

Situated between Scandinavia and Eastern and Western Europe, it is no surprise that economically (and historically) Lithuania deals mostly with Russia and Poland. Its architectural scope, however, is a lot broader. Its architects are attempting to implement new values in a nation that has become one of the fastest-growing economies in the EU. Needless to say, new Lithuanian architecture is on the rise.

Between East and West

TEXT: RŪTA LEITANAITĖ (CREATIVE DIRECTOR, ARCHITECTS ASSOCIATION OF LITHUANIA)



↑ Rūta Leitanaite

A European pioneer in declaring independence from the Soviet Union in March 1990 and surviving the economic crisis of 2008 by embracing severe retrenchment measures, Lithuania continues to prove itself a tough stayer in the quest for prosperity. During the last decade, Lithuania increased its GDP more than 40 per cent, and is among five European countries celebrating the fastest economic growth. The nation is distinguished by a high percentage of people with university education, and this highly qualified labour force is also comparatively cheap. All of this attracts foreign investments, giving an additional stimulus to the local economy.

On the other hand, during the 25 years of its independence, almost one third of population fled the country westwards, with the hottest destinations being the United Kingdom, Ireland, Germany, and Norway. An ageing society, lack of workforce, and brain drain are the looming problems, as the population, especially young.

These changes, bleeding regions dry and challenging bigger cities to form new strategies, affect Lithuanian urban structure. During the pre-crisis economic boom, Vilnius, Kaunas, and Klaipeda experienced outrageous suburban sprawl, which could be related to the restitution of land, the ubiquitous desire to own a house, and a lack of tools for urban control. The housing market was also burgeoning, filling cities with dense, low-quality quarters. Today, facing population shrinkage, the idea of the compact city is being promoted, encouraging development of post-industrial areas in city centres, re-use of existing buildings, retrofitting Soviet-era housing, and improving public space.

All of these measures come with challenges for local governments and architects. Post-industrial areas require an efficient PPP

mechanism and community involvement; working in historic environments, such as UNESCO-listed sites in Vilnius, or the interwar architecture of Kaunas (see p. 49), requires creating harmony between valuable heritage and innovative contemporary architecture. Quite neglected during the economic rise and fall (2000–2012), urban public space today is in the spotlight.

In recent years, cities engage in a process of public space improvement not just because of societal pressure – a main stimulus is European support, financing development of public sector. Thanks to this, quite a lot of public spaces and buildings were built or renovated, especially in outlying regions. European money also supports Lithuania's positioning of itself as a 'soft' economy based on innovations and technologies in science, research, and innovation infrastructure (see p. 46).

The new urban strategies, financing tools, and especially growing public awareness require new modes of work for architects. The younger generation seems to be able to embrace these changes. During the last decade, the education system in Lithuania has produced over 180 architects each year, while the crisis built up a surplus of architects, in turn causing mass unemployment. Those who

↓ Panoramic path, Zarasai (Š. Kiaunė, A. Kiaunienė, T. Petreikis)



↓ Santaka Valley, Kaunas University of Technology Integrated Science, Studies and Business (G. Janulytės-Bernotienės studija)



were well established or had experience and contacts for export (see p. 44) tightened their belts and survived, but the crisis hit the younger generation especially hard. Unemployment was not the only reason for young architects to leave the country. A drive to get more variegated experience and advanced education still attracts young architects to the Netherlands, Denmark, United Kingdom, Belgium, Austria, and elsewhere.

However, some of them have come back to Lithuania from abroad to apply these skills and methods at home (see p. 42). These, combined with an endemic Lithuanian expertise in enhancing a place with subtle new interventions, thereby harmonizing with the context, could shape the identity of new Lithuanian architecture. ◀

↓ Rietavas carriage house reconstruction (Aketuri architektai)



Architects Association of Lithuania

Founded in 1924, the Architects Association of Lithuania (AAL) unites all architects holding a diploma of higher education in architecture, whether they are students, licensed professionals, or retired. Today, this voluntary organization has more than 1000 members.

The main tasks of the AAL are to promote quality of architecture and living environment; to raise public awareness and participation in the process of urban development; to enhance collaboration between different participants of urban

development; to present Lithuanian architecture in a global context; and to foster international collaboration among Lithuanian and foreign architects.

AAL organizes architectural competitions, architectural awards, exhibitions, seminars, lectures, conferences, and other events in Lithuania and abroad. It also consults governmental bodies and municipalities, assisting in dealing with problems related to architectural ethics. Working in close collaboration with the Architects Chamber of Lithuania, AAL participates in Lithuanian

Architecture policymaking, providing recommendations for legislative basis.

AAL is a member of international architectural organizations such as UIA (International Architects Union) and ACE (Architects Council of Europe). Together with its Latvian and Estonian counterparts, AAL forms BAUA, the Baltic Architects Unions Association. ◀

Info www.architektusajunga.lt



LIETUVOS
KULTŪROS
TARYBA

Building spaces and communities

TEXT: RŪTA LEITANAITĖ

Already pervasive in Europe, the urban-activism movement is just beginning to cut its teeth in Lithuania. Several recent examples of strong initiatives led by sociologists, architects, and designers can be mentioned, such as the NGO Iaimikis.lt (with Jekaterina Lavrinec and Julius Narkūnas), BeePart community centre in Vilnius's Pilaitė district, Kultflux platform on the Neris river (Vilnius), or Inga Urbonaitė's events promoting city space. Most of Lithuanian cities and towns have active communities, however, only few of them are interested and engaged in the processes of shaping their urban environments.

The procedure of citizen involvement in design processes is still overwhelmingly formal – a project is usually presented to communities when everything is already designed and

decided. Naturally, the common reaction is resistance (or indifference), making such meetings unsatisfying for all parties: architects, contractors, and citizens.

However, the horizon of participatory planning in Lithuania is brightening, with energy coming from all sides. People require more involvement; cities administrations want shared responsibilities. An especially considerable force enhancing urban activism in Lithuania are the young architects who recently returned to their homeland after studies or work abroad and are now applying their experience in Lithuania. Through their practice, they suggest a new, challenging mode of work and a new role for the architect – no longer an omniscient, undisputable professional, but a moderator, able to manage different interests and work

with various professionals and society. One example of such common work is an architectural workshop in Biržai (northern Lithuania), organized in summer 2015 by the Architects Association of Lithuania (curator Rūta Leitanaite, community moderators Elena Archipovaitė, architect and assistant professor at Norwegian University of Science and Technology, and geographer Dr. Giedrė Godienė).

Suffering from a stagnant industry, unemployment, and decreasing population, Biržai (pop. 13,000) was selected some years ago as one of the target regions of a state programme supporting development of problem areas. The municipality decided to budget part of the money (€5.6 million) for public infrastructure and improve five public spaces – squares, parks, and the castle site – located in the town's centre. A two-stage workshop set a precedent in Lithuania. All the stakeholders (the city, cultural institutions, NGOs, religious and informal groups, businessmen) were engaged in the process, even before the architects. Aiming to obtain a complete array of different wishes and

attitudes towards the development of the public spaces, various platforms for collecting the data were opened, including social media. A conference, presenting various aspects of Biržai's history, heritage, nature, and socio-economic milieu, was followed by an excursion through all five spaces, mapping the ideas of the citizens.

For the final stage, three teams of professionals, comprising not only architects, but also landscape architects and sociologists, came to Biržai. Each of the teams was supplemented with a few community representatives, who were expressing their opinions actively and influencing the proposals during three days of discussion.

The workshop yielded three different spatial, social, and economic strategies for five public spaces in Biržai, plus recommendations for future architectural competitions. It engendered positive community engagement in the municipality's strategy for the town's future, and paved the way for a tradition dialogue and collaboration between various stakeholders. ◀

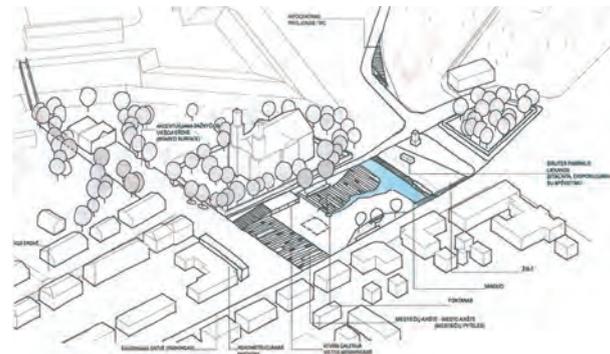
↓ Green area in front of the Reformed Church, Biržai



↓ Waterfront, Biržai (A. Černauskienė, A. Brazauskaitė, A. Galaunytė, R. Sanderson, E.Gruzdytė)



↓ City square, Biržai (AEXN+Co)



Five public spaces, Biržai:
1. Castle;
2. Reformed Church green;
3. J. Janonis square;
4. City square;
5. Fishermen's peninsula

Lithuania



A friendly virus

TEXT: INDIRA VAN 'T KLOOSTER

They left Lithuania to gain education and experience abroad. Now they've come back to implement their skills at home. 'Abroad, I learned about solutions. Now I know what I can do here.' What did DO Architects, PUPA, and YCL find out, and how can they use this knowledge on familiar ground?

Since Tadas Jonauskis (PUPA – Public Urbanism Personal Architecture, 2012, four persons) returned from his adventures abroad, he has focused on urbanism. After his master studies in Delft he worked for De Urbanisten, MVRDV, and founded a Rotterdam-based office with his partner. Subsequently, they won European 11 (Reims) and received a special Swedish mention in European 13. 'More than anything, I was fascinated by the different scale of the competition briefs, so very much unlike I was used to in Lithuania,' he reminisces. Both in Sweden and France, it was the open attitude, the willingness to accept new ideas, that taught him a lot about the differences in building culture.

After working for a private client, Aidas Barzda (YCL, 2011, four persons) was recommended to a relation in France. His first foreign experience was a big success. Looking back on his seven-year stay in Switzerland and Germany, he has learned to take responsibility. The trust his client put in him as the architect for an apartment interior in Strasbourg was contrary to his experience in Lithuania. 'The work is the same and the creative process is the same, but the cultural differences are very instructive. Also, it was great to see something solid emerge out of my design, to literally make it happen with my own hands,' says Barzda.

To Gilma Teodora Gylytė (DO Architects, 2014, sixteen persons), the world comes to Vilnius. Being educated in the Netherlands, Denmark, and Spain, and having work experience in the Netherlands, Germany, and China, her network and that of her three partners is very international. Working at the office are people from OMA, Miralles Tagliabue EMBT, Studio Fuksas, Nicolas Laisné Associés, and Sou Fujimoto. 'It's the professional global culture that drives our office and our projects. For our work on a Free Economic Zone in Klaipėda, we work with international shareholders. The Rolling Homes project went viral on the Internet, and when Daniel Liebeskind got the commission for a Modern Art Centre, we were selected to act as local partner,' explains Gylytė.

What were your reasons for going abroad?

Barzda: 'I went to Switzerland's USI Academy of Architecture in Mendrisio, and have been taught by amazing teachers. I especially remember Valerio Olgiati, who literally made me cry at one point. He was so severe on me for not answering his expectations. It taught me mostly to think independently, to learn of different ideologies and the need to take a personal stance in your work as an architect.'

Jonauskis: 'I agree that education is better in Western Europe. But mostly, I learned to work in teams and to collaborate, to share knowledge, which is not a common thing to do in Lithuania. After the crisis hit in the Netherlands, there was a group of young architects who took the chance to rethink the profession of being an architect, to investigate new boundaries. That taught us to think more openly while trying new concepts ourselves and enrich our team with other professions.'

Gylytė: 'In Madrid and the Netherlands, I learned about the art of communication. Not only with my team members and colleagues to share a collective mind, but also how to present to clients and understand their point of view.'

How do your experiences outside the country reflect on your professional life in Lithuania?

Gylytė: 'We introduced a partner structure, which allows the office to grow in multi-disciplinary fields. Since the era of the starchitect is fading, the figure of the leading architect who has his staff of young workers that are willing to listen and learn from him has lost its meaning. We learn from each other, there is no hierarchy. The importance of authorship

Reactivate Lithuania

↓ Rolling Homes single-family houses by DO Architects, Svencelė



↓ Urban concept for Free Economic Zone by DO Architects, Klaipėda



↑ Frontside at Lund Källby by PUPA, Lund (SE)





is diminishing. In this context of continuous collaboration with international networks, our office has become an ecosystem in which we live this international life.'

Jonauskis: 'We are working on a few projects in Klaipėda and Vilnius, which we use as a testing ground for the Dutch model of bottom-up and shared ownership in the process. In Lithuania, blueprint planning is still fairly usual. Now, we have implemented a process in which people can contribute their ideas in design workshops and interactive games. They actually like it a lot, but we have learned that the administration has little experience in how to sustain this way of working. We hope our results will hold against bureaucratic attitudes.'

Barzda: 'I don't know what knowledge will survive from my foreign experience. This is an age of experiment – I try out various things now. But maybe I have become bolder in my concepts than before. Our previous commission for an apartment interior is half-black, half-white. This total contrast that symbolizes day and night activities is very exciting.'

Why are your ambitions oriented towards the West, while there is a lot of work in the East?

Gylytė: 'We like to team up with innovative and ambitious clients. The Western approach works better for us. Also, it's challenging to work in uncertain and opaque markets.'

Jonauskis: 'I like competitions, and the only challenging competitions are in the West. The East is for commissions, but that's quite boring, as we learn nothing new. Actually, the West is to learn, the East is to sell our ideas.'



↑ Tadas Jonauskis, Gilma Teodora Gylytė, and Aidas Barzda

Barzda: 'Added to all that, communication is slow and you need to be there in person, so you need to travel a lot to be at meetings in which nothing is solidly decided upon.'

Why did you come back to Lithuania?

Jonauskis: 'There is a lack of knowledge in urban planning here. At the moment, no authority requires it apart from land use regulations. Hence, there are no national or regional visions for the longer term. The lack of ownership of land or houses makes it difficult for planning agencies to control future development. Hit-and-run developers focus on quick cash and maximize possible floor area indexes. Abroad,

I have learned ways to counter-attack these guerrilla practices. I now know what to do and how to implement them.'

Barzda: 'I think in the end it's easier to work in the country where you have common networks in education, relations, and background. I see more opportunities here. We have the right people here now. We are a friendly virus.'

Gylytė: 'And the focus on the future is improving. We used to be concerned with survival only, which meant until the next day. Our new horizon will be the next 50 years. Also, I feel a special vibe here. All the good ones are coming back to rebuild Lithuania.'

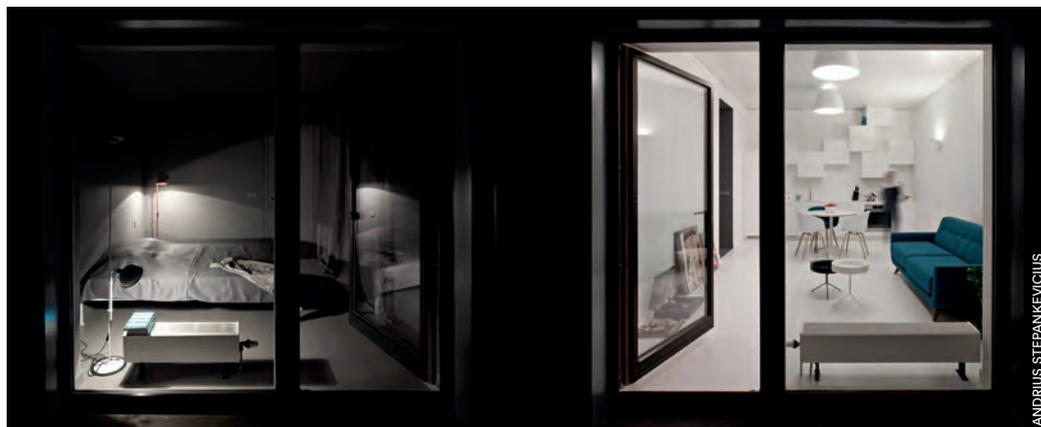
Reactivate Lithuania



↓ The new compact urban district in Lund mixes nature and city.



↓ Black and white apartment interior by YCL, Vilnius



Lithuanian architecture abroad

TEXT: RŪTA LEITANAITĒ

Having the largest number of architects in Baltic States (around 4000 for 2.8 million inhabitants), Lithuania consequently probably has the lowest costs for architectural services and the greatest eagerness to search for new markets in neighbouring countries. Entering the global market of remote, fast-growing economies like China would require agglomerations between countries; however, the political initiative or programmes to support architectural export to these territories is so far lacking. The intensely crowded architectural market in Western Europe is perceived as grounds for learning. Meanwhile, neighbouring countries, such as the Baltic States and Russian-speaking regions, are more accessible and approached by Lithuanians frequently.

Northwards: Latvia and Estonia

Responding to the question, 'Why are Lithuanians not working in Estonia?', architect Vytautas Biekša replies, 'Estonians are auto-orientated – they tend to work primarily in Estonia, and it's very hard to compete with them as they have a high-profile expertise and forte of knowing their own context.'

'Extending your geography means more possibilities to participate in challenging cultural and big projects. The Baltic region is where we see ourselves as adequate contestants,' adds Biekša. His words could not be bolstered more strongly by the fact that his firm, Processoffice, was the winner of an international competition in 2010 for the reconstruction and extension of the Latvian National Museum in Riga (see A10 #37).

The museum, erected in 1905 and given a status of national monument of architecture, was to be adapted to hold contemporary exhibitions and educational and public activities. The young Lithuanian office's proposal included a reconstruction of the historical building, carefully preserving and refreshing the valuable image and elements, and a new underground annex. Almost invisible in panoramas, or even from the street, the new volume creates an intriguing public space: a square hollow amphitheatre is formed by a terraced rim, and the platform – the glazed roof of the new annex – exposes the exhibition rooms underground.

Exercising the project from the first sketches to the final implementation, Processoffice chose local partners (restaurateurs, engineers) themselves. 'The problems we had with the engineering suggests that the level of engineers in the Baltic States still has room to improve, especially in large, complicated projects,' comments Biekša. Still, the project has been completed and, before the museum opens its doors to visitors at the end of this spring, it has already garnered acclaim from Latvian and professional society.

'It's not impossible to get a commission directly in Latvia or Estonia, as long as you come with some good references,' says Aurimas Sasnauskas. However, the project commission for Bauska's public library was given to a2sm after winning an international competition in 2013. The composition of simple rectangular volumes clustered around an irregularly shaped central space corresponds to the promiscuity of the existing urban fabric, the modest scale of the adjacent buildings, and preserves the trees growing on the plot. The red brick cladding of the new volumes relates to the architectural image of the existing administrative building of the sports school, the only historic building integrated into the complex. Each of the volumes is dedicated to



↑ Public library, Bauska (a2sm)

different activities. The blocks of a reading room, conference hall, café, and administrative offices are connected by a transparent central lobby, welcoming various public events. Three floors encourage visitors to submerge themselves in different scenarios: the basement will welcome children, the ground floor is dedicated to communication, the first floor to quiet work. The roof terrace, isolated from the street, offers a space for lunch, games, or cinema. The variety of spaces supports the motto of the library as a public space for communication, creation, and learning.

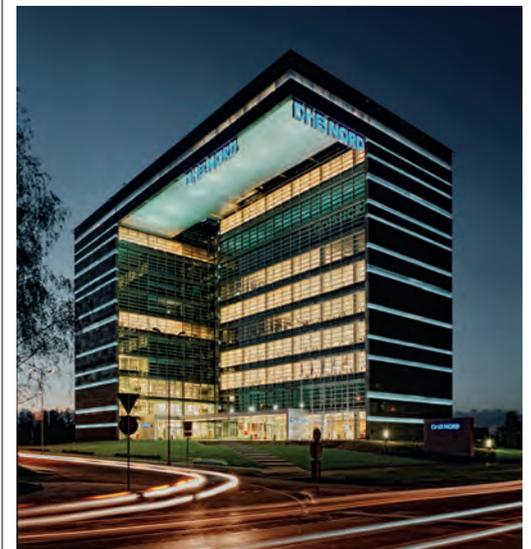
Working with Latvian partners (engineers and project managers), a2sm prepared the project a year ago, and now the implementation of it depends on the city of Bauska's success in the race towards financing it.

Awarded as the best building in Riga 2011, the headquarters of DnB Nord Bank by Audrius Ambrasas architects is also the fruit of an invited architectural competition. 'In the zenith of the economic boom, Latvian architects were so busy and expensive that the investors searched for various participants from abroad,' recalls Audrius Ambrasas. The bank is indicative of the boom period, tinted with optimism: it was to be the first building of a new 21-hectare commercial zone outside Riga's centre. Due to the later crisis, it still remains the only building in a quarter that was supposed to be stacked with other office buildings. The choice of the monumental composed architectural image and simple spatial composition of the volumes proved to be far-sighted, deliberately or not. The existing crossroads is the main urban reference, towards which the building opens with an impressive entrance – a void, topped with an imposing canopy. Exposing its inner spaces to the street through glazed walls at the entrance, the building turns its black sleek sides towards the rest of the quarter. Clear shapes determine functionality and rational exploitation of the bank's inner structure.

Despite the gratifying result, the architects judge the physical distance, language barrier, and differences in legislative basis as drawbacks of working in this neighbouring country.

↓ DnB Nord Bank, Riga (Audrius Ambrasas architects)

↓ Reconstruction and extension of the Latvian National Museum, Riga (Processoffice)





↑ House in Raubičiai, Minsk (G. Natkevičius + partners)



Eastwards: Belarus, Russia, and Kazakhstan
During the Soviet occupation, the Baltic States had an image of being the outpost of Western culture and quality. Lithuanian resorts, services, and production were highly popular among its Eastern neighbours. Despite ambiguous terms and political tensions since Lithuania's independence (1991), economic and cultural relations between Lithuanians and these Eastern states persist, and Lithuanian architecture is one of the cultural products on demand.

The majority of Lithuanian architects, having commissions in Belarus and Russia (particularly Kaliningrad Oblast), are engaged in both commercial projects (shopping malls, office buildings) and interior design. However, most of those projects, especially the big ones, were withdrawn or suspended due to Russia's current economic crisis. The country where the construction market remains immune to Russian political fluctuations is Kazakhstan. Overwhelmingly rich in natural resources, guided by the authoritarian regime of President Nazarbayev, Kazakhstan declares bold ambitions to be one of the most advanced nations in region. Urban development and architecture is the prime means of embodying those aspirations, not to mention proving the country's wealth. An eloquent manifest is Astana, the new capital city arising in the middle of a desert. Craving astonishing architecture, Kazakhstan invites many foreign architects to build; the list, glamorized with big names like Foster + Partners and BIG, also includes Lithuanian architects.

'Being a part of Astana's development equals participation in a miracle,' enthuses architect Valerijus Starkovskis. 'An architect is given carte blanche. The new architecture must be a piece of art, and the money is secondary.' However, working in Russia, Belarus, and Kazakhstan not only offers creative challenges, but also requires certain skills, efforts and has its own specifics, to which Lithuanian architects, it seems, are adapted quite well.

'In Russia, Belarus, and Kazakhstan, we are desirable because of our ability to be a certain mediator; we have expertise in contemporary, high-quality Western architecture and, simultaneously, we understand their local mentality. In addition, in comparison with the other European architects, we are cheap, and we know the language, which is indispensable,' says Starkovskis. Working for eight years in Kazakhstan, the architect comments on specificities of the market and working with a client: 'A good recommendation is the usual way to get a client, therefore you have to work constantly



← National boxing development centre, Karaganda (Performa)



↑ Hotel, Buhlerhohe, Baden Baden (Arches)



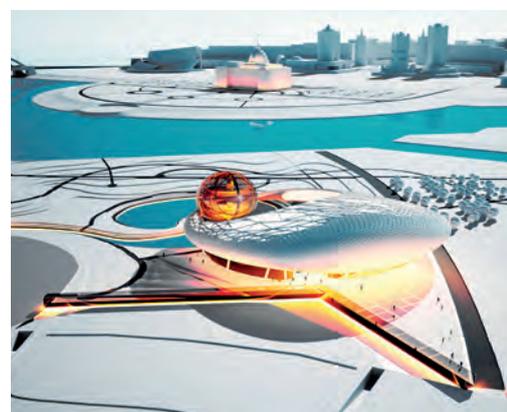
↑ Ramenskoye Airport, Moscow (Vilniaus architektūros studija)

on expanding your personal relations. Also, once commissioned, you have to be there. Literally. No Skype, emails, or phone calls – just face to face talk is efficient.' Such efforts bring a payoff. Apart from various commercial housing projects in Kazakhstan, a national boxing centre in Karaganda by Starkovskis's office, Performa, was implemented in 2011 as the first building of a huge sports zone. Next year, the construction of a 165,000 m² (valued at €194 million) 'Avenue' shopping centre and 'Green Garden' apartments project will commence. Two other Lithuanian architect teams joined Astana's construction in 2009, winning two out of seven architectural competitions for several public and residential complexes: the National Kazakhs Theatre by JAD and Architektūros linija, and the Russian Drama Theatre by TRYS A.M. will be erected at the main urban axis leading to the adjacent President's Office. Architectural concepts of expressive, sculptural buildings are based on symbolism (the Russian theatre alluding to an uncut diamond, and the Kazakhs theatre to 'Aitys', the Kazakh traditional theatre) and should become icons of the most important part of Astana. Idle for some years, the projects gained momentum last year when the architects paid a visit to Kazakhstan; the technical evaluation of the projects will be completed soon.

'Having a project in Russia or a neighbouring country is very time consuming. While the aim of a meeting in Western culture is to reach some decision, here it could be just... communication per se,' explains Rolandas Liola. What tempts one to get involved is an opportunity to experiment and work with unusual tasks. One of these was a hotel in Buhlerhohe (Baden Baden, DE), a project commissioned to Arches by a Kazakh client. The reconstruction and extension project sensitively combines different architectural languages: the rich historical aesthetics of a hotel, designed by V. Kreis in 1912, and the contrasting contemporary transparent glass and metal structures of the new annex of the spa centre.



↑ Russian Drama Theatre, Astana (Trys A.M.)



↑ National Kazakhs Theatre, Astana (JAD and Architektūros linija)

'A foreign architect in Russia is subjected to a local legislative system. European qualification of an architect is not accepted, therefore it's obligatory to work with local partners. Also, one should carefully secure the copyright of the project,' says Vytautas Augustinavičius, co-author of Ramenskoye Airport in Moscow, a project by Vilniaus architektūros studija. A fourth airport in Moscow is being developed through a PPP scheme, and the private partner is a Lithuanian investor. Built within just one year, the passenger terminal of 18,000 m² will be followed by a depot aerodrome, hotels, and shopping mall.

'An architect is trusted and given quite a lot of creative freedom. However, humble democratic aesthetics wouldn't get much applause – a compelling architecture with certain show-offish character is prioritized,' says Gintautas Natkevičius. There is no denying the house in Raubičiai (Minsk, BY) by G. Natkevičius + partners is a statement. Placed atop a hill, the sharp dark slab is a black swan in the context of the ornate post-Soviet housing around it. The house isolates private rooms and opens up common zones towards the yard. 'It took seven years to build it; there were simply no technologies, skills no materials to implement the design we proposed. We had to bring materials and furniture from abroad,' recalls Natkevičius, who was chosen by the clients over an Italian office.

Variegated professional experience by Lithuanian architects proves that neighbouring and Eastern countries are a challenging and sometimes very rewarding ground. However, 'Architecture is like a vegetable – the best for you and the most reasonable in terms of production and supply is the one that grows in your backyard, not overseas,' quips Audrius Ambrasas. ◀

Exporting Lithuania



Winding roads towards quality

TEXT: RŪTA LEITANAITĖ

Competitive Lithuania

PUBLIC PROCUREMENT

1

Public buildings are the most eloquent expression of a state, city, or society's values, priorities, and ambitions. Until the last decade, the public building sector was quite abandoned in Lithuania. However, the economic crisis changed the game. While the market for housing, commercial, and other profitable buildings was floundering, European support for culture, social, science, and innovation infrastructure not only helped to improve Lithuanian cities, but also provided a cushion for the construction market and architects, during and after the economic crisis, respectively. Yet the public money came together within a binding legal frame. The new version of the Public Procurement Law, approved in 2005, imposed new rules on design and building processes. The nightmare with the leitmotif 'the lowest price wins' distorted the market (causing dumping and wild competition) and degraded the quality of many architectural and urban projects. Searching for the best mechanism to achieve the highest-quality result, today various schemes of public procurement competition are applied, yet the same questions remain: is the public procurement system representing the public interest, as it is supposed to? Is it paving the way for quality design and rational use of resources? Perhaps the private sector is meeting the challenges of public buildings better? What are the advantages and drawbacks in working with a private client, compared to the public procurement procedures?

RUPERT ARTS AND EDUCATION CENTRE, VILNIUS

Public procurement competition for a main contractor that hired the architects and participated in the competition together.

AUDRIUS AMBRASAS ARCHITECTS

'Time, time and time. It is essential if one wants to get good results while managing a public procurement competition,' says Audrius Ambrasas. According to him, success lies in an explicit, accurate competition brief and sufficient time for the design process. 'If you have those two conditions fulfilled, then the PPC method could be advantageous, compared to a private contract. It secures a project from any unexpected changes that could be subjected by the client during the design and construction process.'

The resort environment of the most popular and oldest Vilnius beach, Valakampiai, and the mysterious nature of the artistic creative process were the main motives that inspired the architecture of the educational and art centre. The use of a wood finish (thermally modified pine) throughout is in harmony with the building's environment of pine trees, and the only opening in the blind facade of the entrance encourages visitors to look at the world of the artists as if through a keyhole. On the ground floor is a multi-purpose hall, reading room, and administrative offices; in the basement, the computer art workshops. From the first floor, on which the resident artists have their rooms, the open stairs can be used to go straight from the corridor down to the lawn. The same precision, restraint and integrity characteristic of the exterior were also used for the building's interior spaces. Here, the dominating finish of the light, bleached pine gives way to the spaces and views of the natural environment, revealed through the windows, as the most important factor accentuating the interior (see A10 #64).

SUNRISE VALLEY SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY PARK

Aiming to integrate scientific research and innovation into state economics, to link science with business, universities alter the milieu of education and research, and new structures for science institutions emerge. Taking advantage of the EU programmes that support development of the scientific infrastructure, hubs, clusters, and campuses that sprouted in several Lithuanian cities over the last ten years. Sunrise Valley, a child of Vilnius University, Vilnius Gediminas Technical University, and several other scientific institutes, is an appreciable addition to a study campus built in 1980s. The main buildings of the Valley are clustered around a newly formed square, the high point of the campus's pedestrian axis. The detailed plan of the site set no regulations for the architecture, and all the buildings were designed by different architects. However, some common rules for architectural solutions are apparent: coherent scale of volumes, colour palette, and the opening of public premises to the square at the ground level. Projects 2, 3, and 4 are exemplary of this context.

2

JOINT LIFE SCIENCES CENTRE, VILNIUS UNIVERSITY

First stage: public procurement competition for an architectural project (the competition was followed by a negotiation process and alteration of first and second prize winning entries; eventually the second prize winners were chosen). Second stage: public procurement competition for the main contractor.

UAB EKOPROJEKTAS, VILTEKTA, ARCHITEKTŪROS LINIJA

'Having an architectural competition and an approved architectural design before the main contractor is chosen preconditions that quality architectural solutions won't be discarded in order to save money,' recalls Gintaras Čaikauskas about the struggle with the main contractor over a unique facade solution. The building is featured by a vertical pattern of custom-built white fibre cement elements, standing out in clear relief against glazed walls. The monumental composition of 24,000 m² is a 'science machine' dedicated to biotechnology and molecular medicine, and corresponds to the varied and strict requirements for different research, production, and educational scenarios. It makes reference to the structure of historic Vilnius University, located in the city's old town. Interconnected rectangular cubes are clustered around a small courtyard inside the quarter.



1



4



2



3

3

NATIONAL CENTRE OF PHYSICAL AND TECHNOLOGICAL SCIENCES
Public procurement competition for a main contractor that hired the architects and participated in the competition together.

AKG

'The quality of a competition brief weighs the quality of the final result, comments Remigijus Bimba. 'Especially for bigger sites and complexes, the expertise of an architect and an urban planner while drafting the brief is indispensable. Once approved, to amend a brief takes a lot of time and efforts.' In the case of the NCPTS project, the brief was prepared by the client, Vilnius University. 'Almost half of the brief had to be adjusted, therefore the construction process had additional stretch of one year,' says Bimba. 'And, of course, being hired by the main contractor (not the real client directly) means that an architect would have to withstand the pressure to opt for cheaper and simpler solutions.'

Having more than six months to prepare the competition design, the architects nurtured a rational structure. An irregular grid of rectangular blocks, arranged along two perpendicular volumes containing stairs, elevators, and corridors, provides attractive public spaces, such as inner courtyards. The dynamics of protrusions and gaps of the elevations softens the massiveness of the 25,000 m² complex. The centre is dedicated to laser and light technologies, material and nanotechnology sciences, and electronics and physics. The institutes operating here are settled in different blocks that can also be accessed from separate entrances.

4

VILNIUS UNIVERSITY LIBRARY
Invited competition for architectural design (2002), PPC for the main contractor (2011)

R. PALEKAS ARCH STUDIJA

Happily, when the architectural competition was organized in 2002, the actual PPC system was not yet in effect. Otherwise, it would have been impossible to improve the project as we did, says R. Palekas. The competition brief provided an incorrect topographic plan, therefore the architects designed a building that would have required the deforestation of a beautiful pine grove growing on the site. After getting the exact data, the project was distinctly modified, basing the main concept on the harmony between the building and the nature around it.

'The key to a successful PPC procedure and implementation of the project is the criteria of reasonableness, therefore, certain flexibility to improve the project,' suggests Palekas, exemplifying this with the case of the library's facades. During the design process, a new concept of the facades that would have been more rational, cheaper, and better corresponding to the overall blueprint emerged. However, it was not approved by the controlling institution and more expensive facades were installed in the end. 'The managers of such projects should have at least minimal expertise in design and construction processes,' remarks Palekas (see A10 #49).

5

UNIVERSITY OF APPLIED SOCIAL SCIENCES, VILNIUS
Invited architectural competition with private funding

AKG

Working with a private client allows you to improve and optimize the project,' says Remigijus Bimba. 'The flipside of it is a lower budget than that of public projects; therefore you have to rationalize a lot.' The university is an integral part of a post-industrial quarter. Part of the motor factory built after World War II was recently transformed into a residential complex designed by the same architects. Following the fundamental of the whole project, the original volumes were preserved, exposing and accentuating characteristic features of the industrial nature, including structures and original proportions of interior spaces. The choice of the university to settle on this site brought an additional benefit – more vivacity – to the entire quarter.

6

INTEGRA HOUSE
Invited and open architectural competition with private funding

VILNIAUS ARCHITEKTŪROS STUDIJA

'If a client expects quality and is ready to invest money in it, private projects pave the way to better results than the ones achieved through the bureaucratic mechanism of public procurement,' suggests Lijana Petrikėnė. The case of inTegra House gratified the architects with every condition fulfilled: the budget was generous, the clients required maximum quality and uniqueness, were welcoming to the most innovative techniques, materials, and design solutions, and the time given for refining the design and building was more than sufficient (approximately three years).

Located in the fields some 40 kilometres from Vilnius, the inTegra House is a hub for creative synergy between business, art, and education, embracing many kinds of activities: conferences, cultural events, workshops, lectures, meetings, etc. The competition-winning blueprint of separate, triangle-shaped volumes lining up along the slope was implemented without any major changes. Small wooden volumes blend organically with the natural landscape. The power of this unpretentious contemporary architecture lies in a certain playfulness of the urban scheme, sharp geometry, meticulous detailing, and high-quality materials.

Competitive Lithuania



5

6

Architecture meets water

TEXT: RŪTA LEITANAITĖ

Lithuania is often dubbed a land of rain, rivers, and lakes. Curiously, Lithuanians do not celebrate water as an integral part of their lifestyle. Of course, the lakes are crowded on warm summer weekends, but when it comes to an everyday use of water – for daily recreation, transport, logistics, etc. – there used to be a lack of demand (by citizens) and infrastructure and initiative (by politicians or business). The significance of lakes and rivers especially dwindled in the 20th century, when they were forsaken and used as urban drainage, or were left to natural processes.

Today, Lithuania is witnessing a rising engagement by a society eager to enjoy water in its daily life, and cities now include water as valuable resource in their development agendas. While private business is still quite inactive regarding water-related urban projects, European structural funds suggest some facilitation for the public sector, and are willing to improve the infrastructure of public spaces near water. Grassroots and experimental initiatives are emerging from time to time as well.

1. Transformation of the riverside in central Vilnius

Since Neris river was enclosed between steep concrete banks the mid-20th century, it faded away from the map of Vilnius's public spaces. A year ago, the new mayor declared the riverside to be a top priority. Things got moving on trivial and visionary levels: the obsolete pavement on the riverside is being replaced, and meanwhile a process of drafting the programme and design for the whole riverside strip has gained momentum. A workshop, organized by architect Martynas Marozas with various stakeholders, resulted with a set of different scenarios for nine sites on the riverside. The proposals relate to the nature of the institutions located near the river (museum, youth centre, sports centre, office quarter, etc.). The improvement of the recreational public infrastructure, greenery, and business concepts (cafés, rental centres, hotel) were suggested. The city promises to integrate the ideas into the riverside transformation project and seek out EU financing in order to begin major works in 2017–2018.

2. Neris river ferry

So far, the popular public beach of Valakampiai, situated on the right bank of the Neris river in Vilnius, has no physical link to the opposite bank, equipped by a bicycle and pedestrian path. During an internship at the Rupert arts incubator's educational programme (see p. 46), young architect Justinas Dudėnas came up with an idea of a stream-driven, pendulous ferry that would work not only as a connection between the two banks, but also as a cultural space. A round platform could be transformed into a floating cinema, musical scene, or space for debates. The ferry, tested in summer 2014, was instantly popular. Since then, however, the architect is still searching for financial support that could help make it permanent.



↓ Neris river ferry (Justinas Dudėnas)

↑ Raft workshop, Kaunas



↑ Neris riverside transformation in central Vilnius

3. Springboard at Lake Zarasaitis

Encompassed by two lakes, Zarasai, a resort town of less than 7000 inhabitants, builds its identity and economics on natural resources. In recent years, the municipality seized the occasion of EU support in order to enhance its touristic attractiveness by transforming a major part of the waterfront.

One of those projects is a swimming pool and springboard by a2sm on Lake Zarasaitis. A rectangular pool, girdled by the wooden frame of a wide footbridge and generous terraces on the bank, will be supplemented in the future by a café, water amusement structure, and marina. Its simple composition of a flat platform and vertical accent (the springboard), strict geometry, and combination of only two materials (wood and concrete) offsets the variety of forms, textures, and colours of the surrounding nature.

4. Raft as educational provocation

Suggesting that a contemporary architect is too remote from the real outcome of his/her design, the young team of studio 1:1 arranged a workshop during which 20 architecture students from the Kaunas faculty of the Vilnius Academy of Arts had to design, construct, and test an architectural object by themselves: a raft. The idea of a structure of plywood platforms and plastic tubs was adopted, and after three days of work a platform of 6 × 6 metres with a load of 20 people set off on its first journey. The successful experience of their seven-kilometre-long trip

↓ Springboard, Lake Zarasaitis (a2sm)

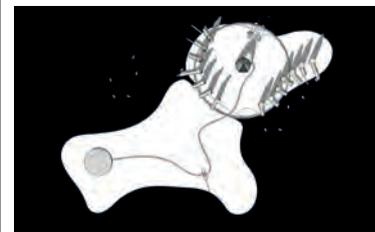


downstream the Nemunas river emboldened the team to try deeper waters, such as the Curonian Lagoon, and even Venice's channels during the Architecture Biennale in 2014.

5. Indraja island

'Once having had the idea of an island that could be a scene for public events and creative collaborations between art, technological innovations, and business, we simply scrolled through the real estate ads on the Internet and bought the island of Indraja lake,' enthuses architect Mykolas Svirskis about his team's project. The team comprised fourteen architects, artists, and businessmen from Lithuania and the United States.

Half of the island is submerged, therefore only several wooden footbridges and floating sheds will be constructed here. The main structure with a library, kitchen, and workshop will be located on the main part of the island. The rest of the accommodation units (tree houses, small huts) will be distributed along the shore. Embracing the crowdfunding model, the implementation of the project will kick off this summer. Starting from the infrastructure, it will continue with workshops for architecture students. ◀



↑ Indraja island (Mykolas Svirskis)

Undisclosed Kaunas

TEXT: RŪTA LEITANAITĖ AND JOLITA KANČIENĖ, PHOTOGRAPHY: NORBERT TUKAJ / KAUNAS 1918–2015. ARCHITECTURE GUIDE



↑ Ramovė Military Office

Celebrating growing global interest and already extensively explored and presented, European modernist architecture of the beginning of the 20th century still has unmapped facets. Kaunas, Lithuania's second-largest city, claims to be a peculiar specimen of architecture built between 1919 and 1939, which is worthy of being a UNESCO World Heritage Site. The application, drawn up by the city of Kaunas, is currently on the table of the Lithuanian Ministry of Culture, and will soon be submitted to UNESCO.

'The Kaunas school of modernism is an outstanding testimony to the diversity of the modern movement,' says Andriana Filinaitė, curator of the process for the inclusion of Kaunas's architecture on the UNESCO list. 'We are used to relating modernism with such big names (and, respectively, aesthetics) as Bauhaus, Le Corbusier,' explains art historian Vaidas Petrulis. 'Kaunas suggests a different narrative of modernism, saturated with specific local features.' Not without reason: when it comes to a locality in architecture, Kaunas's modernism is often dubbed the genesis of a regionalism in professional Lithuanian architecture.

Moreover, the urban landscape of Kaunas has witnessed modernity as a tool capable of withstanding and implementing the ideals of a free nation. At the very dawn of its independence, the Republic of Lithuania, established in 1918, experienced a transference of its capital city status from Vilnius – which was annexed to Poland at the time – to Kaunas, in 1919. Ambitions, enthusiasm, and the pride of a young nation ignited an explosive development of this provisional capital, especially in the public sector. The overall majority of administrative, cultural, and commercial buildings that today shape the central cityscape of Kaunas were built during only two decades.

The UNESCO application, 'Kaunas of 1919–1939: The secret capital of European modernism', names 50 buildings and complexes, most of them located in the city centre.



↑ Vytautas the Great War Museum (V. Dubeneckis, K. Reisonas, K. Kriščiukaitis)

The uniqueness of the 'temporary capital of Lithuania' phenomenon was internationally acclaimed a year ago, when Kaunas became one of 20 sites awarded the European Heritage Label, which indicates locations where European ideals, values,

history, and integration are celebrated. That optimism was boosted by a recent decision by UNESCO to include Kaunas in a Creative Cities Network – the first city from Central and Eastern Europe. If the application is successful, starting in 2018 interwar Kaunas can proudly call itself the sixth UNESCO World Heritage Site in Lithuania.

Pienocentras (V. Landsbergis–Žemkalnis, K. Reisonas) was built as the headquarters for the union of dairy processing companies. The ground floor was dedicated to commercial activities, while the upper floors contained the offices and the apartments.

The building is an exceptional example within the overall context of interwar architecture for its particular expression, present through powerful simplicity and laconic aesthetics. The character of the building's architecture is created by rhythms and



↑ Pienocentras headquarters

proportions of elements. The rounded corner of the building faces the pedestrian street, Laisvės Avenue. The ground floor of the single volume is accentuated by large windows and polished black labradorite trim, topped with a broad lit glass marquee.



↑ House, K. Donelaičio Street

The architecture of Pienocentras received third place and an honourable mention at the 1937 Exposition International des Arts et Techniques dans la Vie Moderne in Paris.

The house at 19 K. Donelaičio Street (A. Funkas) is not a typical case of residential architecture. Its distinctive feature is a wide, rounded bow with corner windows asymmetrically incorporated in the street-facing facade. In order to improve proportions, the ground floor was raised, and the portal is unusually tall.

The ground floor consisted of two leased apartments with separate entrances. The owners lived on the first floor. The interior of the luxurious apartment is based on the principle of merged spaces. The vestibule is connected to the hall leading to the living room, dining room, and office. Plants from the 'winter garden' arranged on the roof are visible through the glazed ceiling of the hall.

After the establishment of the Republic in 1918, Lithuanian society experienced a patriotic fervour, followed by a desire for national symbols. The most distinct of these is the Christ's Resurrection Church (K. Reisonas). In 1928, a plot on a hill was allotted and,



↑ Research laboratory (V. Landsbergis–Žemkalnis)

after a fruitless architectural competition, the design was assigned to the head of Kaunas's municipal Department of Development. Construction began in 1933. The church was built by the entire nation: people bought stamps valued at the price of one brick each. The church was not completed until the Soviet occupation in June 1940, and in 1952 it was converted into a radio factory. It was rebuilt and congregated in 2006 (architects H. Zukauskas, A. Sprindys).

The church is the largest and most modern interwar sacred building in the Baltic region. The architecture is a combination of modernity, monumentality, and asceticism. The inner space is arranged as a classical basilica, while the sharp, squared shapes are modern. The flat terrace roof meant for sacraments became an innovation in the global history of sacral architecture.



↑ Christ's Resurrection Church

One of the first modernist buildings in Lithuania, the Kaunas Central Post Office (F. Vizbaras), represents the search for regionalism in architecture. The facadecomposition is traditionally symmetric, yet also dynamic. The architect emphasized the Lithuanian character through the facade decor: textured and cut plaster refers to locally hewn sandstone, and cement cornices and window frames recall timber carvings. Yet the local character is most revealed in the interior, where floors were adorned with traditional patterns of fabric, and walls with various Lithuanian symbols in the form of paintings and heraldic shields. All of these symbols were destroyed during Soviet times, though partially restored in 1996. ◀



↑ Central Post Office

The texts by Jolita Kančienė are from the exhibition *PARALLELS – Lithuanian architecture: Three eras, three faces*, organized by the Architects Association of Lithuania and curated by Rūta Leitanaite.

Modernist Lithuania