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**Preventive conservation
of the human environment**

6.

Architecture as an element of the landscape

edited by
Weronika Kobylińska-Bunsch,
Zbigniew Kobyliński
and Louis Daniel Nebelsick

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(Un)wanted heritage in the cityscape – arguments for destruction or reuse. The case of the city of Kaunas

Ingrida Veliutė

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, changing the conception of heritage protection, *i.e.*, from heritage itself to a focus on people and their relation to heritage, has led to social aspects dominating evaluations. Therefore, the categories of the values involved begin to interlace, their conception and their significance is expanding and the values are becoming more closely associated with the context, in which the heritage exists. “Some fraction of the material culture produced or inherited by society (artistic as well as utilitarian) becomes defined and recognised as heritage through designation. [...] Simply labeling something as heritage is a value judgment that distinguishes that object or place from other objects and places for particular reasons, and as such, the labeling adds new meaning and value”.¹

In the economically strongest countries utilitarian heritage is starting to be valued as exceptional technical heritage, while in Lithuania the industrial objects and the military heritage is still hardly being recognised. This process is being stopped by a lack of financial resources, difficult historical memories and psychological gaps in education, and its one sidedness (protected sites are dominated by those associated with resistance and struggles for freedom).² “The non-monumental environment was utilitarian, built to serve its present users and destined to disappear when it became physically or functionally obsolete. The cultural significance given to the surviving examples of historic fabrics today is not intuitively understood by the communities that inhabit them”.³

This is the reason why the suburb of Lower Šančiai (Kaunas, Lithuania) was chosen as the main focus of this paper. It is small enough, but stands very much in contrast to today’s city landscape because of its architectural and functional typology. These include wooden houses with carved details (mid of 19th century), wooden and red brick buildings from Kaunas fortress period (the end of 19th century), some industrial territories from the interwar as well as Soviet period relicts. During the last ten years large

scale renovation and revitalisation processes started in this small suburb. So, it is full of architectural heritage objects, some reconstructed and adapted to new functions, but with lost authenticity, others abandoned and almost ruined old living houses, but with authentic details, but also large new markets with cheap architecture and huge signs near to almost destroyed industrial heritage objects. The main aim of this article is to show the connections between heritage objects and today’s users, to disclose the thin line between „unwanted” and „wanted” heritage objects. It is important to explain the term of „unwanted” heritage⁴. It was coined during heritage specialists meetings which were held together with Polish scholars while trying to describe utilitarian (mostly military) heritage objects, which are in very prominent urban locations, but still are not granted heritage status. This is not only about the physical condition of the object, but more about psychological understanding of its meaning.

The example of Lower Šančiai is rather uncharacteristic to Lithuania, *i.e.* the transformation of the military and industrial town part of Kaunas (Lithuania) into a site housing sources for implementation of contemporary social phenomena and even heritage animation⁵ activities. But all mentioned elements have invisible connections and directly implements the changes of Kaunas cityscape.

HISTORICAL AND CURRENT CONTEXT

This suburb has become a part of Kaunas City long ago, and along with holding a militaristic and industrial in one hand and suburb with small private properties as “village in city” image on the other hand. To understand the to-

¹ Avrami, Mason and de la Torre (eds) 2002: 8.

² Vaitkuvienė 2008: 46.

³ Serageldin 2002: 53.

⁴ The specialists of Lithuanian heritage protection had a practical seminar in 2016 about the Soviet period architectural objects. The new definition as „uncomfortable heritage” was created (Noreikienė 2016: 1–73). It could be used in this article partly too, however a more accurate for the heritage described in this article and Lower Šančiai suburb is „unwanted”, because people still recognise it as Tsarist Russian heritage.

⁵ The definition of „heritage animation” is explained in: Veliutė 2014: 108–110.

day's situation and cityscape of Lower Šančiai, it is very important to make an introduction and short historical overview of this specific architectural mix.

Before the construction of the railway during 1861–1862, there were only a few buildings in the present territory of Lower Šančiai, however, in the 19th century, building started on workshops, warehouses and homes of railway workers. Concurrently, first factories began to be established from the railway towards the suburbs of Lower Šančiai. They occupied areas that were quite large and became new elements of the urban landscape, characterised by large brick halls and tall chimneys.⁶ In this case, there is no reason to go deeper into the construction of the railway, however, this engineering achievement can be considered as the beginning of the development of the suburb. A more important element which illustrates the social situation, are the wooden houses of the railway workers situated along A. Juozapavičiaus Av. and the railway lines themselves. These compact wooden houses with 6–8 apartments were built at the initiative of the Railway Board for its officers and workers. The beams of the houses were richly carved and their decorations contained many elements that were characteristic of the carvings of Tsarist Russia.

Today, some of these houses are still owned by the Lithuanian Railways and have, to some extent, retained their primary function. Their condition also depends on the location of these houses. The wooden residential houses of the railway workers situated along A. Juozapavičiaus Av. are visually much more miserable, poorly maintained, even though they have retained their residential function. It is highly unlikely, however, that some of them are still occupied by people related to railway services.

If we move deeper into the quarter, it is not difficult to recognise the territories of former factories on the north-eastern side of the central axis. In 1869, within a short distance from the railway station, a steam operated bone grinding factory of the German industrialist, Nolis, was built. In 1875, Goldberg and Kamber opened a wheel oil factory and Rekosz opened a sawmill. In 1879, the Schmidt brothers opened an agricultural tools and locks manufacturing facility, which was later acquired by the Vailokaičiai brothers, who established „Metalas” AB. In 1922, the development of industrial structures was joined by a large „Drobė” factory in Lower Šančiai, and in 1925, the „Cotton” sock factory, the „Ringuva”⁷ soap factory, the „Schick” cognac distillery, as well as a furniture factory, grinding mills, etc. The territory between the current Geležinkelio, Siūlų⁸, A. Juozapavičiaus and L. Ivinskio streets was dominated by large scale buildings.

Small wooden and brick houses for workers were built among them.

Today. In the end of 20th century, some of these large structures have been adapted for new commercial activities after changing their function, while others have been standing abandoned and waiting for an investor to this day. The structures that used to symbolise clear industrial progress during the 19–20th century now bear witness to the stagnation of the quarter that is situated near the center of the city and no longer meets the needs of the public. These structures, that used to reflect the clear social character of the quarter and were used for the industrial and living needs of the workers have been abandoned and are rather silent now.

In the central part of Lower Šančiai, along the most important communication artery (A. Juozapavičiaus Av.) one can see some structures that were used for various purposes. When building the Kaunas Fortress, a military settlement was designed in Lower Šančiai during 1886–1896.⁹ A settlement that managed to stimulate the development of the suburbs occupied the entire eastern part of the peninsula formed by the twist of the Nemunas River. First of all, a railway siding was built to reach the warehouse areas and has managed to survive near the current Drobės Street till today. The current A. Juozapavičiaus Av. became a very important component of the urban structure of Lower Šančiai. A military settlement was designed in strict observance of a symmetrical building plan: some buildings were situated in rows parallel to the central street, and others – perpendicular to it.

In 1890, following a decision of the Kaunas City Council, a new master plan was prepared, in which Lower Šančiai, together with Petrakalnis and Žaliakalnis, were planned to be connected to Kaunas City.¹⁰ However, this was only realised in 1919 when Kaunas became the capital city.

From the end of 19th century up to 1912 in total, there were 507 military¹¹ structures located in Lower Šančiai, including manholes, cesspits and other small facilities. On the north-eastern side of the current A. Juozapavičiaus Av., between the current Siūlų, Vilna¹² streets and the section of A. Juozapavičiaus Av., a military pigeon station stood close to the center of the settlement then, as well as the house of its director and the fortress firemen team buildings. A grocery store (so

⁶ Lukšionytė-Tolvaišienė 2001: 15–22.

⁷ Vanagas 2009: 14–16.

⁸ Even the names of some streets were very closely connected with their functions, *e.g.*, Geležinkelio (Eng. Railways), Siūlų (Eng. Twists).

⁹ This part of Kaunas fortress is listed in the National Culture Heritage list. The objects have some different codes. One of the part, called Kauno pirmasis karinis miestelis, vad. Žemųjų Šančių kareivinėmis (The First Kaunas military town, the other is called Lower Šančiai barracks), code 26902, was under reconstruction. Internet: <http://kvr.kpd.lt/#/static-heritage-search>.

¹⁰ Lukšionytė-Tolvaišienė 2001: 15–22.

¹¹ The number of military structures varies in the settlement of Lower Šančiai. This number is recorded in the inventory file: RVKIA. (Russian State Military History Archive) F. 13148-1-3647.

¹² Vilnų (Eng. Wools).

Fig. 1. Disappearing big capacity wooden living houses – (un)wanted military heritage (photo by D. Babilas, 2016)



called magazine) was located at the crossing of Audėjų and Linų¹³ streets, and commissariat buildings were located at the crossing of Drobės and Sandėlių¹⁴ streets. Several Panemunė ferry crossing buildings (pontoon boat warehouses) were located right by the river. The two-story military buildings (with a prominent ground floor) – the most expressive of their kind in this settlement – as well as the administration structures, which were built along A. Juozapavičiaus Av., and the buildings servicing the military barracks used to stand behind them. Three types of residential buildings constructed for the military settlement can be singled out, *i.e.*, three store brick buildings with communally used premises for the privates, wooden one-story buildings for the sergeants and two-story brick houses with individual apartments for the officers.¹⁵ Most of these buildings were constructed as generic projects, only partly adapting them to a specific city by fitting them with a different décor, windows, doors and other elements of façade. Military barracks were built of red bricks and their facades were moderately decorated. Most of these buildings were occupied by the bedrooms of the soldiers, which were connected by a corridor that allowed the soldiers to be able to leave the buildings as quickly as possible. The ground floor was used for domestic and household purposes. All the brick residential buildings were characterised by similar styles of decoration. The wooden buildings in the military settlement had large volumes, and were made of logs, covered with planks, and their facades were decorated with carved elements¹⁶ (Fig. 1). The house décor directly depended on the function and rank of the house (the higher the military rank of the soldiers for whom the house was built, the richer the décor) and reflected the

economic features of military construction, the same as that found in defensive structures.¹⁷

In addition to the residential buildings, there were also bathhouses, hospitals, a veterinary hospital, shops, a club, a hotel, buildings for the musicians, workshops, forges, stabling and other necessary structures in the military settlement of Lower Šančiai. Most of the stable structures were also decorated with wooden carvings, whereas the décor of the warehouses was very modest.

Behind the other important parts of the Lower Šančiai quarter were the small residential plots located on the right side of A. Juozapavičiaus Av. towards the Nemunas River, as well as those integrated on the left side of the avenue behind and between the large buildings of the military settlement. This part of Lower Šančiai emerged when the landlord, S. Fanstil, started to sell his land to the residents, on which they started to build small, mostly wooden, cottage-type buildings (Figs 2a, 2b).¹⁸ In this way, from 1925 onwards, the empty lots were filled with low small area residential and household buildings that were reminiscent of housing characteristic of a city rather than a village. The residents used to keep livestock in their plots even during Soviet times.

According to heritage expert Gregory John Ashworth: “The most obvious, direct and pervasive effect of fortifications is the negative restrictions they imposed on the growth and development of town. City defenses are expensive fixed investments that cannot respond easily to the expansion, or conceivably also the contraction, of the urban build-up area”.¹⁹

Lower Šančiai has always been known as a place where mainly poor and marginal inhabitants dealing in shady and clandestine business resided. However, the last decade brought forth changes in the image of Lower Šančiai due to several reasons. Firstly, the project of reconstruction of the old barracks was started,

¹³ Audėjų (Eng. Weavers), Linų (Eng. Linens).

¹⁴ Drobės (Eng. Clothes), a Sandėlių (Eng. Barracks).

¹⁵ Lukšionytė-Tolvaišienė 2001: 15–22.

¹⁶ Veliutė 2012: 12.

¹⁷ Steponaitytė and Zaleckis 2014: 118–124.

¹⁸ KRSA F-218-1-37: 43.

¹⁹ Ashworth 1991: 55.

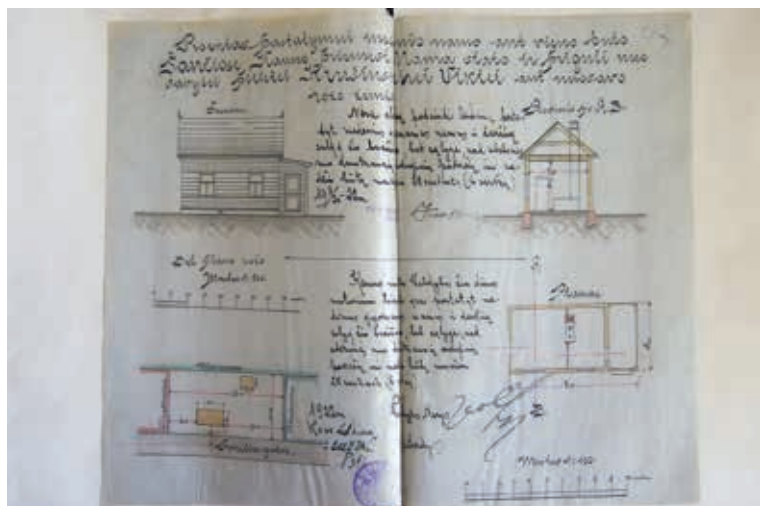


Fig. 2a and 2b. Some small wooden houses creates „a village in the city“ atmosphere in Lower Šančiai (drawing from Kaunas Regional State Archive, F-218-1-37-L.43; photo by I. Veliutė, 2017)



which was followed by important urban solutions. Some military barracks were restored and several new houses were built that are characterised by good architectural and high construction quality. All of A. Juozapavičiaus Av. and its sidewalks were reconstructed over several years.²⁰ During the year 2016 a major renovation project which can easily be called the first revitalisation project of military heritage started.

THE MOVEMENT FROM „UNWANTED“ HERITAGE TO „WANTED“ PROPERTY AND SOCIOCULTURAL VALUES

“Unofficial objects, places and practices of heritage may not be recognised by governments or be listed on official heritage registers, but they are considered to be significant or culturally meaningful by communities and collectives in the ways in which they constitute themselves and operate in the present, drawing on aspects of the past. The case studies that follow explore some of these unofficial objects, places and practices of heritage, as well

as the ways in which they engage with and cut across official processes of heritage”.²¹

Let us consult the newest statistics about the condition of the residential territories in Lower Šančiai. Unfortunately, antiquity is considered to be a very bad attribute. Some residential buildings near A. Juozapavičiaus Av. are run down, and the condition of many wooden houses in this area of the city is considered to be either bad or very bad. Not all areas of the quarter have been provided with engineering networks, meaning that some areas have no water supply, sewerage system or gas supply. The condition of some access roads to the residential blocks near Nemunas River is poor, there is a lack of parking lots and green areas, and the sports and children’s playgrounds are degraded. According to official statistics there are only a few educational establishments, almost no cultural life and a rather high number of poor people.

One is likely think that development and growth would be the answer to these problems. However, when a quarter that was established in the 19th century is reconstructed, and part of it is included in the register of

²⁰ *Kauno miesto* 2011: 51.

²¹ Harrison 2010: 240.

Fig. 3. The main A. Juozapavičius Av. and buildings from Kaunas fortress period – wanted and unwanted in front of each other (photo by D. Babilas, 2016)



cultural values with other elements that are still quite authentic, a more complex analysis is necessary. It is obvious that the values of heritage are under a process of constant variation. For this process to be meaningful, researchers need to distance themselves from theoretical knowledge and the analyses of the natural environment.²² The observation of Jūratė Markevičienė seems to be useful in this case, *i.e.*, „evaluations related to the identity of national and community heritage are not likely to give a final answer. However, when making a selection, we sometimes forget what is always remembered by monument preservation authorities: while the evaluations are changing, any heritage destroyed thereby cannot be restored”.²³ The buildings in the northern part of the Lower Šančiai complex were listed in Cultural Heritage List (CHL)²⁴ as separate units, however, this did not prevent them from undergoing intensive reconstruction when the military barracks were transformed into residential apartments. However, another dilemma is how to evaluate military barracks that have almost lost their authenticity, because of the destruction of structures or objects of heritage or their rehabilitation and adaptation to new needs by partially maintaining their initial residential purpose. This contrast becomes greater when almost destroyed buildings of the military city with barely any traces of their authenticity, which are „protected” by the state, are considered. Ambiguity is also a characteristic of the evaluation of the renovation of A. Juozapavičiaus Av., which undoubtedly improved the communication with the city center and Panemunė. However, the width of the avenue, is in conflict with the scale of the location and enhances the dominating effect of strict military architecture (Fig. 3). In the aforementioned revitalisation project old buildings and new architecture can be seen more positively. It can be seen as a good example of changing realities in former military districts by building

objects with totally different functions. These include a new preschool and private school. Such positive developments can stop sceptics from escalating critique on heritage projects in the public (Figs 4a, 4b).

“The research forms the presumption that it is necessary to look at this layer of the city in a complex way, not only naming the specific objects and their valuable properties but also drawing attention to the immaterial values [...] and involving the issue of social benefits that these heritage values could create. Such an integral assessment should provide a certain pyramid of values, which could directly correlate with the authenticity level of the object to be preserved”.²⁵

A rapid invasion of new residential, public and household buildings has virtually changed the suburbs of Lower Šančiai. Moreover, distinguished Lithuanian artists have settled down in small private wooden houses located in the borough relatively close to the center of the town. Major architectural and cityscape changes were accompanied by different artistic and cultural activities giving new impulses to adaptive activity in the remainder of this suburb.

THE INPUT OF ACTIVE CULTURE ANIMATORS

„Without the bunkers of the Atlantic Wall, without the Second World War, I would not have been interested in architecture at all. [...] But what I also discovered was that, during the war, the whole of Europe had become a fortress. And thus, I saw to what extent an immense territory, a whole continent, had effectively been reorganised into one city, and just like cities of old”.²⁶

Investigate theoretical and practical experience of famous cultural anthropologist Paul Virilio, also discusses the proper preservation and utilisation of fortifications in different countries. Defensive architecture transforma-

²² Veliutė 2012: 12.

²³ Markevičienė 2000: 96.

²⁴ CHL: <https://kvr.kpd.lt/>.

²⁵ Petrulis 2014: 58.

²⁶ Armitage 2001: 63, 186.



Fig. 4a and 4b. The combination of renovated old and new buildings – reflection of nowadays needs and possibility to change the quality of life in the Lower Šančiai (photo by I. Veliutė, 2017)

tion is slow and it is implemented can use both traditional and controversial methods.

Nevertheless, firstly complex scientific research should be carried out, researchers' conclusions and anticipated various opportunities provided, which would enable the organisation of opposite defensive function and modern purposes reflecting activity in fortresses.²⁷

“The purpose of participating (communicative) expression is to provide the public with an opportunity to know the history by showing the past from the inside or to have interactive entertainment not only in the virtual, but also in the actual space, to get involved and to act rather than to observe and contemplate”.²⁸

If the visual variations in Lower Šančiai forces one to think about the lack of education among its designing architects, the sociocultural variation could qualify as examples of the cultural animation or social art described in text books.²⁹ All the important players in this „creative experiment” are present in this case: a rather passive local community which is characterised as statistically

„disadvantageous”, along with professional culture animators living in this area of the city and knowing its life from the inside, as well as professional artists and curators sharing their works and encouraging spontaneous outbreaks of creativity.

“Creative experimentation same as the entire artistic act of creation is characterised by elementary and spontaneity. [...] creative experiments are difficult to attribute to one specific field and usually, the limits of these fields are consciously violated or broken. [...] one important factor affecting the quality of an artistic experiment, especially in the case of modern artistic experiments, is interdisciplinary, while other, even completely scientific information or data, are creatively used or interpreted by turning them into a work of art which newly reflects the aforementioned knowledge by using the means of artistic influence or even several types of art, for example, visual art or experimental sound”.³⁰

Events accompanying the Kaunas Biennale are undoubtedly among the most active factors influencing the spread of professional modern art throughout the discordant block of Lower Šančiai. These include, for

²⁷ Veliutė 2012.

²⁸ Markevičienė 2014: 19.

²⁹ Dovydaitytė 2014: 125.

³⁰ Grunskis 2011: 22–23.

Fig. 5. The “cabbage field”– cleaned cabbage store from fortress period used as the place for local community activities – the way to focus attention on heritage protection problems in the city (photo by I. Veliutė, 2017)



example, excursions led by the guides in the framework of the „Psilikono teatras” which took place in the „Drobė” and „Dirbtinis pluoštas” factories³¹ that are, in fact, completely derelict and unfit for visits. There were also installations and exhibitions organised by artists from Germany, Croatia and other countries. The Biennale program included the cleaning of an abandoned food warehouse that belonged to the Fortress in the 19th century and creative activities organised on the initiative of „Draugiškos zonos” (Friendly Zones). In 2011, during the Kaunas Biennale, „Tekstilė”, the *Urban research: experiences of the publicity* project was carried out in Lower Šančiai. For four days, studies, debates and discussions were conducted in private homes which included sessions about the responsibility for the creation of the environment we live in.³² In the creative practical workshops, an interdisciplinary group of eight people explained the typologies of the publicity characteristic to this quarter. This included the possibility to visit the apartment owners of the former Kaunas Fortress military barracks. A sufficient amount of visual material and short stories that reflected the opinions of the local residents about this part of the city was collected in the process. These are probably the most distinctive examples of animation in the city, not only in Lower Šančiai. Whereas the activities of „Šančių kioskas” (The Kiosk of Šančiai) should be considered as being part of cultural animation, because they do not take place in an object of heritage, but actually unite the community and stimulate various atypical activities, such as the growing of tomatoes instead of a typical flower garden in the city, cleaning the fortress cabbage magazine (Fig. 5), etc.

“Unofficial objects, places and practices of heritage might be used at the local level to build a sense of com-

munity and identity, and the ways in which these local practices might run counter to the ways in which heritage is employed by the state”.³³

The encouragement of social responsibilities is a particularly positive aspect of this process. In order to reveal the influence of this artistic and cultural invasion on the disadvantageous residents of this quarter and the competencies they educate, a comprehensive study of the participants of the events that take place both in Lower Šančiai and other places is necessary. Such initiatives have so far had no essential influence on the improvement of the objects of heritage, however, it is at least a declaration of the existence of the problem. For some irony, it is worth quoting of Arjo Klamer: “In each deliberation some valorisation is going on. If foreigners point out to indigenous people that their piles of old stones are actually cultural treasures and that they are willing to pay to conserve them, the indigenous people change their perception of those stones and may even begin to value them. Get a cultural good listed on the UNESCO world heritage list, and people will value that good more”.³⁴

The suburb of Lower Šančiai combines different sort of neglected heritage. As we observe the transformation in heritage field during the last twenty-five years of Lithuanian independence, the process of utilisation of post military, postindustrial and other big complexes go very slowly, but the movement started because of the local communities’ initiatives and intensified with the encouragement of cultural and then heritage animators. Sometimes these initiatives give very positive results by changing sociocultural values, sometimes the architecture heritage gets irretrievably lost in return for a higher level of everyday life.

³¹ The 10th Kaunas Biennale [viewed on 27 January 2017], access online: www.bienale.lt/2015/en.

³² Kauno bienalė 2011.

³³ Harrison 2010: 240.

³⁴ Klamer 2003: 14.

CONCLUSION

The industrial, military and everyday heritage of Kaunas is constantly involved in various science, arts and media projects, because of the will to preserve it. However, there is no unified concept in both the current complex preservation policy and in its heritage or culture animation processes, therefore, most of the initiatives depend on the persons implementing them. Too much heritage promotion can be dangerous due to the objects subsequent neglect. Since protected objects are perceived as dissonant and representing the heritage of atrocity, the radical change of their purpose might have them accepted as wanted heritage and property in the long run. In changing the military nature of objects, it would be appropriate to establish informal education and training institutions, conferences and exhibitions halls, administrative, office premises, small businesses, that would encourage a positive attitude of the city residents.³⁵ This process already started in Lower Šančiai and hopefully will expand to other former military objects.

The industrial and military block of Lower Šančiai is currently in a process of architectural, urban and socio-cultural transformation. New constructions or the reconstruction of old buildings creates a natural basis for the

settlement of residents with higher incomes and education. The periodical invasion of local cultural animators and external artists draws attention to the problem of abandoned and dissonant architectural heritage. Even if heritage preservation is not the precise topic of their activities. However, the potential of the city and its interest in taking care of the preservation of dissonant heritage will be revealed by further steps of the city's politicians regarding the adaptation of the factory areas for exhibitions of modern art and other activities. The survival of authenticity is a much more serious issue and problem. There are no guarantees to ensure the high-quality administration of authentic objects or structures included in the CHL and their adaptation for the nowadays needs. When building new objects or structures, authentic elements are often destroyed or identified as being of low value or as a construction of the Soviet period, whereas the interference of the CHL with its requirements to „restore” authentic walls sounds rather comical. In some cases, a discussion about authentic elements or structures of the not listed objects is not even possible. Therefore, at least for now, the values of heritage appear to be dissociated from the actual situation and the expressions of the social art in this part of the city have very little real impact on the improvement of the social value of the quarter, while deeper and much more expensive issues concerning the preservation of authenticity remain open.

³⁵ Veliutė 2012.

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