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Article

Lost Urban Spaces and the Idea of Creative City: The Case of Vilnius Sport Palace

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Abstract: The paper analyses the unused urban spaces in concert with the creative city idea. The research issues are developed as follows. 1. The unused urban places express the city's unsustainability since every urban space has the potential to become such a dead zone. 2. The concept of the creative city covers different creative activities in concert with sustainable development. 3. The unusable urban places result from a modernistic approach that neglects the cultural context, of the city's division into functional zones ignoring integral living intentions and industrial exploitation in the previous city's rims. 4. The Vilnius Sport Palace is an unused space not so much due to the lack of interest, but due to a knot of interests, which politicians cannot cut. The research raises the question of whether the problem of the VSP can be solved by using the idea of the creative city. In terms of the theoretical approach, a comparative analysis is used. Besides literature analyses, the case study is applied. Additionally, the semiotic approach is used. For this purpose, two of Greimas' traditional semiotic squares in combination with Ricoeur's idea of the interpretation's conflict are applied.

Keywords: unused places; urban sustainability; semiotic approach; conflict of interests

1. Introduction: Unused Places and the Issue of Sustainability

1.1. Background

The abandoned Vilnius Sports Palace (VSP) in the city centre of Vilnius brings to mind a multiplicity of issues of the lost urban spaces, Soviet modern architecture, heritage protection, conflicting interests, old cemeteries in the urban development, semiotics of death, non-death, life, and non-life, as well the idea of the creative city. The case that we consider in this paper deals with two conflicting heritages in the same place listed on the Register of Cultural Values: the VSP and the Jewish cemetery. As a result, the huge territory in the Vilnius centre has not been used for two decades. Herein lies a paradox: being on the Register of Cultural Values not only does not help to preserve them but also condemns them to a slow death.

Our case study is about a lost urban space (Trancik 1986). Such urban spaces occupy sometimes the best urban territories and are called also urban void (Hwang and Lee 2020), vacant or abandoned property (Accordino and Johnson 2000), terrain vague (De Sola-Morales 1996), void spaces (Aruninta 2004; Colomb 2012; Doron 2000; Hentilä and Lindborg 2003), brownfield (Andres and Grésillon 2013), leftover spaces (Akkerman and Cornfeld 2010; Hwang and Lee 2020), terra incognita (Bowman and Pagano 2004), dead zone (Doron 2000), and urban desert (Cybriwsky 1999). These spaces embody urban unsustainability in twofold ways. Firstly, they are unused or even dangerous places for visitors. Secondly, they block any development of the place for many years. Such a place is the VSP not been used for two decades.

1.2. Structure, Methods, and Research Issues

Structure. The paper consists of two interrelated parts, theoretical and empirical research. Our theoretical research is based on relevant literature and deals with the issues of lost urban spaces, sustainability, and creative city (2. Unusable urban places, creative cities, and sustainability).

Empirical research deals with the case of the VSP in Vilnius centre, by presenting the historical aspects of both the palace and the Jewish cemetery in which the VSP was built (3. The case of the Vilnius Sports Palace), and by analysing the case from a semiotic point of view. In this chapter, the conflicts of interest concerning the VSP are shown. The final chapters (4. Discussions; 5. Conclusions) cover closing remarks, discussions, as well as the conclusions.

Methods. In terms of the theoretical approach, a comparative analysis is used. The literature is selected in the Web of Science under the topics “lost spaces”, “sustainability”, and “creative city”. Preference was given to recent literature and articles more frequently cited. In the empirical part, we use the case study of the VSP. The historical description of the case study is based on open sources available on the internet, mostly in Lithuanian. Besides, the semiotic approach was used. For this purpose, two traditional semiotic squares introduced by Greimas (Greimas and Courtés 1979) were applied. Additionally, this approach was combined with Ricoeur’s (2007) idea of the interpretation’s conflict.

Research issues. General and specific research issues are developed in the paper. The first general issue claims that the unused urban places express the city’s unsustainability since every urban space has the potential to become such a dead zone. The second general issue follows the theoretical part and declares that the concept of the creative city covers different creative activities in concert with sustainable development. The third general issue follows the empirical part and declares that the unusable urban places are the result of a modernistic approach that neglects the cultural context, of the city’s division into functional zones ignoring integral living intentions and industrial exploitation in previous city’s rims. The first specific issue deals with the space of the VSP and declares that it is lost not so much due to the lack of interest, but due to a knot of interests, which politicians (both of the city and the country) cannot cut. The second specific issue deals with the question of whether the problem of the VSP can be solved by using the idea of the creative city.

2. Unusable Urban Places, Creative Cities, and Sustainability

Scholars define unusable urban places in different ways. Table 1 shows some of them. According to Hwang and Lee (2000), there are urban voids, i. e. unused spaces in every city. Transick (1986) analyses the impact of modernism on urban spaces that become separated from historical context and human needs. For example, the transport systems next to the rivers and huge parking next to high-rise office buildings make desirable urban spaces inaccessible. As a result, a city has undesirable spaces that ignore the historical context and human needs. Accordino and Johnson (2000) analyse vacant buildings for many years because of different reasons and called them abandoned property. De Solà-Morales (1996) pays attention to the undefined urban places that are empty but have a big potential and call them terrain vague. Lynch (1990) analyses urban spaces left unused after some performance, production or consumption and calls them waste spaces. Several authors (Aruninta 2004; Colomb 2012; Doron 2000; Hentilä and Lindborg 2003) analyse neglected by municipalities or by developers and marginalized urban void spaces that have uncertain ownership. As a result, they are not subjects of urban planning. In some cases, vacant after industrial exploitation land with abandoned properties is called brownfield (Andres and Grésillon 2013). Some scholars (Akkerman and Cornfeld 2010; Hwang and Lee 2020) neglected spaces call leftover spaces. Bowman and Pagano (2004) describe the places having no attention of urban planners and politicians as terra incognita. Doron (2000) calls such unproductive and unused places drastically – dead zones. Similarly, Cybriwsky (1999) abandoned desolate spaces called urban deserts or planned wastelands. In most of the mentioned cases, we face unusable urban places as the result of a modernistic approach that neglects cultural context, of the city’s division into functional zones ignoring integral living intentions and industrial exploitation in previous city’s rims. The unused urban places express the city’s unsustainability since every urban space has the potential to become such a dead zone. The question is if and how the idea of a creative city could be a response to the problem of unused urban places.

Table 1. Definitions of unusable urban places.

Term	Description	References
Urban void	Unused, underused, abandoned, or misused spaces	Hwang and Lee 2020
Lost spaces	Undesirable urban areas with no positive contribution to their surroundings and no connected elements in a coherent way	Trancik 1986
Vacant or abandoned property	Buildings that have been vacant for two years or more	Accordino and Johnson 2000
Terrain vague	Undefined empty places with immanent potential	De Sola-Morales 1996
Waste space	Valueless space left after some act of production/consumption	Lynch 1990
Urban void spaces	Underutilized, marginalized, or neglected spaces as non-planned entities with uncertain ownership	Aruninta 2004; Colomb 2012; Doron 2000; Hentilä and Lindborg 2003
Brownfield	Post-industrial vacant land with contaminated and abandoned properties	Andres and Grésillon 2013
Leftover spaces	Residual and neglected spaces	Akkerman and Cornfeld 2010; Hwang and Lee 2020
Terra incognita	Lack of land-use policies and politics	Bowman and Pagano 2004
Dead zone	Unproductive spaces	Doron 2000
Planned wasteland/urban desert	Desolate abandoned spaces	Cybrivsky 1999

Sources: Hwang and Lee 2020 and own.

It seems that the response to unusable urban places could be the idea of the creative city. In recent decades, we have faced different approaches that cover the attention to the cultural environment, architectural heritage, and creative activities in a city. In turn, all this is inseparable from certain people, the creative class (Florida 2002) that changes both urban image and the city's environment. In some cases, the scholars (Landry 2000; Florida 2005; Grodach 2012; Kong 2012, etc.) speak of the creative city concept that covers the mentioned aspects. The question is if and how the idea of a creative city could be a response to the problem of unused urban places. Besides, the issue of a creative city is connected with questions of urban sustainability.

Table 2 shows different definitions of the creative city. One of the first scholars who analyse explicitly the concept of a creative city is Landry (2000). In his book on the creative city, Landry speaks of urban planning oriented to a liveable and vital city by encouraging the imagination and talent of people. It is about dynamism, fluidity, and liveness in a city (Landry 2000: 257). According to him, the creative city presupposes "softer sensibilities" and focuses "on sociability, integrated thinking, networking, and human capacities" (Landry 2000: 265). As a result, Landry's conception is more about the way of thinking and consequently planning than about certain (cultural) objects.

Similarly, Florida (2002; 2005) speaks of certain urban policies "to build a broadly creative environment, conducive to the formation and adoption of new ideas." (2005: 165) However, he focuses first on the creative class which is "engage in work whose function is to create meaningful new forms." (Florida 2005: 34) According to Florida, the creative class refers to a different lifestyle by "moving away from traditional corporate communities." (2005: 35) This new social environment shows a shift from industrial society with reservoirs of the social capital to the more dynamic and diverse environment with the creative capital. Although the economic approach is still relevant, the focus is on creative centres and sectors where talent, technology, and tolerance intersect. Howkins

(2013) also invites to develop of the creative sector (creative industries) of the urban economy since this sector is growing faster and has more additional value.

Table 2. Definitions of the creative city.

Description	Source
Urban creativity and culture as key factors towards sustainable urban development	UNESCO 2004
A vibrant, lively, and sustainable city with spaces that allow interaction among urbanites to resolve their problems and heighten their quality of lives	Landry 2000
City with urban places where the 3Ts (Talent, Technology, Tolerance) are dominant to attract the creative class for better economic development	Florida 2002, 2005
Cities with arts and cultural amenities	Grodach 2012
Nurture creative sectors and brand the city to attract creative talent	Kong 2012
A dynamic and open city that covers not only creative elements	Hall 2020
Nurtured socio-cultural context shaped over time by the city's history	Cooke & Lazzeretti 2008
Nurtured cultural capital and creative institutions in a city	Scott 2006
The concentration and the interaction between the talents and urban economic sectors where creative industries dominate	Lorenzen & Frederiksen 2008
A city with produced goods and services with high cultural and symbolic value	Currid 2007; Tavano Blessi et al. 2012
A city with a creative atmosphere for innovation and cross-fertilization	Bertacchini & Santagata 2012; Hall 2000; KEA, 2009
A city with cultural initiatives and heritage-creativity hybridization, while the urban community and creative people interact for better social capital and image	Della Lucia and Trunfio 2018

Other scholars pay attention to different urban aspects that form the creative city. For example, Grodach (2012) speaks of arts and general cultural amenities in a city. Like Landry, Hall (2020) sees beyond certain creative elements an open and dynamic city that is more important than separated details. Following Transick, Cooke, and Lazzeretti (2008) pay attention to the socio-cultural context formed by the city's history. Scott (2006) speaks of cultural capital fed by creative institutions in a city. Like Howkins (2013) and Florida (2002; 2005), Lorenzen & Frederiksen (2008) stress the interaction between talented people and urban economic sectors where creative industries play a crucial role. According to other scholars (Currid 2007; Tavano Blessi et al. 2012), the creative city produces goods and services with cultural and symbolic value. Finally, the scholars (Della Lucia and Trunfio 2018) speak of heritage-creativity hybridization and cultural initiatives, while creative members and urban community interact to increase social capital and to shape the city's image. In the attitudes of different scholars, we notice certain contradictions. For example, Florida (2002) emphasizes creative capital at the expense of social capital, while other scholars (Della Lucia and Trunfio 2018) speak of importance of the social capital. In sum, the concept of the creative city covers different creative activities in concert with sustainable development. As a result, we should analyse in more details the interconnections between creative city and sustainability (Table 4). Before that, let's overview the definitions of urban sustainability (Table 3).

The scholars define urban sustainability in different ways. According to Ratiu (2013), it is a kind of interrelations between cultural, social, economic, and environmental layers for the long-term continuity of urban development. Similarly, Krueger and Buckingham (2012) speak of harmony

between economic development, community integrity, and environmental protection. Kong (2009) pays attention to the valuable creative and social repositories on the one hand and liveable spaces, on the other. Similarly, Kowarik (2018) promotes a community assembly that has no negative impact on the natural environment. Other scholars speak of balanced shopping environments and balanced retail systems (Cachinho and Salgueiro 2016), as well as efficient systems for delivered goods and services (Barata-Salgueiro and Guimarães 2020). In sum, the scholars emphasize the equilibrium among social, economic, political, and environmental dimensions of urban life (McGranahn and Satterthwaithe 2003; Aguilar 2007).

Table 3. Definitions of urban sustainability.

Description	Source
Interrelation between social, cultural, economic, and environmental aspects that warranty a long-term continuity of a project	Ratiu 2013
Reconciliation of community integrity, economic development, and environmental protection	Krueger and Buckingham 2012
Valuable repositories of human (both personal and social) meaning, and simultaneously, liveable, as well rejuvenated spaces	Kong 2009
Preserving balanced retail systems set in diverse facilities and shopping environments for the needs of consumers	Cachinho and Salgueiro 2016
Cities with an efficient network that delivers services and goods to the vicinity imply transformation into a desirable future	Barata-Salgueiro and Guimarães 2020
The equilibrium among four fundamental dimensions including economic, social, environmental, and political	McGranahn and Satterthwaithe 2003; Aguilar 2007
Open-ended community assembly, where direct human impacts on the natural environment are negligible	Kowarik 2018

However, there is not only a positive correlation between creative city and sustainability. Table 4 shows both positive and negative interconnections between them. According to Landry (2000), a creative city solves systematically urban problems by appealing to cultural and artistic aspects. Sasaki (2010) pays attention to the positive interconnection between the nurturance of cultural sphere and sustainable development of urban creative industries. Similarly, other scholars (Smidt-Jensen 2007; Steward and Kruska 2010) notice that sustainable development covers a cultural dimension in the planning process. For several authors (Duxbury, Hosagrahar, and Pascual 2016; Hawkes 2001; UCLG 2010), culture (creativity) is an inseparable pillar of urban sustainable development besides economic, social and environmental ones. Other scholars see the potential of renewing of urban environment in creativity (Jacobs 2004), while creative class reflects the ideas of urban sustainability (Krueger and Buckingham 2012). Besides, culture-led renewing and regeneration regard the pre-existed context and engage with local aspects (genius loci). As a result, many authors pay attention to the ideas of creative cities and sustainable urban development supplementing each other (Aken 2016). However, some scholars speak of contradictions between these ideas or at least between some aspects of them. For example, several authors (Harvey 2012; Martí-Costa and Marc Pradel i Miquel 2012; McCann 2007; Pratt 2011; Scott 2006) emphasize that orientation to the creative class affects social polarisation and gentrification, consequently, neglecting sustainable development. Similarly, some scholars (D'Ovidio and Rodríguez Morató 2017) speak of polarization and deterioration of working conditions. This criticism appeals to Florida's vague notion of creative class. As mentioned above, Florida develops his idea of creative city namely with help of such an elite structure a creative class instead of urban creative society. Besides, planning of creative city can't avoid the bureaucratization of creative processes (Pratt 2011; Scott 2006) and ideological assumptions (Ratiu 2013). In general, the standardized patterns and models to be replicated have always negative aspects, even if they are culture-led (Landry et al. 1996), consequently, they play against the creative city. If we understand sustainability as an approach to renew the urban environment, it plays also against it.

Table 4. Positive and negative interconnections between Creative City (CC) and sustainability.

Description	Positive (+) or negative (-)	Source
CC solves systematically urban problems, using cultural and artistic forces combined with creative methods	+	Landry 2000
CC fosters the growth of cultural endeavors and the sustainable development of creative industries	+	Sasaki 2010
Sustainable urban development covers the dimension of culture in the planning process	+	Smidt-Jensen 2007; Steward and Kruska 2010
Culture (creativity) as the fourth pillar of sustainable development besides the social, the economical and the environmental	+	Duxbury, Hosagrahar, and Pascual 2016; Hawkes 2001; UCLG 2010
CC is under ongoing renewal while creativity is fuelled by small- and medium-sized businesses with high-quality labor	+	Jacobs 2004
The aesthetic of CC in terms of urban creative class reflects contemporary virtues of urban sustainability	+	Krueger and Buckingham 2012
Orientation to the creative class effects gentrification or social polarisation	-	Harvey 2012; Martí-Costa and Marc Pradel i Miquel 2012; McCann 2007; Pratt 2011; Scott 2006
Planning of the creative city leads to the bureaucratization of creative processes	-	Pratt 2011; Scott 2006
Creative policy effects polarization and deterioration of cultural workers' working conditions	-	D'Ovidio and Rodríguez Morató 2017a
Cultural policies (including sustainable aspects) depend on the ideological assumptions	-	Ratiu 2013
Sustainable culture-led urban regeneration respects the pre-existences and engages with genius loci	+	Casals-Alsina 2023
The negative effect of standardized patterns and replicated models even if they are culture-led	-	Landry et al. 1996
Integration of CCs and information technology, as well of CC and sustainable urban development	+	Aken 2016

3. The Case of the Vilnius Sport Palace (VSP)

General remarks. The Vilnius Sports Palace is an abandoned building in the centre of Vilnius, by the Neris River, on the other side of which is the historical hearth of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania with the Upper and Lower (Rulers' Palace) castles. The last event at VSP took place in 2003, since then the building has been closed, its windows have been boarded up, and the territory has been fenced off. Trying to understand the reasons for the appearance of this "lost space" in a Vilnius prestigious place and possible perspectives, let's examine the history of the territory and the building in it.

Historical features and semiotic analysis. The construction of the VSP began in 1965 and was completed in 1971. This is the period of "mature" socialism characterized by modernism and its variant brutalism. Lithuanian Soviet modernism is something that represents the country far beyond

its borders(Lithuanian Soviet modernism continued the traditions of Kaunas interwar modernism, included in the UNESCO heritage list, after a two-decade forced break with Stalinist pseudo-classicism. The most famous examples of Lithuanian Soviet modernism are as follows: Opera and Ballet Theater (arch. Nijolė Bučiūtė), Palace of Marriages (arch. Gediminas Baravykas), Contemporary Art Center (arch. Edmundas Čekanauskas), House of the Lithuanian Cooperative Union (arch. Justinas Šeibokas), House of Composers (arch. Čekanauskas), etc.).

The fact that the building in 2006 listed on the Register of Cultural Values is not so much a reverence for this style of architecture as an interest group's effort to preserve the building. We shall talk about the conflict of various interests regarding this building. Preliminary hypothesis is as follows. This space of the capital city is lost not so much due to the lack of interest, but due to a knot of interests, which politicians (both of the city and the country) are unable to cut. The paradox is that the building was recognized as protected not so much because of its outstanding architecture, but because of its exceptional construction solution, i.e., the holding construction of the roof guys, which has no analogues in Lithuania (constructor H. V. Karvelis). The roof of the building has the shape of a wave, which is a reference to the nearby Neris (Vilija) and Vilnelė rivers, which gave the capital city its name. It can be said that the roof of the palace "raised" the building from other buildings of Soviet modernism and "put" it on the register of protected buildings. We will see how important the role air semantics plays here. Herewith, these "raising" and "putting" ensured for a long time the in-between position of the building – no longer alive and not yet dead. The building was designed by Eduardas Chlomauskas. However, the architectural solution is not original. The palace reflected the modernist trends of the time more than it was originally. A curved, "alive" silhouette of the palace combines brute concrete and glass. For this, the architects of the palace were awarded the State Prize of the Lithuanian Soviet Socialist Republic in 1973. However, in 1966 a building with a similar silhouette was built in Minsk, Belarus. Even earlier, in 1964 a sports palace with almost identical architecture (Joteikaitė 2023) was built in Kagawa, Japan (arch. Kenzo Tange). Borrowing of artistic ideas, which is not decreasing, but increasing in these times of data mixing (Manovich 2002), is a separate topic that I shall not develop here. By the way, Chlomauskas, who designed the Urban Construction Design Institute in Vilnius, is one of the first to break the ice of architecture by re-finding modernism after the "stagnation" of Stalinist pseudo-classicism. In general, the stagnation of Soviet society is another example of "not alive" and "not dead" existence, which art, including architecture, tried to move in its way.

There is a remarkable contrast: the VSP was built for 6 years but has been abandoned for more than 20 years. Compared to other constructions of the Soviet time, the construction duration was not long (For example, the hotel "Lietuva" (arch. Algimantas Nasvytis and Vytautas Nasvytis) had been built for 19 years (1965–1984).). It is a short time of construction even compared to some buildings built during the free market period in Vilnius (For example, the National Stadium has been under construction since 1988, but there is no end in sight.).

Let's ask one more time – what is this place from a historical point of view? This is a fundamental question in terms of the conflict of interests, the in-between position of the building (neither demolished nor reconstructed) and finally the lost place of the city. The VSP emerged in the very middle of the old Šnipiškės Jewish cemetery. On the one hand, the palace arose on the rims of the historical city, where cemeteries, especially Jewish ones, were always established. On the other, the palace found itself in the centre of an expanding city and, as we shall see later, in the crossfire of different interests. Many old cemeteries have been transferred to the expanding city: this is common in every old European city. This cemetery, which has been operating since the 16th century, is no exception. It was closed in the 18th century when the cemetery land was sold to the city. However, time had stood still for about two hundred years. In the interwar photos, we can still see the monuments that were here. After the Second World War, the cemetery was finally liquidated, and the last monuments were demolished in 1955. By the way, the prominent Jewish philosopher Vilniaus Gaon (1720–1797) was buried here, whose remains were moved to the Užupis Jewish cemetery in 1949. The Vilnius Gaon became famous for his fight against Hasidism, which aimed to reform Judaism, and paid a lot of attention to asceticism and the study of the Holy Scriptures. Because of the

authority of this Jewish philosopher, Hasidism did not spread among Lithuanian Jews, who were called *mitnagedi* (opponents). In other words, Vilnius Gaon buried Hasidism in Lithuania. We shall see how much opposition there is to a possible change of the status quo of a fragile building that falls gradually down. Although the cemetery was abolished even before the construction of the VSP, its boundaries were confirmed again in 2009, and the parking on its territory was canceled. This happened at the height of the battle for the place because of the endeavours of one of the interested groups. True, this result did not change the situation of “lost space” in any way.

Until 1990, that is, before the declaration of Lithuania’s independence, the VSP was one of the country’s most significant halls for basketball games. In contrast to the environment of the cemetery, also concerts and performances were held here. Many politically significant events took place in the palace. The semantic load of some events was directly or indirectly related to the cemetery environment. For example, in 1974 Antanas Sniečkus, the long-time leader of the Lithuanian Soviet Socialist Republic, was laid out here. By the way, Sniečkus’ political vitality is evidenced by the fact that he is the only leader of the Soviet republics who remained in power during the times of J. Stalin, N. Khrushchev, and L. Brezhnev. This is an illustration of the fact that the atheistic Soviet authorities organized pompous commemorations of their leaders, thus reviving the semantics of ghost (no(more) living leader)) and fearless hero (undead leader to come). This is illustrated by the semiotic square in Figure 1.

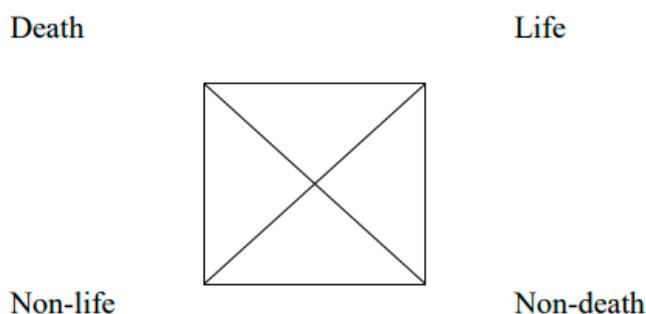


Figure 1. Semiotic square “Life/Death”.

Another case is the concert of the Hungarian rock band “Sirius” in 1975. After that, some visitors to the concert disregarded the barrier and walked across the unfinished pontoon bridge, which collapsed, drowning at least four people. Here, people having fun embodied life, which was “watched” by the dead buried nearby. After the concert, the fearless entertainers, disregarding the characteristics of the place (cemetery, bridge), demount the barrier and find themselves between air and water until a fall occurs, drowning people together. The bridge in this place has a double semantic load: it is not only a bridge across the river to the historical centre of Vilnius with castles, but also a bridge to another world, which in the water is not yet a zone of death (nonexistence), but rather an in-between one. The falling bridge is a reference to the palace being demolished. By the way, in the 1970s, the Palace of the Rulers across the river looked different than it does now – it had been demolished since the beginning of the 19th century. They were rebuilt only in the 2nd decade of the 21st century. The rebuilt palace can be described as undead, and having in mind its current purpose (museum) as no longer alive. Thus, the event after the rock concert illustrates the connections between the first (Figure 1) and the second (Figure 2) semiotic squares.

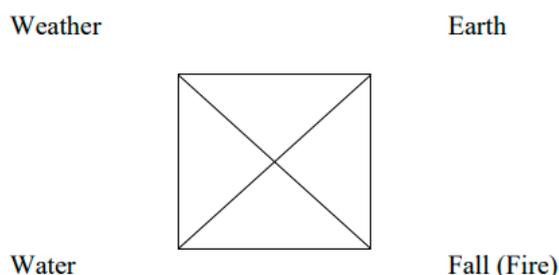


Figure 2. Semiotic square “Air/Earth”.

Similarly, in 1988 the founding convention of the Lithuanian Sąjūdis held here illustrates the future burial of the old Soviet system (not dead), although Lithuania’s independence has not yet been declared (not born). In 1991, already after the declaration of Lithuania’s independence (a living state), the public said goodbye to the Lithuanian freedom fighters (heroes) who died near the Vilnius TV tower. This is another reference to the air, the heights, where you can rise, but at the same time fall. The history of entertainment (life) in the palace ends with the concert of the rock group “Antis” in 2003, which contributed to the fall of the Soviet system.

Conflict of interests. As for the interested parties, the interests of some of them in this place gave rise to the interests of others, contrary to the former. Table 4 shows the interested parts, their interests, and the representative person or hero by appealing to Greimas’ (Greimas and Courtés 1979) semiotic square. It was in the interest of the state to encourage the development of this place, so the privatization of the palace with a plot of land was initiated. In addition, the state sought to get rid of unnecessary costs related to the maintenance of the building. This also met the general attitude in the free market, according to which only strategic objects should remain at the disposal of the state. We will see later that the decision to sell the VSP did not reduce, but increased the costs of the state and the municipality because the building had to be bought again at a much higher price. Not only that, its maintenance costs a lot every year. The reputational damage is even greater when the municipality, together with the building, assumes responsibility for its condition “between heaven and earth”. Here, attention should be paid to the circle in which the building “moved” as it moved away and came back to first owner (the state). However, that movement did not make it more “alive”, on the contrary, it established for a long time the condition of no more alive and not yet dead building in the urban cycle of life and death.

In 2004 the investment group of bank “Ūkis” (IGBU) acquired VSP with the territory attached to them through the companies it managed. The interests of these investors partly corresponded to the interests of the government: they sought to revive the area by building a group of residential houses instead of the VSP, which had to be demolished immediately. However, the IGBU delayed preparing a detailed plan and submitting an application to the European Union for co-financing the transformation of the territory. The application was rejected and the delay was fatal as other interested groups became involved at that time. By the way, the bank “Ūkis” itself collapsed a little later, and this story probably contributed to its bankruptcy.

To demolish the VSP, the IGBU demonstrated a radical approach. The Jewish community demonstrated an equally radical approach. The paradox is that although the Jewish community considered the investors their worst enemies, the immediate goal (demolishing the VSP) of both of these interested groups completely coincided. Willingly or not, the government began to flirt with the small Jewish community, supported by various Israeli actors.

The situation became even more complicated with the involvement of the Union of Architects, which initiated the protection of the building as a cultural value. Although in some other cases objects in Lithuania are very easily removed from the Cultural Register (For example, the Antakalnis Cemetery Memorial (see Kačerauskas 2023 for more) or the Green Bridge sculptures (see Kačerauskas and Baranovskaja 2021 for more) in Vilnius.), as soon as the politicians express their wish, in this case, both the government and the municipality have repeatedly stated that the demolition of the VSP is not being considered based on their presence in the Cultural Register. Thus, the circle closed, and any

changes in this place were stuck for a long time. So the most that being on the Cultural Register does is to freeze the status indefinitely. But the absence of change means a lost urban space, that is, non-death or a ghost-like presence instead of life.

Table 4. Interested parts and interests in the VSP.

Interested part	Interest	Hero
The government	Making the place work by reconciling different interests	Prime Minister
Municipality	Reconstruct the VSP by establishing a conference centre	Mayor
Private investor	Demolish the VSP, build a new building	Investor, shareholder
Jewish community	Demolish the VSP, do not build anything, restore the Jewish cemetery	Chairman of the community
Union of Architects	To preserve the building and the memory of the architect	Chairman of the Union
Department of Cultural Heritage	Preserve the building and its unique roof construction, and preserve the Jewish cemetery	Head of the department
Tourism and hotel associations	Establish a conference centre	Heads of associations

True, for a while it seemed that an agreement, albeit a fragile one, could be reached between the interested groups. After the bankruptcy of the bank “Ūkis” together with the IGBU division, in 2015 the Lithuanian government bought the palace again from the company’s bankruptcy administrators, planning to build a new centre for congresses, conferences, and cultural events. Consultations have started with the Lithuanian Jewish community, together with the Committee for the Preservation of European Jewish Cemeteries and the Commission for the Supervision of American Heritage Abroad regarding the arrangement of the Šnipiškės Jewish cemetery located on the territory of the palace. Lithuanian Prime Minister Algirdas Butkevičius discussed this issue with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. It was stated that there were no contradictions or protests.

Plans for the redevelopment of the palace have been announced. However, the reconstruction of the palace, which started in 2016, was stopped due to a non-transparent tender for the contractor. At that time (2017), the Jewish community got involved again, this time through Meyshe Bairak (head of the Kaunas Jewish religious community) together with Ruta Bloshtein, who lives in Vilnius. They presented the Lithuanian government with a petition approved by 39,000 signatures to refuse the reconstruction of the palace and rebuild the Vilnius Jewish cemetery. Representatives of the Lithuanian government kept repeating that the demolition of the building was not being considered.

After a few years, the clash of interests repeated itself. The state-owned bank “Turtas” intended to announce tenders for the contractor and operator of the future Conference and Congress Centre. However, the world’s most famous Litvak rabbi, Chaim Kanievski, contemporary Gaon of Vilnius, signed a decision explaining that the place will forever be considered a Jewish cemetery, and opposing any other activities there. In the same year, the National Tourism Business Association, Lithuanian Hotel and Restaurant Association and the Lithuanian Tourism Association organized a campaign near the palace, expressing their interest in seeing the congress palace here. They lined up rows of empty chairs with symbolic euro banknotes, emphasizing during the coronavirus crisis that the Congress Centre built there would be one of the most effective long-term rescue measures for the tourism business, would help maintain existing jobs and create new ones, and at the same time promote the overall recovery of the country’s economy. However, Simonas Gurevičius, chairman of the Vilnius Jewish community, called this action immoral.

After the intervention of the Lithuanian government, a commission was formed to reconcile the interests of some interested groups, but its possible conclusions caused waves of new passions and only deepened the conflict. While the commission was leaning towards the idea of a memorial in the reconstructed VSP by handing over the palace to one of the interested party (Jewish community), other interested groups presented arguments that there is no shortage of memorials in Lithuania, moreover, their interests and the interests of the entire city would be violated. In addition, a shadow was cast on the commission, where some interested parts are not represented (Joteikaitė 2023). In addition, it is not clear who would finance the construction and maintenance of the planned memorial: the Jewish community admits that it is not capable of doing this on its own (Plokštytė 2024), not being able to take care of many other Jewish heritage objects in Lithuania.

The Cultural Register has added not only the VSP to the list of protected objects, but also the Jewish cemetery, which was abolished a few decades ago, on the territory of which the palace is located. Both objects were given the same status as objects of regional importance. The interest in preserving the two in one and respecting the principle of equality paradoxically froze the conflict between these irreconcilable objects, in which there can be no winners.

4. Discussions

The case of the VSP shows certain attention to the cultural environment and architectural heritage. It meets the idea of the creative city, at least some of its aspects described by Landry (2000). However, being on the list of the Cultural Register plays against a liveable and vital city, since it has frozen the stagnant analysed place. As a result, it has no more dynamism, fluidity and liveness connected by Landry (2000) with the idea of creative city. The solution could be a creative centre instead of previous VSP. For example, Florida's (2005) focus is on creative centres and sectors where talent, technology, and tolerance intersect. However, a kind of such centre (for conferences and congresses) is blocked by an interested party (Jewish community) because of neighbourhood of a Jewish cemetery. The history of the VSP is also a history of intolerance for previous actors of this place. Hawkins (2013) urges to develop of the creative sector of the urban economy since this sector is growing faster and has more additional value. However, the case of the VSP shows that the potential transformation of unused places to an object of cultural industries causes sometimes resistance from the actors who appeal to heritage values. In general, unused for two decades places do not meet an open and dynamic city (Hall 2020) connected with the idea of creative city. The VSP expresses a double paradox. On the one hand, the protection of this modern architecture expresses the attention shows to the socio-cultural context formed by the city's history. Transick, Cooke, and Lazeretti (2008) assign this aspect namely to the creative city. However, the very VSP neglected the place history (genius loci) while it was being built. Moreover, the defenders of historical precedents here neglect the fact of the VSP. Besides, the most visible actors are global instead of local ones. The question is open if it is possible to have here a kind of heritage-creativity hybridization with cultural initiatives (Della Lucia and Trunfio 2018) since there is no interaction between creative members and the urban community to increase social/creative capital and to shape the city's image. Although culture-led renewing and regeneration should regard the pre-existed context and engage with local aspects, i.e., genius loci (Krueger and Buckingham 2012), the solution to the unused place of the previous VSP is not clear at all.

5. Conclusions

In most cases, we face unusable urban places as the result of a modernistic approach that neglects cultural context, of the city's division into functional zones ignoring integral living intentions and industrial exploitation in previous city's rims. The unused urban places express the city's unsustainability since every urban space has the potential to become such a dead zone. The question is if and how the idea of a creative city connected with questions of urban sustainability could be a response to the problem of unused urban places. The scholars emphasize the equilibrium among social, economic, political, and environmental dimensions of urban life. However, the standardized patterns and models to be replicated have always negative aspects, even if they are culture-led,

consequently, they play against creative city. On the one hand, the Cultural Register protects the urban spaces and objects within it. On the other, it means the stagnation of a space or even the slow death as the VSP shows. Because of the listing of both the VSP and the old Jewish cemetery on the Cultural Register, the conflict was paradoxically frozen between these irreconcilable objects. The result of the frozen conflict is an unused for decades place in the Vilnius centre.



Figure 3. The VSP and Vilnius and the Upper Castle.



Figure 4. The VSP from the side of river Nėris.



Figure 5. A monument to the memory of the Jewish cemetery. The inscription says: “In memory of the old Šnipiškės Jewish cemetery; burials started in 1487, destroyed by the Soviets in 1950”.

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