Memory politics in a Multiethnic City: the Case of Vilnius

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Abstract

In the article, the concepts that have influenced (and are still influencing) the appreciation, assimilation and usage of the collective memory, evidenced in historic Lithuanian towns, especially Vilnius, are analysed, and some possible solutions to the questions arising are proposed. It is emphasized that the recognition, usage and interpretation of cultural values, accumulated in the public spaces of historic towns, which are, as a rule, multiethnic, multi-confessional and multicultural, is a complex undertaking requiring competence, creativity and responsibility. The relationship between this multipartite problem and the cultural politics of modern Lithuania is examined. Two attitudes, mono-perspective (imperial, Soviet, nationalistic) and multi-perspective (postmodern), towards the relationship between ethnic communities and the prevailing culture are distinguished. The clearest cases of public space appropriation/interpretation which provoked inter-ethnic or intersectional conflicts in recent times are analysed. These are related to the sensitivity of the collective memory, which is linked to the traumas and wrongs of the recent past.

The strategic possibilities of the usage of cultural riches accumulated in the public spaces of Vilnius' old town are discussed, by referring to the ideas of conservation theorists and taking into account the Lithuanian context. The actuality of the multicultural traditions and experiences of the unique concord in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania are emphasised, considering the present circumstances of the globalised world.

Historic cities, both in their origins and their current situation, are often multi-ethnic, multicultural and multi-confessional.[1] They are based not only on material and tangible elements (the physical shape of the city, consisting of natural and cultural elements, neighbourhoods, public spaces, streets and urban ensembles, or individual buildings, parks, public gardens, greenery and other objects), but also spiritual and intangible elements (the cultural-ideological meanings of these places, the images of cities, the unique urban lifestyle, distinctive personalities, legends, folk tales and jokes). According to some specialists, recent threats to urban identity and uniqueness are starting to appear, thanks to the acceleration of globalisation and cultural homogenisation (uniformity) processes. These

[1] G.J. Ashworth, J.E. Tunbridge, *The Tourist-Historic City* (Chichester: John Wiley and Sons, 1990), 27-34.

processes can lead both to a feeling of pride when talking about specific areas, their uniqueness and authenticity,[2] and to a variety of defensive reactions related to it, such as insularity and xenophobia. Bearing in mind these processes, it is interesting to see what tendencies in contemporary global, European and regional cultural policies have influenced the memory politics implemented in towns and cities. Which strategies and tactics of the 'politics of memory' (ethnocentric, civic nationalist or multicultural) tend to dominate? Finally, what dissonances arise, and what measures, in trying to avoid, or at least control them, would it be possible to offer?

As we try to answer all these questions, the case of Vilnius, the capital city of Lithuania, will be the main focus. With its complicated history, variety of its topographic scale and multi-layeredness of interpretations, and also the still existing problems of its ethno-cultural 'possessiveness' and 'dependency', Vilnius can be treated as the most prominent example in the arena of changing tendencies in the Lithuanian 'politics of memory' (among other Lithuanian cities, only Klaipėda (Memel) is more or less similar to Vilnius in this respect).

Since society's public urban spaces accommodate clearly identifiable signs and symbols of identity, this article will focus mainly on analysing them, raising the following questions: What story is the historic change in Vilnius' public spaces telling us? That is, to what extent can the changes in a particular epoch's 'politics of memory', its goals, expression, priorities, and so on, be identified? What *messages* are encrypted in them? Are they consistent and fully coherent, or do they tend to lead to conflict?

In trying to answer all these questions, attention will be focused both on the strategies of *heritagisation*[3] and *commemoration*[4] (which, by the way, in some cases are closely intertwined) in Vilnius' public spaces in the 20th and early 21st centuries, occasionally also touching on earlier epochs and their specific trends and characteristics), and the priorities of memory politics. The most important public spaces in Vilnius, their *ideological*, *cultural* and *social* meanings, their contexts and problems of change are analysed. Moreover, attention is paid to places or spaces in the city which were formed deliberately, and which did not appear spontaneously.

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[2] M. Castells, "European Cities, the Informational Society and the Global Economy", *Journal of Economic and Social Geography*, 1993, XXXIV, 4.

[3] Heritagisation: the recognition of places, buildings, artefacts and traditions connected with a certain personality, event or sociocultural phenomenon, as valuable, protected and transmitted to future generations.

[4] Commemoration: the fixing of a memory about a certain historical personality, event or phenomenon in a new material or discursive form.

Collective memory and the cityscape

It is worth noting that the term 'public space'[5] itself contains at least two very important, in our case, and as we shall see later, closely related, connotations: *topographic* (literally) and *socio-cultural-communicational* (in the metaphorical sense, for describing public social discourse, connected with general affairs, *res publica*). In this context, its *functionality* and *communicativeness* could be considered as the most important attributes of public space.

The first aspect has attracted the attention of specialists in architecture,[6] historians[7] and art researchers[8] in Lithuania. In fact, public social spaces (streets, squares, parks, cemeteries and so on) tend mostly to be multi-functional, although many of them could be characterised by a dominant purpose, be it official, sacral, commercial, recreational, commemorative, and so on. It is clear that the concept of public spaces and their purpose changes over time. However, it should be noted that this process of change depends not only on the changing ideological, social and political context of urban life, but also on scenarios chosen by each generation of urban inhabitants to seek a sense of their collective memory. The latter, communicational aspect of Vilnius' public spaces, as far as is known, has only been fragmentally discussed by Lithuanian researchers.[9] Therefore, it can

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[5] It is worth looking at the notion of 'public space'. We live in times when the dichotomy between public and private is getting sharper, mostly noticed in politics, economics and public life, and even in our daily life. As we know, the main difference between 'public' and 'private' is related to anthropological and topographic categories, such as outside/inside and accessible/inaccessible (not to everybody, not always). In this article, the notion of 'public space' will be used stressing its 'accessibility to everybody' dimension.

[6] Tomas Gruskis, "Miesto aikštė sociokultūrinėje visuomenės raidoje" (The city square in the socio-cultural development of sočiety), *Urbanistika ir architektūra*, 1999, t. XXIII, no. 1, 17-29; Tomas Gruskis, "Miesto visuomeninių erdvių sistema: kai kurios teorinės prielaidos" (The system of the city's public spaces: some theoretical premises), *Urbanistika ir architektūra*, 2002, t. XXVI, no. 3, 137-145; Tomas Gruskis, "Tradicija ir ideologija miesto visuomeninėje erdvėje kintančių sociopolitinių sąlygų kontekste" (Tradition and ideology in the urban public space in the context of changing socio-political conditions), *Istoriniai miestai: sena ir šiuolaikiška*, Vilnius, Savastis, 9-19; Tomas Gruskis, "Miesto ir jo visuomeninių erdvių formavimo idėjos XIX a. Lietuvoje" (Ideas in the formation of Lithuania's urban public spaces in the 19th century), *Urbanistika ir architektūra*, 2004, t. XXVIII, priedas no. 3 (Architektūros istorijos tyrimai: meninių idėjų apykaitos), 95-102; Andrius Novickas, "Miesto aikščių paskirčių sąveika ir pasikeitimai" (The interaction and changes of the purposes of urban squares), *Urbanistika ir architektūra*, 2002, t. XXVI, no. 1, 3-10.

[7] The considerable contribution by A.R. Čaplinskas to research into Vilnius street names should be mentioned.

[8] For example, in the huge monograph *Dailė architektūroje* (Fine Art in Architecture) by Algimantas Mačiulis (Vilnius, VDA leidykla, 2003), there is a chapter devoted to sculpture, in which the evolution of the building of public monuments in Vilnius is also discussed.

[9] A. Nikžentaitis, A. Ragauskas (eds.), *Santykis su istorine praeitimi XXI amžiaus Vilniuje* (Vilnius:

be assumed that the analysis of the form, content and historical development of *symbols* of the collective memory encoded in public spaces, and/or what could be called *nodes of symbols*, is relevant and timely.

Landscape, particularly townscape, is perceived today as a place where the identity (national or other) can be created and maintained.[10] In addition, it is always created in a specific historical and political environment.[11] In talking about the cityscape, it should be stressed that historical memory is 'imprinted' in major historical events embodying institutional continuity, and buildings or sites recalling people, such as museum exhibits, street names, monuments, commemorative plaques and so on. These signs and sites of memory embody the conscious choice of society's leaders as to what and who of the whole treasure of past events, personalities and phenomena should be selected, given meaning and commemorated, and what should be bypassed, forgotten and deleted.

It can be argued that, beginning from modern times, in European cities, and especially in the capital cities, the remains of the past were mostly selected, stored and made meaningful in order to create a grand national narrative supporting the national identity, and legitimising the hegemony of the nation-state in a certain area. But at the same time, the struggle between various shapes benefitted the politically and culturally subordinated personalities, events and institutions, thus offering alternatives, bypassing or even rejecting the official attributes of the 'politics of memory'.

The prevailing ideology of nationalism of the 19th and early 20th century usually tried to separate, and spatially, contextually and discursively distinguish the heritage of the different socio-cultural groups, bringing the contribution of the dominant nation into the specific country's culture. Therefore, with disputes arising over the ethnic 'dependence' of a particular urban heritage, this homogenising strategy, among other things, also influenced inter-group conflicts and hostility. Even if efforts at homogenisation survive, from a long-term perspective, the sites and signs of memory may lose part of their former clarity, concreteness and power, so they may need to be removed, marginalised, transformed, reinterpreted or given new elements. In short, material *signs of memory*, and the public discourse giving meaning to them, are historical and change over time. Thus, in the form of a historic city, we can observe something

LR Seimo leidykla, 2004); *Naujasis Vilniaus perskaitymas: didieji Lietuvos istoriniai pasakojimai ir daugiakultūris miesto paveldas* (Vilnius: VU, 2009).

[10] B. Graham, "The Past in Europe's Present: Diversity, Identity and the Construction of Place". B. Graham (ed.), *Modern Europe: Place, Culture and Identity* (London: Arnold, 1998), 40.

[11] T.J. Barnes, J.S. Duncan, *Writing Worlds: Discourse, Text and Metaphor in the Representation of Landscape* (London: Routledge, 1992), 11-12.

like memory sedimentation (accumulated sediment), a certain 'cultural layer' of collective memory whose elements cannot easily be 'deciphered'. Over time, these 'layered' messages may become unreadable, incoherent, inconsistent, irregular, and sometimes even unpleasant.[12]

To what extent is it possible to observe the effects of these ideological choices in Vilnius' public spaces? What features characterised the memory politics carried out in Lithuania's capital city in the 19th and 20th centuries?

Shifts in the politics of memory

In order to 'decode' public spaces in Vilnius, the capital of the Republic of Lithuania, it is necessary to start by distinguishing the city's visual topographic scale, which, as we shall see, complicates the work of its perception and interpretation, creating the problem of multiple layers, a kind of 'matrioshka effect'. In particular, it is necessary to mention the *local* level, the city *per se*, which is important to the city's historical events, personalities and institutions, and which is often obscured by other layers. Secondly, probably by far the most noticeable dimension is the *national* one. In the case of Vilnius, this new dimension only becomes significant in modern times after 1945, since only then did the real process of Vilnius' *Lithuanisation* start, and efforts to establish the grand Lithuanian national narrative began to dominate, even though the image of Vilnius in the Lithuanian historical imagination had occupied a very significant place before.[13] Due to the specific historical circumstances of the Vilnius region, this process can be considered as being delayed, and during the interwar period, in its status as the (temporary) capital, Vilnius was replaced by Kaunas.

Vilnius is usually seen today by Lithuanians firstly as the capital of the Lithuanian nation-state. But as is well known, it was treated as 'their own' town by many other nations, Poles, Belarusians, Jews, Russians and Ukrainians, and this fact in distinct historical periods particularly complicates efforts at its unambiguous 'reading' and 'appropriating'. This is reflected in the different names for the city that are still used by different ethnic groups: Wilno, Вільня, Vilne, Vilnius ...[14]

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[12] For more, see: G.J. Ashworth, "The Conserved European City as Cultural Symbol: The Meaning of the Text". B. Graham, (ed.) *Modern Europe. Place, Culture and Identity* (London: Arnold, 1998), 261-286.

[13] J. Mulevičiūtė, *Modernizmo link. Dailės gyvenimas Lietuvos respublikoje 1918-1940* (Towards Modernism. Artistic Life in the Lithuanian Republic in 1918-1940) (Kaunas: Nacionalinis M.K. Čiurlionio dailės muziejus, 2001).

[14] C. Gousset, V. Wilno, "Vilnius, capitale de Lituanie". Alain Brossat, Sonia Sombe, Jean-Yves Potel, Jean-Charles Szurek (eds.), *A l'Est, la mémoire retrouvée* (Paris: Editions La Découverte, 1990), 489-520.

The problem is also closely related to the *regional* perception of the city, which in this case is probably the most complicated. Vilnius can be seen from several perspectives, both *ethnographically* as the centre of a specific region (the Vilnius region) situated within the Lithuanian state, and also *historically* as the political centre of the former Grand Duchy of Lithuania, far overstepping the current territorial boundaries of the Republic of Lithuania, and emphasising the multicultural dimension of its accumulated heritage. And after regaining independence, and especially after accession to the EU, it is also possible to talk about Vilnius in a *continental* perspective, as a very distinctive, but at the same time typical, East or Central European city. Finally, after 1994, when the Old Town of Vilnius was inscribed on the World Heritage List, not only the regional but also the global dimension of the city's significance emerged. All these levels are often intertwined, and some of them may even clash, complicating an unambiguous and discursively unified perception of Vilnius' history and cultural heritage. Therefore, signs of memory, accumulated in public spaces or newly created, frequently become illustrations of this complexity and heterogeneity.

As was mentioned before, in most cases the creation or actualisation of a public space does not start in an empty site, but in an already prevailing, multi-layered historical environment, which has a unique symbolic load, so that the introduction of new elements, or even an attempt to radically transform this space, can lead to semantic, aesthetic or other dissonances with previous elements. This problem of Vilnius' public spaces became particularly relevant at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries. Until then, the preservation of the historical memory was largely a matter for the rulers, the Church and members of the aristocracy.[15] Gravestones in the churches of parishes and monasteries connected with the history of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, which had not only a memorial but also a didactic and educational value, could serve as evidence. Basically, monuments with a sacral charge were supplemented by secular versions in Europe at the turn of the 18th and 19th centuries (in some places, since the Renaissance period), but in Vilnius, due to the political reality of the period, this tendency, stimulated by the ideas of the Enlightenment, Romanticism, and growing nationalism, did not have time to emerge.[16]

[15] For Europe, it is a typical position of the representatives of these layers, J.-P. Babelon, A. Chastel (comp.), "La notion du patrimoine", *La Revue de l'Art*, 1980, no. 49, 5-31.

[16] Even though there were a few monuments and shrines in Vilnius with a sacral purpose, the first secular monument, the figure of Stanislaw Poniatowski on a tower which was proposed in 1785 by the architect L. Gucevičius in his complex project for Vilnius town hall, was not implemented, despite the efforts made at the end of the 20th century by supporters of this idea.

The importance of Vilnius as a capital and a regional centre began to decline soon after the 1569 Union of Lublin, which unified the Kingdom of Poland and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania into one state, the Republic of Two Nations. However, only after the annexation of Lithuania by the Russian Empire did the new authorities begin a concerted effort to erase signs of Lithuania's former sovereignty and political identity, and to create and strengthen the new identity of the Russified provincial city of the empire. Thus, signs of memory recalling the past of old Lithuania in this context could be preserved or newly created only in 'underground' conditions, mostly in the interiors of Catholic churches and in cemeteries.

The deliberate and purposeful transformation of Vilnius' public spaces was also meant to serve imperial purposes. For example, at the end of the 19th century, several main squares in Vilnius were marked with signs demonstrating Imperial Russian power. In 1863, the Byzantine-style Alexander Nevsky Chapel, devoted to the memory of soldiers who fell in the uprising of 1863, was built in what is now V. Kudirka Square. In 1895, celebrating 100 years since the incorporation of Lithuania into the Russian Empire, a monument (by the sculptor M. Antokolsky) to the Empress Catherine II was unveiled in Cathedral Square. And in 1898, a monument (by I. Trutnev and V. Griaznov) to governor M. Muraviev, who was known as 'the Hangman', appeared in S. Daukantas Square (then known as Dvortsovaya Square), as a symbol of the crackdown by the authorities against the rebels of the 1863 uprising.[17]

Interestingly, the monument to the Empress Catherine was deliberately positioned in order to visually ignore the Catholic context (the cathedral), and symbolically show 'whose authority prevails' (by gazing at the ruins of the Upper Castle).[18]

Furthermore, not only the strategic position of the monument, but also the whole shift in Lithuania's geopolitical orientation, shows the importance of symbolic efforts in the city at that time. This axis is embodied even today in St George's Avenue (now Gediminas Avenue), the city's main artery, which was formed in those times, with the Catholic cathedral at one end, and the Orthodox church at the other, a newly formed feature of the townscape built across a new bridge.[19]

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[17] There is a story that city dwellers secretly smeared the pedestal of the monument with wolf fat, and packs of dogs gathered by the monument and barked. This case could be treated as an example of 'symbolic resistance', used creatively in the struggle against the official version of the 'memory politics'.

[18] For more, see: A. Novickas, "Skulptūriniai monumentai Vilniaus miesto aikštėse XIX a. ir XX a. sandūroje" (Sculptural monuments in Vilnius city squares at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries), *Urbanistika ir architektūra*, 2000, no. 1, t. XXIV, 11-16.

[19] The Church of the Annunciation of the Holy Mother of God was built in 1899-1903, and the bridge over the river beside it was built in 1906.

In this respect, the Polish period of the city (1920 to 1939) is not yet very deeply explored.[20] It is clear that in the interwar period Vilnius remained provincial (it was the sixth largest Polish town). However, as one of the most prominent actions of the time linked to, the 'politics of memory', the significance of which to local Poles and tourists from Poland is not decreasing even now, it is necessary to mention the erection of a memorial with Marshal J. Pilsudski's heart and his mother's grave in 1935 in Rasos cemetery. Another two monuments (now the oldest public monuments in Vilnius) were also put up at that time, one to J. Montvila (Józef Montwiłł, a patron of culture) in Trakai Street, and a bust of S. Moniuška (S. Moniuszko, the composer) in the square in front of St Catherine's church.

In the Soviet period (1940-1941 and 1945-1990), public spaces, especially formal official ones, were intended to create mono-perspective, one-dimensional, valuably integral 'nodes of ideological symbols', to generate for the visitor a clear, uncomplicated and unambiguous *message*, extracted with the help of various well-thought-out visual, aesthetic, technical, discursive and other means. Therefore, a combination of objects and toponyms was used: a visual focus (monument), street names, the function of the buildings surrounding the square (public buildings), and so on.

This strategy was particularly acute in the main space of Soviet Lithuania, Lenin Square (now Lukiškės Square). The problem was that here, as in the case of the monument to Catherine II, there was a sharp clash with older and ideologically hostile elements, the Church of St Philip and St James and the Dominican friary, and in particular their surroundings as a space, giving visual expression to the competition. Therefore, the option of demolishing the church was even considered. At that time, the former chief architect of Vilnius, V. Mikučianis, whose decision was needed to demolish the church, wrote in his memoirs that he defended the church, arguing that there were even churches inside the Kremlin and that no one would destroy them.[21] Thus the church remained intact, despite all the architectural and visual 'tricks' that participants in the competition for the design of Lenin Square were forced to devise in order to hide it from passers-by.[22] However, although closed and converted into a warehouse, the church, standing

[20] See: Andžej Pukšto, *Lenkų paveldas Lietuvoje* (The Polish heritage in Lithuania), http://www.kpd.lt/epd2009/index.php/lt/kitoks-pveldas/lenku-paveldas (žr. 2009 10 29).

[21] V. Mikučianis, *Norėjau dirbti Lietuvoje* (I wanted to work in Lithuania) (Vilnius: VDA leidykla, 2001), 88.

[22] Л.С. Богданов, *Рига, Таллин, Вилнюс. Реконструкция исторически сложившегося ансамбля центра города. 1950 г.* (Riga. Tallinn. Vilnius. The Reconstruction of a Historic City Centre. 1950), Lietuvos Literatūros ir meno archyvas (Lithuanian Literature and Art Archive), F. 204, Ap. 1, B. 58, l. 230-233.

near the Lenin monument, inevitably irritated members of the government for another reason: looking at the monument and the church from a certain angle, it seemed as if Lenin was holding the church's cross in his hand. For this reason therefore, we will not find any official Soviet postcard or photograph with the monument photographed *en face* as is usual.

Another example of a 'node of ideological symbols' is the Green Bridge (at that time named after General I. Cherniakhovsky) with the famous sculptures in the style of Socialist Realism, connected with four ideologically named streets, L. Giros, K. Požėlos, F. Dzeržinskio and Gajaus. In addition, the Museum of the Revolution of the Lithuanian SSR was just in front of the bridge.[23]

A similar *strategy of communicational homogenisation* is characteristic of other ideologies which seek to create a coherent and consistent 'grand narrative'. As is known, thanks to the National Revival movement in the late 19th and early 20th century, a strongly romanticised grand nationalist narrative formed in Lithuania. This narrative has been characterised by mono-perspectivity based on ethno-linguistics, and in the history of Lithuania it tends to emphasise historical periods of medieval military glory and magnificent imperial power associated with 'Lithuanian' characters. For many years this became one of the most important collective narratives uniting the whole of society. In particular, it flourished in the interwar period (1918 to 1940), when the geopolitically weak and territorially clipped Republic of Lithuania tried to draw strength from its imaginary 'golden age', the times of Grand Duke Vytautas (the turn of the 14th and 15th centuries). Interestingly, this grand narrative survived even during the Soviet period, as communist ideology partially adapted it and incorporated it into the construct of official history, with a particular emphasis on the 'anti-Western' political nature of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. It is no wonder that after regaining independence, and after the collapse of the dominant Marxist narrative, attempts to reconstruct or construct anew the grand nationalist narrative were revived.

Signs and symbols representing the former regime were quickly eliminated from public spaces in the main Lithuanian cities and towns in 1989-1991. As is known, this process has also been going on in other Central and East European countries which decided to get rid of the legacy of communism.[24] Ideological

[23] Today the bridge is standing in an opposing visual and value environment: the street names have (re)gained sacral and feudal connotations (Kalvarijų, A. Goštauto, Žygimantų), beside the bridge stands a luxurious renovated hotel with a name in English, around it are advertising hoardings, there is a visual neighbourhood of skyscrapers, and so on.

[24] For more, see: D. Gamboni, *The Destruction of Art. Iconoclasm and Vandalism since the French Revoliution* (London: Reaktion Books, 1997), 51-90; S. Michalski, *Public Monuments. Art in Political Bondage 1870-1997* (London: Reaktion Books, 1998).

badges and monuments were particularly affected: the photograph by A. Sutkus called 'Farewell, Party Friends' (1991), a well-known photograph depicting the removal of the Lenin monument from Lukiškės Square, even became a symbol of the epoch.

However, eradication did not go so smoothly and without obstacles everywhere: the most discussions and emotions were and are still caused by the Socialist Realist sculptures on the Green Bridge (especially the group of 'Red Army soldiers liberators'), which, playing the role of pillars, could not be removed without adverse consequences. In 1997, the bridge was finally recognised as a cultural value. The persistent sensitivity towards this unique object in Lithuania is shown not only by various artistic actions, but also by other attempts to reinterpret the meaning of the sculptures (the heroes of one of the sculptural groups were used in an art installation, at Christmas they were decorated with Santa Claus hats, and they have also been used in a booklet for gays).

Other 'markers' of collective memory illustrate another unresolved question of the relationship with the Soviet legacy in Vilnius: street names, commemorative plaques, and especially surviving monuments to personalities who participated actively in the Soviet occupation, the writers S. Nėris, L. Gira,[25] P. Cvirka, and others. However, it was often noticed that after the removal of the Soviet monuments and other ideological symbols, some public spaces still remained empty, as if awaiting their turn. In fact, there is a number of renovation projects, some of which have already been realised (V. Kudirka Square, Town Hall Square, the reconstruction of Gediminas Avenue). Thus, we can ask the question: perhaps we are at a certain pause in the process of the mastering and awareness of public space which could obviously be connected with a value vacuum in public life, since the notion of 'public space' designates not only a specific location, but also a socio-political condition?

Updates of the politics of memory: between mono and multi perspectives

As we have already seen, talking in terms of ethnic dependence, Vilnius has a very complicated history. Especially in modern times, it has been disputed by many nations and states, and the ethnic dependence of Vilnius' multicultural heritage is a topic of discussion to these days. Perhaps this is why, after gaining independence and talking about strategies for Vilnius' visual form, attempts can be distinguished to put the emphasis on signs of the Lithuanian national identity.

[25] This monument was removed in 2013.

There is a high concentration of signs of national identity in the heart of the city: in the area of the Upper and Lower castles[26] and Gediminas Avenue, in which four squares are almost completed, forming a major national chain of Lithuanian narrative scenes. The evident strategy of the *lithuanisation* of Vilnius' centre not only reflects a conscious political programme, but also the vitality of traditional Lithuanian historiography. Interwar historians sought to 'find the Lithuanians in Lithuania's history' and make a sort of 'cut shred' of Lithuanian history, searching for and identifying purely 'Lithuanian' periods: 1. the Grand Duchy of Lithuania until Sigismund Augustus, the last king of the Lithuanian Jagelonian dynasty on the throne of the Republic of Two Nations (the area of the Upper and Lower castles); 2. the period of the National Revival in the late 19th and early 20th century, and the creation of a national state (V. Kudirka Square with the monument to the Lithuanian national anthem and its author); 3. the struggle for the recovery of statehood (Lukiskės Square, with the already existing and planned signs of the 1863 uprising and the anti-Soviet resistance); 4. and, finally, the most visual part of this narrative, symbols of the recovery of statehood in Independence Square (the Parliament and the remains of barricades from 1990 and 1991).

In addition to the Grand Duchy-centred narrative (the origins of Lithuania's statehood, the establishment and prosperity of the city), the epoch of the National Revival and the main national values and also the post-war period (heroic dimensions of Lithuanian history)[27] are highlighted in various places in the city. Besides paying attention to these periods, one more component could be noticed: the origins of the current state-building, the tragic events of 13 January 1991, when Soviet military troops killed or wounded many civilians who had gathered to protect the Television Tower. The memory of this event is still alive, and there is a strong visual emphasis in the Vilnius cityscape: monuments near the Television Tower, the Lithuanian Radio and Television building, the barricades near the Parliament, the memorial in Antakalnis Cemetery, the street names in the district of Karoliniškės where the TV tower is standing and so on.

[26] Not only is the archaeological and architectural heritage used, but also the creation of new aspects of the public space: the monuments to Grand Duke Gediminas and the Lithuanian King Mindaugas, and a newly built bridge named after him; and the Royal Palace has provoked many controversies and debates.

[27] Also to be mentioned are the newly formed 'node of symbols' in the Žirmūnai district, on the grounds of the former Tuskulėnai manor, where a columbarium for anti-Soviet resistance fighters killed by the NKVD has opened, and in the same grounds the *Homo Sovieticus Museum* is established. For more, see: R. Čepaitienė, *Homo sovieticus muziejaus projektas – atvira erdvė sovietmečio vertinimams* (The plan for the Homo Sovieticus Museum – an open space for evaluations of the Soviet period), *Vilniaus istorijos muziejiniai kontekstai* (Vilnius: LNM, 2008), 44-57.

All these examples show that in the last 20 years, the main steps in the 'politics of memory' in Vilnius, especially expressed in the form of new symbols, are mainly, without exception, Lithuanian in an ethno-linguistic sense.

In many European cities, at least until the second half of the 20th century, efforts could be noticed visually embodying the national narrative, supporting the national identity and legitimising the hegemony of the nation-state in a given territory. However, it has recently played a minor role due to the prevalent multiethnic and multicultural societies. Moreover, being one-dimensional and conceptually thin, it is not useful to the postmodern societies of European towns, where diversity of values and individualism dominate. Thus, the need arises for multi-perspective and heterogeneous objects and narratives. In the case of Vilnius, the mentioned complexity of the city's history in the strategies of the actualisation of the past shows a fluctuation between the *locality* (the history of the city, famous residents of the city) and its *regionality* (Vilnius as the capital of Lithuania, emphasised by symbolism: St Christopher, the Three Crosses, the 'controversial' city, being 'appropriated' by several nations).

However, the emphasis on the multiculturalism of the city, starting from the Soviet period, still remains complicated, not only because of the strong and living ethno-linguistic nationalism of Lithuanians, but also because of today's complicated 'usability' of the city's multicultural history. The 20th century was marked by a striking change in the traditional urban ethnic communities, which complicates the work of the actualisation of surviving material values and symbols (this is especially evident in the case of the reconstruction of a part of the former Jewish quarter).

During the past 20 years, Vilnius has also experienced various applied strategies of inclusion or exclusion. This concerns primarily the commemoration of cultural personalities, whose nationality in some cases 'disappears into the background', or some personalities who tend to be shared by a number of nations (A. Mickiewicz, F. Zappa, R. Gary, C. Shabad [the prototype for Doktor Aibolit], and so on). Such mutual/general characters in the list of Vilnius' street names, commemorative plaques and monuments (dominated mainly by Lithuanian characters)[28] form a fairly significant group, as a quantitative analysis shows. On the other hand, some of Vilnius' ethno-cultural groups (Poles, Russians and Ukrainians) or the embassies of neighbouring countries are quite active in trying to influence today's 'memory policy', putting pressure on Vilnius municipality[29]

[28] While doing this research, the register of actualised signs of the historical culture of Vilnius and the code of street names (Vilnius municipality documents) were analysed.

[29] In 2007-2010, the author of this article was a member of the public commission established by Vilnius city municipality to deal with Vilnius' street names, monuments and commemorative plaques.

to make favourable decisions to commemorate their sometimes quite local initiatives.

The challenges of multiculturalism

Although after regaining its independence Lithuania managed to solve the Soviet-era problem of the integration of ethno-cultural communities far more favourably than its Baltic neighbours, nevertheless new, hitherto non-existent or ignored problems appeared. One of the most important problems is the demand for a new assessment of the heritage of 20th century ideologies and wars.

As is known, the tangible heritage of the Second World War, especially the graves of soldiers of different armies (the military cemeteries from the First World War and the Second World War in Vingis Park and in Antakalnis cemetery) is mostly the concern of foreign countries, public organisations in Germany and Russia, or official bodies. For Lithuanians, these cemeteries have become 'foreign' and discursive and remain rather 'invisible'. This tendency is also illustrated by the indifference towards memorials to Soviet soldiers still carrying the message of 'liberation', and demanding respect for 'heroes who died for the freedom of their motherland'.

After regaining independence in 1990, a new problem received a significantly greater public response: the actualisation of the memory of the Holocaust, which, as we know, was faced not only by Lithuania but also by other post-communist countries. All the attempts to tackle it had and still have not only political and legal, but also cultural and economic consequences. The first steps towards the recognition of the Jewish heritage and history are already being taken in this country, and this shows that academic interest, perhaps determined by political conjuncture, for this topic is currently very high. It is also shown by the regeneration of the Jewish material heritage, and the marking of the memory of the Holocaust (with commemorative plaques in Vilnius' Jewish ghetto, the recreation of part of the Jewish historical quarter, and so on). Members of this community are also the most active in attempting to protect their heritage from the unbridled development of new buildings (the dispute over the boundaries of the old Jewish cemetery in the Šnipiškės district).

Obviously, moderate or stormy reactions in the case of highlighting the 'alien' heritage are mostly influenced by conflicting nationalistic attitudes, the freshness of historical traumas in the collective memory, and the lack of an efficient chronological and psychological distance. A good example, as an illustration, is the quite recent conflict between Polish and Lithuanian Catholics over the treatment of St Faustina Kowalska's material and spiritual heritage (she lived in Vilnius between 1933 and 1936). The aim of the Catholic Church to universalise

what until then was treated as the purely 'Polish essence' of the teaching of Divine Mercy spread by visionary St Faustina and the material attributes of this cult, especially the miraculous painting of the Merciful Jesus, came up against harsh resistance among Polish believers. Despite these protests, the painting was finally moved from a Polish church to a neighbouring church especially devoted to the cult of Divine Mercy, in which the image is worshiped in Lithuanian and in Polish. There is no doubt that this conflict was also directly inspired by echoes of the interwar dispute over the national and state belonging of the city of Vilnius.

In turn, opponents of A. Lukashenko's authoritarian regime in Belarus, in order to construct an alternative for the official Soviet identity discourse, also look back to the times of Vilnius and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, resurrecting questions of 'belonging' and the 'sharing' of cultural values, which also raise the potential for conflict with the Lithuanians.[30] This suggests that 'stereotypes and disputes over the nature of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and claims to Vilnius not only had but still have implications for relations between neighbouring countries, and also leave a footprint in the identities of nations in today's Lithuania: Lithuanian, Polish, Russian, Belarusian etc.'[31]

However, it could be stated that, apart from the complicated cases mentioned above that have attracted publicity, the Lithuanian ethno-linguistic majority apparently do not feel the obvious threat of multiculturalism, so that, little by little, the space of Vilnius is being marked by the signs of an 'alien' heritage and memory (old signboards uncovered on buildings in the Jewish quarter, commemorative plaques or streets named after the personalities of other nations). Thus, it is important to note a certain mental shift which has taken place over the last 20 years. Today people are no longer afraid of regional differences, of the heritage of different ethnic and confessional groups, as they were in the past.

So, despite the persistence of the Lithuanian ethno-linguistic mono-perspective image of the past, tendencies to look step by step at the urban heritage in a more multi-perspective way arise. In fact, no country or city can be completely 'owned' or appropriated by one nation, especially big cities with an importance to the development of the whole region and full of inhabitants of various nationalities, especially 'world heritage' cities 'belonging to all'.

[30] А. Филюшкин, "Вглядываясь в осколки разбитого зеркала: Российский дискурс Великого Княжества Литовского". *Ab Imperio*, № 4, 2004, с. 561-601. "Як Вільня сталася жамойцкім горадам? / 150 пытанняў і адказаў з гісторыі Беларусі", http://knihi.com/pytanni/index.html; І. Воранаў, "Вільня-Вільно-Вільнюс: Гісторыя аднаго горада", http://www.library.by/portalus/modules/belarus

[31] A. Bumblauskas, "Kaip galima derinti žvilgsnį į LDK paveldą?" (How is it possible today to combine a look at the heritage of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania?), *Naujasis židinys- Aidai*, 2003, no. 4, 182.

Conclusions

We can see embodied in the shape and form of contemporary Vilnius and its public spaces the values of modern Lithuanian nationalism, as well as (to a much lesser degree) multicultural values. Sometimes they overlap. For example, in the preparations for accession to the European Union in 2003, we saw the actualisation of the figure of King Mindaugas (circa 1200-1263) and also related efforts at the actualisation of his name in the cultural memory of Vilnius' landscape. Then the role of the king as the first Lithuanian 'euro-integrator', who accepted Catholic baptism in 1251, was strongly emphasised.

'Messages' encoded in cityscapes representing certain plots in the collective memory obviously dominate the level of the 'capital city', while the history of the 'city' in the strict sense, reflecting elements of the 'politics of memory', are quite scarce, and they do not form any logical system. They play quite a significant role when talking about commemorative plaques and street names, but the question as to which out of all the forms of commemoration of the collective memory mentioned is the most effective requires a separate study.

Efforts to keep parts of the grand nationalist narrative and their incarnation in the cityscape (the era of the grand dukes, the National Revival, the anti-Soviet resistance, and the beginning of the current period of independence are still perceived as 'fundamental pillars' of Lithuanian statehood) show the still-existing tendencies of a fragmented and incoherent 'politics of memory'. Thus, despite the fact that the academic stratum puts much effort into deconstructing and demythologising the ethno-linguistic (but not civic) nationalist narrative, one gets the impression that perhaps strategists of the contemporary 'politics of memory' do not see any real alternative to it?

The vitality of the romanticised nationalist narrative, and at the same time its weakness in the Vilnius cityscape, allows us today to talk about some 'rifts' in what might be called 'the modern civic or liberal narrative', in Lithuanian historical culture, collective memory and the forms of its expression. By this, we mean the elements of a democratic, multicultural and civil society and its signs, formed not only on the basis of the ethno-linguistic concept of society, but symbolically and value-existentially embodying aspects of 'statehood', 'citizenship', 'liberal democracy', and others. Although the maintenance or creation of the grand new narrative is delayed today or made questionable due to the postmodern socio-political atmosphere that rejects those efforts as hiding totalitarian intentions and furthering the manipulation of society's collective memory, the question remains open whether society on the whole can live without uniting values, which are usually generated and broadcast with the help of the grand narratives.

Traditional means of memory politics (museum exhibitions, commemorative plaques, monuments, street names, and so on) continue the politics of commemoration of the multicultural past of cities which started in the Soviet

period, even though this is done mainly for local cultural communities that are interested in this topic or due to pressure from foreign embassies, which seek to introduce their collective 'memory places', personalities and signs into historic townscapes. However, it is not possible yet to talk about the purposeful, creative and coherent management of the resources of Vilnius' multicultural heritage, mainly because of the fact that both the national cultural policy in general and the current system of heritage protection in this regard tend to be limited to the solution of individual cases, or to just talking. In addition, in order to develop future scenarios, there is a lack of a deeper and multi-disciplinary, multi-perspective research into these questions.