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58

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## SOVIET MODERNISM IN THE HISTORIC CONTEXT. THE CASES OF VILNIUS AND PANEVĖŽYS CITY CENTERS

**Summary.** In the history of Lithuanian architecture, the period of soviet modernism has made very problematical mark. The architectural and urbanist changes that were made in Lithuanian cities during this period are linked with the beginning and development of modern building practice. Many discussions causes the changes in the city centres that were made from the 1960s. New modern buildings that were built in the historic context changed its individuality and singularity. This article analyses architectural changes that were made from 1960s to 1990s in the historic context of Vilnius and Panevėžys centres. The article suggests that during different decades of the soviet modernism period, the new architecture had a different approach to the historic context. To prove this suggestion, the article presents the most distinctive buildings that were built in the historic context of the selected city centres.

**Keywords:** Vilnius, Panevėžys, historic context, modernism, soviet modernist architecture, contrast in architecture, harmony in architecture.

### INTRODUCTION

The relationship between new architecture and the historic context in the cities is a common phenomenon. During the processes of various changes in the cities, the new architecture replaces the old one. This process in a way renews the image of the city. But sometimes there are cases where during the process of renewal, many old buildings interfere with the new ones. It is the process that is deeply associated with the 20<sup>th</sup> century modern architecture.

In the case of soviet Lithuania, modernization processes started in 1955, when the official language of the architecture changed from socialist realism to the modernism<sup>1</sup>. According to Marija Purvinienė, during that time ‘architects remembered the ideas of the Lithuanian interwar architecture, started to follow the fragmented information about the ideas of the contemporary architects and its goals’<sup>2</sup>. During that time in soviet Lithuania architecture was not only influenced by the aesthetic changes, but also by the other processes and by the context in which the new architecture was developed.

Many will agree that the period from the 1960s to the 1990s known as soviet modernism<sup>3</sup> was very

important in the history of Lithuanian cities. During that time Lithuanian cities experienced rapid changes – the constructions of the new micro districts and public centres began. Not only was this period very important to the city as a whole, but also to its central part. In the recent times, a rich heritage from this period allows us to analyse this period from various aspects<sup>4</sup>. But in the most recent researches there is not enough attention to the relationship between the soviet modernism architecture and the historic context in which new buildings were built.

**Research object:** This research tries to highlight the relationship between the soviet modernist architecture and the historic context. In trying to do so, the cases of two different city centres (Vilnius and Panevėžys) are selected. The process of a change of architecture and its relationship with the historic context in these city centres are the objectives of this research. In this research the historic context is considered to be the buildings built up to the 1940s and assorted in the perimeter blocks.

**Research goal:** The goal of this research is to try to unravel the relationship between the soviet

modernist architecture and the historic context of the Vilnius and Panevėžys city centres. In doing so, this research analyses the key buildings built from the 1960s to the 1990s and its relationship with the historic context. This research also tries to analyse the main problems of the relationship between modernist architecture and historic context in the city centres.

**Research methods:** The main method of this research is analytical, that was applied to the analysis of the cases of Vilnius and Panevėžys city centres. In addition, the research also uses the method of formal analysis, with the help of which the relationship between the key buildings and its context was analysed.

**Sources:** The main sources of this research are the remaining buildings. Also, no less important to this research were the documents of the Lithuanian Central State Archives, Vilnius Regional State Archives, many historical articles in the magazines and newspapers (*“Statyba ir architektūra”*, *“Panevėžio tiesa”*). No less important to this research is the contemporary literature in which the various processes of the soviet architecture of Lithuania are analysed.

## THE CONCEPTION OF MODERN ARCHITECTURE

It is accepted that modernist architecture was a multiple process that is closely associated with the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The beginning of modern architecture is related to the various changes in the building technology and materials, firstly evident in the use of the glass, steel and concrete and with the new ideas in the architecture. According to Marija Drėmaitė, in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, ‘architecture was beginning to be understood not only as an artistic, but also as an intellectual process that could solve many new challenges’<sup>5</sup>. By doing so, it was thought that the new architecture should be completely contemporary and not relate itself to the historic context. That is why in doing so it was thought that the new architecture should find an inspiration not in the history but in its modernization. According to Jurgen Tietz<sup>6</sup>, ‘in the intellectual, artistic level, the historical tradition was ignored, neglected and new

architecture was developed as an antithesis to the past’. That is why in the stylistic of a new architecture, the main accents became not the complexity, fullness of décor, dramatic artistic ground, but the clearness of form, logical functional solutions, that very popularized by the ideas of ‘De Stijl’, ‘Bauhaus’ etc<sup>7</sup>. Many principals of the ideas of the new architecture were emphasized in many theoretical works. For example, in 1922 and 1927 published the theoretical works of Le Corbusier<sup>8</sup> became somewhat of a manifesto. In these works the principals of new architecture were underlined: raising the buildings on pilotis, the free façade and free plan, strip windows<sup>9</sup>. Also, the new ideas of town planning were suggested – the elimination of a perimeter block, the needfulness to build high-rise buildings in the centre of the city<sup>10</sup>, the necessity of new architecture to contrast with the old. As Almantas Samalavičius wrote, to Le Corbusier ‘historical parts of the cities were obstacles to the development, which had to be eliminated, because they were inadequate to the needs of the new century’<sup>11</sup>. The ideas of modern architecture were continued to be developed in the later ‘Athens Charter’<sup>12</sup> and during the CIAM (Congres Internationaux d’Architecture Moderne) congresses.

According to Eugenijus Staniūnas, the development of the ideas of modern architecture in the second half of 20<sup>th</sup> century determined to emerge the reconstructions of historical centres, whose character was beginning to be changed by the new development projects<sup>13</sup>. For example, in the 1950s the historical centre of Stockholm was radically transformed when a ‘Norrmalm’ reconstruction project began. That started the destruction of the old buildings, which were replaced by the new ones<sup>14</sup>. Similar attitudes toward historic context were evening in the new plans of reconstructions in others cities, for example Paris<sup>15</sup> or Copenhagen<sup>16</sup>. But according to Gordon David, the plans of reconstructions sometimes were slowed by the private property, negative response from public, which is why in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century radical changes in historic context of the cities were starting to be seen as acceptable<sup>17</sup>. But at the same time, as Jurgen Tietz suggests, there was also an evident tendency to adapt new buildings to

the context as little as possible<sup>18</sup>. This suggests that even though massive reconstructions of the historic centres were very rarely realized, but this did not stop the constructions of individual buildings in it.

In the context of Soviet Union and soviet Lithuania, the beginning of soviet modernist architecture is related to the initiated resolution in 1955 in which the former Stalinist architecture and design was denounced by being too formal and extravagant<sup>19</sup>. It underlined that 'soviet architecture must be characterized by its simplicity, austerity of form and economy of layout. Buildings must be given an attractive appearance, not through the use of contrived expensive decorative ornamentals, but by an organic connection between the architectural form of a building and its purpose'<sup>20</sup>. This was a turning-point to the evolution of architecture in USSR – the architecture of Stalinist period was to be changed by a new, more contemporary one. According to Deyan Sudjic, this helped to develop a new architecture, which had a foundation in the logic of industrialism (new materials and technologies began to be used in the construction of new buildings), this also influenced the change of aesthetics, where the pure form became one of the most important feature which also had parallels to a western modern architecture<sup>21</sup>. In the context of soviet Lithuania, these processes helped to spread new architectural ideas.

According to Vaidas Petrulis, in soviet Lithuania, during the renewal processes of the old districts, a mass demolitions of the old buildings where avoided<sup>22</sup>. But this did not solve the problem of the relationship between the new and the old architecture. As Gediminas Baravykas wrote about the changes in Lithuanian cities from the 1960s: 'rectangular <...> boxes coherently destroyed the old silhouettes of the cities'<sup>23</sup>. And as states Eglė Navickienė, in order to save the oldest parts of the cities from the new architecture, the rules of protection of old towns were initiated<sup>24</sup>, but in other old districts of the cities, in this case, the new architecture in the central part of Vilnius and Panevėžys, rarely had any limitations<sup>25</sup>. In these territories the development of new constructions was accelerated by a non-existing private property. But as it can be suggested that the soviet modernist architecture was

a multidimensional process, so during the various periods of its evolution, its relationship with the context had changed.

#### THE TENDENCIES OF THE NEW ARCHITECTURE IN HISTORIC CONTEXT

In trying to define the tendencies of new architecture in historic context, it is worth noticing that there is no unanimous opinion about this subject. Despite that many researchers suggest that to define a relationship between old and new architecture, the tendencies can be used, but these tendencies vary depending on the researcher. For example, Konstantina Demiri suggests the contrasting approach, differential approach, interpretation, referential approach and modern approach<sup>26</sup>, while B.C. Brodin excludes replication (which is divided into facsimile, correlation, metaphor and simile) and contrast<sup>27</sup> tendencies. Norman Tyler has written about three – improvisation, compatible and opposition<sup>28</sup>. Slightly different strategies exclude Eglė Navickienė: retrospective, pastiche/interpretation, innovative (indifferent and contrasting)<sup>29</sup>. Steven W. Semes indicates the literal replication, invention within a style, abstract reference and intentional opposition<sup>30</sup>. Michael Davies excludes the pastiche approach, traditional approach, subtle approach, arrogant approach and modern approach<sup>31</sup>.

It is obvious that the strategies or tendencies of a new architecture in historic context are understood too differently. Some of them are much too similar and to tell them apart is very difficult. As could be seen after a short review of the tendencies suggested by some authors, the position of this research is that there could be other tendencies too. The first one is the tendency of contrast (understanding it as the contrary of the characteristics of objects<sup>32</sup>) or contrasting architecture. The second one is harmonious architecture (understanding as a similar, familiar, having close features<sup>33</sup>). These two tendencies are selected because the issue of this research is trying to prove that the relationship between soviet modernist architecture could be demonstrated by these tendencies. In doing so, the cases of Vilnius and Panevėžys centres were selected.

In this research the tendency of contrasting buildings is defined by its respect to the historic context. The most recognizable feature of that kind of buildings is stylistics. It often is very different from the one that dominates in the context. In that kind of buildings, the preference is set not to replicate the tradition of a context but to express its contemporary individuality. This could also be recognized by alienating from the historical character's main features, such as forms, volume, size etc. Also, contrasting building sometimes could not hold a common line of perimeter with older buildings, contrast in these buildings sometimes is also achieved by height, which can be different to that of the older buildings.

The opposite of contrasting architecture in this research is an architecture that is closely related to the historic context. The buildings that could be attributed to it are considered to be built sensitively in regard to a historic character and have a close relationship with it. The buildings of this tendency the closest relationship with the old building could achieve by the stylistics. In many cases it is very similar to that of the old buildings, because the dominant style is interpreted in a new way. And because of that it could be thought that the contrast in this kind of architecture is minimal or it does not exist at all. It is also worth to notice that the close relationship with the historic context could also be achieved not only the style, but also by a similar scale, height, having a common line of perimeter with the older buildings. This could guarantee a very little amount of an intervention. In this research it is considered that by having all of these characteristics, the new building in historic context could be a harmonious one.

But both contrasting and harmonious tendency of new architecture could not be considered to be unambiguous. The buildings that could be attributed to each of this tendency could strengthen and weaken the architectural character of the historical context. In the tendency of contrast there could be buildings that could be an acceptable accent in the historic context. But there also could be contrasting buildings that could weaken the character of its environment and become a dissonance. The same could be applied to the harmonious tendency. There could be cases where too much interpretation of a

historic context in the architecture of new building could lead it to become a pastiche, which depending on its level on separate occasions could be considered to be an unacceptable strategy in regard to a historic context.

#### NEW ARCHITECTURE IN VILNIUS CENTER

In this research the limits of Vilnius centre are defined by Antanas Papšys, who wrote that 'this territory in the north and west borders with the river Neris, from the south with Tauro hill, from the east with the old town'<sup>34</sup>, which begins with T. Vrublevskio street. It is a territory whose main part is Gedimino avenue and its neighbouring blocks, which till the soviet period consisted mainly of the two-five storey buildings built at the end of 19<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of 20<sup>th</sup> century<sup>35</sup>. This territory was developed during the different eras, so there are many buildings that reflect eclecticism aesthetics, there are also buildings from the interwar and early soviet period. Despite that in the 1960s the new plan of a further development of this territory was prepared and it was planned to expand it to the right bank of river Neris<sup>36</sup>, which was developed sparsely, along these plans, the old part of the centre had to experience changes too. Because this territory consisted from the buildings built before 1960s, but they according to Vaclovas Šeštokas, 'were outdated by its size, technical level and did not meet the contemporary requirements <...> that is why there is a need of new buildings in this territory'<sup>37</sup>. This suggests that during the 1960s, this territory was seen in need to be renewed by the new buildings. And because it was not uncommon to build them in the historic context, this started to emerge a problem between new and old architecture.

It should be noted that in the case of Vilnius centre, the tendency of contrast of the new architecture, which became evident from the 1960s, was not a solid process. There are some cases where new, less contextual architecture, the contrast expressed differently. One of the earliest examples of this could be former cinema (J. Kasperavičius) built in 1963 in Gedimino avenue (Fig. 1). The object has a contrasting expression of its façade, but in the urban context





Fig. 1. Former cinema „Vilnius“ in Vilnius, Gedimino av., 1970s. VRVA, F. 1111, O. 11, E. 48, L. 15

is inserted quite harmoniously. The building was designed between older buildings, during the reconstruction of other<sup>38</sup>. Both in its height and its position of façade, this building maintains a visual continuation of the composition with other objects. The contrast with other buildings is evident in its façade composition. The main part of consists of vertical lines that sort of imitates the pilasters of neighbouring buildings. Even though this solution does not fully interpret the façades of other buildings, but this gives it expressiveness. And because of that, the original contrasting object does not diminish the context – does not change its spatial, urban composition

and could be seen as a welcomed approach to the historic character in which it was built.

On the other hand, it was noticed that during that time there were also the cases were new buildings radically ignored historic character. Such an example is a wing of bank in Totorių street (J. Kriukelis) (Fig. 2), that was built in 1966. Looking from an urban point of view, this building ignores a common line of perimeter in this street. The building ignores it and its composition to the street is not typical to its context – the new building is oriented to the street not by its façade, but by its side. Looking from an architectural point of view, the building



Fig. 2. Bank building in Vilnius Totorių st, 2017. Photography by E. Vilkončius

does not fit to the context were the plastic forms of the architecture are dominating – the wing of the bank is too austere, has very clear geometrical forms that are highlighted by the rows of window.

A unique architectural expression has a building that is considered to be on the first high-rise structures in the historical context of Vilnius centre. It is the former building of the Planning committee (E. N. Bučiūtė) built in 1973 on the corner of Gedimino avenue and Vasario 16-osios street (Fig. 3). Eleven storey building dominates in the neighbouring territory not only by its large size but also by a clean and simple architecture. The facades of this building are divided by a row of windows. These features highlight the architectural contrast with the historic buildings in this territory that were built at the end of 19<sup>th</sup> century. The orientation of this building to the street by its narrower side lightens the contrast. But in the context in which the old buildings are four–five storeys high, this high-rise building varies the skyline of this territory. It is worth to underline that as the expressive architecture of this building suggests, the object is an example of intentional opposition with its context. That is why the most important feature of this building is an architectural autonomy, a creation of a unique expressiveness, which is highlighted by the rectangular volume of



Fig. 3. Former building of the Planning committee in Vilnius. *Statyba ir architektūra*, No. 1 (1974): 7

this building that is divided by horizontal and vertical surfaces.

Also, during the 1970s, it was worth to emphasize that the other subtype of contrasting architecture became evident. The buildings that are attributed to this subtype have very organic, complex structures, which suggest an autonomic search for a new artistic quality. Despite the fact that relationship between these new buildings and historic character remained

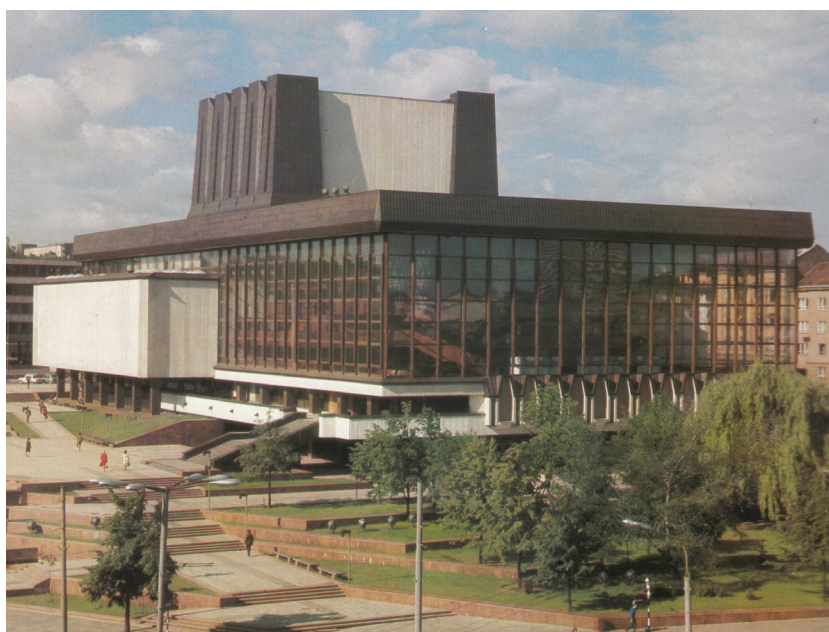


Fig. 4. Opera house in Vilnius, 1970s. Mečislovas Sakalauskas photography, 1980s. In *Lietuvos TSR istorijos ir kultūros paminklų sąvadas*, Vol. 1 *Historical and Cultural Monument's List*. Vilnius: Vyrtausioji enciklopedijų redakcija, 1988: 35



problematic, but original, autonomous architecture of these buildings provided new qualities to it.

For example, the Opera house, that was built in 1974 (E. N. Bučiūtė), dominates in its surrounding by its sheer size (Fig. 4). But because of it, the building became dominant object in the Vilnius centre in which there are many small-sized buildings. It should be suggested that the contrast of this particular object, where historical traditions are ignored, is acceptable. The site of this object is not entirely occupied – there are a lot of space left for the trees, plants and other decorative objects. This feature creates an uplifted atmosphere. The free space that surrounds this building makes it look like an exceptional object in the centre that could be viewed clearly from a various angles. This could not be possible if the large building would have occupied the whole site or would have been built in a tight perimeter with surrounding buildings. This created a sort of square type space gives this building a unique autonomy and representation. The architectural contrast in this building could be interpreted as an intentional. But in the case of this Opera house, as opposed to the earlier buildings, the most dominant feature in the context became not clear, modern forms, but the entirety of many different elements. This could be seen by the original use of glass facades, plain and deepened surfaces, sculptures in the main façade.

Another acceptable example of the soviet modernism in historic context could be considered a building of the union of Cooperatives of Lithuania (J. Šeibokas), built in 1986 in Gedimino avenue (Fig. 5). The composition of this building is dominated by plastic architectural spaces and minimalist aesthetics – the evidence that it was not intended to imitate the architecture of neighbouring buildings. With them this building has not many similarities, except the common cornice line and perimeter line. Even though this object has eight storeys, but the highest part of it is withdrawn to the end of the site. So, from Gedimino avenue, the dominant five storey height is maintained by using the terraces. With the help of these features, the scale of this building is reduced. But the contrast still becomes the most important feature of this building – the composition is dominated by the forms which are unusual to the



Fig. 5. The building of 'The union of Cooperatives of Lithuania' in Vilnius, 1990s. In *Lietuvos architektai* ('Lithuanian architects'). Vilnius: VDA, 2002: 558

historic character. And by the avoidance of imitating the architecture of other neighbouring buildings, this object to its surroundings is integrated highly organically and does not eliminate its dominant features.

It should be regarded that each new building had an expression of a contrast with a historic context in its own individual way. That is why in Vilnius centre the tendency of contrast was a multiple process – the buildings that were built both in the early and late period during the soviet modernism, each have a separate relationship with the context. Even though there are buildings of this tendency that could be interpreted as acceptable in the historic context (for example former cinema, Opera house, the building of the union of Cooperatives of Lithuania) and not acceptable (a wing of a bank, former building of the national planning committee), it should be highlighted that all of them reflect the variability of the evolution of the architecture of soviet modernism in 1960s–1990s.

It was noticed that in parallel with contrasting buildings, in Vilnius centre there were also new buildings built that were more or less better adapted to the existing character. These buildings, which could be attributed to the harmonious tendency of new architecture in historic context, were built in the late period of soviet modernism. But as case studies will show, this tendency was a multiple process that combined the interpretation of a plastic 19–20<sup>th</sup>



Fig. 6. Former building of the Central Committee of the Communist party of Lithuania in Vilnius, 1990s. In Vytautas Edmundas Čekanauskas. Vilnius: VDA, 2011: 109

century buildings and of those which were built during the interwar period.

A peculiar object which in a way interprets the interwar architecture is former building of the Central Committee of the Communist party of Lithuania (V. E. Čekanauskas) in Gedimino avenue, built in 1982. It is a sheer sized object that has irregular architectural composition (Fig. 6). Despite that in the neighbourhood there many buildings from the 19<sup>th</sup> century, but this object closest relationship achieves with the buildings from the interwar period – former bank buildings that were built

when Vilnius was a part of Poland. The similarity of these buildings is evident in the stylistics (ascetic expression), size (the similar volume and scale is maintained), and by its composition to the street – withdrawn from the common perimeter of Gedimino avenue. But even though the former building of the Central Committee of the Communist party of Lithuania is comparable to the objects from the interwar, it creates its own expression, which is seen in the segmentation of its composition, the changes of height in various wings. Even though this building is similar and harmonious to the ones from the interwar period, by minimalizing the contrast, but



Fig. 7. Seimas hotel in Vilnius, Gedimino av., 1990s. In Lietuvos architektai ('Lithuanian architects'). Vilnius: VDA, 2002: 136

it also has its own architectural mood, which makes it an acceptable intervention to the historic context.

A unique example where new building is sensitively integrated in an old character is Seimas hotel (A. E. Paslaitis) that was built in 1988 in Gedimino avenue (Fig. 7). The architecture of this building reflects a retreat from highly geometrical forms that were evident in the previous examples. On the contrary, the most evident features in the architecture of this building can be identified as the elements of postmodernism. The architecture of this object is highly related to its context – it interprets the eclecticism of neighbouring buildings. Also, the hotel maintains a common line of perimeter with older buildings, the same height and similar elements of its façades. Even though this building was completed after the fall of the soviet period in Lithuania, but the fact, that this building was designed earlier suggests that during the late soviet period the attitude towards a historical character of Vilnius centre was beginning to change by designing more familiar objects to it.

In conclusion, it was noticed that during the period from 1960s to 1990s, in Vilnius centre the buildings were built not only with a strong ignorance to the existing character but also with a slight tendency to interpret its motives. This could allow to state that in the process of evolution of modern architecture, historical context also became a source of inspiration, which influenced new buildings. This lead to develop

a slightly different type of modern architecture, that changed the historic context a lot less, which in contemporary view could be seen as an important part of the evolution of soviet modernist architecture.

#### NEW ARCHITECTURE IN PANEVĖŽYS CENTER

Until the beginning of soviet time, the centre of Panevėžys was considered to be the territory in the Laisvės square, but during the urbanization, this territory expanded in the neighbourhood – to the streets of Respublikos, Vasario 16-osios, P. Puzino and Kranto. According to the historian Zita Pikelytė, the core of the Panevėžys centre were low-rise, brick-built small sized buildings, arranged in the perimeter blocks, that were built from during the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century<sup>39</sup>. Because the buildings in this territory were built in various times – some had historical features and some had some interwar modernist forms. According to Giedrė Mateikaitė, during the interwar period, new buildings were built in respecting the dominant context – new buildings were a small-sized, low-rising, arranged in the perimeter blocks<sup>40</sup>.

Many new changes in this territory came during the soviet times, especially in the 1960s, when the new general plan of Panevėžys was prepared<sup>41</sup>. According to the new plan there were plans to build new structures (public, residential, high-rise buildings) in this territory<sup>42</sup>. By doing so, new buildings were



Fig. 8. Former building of the Polytechnic in Panevėžys, 1967. E. Vilkončius' personal collection





Fig. 9. Former building of the daily services in Panevėžys, 1970s. In *Gamyba Panevėžyje* ('Production in Panevėžys'). Vilnius: Margi raštai, 2015: 241

concentrated in the existing architectural context. Despite the fact that during the soviet times, other new plans of the city and its centre were prepared, but all of them had the same strategy – new buildings were to be built in the historical context<sup>43</sup>.

It was noticed that in the centre of Panevėžys, the contrast between the new and the old architecture was beginning to be evident from the 1960s. The new buildings were original itself, had a clear, modern forms but because of its autonomy, also had a very complex relationship with the historical context. One of the first buildings that have these features is a former polytechnic building (J. Jankauskas) (Fig. 8), built in 1966 in the western part of Laisvės square. The contrast with the context of this building is evident in its volume, size, form, spatial composition. The main wing of this building has a clear, minimalistic shape. This has a very clear opposition with the existing old buildings in this territory. The dissonance is evident in the composition of this building according to the existing perimeter blocks – this building is withdrawn from the square's common perimeter line and lead to the erosion of the historic context. Despite the fact the large size of this building was reduced by the passage under the second floor, but it has very little in common with the context. The same or similar features have some other buildings that very build during the soviet times in Panevėžys

center. Such objects are Former building of the daily services (1974, N. Garbaliuskienė), Panevėžys district municipality building (1974, N. Eigminienė) (Fig. 9). These buildings also ignore the architectural and urban context, have minimalistic forms, that has very little in common with the existing context.

Another unique object in Panevėžys centre that was built in the early period of soviet modernism is a former hotel 'Panevėžys' (A. Paulauskas) (Fig. 10). Built in 1972, the object illustrates the tendency to build high-rise structures in the central parts of the cities during the period of soviet modernism<sup>44</sup>. This building has minimalistic, laconic forms, which are highlighted by the horizontal lines of the windows. These monotonic features are embellished by the plastic curve in the centre of the building. The vertical part of this building is withdrawn from the square's common perimeter line and like the J. Miltinis theatre building (A. Mikėnas) that was built in 1968, forms a separate square type space in the structure of Laisvės square.

It is worth to notice that the former hotel building contrasts not only with the neighbouring buildings by its clear, alien architecture, but also with its large volume, that has 12 floors. These features are not common to the historic context of this territory. That is why neighbouring old buildings are dwarfed by the hotel's large size and lost the dominant position in the formation of Laisvės square. With these



Fig. 10. Former hotel in Panevėžys, 2017. Photography by E. Vilkončius

characteristics, the former high-rise hotel building is clearly incompatible with the historic context and has a very problematic relationship with it. Also, the high-rise building is contrasting in the skyline of Panevėžys with the towers of the old churches. Looking from the various angles to the skyline of Panevėžys, it is evident, that the former hotel building dwarfs the towers of the churches.

During the process of this research, another feature of the contrasting architecture was found – during the soviet times there were some buildings built that had interpreted some features of the context where it was built. Despite the fact that these buildings

have a very clear opposition to the context, but this has some parallels with the interpretation of the context. This feature of the contrasting new architecture could be thought to be an acceptable model of the intentional opposition in the historic context.

One of the objects that have this feature is a courthouse (V. Skokauskas) built in 1986 in Laisvės square (Fig. 11). This building has a very different to the early period of soviet modernism spatial composition. The forms of the building are complex, highlighted by different heights of its wings. But despite that, the building has a common feature with the neighbouring old buildings – accented



Fig. 11. Courthouse in Panevėžys, 1990s. In *Panevėžio statybos trestas* ('Panevėžys' Construction Trust Company). Panevėžys, 1997: 16

corner entrance. The same feature has the neighbouring building – a drugstore that was built in the interwar period. This common feature connects these buildings and highlights the intention to replicate some of the old elements in the new building. But this feature does not allow the courthouse to be a literal replication of the old context – this building has unique forms, style, that are strengthened by the expressive use of flat and deepened surfaces. These are highlighted by the rows of narrow windows and massive windowsills.

An odd interpretation of the historic context is evident in the example of other building – former bureau of statistics (A. Blūšius), that was built in Respublikos street in 1988 (Fig. 12). This building has a complex five floor volume. First three floors of this building have an expressive row of narrow vertical windows, deepened surfaces. The same feature is seen in the neighbouring building health insurance building that was built during the interwar. In juxtaposition with the old buildings of Respublika street, the opposition with it by the case of former building is evident – it has five floors, while the old buildings have only two or three. The general composition of the building is an expressive, non-monotonic, and has plastic and monumental forms. But a small interpretation of the context makes it building an original, having unique features. That is why this building could be seen as an expressive architectural

object, which with the help of the interpretation of the context creates its own distinctive composition.

But it would be wrong to state that there is a vast division between the buildings that were built in the early and late soviet modernist period in Panevėžys. It was noticed that even in the late period some new buildings interpreted the features of the historic context, in parallel there were buildings built that had the same ignorance to the context. Such example is a former bank building (V. Sipavičius) in P. Puzino street, that was built in 1987. This building was built in the place where an important historical building – a house of a sculptor Juozas Zikaras stood<sup>45</sup>. The new building was built after the demolition of the old one. Despite that the new building has an original architecture – rectangular volume of it has a characteristic asymmetrical entrance and rows of windows. But it's worth noticing that these features do not reflect the continuation of tradition, physical similarities with the old buildings that stand in this street.

Despite that it was observed that the interpretation of the fragments of historical context was related to the buildings built in Panevėžys centre during the late period of soviet modernism. But because of earlier underlined features, these buildings could not be accepted as a harmonious to the context.



Fig. 12. Former building of the Bureau of statistics in Panevėžys, 1990s. In *Panevėžio statybos trestas* ('Panevėžys' Construction Trust Company). Panevėžys, 1997: 145



It was observed that during the soviet modernist period in Panevėžys centre a literal replication was also strategy that was used in the architecture of the new buildings. This also could be accepted as a welcomed path of building new building in the historic context. In the case of Panevėžys centre, the buildings that had features of a very harmonious architecture are the new wings of the old buildings and the reconstructions of the old buildings. This strategy made the new constructions to have a closer relationship with the context, without the vast erosion of the architectural character. But it is suggested that this model was not a common path – for example in 1987 during the reconstruction of the 19<sup>th</sup> century building in Laisvės square 22<sup>46</sup>, the two-storey building had an additional floor constructed that have an unusual architectural composition.

One of the earliest examples of this harmonious path is a reconstruction of the old drugstore building in Laisvės square 16. Till the reconstruction, in 1938 erected building had a small size, common to the historic character, plain rectangular form, geometrical rows of windows and a curved entrance in the corner. The reconstruction of this building started in 1962<sup>47</sup>. It had to stages – during the first one the two-storey wing was constructed<sup>48</sup>. During the second stage, a whole building – the old one and its wing was heightened by an additional storey<sup>49</sup>.

After the reconstruction, the aesthetics of the old building were not changed and the additional storey had the same architectural details like the old one. The division of the exterior by corner entrance and the narrow windows remained the same in the exterior of the additional storey (Fig. 13). Despite the fact that after the reconstruction, the old building had grown in height, but in the juxtaposition with the height of the other old buildings, remained the same. In the example of this reconstruction it is noticed a harmonious path, that very little changed the old building and its context.

The same principles had the expansion of an old school building in Respublikos street. This 19<sup>th</sup> century building, which had the ‘U’ shaped plan was reconstructed in 1974<sup>50</sup>. Despite Bronius Kačkus, who observed that during that time, many schools in Panevėžys were reconstructed by adding typical wings<sup>51</sup>, in the case of this building, the other path was chosen. During the expansion of the old school building, the new wing was constructed using a literal replication of the style of the old building. By doing so, the new wing that also had a ‘U’ shaped plan, so after the expansion, old building and new wing were connected with a common architectural composition.

There were some other few reconstructions of the old buildings, which have the same features. For



Fig. 13. Drugstore building in Panevėžys, 1980s. In *Panevėžys. Vilnius: Mintis, 1984: 18*

example, in 1984 new wing was erected by the old clinic building<sup>52</sup> in Respublikos street. The new wing has the same style, same size like the old building. It also has the same architectural expression, related to the literal replication of the architecture of the old building – has narrow vertical rows of windows, plastic details, accented corner entrance (Fig. 14).

Despite the fact that the harmonious new buildings are unique approaches to historical context, the justification of it is also a questionable. In one hand, by the case of them, the close relationship remained with the old buildings. On the other hand, because of a blind replication of the historical character in the architectural composition of these buildings, they lost an architectural individuality, as opposed harmonious buildings that were analysed in the case Vilnius centre.

## CONCLUSION

In the 20<sup>th</sup> century rapidly unfolded the conception of modern architecture made it possible to build new buildings that had rejected the historical tradition. In trying to realize the new processes of the architecture in the city spaces, where there were many historical buildings, the problem of the new and the old architecture was born. In the context of the USSR and soviet Lithuania, the beginning

of this problem is related to the new architectural ideas of the 1950s which in the 1960s made it possible to materialize the modernist processes in the architecture.

In trying to define the relationship between the new and the old architecture, there are no solid opinions – this relationship is defined using many different tendencies. In this research this was made by using only two main tendencies – contrast and harmony which were used on the cases of Vilnius and Panevėžys centres. Despite the fact that this research analysed only a very narrow context the soviet modernist period, but these two main tendencies allowed to define the main aspects of the architecture of this period.

The buildings that were attributed to the tendency of the contrast have a very specific opposition to the historical context of the Vilnius and Panevėžys city centres. There are buildings of this tendency that has a very clear opposition to the historical character, but there are also contrasting buildings that try to fit in the context by using some of its specifications. By doing so, it is suggested that each building of this tendency has a very unique and specific relationship with the context. This suggests that there is no inner integrity in the tendency of contrasting architecture. This was also noticed in the case of other tendency – harmony. There were no specific or common features



Fig. 14. The new wing of the health clinic in Panevėžys, 1984. E. Vilkončius' personal collection



in trying to fit in the new building in the historic context. It was noticed that the buildings of the harmonious tendency in Vilnius and Panevėžys city centres emphasized with the various types of historic context – with the buildings from the 19<sup>th</sup> century and with the buildings from the 20<sup>th</sup> century. By doing so, the buildings of the harmonious tendency had a better, closer relationship with the context. But sometimes the new buildings from this tendency had a too straightforwardly interpreted the historical context. That is why even the buildings of this tendency had a complicated relationship with the context in which they were built.

The case studies of Vilnius and Panevėžys city centres allowed to understand that there is no good, nor bad tendency of the new architecture in historic context. The goodness and the badness of the new architecture in historic context can be defined only by the cases of the individual buildings. It is suggested that only an individual building, not a tendency as a whole, can better define its unique and real relationship with the historic context.

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## Notes

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## SOVIETINIS MODERNIZMAS ISTORINĖJE APLINKOJE. VILNIAUS IR PANEVĖŽIO CENTRŲ ATVEJAI

### Santrauka

Sovietinio modernizmo laikotarpis Lietuvos architektūros istorijoje yra gana problematiškas laikotarpis. Šiuo laikotarpiu Lietuvos miestuose įvykę pokyčiai siejami su modernizmo idėjų įgyvendinimu. Itin daug prieštaravimų kelia 7–9 dešimtmečiuose įvykę miestų centrų pertvarkymai. Naujos architektūrinės kalbos įgyvendinimas, stant pastatus, istoriškai susiklosčiusiose aplinkose ėmė keisti jų savitumus. Straipsnyje analizuojami dviejų Lietuvos miestų Vilniaus ir Panevėžio centruose 7–9 dešimtmečiuose įvykę architektūriniai pokyčiai ir jų nulemtas santykis su istorine aplinka.

**Reikšminiai žodžiai:** Vilnius, Panevėžys, istorinė aplinka, modernizmas, sovietmečio modernizmo architektūra, kontrastinga architektūra, harmoninga architektūra.

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75

• SOVIET MODERNISM IN THE HISTORIC CONTEXT.  
THE CASES OF VILNIUS AND PANEVĖŽYS CITY CENTERS