

While focusing on memories and stories, the methods of oral history and ethnography can be used rather successfully. The Palanga school community – the younger part of locals, can be active in the projects of collecting the stories and later structuring them into narratives of their *intent, effect and experience* [9]. Through association with the key stories, according to the highlighted narratives, particular localities will emerge as significant.

In Palanga, modernism heritage case – the "action heritage" would be of great potential [11]. This is a new framework for undertaking heritage research by applying a co-production method ("undisciplinary research") that achieved parity of participation among academic and community-based researchers, and allowed multiple voices to be heard and respected. In Palanga case, alongside with the architects, historians, sociologists and other researchers the local school communities, members of Senior club and local artists can be involved in "action heritage". But it is relevant to include local entrepreneurs and real estate managers in heritage exploring, learning and understanding process, in order to realise that heritage is now acknowledged as a resource distributed across society, it is related to human action and agency and is an instrument of cultural power [12] and the resource for socially inclusive and economically vibrant cities [13].

As the most effective way of community engagement and shaping inclusive heritage the excursions and workshops were tested by the academics of the Faculty of Architecture of VGTU. The guided tour "Palanga. Soviet period" [2] have explained

Palanga modernist architecture as unique not only in European context, but also in former socialist area and even in Lithuania. It was developed exclusively by Lithuanian architects who sought to create architecture of exceptional artistic expression and value, while respecting the guidelines of modernity, trying to avoid the restrictions of the socialist regime and lead by personal creative ambitions. The academic workshops organised since 2015 by the lecturers and students of the Faculty of Architecture (VGTU) [14] in various educational institutions in Vilnius were a great tool not only in educating students but also encouraging school communities raising interest in their built environment. The Palanga young generation study in the buildings most of which were built in Soviet era. It is favourable and completely logical to involve the school communities in analysing, understanding, and perceiving their built environment as modernism heritage by applying the activism techniques, arranging workshops, and by organising the cognitive projects. This can work as the development of the future society, that is able to understand the “production of heritage” as an active relation between “people-objects, culture-nature, expert-community, tangible-intangible” [15].

CONCLUSION

The modern heritage preservation emphasises participatory culture that stimulates heritage making from below. In the course of the shift from exclusive heritage to more inclusive, one of the two different and even contradictory approaches must be intertwined: exclusive and inclusive. According to this notion, the attempt to shape guidelines for the architectural heritage of modernist Palanga is made.

Traditionally the identification, assessment and decision for conservation is made by experts, and this is exclusively related with the material heritage. After identifying the works with valuable features, assessing the aspects of their functional typology, aesthetics, authorship diversity, technological innovation, social significance, and preservation possibilities, the collection of the 2nd half of the 20th century buildings in Palanga could be formed out of two main groups: *in-situ* – listed buildings and buildings with special attention, and *ex-situ* – design and historic material on changed, neglected or demolished buildings.

Trends in Palanga architecture until WW2 on the Heritage List are represented comprehensively. The 2nd half of the 20th century is represented by just two buildings: rest-house “Žilvinas” (1968, A. Lėckas), and library pavilion (1965, A. Čepys). Therefore, aiming to reflect all the stages in the town development it is relevant to enrol a few more samples of the period to the List: the music school designed by architect Irena Likšienė (1981, I. Likšienė) and former youth centre (now the primary school, 1985, G. P. Likša). A group of buildings for accommodation: “Auska” (1977, J. Šipalis), “Šiaulių Tauras” (1983, G. P. Likša), “Pilėnai” (V. Juršys), “Žilvinėlis” (1970, A. Lėckas), together with “Ražė” (1967, R. V. Kraniauskas) and exhibition pavilions (1968, A. Čepys) and “Komprojektas” building could form a certain reserve of the List. Significantly changed children sanatorium “Palangos Gintaras”

(1972, R. Šilinskas), the rest-home of the National Academy of Science (now Cuprum apartments, 1982, V. J. Dičius and L. P. Ziberkas), the new resort town Vanagupė (1975–1990, A. Lėckas, S. Šarkinas, L. Merkinas), coffee shop pavilion “Banga” (1976–1979, G. J. Telksnys) demolished in 2015, and the abandoned rest-house “Guboja” (1976, R. Buivydas) still could be saved *ex-situ* by collecting their initial and transformation design material, oral and written history and maybe some material artefacts.

Inclusive heritage is characterised by the community engagement in learning, identifying, assessing and preserving the heritage and dealing with various kinds of narratives, associations, emotional values and mainly intangible heritage. The proposed guidelines for the heritage making of modernist Palanga includes the most interested and perspective groups of local community – elder generation and intellectuals, and the youngest generation – school communities.

The traditional educational measures, such as seminars, excursions, exhibitions, and written media can be used, but also oral history and ethnography methods can foster the multiplicity of narratives. The “action heritage” methodology will be more effective for understanding heritage, and can be executed as the research with equal participation of academics and the community based researches. The method of creative workshop is seen of great potency for activating the community and raising their awareness about built environment and architectural heritage. These measures have been tested successfully by the lecturers and students of the Faculty of Architecture (VGTU) in Vilnius schools. It is likely that in the case of Palanga it could also produce excellent results.

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