

SOCIOLOGICAL RESEARCH OF HISTORICAL SUBURBS FOR THEIR SPATIAL STRUCTURE MODERNISATION (CASE OF VILIJAMPOLĖ, KAUNAS)

Justina Mačiukėnaitė

Kaunas University of Technology, Institute of Architecture and Construction

Introduction

Relevance of the problem. Historical suburbs – “medieval suburbs” – are old parts of a town, closely related to the historical cores of cities. The expansion of cities caused by the establishment of new urban communities behind the fortification or the growth of estate in the province or lands and manors near the town caused suburb formation. These holdings grew into larger settlements, suburbs (Dijokienė, 2001). According to D. Dijokienė, European cities no longer have these unique areas, their characteristic features were changed by new variations of a structure of the city. However, some Eastern European suburbs still have retained their original features, they are rich of urban – architectural valuables such as street networks, which are preserved best, land (plot) forms, distinctive wooden buildings, predominant street views of low-rise buildings which have changed little till nowadays.

Taking into account the examples of the survives historical suburbs in Lithuanian and major cities in the Eastern European countries, a tendency is observed that although these parts retained the authentic features of the city, they are economically, socially and urban – architecturally poor, inactive in the city despite the great geographical situation in the cities. Historic suburbs are abandoned and the preservation of the valuable features of these territories is legally undefined. Also management options or restrictions for suburbs have not been defined. A particularly relevant aspect is preservation and renovation issues of wooden buildings in the historic parts of a city; these wooden buildings reflect joined ethnic and professional cultural traditions of the nation (Každaitytė, 2011) and should be preserved for future generations.

Moreover, preservation and fostering of the existing areas and buildings, the aspect of continuing traditions, particularly depend on the attitude of the local inhabitants towards the survived features of historical suburbs. Currently wooden parts of city buildings are managed improperly, people lack skills and qualification.

The aim of the paper. To identify and research specific urban – architectural elements of historic suburbs employing a sociological survey.

Research objectives. The review the histori-

cal specificity and determining characteristics of the suburbs of the Eastern European countries in accordance with a general overview of suburbs, to identify general urban and architectural elements which characterize historical suburbs and to reveal their management problems. One of the tasks is to conduct a sociological study the aim of which is to evaluate general historical suburbs and the historical suburb of Vilijampolė, to define their urban, architectural features, to find out respondents’ opinion about the opportunities of the attractiveness of wooden building and management of historical wooden buildings in suburbs, to summarize and structure survey results.

Methodology of the research

Data obtained from literature analysis. The empirical study applies sociological research methods, thus different types of sociological inquiry were carried out. The obtained information was compared by the comparative analysis method and evaluated by the qualitative assessment and data processing method. Historic suburban studies were performed: photography, current state analysis, urban analysis of mapping, changes (fluctuation) and development of street networks and evolution of morphostructural types and blocks.

Research problem. Comprehensive study of historical suburbs with their *distinctive traditional architecture* in Lithuania was done by Nijolė Lukšionytė-Tolvaišienė (Lukšionytė-Tolvaišienė, 2011), Giedrė Filipavičienė (Filipavičienė, 2004), Jūratė Jurevičienė (Jurevičienė, 2005). Dalia Dijokienė (Dijokienė 2001, 2006) carried out research on the value and genesis of urban structures of historic suburbs. *The concept of suburban zones* was generally examined by Matas Cirtautas (Cirtautas, 2010).

Peculiarities of Eastern Europe Historical Suburbs and their Management Problems

According to D. Dijokienė, historical suburbs are “parts of the city, which had already been suburbs since the beginning of the city formation (i. e. their appearance is related to the appearance of the city) till the middle of the XIX century“ (Dijokienė, 2001). Such historical suburbs formed not only in

Lithuania, they are typical for all Eastern Europe. For example, Riga historical suburb of Lastadia, Supillin and Karlova suburbs in Tartu, Estonia, are distinguished for their originality and are very similar to the situation in Kaunas and Vilnius suburbs. Literature analysis and empirical studies emphasize that Lithuanian and Eastern Europe an historical suburbs have similar features: an archaic street network, valuable forms of land (plots) and building morphotypes, predominant low-rise wooden building and already formed particular social classes (layers).

- *An archaic and authentic street network* is the best preserved urban value, differently formed in each historical suburb. Some suburbs (Šnipiškės, Panemunė, Lithuania) had a linear street network, other suburbs (Vilijampolė, Kaunas, Karlova, Tartu (Hess, 2011)) were planned by a rectangular scheme or remained spontaneous: a dense network of small streets with narrow irregular streets (Šančiai, Kaunas) (Dijokienė, 2006). Supilinn suburb in Tartu had several street configurations: “some streets were developed organically, [...] and other streets were planned orthogonally” (Preservation by Neglect...).
- *Building morphotypes*. Most of historical suburbs have a predominant perimeter and rural buildings with a prevailing residential function. For instance, the perimeter building-up is formed by the main streets in Vilijampolė, Šnipiškės (Lithuania). Their plots are of a smaller, narrower, irregular form compared to regular form plots of rural building-ups, in Žvėrynas and Vilijampolė suburbs (Mačiukėnaitė, 2010).
- *Green spaces*. Most of the historical suburbs located near the rivers and slopes, organically merge with the natural environment, so they have retained more green space than city cores (Žvėrynas, Panemunė Lithuania), while other suburbs, especially those, that in times have merged with the city core, or where there is a large density of land, have little of public or private green areas (Mačiukėnaitė, 2010). Another great example of planned public green areas is Karlova suburb, Tartu, where “allées of various tree species” emerged between World War I and World War II; it is “a unique natural settings” of Karlova’s streets (Hess, 2011).
- *Predominant low-rise wooden buildings*, which underwent changes, but still are in the historical suburbs nowadays because these parts of the city remained almost untouched in the period of the Soviet occupation, thus little renovated building have preserved their authenticity (Siilivask, 2002). Some buildings in the historical suburbs are distinguished by their stylistic architectural forms, others barely reflect ethnic tra-

ditions of architectural buildings. For example, Karlova suburb, Tartu city, (Fig.1) has lots of stylistic wooden buildings meanwhile buildings in Vilijampolė, Kaunas city, Lastadia historical suburb, in Riga city (Fig. 2) are distinguished by their traditional low-rise wooden buildings, which are valuable as a whole, and retain the general character of the historical suburb.



Figure 1. Karlova historical suburb, Tartu city, Estonia (picture from www.jodiprice.blogspot.com)



Figure 2. Lastadia suburb, Riga city, Latvia (picture from www.riga.lv)

- In a long period not only a unique urban – architectural character, but also a *particular social society class (layer)* formed in suburbs. Such examples are Supillin, Karlova suburb in Estonia, Užupis in Lithuania which are favourite among students and artists.

However, these historical suburbs are not protected although they have a cultural value and reveal national identity. Starting heritage preservation of the historical suburbs, general problems emerged after literature analysis and empirical research:

- *Architectural problems*. Most of the buildings are in a poor condition because of little renovation or inappropriate regulations. Moreover, they

lack authenticity due to unqualified work of the inhabitants in wooden buildings management.

- *Urban problems.* Disappearing wooden buildings yield plots to new buildings, which are built disregarding already formed urban buildings and the prevailing height (1-2 floor buildings prevail) in suburbs.
- *Social problems.* A pragmatic public attitude (Lukšionytė -Tolvaišienė, 2011) and disinterest of the authorities lead to the decadence of the urban – architectural character of historical suburbs and undeveloped life quality. Society is not motivated to retain and preserve wooden buildings in historical suburbs because they do not perceive them as “a phenomenon of prestige, healthy (ecological) lifestyle and succession of traditions“ (Filipavičienė, 2004).
- *Preservation problems.* City general plans do not sufficiently regulate the management of the historical parts of cities, guidelines are undetermined and preservation programs are inefficient. The main problem in the historical suburbs heritage preservation issue is brittle wooden buildings, which reveal the local (ethnic and professional) building traditions, the national identity (Každaitytė, 2011) but wooden buildings are not preserved sufficiently and are disappearing. This is seen in Lastadia suburb, Riga, Šnipiskės suburb, Vilnius, where modern glass buildings for commercial functions have replaced poor quality wooden buildings simultaneously changing the steady social layer (class).

Sociological Research of Management Opportunities of Vilijampolė Historical Suburb in Kaunas

With reference to analysis of collected literature and foreign and Lithuanian examples, the following considerable problems of historical suburbs management could be distinguished: negative public attitude to the traditional environment of historical suburbs, and undetermined management of historical suburbs (Filipavičienė, 2004, Lukšionytė-Tolvaišienė, 2011). This led to a sociological survey of a little researched, now abandoned, inactive Vilijampolė historical suburb to find out a people's dominating attitude in a Lithuanian society how local population as well as architects value Vilijampolė historical suburb, what direction management professors advise to choose in order to reveal the values of suburb.

Method

During the sociological research a survey was conducted. Three types of surveys were prepared: for society, for Vilijampolė residents and for the architects. An interview method of the professors was also used. The questionnaire for the public was developed on historical suburbs, with the aim to find out their opinion and views on wooden and masonry architecture, and its management perspective. Another questionnaire was given to the inhabitants of the historical Vilijampolė suburb, with the aim to find out their attitude towards their environment, architecture, suggestions on how to renovate the wooden buildings in Vilijampolė, and what function and management directions should be taken to improve the quality of life.

A questionnaire for the architects and interviews with the professors were chosen specifically to find out what valuable historical peculiarities of the suburb should be focused on, how separate parts of the Vilijampolė suburb should be managed, how the existing wooden buildings, that dominate in the historical suburb, should be managed. Ten open-ended questions were given to professors.

The respondents were selected by age and education. 50 respondents, representing the general population, were interviewed about the historic suburbs. The number of the architects' respondents from the Vilijampolė suburb residents was 32, arguments to be valid did not need a large sample, therefore 11 architects were surveyed by the questionnaire and 5 professors were interviewed.

Sociological Research Progressions and Results

In the sociological study initial questions were about *the concept of wooden heritage*. The following questions were given: Would you like to live in a wooden house? Would you like to live in a wooden house in the Vilijampolė suburb? Respondents were surveyed to find out what they associate life in a wooden house with. Having compared the findings, it was concluded that, 68% of the respondents would agree to live in wooden buildings, however, in the case of the Vilijampolė historical suburb a larger part of the respondents (65%) would not agree to live in this suburb. Even 100% of the surveyed architects refused to live in a wooden house in the Vilijampolė suburb.

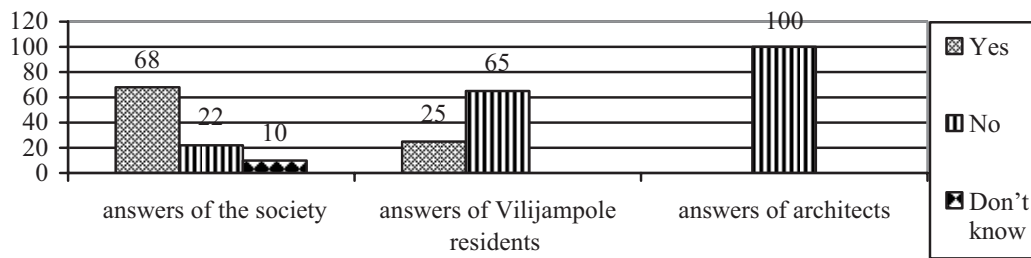


Figure 3. Distribution of the answers to the question “Would you like to live in a wooden house in a historical suburb?”

According to the respondents, this historical suburb is very poor and abandoned, its social environment is frightening, the quality of its architecture and aesthetics issues are low in a historical suburb. Although lifestyle in a wooden house is associated with ecology (56% of Vilijampolė resident, people, 54% of society), tradition (60% of the architects), but living in a wooden house in Vilijampolė is associated with a lack of prestige (4% of Vilijampolė residents) and poverty (10% of the architects).

Other questions were about *attractiveness and value of the historical Vilijampolė suburb*. Most of the respondents noted that the historical Vilijampolė suburb is not attractive as itself, but, according to Vilijampolė residents, society, architects and inter-

viewed professors the Vilijampolė suburb reveals its attractiveness in other aspects: geographical situation, natural surroundings. In fact, all the respondents defined valuable peculiarities of the historical suburb: network of streets, proportions, forms, materiality of the buildings; moreover, the most valuable element was the height of the buildings (28% of Vilijampolė residents and 30% of the architects). Besides, some groups of the buildings were defined as a valuable feature (28% of Vilijampolė residents). According to the interviewed professors, the historical Vilijampolė suburb is cozy and valuable because of its human surrounding, excellent solar light and good visibility.

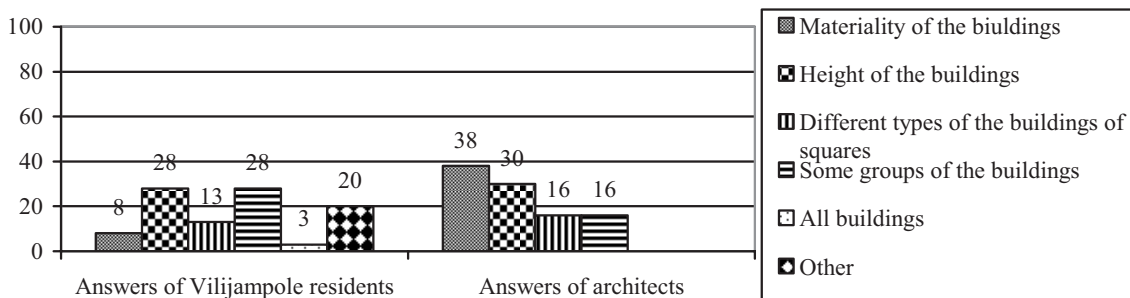


Figure 4. Defined values of the historical Vilijampolė suburb

Summarizing the respondents: answers society’s ‘Vilijampolė residents’, the architects’, the professors’, it has to be said that the historical Vilijampolė suburb, Kaunas city, is distinctive and characteristic due to its authentic urban structure, some groups of valuable buildings despite the fact that it is in a poor and abandoned historically valuable part of the city and needs complex management.

Preservation and management of the architectural – urban value of the historical Vilijampolė suburb. According to the general plan of Kaunas, this historical part of Vilijampolė is named as “a preserved urban site, having cultural value” (Kauno miesto savivaldybės..., 2003, 2010) but separate buildings or complexes of the buildings are not preserved in this historical suburb. It was expected to

find out how the architects imagine the future of the historical Vilijampolė suburb, how to manage this abandoned territory with so many values retained until now. A question for architects: “What management direction should be taken for the historical Vilijampolė suburb?” The architects answered:

- *The dominant character of the historical Vilijampolė suburb should be preserved;*
- *Preservation, revitalization, renovation of distinctive buildings should be applied in this historical suburb;*
- *Improvement of infrastructure, green public areas;*
- *Preservation of a valuable street network, urban structures, authentic buildings-up.*

The interview revealed, that it is most im-

portant to distinguish, which parts of the historical suburb could be preserved and which changed. For example, it was suggested to use less changed quarters during the time with appropriate (in a quite good condition) valuable buildings for nowadays needs

on the main streets of the historical suburb (Jurbar-
 kas, Paneriai streets, Kriščiukaitis). Buildings in an
 emergency condition could be rebuilt and used for
 mixed functions (residence/ commercial/ cultural).
 Other professors suggested to preserve the primary
 function, residence.



Figure 5. View of the main Paneriu street,
 Vilijampolė historical suburb
 (photograph by J. Mačiukėnaitė)



Figure 6. View of the main Jurbarkas street,
 Vilijampolė historical suburb
 (photograph by J. Mačiukėnaitė)

It was suggested to convert chaotically built territories, to change buildings in a bad condition by the high quality constructions on the central part of historical Vilijampolė suburb. According to the interviews and the sociological survey, the architects and the professors suggested to preserve the character of the historical suburb with its wooden low-rise buildings. The architects advised to preserve unique buildings that show the process of variation of wooden architecture and to maintain the valuable features of these vulnerable objects in the historical Vilijampolė suburb. All these valuable buildings could be renovated only using authentic materials.

Opinions of Vilijampolė residents did not differ very much compared to the architects'. The respondents agreed that some buildings in the Vilijampolė suburb given as an example (Fig. 7) should be revitalized. Valuable wooden buildings in the Vilijampolė suburb (No 2, 3 and 5 buildings) should be preserved and renovated. Moreover, the present function of these buildings could be supplemented by residential, cultural, recreational functions. All selected wooden houses could be renovated using natural, traditional and modern materials, meanwhile all other wooden houses in the given example (Fig. 7) could be changed by newly constructed buildings.



Figure 7. Characteristic wooden houses in the historical Vilijampolė suburb
 (photograph by J. Mačiukėnaitė)

New buildings in the context of the historical Vilijampolė suburb. In the interview, the professors suggested to change buildings in a poor condition by high quality constructions which would fit in the characteristic surrounding (by aspects: form, height) in the Vilijampolė suburb. Some newly constructed

buildings could be adapted to the environment of the historical suburb by using modern, natural materials.

The survey showed that most of the respondents (society, Vilijampolė residents and the architects) suggested that new buildings could be con-

structed according to the nuance principle: built in a traditional style, using modern-traditional materials (54% of society, 69% of Vilijampolė residents, 72 % of the architects), although some contrast buildings could be put up. Residents of the historical Vilijampolė suburb agreed with some contrast structures in the historical suburb, they would differ in form, materiality and still fit in the characteristic surrounding. All respondents emphasized that new buildings should fit in contexts of the existing low-rise buildings (88% of society, 83% of Vilijampolė residents, 82% of the architects and professors).

Conclusions

1. Historical suburbs in Eastern Europe are characteristic parts of the city, they have retained valuable features until nowadays: street network, forms of lands or types of building- up of squares, they changed slightly, unrenovated wooden buildings have retained their authenticity which reflects traditional and stylistic forms of the local architecture. Compositional, visual links of the historical suburbs with the city core have remained almost unchanged.
2. According to analyzed literature and the empirical research, historical suburbs have retained their characteristic peculiarities until now. However, they are poor, abandoned parts of the city and need complex management, positive attitude and initiative actions of society and the government.
3. According to the survey, historical suburbs and especially the Vilijampolė suburb, are not an attractive territory and very few respondents would like to live there. On the other hand, society, Vilijampolė residents and the architects are aware of the uniqueness of the historical suburbs. The respondents distinguish the valuable elements of Vilijampolė: height of the buildings, materiality, building morphotype, character of a human scale, geographical situation of the territory.
4. According to the architects, it is most important to distinguish, which territories and buildings of the historical Vilijampolė suburb could be preserved and which changed. Complex management is necessary: the historical character of the suburb with valuable buildings, street network could be preserved. The valuable buildings could be supplemented by other functions, – commercial and others (cultural/ recreational). The newly constructed buildings of high quality architecture should fit considering the nuance and, contrast principles. Moreover, the infrastructure, social places could be improved.
5. Considering the sociological survey, Vilijampolė residents agreed to preserve most of the buildings in the historical Vilijampolė suburb by keeping the residence function and supplementing with new ones (cultural/hotels). The existing wooden buildings should be renovated using traditional, modern materials. New buildings could be adapted according to the nuance principle.

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Summary

Historical suburbs are unique, specific parts of the city near the center of the city, they suburbs since the beginning of city founding. The aim of the paper is to identify and research specific urban - architectural elements of historical suburbs by employing a sociological survey. Historical suburbs in Eastern Europe were researched with reference to the examples in the Baltic countries: historical suburbs in Kaunas and Vilnius cities (Lithuania), Lastadia suburb in Riga (Latvia), Supilinn and Karlova suburbs in Tartu (Estonia). Based on literature and empirical studies, such values of suburbs were distinguished: archaic street network, valuable forms of plots and building morphotypes, green spaces, dominant low-rise wooden buildings, a formed particular social class. However, despite these valuable properties there is a common problem that involves preservation possibilities of historical suburbans: architectural, urban, social and preservation problems. A particularly relevant architectural problem is renovation and preservation of wooden buildings. In addition, wooden architecture reflects local building traditions in the city; therefore the sociological survey examine architectural - building issues and also public attitudes to the traditional environment developed by low-rise wooden buildings.

Keywords: historical suburb, Vilijampolė old part, wooden houses, heritage of wooden architecture.