

Opportunities for Renovation of Mid-20th Century Buildings in a Protected Environment: the Example of the Writers' Creative House in Nida

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Much of the Curonian Spit's architecture dates back to Soviet times, and many buildings are now in need of renovation. During the renovation process, quite flexible design guidelines apply, focusing on combining aesthetics with traditional local architecture. This raises questions as to what design aspects should be preserved after renovation. Should the distinctive stylistic elements of the original architect be saved (and if so, how?), or should the focus be on integrating cotemporary regional architecture trends? This study focuses on the Writer's Creative House in Nida, built during the Soviet occupation, and its architect, Liucija Gedgaudienė. It explores the relationship of the building to its surroundings, its significance for the community, and seeks to identify both- the local architectural elements and the personal design traits of Liucija Gedgaudienė.

Keywords: architect Liucija Gedgaudienė; Curonian Spit; identity; landscape; protected areas; renovation of a building complex; Writer's creative house.

Lithuania's network of protected areas aims to preserve both, cultural heritage and natural values. Among these, the Curonian Spit stands out as one of the most significant. While its beautiful landscape is the main object of protection, it also preserves many culturally significant sites. These places offer a window on the history of this unique region and are therefore of great importance to conserve. It is said that "[...] the loss or total disappearance of any cultural or natural heritage asset irreparably impoverishes the heritage of all the peoples of the world" (Convention, 1972). However, the situation of the remaining unprotected buildings in the Curonian Spit is different. Most of this architecture is of Soviet- era architecture, which poses its own challenges. The design guidelines for the renovation of these buildings are very flexible, main requirement is to match the aesthetics with the traditional architecture of the area.

In various ways, these structures are not only integral to Neringa's landscape but also to its history. Each of them narrates its own challenges and, in parallel, possibilities. Accepting the city as a changing organism and allowing it to change, the renovation of the objects should find a point where the local architecture correlates with the original design and contemporary trends.

The text presents the results of the research carried out on the complex of the Writers' Creative House in Nida. It was started and completed during the Soviet occupation (1973-1982). The study aimed to investigate the relationship between the Writers' Creative House complex and the landscape, its importance to the community, as well as the valuable qualities of the building

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Abstract

Introduction



and the personal style of its architect, Liucija Gedgaudiene. Significant attention was devoted to the local architecture of Nida and the Curonian Spit as a whole, and how these elements integrate into the present context. The aim of the article is to present the results of the research carried out, including a renovation model developed from the results.

Methods

The first chosen method was sociological quantitative survey. The survey was carried out online, two separate questionnaires were created, one for the local population of Nida and another for tourists visiting Nida. The questions in each questionnaire were tailored to the respective groups, considering their different perspectives and experiences. The questionnaires were designed to include multiple-choice questions, providing respondents with a set of predefined answer options for each question. Since the survey targeted two distinct groups (locals and tourists), convenience sampling was chosen, - individuals who were easily accessible or willing to participate were included in the study. Respondents accessed the online questionnaires and provided their responses by selecting the appropriate answer choices. Data analysis involved calculating percentages and conducting statistical comparisons between groups. The aim was to determine the specific attributes that contribute to the popularity of this building, ascertain the significance of this location to respondents, and understand the reasons behind such perceptions. The survey also sought to find out whether the public envisaged the renovation of the complex and, if so, their preferred means of doing so.

To explore the architectural characteristics present throughout various periods on the Curonian Spit, a descriptive object analysis method was applied. This approach aids in identifying unique features specific to each chosen period and discerning their valuable qualities. The selected periods for analysis include the 1800s to the 1990s, the Interwar period, the Soviet era, and the period of Independence.

To elucidate the relationship between the Writer's Creative House complex and its surroundings, a methodology was adopted to assess visual pollution within natural landscape complexes and features. In this method, the complex was identified as the Visual Pollution Object (VPO) due to its juxtaposition with the forest, Urbas hill, and open landscape views. The photo utilized for the study was captured in autumn 2022 from Nida lighthouse site, showcasing the Writer's Creative House complex, Nida Urban Reserve, and the surrounding nature of the Curonian Spit. The analysis examines and evaluates the contrasting elements between the VPO object (in this case, the Writer's Creative House) and the surrounding landscape.

Another analysis, conducted in the form of a descriptive object analysis, aimed to examine the projects of Liucija Gedgaudiene, the author of the Writer's Creative House, within the territory of the Curonian Spit. The objective was to discern the distinctive features of her personal style. The analysis encompassed the following objects:

- _ Diploma thesis „Design of a 200-bed motel in Juodkrantė“;
- _ Holiday home „Kąštytis“, Nida 1964-1965m.;
- _ The Government Villa “Banga” (“Kosyginio vila”), Nida 1966m.;
- _ Holiday home “Pušėlė”, Nida 1966-1967m.;
- _ Holiday home “Rūta”, Nida 1967m.;
- _ Writer's Creative House complex, Nida 1973-1982m.;
- _ Forestry Research Institute point, Juodkrantė 1974m.;
- _ Pension of the All- Union Message Society „Preila“, Preila 1979m.

To define old- new matching method, an analysis of changes based on V. Jurkštas Old and New Harmony Methodology was chosen. This approach encompasses three key principles of renovation, namely:

- _ The principle of similarity; _ The principle of neutrality; _ The principle of contrast.

A descriptive analysis of the objects was conducted, focusing on renovation properties in the Curonian Spit. The selected properties for analysis included: Holiday home „Auksinės kopos“, Nida; Reconstruction of a post office building, Nida; Former holiday home „Rūta“, current hotel „Nidus“; Former holiday home „Linėja“, current „SPA Nida“; Reconstruction project „Labas, Jūra!“, Juodkrantė; Nida Art Colony, Nida.

The results of the sociological survey research (conducted from October 12, 2022 to January 4, 2023) revealed a shared desire among both residents and tourists for increased public involvement in shaping the future of the complex and its surrounding area. Among the 35 respondents from Nida residents, the 41–65 age group emerged as the most active participants. A significant majority (42,9%) indicated daily visits to the complex, citing reasons such as leisurely walks, trips to Urbas Hill, or visits to In Vino café during the summer season. Additionally, 64% of respondents expressed the need for the new spaces within the Writer's Creative House complex, specifying recreational and creative areas like a library or reading room. Opinions varied regarding the renovation of the site, with some advocating for complete redevelopment while others suggested minimal intervention to address deteriorating parts of the complex.

The findings from the survey of Nida tourists mirrored those of the residents' survey. Among the 31 tourists surveyed, the 18–25 age group had the highest response rate. A significant majority (81,8%) were aware of the complex's location, with 51,6% reporting visiting the area once a year or less frequently. When asked about the potential impact of introducing new features to the complex, 93,5% believed it would encourage more frequent visits, often suggesting amenities such as a café or library. Opinions on the style of renovation varied, but the majority favored new designs, colors, and functionalities, indicating a collective desire for modernization and enhancement of the complex.

The results of the descriptive analysis of the objects gave clear insights into the architectural features characteristic of the Curonian Spit in different periods (Table 1).

During the transition period from the late 19th century to the early 20th century, distinctive features in architectural design became established, defining the aesthetics of the era. Buildings were generally rectangular in plan, emphasising order and functionality. Symmetry played an important role, contributing to the overall balance and visual harmony of the buildings. The exterior was

No.	Period			
	End of 19 th century- beginning of the 20 th century	Interwar	Soviet era	Independence
1.	Villa „Charlotte“ (or Neringa school of Art), 1909.	Thomas Mann's summer house, 1930s.	Culture House „Agila“, 1967- 1971.	Nida Art Colony, 2008-2011 first phase, 2016 second phase.
2.	Hotel Konigin Luise (now the holiday home „Jurate“), 1912.	Youth tourism hostel, 1931.	Nida passenger ship pier, 1964- 1972.	Church of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Help of Cristians, Nida 2003.
3.	Villa „Helene“, 1907.	Carl Knauff house, 1932.	Municipal building/ administrative building, 1971- 1976.	Nida Culture and Tourism Information Centre „Agila“
4.	Herman Blode Hotel (now Herman Blode Hotel Museum, Hotel Nida Banga) 1867.	Villa „Gerlach“, 1920s.	Restaurant- cafeteria „Nida“, 1962m.	Apartment in Pervalka, „Mariu verandos“, 2018.
5.	Lighthouse keeper's house, 1873.	Martynas Sakutis Hotel (not preserved) 1933.	Restaurant „Ešerinė“, 1977.	Villa „Preilos krantas“, 2011- 2012.

Results

Table 1

The following periods and buildings were studied

decorated with ornamental window surrounds, giving the facades intricate detail and visual appeal. Architects often drew inspiration from past architectural styles, incorporating elements of historicism into their designs. Mansard roofs, characterised by a double-pitched structure, gave the buildings a distinctive silhouette. The architectural façades highlighted the lines of the eaves, visually separating the different floors and giving depth to the exterior. The façades were decorated with carved wooden elements, demonstrating craftsmanship and highlighting the architectural compositions. The predominant use of brick in the construction of the villas reflected the durability and longevity of the architectural design of the period. All these architectural elements reflect the aesthetics of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, reflecting the innovative spirit and artistic expression that characterised the architecture of the period.

In the interwar period, architectural trends reflected a mix of traditional and modern elements. Glazed terraces and verandas seamlessly connected indoor and outdoor spaces, maximising natural light and scenic beauty. The mansard roofs, with their double-pitched structure, gave the buildings a distinctive character, while providing additional living space in the attics. Functional and decorative shutters provided privacy, shade and protection. Attics extending from pitched roofs could be fitted with windows or additional loft space. Façade finishes with vertically arranged panels contributed to a sense of verticality and rhythm in architectural compositions. The pitched roofs complemented the coastal landscape and provided effective drainage in the presence of precipitation. Decorative elements typical of Curonian Spit architecture, such as profiled window surrounds and elaborately carved pediment cornices, added to the visual appeal of the building exteriors.

Soviet-era architecture in the Curonian Spit was dominated by the modernist and functionalist style, which was characterised by several distinctive features. Clear geometric shapes emphasising simplicity and rationality in design were prevalent, while large glass panels and shopfronts maximised natural light and promoted transparency in buildings. Horizontal lines are evident, emphasising the expansiveness of the buildings and contributing to a sense of stability. The façades were minimalist and devoid of ornamental decoration, reflecting a focus on practicality and efficiency in architectural design. Materials such as concrete, wood and rubble were often used, emphasising the utilitarian nature of Soviet architecture. All of these features collectively defined the Soviet architectural landscape, reflecting both the ideological principles and practical considerations of the time.

Architecture of Independence in the Curonian Spit preserves the essence of rural settlements, emphasising their rural charm and traditional character. This is achieved by using traditional materials such as wooden panelling and reed roofs, thus ensuring that the architectural landscape remains rooted in the cultural heritage. A dual perspective has been chosen, combining modernity with the timeless charm of fishing villages. The implementation of contemporary design elements also makes a conscious effort to preserve the distinctive style and atmosphere of these coastal communities. This harmonious blend of old and new reflects the essence of independence, honouring the past while embracing the future.

During the research of visual pollution to natural landscape complexes and features, the primary objective was to determine how the complex of the Writer's Creative House contrasts with its surroundings, and thus to identify the degree of visual pollution it causes. As it was previously mentioned earlier, during this method, complex is identified as VPO (the object of visual pollution), due to its juxtaposition with the forest, Urbas Hill, and open landscape views. The photo used for the study was taken in autumn 2022 from the Nida lighthouse site (Fig. 1).

The overall character of the observed landscape, according to the physiomorphotope localisation drawing of the study of spatial structure diversity and identification of its types (Kavaliauskas, 2013), the majority of the analysed area falls within the N' /p/ 3>A1 habitat. This means that the



Fig. 1

View from the Nida Lighthouse observation deck, (the white circle indicates the location of the VPO, A. Vilkauskaitė, 17 08 2022)

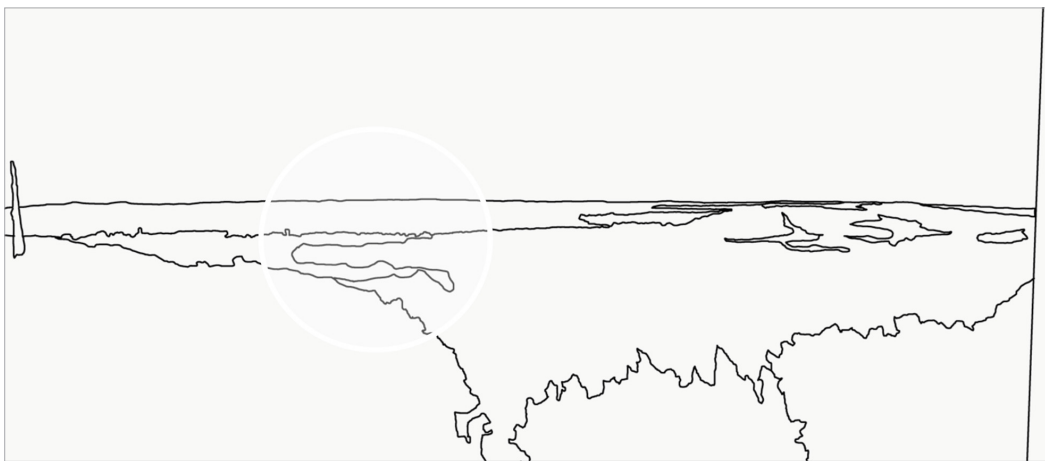


Fig. 2

Analysis of the shapes and lines of the landscape of Nida as seen from the Nida lighthouse observation deck

natural landscape character of the area is the landscape of the sculpted spit. Additional features of the physio genic layer in the area are wetlands. Nature of cultivation - wooded landscape with little urbanization. Architectural qualities of the landscape - ethno-culturalism.

From an immanent point of view- from a natural monument- Urbas hill- the whole panorama of Curonian Spit is visible. From an ecological point of view- Urbas hill is located in the territory of a geomorphological reserve. The whole territory belongs to the Curonian Spit National Park and is included in the UNESCO list. National parks make up only 12.2% of protected areas in Lithuania, nature reserves- 12.3% (Saugomų, 1992).

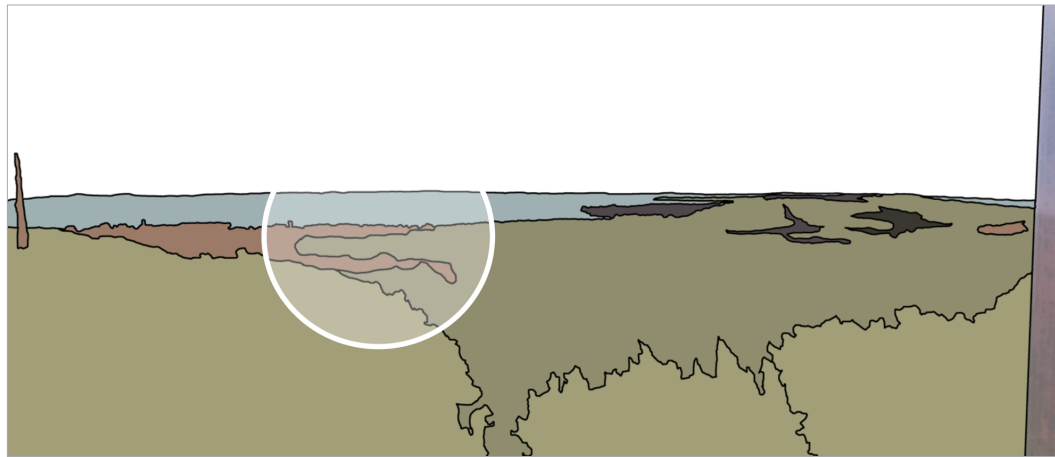
The visual capacity of the landscape is assessed as low or medium. The visual spaces are large, open, seamless and the terrain is gently undulating (Fig. 2). The landscape is quite sensitive to change. In continuous, unbroken forest lines, VPO's are visible if they are located above the treetops.

The following qualitative indicators characterize the image in question: multi-plan view, with 6 different visual layouts: hilly and wooded terrain, which means that new developments will not distort landforms (Fig. 3).

Estimating the extent of visual pollution: the scale of the visual pollution object (VPO, Writers's Creative House complex) in the frame is coarse,- VPO reaches three floors, its upper parts are visible above the tops of the pine trees that dominate the frame. Being in the third foreground, the object hardly blocks the view. The contrast of the VPO with other objects in the town is insignificant, almost imperceptible.

Fig. 3

Analysis of the visual (compositional) plans of the landscaping of Nida as seen from the Nida lighthouse observation deck



The style of the building contrasts strongly with the natural elements but is harmonious in color with the architecture of the adjacent town, and the VPO is not contrasted with the high-rise buildings visible in the same, third plan. The contrast of materials between the objects from the observation deck is almost imperceptible.

The function of the VPO is similar to other structures in the third plan - accommodation. However, the volumes and style of the building contrast somewhat differs from the architectural traditions of the area. Large-scale volumes and flat roofs are not typical from Curonian Spit architecture.

Overall degree of visual contrast identified as weak. The Writer's Creative House, identified as a Visual Pollution Object (VPO) in the study, contrasts poorly with the overall context. This means that the visual amenity object has a negligible effect on the character and visual quality of the landscape. This is a minor visual pollution - it will not be exacerbated without opening up the skyline more. This level of contrast is possible in this location.

Based on the research conducted on visual pollution within natural landscape complexes, results suggests that the Writer's Creative House complex poses minimal visual pollution and is unlikely to sig-

Table 2

Visual contrast of the VPO as seen from the Nida lighthouse observation deck

Landscape components	Relief				Water bodies				Vegetation				Buildings			
	Large	Medium	Weak	Irrelevant	Large	Medium	Weak	Irrelevant	Large	Medium	Weak	Irrelevant	Large	Medium	Weak	Irrelevant
Degree of visual contrast (a comparable qualitative indicator resulting from the application of the SGEI)																
Scale		●						●		●						●
Forms			●					●								●
Lines	●							●							●	
Colours		●				●				●						●
Textures			●				●			●						●
Materials	●				●				●					●		
Style/ species composition	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-		●		
Function	●				●				●							●
Purpose of protection			●					●		●				●		
Degree of visual contrast	Large				Medium				Weak				Irrelevant			
										●						

nificantly alter the character or visual appeal of the landscape, if skyline remains relatively unchanged. In the following study, it was observed that the contrast of the complex with the architecture of the Curonian Spit is somewhat bigger than with the natural landscape.

Although, the results of the research into the analogous projects of the Liucija Gedgaudienė, the creator of the Writer's Creative House complex in the Curonian Spit, reveal distinctive features of her personal style. The predominant features observed in the objects analysed are of similar height, usually with two or one storey with a mansard. The larger buildings are divided into smaller volumes, in keeping with the architectural aesthetic of the region.

Many of the buildings are strategically designed in picturesque locations on slopes, thus enhancing their visual appeal and integration with the natural environment. The first buildings have mainly flat or low-pitched roofs, while later projects combine low-pitched and pitched roofs. Pitched roofs, when present, are usually divided in half and designed symmetrically from the central axis to the sides.

Functionality determines the division of rooms, bedrooms are often located on the second floor to maximise space and privacy. Balconies and staircase galleries are prominent architectural features in all of Gedgaudienė's Curonian Spit projects. These elements are usually decorated with horizontal wooden panelling, emphasising the horizontal aspect of the buildings and encouraging a connection with the landscape.

The decorative elements on the facades are strategically placed horizontally, visually elongating the buildings and anchoring them to the ground. In addition, the architectural composition is dominated by large glass panels, which echo the modernist tendencies of the time.



Fig. 4

Holiday home "Kastytis",
Nida 1964- 1965.
(Drémaitė, 2020)



Fig. 5

The Government Villa
„Banga” Urbas Hill, Nida,
1966. (Drémaitė, 2020)

Fig. 6

Holiday home "Pušėlė",
Nida 1966-1967
(Drėmaitė, 2020)



During the last analysis, research of changes showed, that according to the methodology of the old-new correspondence, the data obtained could be used to observe all three variations: contrast, similarity, neutrality. However, the dominant methods were the principles of similarity and contrast. The similarity is manifested through the volume of the building, often the shape and rhythm of the windows, as well as preserving the function of the building. The contrast in the area after the renovation of the building is manifested in the materials used, the functional zoning of the area, the layout of the rooms and, of course, the style of the interior.

Table 3

Results of the analysis
of change

Que no.	Name of the project	Construction period/year	Year of renovation	Defined old- new matching method
1.	Holiday home "Auksines kopos", Nida	1964, reconstruction 1981-1988	Construction work has started in 2019	Similarity principle
2.	Reconstruction project "Labas, jural", Juodkrante	The soviet era	2018	Contrast principle
3.	Nida Art Colony, Nida	The soviet era	2008- 2011 1 st . phase, 2016m. 2 nd phase	Contrast and similarity principle
4.	Reconstruction of a post office building, Nida	The soviet era, 1974	Project proposal prepared in 2018	Similarity principle
5.	Former holiday home "Lineja", current "SPA Nida", Nida	The soviet era	Project proposal prepared in 2018	Similarity principle
6.	Former holiday home "Ruta", current hotel "Nidus"	The soviet era, 1967	The building has been renovated twice during the independence period, the exact date is unclear	Contrast and similarity principle

Discussion

Based on the results of the empirical research, a model for the renovation of the Writer's Creative House was developed, reflecting three key components: identity, landscape and the combination of old and new.

The concept of identity at the top of the pyramid symbolises the importance of place and object identity. Neringa's architectural identity dictates a distinctive style, while at the same time the Writers' Creative House serves the public not only in terms of its aesthetic qualities, but also its function. The study found

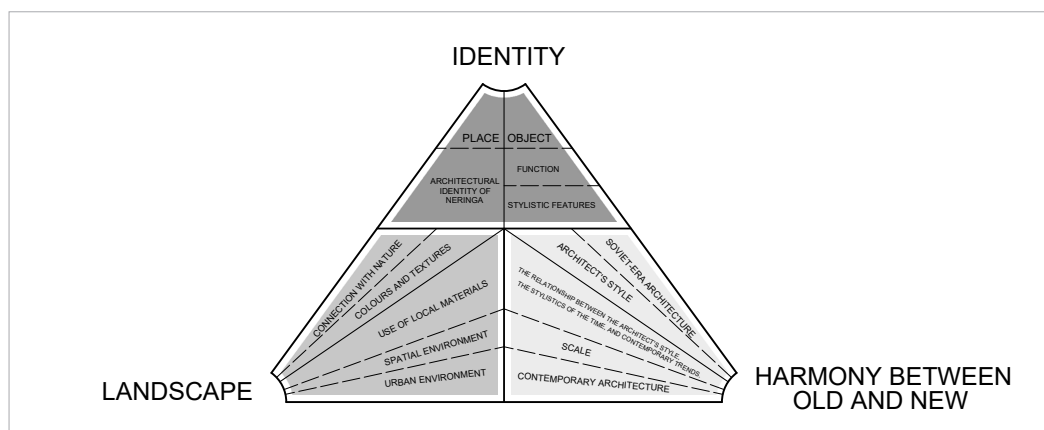


Fig. 7

Model for the renovation of the Writer's Creative House. Scheme by A. Vilkauskaitė

that the preservation of both function and stylistic features is important to the community. All these nuances should be in harmony with the architecture of Nida. The specific character of this region is dominated by a fine scale, a specific colour palette, gabled roofs, and appropriate carpentry.

Landscape is another crucial aspect. The relationship with nature and the urban environment should be maintained through colours and textures, the spatial environment and the use of local materials. The facades in the area are characterised by vertically rolled brown painted cladding. Doors, windows, shutters and weatherboards should be painted black, white and blue. Roofing should be done with reeds or ceramic tiles (brownish in colour).

The third component of the renovation model is the combination of old and new. Two aspects have been identified that should determine the stylistic characteristics of the building after the renovation project. These are the consonance between contemporary and Soviet architecture. The relationship between the architect Liucija Gedgaudienė's personal traits, the prevailing stylistic style of the time (1973), and contemporary trends.

1. Neringa's architectural identity begins with the first fishermen's houses in the Curonian Spit. It has been noted that the fisherman's homestead in the Curonian Spit stands out from all other dwellings in other regions of Lithuania in terms of its decorative elements and the layout of the building. After an analysis of the previously mentioned old fishermen's homes, the following features, that constitutes the architectural identity of Neringa, was discovered: thatched roofs, which were the most locally and easily available material in the area; the decoration of the house with wooden details, such as carved weatherboards, variously carved veranda edgings, and wooden beams; the decoration of the gable of the house.
2. The urban development of Nida and the Curonian Spit is divided into two different periods: before the II World war (until 1945) and after the II World war (1945-1990), later there is a deep hole with the advent of the Soviet period. After the war, the new authorities took an economic approach to the resort area - the fish factory buildings in Nida were the first to be built after the war. Even though the site was assessed as a resort area, it was not immediately realised that the new buildings in the Curonian Spit environment could not be standardised, typified projects.
3. The 'Writers' Creative House Complex' was designed and built during the Soviet period by architect Lucija Gedgaudienė. The building, now in a poor state of repair, still partly reflects the architectural trends of the Soviet period. The complex of rather large buildings is characterised by horizontal planes, overlapping roofs and a less traditional materiality. Despite these, it is clear that the cultural significance and value to the community pulsates with a strong energy. The cultural life of the complex, which is actively simmering, attracts huge numbers of people every summer. The rooted traditions maintain the popularity of the building.

Conclusions

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