

Lithuanian Architecture and Urbanism

Lithuanian Architecture and Urbanism:

Essays in History and Aesthetics

By

Almantas Samalavičius

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For Rūta and Povilas

“Places are fusions of human and natural order and are the significant centres of our immediate experiences of the world. They are defined less by unique locations, landscapes, and communities than by the focusing of experiences and intentions onto particular settings. Places are not abstractions or concepts, but are directly experienced phenomena of the lived-world and hence are full of meanings, with real objects and with ongoing activities.”

—Edward Relph

“The resident lives in a world that has been made. He can no more beat his path on the highway than he can make a hole in the wall. He goes through life without leaving a trace. The marks he leaves are considered dents – wear and tear. What he does leave behind him will be removed as garbage. From commons for dwelling the environment has been redefined as a resource for the production of garages for people, commodities and cars. Housing provides cubicles in which residents are housed. Such housing is planned, built and equipped to them. To be allowed to dwell minimally in one’s own housing constitutes a special privilege: only the rich may move a door or drive a nail into the wall. Thus the vernacular space of dwelling is replaced by homogeneous space of the garage.”

—Ivan Illich

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FOREWORD

Lithuania has a long, complicated history of architecture and urbanism due to historical circumstances particular to East Central Europe and the Baltic area. Throughout the geographical region where Lithuania came into being, the first houses and buildings were wooden, as the whole region was covered by forests. These early structures did not survive, however, and the evidence of their existence is largely based on archaeological records. The wooden architecture was largely built by Indo-European people, as well as by the ancestors of the Baltic tribes, of which the would-be Lithuanians belonged. Two thousand years before Christianity, the tribes of the Balts inhabited a large territory, far-exceeding the borders of present-day Lithuania. As early as the fourteenth century, building materials such as brick and stone started to replace wood, although wooden building traditions continued, as well. Among the early stonework buildings, as some archaeological evidence suggests, there might have been structures executed in Romanesque style. None of these, however, have survived. The remaining legacy of Lithuania's architecture is mostly made up of Gothic, Renaissance, and Baroque. Despite the fact that Lithuanian cities, and Vilnius in particular, were subject to destruction in various historical periods, there are numerous examples of these architectural styles (especially the Baroque ones) that have survived. For example, during a war in the mid-seventeenth century, the loss of Vilnius to Muscovy was especially detrimental to a large number of important buildings, as well as to the city's population.

Neo-Classicism has also left visible footprints in the country's architectural history, as have other architectural trends of the Modern era. Two periods of colonization, those of Imperial Russia and of the Soviet Union, have each also introduced large-scale reconstructions of the architectural and urban cityscape. In Vilnius, on Gediminas Avenue, some of the buildings, as well as the street itself, represent one of the surviving interventions of Imperial Russia's policy of urban and architectural reconstruction. Despite the fact that Tsarist Russian colonization disrupted the course of development of Lithuanian civilization, some of the architectural legacy is quite satisfactory from the aesthetic point of view. Lithuanian architecture and urban structures were both heavily transformed during the Soviet period. Ironically, although Lithuania experienced damage during WW II, the Nazi forces retreating from Vilnius did less

damage to the city than the Red Army, who heavily shelled Vilnius after the Germans abandoned it. Eventually, the program of rebuilding Lithuania involved large transformations that introduced Soviet architectural Realism, which eventually was succeeded by Soviet-style Functionalism and Industrial architecture, which ushered in the ascent of architectural Modernism. The ideology of the Soviet regime was especially skilful at using Modernism to dismantle the “bourgeois” urban legacy and replace it with architectural structures glorifying Progress, Novelty, and The Brave New World (Soviet-style, of course). After the independence was re-established in 1990, a new period of building has started bringing new proportions of damage to Lithuanian cityscapes. This new period, to a certain degree controversial and largely transformative, has isolated and toppled historical buildings and city centers that had previously managed to maintain some of their pre-colonial aesthetic qualities.

This book has been in the making for a long time. It represents my enduring interests in architectural and urban history, architectural aesthetics, and the practice of architectural criticism. It also provides some analysis of historical and the latest urban transformations in Lithuania, namely the shift from the Soviet to the post-Soviet era. The reader of this volume will find my discussion of the new urban transformations and perhaps will forgive me some unavoidable repetitions. Also presented here are some insights about how the building industry, in collusion with servile modernist and post-modernist architects, is continuing their assault on the country’s enduring architectural legacy. Perhaps it is not architectural Modernism, *per se*, that is culturally destructive. After all, Modernism had its own heights. However, applying Modernism heedlessly and mercilessly to an urban tissue that has been evolving for centuries, and coupling that with the growing appetites of the building industry and the real estate market, is what has presently become aggressive and culturally destructive. As I consider the present building industry, aided by architects rife with Modernist dogma, unsustainable in variable senses, I still believe and continue to hope that critical examinations of both the recent trends and earlier developments in architecture will provide some intellectual framework with which to reflect and rethink current practices in urbanism, architecture and city planning in the post-Soviet realm.

CHAPTER ONE

THE VANISHING GENIUS LOCI OF VILNIUS

“Vilnius is like an open book, revealing the history of European art styles from Gothic to Empire. Vilnius is a real treasure to anyone who is inclined to study art history not with the help of books, but from masterpieces of art itself [...] Neither enemy attacks, innumerable fires, nor long periods of foreign rule, when our monuments of the Gothic, the Baroque and especially the Renaissance were mercilessly pulled down and damaged, were able to destroy this treasure.”

—Mikalojus Vorobjovas (1940)

A recent stay in the very heart of the Italian Renaissance, in a city that has managed to maintain its incomparable beauty to this day, inevitably provoked comparisons with my hometown, Vilnius. Well-known for its preserved legacy of Gothic and Baroque architecture, Vilnius also bears less notable and visible traces of the Renaissance, which nevertheless shaped the city's urban character, especially in the mid-sixteenth century during the reign of Sigismund Augustus – a rich and colourful period in the development of the urban culture of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. However, over the last two decades, developments in Vilnius' urban structure have had a strong impact on its cityscape, which has lost many aspects of its former character, the most notable of which was the harmonious balance of nature and architecture that for centuries Vilnius inhabitants were able to boast of.

Strange as it might seem, Lithuania's national resurgence movement in 1990 came into being partly due to the efforts of communities who later turned to the preservation of the urban heritage, which had been badly neglected during the Soviet era. Perhaps less strange is that developments in the last two post-Soviet decades have witnessed the opposite, namely a growing culture of indifference towards the architectural and urban legacy and an alarming ignorance and even neglect of the many problems related to heritage protection. Instead of striving for consensus over the turbulent issues surrounding the preservation of the architectural and urban heritage, politicians, intellectuals and large segments of society became involved



Fig. 1-1. Skyline of Vilnius' Old Town

in futile polemics over plans to rebuild the palace of Lithuania's Grand Dukes, destroyed by Russia's Tsarist regime after the partition of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. Despite the scepticism of some influential critics, and to a certain extent justified concern over the lack of sufficient iconographic material that the implementation of such a huge and ambitious project would require, political will ensured that construction went ahead. The edifice, later renamed the Ruler's Palace, was completed in 2010, albeit with finishing touches pending.

No matter how artificial this issue of rebuilding was, it overshadowed much more important problems associated with the changing visual character of the city. The generation of politicians that succeeded Lithuania's post-independence political establishment became increasingly conscious of the role of monetary power and the interests of real estate developers, who became the most important players in designing projects for the capital's urban development. Further processes of urbanization were rapid, chaotic and largely unbalanced, with the new holders of financial power interested only in the profitability of their own investments and demonstrating an open contempt for public interest. It is not surprising that the urban development of Vilnius was carried out following the old and stale models once suggested by Le Corbusier and his followers, who advocated that "surgery" to be applied to the centre of the contemporary metropolis. This entailed wiping out densely populated city centres along with their Old Quarters and erecting edifices of a new kind in their place. Although such planning models – for example that introduced



Fig. 1-2. Skyline of Vilnius' Old Town.

by the Soviet authorities to Vilnius in late 1950s, which cut the Old Quarters to pieces to make way for a huge highway – were not implemented in full, major damage was done. The Vilnius Old Quarters and their vicinity were treated as a kind of tabula rasa without connection to historical memory. Decaying historical buildings made way for ugly, hastily erected, semi-modernist structures, with the result that Vilnius bears the signs of Soviet aesthetics to this very day.

Society's relationship with its architectural legacy shifted radically during the crucial period of redistribution of wealth in the 1990s, a period that also saw growing political apathy, moral indifference, alienation between social groups and loss of social solidarity, and fewer and fewer barriers against the aggressive penetration of private capital into the Old Quarters and central areas remained. After Gediminas Avenue, the main street in the city centre, had been rehashed as a luxury shopping area, the realtors, developers, nouveaux riches and municipal fathers turned their attention to one of the oldest suburbs of Vilnius, Snipiškes, which, as the city expanded, was more or less incorporated into the neighbourhoods of the central area. The historical structure of Šnipiškės, which had remained almost untouched for centuries, was first targeted by urban planners during the Soviet period. The *Lietuva* hotel (Lithuania) – at that time the city's tallest building, designed by architects Algimantas Nasvytis and Vytautas Nasvytis, subsequently renamed the *Reval Lietuva* and a some time ago again renamed the Radisson Blu – became a visual symbol of the “socialist achievements” of Lithuania's capital and opened up the district for further changes. The *Lietuva* performed the same ideological function as similar representative edifices in other capitals of the Baltic republics, where

hotels for foreign visitors were supposed to glorify the communist regime in visible form as the pinnacle of modern architecture.

It should be added, however, that architects themselves played an ambiguous role during the late Soviet period, especially when socialist realism became increasingly exhausted and unable to capture the artistic imagination. While artists in other fields were discouraged from using ultramodern forms or following the various “isms” that the authorities considered suspect, architects were not merely allowed but also encouraged to turn to modern aesthetics. However this freedom to build came with a price: the destruction of historically or symbolically important buildings and even entire old districts. This ideologically engineered “freedom to build” was a huge temptation to several generations of architects and urban planners, who chose to sacrifice professional ethics, historical memory and visual symbols of the past in order to pursue their own endeavours – to leave their individual traces on the rich texture of historical cities, as the signs of modern aesthetics.

Vilnius was no exception. The *genius loci* or spirit of place was disregarded, neglected and abandoned, standing as it did between the architect and urban planner and his right to build. Aesthetic modernism, so much desired by artists during the decades when any deviation from the code of socialist realism was considered blasphemy to the communist faith, emerged triumphant – however at the expense of visual history and cultural memory. Seduced by the promise to be allowed to implement modernism, leading architects of the period even endorsed the official view in public discussions, arguing for the need to renew Vilnius by simply pulling down morally and aesthetically “worthless” old buildings and erecting modern edifices in their place.

The post-independence resurgence of public interest in heritage conservation was impressive, but, alas, short-lived. Some former activists made their way into politics and gradually shifted their attention to other, more popular and seemingly more promising areas. Others, lacking adequate leadership and facing their own problems in an unstable, changing economic climate, retreated into their own professional fields. Some even succumbed to the idea that having built new national institutions, the time had come to let the professionals do their job. Whatever the reasons were, activism gradually faded away. No wonder the fate of the right bank of the river Neris, the former territory of Šnipiškės, was decided as it was. Realtors, planners and municipal leaders blatantly ignored voices of protest that every year sounded weaker and those who considered it their duty to stand up to the urban “surgery” of near-central



Fig. 1-3. Shifting panorama of Vilnius.

city districts that still contained certain signs of historical memory were derogatorily labelled “nostalgics”. Instead of reconsidering their development plans, municipal officials and investors opened the way to a drastic remaking of the Vilnius cityscape. The historical structure of Šnipiškės was “deconstructed” and the area chosen as the new municipal centre of the capital, despite the fact that the highway running alongside the right bank was becoming a physical obstacle for the development of truly public spaces in the vicinity. This did not seem to bother those who saw a vast potential for expansion of various types of business in the area. The new buildings were designated to attract crowds of people, along with other rapidly growing high-rise buildings in the immediate neighbourhood.

The environs of the notorious Konstitucijos Avenue – a large and noisy highway – were chosen as the site for a growing number of commercial and business centres. The process accelerated when the large high-rise “Europe” was erected next to the city council building, the latter far less impressive as an architectural structure, clumsy and ill-shaped. Despite the Europe tower’s “brave new” ambitions (the complex, with its glistening and impenetrable glass plates, was designed to become a new visual trademark for Lithuania’s growing capital), the structure and others like it remain faceless, and in an aesthetic sense even outdated, reminiscent of the modernistic edifices of the 1980s and ’90s and poor allusions to the architecture of the “international style”. The knowledge that many western

cities are full of equally faceless, inarticulate buildings is hardly a comfort to anyone concerned with the unique historical character of Vilnius, abandoned now in favour of the flow of capital and delusory visions of economic prosperity.

The renowned Vilnius photographer, Jan Bulhak (1876-1950), a true master of light and remarkable essayist who was deeply affected by the beauty of the city, wrote in the mid-1940s that,

Vilnius is so precious, precisely because of the fact that it is not a contemporary city, that it is so close to a village, a garden, a meadow or a pine forest, many of which are all over the country, that it is close to the earth, miraculously concentrated in its motifs in a small hilly, watery and wavy space. It is a manor and a palace, a sanctuary and a monastery, a spacious park and an umbrageous garden, a cluster of luxurious palaces and precious relics, a monument of the greatness of the folk spirit and a witness to its indestructible power. The fascinating landscape of Vilnius merges with great architecture that stresses the merits of the city's layout and uses them for perfect decorative compositions. The old city decorates itself with three main colours: it sparkles with the whiteness of stone, the redness of brownish roofs, and the luxuriant greenery of verdure.¹

The art historian and essayist Mikalojus Vorobjovas, who loved and respected Vilnius no less than Bulhak, praised the unique character of its architecture and natural surroundings in a book published immediately after Lithuania regained its capital in 1940. He noted that,

Nature itself had its own plastic physiognomy, its own architecture. Architecture created by a human being was attuned to nature, enriching and making it more precise. This is how the cultural landscape of Vilnius grew: it contains no artificial forms that would destroy the natural landscape of nature by force, and there is no chaotic penetration of nature into architectural ensembles – everywhere we see a rare harmony and organic unity of elements. It is this that causes the innumerable metamorphoses of Vilnius beauty, always changing and deepening within the atmosphere, depending on the light of the sky.²

Looking around at the anonymous, faceless panoramas of the city, full of new building sites, could anybody say the same today?

¹ Jan Bulhak, *Vilniaus peizažas*, 18 [English trans. A.S.].

² Mikalojus Vorobjovas, *Vilniaus menas*, 14 [English trans. A.S.].

Many things have changed since Bulhak and Vorobjovas wrote their essays on the aesthetics of the city. Vilnius is no longer reminiscent of a village or even a rural landscape. And yet some of its unique character and peculiar atmosphere is preserved, especially in the Old Quarters, also touching some suburban districts. But these areas increasingly look like inclusions in the new visual structure of the city, dominated by dense, high-rise buildings that clash with the overwhelming symphony of Vilnius' church towers. Sometimes it seems as if the city is gradually losing its memory, its individuality, its character, and becoming more and more like a cloned global city. The Finnish architect Juhani Pallasmaa has rightfully reminded us that "We have an innate capacity for remembering and imagining places. Perception, memory and imagination are in constant interaction; the domain of the present fuses into images of memory and fantasy. We keep constructing an immense city of evocation and remembrance, and all the cities we have visited are precincts in this metropolis of the mind."³

When one crosses Florence's ponte Vecchio to the other side of the river Arno and climbs to the top of the large hill to find a square named after Leonardo da Vinci, the wonderful sight of the city lying below opens to one's eyes. A closer look at the large panorama of the historical city reveals that the cityscape is not distorted by high-rise buildings; only the impressive cupola of the *Santa Maria del Fiore* – one of the largest cathedrals – rises over the city, against the background of remote mountains and forests. When I look around the panorama of Vilnius from Tauras Hill, I have to conclude that the cityscape of one of the centres of the eastern European Renaissance has been badly distorted, with barely any hope that this visual destruction will ever come to an end. Behind the complex of the Europe centre and the adjoining council building, a row of new high-rises covered with impenetrable dark glass is growing, speaking its own visual language. This is the language of monotony, anonymity, alienation, contrasting with the elegant towers of the baroque St. Rapolas Church – behind this cluster of cheap glass and concrete, they look sorrowful. Further along, the cityscape is broken by the buildings that rise around the National Gallery – a sound piece of well thought out, minimalist modern architecture that does not attempt to compete with its surroundings. When the eye moves along a bit more, a massive foreign body, the cumbersome dull building of the so-called "Vilnius Gates", begins to dominate the landscape.

³ Juhani Pallasmaa, *The Eyes of the Skin: Architecture and the Senses*, 67–68.



Fig. 1-4. Vilnius' Gates in the city panorama.

Vorobjovas described Vilnius as an “open book” telling of the history of the evolution of European architectural styles, with a strong educational potential before World War II, when the city had already survived more than a hundred years of Russian imperial colonization and had not yet been subjected to the damage done during the upcoming war and post-war reconstruction. Those years of colonial rule were accompanied by a lot of damage, the attempts of the colonizers to wipe out collective and cultural memory by destroying the visual symbols of statehood. The remains of the palace of the Grand Dukes was pulled down and a number of Catholic churches were either closed or converted into Orthodox equivalents. Still, the battle was never won against collective memory. Even the Soviet regime, with its contempt for the past during half a century's rule, proved unable to destroy the cityscape of Vilnius. It is an irony, then, that local finance capital and local realtors are following the same route as their foreign predecessors.

Of course, development projects are based on different reasoning and a different ideology. But the silence of a society in the face of this profit-oriented urban policy, which takes no account of the city both as a visual symbol of history and a collection of memories, indicates that something has happened to our historical consciousness and sense of architectural aesthetics. The future development of this city of memories will be determined by whether those concerned with the future of the Vilnius cityscape can appeal



Fig. 1-5. Panorama of Vilnius before WW II.

to society at large, awakening its collective consciousness and aesthetic sense.

I conclude my remarks about changes to Vilnius' urban character and the city's present physiognomy with an extract from the aforementioned essay by Jan Bulhak, who seems to have been prophetic about the attitudes of people to their city. "It is impossible to remain an indifferent observer in Vilnius. The city draws one closer or repels one. One can understand it or fall in love with it, or reproachfully depart. Not everyone senses the attractive and irresistible power of Vilnius' fascination, and not everyone understands his or her own attachment."⁴

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⁴ Jan Bulhak, *Vilniaus peizažas*, 59.

CHAPTER TWO

VILNIUS CITY: URBANISM DRIVEN BY CONSUMPTION

During the last two decades, Lithuanian's capital city and its urban life experienced significant change. This applies not only to the disappearance of grayish color scheme of apartment block constructed during the Soviet period, but to city's entire visual character – including the present undeniable dominance of high-rise buildings in the central area and on the right bank on the Neris, and the density of international luxury shops and shopping centers on Gediminas Avenue, the capital's main street constructed during the Tsarist period and occupied mainly by administrative buildings and offices of the Soviet era. The very character of historic Vilnius, its *genius loci* or spirit of place, is shifting rapidly, and some urban critics (including myself) would go so far as to claim – radically and irreversibly. There might be different opinions about which of these visual changes are most effective at creating a new character of the present urban structure of Vilnius, but few would refuse to admit that all of them have been extremely profound, and anyone who has visited Lithuanian twenty or even ten years ago and recently returned would agree that what we see today is a totally new image of the city – that if a truly Western capitalist metropolis, hardly resembling the grey, dull and shabby backward city of the Soviet era.

This new post-Soviet image of Vilnius came into being through various factors triggered by the fall of the communist regime and activated by the post-Soviet “fast-food” market economy: it was created hastily, without much consideration of possible economic alternatives, say, the so-called Swedish model. Some of the factors that reshaped the urban tissue of Vilnius were: an uneven distribution of financial capital in Lithuania's largest cities; the reconfiguration of money-flows; the rapid development of real estate sector due to the establishment of market relations in the sphere of housing; and hasty attempts to solve pressing housing problems, but in one way or another, post-Soviet urban development was directly related to the rise of the culture of consumption, a phenomenon most gloriously represented by high-rise commercial buildings, large-scale

supermarkets and, most recently, gigantic shopping malls that were first built on the outskirts, but lately have made their way into the central on subcentral areas of Vilnius as well as other large Lithuanian cities. This article attempts to map out the main visual changes in Vilnius during the post-Soviet decades and to analyze to what degree the present character of the city was and continues to be shaped by the culture of consumption that replaced the culture of scarcity that dominated during the Soviet era.

Cathedrals of the Culture of Consumption

During the reign of communism, individuals destined to remain on the eastern side of the Iron Curtain had a rather vague understanding of the Western market economy, or capitalist system as such, beyond the simplifications of these phenomenon in Soviet-style Marxist textbooks. The vast and mysterious area that stretched beyond the barbed wire of a Soviet borderland was imagined as a promised land of plenty and abundance. Renowned British novelist and perceptive cultural critic John Berger has already insightfully noted some four decades ago in his well-known essay on advertising, long before the dissolution of the socialist system, that “The great hoardings and the publicly neons of the cities of capitalism are the immediate visible sign of ‘The Free World’. For many in Eastern Europe such images in the West sum up what they in the east lack. Publicity, it is thought, offers a free choice.”⁵

Today, no one in the eastern part of Europe, including Lithuania, is emotionally or psychologically moved by the presence of far more advanced advertising and publicity technologies in large cities than what was present in the West when Berger wrote these lines; they are just taken for granted as a natural part of contemporary urban life. However, the grand-scale shopping malls that appeared in Lithuanian cities considerably later than the visual signs of advertising continue to captivate city dwellers and visitors from provincial areas alike. Vilnius’s Acropolis complex – one of the largest shopping malls in the country – became both the visual symbol of the current culture of capitalism consumption and a center of attraction, bringing in tens of thousands of shoppers and visitors every day. Its central location in the topography of urban consumption is pretty well documented by several facts: the permanent traffic jams not only in adjoining territories, but on the highway that leads to Utena through the residential district of Šeškinė, as well as along the special bus routes and mass transportation designed for the potential visitors that start right from

⁵ Berger, *Ways of Seeing*, 131.



Fig. 2-1. Europa Shopping Mall in the new center of Vilnius.

Vilnius's central railway station and leads to the last stop at Acropolis. Moreover, it is well-known that provincial bus companies arrange many one-day tours for local shoppers to visit a place that might be called the great national cathedral of Consumption. Television interviews reveal that many teenagers know only one semantic meaning for Acropolis, and it has nothing to do with Ancient Greece or Classical Antiquity. For those who are just maturing as consumers, it is THE center of mass entertainment, with its abundance of stores, coffee shops, restaurants and a variety of other places of attraction.

British urban researchers Steven Miles and Malcolm Miles have recently argued that "Perhaps the influence of consumerism on our society, but also on our psychology, is so profound that its effect on our urban environment is in turn actually as emotional as it is physical and it is precisely for this reason that it is so difficult to assess the impact of consumption on the urban landscape."⁶ However, this impact on individuals' mental and emotional life, as well as on the general cityscape, is much more evident in the postcommunist realm, where the rise of

⁶ Steven Miles and Malcolm Miles, *Consuming Cities*, 13.

consumerism and a culture of consumption was so fast that it brought clearly visible changes to most urban areas. The main building of Acropolis rising over the hill of Šeškinė can hardly be said to destroy the natural landscape of the outskirts, as some architects argued a few years ago when the plans to add several more floors on top were widely and heatedly discussed in the media, at least compared to other high-rise buildings, like the recently renovated Lietuva Hotel now renamed to Radisson Blu (designed by architects Algis and Vytautas Nasvytis in the Soviet period), or the reputedly tallest of Vilnius's buildings: the tower of the business center "Europa", with its adjoining municipal tower and the half dozen other structures visually "deconstructing" a cityscape more or less organically shaped over centuries. The urban changes fostered by the expansion of shopping malls are even experienced physically: the presence of a kind of circumferential machine can be felt as soon as one approaches the Šeškinė district by car: the traffic gets heavier and heavier with every kilometre, and eventually a huge parking lot opens to view, like an 'automobile ocean' (to borrow a phrase from a poem by Lithuanian author Alis Balbierius).

Contemporary shopping malls in Vilnius are designed to create an easy and relaxing atmosphere for endless consumption. Inside, Acropolis is constructed to resemble a city in itself, with broad avenues and large shop windows, bars and restaurants that can be seen from both the outside and inside. The routes are planned so a potential customer has to walk long distances while looking for a particular shop, brand, or commodity. Although everything the interior design of Acropolis represents is hardly new to seasoned Western shoppers, it creates a special atmosphere for Vilnians, who hardly had an opportunity to experience such grand "joys" of shopping a decade ago. Acropolis and other large shopping malls in Vilnius (like Ozas or Panorama) are designed to symbolize the gates to the Paradise of Endless Consumption – one of the central myths generated by advanced capitalism. The urban image these commercial structures create is extremely effective in pursuing their goals. As Austrian urban critic Robert Misik has recently noted:

Shopping malls are zones with the effects of city life – but by no means does that make them urban spaces. In these mock public spaces, regulations are imposed. That which is perceived as public space is in fact private space that has been opened up, to enable – while simulating public space – traffic back and forth. The owners control this traffic in order to allow access to only certain people or, in the case of a violation of the rules, to give a ticking off. At the same time, an atmosphere conducive to lingering must be created that suits the aims of the owners: music and so