

Search of Architectural and Urban Development of the Town of Pagėgiai in Lithuania Minor

Gintarė Marozaitė^{1*}, Aušra Mlinkauskienė²

¹ Gynėjų g. 14-80, Vilnius 01109, Lithuania

² Faculty of Civil Engineering and Architecture, Kaunas University of Technology, Studentu st. 48, LT-51367 Kaunas, Lithuania

*Corresponding author: gin.marozait@gmail.com

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The architectural heritage of Lithuania Minor, historically known as East Prussia, has received significantly less scholarly attention than that of Greater Lithuania. While historians such as Vasilijus Safronovas and Silva Pocyte have examined the region's historical development, their research has focused more on political and social contexts than on architectural or urban studies. Contributions by Martynas and Marija Purvinas and Algirdas Matulevičius have advanced knowledge of the region's built environment, but mostly with regard to major centers such as Klaipėda, Tilsit, and Ragnit, leaving smaller towns relatively understudied.

The turbulent history of Lithuania Minor – marked by wars, Nazi and Soviet occupations, and shifting regimes – resulted in the loss of many historical sources and buildings. Even so, Prussian construction practices and the use of durable materials ensured that a considerable portion of the architectural heritage has survived and remains worthy of preservation.

This study focuses on the town of Pagėgiai, which grew from a small settlement into a district center during the interwar period. Its aim is to evaluate the town's significance in regional and national contexts, analyze the development of its urban structure across different historical periods, and identify the key features of its architectural character.

Keywords: Lithuania Minor; urban context; architectural expression; valuable features; heritage-based development; sustainable urbanism.

The architecture of Lithuania Minor (also known as a part of East Prussia) has received considerably less scholarly attention than rest of Lithuania. Although the influence of German architectural traditions continues to be examined relatively extensively – most notably in the works of Vasilijus Šafronovas, Silva Pocyte, and others – their research primarily focuses on the historical development of the region. In contrast, architectural, urban, and heritage-related issues of Lithuania Minor remain less systematically explored.

A significant contribution to the study of the architecture of Lithuania Minor has been made by architects and researchers Martynas Purvinas and Marija Purvinienė, Algirdas Matulevičius, and others. While their work provides a more detailed analysis of major urban areas such as Klaipėda, Tilsit, and Ragnit, the architectural heritage of the province remains considerably less comprehensively examined.

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Abstract

Introduction



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Due to the complex history of this region – including the world wars and the occupations by Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union – a substantial portion of historical sources, along with historic buildings and urban structures, has not survived to the present day. Since the conflicts between the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and the Teutonic Order, the area functioned as a border zone and an important link between Lithuania and Western Europe, a role it continued to play in later periods (Matulevičius, 2015). Nevertheless, owing to former Prussian construction policies and the use of high-quality building materials, a part of the surviving structures remains in sufficiently good condition to be preserved, restored, repaired, inventoried, and systematically documented as elements of the region's architectural and urban heritage.

Small towns constitute a crucial component of the settlement system: they link urban and rural areas, function as engines of local development, serve as cultural centres, and fulfil a wide range of social and economic roles. The development of small settlements (or the prevention of their decline) is essential for regional sustainability. It reduces the concentration of population in major cities, supports the preservation of established settlements and their distinctive local identities, and thereby contributes to maintaining regional settlement balance (Banski, 2021). This issue is particularly relevant in the context of rapidly declining rural populations and the continued growth of large cities.

Rural and provincial settlements possess significant cultural and historical potential, yet they are often overlooked when research efforts focus predominantly on larger cities. Culture – expressed through the articulation and promotion of local identity, frequently via the preservation and restoration of architectural and natural heritage – constitutes a key factor in the survival and sustainable development of small towns. Local residents commonly take pride in their community's cultural distinctiveness, history, and heritage, which in turn enhances the vitality of these towns (Somoza Medina, Relea Fernández, 2024).

The preserved historic urban structures and the minimally altered urban framework, including the system of historic buildings, constitute an essential component of the historical townscape. Such heritage represents an integral element of sustainable urban development – serving not only as a historical legacy but also as a functioning layer of the contemporary environment, endowed with significant social and cultural value (Grazulevičiūtė-Vileniskė, Seduikytė, Daugėlaitė, Rudokas, 2020).

The urban structure and architectural expression of the town of Pagėgiai have developed as a result of a multilayered historical and cultural context. The high concentration of historic buildings constructed before 1939 indicates that the town possesses significant cultural and urban potential. Accordingly, this study addresses a central research question: how has the historical development of Lithuania Minor influenced the urban and architectural character of Pagėgiai? This heritage shapes the distinctive identity of Pagėgiai within both the Lithuania Minor region and the broader Lithuanian context, positioning the town as an important locus for the preservation of tangible and intangible heritage, as well as for sustainable regional development.

The aim of the study is to reveal the importance of Pagėgiai in the context of Lithuania Minor and Lithuania as a whole by analysing its urban development, architectural expression and the concentration of historic buildings, and by examining the impact of historical circumstances on the town's tangible and intangible heritage.

During the field research, information was collected to determine the urban structure of Pagėgiai and to assess whether the town's areas possess characteristics typical of state-protected sites. The analysis encompassed the type and network of the spatial layout, roads, streets, squares, natural elements, features of spatial and volumetric structure, building types, height patterns, panoramas, street elevations, and other essential urban components.

Part of the research consists of a review and analysis of the scholarly literature. The analysis aimed to encompass a broad range of historical sources, cartographic material, academic articles, and monographs related to the architectural, urban, and construction practices characteristic of the examined period (from the early 19th century to the late 20th century). Particular attention is devoted to the historical context of Lithuania Minor and East Prussia, whose developmental turning points shaped settlement patterns and the distinctive features of architectural expression in the region. To assess changes in the urban structure, a comparative analysis of cartographic sources from different periods was conducted. This analysis includes the comparison of historical maps with one another and with contemporary cartographic materials, the identification of surviving buildings based on their locations in historical plans, the evaluation of changes in the street network and its geometry, as well as the comparison of block structures and building patterns. The study aimed to preliminarily identify historic buildings within the territory of Pagėgiai and determine which of them would warrant more detailed investigation. An indicative assessment of architectural and typological features was carried out, including a preliminary determination of the construction period, evaluation of surviving architectural characteristics, on-site observation of structural and material properties (photographic documentation and inventory), as well as an analysis of relevant literature and cartographic sources.

Based on these criteria, each analysed building was assigned an identification number and an architectural expression code: MA – wooden architecture, ML – professional architecture of Lithuania Minor, TA – interwar architecture, SA – architecture built after 1939, N – architectural characteristics cannot be determined without further research. Buildings that appear to have retained valuable attributes are additionally marked with the letter S.

Historical Context of Lithuania Minor

The complex, centuries-long history of East Prussia is concisely and clearly presented by Almonaitis and Almonaitienė (2015). The authors examine the region's development beginning in the 3rd–2nd millennium BCE, when archaeological evidence indicates that the territory of present-day Lithuania Minor was inhabited by the Skalvians. This tribe had blended with both Lithuanians and Prussians, adopting cultural features from each. Such cultural intermixing continued throughout subsequent periods, and both deliberate and unintentional social transformations significantly influenced the urban and architectural development of Lithuania Minor and East Prussia.

For centuries, the territory shifted between various spheres of political influence. In the 13th century, the Teutonic Order established control over the region, and the conflicts that persisted until the Treaty of Melno restricted the development of smaller settlements. Nevertheless, processes of cultural assimilation were already evident, shaping distinctive regional customs (Purvinas, 2015). Later, Lithuania Minor became part of the Duchy of Prussia, and the use of the Lithuanian language spread due to the influence of Lutheranism. Because Lithuanian cultural features remained strong, the districts of Klaipėda, Tilsit, Ragnit and Insterburg were referred to as the Lithuanian provinces during the period of the Kingdom of Prussia.

The territory of Lithuania Minor underwent several waves of Germanization: between 1709 and 1711, following the plague epidemic, large numbers of settlers of German origin were brought into the region; under Nazi rule, Germanization measures continued systematically. Later, the area was also affected by Sovietization – first during the Russian army's occupation in 1914, and more profoundly after the Soviet Union occupied Lithuania following the Second World War.

The historical context of Minor Lithuania is exceptionally complex and multilayered. The sequence of historical turning points presented in Fig. 1 reveals not only the dynamics of political events but

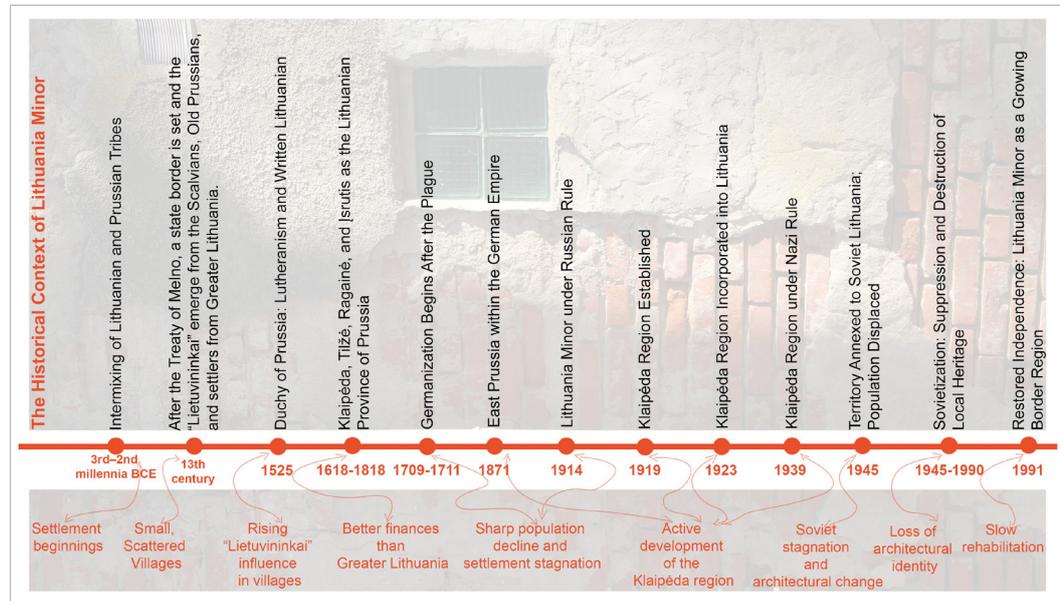
Methods

Results

also the fluctuations in the intensity of urban transformation. Migration processes, abrupt shifts in political power, and transformations of local identity have shaped a persistent social and cultural background marked by both rapid and continuous change. These processes have significantly influenced the region's urban structure and architectural expression, and their impact remains evident to this day.

Fig. 1

The historical context of Lithuania Minor (scheme by G. Marozaitė)



The western part of present-day Lithuania is known as the ethnographic region of Lithuania Minor. The historical context of this area is highly complex, often raising the question of which state or nation its cultural fabric should be attributed to. Local inhabitants did not easily identify with a single ethnic group, instead referring to themselves as "*šišioniškiai*", that is, indigenous residents of the region. The mixing of newcomers and local populations, along with the policies of Germanization and Sovietization, exerted a significant influence on both the tangible and intangible heritage of Minor Lithuania.

The architectural and urban fabric of Lithuania Minor emerged as a product of a layered social space. The continuous interaction and transformation of different epochs and cultures influenced not only the aesthetic expression but also shaped the functional logic of the settlements. Although the influence of German cultural traditions is clearly evident in the region, the "*Lietuvininkai*" – descendants of the Skalvians, Nadruvians, other Old Prussian and Baltic tribes, as well as migrants from Greater Lithuania – developed a distinct cultural phenomenon shaped by processes of Germanization, Sovietization, and population displacement. This phenomenon intertwined with local traditions and resulted in a unique expression of both tangible and intangible cultural heritage. It represents a typical case of a borderland region, where identity can no longer be attributed to a single national side. Such self-perception is reflected in the built environment – from hybrid construction traditions to planning solutions. Diverse historical experiences became interwoven, forming a distinctive synthesis in which no single layer dominates, yet all together constitute the unique architectural and urban code of the region.

Distinctive Features of Urbanism and Architecture in Lithuania Minor

Despite the damage inflicted during the Soviet period, the contemporary urban structure of Minor Lithuania remains largely recognizable as a continuation of the spatial framework formed over the past century. The historical developments of this period exerted the most significant influence

on the present-day architectural and urban character of the region. This analysis focuses on the processes of the 19th and 20th centuries, as well as the early twenty-first century, that shaped the urban form and architectural expression of towns within the region.

The late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (until the First World War) marked a period of substantial economic growth and development for East Prussia and the broader empire. Economic prosperity enabled the implementation of large-scale projects and the restructuring of provincial settlements. Industrialization, which began in the mid-nineteenth century, provided strong impetus for the expansion of towns and villages, while favourable economic conditions supported the growth of wealthier urban centers and larger rural settlements. During this period, engineering networks, transportation hubs, and public buildings – including courthouses, post offices, educational institutions, and religious structures – were rapidly developed. Newly constructed railway lines and station complexes were especially influential, reshaping the landscape, social life, and economic activity. In this era, East Prussia remained closely aligned with the development levels of Western European regions (Purvinas, Purvinienė, 2020).

During the First World War, when the Russian army occupied Minor Lithuania, extensive destruction befell many towns and villages. After the East Prussian territories were retaken in 1915, large-scale reconstruction efforts commenced. Urban design and architectural solutions were deliberately shaped to emphasize the continuity of German cultural traditions – historical forms and façade ornamentation characteristic of Germany were consciously employed to highlight the legacy of the Teutonic Order and German colonists. Following the war and Germany's capitulation, further urban development became nearly impossible due to severe economic decline and post-war crisis. As ambitious pre-war projects could no longer be completed, available resources were redirected toward improving social infrastructure (Purvinas, 2021).

A different trajectory unfolded in the Klaipėda Region after its incorporation into the Republic of Lithuania in 1923. The territory of Minor Lithuania underwent administrative reorganization, and after the state border was shifted to the Nemunas River, the status of former border towns and villages changed substantially. Some settlements experienced stagnation and lost their former border privileges, while others located along the Nemunas began to flourish (Purvinas, 2002). The region retained extensive autonomy – county governance, education, and judicial administration remained under the authority of the Klaipėda Region, largely preserving the administrative structure established before 1923 (Almonaitis, 2015).

Urban development processes in the region intensified considerably after its incorporation into the Republic of Lithuania, and in some cases the urban hierarchy of border settlements was fundamentally reshaped. By the mid-nineteenth century, Lauksargiai had become an important transit and border settlement of Lithuania Minor: one of the most modern roads of the time passed through it, and the construction of the railway transformed the locality into a major transportation hub for the surrounding area. Until 1923 Lauksargiai developed rapidly, but after becoming part of the Republic of Lithuania it lost its former border privileges (Purvinas, 2002). The economic activities that had formed over several centuries lost their relevance, flows of passengers and goods declined sharply, and previously active urban expansion came to a halt. Today, Lauksargiai is a small village with only a few hundred inhabitants.

A similar case can be observed in Katyčiai, a settlement located near the former border with the Republic of Lithuania. Until 1923, it functioned as an important market town with a well-developed infrastructure, including hotels, administrative buildings, a telegraph office, a post office, and other facilities characteristic of the period. Prior to the incorporation of the Klaipėda Region, Katyčiai surpassed Pagėgiai in both population and infrastructural development. However, once Pagėgiai became the district centre, the growth of Katyčiai came to a halt. The population recorded in 1925 was close to 1,000, and most financial resources were redirected toward the development

of Pagėgiai. Although Katyčiai retained its status as a market town, its overall development stagnated (Purvinas, 2009). Today, Katyčiai is a village with only a few hundred inhabitants, having lost its essential commercial function as the significance of the local market declined.

All these geopolitical transformations demonstrate that the shifting of territorial boundaries shapes urban change and the hierarchy of settlements. A town's status, its economic functions and capacities, as well as its pace and patterns of development, depend not on organic growth but on the redistribution of state power. From this perspective, settlements located in border zones are particularly vulnerable.

Fig. 2

Characteristics of professional architecture in Lithuania Minor (scheme by G. Marozaitė)



In Prussia, including the territory of present-day Lithuania Minor, architectural policy in the early 20th century was strictly regulated. Clear rules were established for the organisation of farmsteads, and special design projects were required not only for public or residential buildings but also for agricultural structures. All projects had to be approved by local authorities. These projects defined the overall appearance of a building – its size, layout, and the number of windows and doors—while smaller details, such as decorative elements, were left to the discretion of the builder (Purvinas, Purvinienė, 2025). Over time, in an effort to reduce fire hazards, the construction of wooden buildings was prohibited in towns and smaller urban settlements (Almonaitis, Almonaitienė, 2015). The strict regulatory system, shaped by both aesthetic and administrative control, resulted in a clearly recognisable and coherent building typology.

An analysis of the literature and the professional built heritage of Lithuania Minor reveals several characteristic architectural features, including clear and orderly plot layouts, professionally designed (often standardised) building plans, structures made of rammed earth or red brick, tiled roofs, light-coloured plaster, and expressive façade ornamentation (Fig. 2). These architectural traits are best represented by the numerous surviving buildings – often constructed according to architect-prepared designs – such as railway stations and their complexes, religious buildings, historic schools, manor houses, as well as various public, administrative, and engineering structures found throughout the region (Marozaitė, 2022). The abundance of such buildings indicates that professional architecture had a considerable influence in the region, while standardised designs contributed to a coherent and territorially consistent urban and architectural character.

Despite the strict construction policy, a certain degree of creative flexibility enabled the preservation of local ethnocultural architectural features, while the masonry buildings erected according to regulated designs have remained in relatively good condition to the present day. The region's

complex and multilayered history produced a diverse architectural fabric of a multiethnic society, subtly reflecting the blended identity of East Prussian Germans and “*Lietuvininkai*”.

The comparatively stable and economically stronger governance of Prussia, together with its more efficient administrative system, ensured a higher standard of living than in the territory of present-day Lithuania. Consequently, both rural and urban residents were able to construct higher-quality and more durable buildings. Large rural homesteads with ornate masonry residential and farm buildings – characteristic of Minor Lithuania – stood in clear contrast to the more modest architectural forms of the Lithuanian.

This contrast was fundamentally shaped by the differing political, economic, and administrative systems, and its effects remain visible in the regional landscape today: an analysis of nineteenth- and twentieth-century architecture in Lithuania still reveals distinct variations in materials, typologies, and construction quality.

Pagėgiai in the Historical Context of Lithuania Minor

According to the Treaty of Versailles, which provided for the separation of the Klaipėda Region from Germany, Pagėgiai was designated as the county centre in 1919; however, it did not begin functioning as such until early 1920. At that time, Pagėgiai remained a small, sparsely populated settlement with only limited service infrastructure. It was not yet capable of replacing the long-established and effectively operating administration of Tilsit County nor its developed commerce and service systems (Purvinas, Purvinienė, 2020).

The transfer of county centre functions to Pagėgiai was not based on existing infrastructure; this transitional period illustrated a clear mismatch between administrative decisions and the built urban fabric.

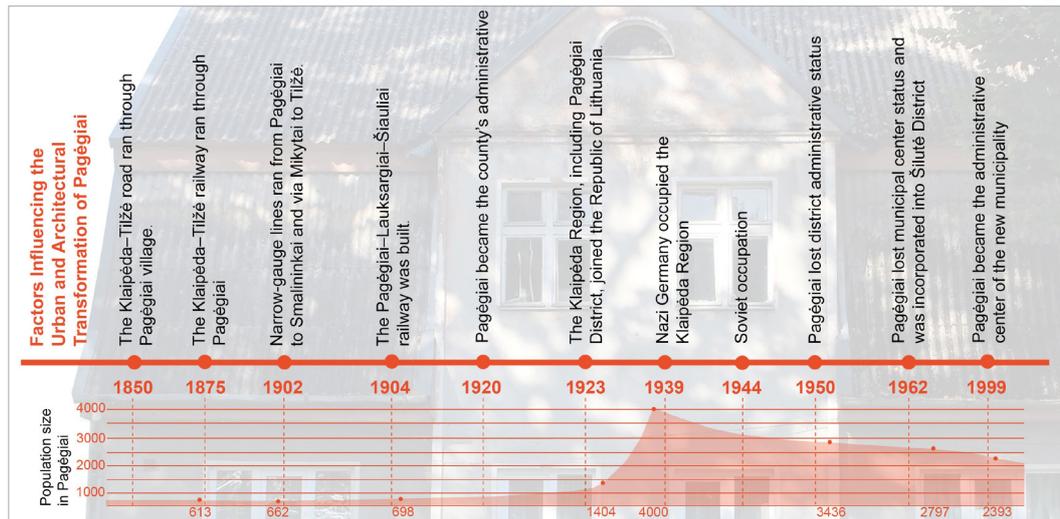
After the Klaipėda Region was incorporated into the Republic of Lithuania in 1923, Pagėgiai was granted town rights, and substantial financial resources were allocated to develop its infrastructure as the new county centre. With this administrative shift, a village of only a few hundred inhabitants was required to rapidly transform into a functioning administrative hub capable of replacing the well-established infrastructure of Tilsit. Within a few years, Pagėgiai had developed a county administration, border police and customs office, a unit of the Lithuanian Armed Forces, as well as three banks, three hotels, several shops, a bookstore, medical offices, a library and a market (Almonaitis, Almonaitienė, 2015). It can be argued that the expansion of administrative functions became the primary driver of the town's growth, rather than the organic economic development characteristic of mature urban centres.

With the onset of intensive construction in Pagėgiai, it became necessary to establish, within a short period, a substantial portion of the infrastructure required to support its emerging role as a district center. In addition to administrative buildings, the rapid increase in population prompted significant expansion of residential infrastructure: new streets with residential and utility buildings were developed, and the city's recreational facilities were further enhanced. According to Almonaitis and Almonaitienė, 39 new houses were built in Pagėgiai in 1932 alone. During this period, the boundary between the town and the nearby village of Benininkai disappeared, effectively transforming the village into a suburb of Pagėgiai. The infrastructural expansion that began around 1850 and intensified after 1920, when Pagėgiai became a district center, enables us to view the town today as an urban settlement that evolved over just a few decades from a small community with only a few hundred inhabitants (Fig. 3). Census data indicate a pronounced increase in population following the town's designation as a district center in 1923. Between 1925 and 1932, the number of inhabitants rose from 1,404 to approximately 4,000. Subsequent political upheavals – namely the Nazi and Soviet occupations—led to a sustained decline in the population, and the town never again experienced growth comparable to that of the interwar period. The

demographic trajectory of Pagėgiai indicates that the town's growth was driven primarily by its political-administrative functions rather than by economic factors.

Fig. 3

Factors influencing the urban and architectural transformation of Pagėgiai (scheme by G. Marozaitė)



In the town of Pagėgiai, three distinct layers of historical architecture can be identified (Fig. 4). The first consists of individual surviving examples of ethnographic village architecture, reflecting the traditions of the old wooden village and vernacular building motifs. The second layer represents the late-19th- to early-20th-century professional architectural heritage of Minor Lithuania, commonly referred to as the “German town.” This architectural stratum is characterized by red brick masonry, light-colored plaster, and expressive ornamentation; it emerged while Pagėgiai was part of the Prussian construction policy framework. The third layer comprises the interwar architecture of the Republic of Lithuania, in which modernist elements are combined with local building traditions. This “Lithuanian Republic town” architectural layer developed after Pagėgiai became part of the Republic of Lithuania.

Fig. 4

Layers of historical architecture in Pagėgiai (scheme by G. Marozaitė)



Pagėgiai Urban Transformation: Origins and Development

Until the second half of the 19th century, Pagėgiai was a small village within the Būbliškė parish, consisting of several farmsteads connected by a network of local roads (Almonaitis & Almonaitienė, 2015). An analysis of the settlement's urban development shows that in the 1769

– 1802 map, four principal streets (roads) are already clearly delineated; these intersect to form the core of the settlement (Fig. 6). These routes connected Pagėgiai with nearby villages of comparable scale – Pavilkiai, Gudai, and Piktupėnai (Fig. 5). It is also evident that the Benininkai stream, flowing adjacent to the settlement, had a significant influence on its spatial formation: farmsteads clustered along the stream contributed to the development of the early built-up structure. According to Antrop (2005), early inter-village connections and natural boundaries often shape the initial settlement structure, which tends to remain stable due to its inherent inertia even in the face of significant political or economic transformations. This foundational structure – formed by natural environmental boundaries and local mobility systems that determine the initial points of village nucleus development – is clearly evident in the analysis of the evolution of the Pagėgiai settlement.

The development of Pagėgiai accelerated after 1850, following the construction of the Klaipėda–Tilžė road through the settlement and the establishment of the Klaipėda – Tilžė railway line in 1875. These infrastructural changes fundamentally transformed the status of the locality: previously a small village with only a few dozen homesteads, Pagėgiai began to grow rapidly, acquiring characteristics of a regionally significant settlement, distinguishing itself from the more slowly developing surrounding villages. The 1861 structure of Pagėgiai, illustrated in Fig. 7, reveals the emerging urban framework: roads leading towards Pavilkiai, Gudai, and Piktupėnai form clearer street alignments, with the central square beginning to take shape at their intersection. The introduction of new transportation routes fundamentally reshaped the hierarchical structure of settlements in the surrounding region, with Pagėgiai emerging as a central node among neighboring villages. The development of road and railway networks was a critical factor in the transformation of the village into a local urban center. Pagėgiai can be regarded as a typical case in which the integration of modern mobility into an agrarian settlement radically alters its functions and significance within the local context.

With the construction of the Klaipėda –

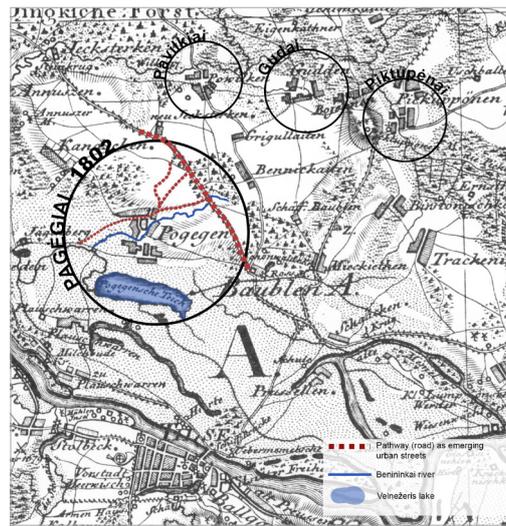


Fig. 5

Pagėgiai in 1802 (wiki.genealogy.net, scheme by G. Marozaitė)

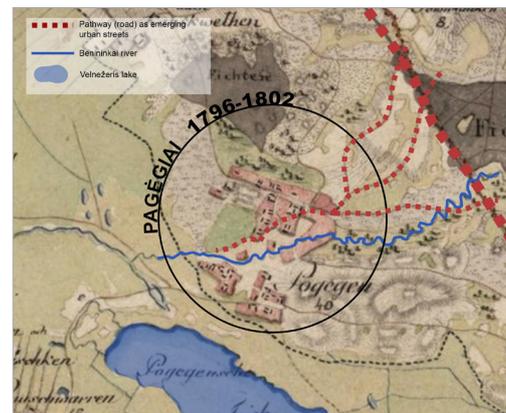


Fig. 6

Pagėgiai in 1796-1802 (wiki.genealogy.net, scheme by G. Marozaitė)

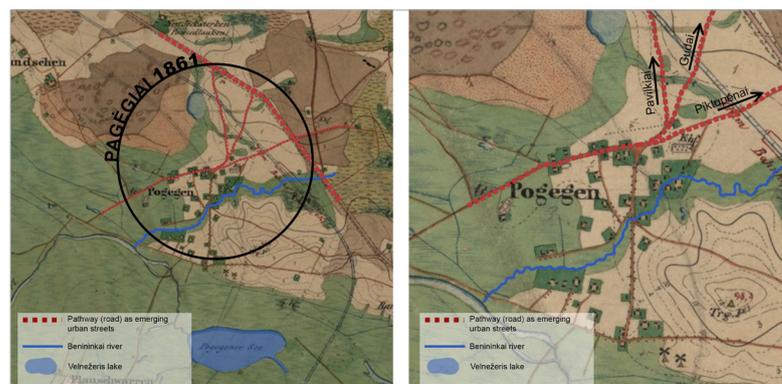


Fig. 7

Pagėgiai in 1861 (wiki.genealogy.net, scheme by G. Marozaitė)

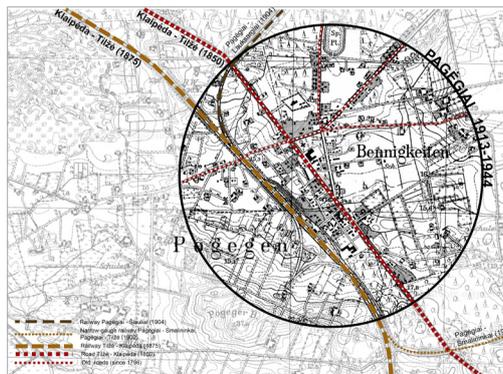
Tilsit road and railway line, Pagėgiai experienced gradual and stable urban development. In 1902, the narrow-gauge railway lines Pagėgiai – Smalininkai and Pagėgiai–Tilsit commenced operation, followed in 1904 by the inauguration of a new line connecting Pagėgiai to Lauksargiai and Šiauliai, thereby linking the town with Greater Lithuania. The establishment of both the narrow-gauge railway and the Pagėgiai – Šiauliai connection facilitated convenient travel for residents to larger urban centers and promoted industrial and commercial development. By 1905, the population of Pagėgiai had reached a significant growth threshold – approximately 700 inhabitants (Almonaitis & Almonaitienė, 2015) – indicating an accelerated social and economic dynamism.

The status and significance of Pagėgiai underwent substantial changes after 1920, when, following the First World War, the settlement began functioning as the administrative center of the county. This transformation prompted rapid urban growth and the partial assumption of functions previously associated with the town of Tilsit, marking a notable rupture in the development of the urban landscape. In 1923, following the incorporation of the Klaipėda Region into the Republic of Lithuania, Pagėgiai acquired not only administrative but also border-town status. Consequently, Pagėgiai became both an economic and symbolic hub connecting two state systems, with the expansion of state infrastructure serving as a key driver of spatial development.

The period during which Pagėgiai became a county center and a border customs settlement marked the transformation of the village into an urban-type settlement. During this time, avenues, squares, parks, and main roads were established, and public infrastructure – including

Fig. 8

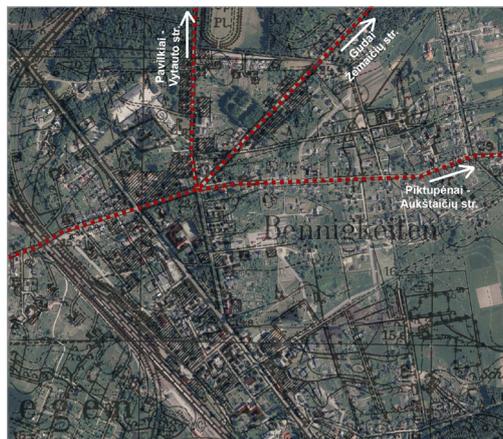
Pagėgiai in 1913-1944
(wiki.genealogy.net,
scheme by G. Marozaitė)



administrative buildings, the railway station, and the post office – began to develop. In the interwar period, the urban network visible today in Pagėgiai was formed and has remained largely stable since (Fig. 8). The 1938 map clearly shows the city's structure, while some routes documented as early as 1796 (towards Pavilkiai, Gudai, and Piktupėnai) evolved into the present-day Vytauto, Žemaičių, and Aukštaičių Streets (Fig. 9). In the case of Pagėgiai, historical roads function as long-lasting morphological frameworks, ensuring continuity in the city's spatial development despite political and economic changes.

Fig. 9

Pagėgiai urban structure
in 1944 and now (scheme
by G. Marozaitė)



Pagėgiai as an Interwar City

The study examines the urban and architectural expression of the main streets in Pagėgiai. Fig. 10 presents the contemporary streets of Pagėgiai – Žemaičių, Aukštaičių, Vytauto, Vilniaus, Birutės, Vydūno, and Geležinkelio – with their established built environment. The analysis covers the majority of existing buildings in Pagėgiai, classified according to architectural expression and period of construction: wooden Pagėgiai architecture (ethnographic village), Professional Architecture of Lithuania Minor (constructed before 1918 or exhibiting the characteristics of this architectural style), interwar architecture (1918–1939), and buildings constructed after 1939. Some structures cannot be classified without further investigation.

Each building is assigned a unique number for identification in the analysis. All buildings included in the study are listed in a comprehensive table, an example is shown in Fig. 12, which indicates the current condition of each building (photographic documentation) and its assigned category: MA – wooden architecture (ethnographic village), ML – Professional Architecture of Lithuania Minor (German town), TA – interwar architecture (Republic of Lithuania town), SA – post-1939 architecture, N – cannot be classified without further research. In Fig. 12, buildings marked with the letter S are those that, upon further investigation, could potentially be designated as state-protected, as an external assessment suggests they have likely retained their significant heritage values.

The study evaluated 172 buildings (Fig. 10). Classification revealed that 102 buildings (59.3% of all assessed objects) in the surveyed areas were constructed before 1939. Of these, 20 (11.6%) were identified as wooden architecture (ethnographic village heritage), 16 (9.3%) were attributed to professional architecture of Lithuania Minor, and 66 (38.4%) belonged to interwar architecture. Buildings constructed after 1939 accounted for 61 objects (35.5%). Nine buildings (5.2%) could not be reliably assigned to a specific category due to significant alterations to their current appearance, and determining their construction period would require further investigation.

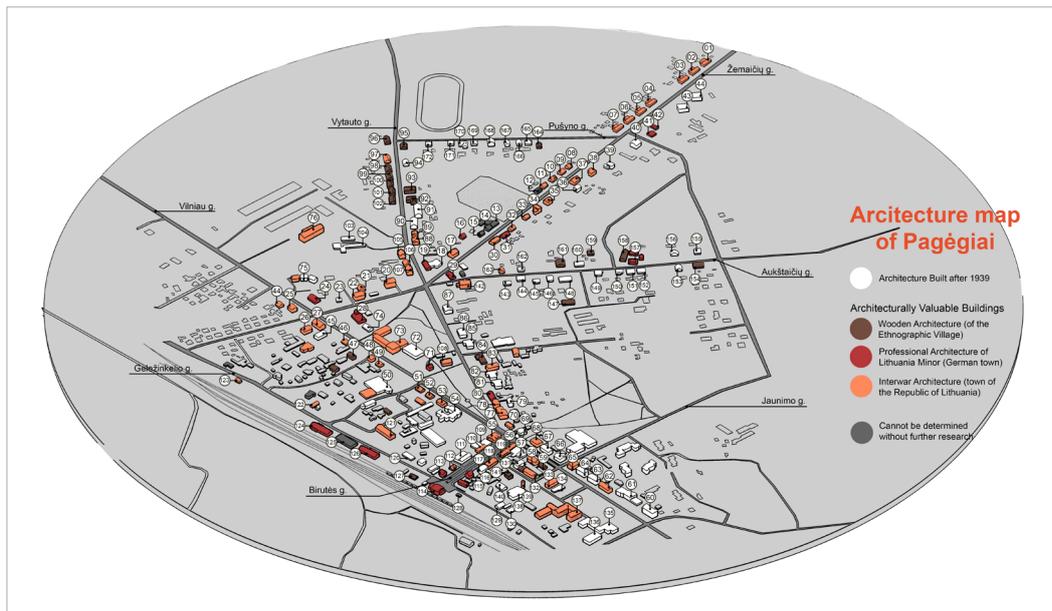


Fig. 10

Analysis of the architecture and urban structure of Pagėgiai (scheme by G. Marozaitė)

The high concentration of historic buildings (constructed before 1939) reflects the distinctive character and resilience of the city's urban structure. This feature is significant not only within the context of Lithuania Minor but also more broadly across Lithuania, where a large portion of urban and architectural heritage was destroyed during the Second World War. The surviving urban and architectural fabric provides a material basis for shaping and sustaining local identity.

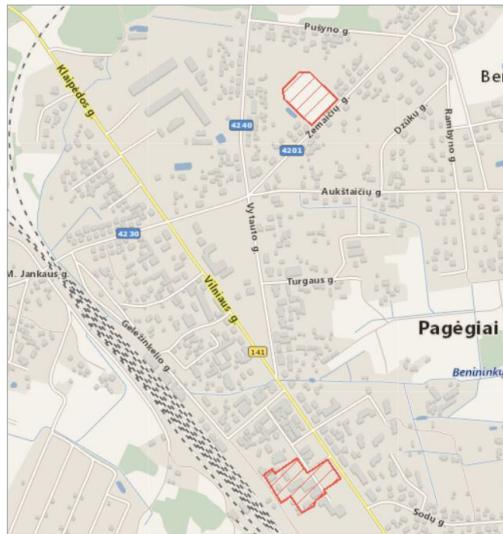
The architecture of Pagėgiai is not limited to the city's urban fabric; it represents the outcome of long-term political and cultural processes that have shaped the identity of the contemporary community.

Currently, only one building in Pagėgiai is listed in the Register of Immovable Cultural Heritage – the Pagėgiai Kristijonas Donelaitis Gymnasium. Additionally, the site of the Soviet soldiers' burial from World War II is recognized among the protected immovable cultural heritage assets (see Fig. 11; kpd.lt, 2025).

Urbanistic and architectural analyses indicate that a considerably larger number of buildings in Pagėgiai may possess valuable heritage features (Fig. 10). Examination of the oldest streets and their structures revealed that at least 72 buildings require detailed investigations to determine whether any preservable heritage attributes remain. These buildings constitute 38.71% of all analyzed structures.

Fig. 11

Pagėgiai map – extract from the register of immovable cultural heritage (kpd.lt)



These findings highlight a significant gap in heritage protection: nearly 40% of potentially valuable buildings lack formal safeguarding, designation, or clearly identified cultural value. From the perspective of urban policy and sustainable development, this suggests that Pagėgiai possesses underutilized resources. Historic buildings could serve as catalysts for urban regeneration, reduce depopulation, strengthen local identity, attract investors, and foster tourism development, thereby contributing to economic prosperity.

The preliminary analysis of historical buildings, including photographic documentation as well as the study of historical maps and iconography, indicates that most of the structures

have retained their essential volumetric composition, floor-plan configuration, facade architectural solutions, construction system, and other key features. However, a comprehensive assessment of these characteristics would require more detailed, dedicated investigations. The surviving historical buildings and their inventories can be regarded as significant elements of the tangible heritage, enabling the community to maintain a reflective connection with the origins of the city's development.

By comparing the current map of Pagėgiai with cartographic materials from 1913–1944, it is possible to accurately identify the locations of surviving buildings and assess the extent of those that have disappeared. Fig. 13 presents the numbered structures, which correspond to the buildings analyzed in greater detail in Fig. 10 and 12. This method of identification makes it possible to determine which constructions were erected during the interwar period or even earlier.

Fig. 12

Assessment of street frontages in the city of Pagėgiai – field survey (scheme by G. Marozaitė)



The map identifies the majority of Pagėgiai's buildings that have survived to the present day (Fig. 13). Among them are several architecturally and historically significant structures, including the former teachers' dormitory (118), a commercial store (55), the villa adjacent to the former marketplace (20), a multi-apartment residential building (103), the district administration building (108), the customs office (127), the railway workers' residence (113), the Royal Post building (116), mixed residential–commercial buildings (46, 48), the gymnasium (137), a restaurant (65), the customs officers' dormitory (121), and the railway station (114). On the right side of the map, iconographic material from Pagėgiai dating to 1940 – 1941 is presented, enabling a comparison

between the contemporary urban landscape and the city's historical structure.

Only a small number of public and commercial buildings constructed in Pagėgiai during the interwar period have retained their original functions. These include the Algimantas Mackus Gymnasium, formerly the Agricultural Secondary School (73), the still-operational – though now serving exclusively freight transport – railway station (114), and the Lutheran church (28). The former Kristijonas Donelaitis Gymnasium (137) currently houses the Pagėgiai municipal administration and the School of Arts, thus preserving its educational function only partially.

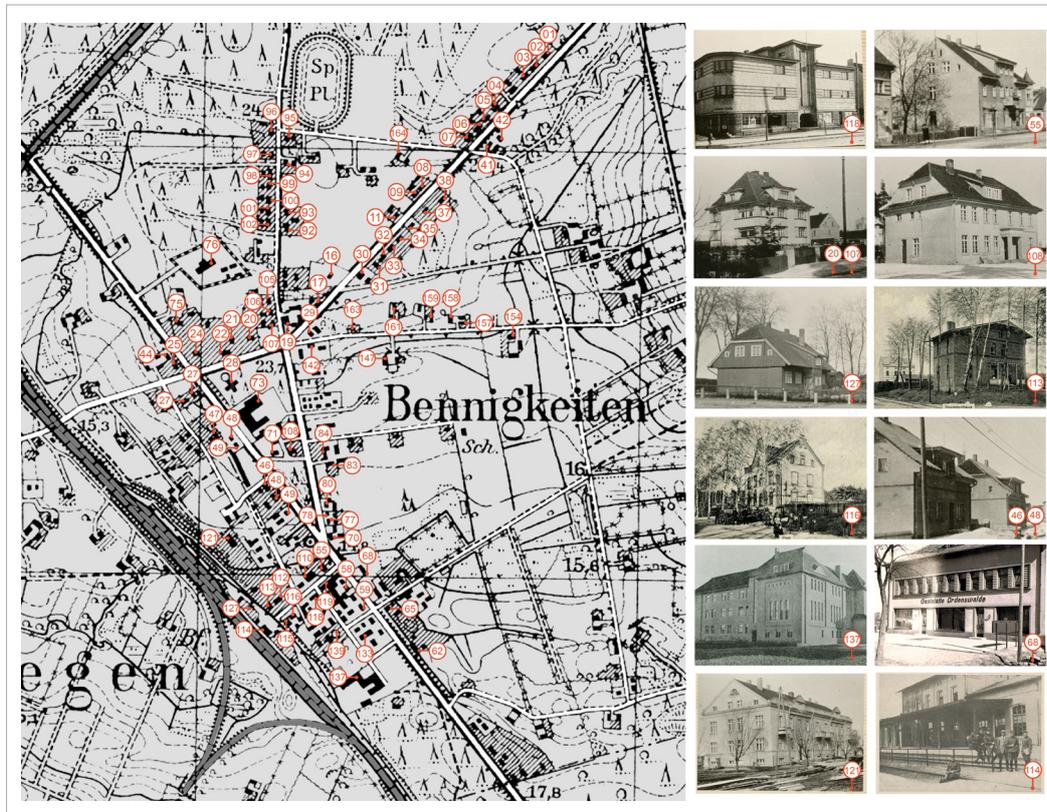


Fig. 13

Map of Pagėgiai, 1913–1944; historic buildings still standing today (bildarchiv-ostpreussen.de, scheme by G. Marozaitė)

Several architecturally distinctive interwar buildings – such as the former railway workers' residences (113, 115), the customs officers' dormitory (121), and the teachers' dormitory (118) – retain their functions only in part, having been converted into private residential buildings or apartment houses. A number of other interwar public buildings have likewise been privatized and adapted for residential use, including the former Agricultural School (22) and the Health Insurance Office (71). A portion of the architecturally characteristic structures that once distinguished Pagėgiai from other rural settlements and reflected a more urban identity has not survived to the present day (Fig. 14). Lost buildings include the cinema on Vydūnas Street, the district administration building, the municipal power plant, the doctor's office and residence (of which only part remains, Vytauto St. 4), the Catholic church (with only its tower surviving, Vydūnas St. 8), the bakery–residential house (Birutės St. 4A), among others.

An analysis of Fig. 13 shows that the buildings, although having changed their original functions, remain easily identifiable on the 1913 – 1944 map. This indicates that the urban structure of the town of Pagėgiai was not significantly destroyed or radically transformed, and thus its urban identity has remained continuous. Architectural objects that have potentially retained their valuable attributes acquire greater cultural significance from a heritage conservation perspective.

Fig. 14

Architecturally expressive and functionally important buildings no longer extant (bildarchiv-ostpreussen.de, scheme by G. Marozaitė)



Discussion

The study examines the urban and architectural development of Lithuania Minor, with particular attention to the less researched provincial town of Pagėgiai. Drawing on scholarly literature, historical maps, and on-site architectural inventory data, the research identifies how several centuries of political, cultural, and economic transformations – Germanization, Sovietization, administrative reforms, and the expansion of transport infrastructure (particularly railways) – shaped the region’s characteristic urban form and architectural expression.

Pagėgiai is selected as an atypical case both within Lithuania Minor and in the broader context of Lithuanian urban development. Originally a rural settlement in the late 18th and early 19th centuries, it underwent rapid transformation following the construction of the Klaipėda – Tilsit road in 1850 and the railway in 1875. A decisive shift occurred between 1919 and 1923, when Pagėgiai became a district centre and a border town. The essential street network formed during the interwar period has largely survived to the present day, together with most of the architecture from that era.

An inventory of 172 buildings located along the town’s oldest streets revealed that 59.3% were constructed before 1939, while 38.71% exhibit characteristics that warrant further detailed investigation and potential inclusion in the Register of Cultural Properties. Currently, only one building and a military burial site are officially protected, indicating that the existing heritage protection framework does not reflect the actual concentration of cultural assets in the town.

Conclusions

Pagėgiai’s multilayered identity has developed within a long-standing urban framework shaped by the traditions of Lithuania Minor and the cultural heritage of the “*Lietuvininkai*” community. This hybrid identity is reflected in three architectural layers: ethnographic wooden buildings, the “German” professional architecture of Lithuania Minor, and interwar modernism adapted to local conditions.

The town’s principal urban structures, formed between the 18th and 20th centuries, remain largely intact. Their evolution was decisively influenced by the development of road and railway infrastructure and the granting of county-center status between 1919 and 1923, which enabled the rapid transformation of a rural settlement into a regional center.

Among the 172 surveyed buildings in Pagėgiai, 59.3% were constructed before 1939, and 38.71% display preliminary heritage value. The building practices of the 19th and 20th centuries have preserved much of the historical urban fabric, making Pagėgiai a representative example of a provincial town of Lithuania Minor.

As the living memory of the local community diminishes, material heritage assumes the role of a key carrier of collective remembrance (Nora, 1989). From the perspective of memory studies, the high concentration of historical buildings in Pagėgiai constitutes a materialized form of collective memory. These structures function as “*lieux de mémoire*”, making Pagėgiai, in this context, a “city of memory.” The surviving architectural fabric ensures the continuity of urban identity and enables

historical processes to be perceived and interpreted through spatial experience.

The existing legal protection – consisting of a single building listed in the Register of Cultural Heritage and the cemetery of Soviet soldiers – clearly fails to reflect the actual abundance and significance of architectural heritage in Pagėgiai. Pagėgiai is one of the few cities in Lithuania where interwar architecture played a decisive role in shaping the urban structure.

To ensure effective heritage protection, it is recommended to adopt a comprehensive approach that encompasses both specific urban areas and individual buildings. It is also necessary to develop conservation guidelines and carry out detailed research on the 72 priority objects, aligning heritage preservation measures with the principles of sustainable urban development.

The multilayered identity of Pagėgiai, shaped by complex historical circumstances, reveals a distinctly recognizable cultural and spatial hybridity. This stratification demonstrates the city's urban resilience: its spatial structure has been able to endure political ruptures, demographic shifts, and infrastructural transformations. Such a long-standing urban configuration constitutes an important resource for sustainable development. The historically formed street networks, mixed-use corridors, and compact urban form align with contemporary urban planning standards and, if appropriately adapted, may contribute to mitigating population decline.

Nearly 40% of the buildings in Pagėgiai possess preliminary heritage value. This represents not only cultural significance but also a potential resource for sustainable urban development, fostering regenerative processes within the city. Historical buildings can serve as catalysts for the local economy through tourism, services, and creative industries.

The existing gap in the protection of architectural heritage may serve as a starting point for formulating a new urban development policy for Pagėgiai. By following the guidelines outlined below, Pagėgiai could be transformed into a representative model of sustainable regeneration among the towns of Lithuania Minor:

- _ apply comprehensive protection measures focused not on individual objects but on urban territories and street structures;
- _ prepare conservation and management guidelines oriented toward sustainable development by making full use of the existing architectural legacy;
- _ conduct detailed analyses of priority sites to determine possibilities for their conversion, adaptive reuse, and integration into the urban fabric;
- _ ensure that heritage is perceived not as an obstacle but as an instrument for enhancing sustainability and resilience.

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About the authors

GINTARĖ MAROZAITĖ

Master's degree

Kaunas University of Technology, Faculty of Civil Engineering and Architecture

Main research area

Architect and researcher. My work focuses on cultural-heritage sites and buildings, and on their relationship to the public and to heritage education. I devote particular attention to the professional architectural heritage of Lithuania Minor

Address

Gynėjų g. 14-80, Vilnius, 01109, Lithuania
E-mail: gin.marozaitė@gmail.com

AUŠRA MLINKAUSKIENĖ

Associate Professor

Kaunas University of Technology, Faculty of Civil Engineering and Architecture

Main research area

Research interests focus on identifying landscape values, protecting and assessing urban heritage, and evaluating changes in the physical condition and cultural significance of heritage sites.

Address

Studentų str. 48-409, Kaunas
E-mail: ausra.mlinkauskiene@ktu.lt

