Site, Symbol and Cultural Landscape

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FOREWORD

Today we live in an urban environment that has been subjected to enormous changes, especially during the course of the last century, when modern architecture and urban planning reshaped the built environment on a global scale. Nevertheless, despite grand ambitions to create a new urban environment eschewed by modern movements in architecture, the consequences of the modernist paradigm have proved to have been far less successful than its early visionaries expected. On the other hand, the excessive transformations of the built environment that have occurred during the last century have also strengthened a longing for a more liveable urban environment and more meaningful architecture than the one that has made our cities faceless and devoid of their previous character.

It is quite natural that both people who experience the ambiguities of contemporary urban environments and architectural designers who are reflecting upon the consequences of the architectural practice that has shaped our cities that we inhabit today are conscious of the importance of the city and its *genius loci*, the symbolic and spiritual dimension that exists in all good architecture and meaningful urban environments. The experience of the conspicuous homogenization of contemporary cities, with dull and almost uniform centers and downtown areas devoid of any civic, cultural, or historical character as well as equally disappointing and faceless suburban sprawl, has given impetus to reconsidering the value of places. It is not surprising that, recently, more and more scholars and architectural designers are engaged in rethinking the role the built environment plays in human life.

Thus, the histories of places, their cultural landscapes as well as their symbolic and spiritual dimensions become legitimate objects of scholarly concern. It is no coincidence that this volume contains a number of essays focused on various aspects of cultural landscapes that shape the experience of our cities. Though most of the essays are focused on Lithuanian cities, their scope transcends a particular country or region. They all provide some timely discussions on what values exist in our urban environment and reflect upon architectural legacies of the remote and not so distant past.

This particular collection of scholarly essays is dedicated to the memory of Professor Rimantas Buivydas, Ph.D. (1945–2017), the Dean of the School of Architecture at Vilnius Gediminas Technical University, a gifted

architect, thoughtful architectural scholar, and exceptional educator, who remained concerned about the value of cultural landscapes during his whole professional and academic life. Most of the contributors to this volume remember him as a dear mentor, colleague, and friend.

VILNIUS' CITYSCAPE AND *GENIUS LOCI*: HISTORICAL ARCHITECTURE AND NATURE IN AN URBAN ENVIRONMENT

ALMANTAS SAMALAVIČIUS

The city of Vilnius (historically also known as Wilna, Wilno) – the capital of Lithuania – was established near the juncture of the Neris and Vilnia rivers in the thirteenth century, but the available archaeological data suggests that people lived in this area much earlier. Though the exact date when the city was actually founded remains unknown, Vilnius was first mentioned in the currently available written historical sources as early as 1323. That particular year, Gediminas, the ruler of Lithuania, referred to the city in his letters addressed to the German towns inviting foreign merchants and artisans to come and settle in the city of Vilnius. The ruler promised the freedom of faith to all those coming to settle in the city, emphasizing that "I do not forbid the Christians to worship God according to the manner of their faith, the Russians according to theirs, the Poles according to theirs, while we ourselves will worship God according to our customs."[1] This fact means that the city had already existed both as a human settlement (*urbs*) and a political entity (*civitas*). Thus, one can conclude that in the thirteenth century, it was already a rapidly growing and important town. The findings of the archaeologist Vykintas Vaitkevičius suggest that the city existed even earlier than the thirteenth century.[2] This is further confirmed by the fact that Vilnius was granted Magdeburgian town rights in 1387. From then, the city became the largest and most important town in the area and the seat of Lithuanian kings (or grand dukes). Nevertheless, there is substantial (mostly archaeological) evidence that the history of this city is far older than the written sources indicate. Manuscripts of the Karaite community in Lithuania (circa fourteenth

[1] Stasys Samalavičius, *An Outline of Lithuanian History* (Vilnius: Diemedis, 1995), 28.

[2] Gediminas Vaitkevičius, *Vilniaus įkūrimas* (Vilnius: Lietuvos nacionalinis muziejus, 2010), 21.

century) suggest that the city of Vilnius was established in 1189–1190.[3] However, remains of human dwellings have been found in the area of Gediminas Hill, evidencing that people inhabited the area as early as the Iron Age.[4]

The City and Its Character

Since the fourteenth century, Vilnius has been largely divided between communities representing different nationalities: most of the urban dwellers were Lithuanians, while German craftsmen and merchants occupied the territory between the Trakai-Rūdninkai road and Russians tended to live on the Medininkai axis; in addition, Tartars moved to Vilnius as early as 1341. So, in this respect, it was a colorful and international city like most European capitals of the late medieval period. Traces of these communities still exist in the present city and range from the remaining architectural structures to the realm of memory, which includes place names, like those of German or Tartar streets. During the medieval period, wooden structures were replaced by masonry, and the towers of Vilnius' cathedrals and churches became the most visual symbols of the Christian city.

Experiencing numerous changes throughout its historical development, the city of Vilnius is now a large metropolis suffering from many ills of contemporary urbanization, like ongoing sprawl and persistent traffic congestion; however, despite its progressing urban growth, the city is well known for its other qualities, especially the impressive ratio between architectural/urban mass and natural environments that currently makes up no less than 43 percent of its territory. Some authors go further to suggest – basing their insights on the data of the Vilnius Master Plan – that to this very day, only 23 percent of the territory of Vilnius municipality is urbanized.[5] Of course, this makes the city quite exceptional, not only in a regional but also in a larger context, as most European capitals can hardly boast of such a ratio between their urban tissue and the nature contained within the city limits.

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[3] Napoleonas Kitkauskas, *Vilniaus pilys: istorija, statyba, architektūra* (Vilnius: Mokslo ir enciklopedijų leidybos institutas, 2012), 17.

[4] Gediminas Vaitkevičius, "Vilniaus tapsmas," in *Miestų praeitis* 2 (Vilnius: VPU leidykla, 2010, CD), 20.

[5] Donatas Burneika and Rūta Ubarevičienė, "The Sprawl of Vilnius City – Some Consequences of Rural – Urban Transformations," *Annales Geographicae* 43–44 (2010–2011): 113.

Fig. 1. The medieval Gates of Dawn and its environs

Thus, no matter what urban transformations the city has endured, it still maintains an admirable balance with nature that was recorded by its numerous visitors and observers during different moments of its history. Architectural historian Valdas Drėma, who, after the re-establishment of Lithuania's independence, published a monumental study focused on the urban transformations of Vilnius, insisted that, in the old times,

> Vilnius was colorful – rich and poor, glamorous and shaggy, but all these social contrasts were softened by its pictorial diversity, intimate scale, good topographic location – picturesque terraces of the river Neris and a shelter between hills covered densely by woods. Vilnius was decorated not only by neighboring forests and oak-tree woods but also by a variety of parks, orchards and small gardens that surrounded the dwellings of artisans....[6]

As one can guess from these comments, the city of Vilnius is deeply embedded in natural surroundings and even contains a lot of nature within its boundaries. And in fact, this is true – many parts of the city are covered with greenery that contributes to the specific character of Vilnius, as

[6] Vladas Drėma, *Dingęs Vilnius* (Vilnius: Versus Aureus, 1991), 21.

recorded a long time ago by numerous individuals who visited the city. Some of these testimonies will be examined further.

Since the medieval period, the city has acquired a distinct and specific character. Being located in a picturesque hilly area, between a confluence of rivers and amidst surrounding forests, it managed to sustain its peculiar natural spirit and was destined to ordain it with impressive sacred architecture – Gothic, Baroque, and, eventually, Neo-Classical. Some periods were less fortunate, but despite falling prey to foreign powers, Vilnius managed to maintain its historic and cultural identity. During tsarist Russia's occupation and rule, Vilnius lost one of its (culturally and historically) most important buildings – the Rulers' (or Grand Dukes') Palace, which was mercilessly demolished by the colonial authorities. Some of its famous Catholic churches suffered as well by being converted into Russian Orthodox churches, losing some of their former architectural/aesthetic features. Vilnius went through its first urban crisis when it was occupied by Russian troops for the first time in its history back in the mid-seventeenth century. Even more significantly, the city was demolished at the end of World War II when the Red Army subjected Vilnius to heavy cannon fire after the German troops had already abandoned it. Later on, during the Soviet colonization, it was further damaged by the hostile attitude toward architectural heritage and the neglect of its rich multicultural layers. It was immediately after World War II that the Great Synagogue, damaged during the war, was pulled down, and many Catholic churches were closed and/or converted into warehouses. These architectural structures continued to decline during the whole period of Soviet rule. During the last three decades – in the post-Soviet era –, some historical parts of the city have continued to decline, albeit for different reasons: first because of "wild capitalism" and, more lately, because of neoliberal policies that have contributed to the demise of some important architectural legacies. Nevertheless, the city has managed to maintain at least some features of its previous character that continue to sustain its declining *genius loci* and make it a place where an old spirit of European urbanism can occasionally be experienced.

The Uses of Phenomenology

This essay is based on a cultural, historical, and phenomenological analysis that includes and embraces personal experiences of the city and its environments together with analytical procedures peculiar to scholarly research. As Vilnius was subjected to changes inflicted by certain ruling regimes (especially during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries), this

Fig. 2. St. Catherine's Church and hilly green area behind

essay, among many other goals, aims at discussing a picture that includes relations between the city's urban character, its most visible symbols, and clusters of nature within the city limits. Personal experience of the old city reflected upon in a phenomenological way adds significantly to the understanding of its wholeness as well as to the analysis of the picturesque cityscape.

Architectural phenomenology – an approach used in this particular article – is rooted in the shifts of architectural research triggered by the pioneering studies of Christian Norberg-Schulz, who was one of the first architectural theorists to realize the potential of architectural phenomenology that has grown since he published his seminal work *Genius Loci*. Despite various critical comments on Norberg-Schulz's phenomenological approach (mostly the limitations of his relience on Martin Heidegger), the interpretational paradigm of architectural phenomenology he developed has been helpful in bringing to light various aspects of the built environment, especially when dealing with such old historical urban places as Prague, Krakow, or Vilnius. Norberg-Schulz might be criticized for a somewhat narrow focus on his sources of philosophical phenomenology,

yet the perspective he opened for inquiries into architecture has proved to be extremely resourceful.

While discussing the peculiarities of urban places, one has to be aware of an important message provided by Norberg-Schulz: "Being qualitative totalities of a complex nature, places cannot be described by means of analytic, 'scientific' concepts."[7] By quoting Norberg-Schulz, I do not intend to diminish the virtue of the analytical (or scientific as some would prefer to say) approach; rather, I want to emphasize that the adoption of a phenomenological perspective allows a broader and more holistic perspective aimed at experiencing, evaluating, and describing urban places. As Norberg-Schulz famously remarked, "History has a fundamental function in the formation of the art of place, which implies permanence and change, while other artistic expressions derive especially from positions typical of the permanence and change they were conceived. The art of place is the art of totality."[8] As Norberg-Schulz further acknowledged: "Phenomenology, thus, does not aspire to replace the natural sciences, but rather to replace the relationship and the entire body of principles that these sciences express. And while phenomenology does suggest an understanding of the qualitative world in which everyday life occurs, it enriches it with choices and significant interpretations."[9]

In addition to offering a phenomenological attitude toward architecture and the built environment, Norberg-Schulz was an architectural theorist who revived and substantiated the old notion of the spirit of place or *genius loci*, as it was known to the ancient Romans. Adopting a phenomenological perspective for the interpretation of architecture and focusing mostly (and somewhat exclusively) on Heidegger's philosophical legacy, Norberg-Schulz, however, elevated the poetic and somewhat obscure ancient notion of *genius loci* to the level of sound and reliable architectural theory that is applicable not only to natural surroundings but to the urban dimension as well while dealing with particular places that have their own character that has been shaped over many centuries. According to this architectural theorist:

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[7] Christian Norberg-Schulz, "The Phenomenon of Place," in *The Urban Design Reader*, ed. Michael Larice and Elizabeth Macdonald (London and New York: Routledge, 2007), 126.

[8] Christian Norberg-Schulz, *Architecture: Presence, Language, Place* (Milan: Skira, 2000), 221.

[9] Ibid., 21.

Fig. 3. Vilnia River and the Bernardines Church

Through building, man-made places are created which possess their individual *genius loci*. This genius is determined by what is visualized, complemented, symbolized or gathered. In vernacular architecture the man-made *genius loci* ought to correspond closely to that of the natural place, in urban architecture, it is more comprehensive. The *genius loci* of a town, thus, ought to comprise the spirit of the locality to get "roots", but it

> should also gather contents of *general* interest, contents which have their roots elsewhere, and which have been moved by means of symbolization. Some of these contents (meanings) are so general that they apply to all places.[10]

Norberg-Schulz admitted that places are dynamic rather than static entities and thus are subject to change, yet this very fact, according to the architectural theorist, "does not mean, however, that *genius loci* necessarily changes or gets lost." And this, according to the architectural scholar, means that "To protect and conserve the *genius loci* in fact means to concretize its presence in ever new historical contexts. We might also say that the history of a place ought to be its 'self-realization.'"[11]

Architectural phenomenology further developed after Norberg-Schulz coined his famous concept of *genius loci* and equipped architectural theory with a useful and promising intellectual tool. Even if his attitude and concepts have been subjected to critical scrutiny,[12] many of his insights remain valid despite the fact that a number of architectural scholars have significantly expanded the realm of phenomenology in architecture and urban studies.

Vilnius' Cityscape and Its *Genius Loci*

Echoing the observations of Vladas Drema cited earlier, Vilnius is deeply embedded in its natural surroundings and contains a lot of nature within its boundaries, as has been noted by many individuals who visited it over the centuries

For example, a would-be renowned natural scholar and a participant of the second expedition of British captain James Cook to circumnavigate the world that started in 1772 and lasted three years, Georg Forster, who eventually happened to serve as a professor at Vilnius University for a number of years at the end of the eighteenth century, remarked in his letters that "The geographic situation of Vilnius is comfortable and pleasant, this is the most beautiful area that I ever saw in Poland; this, however, says little, as remaining Poland is almost entirely plains."[13] In

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[10] Christian Norberg-Schulz, *Genius Loci: Towards a Phenomenology of Architecture* (New York: Rizzoli, 1980), 58.
[11] Ibid, 18.
[12] See e.g. Reza M. Shirazi, *Towards an Articulated Phenomenological Interpretation of Architectural Phenomenal Phenomenology* (New York: Routledge, 2014).
[13] *Georgo Forsterio laiškai iš Vilniaus*, trans. Jonas Kilius (Vilnius: Mokslas, 1988), 52.

another letter, however, Forster seems to have been more generous in assessing the landscape of the region: "Vilnius just one hundred years ago had 80,000 inhabitants, now it has a mere 20,000, including 12,000 Jews, it looks from afar far better *meo judicio* than Krakow or Grodno and, being decorated by numerous church towers, it looks good, however, inside the town one can see deserted, abandoned, devastated houses destroyed by Russian and confederate armies. Vilnius environs are most beautiful to the eye because they are hilly, meanwhile the road from Krakow to Vilnius is pure plains and sand."[14]

Forster, who was already a well-known and promising natural scientist when he travelled to Lithuania after being offered a professorship at Vilnius University, made a long journey that lasted for several months before reaching the environs of Vilnius in November 1784. In his diary, written over the course of this lengthy trip, Forster gave an impressive description of his final destination. In an entry to his diary, Forster wrote that he finally approached Vilnius on November 18 and was captivated by the surrounding natural environment and the view of the city that opened before his eyes:

> A mile before entering Vilnius (Wilna), the area near Wilia (Neris) River became more beautiful because of the sandy hills and limestone mountains that rise everywhere and are crowned with woods. The location of Vilnius makes an unexpected impression when one comes closer to the city, on the slope of the valley where the whole city looks as if spilled with its beautiful, still-surviving towers – the city really looks majestic and great. Inside the city, however, one finds narrow dirty streets and a lot of ruins, however a few great edifices can be found among the neglected buildings.[15]

Forster was generally not very happy during his stay in the city, and he often complained in his letters about the public life in Vilnius as well as the harsh climate he had to suffer. On the other hand, he had no special interest either in Vilnius' cityscape or its urban structure that merged with picturesque natural surroundings. Nevertheless, his observations of the city's

[14] Ibid, 77.
[15] Ibid, 410.

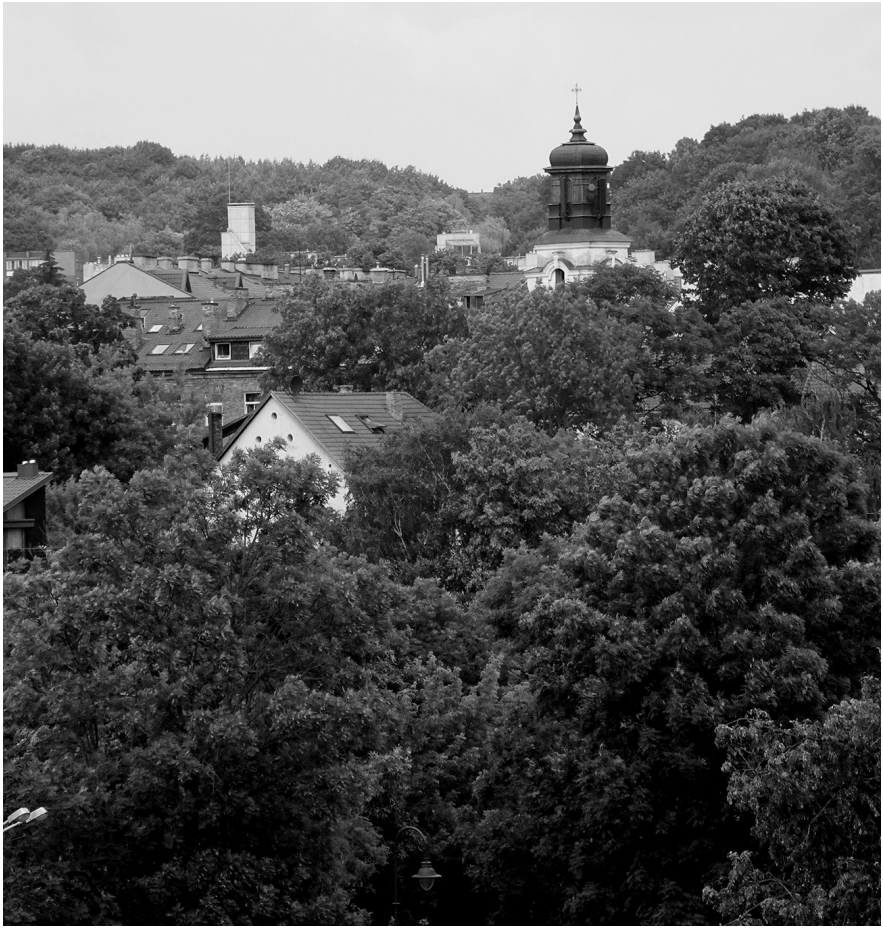

Fig. 4. Panorama of Užupis Quarters in Vilnius city

character he made in his letters and diaries, no matter how sparse and fragmented, provide valuable insights into the *genius loci* of Vilnius at the end of the eighteenth century before the city was subjected to the urban transformations of the modern era.

Polish photographer and professor of the art of photography at Vilnius University Jan Bulhak, who lived in Vilnius from 1912–1939, was a more consistent, subtle, and attentive observer of its urban character. Encouraged

by the renowned Polish painter Ferdynand Ruszczyc, he spent several decades documenting the cityscape and architectural structures of Vilnius and its natural environment. In addition to his work as a photographer and educator, Bulhak wrote several books on photography and aesthetics. One of them – a collection of essays published in Vilnius in 1936 – was focused exclusively on its cityscape and the landscape of its environs.[16] Bulhak, who agreed to document the city of Vilnius, had a keen interest in urban aesthetics, and thus a large part of his photos of Vilnius was not only for its documentation but also for the aesthetic reception of the city. His attitude is confirmed by his own photos as well as by his essays on the objects he documented with the help of a camera as well.

Bulhak, who studied the ethnography of Vilnius as the city's commissioned photographer, developed a deep interest in his subject manner. This is quite obvious not only from his work as a photographer but also from his books. Bulhak commented on Vilnius' cityscape as follows: "Vilnius does not obscure the perspective of its congenial and important objects and is an exception that is worth attention. [...] In fact, Vilnius is not a city and never was. Vilnius only pretends to be a city, unsuccessfully, because regardless of time and its spirit, it always remains a village. Only here and there do a few main streets have an image of a metropolis, however, behind this cover, an essentially different reality exists."[17] Bulhak seems to have been extremely sensitive to the city's peculiar and unique character. He was enchanted by its picturesque topography and subtle layout, as well as the street views and broader panoramas this structure provided. A keen observer of the city, the Polish photographer realized the beauty of its surviving architectural structures that were intimately related to their natural surroundings. According to Bulhak, "Vilnius is lovely because it is not a contemporary city, it is close to a village, orchard, field or pinewood, the abundance of which one can see all over the country, close to the earth, miraculously concentrated on a small hilly, watery and choppy piece of land. It is at the same time a manor house and sanctuary, a witness of the greatness of a folk spirit and its indestructible power. The enchanting landscape of Vilnius merges with great architecture that emphasizes the benefits of the city's location and uses them for excellent decorative compositions."[18] Yet despite these

[16] The book was written and originally published in Polish, however, in this essay, my references are to the later Lithuanian translation of the book. See Jan Bulhak, *Vilniaus peizažas. Fotografo kelionės* [The Landscape of Vilnius. Photographer's Itinerary], trans. Stanislovas Žvirgždas (Vilnius: Vaga, 2006).
[17] Ibid., 10–11.
[18] Ibid., 18.

pictorial compounds and mixtures, the city's topography and location were neither misleading nor mysterious; on the contrary, the layout of the cityscape was pretty simple. Bulhak sketched it extremely precisely:

> A deep valley, surrounded by hills almost from every side, two rivers, some forty shrines and a sea of greenery – this is the most simple plan of Vilnius. Everything else disappears imperceptibly in the ensemble of towers, hills and trees and testifies how vigilantly nature preserves the landscape of Vilnius. It takes care of the city and man, follows him as a caring nanny, covering and decorating even the slightest traces of human existence.[19]

One might read the narrative of the photographer's essay as being written from a somewhat romanticizing perspective; however, he hardly exaggerated the truly rural character of this city that one could experience in the first half of the last century when he penned his essay on Vilnius.

The Polish photographer's emphasis on the intimate relationship between nature and architecture in Vilnius was echoed by another insightful observer – Mikalojus Vorobjovas, an art historian who published a book on Vilnius that was, coincidentally, illustrated by the photos of Jan Bulhak on the eve of World War II when Lithuania regained its historical capital. Vorobjovas emphasized that

> Architecture created by a human being is 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.[20]

Before and even after World War II, the city still maintained its rural character, which included a large amount of greenery in its central and semi-central areas. Greenery, however, is only one of the aspects that make up the *genius loci* of Vilnius, as its character is created by a variety of rich cultural layers. For Bulhak, as he explicitly stated in his observation quoted above, it was the rural aspect of Vilnius that added the most remarkable qualities to its cityscape.

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[19] Ibid., 35.
[20] Mikalojus Vorobjovas, *Vilniaus menas* (Vilnius: Spaudos fondas, 1940), 14.

Being a keen and subtle observer of the city's architecture, Bulhak was no less sensitive to the role played by the *genius loci* in the historical parts of the city. He took notice of the fact that Vilnius was far more closely related to its natural surroundings than any other city in the region. Moreover, he realized that the lack of rapid modern urban development added to the preservation of the beauty of Vilnius' cityscape.

On the other hand, it was the ascending towers of Vilnius' many churches that expressed the truly European dimension of its remarkable architectural legacy. As one can judge from any panoramic photos taken before World War II, the church towers rose high above the cityscape of Vilnius in the same way as the dome of the cathedral designed by Brunelleschi still powerfully dominates the cityscape of contemporary Florence.

Sacred Spaces and Conflicting Visual Symbols

In his seminal book *The Culture of Cities*, which provided the foundations for many of his later writings, the renowned urban historian and theorist Lewis Mumford mused about verticality and the upward line that has characterized most western cities since the medieval period. He observed that in medieval European cities

> The towers of churches raised the eyes to heaven: their masses rose, in hierarchic rank, over all the lesser symbols of earthly wealth and power; through their stained glass windows the light burst in aureoles of splendid color. From almost any part of the city, the admonitory fingers of the spires, archangelic swords, tipped with gold were visible: if hidden for a moment, they would suddenly appear as the roofs parted, with the force of blasts of trumpets.[21]

[21] Lewis Mumford, *The Culture of Cities* (New York: Brace and Company, 1938), 62.

Fig. 5. The view of All Saints Church. Photos by Almantas Samalavičius

Quite interestingly, Mumford's insights echo with the observations of Jan Bulhak, who emphasized that, for him, Vilnius, while maintaining its rural (somewhat wild and primordial) character at the same time contains spiritual topography marked by rhetorically eloquent church towers. Thus, the space of the city was not only profane but also a sacred or spiritual realm. Containing a variety of aesthetically and spiritually impressive symbols, the rising shapes and silhouettes of the churches and their towers

were dominating the whole urban landscape, and thus the city could be regarded as a truly sacred space:

> All churches built in Vilnius do not belong to the city alone: they rise above the people, nature and landscape, their silhouettes support the high sky and from there take a view of the whole district. The churches and the sky merge into one noble dream, they sparkle for the miraculous city in the glory of sunset where the creation of God is no different than the work of men for the city, the old architecture of which is an overture to the eye and thought….[22]

Though Gothic churches in Vilnius (like the famous St. Anne's Church) could hardly compete with most of their western European counterparts in terms of size and height, the aspiration to 'raise eyes to heaven' is evident, and later, especially during the Baroque era, church towers grew higher, powerfully dominating the cityscape and, thus, could be recognized from afar, as is evident from the epistolary legacy of Georg Foster, among many other written and iconographical sources. Though perhaps not a single vertical element became as dominating as Brunelleschi's dome over the cityscape of Florence, the towers of several dozen churches scattered all over the valley created a sacred landscape that endured for centuries and was subjected to destruction quite late – after World War II and the imposed period of post-war urban modernization during the period of 'really existing socialism,' as the Soviet regime famously labelled itself.

Ironically, the process has continued even more energetically after the fall of communism and the arrival of capitalism. And, quite naturally, this has brought about serious contradictions related to the existence of individuals, the community, and their urban setting. Contemporary Vilnius, pregnant with new visual signs of capitalism, the free market, and consumerism has inevitably lost some of its formerly sacred spaces to symbolic glorifications of earthly wealth and power. Recently built high-rise buildings, like the '*Europa*' commercial shopping center, now soar over the domes and towers of the religious structures, creating an expanding profane dimension devoid of any spiritual or communal meanings.

Thus, meditating on the hastily shifting cityscape of Vilnius during the transition from communism to capitalism, I tend to agree with Philip Sheldrake, who wisely observed that "Cities reflect and affect the quality of human relationships. The fact is that in the context of urban environments, we cannot separate functional, ethical and spiritual questions. If the place

[22] Bulhak, *Vilniaus peizažas*, 28.

is to be sacred, places must affirm the sacredness of people, community and the human capacity for transcendence."[23]

Before World War II however, Vilnius was still characterized by a multitude of vertical sacred structures, most of which were erected during the Baroque period, especially after the wars with Muscovy and Sweden were over in the second half of the seventeenth century and the city experienced a brief yet extremely busy revival. It was during this period that wealthy noble families generously allocated funds for erecting new churches. As Victor L. Tapie noted back in the seventies of the last century when trespassers were mostly prevented from entering the country by the colonial regime,

> One might almost say that the city of Wilno reflected their [the nobility's] self-assurance, when it began to evolve a style based on the works of Borromini and Guarini and their pupils. Wilno, too, was to have a chequered and strange history, but in the seventeenth century it was a residual town where the nobles built their palaces and were very generous in their gifts to the local churches. The religious orders had gained a strong foothold: the Dominicans, the Carmelite friars and nuns, the Benedictines, Augustines, Jesuits, and also those Trinitarians who sought to keep the Uniate Church allied to Rome by granting the use of Greek ritual. It was also from Wilno that civilization spread eastwards and exerted an influence on people like Ordin-Naschokine, who was in the Czar's entourage.[24]

It can, however, be concluded that the Gothic legacy of Vilnius is largely lost, despite the fact that there are numerous examples of the style in its historic center, such as St. Nicholas' Church (the city's oldest Gothic sacred building) or the marvelous St. Anne's Church. The present cityscape of Vilnius' Old Town and its character – or *genius loci* (if one prefers the conceptualization of Norberg-Schulz) – contains a character more peculiar to the urban and architectural aesthetics of the Baroque or, in some cases, the Neo-Classical era. Nevertheless, some remaining architectural layers are still visible, and sacred architectural symbols continue to be deeply embedded in nature.

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[23] Philip Sheldrake, *Spaces for the Sacred: Place, Memory and Identity* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), 153.
[24] Victor L. Tapie, *The Age of Grandeur: Baroque Art and Architecture*, trans. A. Ross Williamson (New York: Grove Press, 1960), 230.

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ŠNIPIŠKĖS: THE CONVERSION OF A HISTORIC SUBURB INTO THE NEW CENTRE OF VILNIUS

AGNĖ GABRĖNIENĖ

Introduction

Located in the very centre of Vilnius, the capital of Lithuania, Šnipiškės is one of the oldest and most historic suburbs of the city. Thanks to its very favourable location and business interests triggered by it, it is also the territory with the fastest-changing landscape. This historically evolved, very green area, mostly of homestead-type buildings of small rustic scale, has recently been overcome by tall glass office towers, rows of apartment blocks, and new streets laid out between them. The massive volumes of new buildings, their concentration, and the speed of their construction point to the high economic value of land plots and the scale of economic interests. The speed and nature of large-scale changes are alarming to the residents of Vilnius and social critics, and the consequences for the city and its community are unpredictable and likely to be long-lasting. Although the true value of the hastily created new urban structure and architecture will only become apparent and finally appreciated after some time, the current intensive conversion of the historic suburb into the new centre of Vilnius calls for a closer look at the ongoing changes, which are significant for the continuity of the city's identity.

Peculiarities of the Evolution of the Suburb

The history of the suburb of Šnipiškės is long and colourful, from a village with the kennels of the grand duke[1] to the city centre with high-rise buildings. Along with some other historic suburbs of Vilnius, such as Žvejai and Žvėrynas, Šnipiškės emerged before the sixteenth century.

[1] Vladas Drėma, *Dingęs Vilnius* (Vilnius: Versus Aureus, [1989] 2013).

Since the valley of the Neris River, where Šnipiškės begins, was a convenient location for storing goods to be floated down the river, warehouses were built there with this purpose in mind. In addition, there was some '[…] excellent clay that would sometimes be transported even to faraway lands for manufacturing more refined articles' in the suburb,[2] while these resources encouraged local residents to take up manufacturing various ceramic objects. It is known that the craftsmen concentrated here made bricks for the Church of Sts Peter and Paul in Vilnius.[3] In discussing the evolution of Vilnius, the art historian Vladas Drėma wrote that 'brick makers, potters, and stove-builders occupied the whole suburb of Šnipiškės' and that 'horticulture was also widely cultivated here'.[4] The growing importance of the suburb is also evidenced by the impressive bridge. In 1536, Sigismund the Old, King of Poland and Grand Duke of Lithuania, issued a privilege for the construction of a new bridge, and the castellan Ulrich Hosius supervised its construction. It connected, for the first time, the territory of Šnipiškės with Vilnius Street, leading to the Old Town, and is depicted in some detail in Brown's *Atlas of Cities* of 1581.[5] In the eighteenth century, the Baroque St Raphael's Church, which for a long time dominated the landscape of Šnipiškės, was erected on the road (now a pedestrian walkway) close to the bridge. The new prospective plan of Vilnius, drawn up in 1875, foresaw the expansion of the city in a northerly direction, and Giedraičių Street was laid in accordance with this plan. From 1890 to the early twentieth century, the area was the site of the intensive construction of residential wooden houses. At present, the area, which is mainly built up with wooden homesteads, is conventionally referred to as Skansen, after the world's oldest open-air museum of architecture and culture founded in Stockholm in 1891.[6] One of the few surviving colonies of houses built in Vilnius in the late nineteenth century on the initiative of Juozapas Montvila, an entrepreneur, banker, social activist, and philanthropist, after the model of the cities of England and Germany, has survived on the eastern boundary of Šnipiškės and is known as Piromontas. It was a novelty aimed at improving people's living conditions, but, unlike abroad, in Vilnius it was aimed at the middle class,

[2] Adomas Honoris Kirkoras, *Pasivaikščiojimai po Vilnių ir jo apylinkes* (Vilnius: Mintis, 1991).
[3] Stasys Samalavičius and Almantas Samalavičius, *Vilniaus šv. Petro ir Povilo bažnyčia* (Vilnius: Vilniaus pilių tyrimo centras, 1998).
[4] Drėma, *Dingęs Vilnius*.
[5] Ibid.
[6] SkansenSE, "Historier får liv," *Skansen.se*, accessed April 11, 2021, https://www.skansen.se/sv.