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ARTICLE

Disagreement over monuments: cultural planning of national jubilees and public spaces in Vilnius

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ABSTRACT

This article explores the emergence of a new cultural policy phenomenon in Lithuania: the debate about public spaces and monuments and its role in urban cultural planning. Between the 1940s and1980s state socialist cultural policy built and transformed public spaces without any discussion involved in the process. In contrast, contemporary cultural policy appears to cause endless controversies. These controversies have followed political decisions to endow Vilnius public spaces with socio-historical meaning via monument-building. By focusing on public critique and disagreement about key cultural events, which include the state sponsored national celebrations Vilnius, European Capital of Culture 2009, the Centennial of the restored Lithuania (2018) and reconstructions of urban public spaces, this study explores the new phenomenon of cultural policy controversy as an example of democratic cultural planning.

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The ongoing Lithuanian debate about public spaces is characterised by unprecedented intensity. For more than half a century state socialist cultural policy built and transformed public spaces without any discussion involved in the process. However, the failure to consult urban populations is not unique to state socialism, but is a feature shared by both socialist and neoliberal cities (Swyngedouw, Moulaert, and Rodriguez 2002; Zarecor 2018). Indeed, as I show in this article, the shift from Soviet to liberal democratic cultural and urban policy in Lithuania entailed many controversies that followed political initiatives to endow Lithuanian cities, especially the capital Vilnius, with new socio-historical meanings via monument-building. Politicians and then the media extolled the significance of marking historic events, commemorations and personalities by constructing new monuments, as well as claiming the symbolic and exceptional functions of central urban spaces. In addition to this, economic considerations also played an important role: as Couch and Fraser (2003) noted, many cities combine historical commemorations with urban regeneration projects. I suggest that a dual logic of the transformation of urban space through cultural planning that combines political and economic rationales applies particularly well to the Lithuanian cases that are analysed here. The two national anniversaries that this article focuses on motivated the 'need' for political action and provoked public calls for the unification of historical narratives. At the same time, some Lithuanian public intellectuals, culture critics and journalists reminded the public about the indeterminacy and inconsistency of any collective identity, casting doubt on the need for any consensual representation. However, others continued deploying the ideologically constructed 'historical objectivity'in order to build or remove the monument.

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The article offers an analysis of public critiques and disagreements around the politics of public space and monuments in Vilnius, Lithuania, between 2009 and 2019. This study approaches the contrasting opinions as to what deserves to be shown and seen in public as a symptom of the highly selective, contradictory and politically motivated nature of efforts to commemorate the past. It suggests that the causes of controversies are neither an effect nor a response to a systematic cultural policy; indeed, these viewpoints change sporadically, when a certain opinion, hero, or a date is brought to the fore, while others are temporarily forgotten. Such unsystematic promotion of a place or a monument of remembrance could be interpreted as civic boosterism, a term proposed in city planning and image building literature (Larkham and Lilley 2003). Cultural policies of European cities adopted the planning perspective (Bianchini 1993) through innovative approaches and toolkits for culture management (Landry 2000). Models of democratic planning, however, often pit against the waves of civic boosterism when active promotion and tacit disagreements over celebration of national jubilees and monuments lead to numerous public discussions about the nature of a 'proper' global and local identity (Trilupaitytė 2009; Mulcahy 2017). Drawing on the analysis of public discourses, expressed in press releases, public discusssions and statements of politicians, this article explores the political and cultural conditions of the new cultural planning in Vilnius to argue that it not only differs significantly from the more centralist Soviet model, but also demonstrates the remarkable propensity for failure of top-down strategies.

The empirical focus is on the most prominent cases of cultural planning in the capital: the state sponsored national celebrations Vilnius, European Capital of Culture (2009) and the Centennial of the restored Lithuania (2018). These saw the transformation of central public spaces, namely Lukiškės square and the Green Bridge, and the ongoing initiative to remove the monument to the Soviet writer Petras Cvirka. All interventions were framed in terms of urban regeneration, although the actual removal of the statues, as I show, was mainly for ideological reasons, as part of the continued process of de-Sovietisation. In addition to this political complexity, I draw on this analysis to reveal the emergence of a complex cultural policy landscape that has not been sufficiently analysed in existing work on East European cultural policy: cultural planning is pursued not only by state committees, departments and ministries, but also by the city municipality, which has become increasingly interested in the instrumentalisation of culture in local politics.

Events and explicit and implicit cultural policy

Before we proceed, a brief review of the historical role of special events in Lithuanian state cultural policy is necessary. There is a wide body of scholarship on the role of national festivals and formal state events in identity politics (Gold 2016; Meyer 2005; McDonald and Méthot 2006; Antanavičiūtė 2019), as well as other 'special events' such as global sports spectacles (Mulcahy 2017), the millennium and European Capital of Culture (ECOC) serving as vehicles for national and global identity and expressed in formal and informal initiatives (Laķe and Muktupāvela 2017). In Lithuania, state-led efforts to actively shape and visually display modern national culture were initiated in the interwar period (Sirutavičius 2001), continued in a restrained form during the Soviet period and, after 1990, became part of the main state cultural policy repertoire (Rindzevičiūtė 2005; Lubytė 2008). In this process, events played an important role: for instance, scholars showed that the regular organisation of National Song Festivals disseminated a shared understanding of Lithuanian national identity (Nakienė 2014; Daujotytė 2018). Rindzevičiūtė (2012) suggested that the goal of state cultural was to enhance social cohesion and even homogeneity, demonstrating how the documents of Lithuanian state cultural policy continued to reproduce the discourse of national unity in the 1990s-2010s. At the same time, state cultural policy was characterised by the reform processes of democratisation and decentralisation.

However, policy documents allow access to only one part of the policy process. In her conclusions Rindzevičiūtė (2012) pointed to the need to analyse 'how these terms are translated into practice'. A similar call to pay attention not only to documents, but also to everyday cultural practices, was suggested in the distinction between explicit and implicit cultural policies. As Jeremy Ahearne (2009)

shows, explicit cultural policy is manifested in the instrumentalisation of culture for political or economic goals. Explicit cultural policy is manifest in programs designed for national commemorations and state jubilees. In contrast, implicit cultural policy might be detected in numerous debates and political conflicts: discourses that often lie behind the scenes, but which do not necessarily enter official statements. Critical debates in the public sphere are central for this broader understanding of cultural policy as disputation over ideas when one enters, as Jim McGuigan (2004, 5) put it, 'a contested terrain where campaigns are waged over issues'. Culture, if understood in a broader sense as an embodied system of values, could be interpreted as an implicit element in governmental or municipal policies. As Ahearne (2009, 144) states 'explicit cultural policies will often identify "culture" quite simply with certain forms of artistic expression, thereby deflecting attention from other forms of policy action upon culture'.

This separation is quite apparent in the Lithuanian case: when display functions are explicitly built into strategies of urban and cultural development, national ambitions and pomposity became important aspects in the planning of State jubilees. When cultural policy becomes explicit and voiced in formal criteria or programs it often correlates with preferences towards strictly traditional artistic expressions. For instance, explicit articulation of nationalist visions and strategies in the Centenary of Lithuania's Independence program and in political programs were discussed in Lithuanian cultural studies scholarship (Laužikas 2017; Repšienė 2017; Ivanauskas 2018).[1] Nevertheless, one should not unequivocally conflate implicit cultural policy with display and explicit cultural policy with proper strategies of cultural policy. There are more 'shades and nuances' (Ahearne 2009, 145).

European capital of culture and the centennial events

The organisation of special events, which in the case of Lithuania were linked with national jubilee programs, entailed significant modifications of local cultural policies, particularly when it was found advantegous to incorporate international cultural policy frameworks. EU accession in 2004 stimulated significant changes in Lithuanian culture, not all of which appeared as explicit cultural policy: the emergence of new international intellectual exchanges, prolific creative journeys, and other previously unheard-of initiatives and rhetoric. For example, in 2009 Vilnius enjoyed the ECOC title at the same time that the country celebrated its Millennium by commemorating the alleged 'discovery' of Lithuania, its first mentioning in historical sources in 1009. This was the first time that extensive cultural initiatives had been launched since Lithuania separated from the Soviet Union. Typical of the European capitals of culture framework, the Vilnius, ECOC 2009 programme deployed social-democratic discourses of inclusion in its official agendas, promising greater access and inclusion of disempowered groups in social and cultural life and promoted this new vocabulary in cultural policy circles.

This shift to inclusion was not unexpected: many urban scholars have called for a more integrated and locally-oriented approach in city culture planning (Evans 2001; Garcia 2004; Stevenson 2004; Miles 2007; Bučinskas et al. 2009). Also, cities are required to follow certain criteria following the award of ECOC (Lähdesmäki 2014). Although Vilnius, ECOC 2009 was described as a success of inclusive cultural planning in the Lithuanian academic literature on culture management and planning, international cultural policy scholars detailed many troubles and failures in fulfilling the promises of the Vilnius, ECOC 2009 programme, mainly because of the disruption caused by changes in government (Palonen 2010).[2] However, I suggest that the Lithuanian Parliament elections at the end of 2008 was not the only reason for failures of the ECOC program and ensuing dissatisfaction. Changes in the rules of the political game in Lithuanian cultural policy usually meant that local politicians, for example, adopted rather different perspective from the Ministry of Culture or other branches of government; therefore institutions were pitted against each other in disputes over the meaning of high arts and popular culture. Political tensions and disagreements over the 'proper' implementation of ECOC goals concealed a scramble for resources and different ideological attitudes

towards culture. Indeed, as I show later in this article, the cultural programs of national jubilees revealed ambivalences in local culture planning, especially where narratives of national historical memory are concerned.

Another important aspect of ECOC, the idea of new European cultural identity, was expressed, among other things, in the rise of civic boosterism for building new monuments and creating new cultural organisations. To this end, politically driven funding from the government, originally dedicated to celebrate Lithuania's Millennium, was used to support the visual art program of Vilnius, ECOC 2009. It helped launch Vilnius Art Fair and to open the performing arts venue The Arts Printing House. The most important legacy of the celebrations in the year 2009, however, was the opening of the National Gallery of Art (NGA).[3] The NGA's collection was closely scrutinised and criticised by many professionals: the newly-opened national collection of modern art raised debates, published in local cultural magazines (Šapoka 2010).

A decade later, the Centennial of the Restored State of Lithuania (the marking of the 100th anniversary of signing the Act of Independence on 16 February 1918) was celebrated with an extensive cultural program, developed by the governmental committee. The main goal of the centennial celebrations was to enhance the citizens' experience of political and cultural unity.[4] To this end, in 2018 the local cultural and artistic community produced many exciting plans, but the programme raised too many expectations that were not fulfilled, which led to disappointment. A range of cultural policy opportunities were acted upon, but several grand plans were not realised and were understood as evidence of failing politics (Trilupaitytė 2019). These failings were widely discussed in the national media, where the general public mainly payed attention to unresolved legal issues and political accusations, particularly those regarding ECOC 2009 (Urbonaitė 2009; "Vis dar sostinė" 2010). Accusations were made of money embezzlement and that real estate companies had hidden private interests in the development of grand urban sites for ECOC 2009; the dysfunctional legal framework regulating cultural activities was often discussed as well. Later, despite long-lasting preparations for special Centenary events, Parliament and local elections also created a politically-charged context which resulted in clashes over programme priorities and witch-hunts for wasted resourcesm leading to public finger pointing and ideological and partisan disagreements between political opponents. What was meant to be a celebration of national unity became an ongoing political controversy, which provoked pessimism or sarcasm towards culture projects in the media.

As explicit policies, ECOC and Centenary events were regarded as relative failures. However, there were successes that could be seen as examples of implicit cultural policies. In 2009, the opening of the NGA coincided with a family of local business people, Danguolė and Viktoras Butkus, prominent collectors of Lithuanian visual art, stepping into the Lithuanian art scene with a major exhibition of their collection. The couple were already known in the Lithuanian art world for supporting artists and buying important works from the Soviet and post-Soviet era. Their collection already had a public face through the Modern Art Centre, a virtual organisation funded by the Butkus family. In 2018, the collection acquired a material home: the Butkus family built the first private art museum in Vilnius, the Modern Art Museum (MO), designed by Daniel Liebeskind. The construction of the MO building was delayed by a few years. According to the first proposal, it was meant to be situated next to the NGA, on the bank of Neris, but the second proposal placed it on the site of the 'Lietuva' cinema theatre, where, following a third proposal, it was actually built. The delay proved to be fortunate for the MO, because it coincided with the Centenary. According to Butkus, 'it was a coincidence, but a very nice one. It is pleasant to call it [MO] a centenary gift or a centenary project. The script for our opening was also based on the number one hundred as well.' (Pumprickaitė 2018). Being representatives of the post-Soviet business world, the Butkus family were keen to stress their anti-elitist, 'art for all' mission.

These examples of the transformation Vilnius public space help us to reconsider the divergence between optimistic civic boosterism (and public relations campaigns) and urban reality, in this case as seen in the media response. The pessimists refered to the contradictions and unrealised ambitions

of cultural projects, attributing institutional drawbacks to 'remnants' of the Soviet mentality. However, as the next two sections show, these controversies only emerged in relation to the centrally located and highly symbolic square and monuments.

Lukiškės square: between recreation and official ceremonies

Since the break up of the Soviet Union, there has been ongoing discussions about the status of Lukiškės Square, originally formed in the nineteenth century. During the Soviet era, the square was reconstructed and renamed Lenin Square. A dominating statue of Lenin, designed by the Russian sculptor Nikolai Tomski, was erected in its centre. Lenin's statue was removed in 1991 and the historic name of Lukiškes Square was restored. Since then, many discussions have taken place about what the square's proper function might be and how its history could be memorialised. The survivors of the Soviet repressions and gulags, the Union of Political Prisoners and Deportees (UPPD), who promoted building traditional national monuments and establishing museum discourses of anti-Soviet resistance and sites of remembrance (Rindzevičiūtė 2018, 231–232), argued that this space should be dedicated to the memory of those who struggled for the nation's freedom and suffered from Soviet repression. In February 1999, the Lithuanian Parliament decided that Lukiškės Square should become the main representative square of the State with a memorial to the Unknown Lithuanian Partisan (Freedom Fighter). In line with the proposed monument, it was decided to develop the square to fulfil representative, memorial, recreational, and societal functions (Grunskis 2012). Although art critics proposed to turn the square into an ordinary plaza for city dwellers, a proposal that would have been less costly than a representational space, it did not gain governmental support (Lubytė 2008aa).

The approach of Lithuania's Millenium in 2008 became an important starting point for restructuring and reorganising the square in accordance with new narratives of nationalist historical memory. After public discussions, a call for proposals to redesign Lukiškes Square was announced in 2008. The call stated that the main object should be a design symbolizing the nation's struggle for independence called *Liberty*. Nevertheless, as the important date of 2009 was approaching, various lobbying groups, such as former anti-Soviet dissidents and the Union of Freedom Fighters, and political organisations or members of conservative political parties, clashed with other political forces, as well as various bureaucracies. In the autumn of 2008 Vilnius municipality announced that for the Millennium and Vilnius, ECOC 2009 event a new 'modern and reconstructed Lukiškės Square' would not be ready, despite previous expectations. The media added that the whole process represented a fiasco of public planning.[5]

The competition for the refurbishment of the square failed for various political, legal, and financial reasons. The Lithuanian government tasked two ministries of Environment and Culture to announce a new double competition. In 2011 the Rolandas Palekas Studio won the competition to redesig the square and a spot was selected for the monument in memory of those who died fighting for Lithuania's freedom. In October 2012 the Ministry of Culture announced another competition for the best artistic idea for memorializing Lithuanian freedom fighters in Lukiškės Square, with the main provisions of the contest formulated by the Lithuanian Republic's Governmental Commission for the Renovation of Lukiškės Square. The Ministry of Culture received twenty-eight proposals in the spring of 2013, of which eighteen met the call's technical specifications. In July experts selected a project by Vidmantas Gylikis, entitled *Nation's Spirit*, as the winner. They hoped that if legal issues were resolved and financing from the government were secured, the implementation of the monument could begin in 2015.

Centrally located, representative city squares excite more attention and generate more controversy than public spaces in the outskirts. The representative function implies many regulations defining the historical significance of the space and its usage. This function can correlate with traditional or conservative aesthetic priorities that are expected from participants of competitions. The written requirements and conditions that were formed mainly by the bureaucrats representing

various governmental and municipal institutions were often derided by contemporary artists and art critics. Prescriptions for a traditional monument paid no heed to the multifunctionality of a changing culture, and totally ignored the possibilities of novel and nontraditional artistic expression. Despite the composition of Gylikis' *Nation's Spirit*, which resembled an abstract spire, the design of the memorial was neither figurative nor controversial or too contemporary. It did not attract many admirers and political supporters.

Eventually, the project was also not realised for bureaucratic reasons.[6] There were misunderstandings concerning the lack of transparency, ambiguities in the organisation of the competition and disagreements over the artistic language of an 'historic monument'. The result was a growing conflict between the memorial and recreational functions of the square (Kirtiklis 2013; Lavrinec and Narkūnas 2013). According to the influential Vilnius municipality architect Mindaugas Pakalnis, the Chief architect of the city, the commission's decision regarding the monument and the appearance of a renovated Lukiškės Square represented a compromise:

> For some, it had to be a pompous square, merely a collection of symbols and signs; others wanted something lively; still others yearned for a recreational space in the middle of the city. I think the design chosen […] represents a compromise between these three views (Narušytė and Jursevičius 2013)

However, litigation regarding copyright law and institutional conflicts impeded the process. The national elections in 2016 changed the political rules of the game and thus ended this public campaign. Changes in power did not, however, overrule the prevailing attitudes in cultural policies and planning practice. The failure of all competitions to redesign Lukiškės Square was happening against the background of increasingly vocal opposition to the tradition of stately monuments embodying hierarchical thinking and anachronistic figurative forms. Also, although some groups in society offered to solve the monument issue on a volunteer basis, without following the procedures requisite for fulfilling official directives, in reality the procedural side of the issue was given great importance.[7]

As the Centennial of the Restored State of Lithuania was approaching, conservative politicians, backed by the Freedom Fighters Union, started to promote the idea to build a traditional statue of Vytis, the official Lithuanian national symbol, a knight on horseback. On 2 May 2017 the Lithuanian Parliament adopted a resolution refering to the decision of 1999 to determine the representative function of Lukiškių Square and urging the Government to refurbish the site and erect a memorial for Freedom Fighters for the Centennial of the Restored State of Lithuania.[8] The Municipality of Vilnius was tasked with fulfilling some reconstruction work and sharing some budget costs.

The Government of Lithuania and Vilnius municipality soon initiated a new competition for Lukiškės Square. In July 2017 the Ministry of Culture of Lithuania partnered with the Contemporary Art Centre (CAC) and publicly called professional artists to participate in a creative workshop which aimed to develop ideas for the Memorial of Lukiškės Square, dedicated to the memory of Lithuania's freedom fighters. The artistic criteria, because of the CAC initiative, were not too strict about non-traditional forms this time and there was no unequivocal requirement to execute the sculpture in a 'recognisable' way so as to visually embody all the historical facts and images marking the suffering and fight of nation, as had been the case with the previous competitions.[9] Several contemporary artists participated in the competition.

The winner of the competition, which followed the creative workshop, was a designer of the younger generation, Andrius Labašauskas, who was selected by the expert jury and public survey ballot organised with the help of the municipality. He proposed a new concept for a memorial: it was an assemblage of massive concrete forms which referred to Lithuanian forests, sites of postwar guerilla figting and partisan bunkers. Labašauskas suggested a small mound rising from Lukiškės Square as a continuation of the grass lawn, which emphasised the vision of freedom in contemporary city full of life. While talking about his vision of a democratic and open space, Labašauskas argued that traditional sculpture, such as the statue of a knight on a horse that was proposed earlier, is obsolete: 'This tradition of sculpture has actually been dead for a long time. The world has advanced.

It is 2017 now'.[10] From the institutional point of view, the Ministry of Culture supported the CAC as an organiser of the competition and Vilnius municipality issued enthusiastic reports about the young artist's triumph and promised help in organizing the work and financial support. This was clear evidence of the growing awareness of new artistic expression among younger city politicians, at that time representatives of the Liberal party, and municipal urban planners. The competition arguably broadened the understanding of public art amongst the general public.

Unfortunately, the Centenary celebration of 2018 came and passed, while the Lukiškės reconstruction process again sunk into litigation. The Government oscillated about the whole issue, as the group of conservative parliamentarians and other lobbying groups (such as the above-mentioned UPPD and Union of Lithuanian Freedom Fighters) declared that the entire workshop and competition process and thus the winner, picked by the CAC, was not legal. According to this group, the idea of the national symbol of Vytis, to which Labašaukas offered an alternative, was the only legitimate choice. Many did not shy away from openly articulating an extremely negative opinion about the artistic expression of the project resembling a hill (despite its reference to guerrilla bunkers, the mundane lodgings of the anti-Soviet partisans). The conservative-led Parliamentarian Commission of State Historical Memory, along with some members of Parliament, referred to the previous decision of Parliament (1999) and even proposed a new law for Lukiškės Square which would secure the right for the 'Monument of Vytis' in this representative space in Vilnius (Činga 2017). This attempt, in turn, was ridiculed by their political opponents.

In this high-level political debate, the Lithuanian Cultural Heritage Department, the institution generally giving permissions to projects in central spaces of the city, took the side of the conservative politicians. During court proceedings it declared that the Memorial project proposed by the CAC fell short of requirements and heritage regulations.[11] According to Labašauskas, contemporary art critics and younger supporters of Vilnius' Liberal party, the whole process turned into a foul political play, expressing the desperation of institutions whose resentment grew over the winner and were thus not willing to let the new forms of artistic expression into the mainstream (Gimbutaitė 2019). Vilnius municipality, although officially still supporting the artist, also became uncertain about the future of the project, as some administrators mentioned in passing (Grigaliūnaitė 2019).

This case shows that the material articulation of an historical narrative in public space caused controversies and became problematic in Lithuanian cultural policy. Political support and momentum were deployed by linking the competitions and commissions for the renewal of the square and building the monument with the highest level national cultural events. But 'the urge for display,' evident in cultural planning as it was explicitly expressed in official policy documents, did not correspond with what was articulated in the actual policy action, which descended into a political contest between the incumbent city and national governments, political parties, cultural organisations and civil society groups.[12] If implicit cultural policy is to be discerned in this case, it is one of liberal democracy, where a plurality of opinion and the legal process prevail against consolidated institutional interests.

Clearing public space and fights over Soviet statues

The demolition of Soviet ideological monuments began in 1989 and accelerated after the restoration of Lithuanian independence in 1990, when statues of Soviet leaders were removed from city centers. In the absence of a consistent storage policy for the 'despised' Soviet heritage, many dismantled ideological monuments were piled in the backyards of utility companies. Some communist statues were destroyed or sold on the illegal metal trade market and eventually debates about the fate of these works of art led to the establishment of Grūtas statue park near Druskininkai in southern Lithuania. This private park, where Soviet ideological sculptures had been privately collected from all over the country, opened in 2001. The phenomenon of communist heritage has been discussed by comparing Grutas park with its more famous Hungarian counterpart Memento Park (Szoborpark) in Budapest (Kreivytė 2001), contextualising it in the ambivalent post-communist memory politics (Nikžentaitis 2003;

Dovydaitytė 2010; Dementavičius 2011) and the cultural reevaluation of the communist past (Rindzevičiūtė 2018, 237–241).

Two decades later, a new wave of reassessing the Soviet past emerged in response to the regeneration of Vilnius city center. It all started with reevaluation of the socialist realist sculptures that were erected on Green Bridge in Vilnius in 1952. The sculptures included four sets, each featuring two people and depicting collective farmers, workers, soldiers, and school youngsters (the titles being *Agriculture, Industry and Construction, In Defense of Peace*, and *Student Youth*). As art historians noted, the Green Bridge sculptures were prominent examples of Soviet socialist realism, representing idealised images of Soviet social classes. Although these sculptures were in plain sight for Vilnius citizens for more than two decades, only in 2010 were they turned into rhetorical weapons of ideologically charged statements bombarding the national cultural imagination. As stated by cultural sociologist Rasa Baločkaitė, 'the statues are neither explicitly political nor ideologically neutral, so they survived the fall of the Soviet regime and existed in relative peace until 2010' (Baločkaitė 2015 no page). In early 2010 they came to dominate public consciousness when officials noticed that some sculptures were seriously rusted. As the material condition of the statues deteriorated, the question of how to restore this heritage became a public concern.

The Municipality of Moscow offered their services (Tracevičiūtė 2010). The mayor of Vilnius, Vilius Navickas, however, responded sarcastically: 'We'll fix those mummies, which were piled up on Green Bridge by the Soviets, ourselves' (Urbonaitė 2010). These apparently folksy judgments had an effect on people's rekindled deliberations about historical memory and disputes about whether these cultural objects were 'Lithuanian' or 'Russian.' The continued presence of Soviet sculptures on the Green Bridge soon provoked the anger of some politicians, patriotic political groups (such as UPPD) and famous journalists. Several commentators suggested the removal of these sculptures, redolent of Soviet occupation, to Grūtas Park.

Similar ambivalences around the history of the Soviet past led to the fight over the Bronze Soldier of Tallinn in 2007 (although the function of the Bronze Soldier was not the same as Vilnius' Green Bridge statues, because the latter did not signify a memorial place). Controversies surrounding the Soldier's monument in Tallinn were eloquently described by Robert Kaiser (2012). These conflicts, including riots and protests by Russian speakers, spread through Tallinn after Estonia had already solidified its independent statehood and joined NATO and the European Union. New media and social networks, together with politically biased reports, helped exacerbate the conflict and ignited a culture war that was fueled by internal and external agents. In Estonia, confrontations over the Bronze Soldier's fate, the defense of the monument and 'affective moments' of political decision-making were followed by cyber attacks from Russia.

If this Soviet monument had been moved from the city center immediately after Estonia had regained its political independence, this probably could have been accomplished without causing any adverse reactions at all – precisely because during that period, numerous remains from the Soviet epoch were being removed from city centers throughout the region. External circumstances and various media channels in later years, however, became important whenever contested identities came to the surface in the politics of historical memory. In a similar way, for example, in 2010, the local election debates and ideological pre-election disputes in social media eventually exacerbated the objective need for the Vilnius Green Bridge sculptures to be renovated. Debates pitted nationalists demanding the removal of the statues against those who saw them as historical artifacts. While Lithuanian politicians had been arguing over who should refashion the Green Bridge's cultural heritage, fuel was added to the fire by media reports that the Russian Embassy was frustrated at Lithuania for allegedly 'prohibiting the upkeep of monuments to Soviet soldiers'.[13] Even though the sculptures on Green Bridge are essentially decorative art, they neither mark a burial site nor are erected to commemorate a particular event (as the Russian Embassy maintained), these disputes showed that the way people interpret totalitarian monuments might change rapidly (Trilupaitytė 2010).

This time the dynamics of disagreement was prompted not by upcoming national commemorations but rather a culture war in which internal rationales morphed into external ones. The Green Bridge statues became associated with the threat that was demonstrated by events in Georgia (2008) and in Ukraine (2014), where statues of Lenin were tumbling after Russian invasion. Geopolitical circumstances especially triggered conservative and some liberal Lithuanian politicians. In May 2013, a conservative member of the Lithuanian Parliament, Kęstutis Masiulis, like many others offended mostly by the Soviet soldiers depicted in one of the sculpture groups, asked the Parliament to consider whether it was really necessary to preserve objects displaying Nazi or Soviet symbols (the latter indeed adorn the soldier group). Masiulis proposed amending the existing 2008 law banning objects displaying Soviet or Nazi coats of arms, emblems, banners, flags, uniforms, etc., to also not allow them to be treated as part of the national heritage (the proposal was eventually rejected). Soon thereafter, another well-known Lithuanian politician, Mečys Laurinkus, also expressed a negative attitude towards what he dubbed 'Soviet icons' still standing around in the city and appealed to the nation's conscience (Laurinkus 2013). On the other hand, some historians, culture critics and cultural preservationists, such as State Monument Preservation Commission Chair, Gražina Drėmaitė, opposed these sentiments; in public discussions Drėmaitė contended that the sculptures in question were primarily works of art and belonged to our historical inheritance (Ragėnienė 2013). Some emphasised the point that if you removed just the one sculpture group that directly depicted the occupiers' army, the visual unity of the bridge itself would be impaired. Then, in August 2013, the mayor Artūras Zuokas announced a plan to refurbish the statues without removing them from the bridge.

The representatives of Vilnius municipality (which was responsible for the restoration), the Ministry of Culture and its subsidiary the Department of Cultural Heritage held mixed opinions. In late 2014 and the beginning of 2015, another local election campaign stirred the emotions regarding the Green Bridge statues. These were followed by online petitions, a series of protests and demands for removal of statues from the Cultural Heritage List.[14] As noted by Rasa Baločkaitė, 'the Green Bridge statues remain a litmus test, revealing highly polarised public opinions towards the Soviet past in general and Soviet cultural heritage in particular' (Baločkaitė 2015, no page). Similarly, historian Rasa Čepaitienė, who analyses the issue of soviet cultural memory, stated that public discourse about the Green Bridge statues helped construct a schism in Lithuanian society while deflecting attention from acute social problems (Čepaitienė 2015). Opinions by culture historians, architects and experts were summarised in a special collection after a 2015 conference on the Soviet heritage (Drėmaitė 2016).

In July 2015 the newly elected Vilnius municipality government, with a Liberal majority, finally removed the four groups of statues, officially for safety reasons, but it was obvious that the main reason was ideological. Soon after, pots with flowers were placed in the vacant places as an immediate ideological 'remedy' for the controversial site. The new mayor of Vilnius, Remigijus Šimašius, confessed there was 'a big debate of the principles and values behind the statues' and he added that 'personally, I think the values the statues represent were actually big lies about the Soviet system. Nothing more, just big lies' (East 2015 no page). Although these artifacts still enjoyed the status of cultural heritage status, in March 2016 the First Council of the Assessment of Immovable Cultural Heritage withdrew legal protection from the bridge and the sculptures. Therefore, the restoration and return of the statues to the bridge became highly unlikely. Cultural officials expressed hope, however, that the statues would end up in a museum. Later the city launched a competition and started allocating a special annual budget for temporary installations in place of the removed statues. The statues were removed without stressing symbolic linkages to particularly significant events, although the newly-elected liberal mayor exploited this spectacle to shape Vilnius' political identity in an international context. Yet later, with the new jubilee approaching, political rhetoric echoed what was understood as proper timing in taking meaningful steps for such celebrations.

While the removal of Green Bridge sculptures was initially motivated by concerns about health and safety, the urban regeneration process placed another prominent state socialist statue at the centre of controversy and conflicting planning projects: the monument to the Soviet writer Petras Cvirka (1909–1947) which is located in the Vilnius square named after him. The Cvirka monument had escaped the fate of ideological Soviet sculptures during the break up of the Soviet Union, despite the fact that Cvirka collaborated with the Soviets and helped consolidate the occupation of Lithuania during World War II.[15] As a reward for his political loyalty, Cvirka's bronze statue was commissioned from the prominent Lithuanian sculptor Juozas Mikėnas, who designed some of the most prominent sculptures celebrating interwar Lithuanian nationalism. The monument was built in 1959, as part of the reconstruction of the slope of Tauras Hill, where it is situated. The writer's role in spreading Soviet propaganda has never been a secret; for instance, Cvirka bus station was renamed Islandijos after 1990. However, the struggle over the monument was belated: it escalated several years after the removal of the Green Bridge statues and was linked with proposals to get rid of several other 'disgraced' historical figures and their memorial sites, such as the poet Salomėja Neris.

From 2018 Vilnius authorities expressed their intention to refurbish Cvirka square by taking down the statue. It was not the case that the sculpture needed reparation because of its ostensible deteriorating condition. Unlike the statues of solders on the Green bridge that were 'all corroded', this monument is in a good condition, so the campaign for its removal and division between those who supported the removal and those who objected them has been purely ideological. In April 2018 a city municipality commission suggested to the mayor the idea of removing Cvirka's statue from the central part of the Lithuanian capital on the basis of the writer's negative political role. However, legally, the mayor cannot do this by his sole decision. The removal was therefore linked with the grand event, an example of an explicit policy of what was seen as a proper display of statehood. As the head of the commission and a conservative city councellor noted 'we agreed to remove the monument, thus facilitating a new identity of the area in Vilnius. We think this is a meaningful step in celebrating the centennial anniversary of the Lithuanian statehood'.[16] By pointing towards the celebration of the modern Lithuanian state, Kuzmickienė emphasised the proper timing of this attempt to 'purify' historical memory. According to the councellor, 'we recognise that Cvirka is a symbol of Soviet ideology, which is not consistent with the idea of the freedom of independent Lithuania and, of course, the society's expectations at all. We realise that his political activities, not his writing, is viewed negatively'.[17]

The removal of the statue became part of political party bargaining: after winning the 2019 municipal election in March, the conservative and liberal coalition led by the then serving and reelected liberal mayor, signed an agreement which included, among other things, the goal of removing the statue of Cvirka from its Vilnius square. The political process escalated public debate. Since Vilnius authorities made the electoral pledge to the voters, some City Council members became actively involved in commenting on memory policy and shaping the cultural vision for contemporary Vilnius. However, political meddling into sensitive historical, cultural and artistic issues was criticised by a significant number of public intellectuals and cultural organisations.[18] Several cultural critics, despite recognizing that Cvirka served the occupying regime, advocated a deliberative approach to cultural memory, suggesting that a negative historical role should not lead to the removal of his statue because the site could serve for education about the painful past. The Minister of Culture, Mindaugas Kvietkauskas (a scholar of modern Lithuanian literature), shared this view and opposed the municipality's plans to purge Cvirka Square. According to the Minister, this urban heritage is 'a testimony to the present about the history of the Soviet period'. A solution, suggested by the minister, was placing 'an information board next to the Cvirka statue about the controversial points in his biography'.[19] The head of the Department of Cultural Heritage under the Ministry of Culture, Vidmantas Bezaras, also declared that the statue should not be removed from its original place, because the monument is listed as cultural property in the state Register of Cultural Property and there will be additional procedures to determine the valuable features of the site.[20]

It is inevitable that those city areas which are designated to host political symbols and events attract more political and media attention than the ones which are mainly used for transport logistics or leisure. Although the importance of Cvirka Square is not comparable with Lukiškės in its scale, its location in the city center makes it a desirable real estate asset. The risk of development is enhanced by it's the lack of clear definition of the square's legal status in city planning documents. While radical approaches towards controversial historical heritage float in the air, the destiny of Cvirka's monument remains unclear. The local Vilnius politicians reproach their opponents for being soft with what they see as the crimes of Soviet totalitarianism, arguing for a future-oriented, 'proper' urban space. However, legal actions and unexpected outcomes of some lawsuits could impede these ideologically driven forms of cultural planning. According to the chair of the Historical Memory Commission at the Municipality of Vilnius, the municipality do consider the alternative of leaving the monument in place, 'but reinterpreting it, taking into account both [Cvirka's] merits and controversies. Of course, there are others who demand to take down the statue.'[21] Here, explicit cultural policy depends on reevaluation of the Soviet totalitarian past, since prevailing implicit values or attitudes have become explicitly articulated via new criteria set by Vilnius municipality. Yet the formalisation of what should become visible in policy can deflect attention from other actions in culture and heritage protection, such as economic interests in urban regeneration projects.

Conclusion

In this article I have analysed the debates over urban public spaces as an arena for negotiating competing understandings of national culture in its implicit and explicit forms of cultural policy. The examples of these discussions and disagreements suggest important case material documenting the new cultural planning in post-Soviet cities. As I have argued in this article, the pursuit of optimistic representational culture always accompanies state anniversaries, as politicians and lobbyists embark on ambitious programmes for what they see as proper commemoration of the dates that are supposed to matter to the nation. In doing so, they tend to focus their rhetoric on new monuments or clearing space of the totalitarian past. However, at the same time, as my case studies show, a liberal democratic culture provides for open voicing of opposing opinions. The fact that both the Ministry of Culture and Vilnius municipality supported Labašauskas's project of contemporary art for Lukiškės memorial for Freedom Fighters could be read as a sign that Lithuanian society has become ready to embrace artistic diversity in the interpretations of the idea of national liberty expressed in contemporary artistic forms.

However, the implementation stage of cultural planning can get disrupted by conservative social groups and political actors in Parliament whose habits and cultural attitudes shape implicit strategies. Such informal, unwritten policy can last for years and become a cause of political controversy, when the disagreements over urban cultural policy are exacerbated by external factors. For instance, political circumstances, such as national cycles of election campaigns and international tensions, shape the discourses of special events (state jubilees), reorganisation of public space (city squares) and building of new monuments. This appears to be inevitable: as organisational preparations for large cultural projects take at least one or two years, the cycle of political elections tends to get in the way. This can be particularly problematic at the initial stages of cultural planning, when questions of the program and financing issues are not yet settled and are vulnerable to conflict and controversy. Carefully planned national jubilees can fall victim to banal realities: limited budgets, organisational mismanagement and overblown expectations. The story of post-Soviet urban cultural planning is not only a battle of ideological representations of the past through explicit and implicit cultural policies, but also a mundane activity of cultural management.

Notes

1. Although in 2013 the idea of culture as part of creative economy and emphasis on culture and creative industries was introduced in Lithuanian cultural policy documents signifying the neoliberal turn of culture policy and the strengthening of the discourse of Europeanisation (Trilupaitytė 2015, 159–194).
2. Some researchers criticized post-Soviet urban regeneration (Grazulevičiūtė-Vileniškė 2014), but Lithuanian cultural management research tends to draw on optimistic theoretical models, disregarding failures (Trilupaitytė 2015, 176–194).
3. For instance, the NGA was planned to open in 2007, to mark the centenary of the first exhibition of Lithuanian art (1907).
4. 'Restored Lithuania 100' http://www.lietuva.lt/100/en
5. '2009-iesiems Lukiškių aikštės sutvarkyti nespės', *www.lrt.lt*, 2 October 2008. https://www.delfi.lt/news/daily/lithuania/2009-iesiems-lukiskiu-aikstes-sutvarkyti-nespes.d?id=18737454
6. As was noted in March 2015 by the Chancellor of the Government, who commented on the plans to commence the reconstruction of the square for the upcoming state Centennial, all the uncertainties about the future plans for the monument are embedded in nuances of cultural heritage, obscurity of the land borders and uncertainty of financing: 'One thing is the political decision, another is bureaucracy; see all those competitions that already happened. The lawyers must tell us if there should be new competitions, or there could be the same results we already have, or maybe we should eventually bring new results,' *BNS* (29 March 2015) https://www.tv3.lt/naujiena/829234/lukiskiu-aikste-tvarkomu-objektu-sarase.
7. For example, in 2012, relatives of the émigré architect Jonas Mulokas offered to donate a wayside cross designed by the architect to be placed in this square instead of a monument.
8. 'Resolution Regarding Urgent Actions in Redeveloping the Lukiškių Square in Vilnius, and Building There a Memorial Commemorating Lithuanian Freedom Fighters, for the Occasion of the Centennial Celebration of the Restoration of the Lithuanian State' (April 2017), https://e-seimas.lrs.lt/portal/legalAct/lt/TAP/e8a4ca202b1911e79f4996496b137f39.
9. The only three criteria written in the requirements of the competition stated that the memorial must honor the memory of Lithuania's Freedom Fighters, take into account the space and scale of the newly reconstructed square and be viable in terms of a final budget not exceeding 500,000 euros.
10. *BNS* (27 November 2017) https://en.delfi.lt/culture/vilnius-central-square-monument-contest-winner-says-sculpture-tradition-is-dead.d?id=76476551.
11. A deputy director of the Cultural Heritage Department, speculated that this memorial project 'violates the 2010 conclusion of the Immovable Cultural Heritage Council, which suggests that the Lukiškės Square in central Vilnius should be flat'. *BNS* (29 November 2017), https://en.delfi.lt/culture/lukiskiu-memorial-short-of-heritage-rules-cultural-heritage-dept.d?id=76491751
12. 'Restored Lithuania 100' http://www.lietuva.lt/100/en
13. See *www.delfi.lt* (19 September 2010) http://www.delfi.lt/news/daily/lithuania/rusijos-ambasada-lietuva-draudzia-tvarkyti-paminklus-sovietu-kariams.d?id=36688291
14. As Baločkaitė noted,'the Minister of Culture, Šarūnas Birutis, signed a law amending the criteria for cultural artifacts to be listed as heritage. From now on, objects marked with Soviet symbols will not be included in the Register of Cultural Heritage; however, the Department of Cultural Heritage has yet to decide how to protect objects with such insignia that have already been included in the register' (Baločkaitė 2015 no page).
15. The writer Cvirka has been recognised as a significant figure in Lithuanian literary history. However, Cvirka legitimised the country's occupation by the Red Army as a member of a puppet delegation comprised of important political and cultural members who went to Moscow to ask Stalin for Lithuania's accession to the Soviet Union in 1940. Cvirka was also known for betraying his fellow writers while serving as the head of the Writers' Union in Soviet Lithuania.
16. *BNS* (19 April 2018), https://en.delfi.lt/culture/commission-suggests-removing-monument-to-cvirka-in-central-vilnius.d?id=77760063
17. Ibid.
18. The Lithuanian Artists Union and the Lithuanian Writers Union issued statements asking to save this public square, because it contains a unique historical statue from the late 1950s.
19. 'Soviet Lithuanian author in the crosshairs of memory politics', *www.lrt.lt* (23 October 2019)https://www.lrt.lt/en/news-in-english/19/1109475/soviet-lithuanian-author-in-the-crosshairs-of-memory-politics. However, although a plaque detailing the horrors of Soviet occupation was installed to accompany the Green Bridge sculpture group with a soldier, it did not help secure the statues in situ.
20. I. Jačauskas, 'Kultūros paveldo departamento direktorius: P. Cvirkos paminklo negalima nukelti', *www.15min.lt* (25 October 2019) https://www.15min.lt/naujiena/aktualu/lietuva/kulturos-paveldo-departamento-direktorius-p-cvirkos-paminklo-negalima-nukelti-56-1222250?copied
21. 'Soviet Lithuanian author in the crosshairs of memory politics'.

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