8 The role of architects in fighting the monotony of the Lithuanian mass housing estates

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Introduction

Recent scholarly studies have introduced a new approach on the design of the large Soviet mass housing estates, increasing interest in the unique architectural designs and regional diversity (Ritter et al. 2012; Meuser 2016). As Meuser and Zadorin (2015) demonstrate, the Soviet post-war mass housing was, despite the appearance of monotony, in fact substantively diverse. Michał Murawski (2018) has noted that the scholarly accounts of built socialism's shortcomings and disintegrations have contributed a great deal to the understanding of socialist modernity as a perverted version of modernity proper, failure-bound from the beginning. However, the exceptional nature of Baltic design within the Soviet mass housing context has been touched upon by several researchers, particularly in light of Baltic relations with, and orientation towards, the West and international modernism (Hess and Tammaru 2019; Kalm 2012:33–45; Drėmaitė 2017). David Crowley 2008; Crowley and Reid 2000; 2010; and Susan E. Reid 2014 emphasised the ways in which designers and consumers cultivated agentic creativity despite or in opposition to strictures imposed on them from above. Papers discussing specific Baltic aspects of mass housing have also shown the criticism of mass housing (Kurg, 2009), which led to alternative house design solutions. Findings of the research of the architects' role in designing large housing estates in Estonia suggest that regulations issued in Moscow played a less important role than previously assumed in town planning outcomes because international modernist city planning ideals, combined with local expertise, strongly influenced town planning practice (Metspalu and Hess 2018). Similar ideas were reflected in Lithuania (Maciuika 1999; Maciuika and Drėmaitė 2020). In this regard, the chapter will further explore the role of an architect and unique design in Lithuania in the field of mass housing.

The methodology of the research is based on the concept of the Baltic states as "the Soviet West". William Risch argues (2015) that different experiences of WWII and late Stalinism and contacts with the West ultimately led to this region (Baltic Republics and Western Ukraine) becoming Soviet,

yet different from the rest of the Soviet Union. While "the Soviet West" was far from uniform, perceived differences between it and the rest of the Soviet Union justified claims at the end of the 1980s that the Soviet Union was an empire rather than a family of nations. The well-known Soviet-era cultural critic Yuri Gerchuk has observed (2000:82) that the Baltic republics (Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia) actively contributed to a transformation of the Soviet Union's aesthetic environment and to the formation of a new, modernist sensibility: "Annexed by the Soviet Union in the twilight of the Second World War, these republics were able to bounce back somewhat more rapidly than other regions during the era of the Khrushchev thaw; for this reason, cultural products from the Baltics inevitably came to symbolise the European culture". It can therefore be presumed that a smaller scale of the republics (Lithuania had almost three million residents, Latvia – up to two million, and Estonia – ca. one million); a developed housing stock from the pre-war period of the 1920s and 1930s; and later incorporation into the Soviet Union (the Soviet occupation of the three independent Baltic states by the Soviet armed forces occurred simultaneously in June 1940) resulted in a different planning and mass housing construction even under the all-union strict regulation.

Material for this research was selected from the USSR professional press covering the period of 1956–1990: the monthly journal *Arkhitektura SSSR* (*Architecture of the USSR*) and the Lithuanian professional journal *Statyba ir Architektūra* (*Construction and Architecture*). Original designs (including drawings, photographs and briefs) were examined at the Lithuanian State National Archives and the Vilnius Regional State Archives, as well as in the seven volumes of the "Collection of designs of the Lithuanian SSR towns, blocks and microrayons", published by the State Urban Design Planning Institute from 1967 to 1985 (in total, 290 designs).

Another methodological approach used in the research is based on the theory of expert cultures (Kohlrausch et al. 2010:9–30). The expert is not only seen as a trained professional but also as a mediator between the nation and the state. Expert status is also a cultural ascription largely dependent on social, economic and political environment. While one standpoint sees a static, top-down, highly controlled relationship between the totalitarian state and the professionals within it, the latest research reveals far more nuanced and complex reciprocal influences between the specialists and the state officials in charge. Indeed, Lithuanian and Estonian architects were rather closed professional groups (trained in local architectural schools with pre-war tradition – Tallinn (Estonian Art Academy), Kaunas (Polytechnic Institute) or Vilnius (Art Institute) with almost no administrative or leading specialists from Moscow, Leningrad or other Soviet republics). In the post-Stalinist period beginning in 1954, the all-union policy of "national specialists" in the national republics was introduced, and since then, all Lithuanian construction and architecture leadership became predominantly local, raised and trained in Lithuania. In 1959 they began to be assigned to leading positions in

urban and regional offices, having successfully changed their "guardians" sent from Russia during the first post-war decade.

The state's increasing faith in its architects is corroborated by the fact that the architects did indeed enjoy greater freedom compared to representatives of the other creative professions (Maciuika and Drėmaitė 2020:70). Architects were regarded as experts (more from the technical than artistic standpoint), and as such they were granted greater decision-making authority, particularly in the field of city planning.

In this context, the recollections of the first generation of post-war modernists, the so-called founding fathers of the "Lithuanian modernist school", are important (Maciuika and Drėmaitė 2020). Born in the 1930s, raised in cultured family surroundings and finishing high school during the years of WWII (1940s) and the Soviet occupation, this generation began expressing itself in the 1950s by criticising Stalinist architecture by realising significant public buildings in urban centres and even in mass housing and by rising into ever more influential posts in architecture and academia. Architects (in published materials and in conversation) emphasised the Baltic and especially Lithuanian mass housing design as a special case within the entire Soviet Union. It can therefore be presumed that the Soviet cultural image of the "West" (Péteri 2010:1–13) and the group agency were determining factors in the self-understanding of Soviet-era Lithuanian architects and designers, becoming an underlying factor in the narrative of shaping different built environment in comparison to Soviet standardisation and even cultural resistance.

The main theoretical question of this chapter is how much impact local Lithuanian architects were able to make in a seemingly rigid system of Soviet housing production. Was it because of the peripheral nature of the Baltic republics, where regulations were less strict, or was it motivated by the self-perception as "the Soviet West" and professional aspirations of the architects as a professional group not satisfied by the Soviet standardisation? This chapter will therefore further explore the role of the architect and the individualised design approach in the field of mass housing.

Standardisation of mass housing as an architectural problem

The development of residential zones became a critical urban planning issue for the Soviet Union following the Communist Party's 1957 promise to provide every Soviet family with their own individual apartment (Decree No. 591). The housing construction industry had to focus on two issues in particular: standardisation and industrialisation of prefabricated housing types and the new residential district model for the housing blocks. Both undertakings were subject to strict regulation from the beginning: the adoption in 1954 of regulations known as the Construction Norms and Rules (known by their Russian acronym, SNiP – *Stroitel'nye Normy i Pravila*) served for years as a means to control residential housing planners. In the period from 1954

to 1991, the SNiP rules dealing with mass housing were thoroughly revised only four times: in 1957, 1962, 1971 and 1985 (Meuser and Zadorin 2015:21), resulting in slow development of residential architecture.

A Soviet version of the neighbourhood unit, the *microrayon* (microdistrict) was developed with the aim of grouping prefabricated blocks of flats. The composition abandoned the location of houses along the perimeter of a city block in favour of a more freestyle arrangement (called "open planning"), which followed three parameters: compass direction, topography and the economics of the assembly crane (Meuser and Zadorin 2015:153). New housing was to be grouped into large, functionally zoned *microrayons* with 9,000–12,000 inhabitants. The core unit of the *microrayon* was a group of blocks of flats serviced by kindergartens, schools and shopping centres. Several *microrayons*, in turn, would be joined together to create a residential district (*rayon*) with 40,000–50,000 residents, with its own central shopping and recreation centre, a medical services building and other similar public facilities. Green zones were introduced between buildings and roadways, while pedestrian walkways wound through interior courtyards.

The essence of this type of planning was a tiered system of public cultural and consumer services based on the estimated needs of 1,000 inhabitants and defined by frequency of use (Baranov 1967:168–242): daily use sites (kindergartens, schools, food shops), periodic use facilities (visited two to three times per week) and episodic use facilities (used two or three times monthly). Services accessed on a daily basis were located within the boundaries of a given *microrayon* and usually arranged no further than 400 m from a given home. All first-tier public buildings were also expected to follow standard designs and consist of prefabricated parts. Second-tier (or rayon/district-level) facilities, such as cinemas, libraries, department stores and health care facilities, were meant to be used periodically and were thus located within 1 km of residential homes. The *microrayon* approach was extremely attractive for rapidly growing cities since planners could apply it continuously, linking one *microrayon* to another, achieving a limitless expansion of their socialist cities.

By 1961, the Third Congress of Soviet Architects was able to boast of huge quantitative progress (165 million square metres of residential floor space built in 1959–1960), but it also took note of significant shortcomings, including "a lack of creativity in use of standard designs", and "a one-sided perception of industrialisation in architecture" (Arkhitektura SSSR 1961:6). Even Nikita Khrushchev noted the "lack of aesthetics" in industrial construction in a report he presented to a plenary meeting of the Soviet Communist Party's Central Committee in November 1962. "Nowadays", the Soviet leader observed, "Soviet architects face many new problems, especially concerning large panel house construction. The technology of industrial construction demands simple forms and minimum variety. Even under such conditions, however, the question of expressiveness in architecture must not be ignored. Individual architectural and

artistic undertones must reveal themselves without exceeding the limits of what is capable and reasonable" (Kosenkova 2013:65–6). Studies had been repeatedly conducted on the use of "artistic undertones", but the economy was the real reason why Soviet mass housing areas were full of elongated rectangular five-storey buildings with 60 to 80 units per structure (the Moscow Institute series I-464 were the most widespread industrial series in the Baltic cities) arrayed in extremely regular patterns.

To avoid monotony in thousands of new residential districts, diversity had to be introduced as a matter of urgency. In 1960, the architectural journal *Arkhitektura SSSR* introduced a new regular section titled "Residential districts and the scope of progress in the construction of *mikrorayons*". Between 1960 and 1962, institutes under the jurisdiction of *Gosstroi*, the All-Union Construction Committee, developed and published external finishing design recommendations and manuals for standard housing series (Arkhitektura SSSR 1960:9; 1960:10). Architects understood, however, that such measures were superficial and that more fundamental change was necessary. For example, the architect Albertas Cibas, an official with the Lithuanian *Gosstroi* (a republic's branch of the central institution), called for measures to attract the best and most experienced architects to work in standardised designs, providing them with a degree of creative liberty, particularly in the adaptation of standard designs for certain sites (Arkhitektura SSSR 1961:7).

Introducing experimental design in Vilnius

The tension between serialised and unique designs became a long-standing feature of Soviet architectural production. As Mart Kalm put it, "Standardised designs were already in extensive use during the Stalinist period but became an obsession during Khrushchev's Thaw, when economical building practices became the focus of attention. […] The more the state demanded standardised designs, the more architects became irritated and felt oppressed by the restrictions" (Kalm 2012:39). In Lithuania, for example, such tasks were delegated to recent graduates who, in turn, hoped to escape their new duties as soon as possible.

However, the ambitions of a new generation of modernist architects could be seen in efforts to amend and improve standardised designs. Architect Vytautas Edmundas Čekanauskas recalled: "We referred to these buildings simply as bricks, for their slab shape and ungainly nature. We wanted to improve these buildings by changing those horrible Russian designs. An internal mini-competition was organised [in 1961 at the Vilnius Urban Construction Design Institute] to see what could be done with those buildings" (personal conversation with Čekanauskas, Vilnius, 11 December 2006). Indeed, proposals were already being made to design a series of residential buildings suited specifically for the Baltic republics, incorporating materials typically found in the region. Field visits to Finland organised for Soviet

architects also inspired them to seek better solutions for mass housing architecture (Drėmaitė 2021).

Experimental design became an effective way of introducing improvements to the Soviet residential housing system. Architects and designers who could characterise their work as "experimental" (meaning that an experimental building would provide technical know-how for the rest of the building sector) could bolster their credentials as technical specialists and draw on greater resources and enjoy greater freedoms. The Vilnius Urban Construction Design Institute established a special office for this purpose in 1960. Between 1960 and 1965, numerous experimental apartment units and housing designs were produced, seeking alternatives that improved standardised designs. A group of young architects (Gediminas Valiuškis, Enrikas Tamoševičius and Algimantas and Vytautas Nasvytis brothers) drew up the experimental plans for apartment units in 1961. Algimantas' account illuminates some of the available strategies he employed in pursuit of his goals: "We looked particularly at developments in the West, because this has long been the predisposition in Lithuanian architecture. Our orientation was explicitly towards the West, and not the East. It was our purpose to soften the norms and requirements that were issued to us from Moscow. We always sought a way to adjust them to better fit our local conditions – or, wherever possible, to ignore them, to skirt them, or, in the end, to at least soften them" (Maciuika and Drėmaitė 2020:102–4).

Vytautas Nasvytis, Jaunius Makariūnas and Algirdas Jasinskas developed an improved version of the standard I-464 series house, with apartments that could be divided using light sliding partitions or room dividers that also served as closets, allowing for different configurations of each apartment. However, the price for one square metre increased by 5–6%, and the Vilnius factory producing the concrete elements refused to make changes. A chairman of the Board of Lithuanian Union of Architects complained: "This is a strange situation – on the one hand, architects are criticised for design flaws, yet on the other hand, their improvements are not accepted" (Cibas 1962:13).

In 1966, Vilnius hosted the third plenary meeting of the Soviet Architects' Union Executive Committee, during which Vytautas Balčiūnas, Senior Architect for the Vilnius Urban Construction Design Institute, voiced his criticism and called for allowing national republics to oversee the planning and construction of residential housing themselves: "We must review and repeal the planning and construction prohibitions which have been adopted en masse in recent years and which only serve to inhibit initiative and thwart progress. A proposal has been made to change the system of standardised planning and financing and to restore the previously enjoyed right to have a republic's construction committee plan and finance standardised projects being constructed in that republic. It is time to grant republics more self-sufficiency, which will also increase initiative

and accountability" (Balčiūnas 1966). The proposal was not implemented, but the 1969 decree "On Measures to Improve the Quality of Residential Construction" (Decree No. 392) already aimed to produce greater architectural expressiveness, introduce unique cityscapes and imbue residential areas with a stronger sense of local identity.

Shaping the individuality of the microrayon: Lazdynai and Žirmūnai as all-union models

Vilnius grew at a particularly fast rate. In 1945, the post-war Lithuanian capital had 110,000 inhabitants. By 1959, that number had more than doubled to 236,000 and in 1979 Vilnius was nearly at the half-million inhabitant mark. A new master plan for Vilnius (Master Plan Brief 1964), completed by architects Vaclovas Balčiūnas, Kazimieras Bučas, Vladislavas Mikučianis, Vilhelmas Sližys and Juozas Vaškevičius in 1967, foresaw the construction of ten new housing estates in massive neighbourhoods planned as separate city districts.

Microrayon D–18 was designed and built between 1962 and 1964 for 12,000 residents as a first part of the future Žirmūnai mass housing district in the northern periphery of Vilnius. The young urban planner Birutė Kasperavičienė (1926–1976) had previously collaborated on the design of a new industrial town named Elektrėnai (1960) and other *microrayons* in Vilnius (Figure 8.1). D–18 was to be an "experimental site", introducing the concept of diversity in skyline through the use of improved five-storey series I-464A panel houses (developed by architect Bronius Krūminis and structural engineer Vaclovas Zubrus), experimental nine-storey panel houses (designed in Lithuanian Urban Construction Design Institute by architect Enrikas Tamoševičius) and an open neighbourhood centre featuring public art. Kasperavičienė had also used the natural slope of the adjacent Neris River bank and adapted it into a park. The completed microrayon attracted an all-union interest.

In a continuing search for new ideas, the first Soviet-wide review of the country's architecture was organised in Moscow in 1967. From a field of 167 submitted designs, the first prize was awarded by a unanimous decision to the *Microrayon* D–18 of Žirmūnai thus "signalling a turning point in Soviet architecture" (Barkhin 1968). Žirmūnai, it was claimed, served as an example of urban housing perfectly matching the contemporary style of the new Soviet residential ideology calling for original architectural ensembles and profiles. Since it was the first mass-produced residential site to be awarded the prestigious architectural USSR State Prize, it was elevated to a new level of good practice. Reviewers singled out overall improvement in designs of standard five-storey houses: "The site's value stems from a successful implementation of mass housing" (USSR State Prizes 1968 April Session). It was explicitly stated that Žirmūnai served as proof "that industrial housing can be diverse: it can have its own character

Figure 8.1 Architect Birutė Kasperavičienė at her drawing desk at the State Urban Construction Design Institute in Vilnius. Photo: A. Barysas, 1968.

Source: Lithuanian Central State Archives.

and it can avoid becoming a [nationwide] cliché" (USSR State Prizes 1968 October Session).

In 1962, two young architects, Vytautas Brėdikis (1930–2021) and Vytautas E. Čekanauskas (1930–2010) at the State Urban Construction Design Institute were commissioned to design Lazdynai, a large housing estate for 40,000 residents on the Western periphery of Vilnius. Both architects were already known for their modernist designs of public buildings and talked about their desire to improve standardised large housing estate image – in later interviews they mentioned considerable influence on their designs of Finnish (Tapiola), Swedish (Vällingby, Farsta), and modern French (Toulouse-Le Mirail) suburban projects (Maciuika and Drėmaitė 2020). The site for Lazdynai was naturally hilly and well forested – features that would be preserved in the final landscape design in contrast to usually levelled sited for large panel house construction. The project architects also suggested improvements to the series I-464 buildings and advocated for the placement of five- and nine-storey housing blocks perpendicularly across the sloping terrain to create a unique silhouette for the new community. For the first time in Lithuania they added large panel 12-storey towers as vertical landmarks of the site. The production of these new types of buildings was a challenge for the Vilnius Panel Construction Factory, but institutional nationalism (strong personal connections between architects and local Communist Party and municipal leaders) played a role when the need arose to defend the innovative designs to the Soviet Construction Committee (Figure 8.2).

Over time a kind of "institutional nationalism" took shape, strengthened by collegial ties with local Lithuanian government officials, which helped generate original solutions to material shortages and economic challenges. Local officials and state authorities in the memories of architects are mostly described as "favourable", well-disposed towards the architects as fellow Lithuanians, yet understanding nothing about architecture. In general, the architects' recommendations were locally respected because the architect was considered an authority.

Consideration of Lazdynai's nomination for the Lenin Prize in 1974 proceeded extremely smoothly at the Architectural Section and at the Plenary, because the uniqueness of the site was confirmed by *Gosstroi* and the Architectural Section members' visit to Lazdynai and a tour by helicopter (Lenin Prizes 1974 April Session). Thus, Lazdynai became the first mass housing urban design recognised with the most prestigious Soviet national prize (Drėmaitė 2019). The residential area showed a degree of Nordic influence with the semi-open courtyards and pedestrian avenues, the development of customised designs and adaptation of hilly terrain. Ideologically Lazdynai demonstrated the possibilities for a bright future in large panel mass housing construction, with only an added touch of "landscape design" and improvement of standard house series.

Figure 8.2 Architects Genovaitė Balėnienė and Aida Lėckienė with colleagues
working on the detailed plans of Lazdynai mass housing area. Photo:
T. Žebrauskas, 1973.

Source: Lithuanian Central State Archives.

Critique of *microrayon* and the pursuit of uniqueness over standardisation

The optimism of the 1960s had been replaced with the criticism voiced in the
1970s. Despite the success of Lazdynai, criticism of mass-constructed resi-
dential districts intensified both in Lithuania and throughout the Soviet Union.
The problems of urban and architectural monotony of residential areas become
a frequent topic of the professional press. Several main issues were named:
First, it was a long-term and repetitive use of the same series I-464 with minor
modifications from Žirmūnai district (in 1964) with 36,000 residents through
Lazdynai (1967–1973) with 40,000 residents and further in Karoliniškės
(planned for 45,000 residents, architects Genovaitė Balėnienė and Kazimieras
Balėnas, 1971–1976), Viršuliškės (planned for 25,000 residents, architects
Kasperavičienė and Jonas Zinkevičius, 1975–1980) and Baltupiai (planned for
20,000 residents by architect Nijolė Chlomauskienė, 1978). The second
problem was a small selection of finishing materials and a lack of colour
variety. In Karoliniškės and Viršuliškės, the colour schemes for the *microrayons*
were designed; however, during the construction process, only dark red fire-
walls were done in Karoliniškės, whereas no colour was provided for
Viršuliškės. In the case of Šeškinė, one more mass housing area built in
1977–1985 (architects Balėnas and Balėnienė) for 50,000 residents, instead of

the planned clean white colour of the facades, grey was implemented because the factory ran out of white granite grains (Ruseckaitė 2010).

However, the most problematic thing was the lack of comprehensive implementation of urban projects – no residential area was fully built as envisaged in the approved projects. Economic considerations played a central role, with new regulations imposed that increased both the density and height of residential buildings in the *microrayon*. With a few exceptions, urban design for the remainder of this period was viewed as an endless row of tedious construction, made only worse by the low quality of work and partial project completion. Even Lazdynai came under criticism for falling short of better standards existing abroad, both in terms of aesthetics as well as technical execution – a low quality of sound insulation, panel construction, etc. (Gūzas 1971).

Criticism of the monotony of residential areas was followed by the proposals on how to avoid it. It was proposed to replace series I-464 with new types. Although experimental design in residential architecture flourished in the late 1960s and early 1970s, no actual construction was built. In 1970 Krūminis' group designed an experimental series for construction in Lithuania in 1971–1975, which served as the basis for the second-generation 120 V panel housing series (1973), distinguished by façade detailing, corner balconies and larger kitchens. These blocks with a shorter pitch were seen as a possibility to make apartment planning more convenient and to bring greater volumetric diversity to the *microrayon*. The need for the latter was highlighted again in Decree No. 392 "On Measures to Improve the Quality of Residential and Civil Construction", adopted in 1969 by the Soviet Council of Ministers and the Communist Party Central Committee, which aimed to achieve greater architectural expressiveness, introduce unique cityscapes and imbue residential areas with a stronger sense of local identity. Indeed, series 120, developed during the 1970s for different cities of Lithuania, was in construction up till 1990.

Original urban design ideas were proposed in Kalniečiai residential area in Kaunas, especially its 3rd *microrayon* (architect Alvydas Steponavičius, 1983). The 120 K series of five-, nine- and twelve-storey panel buildings, designed especially for Kaunas, were arrayed around pedestrian paths and courtyards, with a central public area accentuated by sixteen-storey mono-lithic concrete towers. In addition, each street featured different coloured building numeration plaques with unique graphic designs (Jankevičienė 1991:110–2). For the first time, the overall composition also incorporated existing old-style country homes with their surrounding garden plots. The biggest innovation in Kalniečiai, however, was the decision to forego the tiered system of consumer services, instead locating large shopping centres closer to principal streets.

Introducing concrete towers that were meant to be unique architectural landmarks of *microrayon* was seen as another solution. The first experimental sixteen-storey tower block was built using monolithic concrete in Lazdynai in

1980, designed by architect Česlovas Mazūras. In 1981–1982, architects Krūminis and Danas Ruseckas designed 13- and 16-storey monolithic concrete towers with rounded balconies for the Šeškinė residential district. In the end, however, poor construction quality, inferior materials and incomplete structures conveyed a sad image of squalor.

Urban sociology was gaining interest as yet another measure to improve mass housing areas. By the late 1970s, interest in urban sociology was on the rise, spurring research of the new residential districts and analysis of the quality of the living environment and its impact on human lifestyle, spiritual condition and health. A short time after residents moved into a new district, analysis of the neighbourhood's usage patterns began to paint a "sociological portrait" of the given area (Vanagas 1982). For example, in 1982 even 91.6% of Lazdynai's residents expressed satisfaction with their own district, emphasising the neighbourhood's suitability for pedestrians and a proper balance between architecture and the surrounding landscape (*ibid*). However, the results of such sociological studies had little impact on the construction of residential districts, where economic considerations always took precedence. Nevertheless, polling of residents in Vilnius' new neighbourhoods revealed one clear and strong preference for districts constructed within a more scenic natural environment (Vaškevičius 1974).

Indeed, environmental concerns began receiving more attention in the early 1980s. In 1980, Vilnius hosted a local conference for the planners of the new residential districts on landscape design and natural environment. The conference found that the intrusion by architects and builders into the natural environment during the construction of new residential neighbourhoods often harmed the existing ecological balance, causing irreparable damage to the environment. The observation was also made that new Vilnius construction sites merely used the natural environment, rarely doing anything to shape those surroundings (Jančiauskas 1981). Lithuanian planners began cooperating with Finnish architects over the question of how to preserve the natural environment in the design of new residential districts. An experimental planning project was developed in 1978, focusing on the Baltupiai district in Vilnius and Malminkartano in Helsinki – both low-rise construction areas with striking natural surroundings (a pronounced terrain, forests and a small river) and located on the urban periphery (Girčys and Katilius 1981).

Regionalist approach to mass housing areas

By the late 1970s and early 1980s, it was possible to see more numerous manifestations of regional identity and an ever more individualised approach to mass housing design, as with the series designed for the coastal city of Klaipėda in 1980 (by Krūminis, Sargelis, Zubrus and Jonas Stanislovaitis, an engineer with the Klaipėda Panel Building Factory).

The Baltic port city's volatile climate was also taken into account: terrace balconies were designed that could be transformed into enclosed glazed verandas. Another innovation in mass-produced apartment construction was the introduction of an 11 m^2 hall leading to the apartment balcony, heated attics, prefabricated roofs without rolled covering and more spacious kitchens (8.67 m^2).

Houses were decorated with red brick cladding, considered to be a style typical of the Klaipėda region, conceptually developed by architect Gytis Tiškus. While working on new residential districts in Klaipėda, Tiškus tried to maintain the unique architecture of each neighbourhood centre, seeking inspiration from local and regional characteristics. He changed and adapted standardised public buildings, conveying regional traits through colour and materials, using red brick or ceramic finishing. Despite these efforts, Klaipėda's originality was limited to its unique public buildings and red brick finishing – broader urban planning approaches, however, received their fair share of criticism.

Strong regionalist approach in architecture of residential neighbourhoods could be felt especially in smaller towns and resort settlements. It was motivated by the general Soviet design approach prevalent in resort areas that the built environment must please the eye, but more importantly, these areas were usually in natural resorts and protected areas. For example, mass housing area in a Baltic Sea resort town Nida on Kopu street was specially designed employing regional elements (architect Ramūnas Kraniauskas, 1980s). Nine 3- to 4-storey multi-apartment houses were constructed in yellow brick and finished with pitched roofs and decorative wooden elements (Drėmaitė et al. Neringa 2022:164–7). These large structures were harmoniously incorporated into a particularly fragile and protected natural environment. Residential area in another Baltic Sea resort town Palanga was specially designed in yellow brick, low-rise (2–4–5 storey) multi-apartment segments to avoid standardised five-storey prefabricated slabs (architects Juozas Šipalis, Edmundas Benetis, 1974–1980). Multi-unit two and four-storey apartment buildings in Birštonas, a small resort town along the Nemunas River in southern Lithuania, were specially adapted to suit the scale and surroundings of the natural environment.

Conclusion

Reviewing mass housing architecture in Lithuania, it is evident that architects sought to avoid Soviet standardised designs that were not valued as creative and prestigious within the professional environment. Despite standardisation and the very limited choice of materials and building types, there were attempts to improve the design of mass-produced architecture and neighbourhood planning. In the 1970s original district planning solutions were sought by using the modified series I-464 and composing them

in a unique way in each district and decorating the buildings and the environment in a specific way to the district. Faced with urban monotony and its criticism, the spatial parameters of standardised designs began to be changed. In order to avoid urban and architectural monotony, in the 1980s, the identity and original character of residential areas began to be created with new series 120, specially designed high-rise towers, landscape design and regionalist approach to individualised house design. Such efforts were made easier by the existence of professional relationships developed between designers, local administration officials and the heads of construction material enterprises (especially the directors of housing construction factories).

Although architects in many Soviet republics began to shun mass construction projects and concede initiative to engineers, the design of mass housing in Lithuania was overseen by professional architects. The state's increasing faith in its architects is corroborated by the fact that the architects did indeed enjoy a greater freedom compared to representatives of the other creative professions. Architects were regarded as experts or specialists (more from the technical than artistic standpoint), and as such they were granted greater decision-making authority, particularly in the field of city planning. The increasing role of an architect as an expert in the field of mass housing illustrates the shift in late Soviet architecture, where decision-making in urban planning shifted from politicians to technocrats. This shift was validated because of the changing approach to an architect as a technical expert and growing expert culture in general.

Professional ambitions of architects and urban planners were reflected in design competitions and "experimental projects". However, the great majority of experimental designs were never realised or were implemented with considerable modifications because of the economic issues. It can be noted that the lack of prestige in mass housing urban planning lead to the fact that most of these areas were designed by female architects (e.g., Birutė Kasperavičienė designed 11 sites; Genovaitė Balėnienė – 11; and Nijolė Chlomauskienė – 15). This aspect in mass housing urban design can be researched further.

The numerous awards regularly given to Lithuanian urban planners in the late Soviet period can be viewed in two ways. Though a considerable role was played here by the good reputation earned by the designs of Žirmūnai D–18 and Lazdynai, Lithuanian approaches to *microrayon* design, in general, were notable within the general Soviet context for their architectural originality. First and foremost, these districts were constructed in suburbs well chosen for their natural characteristics, while the effort to give each new neighbourhood a sense of uniqueness drove improvements in industrialised housing construction and assembly as well as environmental clean-up projects. It could be said that these efforts became the defining characteristics of Lithuanian residential urban planning.

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