The Impact of the Specific Elements of Globalization on the Spatial Structure of Lithuanian Towns and their Valuation

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Processes and occurrences in the world are becoming more and more globalized and that is reflected in Lithuanian towns as well. Depending on scale of globalization, towns take new expression with unified symbols, the uniform elements of urban space, separate objects, networks, etc. These objects mainly are dedicated to develop the spheres of services and commerce. Very often these objects and their networks do not take into account place and do not reflect its singularity, but only form and expand unified symbols of their own. In such way urban localities, where these objects are developed, are decreased and belittled. Unified view usually does not take into account exceptional current urban, architectural, natural, landscape and identity conditions. Paper analyses current situation of these globalization elements, their meaning to the landscape and spatial structure of Lithuanian urban spaces. New constructions confirm characteristic feature for nowadays globalization: territories of historic urban structures and their synthesis change all the time. Urban environments are shaped by maintaining specific existing identity roles and further developing the town that is formed by global processes that stimulate changes of its identity. Size of new constructions and quality of architectural-urban solutions that are based only on economic aims, show the weakness of urban thought and understanding of globalization, weak abilities to request possibilities that are given by globalization to cherish town identity but not to suppress it. Under conditions of globalization it is important that towns could save the most important – national and regional identities. After that they should save local identity, natural surroundings, town silhouette, form, and architectural character. Analyzing Lithuanian towns and clear reflections of globalization in their spatial structure, there could be consumption culture excluded as separate expression that alters the identity of cities and towns with global elements. During Lithuanian cities and towns identity research it was established that the identity and local architecture were saved mainly by creating small shops that do not require huge spaces and there are possibilities to organize them in existing reconstructed buildings. Such types of "shops near home" quite often are organized in existing buildings, and from outside they might be recognizable by names or logos. Huge shopping centers are usually organized in new big buildings, where besides shopping people can find other services or entertainments. These buildings usually are standardized, very similar in their form and architecture, minimally adapted to urban surrounding, they do not reflect, continue and form local architecture traditions, townscape, aesthetic view, but destroy it.

Keywords: *aesthetics, architecture, identity, globalization, town.*

1. Introduction

Nowadays many processes around us are understood and valuated through the prism of globalization. Currently ongoing urbanization and urban sprawl are valued as specific expression of globalization that is induced by human life changes, development of technologies, etc. Together with globally activated social, economic, cultural factors, form and inside of towns changes as well. New requirements of town development and formation appear. Because of globalization's specific feature to standardize everything around, the threat to the identity of cities, towns and villages emerges. Today this question is emphasized in by the relevant concept of sustainable development. It tries to solve the problems of urban sprawl, urbanization control, preservation of natural surrounding and others.

Globalization – process, occurring in social space, including different spheres of activities of society, country and other social organizations. It reveals itself by more intensive connections, mobility and other characteristics in the scale of the whole world. This concept means, that social, political and economic activity exceed country borders and events, decisions or activities in one region might be meaningful to the individuals or societies in the other region

of the world. From the architectural-urban point of view the globalization might be seen as building architecture and the uniformity of town spaces caused by it.

As the phenomenon, globalization and its interaction with other processes and objects is analyzed by the specialists from many different fields: architectural, urban (Dringelis *et al.* 2006), philosophical (Bauman 2002; Castells 2005), cultural (Petrušonis 2005; Butkus 2011; Samalavičius 2002; Held 2002), identity (Rubavičius 2005), heritage protection (Čepaitienė 2006) and else.

The aim of the paper is to discuss specific elements of globalization and their impact on Lithuanian cities and towns. The tasks of the paper are to distinguish especially influential, easily recognizable globalization related objects – elements of the urban spaces, to compare and evaluate them. In order to receive the results of the paper, specific object selection and comparative methodologies were used.

The globalization elements analyzed in the paper are architectural objects or their parts that are used for commercial purposes. The paper also evaluates such aspects as developed of commercial networks, their structure and identity in small or large towns.

2. Globalization influence to the identity of towns spatial structure

Globalization in Lithuania appears in different ways. Similarly as in all the world, people's life, living surroundings and habits become more and more global by the wide use of modern technologies, traveling, keeping mobile and else. Globalization in Lithuania as in all the world touches various spheres of human life – from wide social, to very narrow personal, political, worldview and else. Of course, much stronger globalization affects larger urban places – naturally here intersect more global connections and nets with objects existing there. The bigger town is, the bigger global pressure it feels. But together with that it gets more global possibilities too. Accordingly the residents of cities and towns – in more global surroundings they live, the more possibilities they have getting global and creating new global surroundings.

One of the main globalization problems in towns and people's life appears when there is an urge to save the local identity. For the person to save personal identity is much easier, in spite of that he is affected by global factors. It is his own choice to take part in many processes and to became global. In urban places regulation of globalization is much harder, because of functioning of separate people, their groups, local and foreign companies that create different products, give services and develop their networks.

According to M. Castells (2005), „new global economics and forming information society gain new – megacity – spatial form that becomes apparent in various social and geographical contexts." This megacity may be understood also in the figurative way that it is not only very large city or town – it might be really small town that belongs to the global net.

Analyzing globalization and identity in the urban space, it can be identified (Morkūnienė 2003) that under conditions of globalization, tension appears in urban culture between such objects:

- between global and local. That problem is expressed by question how different, small country might slowly join to the society of the world by saving its roots and cultural identity that in a big part is reflected in the cities and towns;
- between traditions and modernism. This problem appears by willingness to save variety of cultures under conditions of globalization. Willingness to improve, to live modern life is related with the wish to save distinctive, characteristic urban spaces, forms and else;
- between long-term and short-term aims. Now usually instant aims dominate and problems are solved hastily. On the other hand, a lot of problems require strategies and discussed actions.

Identity of the town is shaped when urban structures interact with natural surroundings. Even if identity and its continuity before some time were not held as significant urban or socio-cultural valuable thing, now they became very important. Identity and distinction problem was raised by town's significance in the process of globalization. So the most important becomes question if town is able to keep all its identities among economic, cultural, technologic globalization or it becomes just a place where global processes happen.

New constructions confirm characteristic feature for nowadays globalization – territories of historic urban structures and their synthesis change all the time. Urban environments are shaped by maintaining specific existing identity roles and further developing the town that is formed by global processes that stimulate changes of its identity. Size of new constructions and quality of architectural-urban solutions that are based only on economic aims, show the weakness of urban thought and understanding of globalization, weak abilities to request possibilities that are given by globalization to cherish town identity but not to suppress it.

"Concrete physical elements of urban development may expose or may equalize visual expression of the landscape, together identity and uniqueness of landscape characteristics." (Laukaitytė-Malžinskienė 2008). So it is commendable conception of landscape or town character – it is unique and recognizable totality of elements that is not making the locality better or worst, but make it exceptional and unrepeatable from other localities. Urban development through concrete physical elements also may expose or may equalize expression of town and its wholeness identity and uniqueness.

One more specific town and culture identity field is cultural heritage. „It is more than buildings, it covers identity of all town, town is analyzed as totality of different qualitative layers" (Petrušonis 2005). Such treatment reflect the fact that town may be interpreted in different ways. On the other hand, problems of identity can't be linked only with history – they have to be analyzed in the context of nowadays problems. In order to achieve the

sustainable development, it must be taken into account that the information about the identity of the locality has to be flexible for its more dynamic use in the changing current world. According to V. Petrušonis (2005), "codes of identity models must be such that they would not contradict to historical context and while in the mind of the planner spontaneous changes are going, it would ensure frankness to the modern context." So, identity must be created such that it would reflect historic development, but at the same time it must be adapted to nowadays surroundings and their changes.

Under conditions of globalization it is important that towns could save the most important – national and regional identities. After that they should save local identity, natural surroundings, town silhouette, form and architectural character.

3. Insight on the elements of globalization in the towns of Lithuania

Analyzing Lithuanian towns and clear reflections of globalization in their spatial structure, the consumption culture could be excluded as separate expression that alters the identity of cities and towns with global elements.

In the article the consumption culture as the reflection of globalization is analyzed in 4 different situations according to the expression and functioning principles:
1. Standardization. All of us are able to observe and aesthetically evaluate unified, typical architecture of commercial and service networks in many Lithuanian cities and towns where these networks develop their activity.
2. Recognizable elements. Probably it would be hard to find commercial business network that would not seek to distinguish oneself from others. By creating easily recognizable symbols, names and other elements that usually are used even creating their architecture, these networks try to occupy niche in the business world and make its activity more popular.
3. Subsidiary means in architecture, design and visual expressions – commercials, advertisements and their stands in the spaces of towns, on the facades of the buildings and else. The aim of these commercials is to stimulate the usage and to affect the behavior of people, to socially orientate them.
4. In these standardized, easily recognizable, advertised objects and oldest globalization activity – trade, huge masses of people are involved. Standard architecture and commercials stimulate people to join these global networks and indirectly support their further development by visiting them. So it is indirectly confirmed that developed trade and offered activities are acceptable and valuable.

During the research of identity of Lithuanian cities and towns it was established, that the identity and local architecture was in the most cases saved by creating small shops that do not require huge spaces and there are possibilities to organize them in currently existing reconstructed buildings. Such types of "shops near home" quite often are organized in existing buildings and from outside might be recognizable by the names or logos.

Huge shopping centers are usually organized in new large buildings where besides shopping people can find other services or entertainments. Abroad these centers mostly are visited once a week. These buildings usually are standardized, very similar in their form and architecture, minimally adapted to urban surrounding, they do not reflect, continue and form local architecture traditions, townscape, aesthetic view, but destroy it.

Glancing at these buildings the question may arise how these buildings may be valuable and how people may relate them with one but not other Lithuanian city or town. Their expression is anonymous – they are not connected with locality, do not preserve its current and make recognizable only the network which they represent. Here may stand the question: if such building would be taken away from the territory of the town – would local people miss it? Would they miss it like they would miss the church or other close and dear object taken away? On the other hand creation of commercial networks as the process of globalization is not new. Once the religious globalization was intensively going on and the network of churches in the urban places was created too. The only difference, that every church was built different. Function is the same, size, form, surface materials – different. Adapted to local landscape and architectural traditions they continued traditions of locality identity.

According to V. Rubavičius (2005), very important aspect must be underlined – "town identity exist only if local people support it by their way of life. According to that, it is important not only memory, but also variety of town life and historical its continuity." So it is very important to know the history of town, its development evolution, know and recognize the distinguishing features and plan town identity continuity by supporting them.

The contemporary shopping centers and some catering services networks might be compared with the Soviet era multi-flat standardized housing that was built not even in one country, but in the whole Soviet region. From the time perspective it is possible to evaluate objectively if these buildings became a very valuable architecture, if even a small part of them is considered built heritage, etc. The standardized architecture of the Soviet time construction and the contemporary shopping centers demonstrates that functionality here is considered more important than all other architectural and urban characteristics. Now function goes in front of the form and this in some way ensure further development of such "architecture". Such standardization is easily defined in the architecture of commercial buildings. Of course, some standardization appears in cultural, sport and other buildings too, but not on that scale as on commercial buildings. This shows, that now, during globalization time, money is able to do all and to go through all.

Unique, exceptional, with local characteristics architecture of Lithuanian cities and towns is important part of our culture. With discussed commercial buildings and

their architectural expression, the foreign culture is repeated and conveys the lost traditions. All this is based on the short-term economic aims. Similar threats, like danger to lose local identity are accepted not only locally, but internationally too. Analyzing the concept of culture L. Donskis (1993) emphasized such borders of the cultural function of the town: "Speech of cultural forms is understandable only by humans; culture as huge text can be red also only by humans. If culture is authentically and adequately "read", in real life it becomes the thing, without which humanity can not exist – collective experience and its models, collective memory and its forms." Lithuania, being in cultural joint and cherishing its own cultural traditions from the past, distinguishes itself with valuable and significant historical and cultural heritage, original interaction of different cultural traditions and free expression that has to be preserved and continued even in the global world.

4. Valuation of the elements of globalization in the urban places of Lithuania

How these objects affect urban places of Lithuania and their identity, what information they provide? Large shopping centers and services networks fist of all locate their nodes in the biggest urban places, later thicken the network in the smaller urban places and so on. Along urban place size and probable flows of visitors, the node often gets bigger or smaller "package" of goods or services, trade area, number of boutiques or services. Since most of such shopping and service nodes are divided to the different levels, so mentioned aspects becomes typical and unified for each level. This of course reflects on the surface of buildings – in its size, facades, materials. In such way object becomes easily recognizable in any place and gives a signal to the people with primary information – what, how many, what level you may expect and get. In such way expectations become very similar and they are fulfilled similarly, because one network offers its standardized services and quality.

Discussed commercial buildings, as usual elements of globalization can be found in almost all urban places of Lithuania. Depending on the people flows – potential customers, different size shops are built, but their architecture and expression is uniform (Fig. 1– 3).

Fig 1. *Shopping center Maxima in Lazdijai (Shopping... 2013a)*

Fig 2. *Shopping center Rimi in Alytus (Shopping... 2013)*

Fig 3. *Shopping center Rimi in Marijampolė (shopping... 2013c)*

Such anonymous architecture, that does not create new aesthetical quality, looks alike to logistics, warehouse, vehicle service buildings (Fig. 4, Fig. 5).

Fig 4. *Logistic center in Vilnius (Logistic... 2013)*

Fig 5. *Vehicle service center in Vilnius (Vehicle... 2013)*

Nowadays the architecture of the shopping centers encumbers urban spaces, obstructs and covers significant objects – cultural heritage objects, monuments, even urban structure of historic urban center or other urban area (Fig. 6, Fig. 7).

Fig 6. Shopping center Akropolis in Kaunas (Shopping… 2009)

Fig 7. Shopping center Maxima in Marijampolė. Behind shopping center – St. Archangel Mykolas basilica (Shopping… 2013b)

Developing aesthetically valuable architecture and environment in Lithuanian cities and towns, also admitting the processes of globalization, it is possible to create new values by using existing buildings and urban spaces. In such way the continuous identity and distinctiveness of urban space would be saved, local globalization would be ensured. Logos taken from the existing, architecturally, culturally and aesthetically valuable building might be easy changed by other ones (Fig. 8–10).

Fig 8. Shop Maxima in existing building in Šilutė. (Shop… 2013)

Fig 9. Shop Maxima in existing building in Vilnius (foto Andriaus Ufarto/BFL) (Shop… 2013a)

Fig 10. Shop Maxima in the multi flat house in Vilnius, A. Smetonos st. (Shop… 2013b)

In such a way the further existence of the valuable buildings is ensured On the other hand, would towns have the same valuable buildings left if the symbols and names from the contemporary shopping centers would be taken away? Only anonymous boxes without any architecture that do not enrich our town's spatial structures, but only depreciate it, would remain.

5. Conclusions

1. Influence of globalization is felt in the entire world, in Lithuania as well. This process is almost not controlled, because there are no physical borders between countries, possibilities to travel daily become better, information technologies have improved. There is only chance to choose the way how to globalize – unconditionally accepting new processes or regulating them according to local traditions.

2. Consumption culture as one of clearly visible and understood reflections of globalization might be divided to 4 groups that all together or separately form and change identity of Lithuanian urban places. That is standardization, usage stimulation, recognizable elements, commercials and advertisements, other processes that are orientated to conscious stimulation of using.

3. Shopping networks usually are developed by building new typical buildings that do not create new architectural value, but depreciate spatial structure of urban

places. Because of their influence Lithuanian cities and towns get uniformed, that weakens their local identity.

4. If globalization aspects will rise, than new, not valuable architecture may weaken or destroy local identity of urban spaces. This is the base for higher requirements for new shopping networks buildings, also base for requirements of local urban history and its specifics respect.

5. In order to preserve the local identity of the spaces of cities and towns, it is necessary to review planning rules and design requirements of commercial and services networks buildings.

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