THE (POST-) SOVIET BUILT ENVIRONMENT: SOVIET–WESTERN RELATIONS IN THE INDUSTRIALISED MASS HOUSING AND ITS REFLECTIONS IN SOVIET LITHUANIA

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ABSTRACT This paper discusses the social, political and especially the technological aspect of the post-war Soviet industrialisation of housing, focusing on the relation to Western planning and technology. The chronological scope of the paper covers the thaw in Soviet architecture and construction that began in 1954 after the well-known meeting of Soviet architects and builders initiated by Nikita Khrushchev. This study presents Soviet architects' study trips to the West, which became crucial in changing the entire urban planning and mass housing production system in the USSR. The text examines how pan-Union mass housing industrialisation policy and practice were carried out in the 1960s in the Western periphery of the USSR, namely Soviet Lithuania, which became the leader in mass housing urban design because of the Western-oriented ambitions of Baltic architects. Thus, in the paper the modern Soviet mass housing programme is researched from the perspective of (mutations in) modernist urban planning*.

In recent years, it has become popular to contrast post-war housing in the East with that in the West and to present strikingly similar result.¹ The current decade has witnessed growing interest in post war housing in Europe with special focus on Central and Eastern Europe in the Cold War era both from the social-economic and architectural points of view.² Research of housing in Czechoslovakia³,

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¹ *Constructed Happiness: Domestic Environment in the Cold War Era*, ed. M. Kalm, I. Ruudi (Tallinn, 2005).

² *Ideals in Concrete: Exploring Central and Eastern Europe*, ed. C. Wagenaar and M. Dings, (Rotterdam, 2004); *Socialist Spaces: Sites of Everyday Life in the Eastern Bloc*, ed. S.E. Reid, D. Crowley, (London,, 2002); *Style and Socialism. Modernity and Material Culture in Post-War Eastern Europe*, ed. S.E. Reid, D. Crowley (London, 2000); etc.

³ K. Elman Zarecor, 'The Local History of an International Type: the structural panel building in Czechoslovakia', *Home Cultures* 7 (2010), pp. 217–236.

Bulgaria⁴, Romania⁵, and other countries has provided international scholarship with fresh insights especially in the field of comparative studies: East-West technological relations, appropriation of Soviet directives, and innovations of local expertise. However, socialist mass housing research still lacks comparative studies of the process of the technological transfer and relations of socialist planners, producers and manufacturers with those of the West. The main area in which research needs to be fine-tuned is a comparative study of the appropriation in mass housing technologies between the socialist and capitalist Europe.

Studies of modern housing have witnessed a notable change also in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. As in many post-Soviet countries, the shift in architectural history and research is marked by a new interest in the domestic environment, especially that of the Soviet period, including not only housing issues, but also a view on the private sphere as a specific cultural and symbolic entity. Masshousing and standardisation has been one of the key topics in new research themes: Triin Ojari in Estonia has observed how the concept of the 'neighbourhood unit' spread and adjusted to the Soviet context as well as the ideological programme behind the optimisation of residential units: 'floor space' being an important keyword in Soviet rhetoric in the 1960s.⁶ Marija Drėmaitė⁷ in Lithuania and Andis Cinis⁸ in Latvia have both written on masshousing in the context of the International Modern Movement. In the USA, John Maciuika

⁴ D. Parusheva, I. Marcheva, 'Housing in Socialist Bulgaria: Appropriating Tradition', *Home Cultures*, 7 (2010), pp. 197–216.

⁵ J. Maxim, 'Mass Housing and Collective Experience: on the notion of *microraiion* in Romania in the 1950s and 1960s', *The Journal of Architecture*, 14 (2009), pp. 7–26.

⁶ T. Ojari, 'Modenismi parameetrid: Mustamäe kujunemisest', *Kümme. Eesti Arhitektuurumuuseumi aastaraamat*, Tallinn, 2005, pp. 49–64; idem, 'Elamispind. Modernistlik elamuehitusideoloogia ja Mustamäe' *Kunstiteaduslikke Uurimusi* 13 (2) (2004), pp. 42–70.

⁷ M. Drėmaitė, 'Masinė gyvenamoji architektūra', *Architektūra sovietinėje Lietuvoje* (Vilnius, 2011), p. 149–171; eadem, 'Soviet Industrialisation of Housing Technologies in the Context of the International Modernism', *TENSIONS OF EUROPE/INVENTING EUROPE Working Paper Series*, electronic publication <http://www.tensionsofeurope.eu/publications/working/workingpdf/2009_2.pdf> [address visited on April 2009].

⁸ A. Cinis, 'Signs of Modernism in the Architecture of Soviet Latvia between 1960–1980', *Industry and Modernism: Companies, Architecture, and Identity in the Nordic and Baltic Countries during the High-Industrial Period*, ed. A. Kervanto Nevanlinna (Helsinki, 2007), pp. 172–183.

published a research on modernism in the Lithuanian residential districts describing a westward-looking orientation among local architects which kept alive an historical ambition to be included in a Western European cultural community.⁹ Ideological controversies of the Soviet ‘classless society’ were analyzed by Epp Lankots in her account on the Soviet *nomenklatura* apartment houses in Tallinn.¹⁰ Mart Kalm has written about collective farm settlements as a specific spatial and cultural phenomenon in Estonian countryside producing a radically different type of domestic environment as compared to the traditional settlements of the early 20th century.¹¹

The scope of this paper is the political and technological aspect of the post-war Soviet industrialisation of housing focusing on relations to Western planning and technology. The chronological scope of the paper covers the thaw in Soviet architecture and construction that began in 1954 after the well-known meeting of Soviet architects and builders initiated by Khrushchev. Official study trips of the Soviet architects to the West, which became crucial in changing the entire urban planning and mass housing production system in the USSR, is an important political aspect of technological ‘exchange’. The article further examines how this pan-Union mass housing industrialisation policy and practice was carried out in Soviet Lithuania in the 1960s, which became a leader in the mass housing urban design. Here I argue that modernist aesthetics and Western-oriented ambitions of the Baltic architects have been reflected in mass housing as the architect’s wish to modernise the everyday local environment as well as to declare his belonging to the international school of

⁹ J.V. Maciuika, ‘East Block, West View: Architecture and Lithuanian National Identity’, *Traditional Dwellings and Settlements Review*, 11 (1999).

¹⁰ E. Lankots, ‘Two Faces of Stalinism. The Privileged Space and the Academics’ House in Tallinn’, *Quo Vadis Architectura? Architectural Tendencies and Debate from the Late 1930s to Early 1950s*, ed. T. Simons, (Helsinki, 2008), pp. 208–217; E. Lankots, ‘Klassid klassideta ühiskonnas. Elitaarne ruumimudel Eesti NSV-s ja nomenklatuursed korterelamud Tallinnas 1945–1955’, *Kunstiteaduslikke Uurimusi* 13 (2) (2004), pp. 11–41.

¹¹ M. Kalm, ‘Does Urban Life Make Farmers Happy? The Central Settlements of the Collective Farms in the Estonian SSR’, *Urban Planning and the Pursuit of Happiness. European Variations on a Universal Theme (18th–21st Centuries)*, ed. A. Bartetky, M. Schalenberg (Berlin, 2009), pp. 128–147; M. Kalm, ‘The Oasis of Industrialised Countryside in Soviet Estonia’, *Industry and Modernism. Companies, Architecture and Identity in the Nordic and Baltic Countries during the High-Industrial Period* (Helsinki, 2007), pp. 352–371.

architecture within the limitations of the Soviet construction industry. However, today these residential areas remind us of nothing else but a notoriously poor Soviet built environment. Thus the model housing in Soviet Lithuania is researched from the perspective of the (mutation of) modernist urban planning.

Appropriating Technology: Modernising Socialism with Western Expertise As post-war urbanisation rhymes with modernisation on both sides of the Iron Curtain (or the Concrete Curtain suggested by A. Forty¹²), the architectural historian Jean-Louis Cohen suggests that the ‘Platte’ is perhaps the most obvious common symbol of the times.¹³ Despite the ideological differences, one can see the European post war housing architecture as a modernistic illusion of happiness, where ideological aspect (social equality, collectivism and community building) of the mass housing programmes seems to be as important as the practical one (cheaper, faster and more).

On both sides of the Iron Curtain, mass housing served as an important political tool. In the Soviet bloc, the industrial method of construction promised to ‘build communism faster’ while in the West it had to build a ‘better future’ and a ‘welfare state’. The ‘one million apartment programme’ in Sweden (1964)¹⁴, as well as ‘Montage programme’ in Denmark (1960)¹⁵ was a clear manifestation and promises of their social-democratic governments. Following the French government’s programme ‘Opération Million (1955–1962)’, aimed at lowering the construction costs, many thousands of cheap apartments were built in the suburbs of Paris and Marseille. In the 1960s one-fourth of the British housing construction was social housing financed by the government.¹⁶

The decade known as the Khrushchev Thaw also can be viewed as a period of certain ‘welfare programme’, which had to employ the progress of technology. The face of modern socialism was conceptualised at a meeting of Soviet architects, engineers and builders

¹² A. Forty, ‘Cold War Concrete’, *Constructed Happiness*, p. 32.

¹³ J. Cohen, ‘Reflections on the Cold War’, *ibid.*, p. 278.

¹⁴ J. Poom, ‘Housing Policy in Sweden 1945–2000’, *ibid.*, p. 238.

¹⁵ C. Bundgaard, ‘Repetition versus Montage: Prefabricated Industrialised Building of the 1960s – in the Light of the ‘New Industrialisation’, *Universal versus Individual: The Architecture of the 1960s*, Conference proceedings (Alvar Aalto Academy, 2002), p. 11.

¹⁶ S.V. Ward, *Planning the Twentieth-Century City. The Advanced Capitalist World* (Chichester, 2002), p. 238.

in December 1954, where Khrushchev delivered his famous speech on architecture. The main message of the leader was to make the process of construction faster and cheaper and to validate pre-cast concrete construction and resulted in the two well known acts of 1955: ‘Development of the Means to Improve, Industrialise and Reduce the Cost of Construction’ and the notable ‘Removal of Excess in Architecture and Construction’. M. Ilić and R.W. Davies illustrate in detail how such a carefully orchestrated campaign could work in practice in the case of the construction industry.¹⁷

As architectural reforms were initiated from above and directed to bring construction closer to contemporary technology, it turned out to be necessary to draw on the experience of foreign mass housing methods. The rhetoric towards Western architecture became more ‘rational’¹⁸ and the models could occasionally be experienced at first hand as international contacts began to expand officially.

When in 1954 the Council of Ministers passed the act ‘The Development of the Mass Production of the Assembled Reinforced Concrete Structural Features’, on Khrushchev’s initiative, experts were sent to France to study the pre-cast systems and to acquire the Camus system patented by the French engineer R. Camus in 1948 for rebuilding Le Havre.¹⁹ However, some Russian sources claim that the Moscow engineer V. Lagutenko (1904–1967) pioneered the Soviet pre-fabricated housing system.²⁰ In fact, in 1947 the city of Moscow appointed him to lead the experimental Industrial Construction Bureau, with an objective to study and design the low-cost technology suitable for fast mass construction. By this time, competing experimental designs were tested in real-life construction, and prefabricated concrete panels emerged as a clear winner. However,

¹⁷ M. Ilić, R.W. Davies, ‘From Khrushchev (1935–1956) to Khrushchev (1956–1964): Construction Policy Compared’, *Khrushchev in the Kremlin: Policy and Government in the Soviet Union, 1953–1964*, ed. J. R. Smith, M. Ilić (London, 2011), pp. 202–230.

¹⁸ For example, the authors of the book *Foreign Types of Houses and Apartments* (1959) write that foreign practice of mass housing might be of interest in the case of developing and perfecting housing types of the Soviet Union. See V.G. Kalish, V.A. Kossakovskii, O.I. Rzhekhina, *Tipy domov i kvartir za rubezhom* (Moscow, 1959), p. 4.

¹⁹ A. Forty, ‘Cold War Concrete’, p. 34.

²⁰ N.E. Gigovskaia. ‘Portret mastera’: *Arkhitektura i stroitel'stvo Moskvy*, No 5, <<http://www.stroi.ru/periodical/detail.asp?d=2498&dc=2498&dr=72337>> [address visited on 10 Apr. 2002].

it seems that the pace set by the party required tested and approved assembly lines.

This might answer the question ‘why Camus?’ Camus was the first fully pre-fabricated system including a production factory, a fleet of transportation trucks and construction-site equipment. Assembly work was effectuated on site with large lifting gears and machines. There were no scaffolds; formwork was reduced to angle bars positioned at the corners of the panel junctions. This procedure led to a reduction in manpower, specialists and budget. Progress was especially rapid: from the foundations to the delivery of completed housing units, from one-to-two months were required for the individual dwellings, four-to-six months for the small groups of twelve flats, eight-to-ten months for the buildings with a hundred flats. The method required a small and not very qualified labour force, which led to an economy of up to 90 per cent of the work force for finishing that demanded qualified workers. R. Saint-Pierre explained that of three novel prefabrication procedures that were born in Le Havre between 1948 and 1950, Otin, ETM and Camus, applying, respectively, light, semi-heavy and heavy prefabrication, the *Camus* process was an enormous national and international success, particularly in the USSR.²¹

The Soviet State construction committee soon implemented the new technology. The first series of the multi-storey pre-cast houses following the French standard were designed in 1956 by the USSR Academy of Construction and Architecture, and by architects of the All-Union Design Institute, *Gosstroiproiekt*. According to Soviet economists, the most economical was the five-storey house with small-sized apartments (later known as Khrushchevka²²), the type that covered entire USSR from Vilnius to Vladivostok.

In Search of Ready-Made Examples: Soviet Architects and Engineers Study Western Housing Sites in 1957 As Soviet modernisation was based on ready-made examples, one can see a similar method of appropriating a model of a modern satellite town. A new phase of socialist life organisation in urban environment was the concept of *mikrorayon* – a Soviet version of an American

²¹ Le Havre: Ilôt N17, système Camus, Fiche DOCOMOMO, <<http://www.archi.fr/DOCOMOMO-FR/fiche-havre-n17-va.htm>> [address visited on 20 June 2007].

²² For a detailed analysis of Khrushchevka, see R.A. Blair, ‘From khrushcheby to korobki’, *Russian Housing in the Modern Age*, ed. W.C. Brumfield, A.R. Blair (Cambridge, 1993).

neighbourhood unit developed by British new towns. The new suburbs of the Nordic capitals: Vällingby, a new suburb of Stockholm (begun 1953, architect S. Markelius), and Tapiola near Helsinki (begun 1953, architect A. Ervi) also served as models.

The latter two were experienced in 1957 when the *Gosstroy* (State Construction Committee) organised month-long study trips for Soviet architects, engineers and builders. Two delegations were sent to Nordic countries and the Federal Republic of Germany in search of the innovative construction technologies and building types. The official character of the study trips evidently proves that despite competitive and still rather unwelcoming public rhetoric, Soviet officials had clearly a technocratic and utilitarian approach towards the western development in mass housing.²³

The tasks of both delegations were similar, namely studies of the latest practice in mass housing design and construction. The visited sites were rather similar: new residential areas (apartment blocks, schools, kindergartens, hospitals, administrative buildings and cinema theatres), research and planning offices, construction material industries and exhibitions of which *Interbau* in West Berlin made the biggest impression. The visits were coordinated officially (for example in Germany – by the Ministry of Housing Construction).

The delegation to Nordic countries consisted of eight persons, headed by V. Kucherenko, the chief of *Gosstroy*. They spent thirty days (4 October–5 November 1957) visiting new mass housing districts, planning offices, and construction material enterprises in Sweden, Norway, Denmark, and Finland. Impressed by the economic parameters and quality of finishing materials in the houses and public buildings (especially hotels, schools and hospitals) the Soviet architects suggested that the Soviet government acquire several production lines from the Scandinavian manufacturers.²⁴

Almost at the same time (18 September–12 October 1957), another delegation of eight Soviet architects, engineers and builders, chaired by V. Svetlichny, the deputy director of the *Gosstroy*, visited Hamburg, Kiel, Berlin, Munich, Augsburg, Stuttgart, Frankfurt am Main, Bonn, Essen, Cologne, and Hanover. They summarised the achievements of the German Federal Republic in mass housing rather positively

²³ Extract from the Record of the USSR Council of Ministers, 3 Feb. 1958, LMA, f. 87, ap. 1, b. 227, p. 1.

²⁴ Report on the visit to Scandinavian countries, No. 497, 2 Oct. 1957, *ibid.*, pp. 2–28.

(the delegation concluded that ‘German construction methods lag behind the Soviet ones from about fifteen to twenty years; however, the rapidity and the quality of construction is surprisingly good’). Soviet planners also highly evaluated the superior quality of the sanitary equipment in the German apartments.²⁵

Differently from the Scandinavian delegation, the German one proposed that the Soviet government did not purchase certain technological lines, but rather acquire certain examples of equipment (e.g. sanitary engineering, the latest example of the hospital bed and ward equipment, the latest example of the school desk, the writing board, the equipment of the sports hall, and several examples of constructional equipment).

Both delegations highlighted economic aspects of mass housing: a low ceiling height (2.5 m), the economic multi-storey housing type without an elevator (4 to 5 stories), and apartments established on the ground floor since all the shopping and service premises were relocated into a separate standing purpose built low rise micro-centre of the district. It is curious that Soviet architects noticed no bomb shelters in the basements of the Nordic multi-storey apartment blocks but the storage rooms instead and thus suggested this daring novelty for the welfare of the Soviet citizens. A prevailing modern open/free positioning of houses in the district also attracted attention. Both delegations were really impressed by the high quality of landscape design in the Nordic and German housing districts. They suggested introducing landscape design studies in the USSR, and including landscape architects into the planning process of the new mass housing areas.

Many technical and practical notes were made during the visits. In addition to the ideas and impressions, the delegations also acquired lots of specialised literature and catalogue, took more than 1,000 photographs and 700 meters of footage. The reports were distributed among the prime ministers of all the Soviet republics, the chairs of all *Sovnarkhozes*, and the chairs of the two main municipalities – those of Moscow and Leningrad. *Gosstroy* was obliged to publish the material of the study trips and to produce an instructional film about the foreign experience for the Soviet builders. Finally, the *Gosstroy* was committed to examine the reports and introduce the most progressive foreign construction technologies and methods into

²⁵ Report on the visit to West Germany, No. 496, 2 Oct. 1957, *ibid.*, pp. 30–59.

the Soviet practice. The proposals were to be delivered directly to the Council of Ministers of the USSR.²⁶

It is obvious that study trips were crucial in modernizing the entire urban and mass housing planning in the USSR, especially after the 1958 International Union of Architects Congress in Moscow following the theme of reconstructing cities.²⁷ The housing development now had to be reconciled with the natural environment. A *microrayon* for 9,000–12,000 inhabitants consisted of prefabricated housing blocks bound by motorways and a comprehensive public transport system and composed around a *microcentre*: low rise prefab buildings of a school, couple of kindergartens, playgrounds, a shopping and public service building, pedestrian area and lots of greenery. Some parameters of foreign housing (e.g. the height of the rooms and the width of the stairwell) as well as inhabiting the ground floor of the multi-storey house were soon adapted in the designs of Soviet apartments.²⁸

Looking Westwards: Modernising the Local Environment in Lithuania²⁹ For the Baltic architects political reforms in architecture played an important, but different role. Khrushchev's Thaw encouraged the process of cultural liberation that could be characterised by a clear re-emergence of national, Western-oriented and modernist aspects of culture. Both the older and new generations of architects and designers were happy to get rid of the Stalinist wedding-cake aesthetics and return to modern aesthetics, experienced or known from the pre-war period of independent national states and foreign architectural magazines. As the knowledge of modernism was really scarce for the young generation of architects (who entered studies in early 1950s and graduated in the mid- and late 1950s), the possibility to visit socialist or even friendly capitalist countries made important influence. The first impulse was the 1959 joint trip of Lithuanian, Latvian, Estonian and Leningrad architects to Finland.

²⁶ Extract from protocol No. 1 of the Council of Ministers of the USSR, 10 Jan. 1958, *ibid.*, p. 1.

²⁷ Ojari, 'Elamispind. Modernistlik', p. 69.

²⁸ *Tipy domov i kvartir*, p. 4.

²⁹ For the visual material of this chapter visit: M. Drémaitė, 'Soviet Industrialization of Housing Technologies in the Context of the International Modernism', TENSIONS OF EUROPE/INVENTING EUROPE Working Paper Series, April 2009, electronic publication <<http://www.tensionsofeurope.eu/www/en/publications/working-papers>> [address visited on 20 Jun. 2007].

‘We really felt architecture there’, the famous Lithuanian post-war modernist V. Čekanauskas remembers.³⁰

In the Baltic republics modernism has been a long awaited turning point in architecture, since it has always been connected with an alternative and even national approach. Maciuika described that feeling in the local architectural community: ‘by grafting westward looking orientation onto local traditions, architects at the Baltic periphery of the Soviet Union kept alive an historical ambition to be included in a Western European national and cultural community’.³¹ The fact that Baltic architects and architecture quickly jumped in the forward lines of Soviet modernist architecture, as they were well prepared and highly qualified to design in the new manner, supports this statement. ‘Professionalism’, meaning a professional member of the world community of architects, became the new ambition supported by national aspirations to modernise culture and the local environment.

This might also explain why Western inspired aspects of modernist architecture in Lithuania can be seen not only in the area of exceptionally designed public buildings that marked the breakthrough of modernism, but also in the field of banal or budget modernism.³² It is well known that after the reform in Soviet construction the mass housing planning was degraded to engineering and was located at the Departments of Standard Design at the Design Institutes. Thus, the story of modern suburban planning in the Soviet Union usually omits an architect as a submissive instrument in the mass housing construction system not even to mention its aesthetic issues. However, the research of the new residential architecture in Soviet Lithuania in the 1960s shows that architects, designers and planners were quite influential in the mass housing and had no other models than those of the Western Europe. This resulted in a win-win situation for many: local architects received support to implement their modernist ambitions while the party leaders got modern showcase

³⁰ M. Drėmaitė, ‘Vytautas Edmundas Čekanauskas as a Romantic Modernist’, *Archiforma. Lithuanian Architectural Review*, 2006, No. 4.

³¹ J.V. Maciuika, ‘East Block, West View: Architecture and Lithuanian National Identity’, *Traditional Dwellings and Settlements Review* 11(1999), p. 24.

³² For the explanation of ‘banal socmodernism’ see: D. Crowley, ‘Socmodernism and the architecture of leisure in Eastern/ Central Europe in the 1960s and 1970s’, *Different Modernisms, Different Avant-gardes: Problems in Central and Eastern European Art after World War II*, (Tallinn, 2009), p. 247.

models for exhibiting Soviet urban planning achievements at home and abroad.

In search for the origins of the socialist *microrayon* one should look back into the experience of the Soviet study trips. The success of the *Interbau* inspired Soviets to organise a socialist competition for housing models and to build an entire socialist experimental district (such experiment was organised in the south-western part of Moscow in 1960). Here one can meet the first official record about a group of Lithuanian architects taking part in the competition. Although their experimental design (chief architect Mečislovas Urbelis, 1959–1960) was made with inspiration from some British and Nordic urban planning ideas, the knowledge from architectural magazines proved to be not sufficient and rather old-fashioned design did not receive much attention. According to the architect, V. Brėdikis³³, a member of the group, it was much more important to experience at first hand the planning ideas and models proposed by Polish, Czech, East German or Hungarian architects. In 1960, when the time has come to design the first modern residential district in Vilnius, the municipal administration commissioned the group of young architects at the Vilnius Town Planning Institute (V. Čekanauskas, V. Brėdikis, J. Makariūnas, the brothers A. and V. Nasvytis) in expectation of the fresh modern ideas.

The planning and design process of the new residential district Burbiškės (35,000 residents, 1961–1962)³⁴ witnessed certain mutations of the Soviet planning system. Although the new planning directions were set, they were not clearly articulated, thus local planners relied on experience of foreign study trips and foreign magazines. For example, the design of Burbiškės used the British gradual system of service and at the same time it had to represent social and spatial organisation of the modern Soviet residential district. The group of buildings inhabiting ca. 2,000 residents was composed around the local shop and became the main structural element of the *microrayon*. These groups of buildings were located around the centre of the *microrayon*, which included shopping and service centre, a school, and a couple of kindergartens (for Russian and local inhabitants). Architecturally and socially the centre was

³³ Author's interview with Vytautas Brėdikis, Vilnius, 2011

³⁴ Design of Burbiškės, 1962, Vilnius County Archive (VAA), f. 1036, ap. 11, b. 234.

marked by high-rise towers, because according to the contemporary social theory, single people should have been placed in higher buildings near the social centres, while families should reside in lower (5 storey) houses located more remotely. Several *microrayons* constituted a residential area (ca. 40,000 residents) with the main public centre which housed not only commercial but also cultural activities in a form of cinema, library and a concert hall. Although Burbiškės was never built (after a thorough topographical survey) it became a school and a background of the Lithuanian school of residential planning and was later developed in the planning of Lazdynai residential district – the most famous Lithuanian urban planning design.

In parallel with Burbiškės a few other residential areas were started to be designed. The first fully built site was a new industrial town, which was to become a showcase for modern socialist lifestyle and architecture. Elektrėnai (a mono-industrial town for 4000 residents) was built together with a huge power station in 1960–1968³⁵. It was designed by a young architect B. Kasperavičienė and K. Bučas, representing the older generation of pre-war architects, both from the Vilnius Town Planning Institute. It was characteristic of Soviet practice to start new life on an empty place, thus the site for Elektrėnai was chosen near the man-made lake of the power plant on empty grounds without any historical background. Standard concrete panels for 18 four-storey apartment blocks of 64 small-scale apartments and several nine-storey high-rises were produced in Vilnius, and assembled on the spot and were positioned according to the new concept of open (or free) planning, leaving houses east-west oriented (for the direct sunlight) and widely scattered in between the future greenery. The central part displayed the full collection of social and cultural needs of socialist society: a two-storey department store, a public service building, a cultural club with a wide-screen cinema, a school and kindergartens, a hospital, and a technical college. However, some of the public buildings were not standard, but specially designed and thus introduced the tradition to beat monotony with unique designs of public buildings. For example, the school was of an exceptionally modern design (architect L. Mardosas; it won an

³⁵ Meaning an electric town, see M. Drėmaitė, 'Political Planning and Architecture: The Sovnarkhoz System and the Industrialisation of Lithuania in the 1960s', *Industry and Modernism. Companies, Architecture, and Identity in the Nordic and Baltic Countries during the High-Industrial Period*, ed. A. Kervanto-Nevalinna (Helsinki, 2007), pp. 239–255.

award in 1962 and later became a standard model). Actually, the design of Elektrėnai was in total harmony with the ‘contemporary style’ of the new Soviet residential ideology, but since it took time for new ideas to be implemented widely, the town pioneered fresh urban design and became a model for the modern power-station-worker towns in the USSR. Here one can see a standard Soviet procedure to level out sites to make it easier for cranes to set up on either side of a building.

But in her later project, that of the first modern residential *microrayon* in Vilnius, Žirmūnai (1962–1964), B. Kasperavičienė already preserved the natural slope towards the river bank. She also had the advantage to use the improved standard house series that were designed at the Institute as the experimental houses for Burbiškės. Žirmūnai also became an experimental site where some of the modernist ideas (strongly relating to Nordic ones) and norms were introduced: for example, the new 9 storey panel house for single persons and the type design of the centre of *microrayon* with the landscape design and public art. As the really early and fully carried out construction of the model *microrayon* in the Soviet space, Žirmūnai became widely publicised in the Soviet press and received a State award in 1968.

However, it was not until the Lazdynai residential district was built in Vilnius that qualitatively different modernist town planning ideas were introduced into Soviet space. Young and ambitious architects V. Brėdikis and V. Čekanauskas were commissioned to design Lazdynai (housing area of 4 *microrayons* for 40,000 residents) in 1962. Both Brėdikis and Čekanauskas openly talked about strong influences of the Finnish (Tapiola), Swedish (Vällingby, Årsta) and modern French (Toulouse-Le Mirail, by Georges Candilis, Alexis Josic, and Shadrach Woods) suburban designs.³⁶ At the same time architects could develop their Burbiškės experience – the gradual service concept was implemented here as well as safe neighbourhoods with semi-open courtyards and comfortable pedestrian avenues (as propagated by G. Candilis) leading to the main centre of the residential area (as in Vällingby, however, it was never built). Two other architectural aspects highlight this project: harmony with natural environment and development of alternative housing models

³⁶ M. Drėmaitė, ‘Vytautas Edmundas Čekanauskas as a Romantic Modernist’, *Archiforma*, 2006, No. 4.

The sites for a district were naturally hilly and with pine trees that were meant to be preserved and serve as a part of landscape design (as in Tapiola). Architects argued that dispersing standard five- and nine-storey housing blocks among hills would create a unique silhouette. However, this idea required different house designs, therefore the architects collaborated closely with the Department of Standard Design of the Institute and designed 15 types of the improved standard All-Union House Series 1–464–LI (LI – meaning Lithuania).³⁷ The new series of five-, nine- and twelve-storey prefabricated large panel houses (among them unique stepped and terraced five- and nine-storey house types as well as five-storey slabs of the broken plan). The upgrade in apartment design was minimal – architects were obliged to keep the standard panel measure of 3.20, but they were able to carry a better apartment planning and also improve the façade aesthetics introducing loggias instead of balconies. The twelve-storey panel towers were first built in Lazdynai because of the aesthetics of composition, forming necessary visual urban hills, but in general the panel block construction for a tower was declared non-efficient by Soviet economists.

According to architects, institutional nationalism played its role when there was the need to support novelties of Lazdynai at the State Construction Committee. The most important decision maker here was a director of the Vilnius Combine of Housing Construction who hardly approved the new series and started to produce. The same could be attributed to the design of public centres of the *microrayon* – although planners were committed to use the standard design, all three centres were planned individually, thereby gaining original characteristics especially featured by public art.

Lazdynai was not an experimental project, which could have justified its innovations, but it was most likely that the local party management foresaw it as a model design. Indeed, after several visits of important heads of Soviet Union Construction committee, Lazdynai was awarded the Lenin prize for the All-Union Architectural Design in 1974 (it was the first highest-level award for urban design). Following this award, Lithuanian urban planners became well-established leaders of the Soviet urban and suburban design while Lazdynai became widely featured home and abroad culmina-

³⁷ M. Drėmaitė, 'Bronius Krūminis, an Ambitious Architect of the Daily Round', *Archiforma*, 2007, No. 4.

ting on the cover of the East Bloc's international survey of modern panel housing construction.³⁸

However, two paradoxes might be seen in the story of Lazdynai. The housing district that was designed as an opposition to the standard Soviet mass housing started being used as a new 'socialist' design excellence. It was also evident, that for the local architects and planners Lazdynai signified direct Western influence, carried out on behalf of a more successful architecture. Nevertheless, the poor quality of construction resulted in the fact that today a casual observer only sees the area as a typical socialist housing scheme.

Conclusion It is evident that most political systems in Europe in the 1960s took similar action to rationalise, industrialise, and standardise housing architecture. If one compares a housing unit or a housing district in the East and in the West, one would find not so many differences (except the quality of construction, of course). Ideologically, Soviet town planning was similar to the principles of social-reform-minded international modernism. Nevertheless, the notoriety of socialist mass housing should not be explained just by the production process that had drawbacks in all its steps leading to a poor final result. Monotony and short-sighted economy, distorted concepts of type design were criticised in the Soviet press. I would argue that notoriety of the socialist mass housing architecture dwells on the one-sidedness, stability, and irreversible character of the Soviet mass housing doctrine. Compared to the many types of the pre-fabricated systems in the West and the amount of the alternatives to it, the Soviet experience was a complete and total transformation of the housing industry, with very few regional and temporal changes. Therefore, Lazdynai could be seen as a direct evidence and legacy of the totalitarian regime where even some trailblazing attempts melt in the pot of the mutated standard of the socialist modernism.

Author Detail

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³⁸ W. Rietdorf, *Neue Wohngebiete sozialistischer Länder* (Berlin, 1976).

BŪTI (PO)SOVIETINĖJE GYVENAMOJOJE APLINKOJE:
SSRS RYŠIAI SU VAKARAIŠKAI STATANT DAUGIABUČIUS IR
JŲ ATSPINDŽIAI LIETUVOJE

Santrauka

MARIJA DRĖMAITĖ

Straipsnyje aptariami socialiniai, politiniai ir technologiniai sovietinės „chruščiovinės“ masinės daugiabučių statybos aspektai, ypač atkreipiamas dėmesys į ryšius su Vakarų Europa ir jos daromą įtaką. Tyrime apžvelgiamos specialiai organizuotos sovietinių architektų, inžinierių ir statybininkų profesinės komandiruotės į Vakarus „pasikeisti patirtimi“, po kurių buvo suformuota sovietinio mikrorajono samprata ir nauji gyvenamųjų rajonų planavimo ir statybos principai. Šiame kontekste aptariami pirmieji modernistiniai gyvenamieji rajonai Lietuvoje – čia Lietuvos SSR architektai ne tik pritaikė aiškiai vakarietiškus modelius, tačiau šie rajonai labai greitai buvo įvertinti SSRS mastu ir pradėjo reprezentuoti geriausius sovietinės gyvenamosios urbanistikos projektus. Taigi į masinę sovietinę daugiabučių statybą galima pažvelgti ne tik kaip į ideologinę programą, siekiant suformuoti sovietinį žmogų, bet ir kaip į XX a. antrosios pusės moderniosios urbanistikos mutaciją.