

**Vaidas PETRULIS**  
Kaunas University of Technology, Kaunas, Lithuania

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V A I D A S P E T R U L I S

## CONFLICTS OF THE HERITAGE: MAPPING VALUES OF IMMOVABLE CULTURAL HERITAGE IN KAUNAS DOWNTOWN AREA

**Summary.** The article focuses on the process of defining the value of the immovable heritage of Kaunas downtown (*Naujamiestis*) area. This urban landscape is protected by the national law of Lithuania. However, the official value of the site also includes 45 buildings marked with European heritage label (EHL). Besides, there are aspirations to inscript modern architecture of Kaunas on the UNESCO World heritage list. The main objective of the article is to discuss how these official layers of values correspond with expectations of the heritage community. Academic and doctrinal texts on cultural heritage widely acknowledged the importance of the community in the process of value definition. This aspect is especially important when speaking about the heritage of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Majority of these buildings that were announced as a cultural heritage directly affect daily activities of the heritage community. After comparing some instruments official institutions and heritage community use for the value definition, it can be declared that in such complex territories as Kaunas downtown, all actions on the value definition have to be based on research. One of the tasks of such research should be a comprehensive map of values combining expectations of official institutions and the heritage community.

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**Keywords:** Kaunas downtown area, dissonant heritage, conflicts of the heritage, values.

### INTRODUCTION

Heritage protection is one of the most controversial aspects of the contemporary cultural life. Official preserving practices, which are based on the humanitarian values (historical, artistic, memorial and etc.), have a significant impact on everyday urban development and cause a wide range of dissonances between the political, economic, cultural and other objectives of various social groups. These gaps of expectations between different heritage communities<sup>1</sup> and the official heritage policy are traditionally denoted as a dissonant nature of the heritage. The concept of *dissonant heritage* has been popularized in 1990s by John Tunbridge and Gregory Ashworth as they stated that heritage is “a product of the present, purposefully developed in response to current needs or demands for it, and shaped by those requirements.”<sup>2</sup>

Selective use of the past for the different purposes determines the relativity of the inheritance process and creates a platform for the different interpretations that could potentially conflict with each other. As a consequence, the recognition of the heritage values during recent decades has undergone shifts in the content: “from elite to vernacular, from distant to recent past, from tangible to intangible heritage.”<sup>3</sup> One of the most important consequences of such constantly broadening understanding of value is “the abundance of heritage in our late modern world.”<sup>4</sup> This aspect is especially important when we speak about the heritage of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. An overwhelming number of these buildings affect many aspects of daily life. Therefore, the fundamental questions – “Who decides what the heritage is?” and “Why and for whom is the heritage created?”<sup>5</sup> – become very important when discussing the inheritance of more recent architectural legacy.

On the political level, the acknowledgement of the 20<sup>th</sup>-century-Europe “serves as a constant reminder” of the common European identity back in 1989.<sup>6</sup> After two decades, professionals much less doubt “obligation to conserve the heritage of the twentieth century is as important as our duty to conserve the significant heritage of previous eras.”<sup>7</sup> However, since the beginning of the process, aspirations to save most prominent architectural examples of the 20<sup>th</sup> century are not supported enough by the society: “average citizen ... develops an individual and often rejecting opinion regarding modern architecture with which he confronted daily.”<sup>8</sup> For example, until now, such architectural style of the 20<sup>th</sup> century as brutalism in a popular discourse is “most likely to be described as ‘ugly’, ‘unloved’, or even ‘hated.’”<sup>9</sup> Case of the Sports palace in Vilnius, value of which is highly debated, apparently approves this tendency. Therefore, one of the most evident conflicts in the protection processes of the contemporary cultural heritage is the lack of social agreement on values. This leads to the “conflict-ridden relationship between cultural meanings and the places and landscapes that embody, reflect and shape those meanings.”<sup>10</sup> More often though, in today’s discourse of heritage, the keywords “heritage” and “conflict” find themselves side by side when speaking about the heritage after conflicts,<sup>11</sup> legacies of occupations or regimes,<sup>12</sup> heritage as tool to express political conflict<sup>13</sup> and many other situations where interpretation of the monuments is problematic. Various forms of difficult legacy became an important topic in Lithuanian discourse as well. Although the process of rethinking different traumatic pasts in Lithuanian context is essential, this article aims to disclose conflicts in definition of the value in such cases where objects do not have clearly expressed dissonant past: for example, architectural legacy of the interwar period in Kaunas. Article suggests that in order to indicate bottlenecks of the protection of the contemporary cultural heritage, discussing different interpretations on values is necessity even when places are not controversial for their political connotations.

Therefore, the scope of the article is the conflicts of the heritage, not the heritage of conflicts. The

study tackles most problematic and conflict issues of setting the value using an example of downtown (*Naujamiestis*) urban area in Kaunas, where the heritage of the 19<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup> centuries dominates over the traditional monuments. The conflicts revealed in the research suggest the idea that complex territories including different cultural heritage sites need a different methodology of the value definition if to compare with single monuments. One of the main principles of this methodology is the diversification of values.

#### OFFICIAL DEFINITIONS OF VALUES OF THE IMMOVABLE HERITAGE IN KAUNAS DOWNTOWN AREA

In the urban area of downtown in Kaunas, we can indicate three levels of official interpretations on cultural value: Register of Cultural Property of Lithuania (*Kultūros vertybių registras*), European Heritage Label (EHL) and aspirations to be inscribed to the UNESCO World Heritage list. Looking from the everyday perspective, the most important document on the value is the official Register where all values of immovable cultural heritage are indicated. Each inscription in the Register, according to the principles of Lithuanian legislation, requires the Act of Valuable Features (*Vertingųjų savybių nustatymo aktas*) where all valuable elements of the site are indicated. In 2013, Cultural Heritage Assessment Board of Kaunas recognized this historical part of Kaunas as a site (in terms of the contemporary heritage discourse, it is an example of the Historic Urban Landscape) valuable for architectural, urban, historical, engineering, and landscape reasons.<sup>14</sup>

As it is seen from the graphical representation of the urban area of downtown in Kaunas, it is a territory with dense concentration of cultural heritage objects. Almost all of the valuable buildings in this territory can be categorized as recent heritage: 41,6% of the buildings date the interwar period (Fig. 1), 20,8% were built before the WWI, and 37,6% –after the WWII.<sup>15</sup> Consequently, the list of immovable cultural heritage includes not only traditional monuments, such as Church of the Holy Cross (Carmelitan) or the complex of Vytautas the Great War Museum and M. K. Čiurlionis National

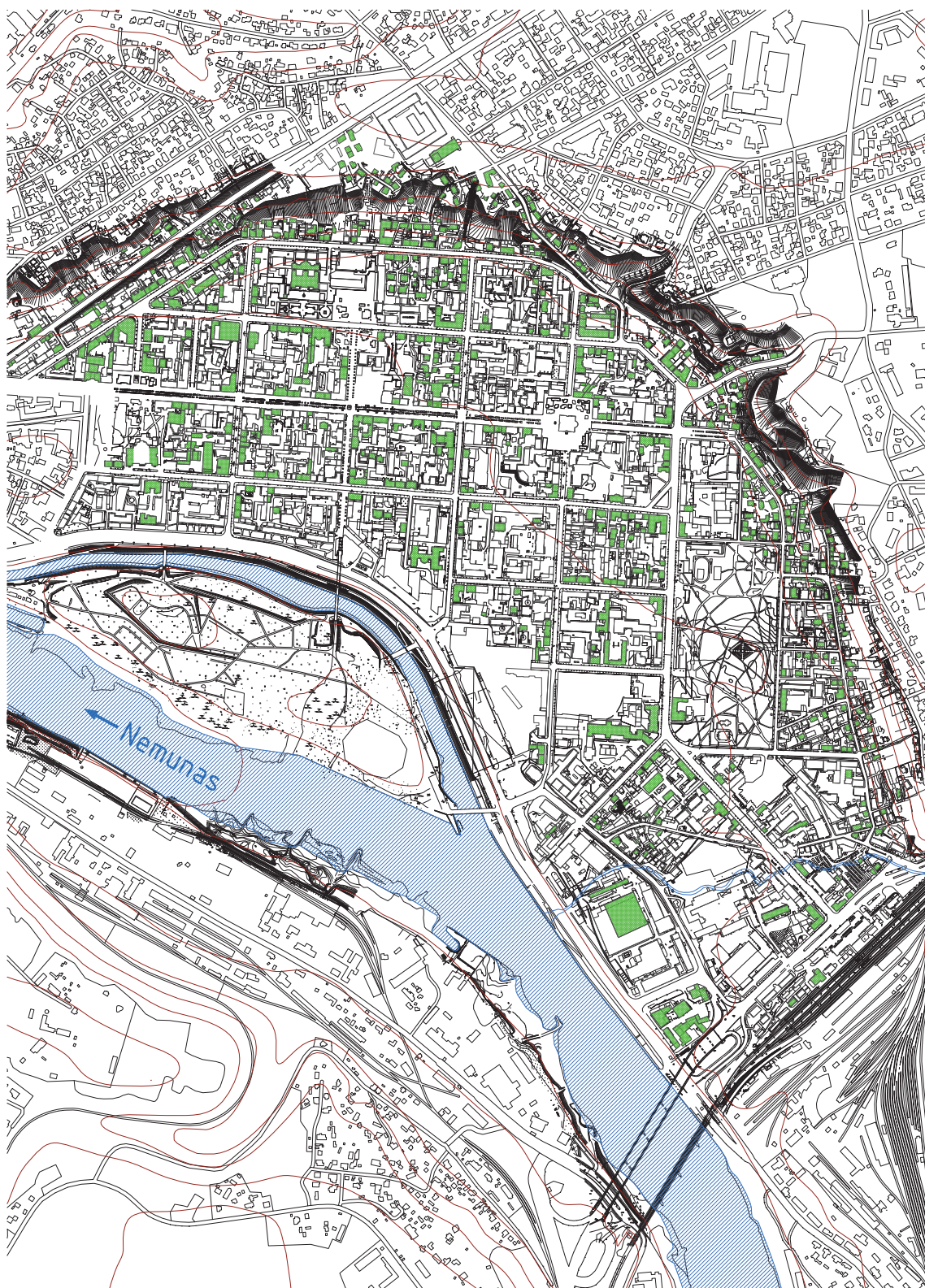


Fig. 1. Green colour indicates buildings from the interwar period in Kaunas downtown area. Map by Giedrius Bugenis. From the archive of Cultural Heritage Department of Kaunas city municipality

Museum of Art (Fig. 2) but also few hundred residential buildings (Fig. 3) and other sites of everyday infrastructure (buildings to serve as school, library, hospital, university, post office and etc.). Naturally

the questions about valuing become a major concern not only for professionals but also for the heritage community, and first of all, for the owners of the cultural heritage.



Fig. 2. Cultural heritage as a monument: Vytautas the Great War Museum and M. K. Čiurlionis National Art Museum. Architects Vladimiras Dubeneckis, Karolis Reisonas and Kazimieras Kriščiukaitis, built in 1936. From the personal collection of Antanas Burkus

The Act of Valuable Features indicates particularly valuable physical elements based on the criteria indicated in the official document of description of evaluation and selection of Immovable cultural property.<sup>1</sup> The purpose of the document is to objectivize the procedure of defining the value bringing such criteria as representativeness, importance, rarity or uniqueness of cultural heritage property. However, such methodology of the value definition cannot be comprehensive when considered as a tool for the value definition in an urban area. First of all, the “valuable elements are interpreted only in physical level.” The whole set of cultural and

mythological connotations are being ignored.<sup>1</sup> One the other hand, numbering the separate buildings as valuable elements of the urban territory does not give an overall strategy on, let’s say, how many representative sites of the interwar period are necessary to sustain the “spirit and feeling” or distinctiveness of the place. In other words, does all the housing of the interwar period have to be part of the list, or just a part of them?

Another important document – Special Plan (*Specialusis planas*) – is intended to give a more complex view on values. This document declares the architecture of the interwar period is among the top



Fig. 3. Residential houses listed as objects containing valuable features in Kaunas downtown area. Photo by V. Petrulis

priorities: “the priority is given for preservation of prevailing urban structure and valuable architecture, first of all, from interwar period.”<sup>21</sup> Such definition of the value rests on the ideals of the Venice Charter and aims to protect and preserve monuments and sites as unchanged as possible. In the areas where interwar architecture is dominant, “all the authentic buildings of the interwar period should be preserved: their volumes, architectural expression of the façades, materials, authentic elements of interior; because if we change even the smallest detail, all the authentic character of the territory will change.”<sup>21</sup> Therefore, the arguments for the value are more the perspective of a thorough identification of all possible valuable elements bringing into the fore such arguments as “territories of biggest concentration” and the method of preserving the authentic state.

Another important layer of value is the European Heritage Label which was awarded for “Kaunas of 1919–1940” on 15 April 2015. The main argument for this decision is that “Kaunas created an urban landscape exuberantly reflecting European interwar modernism and constituting today the outstanding heritage of a flourishing golden period.”<sup>22</sup> EHL is an

initiative by European Union designed to acknowledge historical and cultural significance of locations and events for the creation of Europe and the European Union. From the political side – or from the point of the heritage diplomacy – this is closely connected to the official position of the former President of the European Commission José Manuel Barroso who has claimed that culture is “the cement that binds Europe together.”<sup>22</sup> Thus, the key goal of the label is related to the communication, active creation of the content, and effort to draw focus on the forms of expression of the European identity. Or, if to be critical, to place heritage which is “affective and therefore effective strategy of using power.”<sup>22</sup> Unlike the UNESCO World Heritage sites, instead of the tangible authenticity, the label emphasises the ideological importance of certain phenomena and artefacts of Europe and its shaping. However, in case of Kaunas, despite the intangible intentions, the definition of European heritage label is related not only to historical event, such as the Constitution of 3 May 1791, but also with a tangible layer. 45 buildings have been selected to represent architectural legacy of the interwar period (Fig. 4). This is a wide range

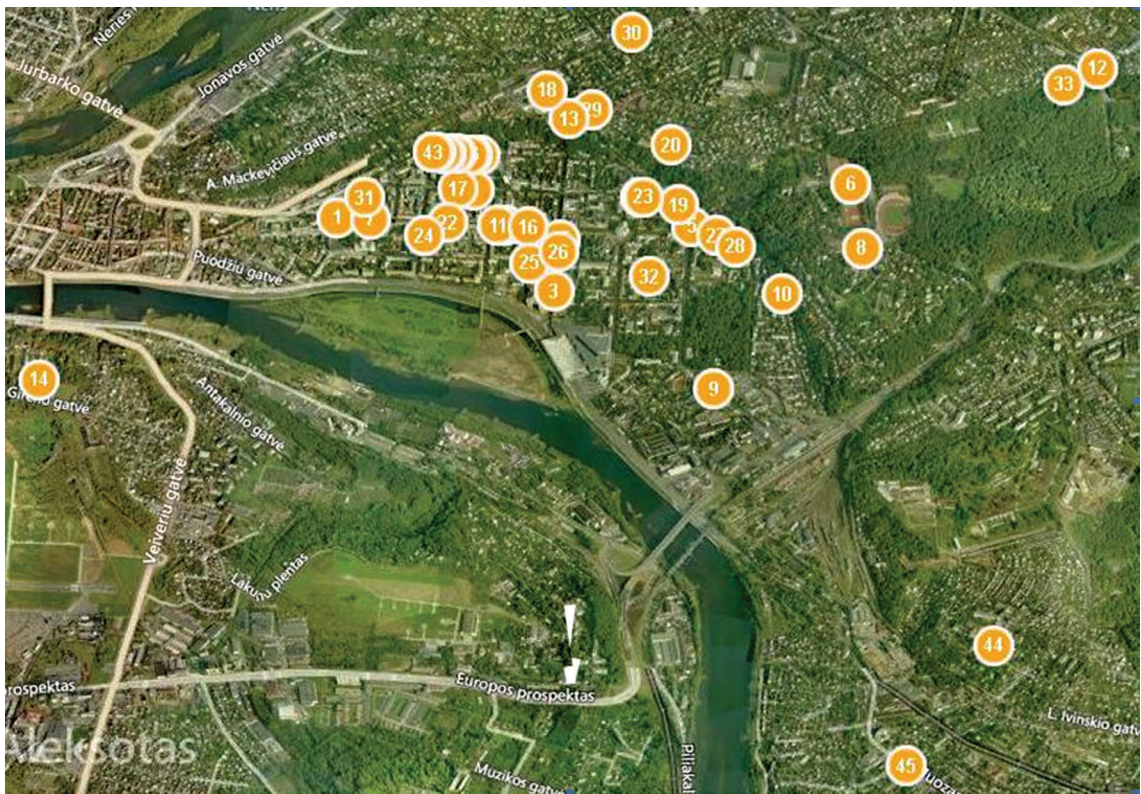


Fig. 4. Map of European Heritage label buildings in Kaunas. From the archive of Cultural Heritage Department of Kaunas city municipality



Fig. 5. Cinema “Romuva” as a European heritage label building. Architect Nikolajus Mačiulskis, built in 1940. Photo by V. Petruelis



Fig. 6. Residential housing as a European heritage label building. Architect Jonas Kriščiukaitis, built in 1932. Photo by V. Petruelis

of public (Fig. 5) and residential (Fig. 6) structures which illustrates all functional aspects of temporary capital as a phenomenon. It is interesting that 5 of 45 buildings listed in EHL are not on the national list of cultural properties yet. Not going into the discussion whether EHL plays a positive role in making an impact on expansion of national heritage list, it is evident that giving exact list of the buildings which carry this meaning of temporary capital implies the idea that these structures have to be protected on a physical level as well. In other words, they have to be a part of national list of immovable properties.

Nevertheless, the discussions can be further developed whether exact choices are the best, but in this article, it is important to indicate the arguments for the value definition. As it was mentioned, the status of EHL does not highlight the aspect of material authenticity. In other words, the intangible meaning of the “temporary capital” as a whole is more important. However, it must be admitted that arguments for selection of 45 buildings out of the very rich layer of the interwar period were not discussed from this perspective. The list rather represents traditional arguments of architectural value and authenticity than intangible aspects of Kaunas temporary capital.

Therefore, the status of EHL, which fosters a lot of positive shifts in the protection of Kaunas heritage, still has to be further discussed from the perspective of values. Not only on split between the tangible and intangible values but also on the importance of narrative in the process of denominating the value.

While analysing international perspectives on values in Kaunas downtown, the process of preparation for nominating Kaunas modernism as the UNESCO World Heritage site should be also mentioned. In 1994, the World Heritage Committee adopted Global Strategy for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention aiming “to broaden the definition of World Heritage to better reflect the full spectrum of our world’s cultural and natural treasures.”<sup>22</sup> Lithuania being one of the European countries does not share the destiny of underrepresented world. Four sites in Lithuania have been listed already. Therefore, the ambition to develop further seems rather questionable at first glance. However, the lack of the 20<sup>th</sup>-century buildings can be a chance for Kaunas to be a place which fills the gap of underrepresented heritage from recent times. Especially, if the application of Kaunas will be able to express its own specific definition of value and authenticity.

The initial purpose of this proposal is to highlight the fact that Modern architecture of Kaunas is a unique example of the tangible heritage, driven by the intangible aspirations of a young capital city. In contrast to radical schools of Modernism, Kaunas developed in a consistent and continuous way, gaining a form of aesthetic expression that was close to international Functionalism but still based on its unique local character. In contrast to international definitions, modernism of Kaunas can be characterised by its small scale and disparateness rather than clear functional zones; by the consistent development of the townscape rather than dramatic restructuring; by a local character rather than a clearly recognisable Bauhaus architectural look (Functionalism). As a result, the influences of national traditions, the human scale and close relations with the existing environment gradually formed the local school of Modernism, and made the city one of the earliest examples of regionalism in Modernism.

It should be known that universal language of UNESCO brings some new aspects to definition of value. First of all the concepts of outstanding universal value, authenticity and integrity becomes an important factor. As it is indicated in operational guidelines the “judgments about value attributed to cultural heritage, as well as the credibility of related information sources, may differ from culture to culture, and even within the same culture”<sup>24</sup>. It is very important to notice that this statement opens a possibility for a different discussion on valuating modern structures even within official language of UNESCO. Nevertheless “Operational Guidelines” warns that “such attributes as spirit and feeling do not lend themselves easily to practical applications”<sup>25</sup> – spirit and feeling of Kaunas downtown could also become a strategic point for further discussions on value of Kaunas interwar architecture. Therefore again we come to a conclusion that more precise discussions on relation of tangible and intangible values have to be performed.

#### CONFLICTS IN THE PROCESS OF VALUE DEFINITION

While discussing the official notions on values of immovable heritage, one of the most usual

confrontations are the differences between “top-down” and “bottom-up” approaches. This dimension can be explained not only as a traditional conflict of heritage community and the state but also from the perspective of globalization: “the issue of preservation and heritage has called into question restoration practices in terms of what these practices do to maintain certain narratives, primarily those surrounding nation-building practices, economic development and universalizing notions of Euro-American values, as can be understood from within such concepts and institutions as UNESCO World Heritage sites.”<sup>26</sup> Giving up with spiritual practices in Angkor War, in the name of the international tourism industry, is considered as a characteristic example of the process. Globalization in this context means a “conflict over the very meaning of heritage between the local community and the local or national authorities who wished to promote tourism, often at the expense of the former.”<sup>27</sup>

The concept of “outstanding universal value” used by UNESCO can also become the target of criticism. Pressure on searching for the universal values promotes the idea about heritage as a universal language which can be legitimized, perceived and discussed regardless of the incredible complexity of the heritage itself and regardless of the diversity of perceivers, i.e. ignoring “differences in socioeconomic status, geographical origin or cultural frame of reference.”<sup>28</sup> Recent movements in European Union towards the search of European cultural heritage which “constitute a shared source of remembrance, understanding, identity, dialogue, cohesion and creativity for Europe”<sup>29</sup> might also generate this kind of conflict on value definition. Looking from this perspective, it is evident that the “European idea of cultural heritage and monuments was developed as an instrument in the context of Western nation building, and it does not necessarily work in the same way outside the context in which it was developed.”<sup>30</sup> The political task of the nomination is more about “European place-identity to complement, if not replace, national identities.”<sup>31</sup> National constructions of the past can obviously differ from European objectives.

Among the most genuine sources of conflicts in the heritage field, the conflict between the state as institution and everyday needs of society can also be

accentuated. As early as in 1931, these issues were tackled in Athens conference recognizing the “difficulty of reconciling public law with the rights of individuals.” Although it was recommended “that the public authorities in each country be empowered to take conservatory measures in cases of emergency”, the importance of debates was stressed. “They should be in keeping with local circumstances and with the trend of public opinion, so that the least possible opposition may be encountered, due allowance being made for the sacrifices which the owners of property may be called upon to make in the general interest”<sup>32</sup> – it was stated in the Charter of Athens.

Problems of the economic nature seem to be the most important issue where the owners get different approaches compared to the state. This is widely discussed topic in the cultural heritage theory. However, in the context of this paper, it is more important to pay attention to the conflict between the public and private sector as it can also appear on the level of value interpretation. As it was noticed by Gabi Dolff-Bonekämper, “the driving force behind the actions of the *dramatis personae* is the wish to be the sole owner of inherited property and not to share with siblings or others.”<sup>33</sup> Such position contradicts the ultimate statement that cultural heritage belongs to the society. Lithuanian law for the protection of an immovable cultural heritage also indicates accessibility as a decisive factor. However, accessibility also means openness for interpretation of value which causes a conflict between the owner’s “wish to dominate the interpretation and to determine the meaning of cultural heritage”<sup>34</sup> and official descriptions of the value.

Such a gap between the official and private treatment of value in case of Kaunas appears as one of the major concerns. There are many cases when owners are hostile to any requirements for preservation of the heritage. Although such hostility is also visible in public debates, different approaches to value gain a particular importance at the operational level. Assessment Boards of Immovable Cultural Heritage often receives questions why one or another property has a value and rejects any official explanations if they interfere with practical needs of the owner. The fundamental danger is that owners are intended to reject any value in favour of freedom of their decisions.

However, this article develops a premise that such conflict has to be explained as more complex than just economic pragmatism (mechanisms of financial compensation exist after all). As it was already mentioned, the process of valuing is very relativistic and “different generations and highly diverse social groups repeatedly appropriate heritage to define their own identity.”<sup>35</sup> Such dynamism of value attribution suggests that the relation between official and private spheres can be managed.

The purpose of cultural heritage, as it is indicated in Lithuanian law of immovable heritage, is to maintain “cultural value and social importance.”<sup>36</sup> Therefore, the main task is community engagement in the process of identifying and, most important, maintaining the values based on sociocultural aspirations. In other words, the aim is to evoke the “desire by local people to gather around a joint project to do some meaningful work together. In this context, the local understanding of cultural heritage becomes a social process rather than a physical object to be preserved.”<sup>37</sup> Contemporary theory on integration of values and social needs suggests the concept of culture based development. As it was proposed by Annie Tubadji, culture based development can be described as the “existence of a mechanism through which: the total stock of material and immaterial cultural goods at a locality in a particular point of time has the potential to exercise a significant impact on local socio-economic development.”<sup>38</sup> One of the preconditions to foster this process is to ensure a vibrant relation between local cultural milieu and social potential of the place. “In the course of history, places have developed different immaterial and material local culture and unique forms of cultural heritage and living culture.”<sup>39</sup> Therefore, the social environment is among the decisive instruments to create distinctive character of the place.

Abrupt changes leave the physical surface of the place without any social rationale to continue this process. Kaunas is a convincing example of such situation. All the social preconditions of interwar period have been changed during the soviet period. Therefore, the main obstacle to achieve a positive effect is not only simple lack of investment. Social and cultural ties of community and its living environment are equally important. According to some



researches, these circumstances even caused “revolutionary changes of the genotype of the investigated area despite the fact that the street network and urban morphotype did not change much.”<sup>4</sup> Therefore, the main task is to perform deeper research of possibilities of culture based development taking into account that “predominant living culture and cultural openness are associated with positive effects on local development.”<sup>4</sup> Although community involvement is one of the most widely discussed topics in today’s heritage protection, in case of Kaunas downtown, there is no thorough, systematic analysis of heritage community involvement in defining values in downtown of Kaunas. At least the documents indicating values (Special plan or Act of valuable features) do not indicate such. Even if the community involvement process is very complicated, the paper suggests that in Kaunas, mapping of those different values and concerns could be the first step in this process.

The starting point in considering granting tactics for the potential heritage could be the concept of the future of heritage protection in Europe proposed by Prof. Maria Gravari-Barbas: “there are two possible scenarios for Europe: to become a theme park (not wanted) or a heritage laboratory (for which global expertise is needed).”<sup>42</sup> By accepting such condition, we could formulate a task to create an individual – maybe even experimental – strategy encompassing the unique features of the Kaunas architecture as well as expectations for a modern city. The tactics of preservation and integration of this heritage into the developing city should be based not on standard procedures of identification of valuable elements and their mechanical transplantation into the conservation system but on a holistic model connected to the development of a specific city aiming to implement heritage as “opportunities for socio-economic development, such as the development of tourism, recreation, leisure and other kinds of cultural activities in the post-industrial city and/or region.”<sup>4</sup>

## CONCLUSIONS

Research on the urban area of downtown in Kaunas suggests that the dissonant nature of the heritage can be understood not only as ideological conflicts

between the different heritage communities or economic conflicts between owner and state. An incompatibility between different official approaches towards value definition can also appear as an important indicator of the dissonant nature of the heritage. For example, Lithuanian National cultural heritage list is based on physical elements while European Heritage Label concerns more about intangible aspects of the place. Such dissonances indicate the necessity to rethink strategies of value definition. For example, official value definition in Lithuanian legislation system, besides the existing criteria of representativeness, importance, rarity and uniqueness, could include additional criteria of *distinctiveness* which would be implemented as a tool to represent such immaterial (intangible) aspects of the heritage site as spirit and feeling.

It is also important to indicate that complex urban territories with dominant layer of an immovable heritage from 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries bring dissonances in understanding the value of the heritage not only from the perspective of definition (i.e. emphasis on tangible or intangible). It opens up a discussion on different expectations by different stakeholders (state, owners and etc.). Therefore, identification of valuable elements has to demonstrate holistic approach not only aiming to grasp architectural or historic richness of the site but also to correspond with contemporary sociocultural needs.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> *Heritage community* consists of people who value specific aspects of cultural heritage which they wish, within the framework of public action, to sustain and transmit to future generations. In: *Council of Europe Framework Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society*, Faro, 2005. Internet access: <https://rm.coe.int/CoERMPublicCommonSearchServices/DisplayDCTMContent?docu mentId=0900001680083746>

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**Vaidas PETRULIS**

*Kauno technologijos universitetas, Kaunas, Lietuva*

## PAVELDO KONFLIKTAI: NEKILNOJAMOJO KULTŪROS PAVELDO VERČIŲ IDENTIFIKAVIMAS KAUNO NAUJAMIESTYJE

### Santrauka

Straipsnyje aptariamos Kauno naujamiesčio nekilnojamojo paveldo verčių nustatymo aktualijos. Šiame urbanistiniame kraštovaizdyje susiduria keli oficialiųjų verčių lygmenys. Urbanistinė teritorija ir jos vertingosios savybės yra Lietuvos respublikos nekilnojamojo kultūros paveldo sąrašo dalimi. Tačiau teritorijoje taip pat yra 45 pastatai pažymėti Europos paveldo ženklu. Taip pat esama aspiracijų Kauno moderniąją architektūrą įrašyti į UNESCO Pasaulio paveldo sąrašą. Pagrindinis straipsnio tikslas pristatyti kaip šie oficialieji verčių lygmenys siejasi su vietos paveldo bendruomenės lūkesčiais. Akademinuose ir doktrininuose paveldosaugos tekstuose yra plačiai pripažinta, kad optimalus vertės nustatymo procesas turėtų įraukti ir paveldo bendruomenę. Tai tampa ypač svarbu kuomet dėmesio centre atsideria naujasis, XX a. paveldas. Didelė šių kultūros vertybėmis paskelbtų pastatų dalis yra betarpiškai susijusi su kasdienėmis paveldo bendruomenių veiklomis. Tekste palyginus kai kuriuos paveldo vertės apibrėžimo mechanizmus konstatuojama, kad tokiose kompleksinėse vietovėse kaip Kauno Naujamiestis bet kokie verčių nustatymo procesai turi remtis tyrimais. Sudėtinė tokių tyrimų dalis turi būti išsamus verčių žemėlapis apjungiantis oficialiuosius ir paveldo bendruomenių lūkesčius.

**Reikšminiai žodžiai:** Kauno naujamiestis, disonuojantis paveldas, paveldo konfliktai, vertės

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VAIDAS PETRULIS

Humanitarinių mokslų daktaras, Kauno technologijos universiteto

Architektūros ir statybos instituto vyriausiasis mokslo darbuotojas

Ph. D. in Humanities, senior researcher at the Institute of Architecture and Construction,

Kaunas University of Technology

Adresas / Address: Tunelio str. 60, LT-44405, Kaunas, Lithuania

El. paštas / E-mail: [vaidas.petrulis@ktu.lt](mailto:vaidas.petrulis@ktu.lt)