

Changes of approach to urban context in international guidelines and experiences in Lithuanian urban environment

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Abstract. The focus of the research is the concept of context, guidelines for the approach to it, and the ways by which it was regarded in the development of urban environment. The paper defines how these approaches and practices changed during the last century. During the last century, an especially dynamic and turbulent one, Lithuanian state experienced divergent and controversial periods: independence (1918–1940), World War II (1939–1945), Soviet period (1944–1990) and independence restored (1990–present). The paper discusses the Western attitudes and the evolution of approach towards context while dealing with urban environment, and peculiarities of Lithuanian practice in conformity with these attitudes during last century.

The theoretic investigation is grounded by the documents formulated and declared by international organisations like CIAM, UNESCO, ICOMOS and others, as accumulations of pioneering thought. Particularly, their statements that consider the surrounding context as basis, principle, or inspiration for the creating, transforming or reconstructing the urban environment are analysed. The term context is used as a generalising term, an umbrella one, which covers several terms used in the documents or literature to define closer or wider urban environment while dealing with it. The paper focuses mostly on historical urban situations, and wide range of activities in changing the environment from architect or landscape architect's professional point of view.

The theoretic analysis is followed by the critical review of certain experiences in Lithuanian practice at that time, in characteristic redevelopment of spaces in the main cities (state capitals). The identified evolution reveals the expansion of the concept of urban context and growing regard for it both in theory and in practice. The evolution of contextual approach in Lithuanian practice follows the guidelines stated in documents of international organisations in spite of its political situation, but the research discloses its certain peculiarities.

Keywords: context, contextual approach, Congrès internationaux d'architecture moderne (CIAM), UNESCO documents, ICOMOS documents, historic urban landscape

Introduction

During the last century, urban landscape experienced extreme quantitative changes towards massive new developments. Qualitative aspects of progressive development trends point to even bigger issues as the legacy of last century features the decline of cultural significance with its deeper values, social inclusion, rootedness, and communicative qualities. The extent of urban transformation is incredible when progressive modernity is compared with meaningful cultural patterns and living tradition of pre-modern city. Although until the advent of modernity, the historic cities were never 'historic' and preserved in modern sense, they featured balanced inherent evolution following the traditional patterns without substantial transformations [1]. The dramatic gap of development of urban landscape comparing the cultural evolution processes of traditional societies and accelerated modern urban development brings forth the question of dealing with inherited urban context while bringing to life new objects of any type and any scale. The approach to existing context is the sharper question as the bigger difference in physical parameters, social patterns and semantic meanings occurs between a new element and the inherited environment.

The paper deepens into the attitudes of an architect or a landscape architect towards existing context while designing a new urban element. During the last century the understanding what context is, how much it is important, what aspects of context should be taken into account while dealing with the inherited situations, was constantly changing. The paper aims to define the concept of context, the guidelines for the approach to it, and the extent and ways by which it was regarded in the new developments in certain chronological periods. The evolution how these approaches and practices changed during the last century is described. The theoretic investigation is grounded by the statements and documents formulated and declared by international organisations like CIAM, ICOMOS, and UNESCO, as these manifestos are considered as the leading and guiding international contemporary thought. The paper deepens into particular statements of these documents that define or explain the reasons for the notion of context of that time with its certain significance and extent and point to ignoring or encouraging the consideration of the context as basis, principle, or precondition for the creating, transforming or reconstructing the urban landscape.

The period investigated is approximately the last century. If defined precisely, it covers period 1918–2018 and it remarkably matches with the centennial anniversary when Finland, Estonia, Lithuania, Poland and Latvia regained their independence in 1918, and with the topic this particular issue of the journal commemorates as well. Although we are not framing the territorial scope of the progressive theoretic thought stated in documents by international organisations mentioned above, the critical review of certain examples of practice, that follows theoretic investigation, focuses on the cases that are located in Lithuania, in its main cities: capital Vilnius and temporary capital Kaunas (1920–1939). The selected cases of redevelopment of built and open spaces reflect the approaches to context in practice, characteristic for that time.

The problem of dealing with context is the most relevant in introducing new elements into urban landscapes saturated with cultural imprints. Thus, the paper focuses mostly on historical urban situations, and wide range of activities in changing the environment in architectural or landscape architecture terms, as “architecture always creates, re-creates and destroys all at the same time” [2, 46].

Last century faced immense changes in paradigms in the fields of architecture, landscape architecture, heritage preservation, and urban development. Consequently, the notions, definitions, and extent of context as the surrounding environment that interacts with a new urban element were shifting. Talking about urban context, we use the term context as a generalising term, an umbrella one, which covers terms used in the documents or literature to define closer or wider environment and that bear certain meanings of that time: setting, surroundings, environment, cultural landscape, urban historical site, place, historic urban landscape, etc. Rephrasing the definitions in the key dictionaries, context is situation within which space or object exists and in terms of which it is perceived¹. The notion of context covers several layers: natural landscape and climatic circumstances; man-made built environment like urban pattern, spaces, buildings; social activities and experiences; cultural meanings and spirit of place. It took several decades for modern society to disclose these layers.

The apparent shift of architectural concept: from CIAM to Team X

The 19th century society have oscillated between the extremes of totally planned and industrialised utopias and the denial of the reality of machine production [3]. Such fluctuation is reflected in the theoretical works of C.-N. Ledoux, E.-E. Viollet-le-Duc, A. W. N. Pugin, J. Ruskin, W. Morris, E. Howard, G. Semper, C. Sitte, O. Wagner, A. Loos and others. The architectural practice in 19th century used a lot of neo-styles, and the circle of imitations had expanded to include the whole domain of architectural history [4]. After 1850, this eclectic architectural culture favoured an intermingling of styles in all the European countries. It led to changes in the styles of the turn of the 20th century, when the architecture searched for new ways instead of using historical architectural elements or motifs. The new materials, developing new technologies and emerging new functions required corresponding forms and decisions.

According to K. Frampton, the history of modern architecture is as much about consciousness and polemical intent as it is about buildings themselves [3], so it is essential to observe in this chapter the deliberately formulated theoretical insights on architecture at that time and search for the articulation of conceptual context of architecture.

The internationally influential organisation *Congrès internationaux d'architecture moderne* (CIAM, established in 1928) had set the ambitious targets to formulate the contemporary program of architecture, to advocate the idea of modern architecture. These objectives allow grasping the contextual inclination towards technology, economy and society and “defined new socially transformative roles for architects and architecture, by convincing that architecture should serve the many and not the few” [5].

CIAM's *La Sarraz Declaration* (1928) [6] is the manifest for the totally new concept of architecture where architects have great professional obligations towards society. The thesis “architecture can spring only from the present time” and must “satisfy the spiritual, intellectual, and material demands of present-day life” testified the complete focus on the current person needs and implicated the strict rejection of the former achievements and celebrated distancing from tradition. Architectural phenomenon at that time was tightly inter-linked with and dependent on “the economic order and of social life”. Such understanding pointed to yet unfamiliar architectural context, that can be characterised by terms of economic system, economic efficiency, rationalisation, standardisation, simplification, reduction, industrial technology. The focus was made on town planning “as the organisation of collective life”, that is conditioned by “functional order”, but not by “the claims of pre-existent aestheticism”.

¹ Definitions of ‘context’: the situation within which something exists or happens, and that can help explain it in Cambridge Dictionary: <https://dictionary.cambridge.org>; the circumstances that form the setting for an event, statement, or idea, and in terms of which it can be fully understood in Oxford Dictionary: en.oxforddictionaries.com

This CIAM very first declaration has formulated the completely different architectural context, expressed through the urban planning and functional order, by highlighting the economic and social aspects and totally denying the previous importance of tradition and aesthetic ("architecture must be set free from ././ preserving the formulas of the past").

The Athens Charter for the Restoration of Historic Monuments (1931) can be seen as the reaction to the statements of the *La Sarraz Declaration* and like a certain counterbalance to its revolutionary approach [7]. This Charter obviously represents the attitude of that time towards safeguarding the architecture: "the historic and artistic work of the past should be respected, without excluding the style of any given period". The charter focused on the preserving the historical architectural masterpieces and insisted to respect the character of "the neighbourhood of ancient monuments". The charter expressed the passive attitude of architectural creativity when new erection must be visually consistent with historic surroundings ("certain particularly picturesque perspective treatment should be preserved").

As D. Rodwell [8] aptly have noticed, the two opposite architectural approaches were identified in two documents of similar time and similar titles: *The Athens Charter for the Restoration of Historic Monuments* (1931) represents the conservation and CIAM *The Athens Charter* (1933) [9] promotes the modern movement. The latter document (composed by Corbusier and published in 1943) keeps the spirit of the *La Sarraz declaration*. It mainly deals with the concept of "Functional City". The modern movement conceptual context was understood as urbanism with domination of economic, social and political indicators. The function of dwelling was emphasised beside the working, leisure and circulation. In general, architect's activities were aimed there at the creation of a healthy human environment and his main creative elements were "three raw materials: sun, vegetation and space".

As the inevitable response to the conservational approach, CIAM *The Athens Charter* (1933) admits that "witnesses of the past should be respected due to their historical, sentimental and artistic value", but pointed out the strict condition: "if their preservation does not entail the sacrifice of keeping people in unhealthy conditions". CIAM *The Athens Charter* rejected "any narrow-minded cult of the past", denied "the cult of picturesque and the historical", and didn't tolerated the "practice of using styles of the past on aesthetic pretexts for new structures erected in historic areas".

In general, CIAM *The Athens Charter* gave priority to creating healthy physical environment

that satisfies the needs of a person and encouraged new architecture in respect to social environment and economy. The architectural context excluded the tradition, the history achievements, the aesthetic and visual concern; only the today's conditions, opportunities and needs are relevant. Heritage can exist autonomously as a museum object, without its authentic environment, and only if it does not interfere with the welfare of the community.

The World War II had changed the balance of the architecture; the industrial revolution had increased because of war industry. Consequently, the new building techniques, new materials, new usages of materials and new methods for structuring came to light [10]. The ideas of CIAM *The Athens Charter* were influential during the period after WWII as it was reaffirmed at the CIAM VI conference in 1947 [11]. The novelty of "Reaffirmation" was the manifested return of architecture to the realm of art and the necessity to "enrich the aesthetic language of architecture" for better compliance to human emotional needs.

After WWII the CIAM ideas had triumphed, the concept of "Functional City" seemed to solve many housing problems all over the world. However, in the 1950s the "new architecture" form and planning came under the severe criticism. The rationalism and technological standardisation produced intolerable uniformity and monotony, and formed inhumane environment. CIAM VIII conference in 1951 considered the societal, historical, and cultural problems that modern movement have confronted.

At CIAM IX conference in Aix-en-Provence in 1953, the problem of the identification with urban environment was discussed [12]. This caused a radical shift in the modern movement's conception of dwelling understood as "maschine for living" to the concept of "habitat" as encompassing patterns of living and dwelling in all of their complexity.

The CIAM X conference (1956) was the breaking point of CIAM and the emergence of Team X [13]. The new ideas included the introduction of human and social sciences in design, the concepts of culture, history, and regionalism inclusion in the discipline and practice of architecture. The participation of users in design process was the original idea. The oversimplification of architecture was rejected and complexity and contradiction in built environment was promoted.

As it was aptly observed by Baghdadi [14], the second half of the 20th century is comparable to the Renaissance. It represents the major shift of architectural paradigm towards systemic approach. Architecture, being closely related to economy and having the commitment for the society now in its conceptual context have recovered the artistic category and included the aesthetic requirement.



Fig. 1. Vokiečių avenue in Vilnius Old Town, 2018.



Fig. 2. The secondary school in Vilnius Old Town, built in 1964,
now Salomėja Nėris gymnasium, 2018.

As a certain revival of architecture can be perceived the extension of its context by incorporating historical and cultural concepts.

The change of reduced architecture conceptual context to the wide and multifaceted context didn't happen naturally. Originally, it was rejected by supporters of modern movement, then legitimised over time in the 1960s and accepted by the architectural community since 1970s.

During interwar period Lithuania have gained Independence and started creating the national state. The architectural concept at that time followed the tradition of the 19th century, but in the fourth decade of the 20th century the modest applications of the modern movement can be seen in Lithuanian architecture.

The ideas of CIAM was very influential in Lithuania after the WWII, when there was a great need to rebuild the ruined cities. Lithuania was occupied by Soviets and the ignorance of historical context can be perceived as an ideological proposition. The redevelopment of Vokiečių avenue in Vilnius Old Town, that was erected instead of the ruined historic blocks, can be the example of such approach (Fig. 1). The design of apartment buildings (1953-1955) was made by architects from Petersburg L. Anikina and L. Kazarinsky. The reconstruction task (1948) was to create the most favourable cultural, household and sanitary-hygienic conditions for the population. The space of demolished quarters was expected to use for new

streets and squares, for the maximum afforestation of the city, and for improvement of transport conditions [15]. These objectives correspond to the ideas of "Functional City" declared in *The Athens Charter*. The new avenue was planned about ten times wider than previously was (from 4 to 35 meters). The new structure ignores the former environmental character, claims the rational principles of straight lines, large spaces and masses. One side of the street was formed of the 4-story buildings of pseudo-classical architecture (stalinistic architecture style). This public space was formed in 1959 and violated the existing spatial structure of old Vilnius by introducing the attributes of modern socialistic city. The secondary school, as the extension of the avenue was built in 1964 by the project of architect L. Kazarinsky (Fig. 2). The modernistic architecture stands out of the historical architectural environment, but makes it possible to exhibit the baroque church, like a piece of art (like in the museum). Such a spatial solution meets the CIAM's heritage provisions to preserve the object, but to ignore the environment of the protected item.

Context as physical built environment perceived visually in 1960-1970s

Talking further about the change of mind in approach to context as the base and support for the design of a new urban element introduced into inherited environment, there was a great push forward in the beginning of 1960s, when international legal regulation by the UNESCO (The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, founded in 1945), ICOMOS (The International Council on Monuments and Sites, founded in 1965) and other international organisations started. Since identifying the problems faced, the legal documents adopted by these organisations declared the progressive statements on principles, policies, and guidelines for issues of the greatest relevance at that time. And the most relevant issue concerning urban environment at that time was the conservation of its valuable elements. International doctrine towards urban environment and its safeguarding, maintenance and management in the initial legal regulation by the UNESCO and ICOMOS organisations explains the reasons for the specifics of that period in dealing with context.

In the international doctrine of that time, urban territory was considered in a fragmentary way, from the points of view of relevant fields. Symptomatically, the first two documents adopted in the beginning of 1960s, that concern safeguarding of urban landscape, reflect two different approaches based on landscape and architectural disciplinary fields, and each one pick out their object of interest in urban territories. *Recommendation concerning the*



Fig. 3. The apartment building in Vilnius, in Pilies Str., built in 1979, 2018.

safeguarding of the beauty and character of landscapes and sites focuses on the protection of “natural, rural and urban landscapes and sites, whether natural or man-made, which have a cultural or aesthetic interest” [16]. *The Venice charter-1964* talks about historic monuments and sites, and its focus is on architectural monuments of exceptional aesthetic and historic value within “the urban or rural setting in which is found” [17]. It should be emphasized, that in these documents and the next ones adopted by UNESCO and ICOMOS in the following decade that talk about urban territories, like *Resolutions of the Symposium on the introduction of contemporary architecture into ancient groups of buildings* and *Recommendation concerning the Safeguarding and Contemporary Role of Historic Areas*, the second approach concerning architectural monuments was elaborated much more than the first one concerning landscapes, and than the urban outlook as well [18; 19]. International doctrine of that time was “mainly focused on architecture, even when related to historic urban areas (...). What we are missing here are the notions that would make an urban area *urban* beyond architecture (if possible)” [20; 23]. The other important point here is the fact that the valuable urban (in the point of view of that time – architectural) environment was treated reduced up to the tangible elements that constitute it, its “significance was universally assumed to reside on material form” [21, 56]. The physical built environment is the central issue in urban territories; it excludes movable forms and non-material expressions [22]. As the protection of urban environment (at that time – mainly architectural one) was focused on the tangible dimension of cultural heritage assets, its management was mostly defined by an intolerance to change [23, 245], where urban landscape of artistic and historical value was looked on as a picturesque and static view.

The approach towards context prevailing in 1960–1970s is explained by the key attitudes

expressed in documents by UNESCO and ICOMOS international organisations. In valuating urban landscape, and consequently, in treating urban environment as the context for introducing changes, the architectural segment of urban environment was prioritized above the landscape and the urban segments; the focus was on the material aspects of the built environment; and significant urban spaces were managed by freezing them as static pictures. The perception of urban spaces, in the treatment by professionals like architects or landscape architects, was of limited scope, relying on human senses, and especially on visual perception; “if some aspect of the built environment cannot be directly perceived, then it simply does not exist” [24, 4]. Fragmented extent of urban environment was calling for the regard for context based only on visual perception and architectural compatibility while introducing a new urban element into an existing environment [25]. Any new element in a inherited urban environment was judged mainly by visual compatibility. This approach was predominating in professional literature of that time, too, for example, in the book *Architecture in Context: fitting new buildings with old* the main emphasis is put on visual integration, aesthetic compatibility, and visual continuity [26].

Although Lithuania was part of Soviet Union in period 1944–1990, the attitudes towards the relationship to the context in architecture in historic environment was in parallel to international guidelines. The apartment building with shops on the ground floor in Vilnius, in Pilies Str. 23, that was designed in 1970 (architect A. Lukšas) and built in 1979, is a distinct representative of the positions of that time (Fig. 3). The building is located in the very centre of Vilnius Old Town, in the part of the territory bombed and burnt during the WWII, in the place of pre-existent buildings finally demolished in 1957 [15]. As well as the newly established public space beside it, the layout of building does not follow previous urban structure and its possession grid. The building sets much larger urban scale with its massive volume and regular geometry. In order to achieve a better visual integration, its volume is divided vertically into segments. Also, the building is divided into three horizontal parts by introducing ground floor gallery and elements of mansard roof on the top. These architectural solutions make its scale smaller and provide ‘a kind of historic’ image that helps to integrate the building visually into the streetscape. But if we consider that visual compatibility is not enough, and if we go deeper into the design of the building as an integral part of Vilnius Old Town, besides urban discrepancies, we can find architectural ones, too: the ground floor galleries and mansard roof are not characteristic to historic Vilnius Old Town architecture; mansard

roof is fake – it's a building with flat roof and vertical exterior walls with decorative element of mansard roof attached. In the point of view of that time, urban and architectural discrepancies were outside of the matter of interest, as the main goal – the visual integration into existing architectural environment – was achieved.

Context as dynamic and people-centred cultural landscape in 1980-1990s

The 1980s brought landscape, urban and human dimensions into the scope of urban heritage by upscaling the attributes from single object to landscape. Regarding the historic urban heritage, *Washington Charter 1987* stated that it comprises “the natural and the built environment and the everyday living experience of their dwellers as well”. The Charter added urban attributes (urban patterns, relationships between buildings and green and open spaces, the formal appearance of buildings, the relationship between urban area and its setting) and human experience (everyday living experience, functions, spiritual elements) [27] to understanding, what historic urban heritage is, as a valuable entity, and as the context for new elements introduced to it. The guidelines for managing a dynamic process in a heritage place whose character was defined by living organisms, instead of preservation of historic fabric, for the first time was set in *ICOMOS Florence Charter* for the conservation of historic gardens [22, 57].

Nevertheless, the fundamental push forward in this period was made by influential regional document *The Burra Charter* [28] that continues to hold international importance due to its global recognition [23, 250], and also by regional documents adopted later by the national committees of ICOMOS from Canada, Mexico, Brasilia, New Zealand. These societies are the New World societies with a need to adapt to multiculturalism, as they all result from invasion of territories previously controlled by what have become indigenous minority groups [29, 4]. As an opposition to prevailing Euro-American tradition in conservation based on fabric-centred approach, authenticity, and maintaining existing structures according principle of minimum intervention, the ‘periphery’ documents used the term *place* with its full scope, instead of *monument* and *site* [24; 29]. These documents brought multidisciplinary people-centred [24] and landscape-based [23] approach, turned the management of valuable places to dynamic process instead of freezing the static situation, and put the priority on the safeguarding of people identity, the cultural meanings and associations inscribed in heritage sites: “in certain types of heritage sites, such as cultural landscapes, the conservation of overall character and traditions, such as patterns, forms and

spiritual value, may be more important than the conservation of the physical features of the site, and as such, may take precedence” [30]. The role of intangible attributes like uses and traditional activities, meanings and spiritual associations sprouts up towards the same importance as material fabric.

The concept of cultural landscapes as a system of interaction between human activity and natural habitat that focuses on dynamic cultural processes was elaborated. In the light of cultural landscape, urban landscape was treated as a social construct [23, 255], that “is permanently undergoing a dynamic process of successive transformations” [20]. The emerging landscape-based approach in management of urban heritage territories gave priority to social practices and cultural processes. In cases of further urban changes, this approach called for the interpretation of character and traditions of setting and context, and for the regard for intangible elements beside physical ones, like memories and meanings. Landscape-based approach called for more than visual and compositional compatibility in transformations of a place, and the readiness for more careful and elaborated regard to the context appeared [25]. The emphasis was put on the safeguarding of the historic character of the urban territory and reflecting it in new activities [27]. The character, according to influential thinker of that time Chr. Norberg-Schulz, describes the very nature of locality; it denotes a general comprehensive atmosphere answering to the question how one feels in a certain place [31]. Phenomenological discourse brought more experiential issues into understanding what context is, like spirit of place, sense of place and place attachment that deal with the emotional bond with a place. In practice, this set of mind helped to avoid new elements that are visually compatible, but not characteristic for the particular place. One should admit that the regard for the character of a context in design of new interventions could result in a different quality, ranging from ‘rooted’ relationship based on consistent reflection of place’s qualities, to superficial imitation, pastiche of appearance of neighbourhood. Anyway, it was understood that the quality of integration of a new element into place depended on the knowledge of a peculiar place and ability to reflect it. More categories were added for integration of new elements into an urban heritage territories: reflection of character that embraces qualities of buildings, spaces, functions and social diversity; continuity of traditional building materials, technology and crafts; and reflection of social experience, memories and meanings.

The attitudes of that time can be recognized in the complex relationship of the building of the Ministry of National Defence in Šv. Ignoto Str.



Fig. 4. The building of the Ministry of National Defence in Vilnius, Šv. Ignoto Str., built in 1997, 2018.



Fig. 5. Sculpture Sisters in the Lazdynų Peledos public square in Vilnius Old Town, arranged in 1995, 2018.

in Vilnius (architect N. E. Bučiūtė) to its place (Fig. 4). The building was designed, re-designed and built during the long period 1977–1997 as its experienced changes in function, architectural design and even in political situation as Lithuania regained its Independence in 1990. After the archaeological excavations disclosed the remains of four gothic houses with a wall between them, the architect changed the initial design by restoring to life the silhouette and rhythm of the 14th and 15th century structure of Šv. Ignoto Street. The gable of the last house overhangs the street that came into being in later centuries. On the other side of the building, the high base part marks the wall of previous historic storehouses. The signs, symbols and associations inscribed into the building, and the structural and compositional harmony with the surroundings are based on the thorough knowledge of the place's historic and artistic qualities, and they set a deep relationship to the context on urban, architectural and mental level. Semantic meanings also help to integrate sculpture *Sisters* (sculptor D. Matulaitė, architects R. Buivydas ir J. Balkevičius, 1995) in the Lazdynų Peledos public square in Vilnius Old Town (Fig. 5). The sculpture pictures two sisters – writers Lazdynų Peleda – sitting on the chest that symbolises all kinds of

treasures and temporality at the same time. Through references of architectural elements to remains of a burnt house, the platform of the sculpture upscales the meanings of chest from personal experience to the urban one, and recalls the narrative of lost quarter, that was partly ruined during the WWII, demolished after more than a decade and turned into a public square.

Context as multi-layered and culture-centred historic urban landscape since 2000

In 2000 *European Landscape Convention* recognised the complexity of the idea of landscape where it is defined as “an area, as perceived by people, whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and/or human factors” [32]. Cultural landscape, as described by J. Jokilehto, is a living territory characterized by layers of history and evolution over time, by the traces left by the different generations in response to the challenges offered by the natural environment [20: 33]. Later on the concept of cultural landscapes, including historic urban landscape, was updated “as living, evolving socio-ecosystems, and as systems and processes, rather than primarily as sites as objects” [33: 8]. The notion of historic urban landscape was firstly set in *Vienna Memorandum on “World Heritage and Contemporary Architecture – Managing the Historic Urban Landscape”* (UNESCO, Vienna, 2005), and it brought place-based approach to historic cities [34]. The approach of historic urban landscape sees towns and cities “as a space for ritual and human experience” [35; 19]. According to this approach, the change in historic cities can range from static to dynamic and it should maintain specific qualities, which should be recognized for their social and cultural as well as physical characteristics [20; 33]. The historic urban landscape approach, even in the cities inscribed on UNESCO's World Heritage List, “has been particularly controversial in that it suggests that in historic cities the process of change per se can be an integral component of the significance of the place” [36]. The city became understood as a strategic and complex system, where its heritage contains, conveys and creates value [23], where its valuable places anchor cultural identity and become an important element at the heart of community development and incubator for creativity [22].

K. Taylor defines landscape as a cultural process with fundamental connections between landscape and identity and hence memory, thought, and comprehension. He sees landscape as “a cultural construct, a mirror of our memories and myths encoded with meanings which can be read and interpreted” [35, 23]. In the very beginning of this century, the growing importance of cultural dimension in urban landscapes concentrated the



Fig. 6. Reconstructed Jewish quarter surrounded by Ašmenos, Dysnos and Mėsinių Str. in Vilnius Old Town, built in 2006, 2018.



Fig. 7. Multi-functional complex Ogmios miestas, conversion since 2005, 2018.

attention to intangible attributes and experiential issues, like emotional connection to place. The stimulus to outline, describe and elaborate these issues up to an applicable tool resulted in *Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage* [37] and *Quebec declaration on the preservation of the spirit of place* [38]. Spirit of place is defined as the tangible (buildings, sites, landscapes, routes, objects) and the intangible elements (memories, narratives, written documents, rituals, festivals, traditional knowledge, values, textures, colors, odors, etc.), where the two interact and mutually construct one another and give meaning, value, emotion and mystery to place [38]. Intangible dimension and emotional connection to place through spirit of place and sense of place added more new layers into understanding how the context should be regarded. New layers deepen the understanding of context, to which new elements must respond: it is more than a three-dimensional built environment, it is rather a multi-dimensional place filled with interacting natural, tangible and intangible attributes and people's experience of the place treated as an integral part of their society [25].

A new element inserted is a means to provide a sense of continuity and support the social and cultural identity of a place.

Vienna Memorandum on "World Heritage and Contemporary Architecture – Managing the Historic Urban Landscape" made a step forward in recommendations for new design in urban historical landscape [34]. While new approaches to inherited territories that emerged during last decades added more elements or layers to the understanding of context to be regarded in new interventions, *Vienna Memorandum* pointed to qualitative features of a new intervention itself instead of expansion of features of the context. It highlighted three major keystones for new interventions: continuity of culture through high-quality interventions, avoiding pseudo-historical design [34]. While the last demand to avoid pastiches is repeated regularly since Athens Charter [7] and the request for continuity of culture is part of management of cultural landscapes, the demand for high-quality design and execution of new cultural expressions is a request that for the first time is set by international document concerning changes in urban landscape.

Wide span of layers in the notion of context give basis, stimulus and inspiration for new elements introduced into historic urban landscape. Material level of context to be regarded in its design covers built environment (site, spatial structure, street pattern, buildings, objects), natural features and visual relationships [39]. Intangible level of context comprises human activities and practices, cultural expressions, traditional knowledge, narratives, meanings and memories. Interaction of both levels gives meaning to places, tells stories that can be read, interpreted and experienced [35, 24], and by various social actors, its architects and managers as well as its users [38] construct spirit of place. As *Vienna Memorandum* states, the reflection of abundant qualities of place should result in high-quality intervention in its artistic design and execution, as contemporary elements, as well as the historic ones, "contribute significantly to the value of the city by branding the city's character" [34]. There is a danger, as R. van Oers argues, that in this view, the role of new interventions appears "to be more related to city marketing strategies than to the making of urban space" [40, 12]. Having in mind dynamic and ever-changing nature of historic cities, it means that by introducing a new element, an architect or a landscape architect contributes to the future context of valuable urban landscape. New intervention is as a cultural construct of that time, which is an active contribution to dynamic and ever-changing evolution of historic processes and patterns of urbanisation that ensures its integrity and contributes to social and cultural identity of place.

The contemporary approach towards regarding the context and contributing to it in the recent Vilnius practice is quite controversial. Since regaining of Independence in 1990, recent Vilnius Old Town legal and regulatory documents encourage identical or image reconstruction of demolished historical buildings in Vilnius territory inscribed on UNESCO World Heritage List, despite the international documents of last century require to avoid historical reconstruction and pseudo-historical design. There are many cases of reconstructed buildings and even quarters, that use design of former historic buildings in imprecise and pseudo-historical way, with the exterior similar (usually higher) to previous buildings, and the other parts following needs of contemporary society like in the former Jewish quarter surrounded by Ašmenos, Dysnos and Mėšinių Str., Vilnius (architects UAB “Archinova”, 2006). In such a way, the interaction to the rich context is limited up to recalling of historical information (Fig. 6), although in the way that is not ethic and methodical, distorting recognisability and skin-deep. Outside the territories of strict regulation, we can find examples that follow the contemporary progressive attitudes. The multi-functional complex *Ogmios miestas* is a territory of 12 ha that is a former military camp for czar Russia, Polish and Soviet armies. Barracks, garages for tanks, warehouses, most of them from soviet period, are still there in *Ogmios miestas*, in the part of previously closed military territory. The dialog between managers and architects (architects UAB “Do Architects”, since 2005) led to the concept of commercial polycentric human-scale development that follows the Old town urban pattern by reconstructing the inherited built environment. Architects organised scattered urban structure of reconstructed buildings by adding cosy public spaces that are friendly for people, for families (Fig. 7). The step-by-step reconstruction of buildings and new public spaces strengthen the spirit of place as everyday elements from soviet period are recalled in sculptures and fountains, the interiors expose the fragments of soviet structures, the industrial and military elements are left to mark the history. The exposition of eloquent inherited elements and reflections of place history, memories and local narrative strengthen its identity and construct a strong sense of place.

Conclusions

Urban context is the situation within which an object exists and in terms of which it is perceived. The understanding of notion and extent of that situation is mostly determined and formed by the movements that deal with urban landscape. These movements emerge from disciplines like urban planning and design, architecture, landscape

architecture and cultural heritage, and they rise from concerns and priorities of professional community. While analysing the last century evolution of statements of documents of international organisations, it is obvious that the movements and factors that impact the understanding of urban context, were of different importance, and they represent different disciplinary fields. Consequently, the notion and dealing with urban context on certain periods depended on ideological and methodological background of the movements and factors that were of major progression and relevance in professional society at that time.

During the period 1928–1960, the conceptual context of architecture that was dominated by the urban planning disciplinary field has experienced essential changes. Firstly, it focused on economy and social demands by celebrating the functionalistic approach, later it turned to the multifaceted conceptual context that includes culture, human and social sciences, history and art, and perceives the complexity of the architectural phenomenon. The essential change was caused by the critique of modern movement in 1950s that is closely connected with the rising urban heritage preservation movement. In its beginning, only fragmented architectural environment was preserved, and in cases of transformations of urban environment, its context was treated as physical built environment that is perceived visually. Later, the concept of cultural landscape and the attitudes of non-Western societies brought multidisciplinary people-centred and landscape-based approach in dealing with urban environment. This approach gave priority to dynamic social practices and cultural processes. Urban context was treated as a place rich in character, history and intangible elements. The concept of historic urban landscape and the growing concern about intangible attributes, cultural identity, and experiential issues, upgrades the understanding of urban landscape up to holistic cultural process. Thus, the urban context is not just a three-dimensional urban space filled with architectural objects, it is rather a multi-dimensional place filled with interacting natural, tangible and intangible attributes and people’s experience of the place. According to such a holistic approach, urban context is considered as a cultural construct and an integral part of society.

In general, Lithuanian practice in regard to urban context is in parallel to the evolution revealed. The architectural practice in Lithuania after WWII followed the notion of modern movement and mainly complied with the contextual requirements of CIAM *The Athens Charter*. Later contextual approach was extended from visually perceived built environment,

to complex treatment of urban landscape in its systemic transformations by adding historical, social and experiential dimensions. The research disclosed certain variances. Architectural practice of interwar period, when Lithuania was establishing independent state (1918–1940), was characteristic

for its conservative approach that accepted radical attitudes of modern movement only moderately. It is much more difficult to ground the recent encouragement of pseudo-historical design and demand for historical reconstruction in the Vilnius Old Town as UNESCO World Heritage place.

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