

PROTECTION OF ARCHITECTURAL HERITAGE IN THE LATVIAN SSR (1945–1991): IDEOLOGICAL, CULTURAL AND POLITICAL ASPECTS

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This article examines the protection policy of architectural heritage in Latvia in the period of Soviet occupation. The author analyses the basic protection principles towards monuments, and their connection with the prevalent ideology of the Communist Party, as well as the protection peculiarities in terms of the typological groups of architectural monuments (sacred buildings, the centres of former estates and the objects of urban construction). The author has drawn attention to the practice of list-making, analysing the inclusion of architectural monuments protected by the state. The article is concluded with an overview of the condition of architectural monument protection in the Latvian SSR and the public attitude towards this area during the Soviet occupation era.

Key words: architectural heritage, the Soviet cultural policy, the Latvian SSR, protection of monuments.

INTRODUCTION

Architectural heritage consists of the historical buildings and construction complexes which society perceives as especially important. It can be related to the historical, aesthetic and symbolic value of the particular object. Therefore, the protection of architectural heritage is always connected with the interpretation of the significance of this heritage in accordance with the value criteria provided by experts in the heritage area and society. The

idea of a monument always has a certain political dimension, which, on the one hand, is made by the ideological “demand” of the state in relation to the interpretation of history, and, on the other, the readiness of monument protection employees to accept the offers of collaboration expressed by the power structures.¹ The public attitude towards architectural heritage is also an indicator of the public attitude towards its past, because the symbolic meaning of the historical buildings depends on what associations it creates in society.² When examining the history of monument protection in a certain period, the interpretation of a heritage is also marked by the term “policy for monuments”, which includes both the direct work of monument protection and the historical and social context.

In the historiography of Latvia, the history of the protection of architectural monuments so far has been studied by drawing attention to a few issues of monument protection work and assessing the contribution of certain individuals in this area. The range of historical sources available to scholars on this theme is extremely broad; it reveals the problems of legal protection of historical construction, as well as practical preservation issues. The aim of the article is to examine the protection of architectural heritage as part of the state cultural policy in the Soviet occupation period from 1945 to 1991.

CULTURAL HERITAGE AND SOVIET IDEOLOGY

The protection of cultural heritage, similarly to the cultural policy implemented in the state overall, was stipulated in the Soviet Union by the core ideological principles defined by the Communist Party. In the framework of these principles, the public (and partly also the private) life of each individual was perceived as the object of state politics. The attitude of the Communist Party towards cultural policy was determined by a utilitarian approach viewing culture as a specific area of production: the task of culture was to “entertain and raise the producers of material values in the spirit of the Communist ideology”³. In the

history of the Soviet cultural policy there were both periods of liberalization and political repressions, however, its core values remained unchanged: it was a policy to create an isolated society secluded from the outer world,⁴ and its key goal was to teach a worldview corresponding to the Soviet ideology or to achieve at least formal acceptance of this worldview in society.

The Soviet state articulated its attitude towards cultural heritage in 1934.⁵ In accordance with this conception, cultural monuments had to be used as examples for the history of class struggle in a certain period of social development: in national Soviet republics those cultural monuments which facilitated friendship among nations had to be preserved, whereas the sacred or “cult buildings” had to be used for antireligious propaganda. Thus, the value of those objects of cultural heritage that did not correspond to these criteria obtained a secondary meaning. The historical buildings, too, were perceived as symbols of social order and ideology in a certain period of time, and this determined the attitude of Soviet authorities in relation to the preservation possibilities of such objects.

The normative acts divided the architectural monuments into two groups: the monuments which were used pursuant to their initial function, and the monuments whose usage was not connected to these criteria.⁶ Ideologically harmful heritage objects were destroyed, justifying the destruction with the need for new constructions or a bad state of repair of the historical building. As evidenced by the destruction in 1948 of the remains of the House of the Blackheads, ruined during World War II, even the status of the building as a monument of All-Union significance did not grant its preservation. Formally, the highest status of legal protection of the House of the Blackheads in the Soviet system was ignored in the name of political considerations.⁷ The same result could be achieved indirectly as well: no attention or maintenance of a building resulting in its “natural” collapse.

Thus, the Soviet authorities protected cultural monuments and at the same time justified and implemented the destruction of these monuments. Formally, the USSR accepted the basic

principles of the preservation of international cultural heritage and participated in the work of international organizations (UNESCO, ICOMOS, etc.),⁸ emphasizing the role of monument protection in the political and aesthetic upbringing of Soviet society. Also, Article 47 of the 1977 Law *On the Protection and Use of Historical and Cultural Monuments* of the Latvian SSR stipulated the priority of ratified international agreements and conventions over the laws of the USSR and the Latvian SSR in the area of monument protection.⁹ It had a declarative meaning, because the actual boundaries of the priority were stipulated not by the international organizations but by the Soviet Union. The international documents of monument protection had an advisory nature, and their actual application in practice was not mandatory.

The awareness of cultural heritage and its preservation played an ambivalent role in Soviet cultural policy. On the one hand, it was one of the elements of the cultural industry, which could not obtain the same significance as, for example, the work of professional unions (literary scholars, artists, architects, etc.), which were the mediators for organizing and controlling the development of Soviet culture. On the other hand, the cultural heritage had a crucial ideological significance, because it was connected with the ideas of society concerning its historical past and, thus, concerning the Soviet regime. Especially in the recently occupied Baltic States society could use the cultural evidence of the past, comparing the Soviet reality with another non-Communist social order, traditions and values.

Due to ideological reasons the architectural heritage, as well as the culture of the past in general, was divided into the “bourgeois” and the “progressive” which was a potentially useful heritage for the construction of Socialism and Communism.¹⁰ Accepting only that part of the past which corresponded to the Communist ideology (depending on the political state of affairs), the Soviet history policy thus achieved an alienated public attitude towards the cultural heritage, which naturally led to the destruction of monuments.

Although during the Soviet occupation, in all three Baltic Republics, the system of monument protection was implemented centrally,¹¹ differences in the cultural policy in Latvia, Estonia and Lithuania determined a different outcome of this system. The priority in the preservation of the cultural heritage of the Latvian SSR was given to the protection of places that were connected to the lives and the most important events of outstanding individuals in the interpretation of Soviet history.¹² From the end of Stalin's period in 1953, there are no grounds to speak about a strong "Moscow's dictate" in this area. Since the mid-1950s, the last word in the cultural policy of the Latvian SSR belonged not to Moscow, but to the leadership of the Communist Party of Latvia (CPL). The key reason for the cautious attitude of the government of the Latvian SSR towards the protection of cultural heritage was related to the fact that the protection of monuments was considered a means for Latvian nationalists to implement anti-Soviet activities in a half-legal manner.¹³ Such a point of view of the CPL leadership was intensified after 1959, when the so-called national Communists lost their political influence, and this attitude remained until the Perestroika period in the second half of the 1980s. The Ministry of Culture, which had to supervise the protection of monuments since 1962,¹⁴ was one of the poorest and least prestigious ministries in the governance system of the Latvian SSR.¹⁵

The activities of industrial companies and rural collective farms which also included the monitoring of the architectural monuments were usually related to arbitrary reconstruction works or simply indifferent attitudes towards the historical building.¹⁶ It was popular to think in the Soviet Latvian society that interest and understanding of the objects of cultural heritage was something similar to a hobby or entertainment of specialists in certain fields, and not the concern of the general public.¹⁷ In a time period when published press articles were full of outrage aimed at the sad state of Latvian manors,¹⁸ the vandalising of architectural monuments still went on, for example, the looting and destroying of rural churches, and was implemented by the representatives of the same society.

INSTITUTIONS AND CRITERIA OF MONUMENT PROTECTION

The attitude of the Soviet authorities towards the architectural heritage of Latvia is revealed by the foundation and work of the monument protection institutions, as well as the lists of the objects to be protected by the state and the question about the assessment criteria of the historical buildings.

In the relatively short time period from June 1940 to June 1941, the Soviet occupation regime did not manage to introduce in Latvia the protection system of cultural monuments that was in force in the USSR, although there were practical measures implemented to subordinate the field of monument protection to the control of the Communist Party. The implementation of the plan by Soviet authorities in Latvia was interrupted by the war between Germany and the Soviet Union and the following German occupation. At the end of World War II, when the Soviet regime was renewed in the territory of Latvia, the process of Sovietisation was finalized, conceptually transforming the protection system of the cultural heritage, too.

The protection of cultural heritage initially was divided among various governmental institutions in the Latvian SSR, which was opposite to the practice of the Republic of Latvia, where this area was supervised by one institution – the Board of Monuments of the Ministry of Education. Such an approach in the Soviet bureaucratic practice would have implied the lowering of the status of monument protection and subordination to the interests of other fields.

The protection of architectural monuments was entrusted to the Department of Architectural Monument Protection of the Unit of Architectural Affairs of the Council of People's Commissars of the Latvian SSR in January 1945. Its manager was architect Leons Plaučiņš (1903–1993), who had started working in the protection of architectural heritage before the Soviet occupation. Plaučiņš played a crucial role in the field throughout the entire Soviet period. He represented the generation of those specialists who emigrated from Latvia to the West in World War II.

Starting from 1948, the legal grounds of the monument protection system of the Latvian SSR consisted of the adapted USSR laws which regulated the work of the institutions. At the same time, a unified classification system of cultural monuments was introduced in Latvia, which stipulated the classification of the objects into All-Union, republican or local significance: the list of the first category was approved by the Council of Ministers of the USSR, the list of the second category by the Council of Ministers of the United Republic, but the lists of monuments of local significance were compiled from 1971 by the deputy councils of regions and cities. Such a classification system of cultural monuments remained in force until the renewal of the independence of the Republic of Latvia.

The lack of clearly defined criteria for determining the value of architectural monuments can also be seen in the legal documents of monument protection of the Soviet period. In the 1950s the selection criteria of architectural monuments were not explained in much detail, usually only mentioning the social significance of architectural monuments.¹⁹ The social significance of the architectural monument was defined very broadly; comprising the political, scientific and artistic value.²⁰ In 1985, historian and representative of the Latvian SSR in ICOMOS, Mārtiņš Apinis (1938–1991) noted: “Nor in the academic, neither in the legal literature there are elaborated and justified the principles of such cultural values.”²¹ Therefore, the ideological manipulations of the value of architectural heritage played a crucial role. The lack of officially confirmed assessment criteria of architectural monuments (beyond their classification as All-Union, republican or local significance objects) did not impose any liability for using these criteria in practice.

The impact of ideology on the protection of monuments was revealed in the conference in 1967 organised by the Ministry of Culture with the support of the Central Committee of the CPL and the Academy of Sciences.²² Strict political requirements were set to the assessment criteria of architectural monuments: “When determining the level of restoration of architectural monuments,

one needs a strict ideologically grounded and class-wise differentiated approach to the monument overall and to its parts separately.”²³ A short while later, art historian Pēteris Savickis (1925–2015) tried to neutralize them using a different kind of rhetoric: “Sometimes one can hear fallacious arguments stating that the architecture of the past periods only approve the splendour and mightiness of the upper classes. In fact, not only the ancient castles and fortresses, but even the splendid churches tell about the efforts, skills and creativity of the working class.”²⁴ The indirect formulation on the fallacious arguments only formally masked reference to the officials of the Soviet authorities. As noted, the significance of the “class-wise approach” in the determination of the value of architectural heritage was regarded a priority in the entire Soviet Union.²⁵ In the case of Latvia, the class-wise principle could be mostly felt in the negative attitude towards construction works at the manors,²⁶ and it was intensified by the ideas on the “German oppressors”, rooted in the national Romanticism of the 19th century. Soviet propaganda continued to use it for its own purposes, merging the class-wise and the ethnic principle in the assessment of architectural heritage.

Some specialists of the field tried to decrease the role of political criteria in the determination of the value of the protected buildings. For example, in 1985 architect Andrejs Holcmanis (1920–2009) suggested applying the following assessment principles of architectural monuments: 1) **the historic value** of the building is determined by its age; 2) **the scientific value** can be diagnosed in all historical buildings; the key criterion is the typical features of the object – the architectural monuments must include all the most characteristic types of buildings; 3) **the artistic value** of the building plays a crucial role, and it is determined by the manifestations of the architectural style of the respective period in the building.²⁷ In the context of the international practice of the time, these criteria might seem archaic; however, in the circumstances of the Latvian SSR they were potentially apolitical while trying to avoid the impact of Soviet ideology.

INSPECTION OF ARCHITECTURAL MONUMENTS AND THE PRINCIPLES OF THEIR PROTECTION

The first expeditions to find architectural monuments in the territory of Latvia were organised after World War II in the summers of 1947 and 1949.²⁸ The aim of the expeditions was to collect materials for the lists of architectural monuments of republican significance. The lists were compiled for six years, since Moscow refused to approve the submitted lists and rejected them on several occasions due to the too huge number of protected objects. The first list of architectural monuments of republican significance, which the Council of the Latvian SSR finally approved in August 1952, contained 343 monuments. It was considerably less than in the list of architectural monuments prepared by the Council of Ministers of the Latvian SSR in 1949, stipulating to protect 670 historical buildings, which was rejected by Moscow.²⁹ Still, in the reduced list, too, the range of typology of the architectural monuments was rather broad: the dwelling houses and warehouses in the cities, the dwelling houses and household buildings of manors, churches, medieval castles and ruins, as well as historical manufactories, ancient cemeteries and parks.³⁰

The second list of architectural monuments of republican significance was approved on 31st October 1962, and the number of historical buildings included in it was decreased down to 198 objects.³¹ This related to the campaign at the USSR level to decrease the amount of cultural monument protection, due to the implementation of the Communism building programme approved at the CPSU XXII Congress. The scale of the campaign in Latvia was determined by the fact that since 1959, “cleansing” of the Latvian National Communists had been in progress.³² This list did not last for too long. Already on 29th December 1967 the Council of Ministers of the Latvian SSR approved a new, third list of architectural monuments of republican significance.³³ In the new list of architectural monuments using the data obtained in the inspection expeditions, 284 objects were mentioned, including

some historical buildings which in 1962 had “hastily”³⁴ been excluded from the list of the state protected monuments. From 1968, the monument protection inspectors worked in all 26 administrative boroughs of Latvia.

The Ministry of Culture together with the Institute of History of the CC of the CPL, the State Art Academy, the Institute of History of the Academy of Sciences and the State Committee of Construction Affairs of the Council of Ministers started to elaborate the fourth edition of the list of architectural monuments of republican significance in 1976. Up until 1980, annual expeditions to inspect objects were organised in Latvian cities and rural regions, counting the monuments, measuring them and documenting them in photography, at the same time gathering the historical material available from the archives, museums and publications. As a result of the expeditions, all 33 urban construction monuments (historical centres of the cities or their parts) and 498 architectural monuments were included in the list approved by the Council of Ministers of the Latvian SSR on 18th October 1983.³⁵ Similarly to 1967, one accession number was used for registering those architectural complexes which consisted of two (a manor and a church) or even three historical buildings, for example, a church and a medieval castle; or the dwelling house of a manor and several household buildings.

The buildings of a chronologically more recent period (the 18th–19th century) were first counted in the category of architectural monuments of local significance. Part of the architectural monuments of local significance which were registered in the 1970s, for example, the Īvande, Madliena and Suntaži Lutheran churches,³⁶ in 1983 were incorporated in the list of architectural monuments of republican significance. The uncertainty of assessment criteria in determining the value of monuments provided an opportunity to increase the legal protection status of certain buildings, justifying it with the discovery of new aspects in the object’s artistic and architectonic value.

The significance of the legal documents of monument protection in the practical preservation of the cultural heritage was

restricted because they were contradictory and could not ensure the control of usage of the protected objects.³⁷ Besides, the violation of legal norms in the monument protection area could be easily justified by a lack of financial and materially technical resources. In the early 1980s the number of non-restored and collapsing monuments in the USSR considerably exceeded the number of those objects whose level of preservation and circumstances could be considered as satisfactory.³⁸ Therefore, for the Soviet authorities it was beneficial to choose just a few of the most outstanding objects of architectural heritage in each united republic and focus on the preservation and renewal of these buildings.

In Latvia, such “parade objects” were the Riga Dome complex and partially the St. Peter’s Church.³⁹ A similar status, taking into account the popularity of this object among tourists, was obtained in the mid-1970s by the Turaida Castle complex as the defining attraction of the Gauja National Park and the core of the only museum reserve in Latvia. Later, the ensemble of the Rundāle Palace, which had been renovated since 1972, joined them. The situation is well characterised by Imants Lancmanis (1941), the Director of the Rundāle Palace Museum, who in the late 1980s said that behind the “splendid façade [of the Rundāle Palace] many buildings called castles are hidden”⁴⁰, whose practical maintenance the state did not want or could not ensure.

The structure of the Soviet economy gave rise to certain peculiarities in terms of the practical preservation of architectural monuments. The key problem was related to finding an appropriate mode of usage. In circumstances when there were no rights for private property (land and buildings), this problem theoretically could be solved by the means of planning, determining for each historical building the most appropriate mode of usage with the help of experts. However, in practice this utopian idea was never implemented. Already in the late 1960s, one of the most prominent specialists in the architectural heritage in Latvia, Jurijs Vasiļjevs (1928–1993), stated that architectural monuments “could not be used in the same way as before in the changed

circumstances of life. Abandoned or half-collapsed old cemeteries, manors, churches, peasant houses and windmills could be seen everywhere. On most occasions they were not used at all or used in a completely dissatisfactory manner, these monuments considered a free-of-charge property with some material value⁴¹

The most important criterion of architectural monuments for practical preservation in the Latvian SSR was their potential for practical use and not the culturally historic significance of the object or its technical condition, except the conservation of castle ruins. In all other cases, the key criterion was the potential use of the architectural monument after the restoration works.⁴² However, in the implementation of the approved restoration works one had to take into account the problems and obstacles caused by the planning of the monument protection system and the restricted capacity.

In the plans for the repair and restoration works of architectural monuments funded by the state, only those objects which were supervised by the special scholarly restoration organizations of the Ministry of Culture were included.⁴³ The fate of the rest of the objects was subjected to the attitude of the building's user, which determined the outcome, namely, whether the necessary financial means, construction materials and qualified labour would be found to ensure the maintenance of the building. However, the budget planning practice implied that monetary means were allocated to the manufacturing objects and blocks of apartments first. Funding for architectural monuments had to be sought separately, and this was economically disadvantageous for the users of the monument,⁴⁴ because they wanted to obtain a practically usable building as quickly as possible. The building only had to "look good", no attention was drawn to the monument as the historical source and the preservation of its historical details was neglected.⁴⁵

The budget of the scholarly research and restoration institutions of the Ministry of Culture had increased significantly since 1982 due to the implementation of the regeneration project of Old Riga. However, the key task of the restoration was to im-

prove the technical state of the architectural monuments, allocating minimum funding to the research of the building and its interior.⁴⁶ In the time period from 1951 to 1968, conservation and restoration events were implemented at 150 architectural monuments in the entire territory of Latvia.⁴⁷ In the mid-1980s, the employees of the Scholarly Restoration Administration of the Ministry of Culture worked in around 120 objects simultaneously,⁴⁸ however, half of the capacity of the Administration was directed at objects which did not have any connection with the restoration of architectural monuments.⁴⁹ Therefore, the data to be found in publications on the total number of objects restored in Latvia, from 1951 to 1991 exceeding five hundred,⁵⁰ must be evaluated cautiously because the actual weight of architectural monuments among them was less than a half.

When the Soviet economy started to struggle, eventually more and more buildings, even those allocated the status of an architectural monument of local or republican significance, reached a bad state of repair and were not used anymore.⁵¹ In the 1970s, approximately 70% of all architectural monuments of republican and local significance were used, yet many of them, according to the specialists' opinion, were in a "dissatisfactory" or "poor" state, including several churches whose interiors were considered outstanding monuments of art.⁵²

In such circumstances in the early 1980s, two different approaches could be noticed in the protection of architectural monuments.⁵³ The supporters of the first approach, mostly the officials of the monument protection institutions, offered to concentrate resources on the restoration of the most prominent buildings and to destroy the buildings in a bad state of repair in order to save the means spent on their preservation. The second approach was supported by most of the specialists of the field, and pursuant to this approach no historical building could be destroyed without prior research. Unfortunately, the research started on many objects often could not be completed due to a lack of resources, thus the protection of buildings was even more jeopardised.

In accordance with the data published by the State Inspection of Cultural Monuments in early 1991, there were 172 architectural monuments of the republican and local significance in a bad state of repair in the territory of Latvia, for example, many rural churches and centres of manors, as well as a third, that is, 11 out of 33 monuments of urban construction, including the historical centres of Riga, Liepāja, Kuldīga, Aizpute and Jēkabpils.⁵⁴ These numbers attest to serious problems in the monument protection system in Latvia during the Soviet period.

THE MONUMENTS OF SACRED ARCHITECTURE OR THE “CULT BUILDINGS”

Until the so-called “Perestroika” period (1985–1991), the Communist Party considered religion and the Christian Church as some of the key enemies of the Soviet ideology, therefore, the sacred buildings were an inconvenient part of the architectural heritage, although their specific weight in the number of the protected objects in the Latvian SSR was considerable. In the 1950s, there were 108 churches included in the list of architectural monuments of republican significance,⁵⁵ according to other data – 100⁵⁶ churches. Assuming that the official data⁵⁷ on the 189 sacred buildings destroyed in World War II in the territory of Latvia are accurate, one can obtain an idea concerning the politics of Soviet authorities in this area.

The state funding allocated in the first post-war decade was used for the repair work of several churches (in Gulbene, Bērze, Cēsis etc.), as well as for provisional conservation work on the destroyed St. Peter’s Church in Riga.⁵⁸ However, the conservation of destroyed churches in the Soviet period was an absolute exception. For example, the remains of the Liepupe Lutheran Church, burnt down in 1971, were conserved only ten years after the church was destroyed.⁵⁹ The tower of the Jelgava St. Trinity Church was preserved after its destruction in 1954 only because the Soviet Army used it as the central point of the city triangulation network.⁶⁰

From the second half of the 1960s it was cautiously noted in the official reports of the Ministry of Culture that the churches in the Latvian SSR were being vandalized. Outstanding examples of sacred architecture were the victims of these vandalizing acts, for example, the Lestene Church in the region of Tukums, the Tērvete Kalnamuiža Church in the region of Dobele. Yet these examples were always named as “individual cases”.⁶¹ They were juxtaposed with the positive examples: equipping the Riga Dome Cathedral⁶², Valmiera St. Sīmanis’ Church⁶³ and the mediaeval church in Lielstraupe Castle⁶⁴ with concert halls. In comparison to the lists of architectural monuments approved in 1967 and 1983, it can be concluded that the number of protected churches had increased from 91 to 149 buildings.

The real situation was different: the practical usage of architectural monuments left the most devastating impact on sacred buildings in the Socialist period. The data collected by the Soviet institutions,⁶⁵ referring to all confessions, provide evidence that in the time period from 1960 to 1970 there were 124 churches and worshipping buildings closed, in 34 churches there were warehouses set up, 20 sacred buildings were demolished, and 21 unused churches collapsed “naturally”. Only 22 churches that were confiscated from the parishes were used for the purposes of concert halls or museums (in Koknese, Vietalva, Dubulti, etc.).

The overall tendency in this area is manifested by the fate of churches in one Latvian region – Semigallia – where parishes were forced to give up their churches.⁶⁶ When the churches were left to the disposal of collective farms or Soviet households, they were used for various practical purposes: at the Jaunsaule and Glūda Churches warehouses were set up, at the Lambārte Church – a collective farm club, while the Penkule Church was reconstructed as a sports hall. A similar situation was faced by the churches in the cities, for example, in the St. Nikolai’s Orthodox Church in Liepāja Karosta a sailors’ club of the USSR Navy was set up,⁶⁷ whereas the Valdemārpils Orthodox Church was reconstructed into a cinema.⁶⁸ If it was not possible to adjust the confiscated church to a similar “mode of usage”, the building was

closed and left to the hands of fate, usually without any protection or security means to guard the interior objects from vandalism and looting.

The attitude of the Soviet authorities towards the monuments of sacred architecture remained distanced until the end of the regime. Even in 1989 the Ministry of Culture was of the opinion that these monuments had to be preserved only due to the typological variety of architectural monuments.⁶⁹ Changes in the official attitude towards the “cult buildings” can be noticed when comparing two opinions of architect Jānis Zilgalvis (1955), which were published in the press a few months apart. First, the architect recommended arranging youth clubs, cafeterias and theatres in the abandoned churches, especially noting that this strategy was not jeopardizing the space of churches and their structural preservation.⁷⁰ However, soon afterwards Zilgalvis offered another, crucially different potential of usage of the sacred buildings: “No doubt, they must be renovated and perhaps given back to the parishes, if such parishes reappeared.”⁷¹ Since the renewal of state independence this task has been implemented with various degrees of success.

THE CENTRES OF RURAL MANORS AND THEIR USAGE

The complexes of the manors also constituted a rather big group of architectural monuments, and their preservation in Latvia was influenced both by the Soviet ideology and the opinions inherited from the pre-war period, namely, that manors were the “heritage of German culture”. World War II in the territory of Latvia destroyed approximately 40 centres of historical manors, and in some places the vandalism continued in the first years after the war, too.⁷² Therefore, the state of manor protection in the Soviet period can be compared with the situation of churches. The lists of monuments shows that in 1952 the status of an architectural monument of republican significance was provided to 57 dwelling houses and household buildings of former manors⁷³, but

in the list approved in 1967 there were 46 such architectural monuments included.

Next to the trend to arrange schools in the manors, which continued the pre-war tradition, in the Soviet period new modes of usage of the previous manor complexes emerged, related to the collectivisation of agriculture.⁷⁴ The collective farms used the manors as their administrative and economic centres: there were collective farms, mechanical workshops, warehouses for grain, construction materials and technical parts. The household buildings of the manors were reconstructed and extended. The parks, too, were partially adjusted to the needs of agricultural production. Starting with the 1960s, the new villages of the collective farms were usually built outside the former centres of manors, and part of the unused buildings were abandoned or temporarily turned into halls of residence.⁷⁵

In the Soviet period, too, the dwelling houses of manors were most often used for the needs of educational establishments. Arranging schools in these buildings was the principle of the “lesser evil”, because such a mode of usage destructively impacted the preservation of the historical interiors.⁷⁶ Taking into account the fact that a school at least maintained the building in a normal technical state, the monument protection institutions had to accept this solution. At times, it was the only way to ensure the preservation of the architectural monument. Such an example was the reconstruction of the unique wooden dwelling house of the Ungurmuiža manor in 1949–1954, which was termed as restoration,⁷⁷ yet, in fact, meant the adjustment of the building for the needs of an elementary school.

After World War II, there were continuous efforts and struggles to find an appropriate mode of usage for several medieval castles which were located in former centres of manors, for example, Ventspils, Dundaga, Ēdole, Nurmuiža and Krustpils castle, even though all these buildings were used for practical purposes. The recommendations of specialists to use medieval castles as the museums of local history, premises for public events or accommodation for tourists⁷⁸ were taken into account and implemented only in a few cases.

In the inspection campaign of the centres of manors in 1967–1970, there were 397 objects together with parks inspected to find out their mode of usage. The inspection data provided evidence that educational establishments were still dominating in the centres of manors, yet there were also arranged flats, administration premises, cultural houses, sanatoriums and old people's homes or homes for people with special needs.⁷⁹ This study showed that there was no such mode of usage of the centres of former manors, which would have ensured their preservation. It must be noted that some art historians in the 1970s admitted that the abandonment of manors was not acceptable: "If in 1905 all manors were burnt down or vandalised, history would not treat it as barbarism: it was a righteous outburst of people's anger, part of the fight for one's right. But, if the old buildings are damaged by decay over time, it happens because of our failure to act."⁸⁰ However, such an opinion did not change the situation of the former centres of manors. In Latvia, the preservation of these monuments mostly depended on the interests of the users of manor complexes. Overall, up to the late 1980s in approximately 30 manor complexes in Latvia various maintenance, repair and restoration works were carried out,⁸¹ however, the idea of a manor as an architectural treasure became popular only in the 1990s after the renewal of the state's independence.

THE MONUMENTS OF URBAN CONSTRUCTION

In the classification of Latvian architectural monuments, the Old City of Riga as a monument of urban construction was defined for the first time during the German occupation. In the battles between the Soviet and German army in June 1941, the centre of Old Riga was destroyed, yet in 1943, still under Nazi occupation, along with the status of architectural monument given to 337 historical buildings the entire territory of the Old Town was also announced as a monument protection zone. The reconstruction or demolition of the buildings included in this list, among them St. Peter's Church, the Town Hall and the House

of the Blackheads, was prohibited.⁸² In the circumstances of warfare, it had a symbolical meaning, however, this fact was not often mentioned during the Soviet occupation period.

The monuments of urban construction as a separate group in the documents of monument protection of the Latvian SSR only appeared in 1967, when pursuant to the decree of the Council of Ministers the protection of historical centres in 18 cities was stipulated⁸³. As noted before, in 1983 their number increased up to 33 objects. The first complex of urban construction which obtained a formal legal protection in January 1946, was again Old Riga.⁸⁴ The meaning of this decision was soon discredited by the demolishing of the remains of the House of the Blackheads and the Town Hall respectively in 1948 and 1954, which was sanctioned by the same representatives of the Communist Party and the Soviet government. Outside Riga, the protection regime was applied to the Kuldīgas and Cēsu Street networks and historical construction.⁸⁵ These events initially were merely declarative, because the Inspection of Protection of the Riga Architectural Monuments was only established in 1968 to carry out this task. In provincial towns there were no such institutions at all.

During the second half of the 1960s, architects started debating in the press, first about the preservation of Old Riga and then about the historical centres in other Latvian cities due to the reconstruction of the cities anticipated in the economic development plan. The press disseminated information on the structures of urban construction, the peculiarities of architectural styles and compositions, as well as the so far little known term “architectural landscape”.⁸⁶ Thus, for the first time in the protection of Latvian architectural heritage it was not the individual architectural monuments that stood out, there were attempts to perceive the monuments as a united complex of urban construction.

The inspection of the historical construction heritage in the cities started in the Latvian SSR in the 1970s and up to the mid-1980s it was found out that in 50 out of 93 inspected centres of cities and towns existed crucial architectonic heritage; however, the same was stated about 140 out of 670 rural centres.⁸⁷

Nevertheless, the inspection and protection events of the urban architectural heritage were uneven. The only example of complex research and protection of urban construction in the Latvian SSR was the regeneration project of Old Riga (1983),⁸⁸ which encompassed guidelines on the research of historical buildings, renewal and further usage. The implementation of the project was slowed down by the same circumstances that affected the system of monument protection overall: the lack of financial, material and human resources. When the funding allocated from the USSR state budget ran out, which in the time period from 1982 to 1991 covered the labour costs of the restoration specialists from the Polish People's Republic in Old Riga, and when the entire economic system changed, the regeneration project of Old Riga could not be adjusted to the new situation and thus this project as a programme of action lost its meaning.

In Latvia, the attitude towards the preservation of the historical construction of a town was uncertain: there was an opinion that new buildings had to be erected to replace old buildings. These new buildings had to be relatively adjusted to the existing urban construction. In the 1970s–1980s it was very popular to demolish wooden buildings, because it was not possible to ensure their preservation and reconstruction.⁸⁹ In the late 1980s, Latvian press discourse criticized the practice of Socialist states to “compensate” for the demolition of authentic buildings with look-alike imitations,⁹⁰ which had nothing to do with the protection of architectural monuments. The technical state of the historical buildings of Latvian cities at the time was regarded as catastrophic on many occasions: “It only remains to decide, whether to restore it or whether to preserve only the facades, erecting new buildings behind them, or to demolish the existing background buildings and to replace them with new buildings.”⁹¹

The condition of the Soviet economy did not provide special grounds for hope in the immediate future. As noted by architect Uldis Pilēns (1956) in 1986, the tired society only saw an opportunity in the restoration of architectural heritage “not to lose the reference points of the still preserved values,”⁹² hoping the lost

ideal past would replace the negative present. The popularity of restoration was turning into an illusory, nostalgic seclusion from the chaotic life of the late Socialist period. Thus, the public awareness of the symbolic meaning of the architectural monuments rose. It was vividly manifested by the majority of votes in favour of the renovation of the House of the Blackheads straight after the renewal of the state's independence, which from the point of view of monument protection was anachronistic.

CONCLUSIONS

The dependence of the cultural policy of the Soviet Union on the ideology of the Communist Party determined the politicization of the monument protection area. The officials of the Soviet state perceived the architectural heritage as a political phenomenon, whereas the popular opinion was that the point of renovating historical buildings was to achieve the presence of a beautiful, visually impressive object. Therefore, the attention was focused not on the entire architectural heritage of Latvia, but on individual objects which were politically significant or popular.

Starting with 1962, a branched system of inspection and control of architectural monuments was gradually introduced in Latvia. There were institutions which coordinated the scholarly research and restoration works of the historical buildings, although the resources of these institutions were not sufficiently large to ensure a balanced preservation of the architectural heritage objects.

The preservation of historical buildings depended on the attitude of the users of monuments, their priorities and interests, which did not correspond to the conditions of monument preservation. The negative impact of these factors could have been diminished by implementing a complex protection programme of architectural monuments, which was frequently discussed in the 1980s, yet such a programme was not introduced.

Public interest in the preservation of the architectural heritage in the Latvian SSR has never been a subject of sociological

research, yet it can be stated that it was paradoxical. Next to an intensive interest in the protection of Old Riga and some of the most outstanding objects elsewhere in Latvia (the Turaida, Cēsis and Rundāle Castles, the historical centre of Kuldīga, etc.), systematic looting and vandalising acts in rural churches were carried out and the Soviet authorities did not object to that even in terms of formal legal acts. In the Soviet period, Latvian society increasingly started to draw attention to the symbolic meaning of architectural monuments, because the historical buildings embodied another, long passed, yet attractive and idealised period, as well as human relationships.

ABBREVIATIONS

CC – the Central Committee

ICOMOS – the International Council on Monuments and Sites

CPL – the Communist Party of Latvia

CPSU – the Communist Party of the Soviet Union

SSR – the Soviet Socialist Republic

USSR – the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

UNESCO – United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

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ARHITEKTŪRAS MANTOJUMA AIZSARDZĪBA LATVIJAS PSR (1945–1991): IDEOLOĢISKIE UN KULTŪRPOLITISKIE ASPEKTI

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Rakstā analizēta arhitektūras mantojuma aizsardzības politika Latvijā padomju okupācijas periodā. Raksturoti pieminekļu aizsardzības pamatprincipi un to saikne ar padomju valstī dominējošo komunistiskās partijas ideoloģiju un atsevišķu arhitektūras pieminekļu tipoloģisko grupu (sagrābo celtnu, bijušo muižu centru un pilsēt būvniecības objektu) aizsardzības īpatnības. Aplūkota valsts aizsardzībā esošo arhitektūras pieminekļu sarakstu veidošanas prakse. Nobeigumā sniegts kopsavilkums par arhitektūras pieminekļu aizsardzības stāvokli Latvijas PSR un par sabiedrības attieksmi pret šo jomu padomju okupācijas laikā.

Atslēgas vārdi: arhitektūras mantojums, padomju kultūrpolitika, Latvijas PSR, pieminekļu aizsardzība.

Kopsavilkums

Rakstā analizēta arhitektūras mantojuma aizsardzības politika Latvijā padomju okupācijas periodā no 1945. līdz 1991. gadam. Raksturoti kopīgie kultūras pieminekļu aizsardzības pamatprincipi un to saikne ar padomju valstī dominējošo komunistiskās partijas ideoloģiju. Īsumā

aplūkota arhitektūras mantojuma aizsardzības institūciju attīstība Latvijas PSR un atsevišķu arhitektūras pieminekļu tipoloģisko grupu (sagrālo celtnu, bijušo muižu centru un pilsētībūvniecības objektu) aizsardzības īpatnības. Aplūkota valsts aizsardzībā esošo arhitektūras pieminekļu sarakstu veidošanas prakse. Nobeigumā sniegts kopsavilkums par arhitektūras pieminekļu aizsardzības stāvokli Latvijas PSR un par sabiedrības attieksmi pret šo jomu padomju okupācijas laikā.

Kultūras mantojuma aizsardzības sistēma Latvijas PSR kopš 1948. gada tika veidota centralizēti un pēc PSRS normatīvo aktu nosacījumiem. Tās uzdevums bija sniegt pārskatu par valsts aizsardzībā esošo objektu skaitu, tipoloģiju, kā arī par to stāvokli un izmantošanas veidu. Vienlaikus arhitektūras pieminekļu aizsardzība bija pakļauta padomju ideoloģijas priekšstatiem un tās uzdevums bija akcentēt padomju režīmam pieņemamos objektus, bet notušet ideoloģiski kaitīgos, piemēram, lielāko daļu no sakrālās arhitektūras pieminekļiem un lauku muižu centriem. Kopš 20. gadsimta 60. gadiem gan arhitektu vidē, gan sabiedrībā pieauga bažas par pilsētu vēsturisko centru saglabāšanas iespējām padomju industrializācijas un komunālās saimniecības problēmu dēļ. Sociālā spiediena rezultātā un arī republikas prestiža dēļ 1983. gadā tika apstiprināts Vecrīgas reģenerācijas projekts, taču provinces pilsētu vēsturiskās apbūves saglabāšana bija problemātiska. Arhitektūras pieminekļu aizsardzība arī padomju sociālisma sistēmā bija atkarīga no celtnes praktiskās izmantošanas iespējām. Visu kultūras mantojuma sistēmu kopumā ietekmēja arī padomju ekonomikas stāvoklis un ar to saistītais hroniskais cilvēku un materiālo resursu trūkums šajā nozarē. Savukārt sabiedrība arvien vairāk saistīja vēsturisko celtnu restaurāciju ar iluzoro priekšstatu par pirmskara ideālo Latvijas sabiedrību un saskatīja restaurācijā simbolisku iespēju atgriezties “zaudētajā paradīzē”, kas radīja priekšnoteikumus anahronisku Otrā pasaules kara laikā iznīcinātā Vecrīgas centra atjaunošanas koncepciju īstenošanai 21. gadsimta sākumā.