

ŽIVILĖ MIKAILIENĖ

MEMORY CULTURE AND MEMORY POLITICS IN LITHUANIA (1990–2018)

THE CASE OF LUKIŠKĖS SQUARE IN VILNIUS*

On 23 August 1991 – Black Ribbon Day, commemorating the anniversary of the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact in Vilnius – in one of the largest and most important public squares in the city, known at the time as Lenin Square, the crowd was going wild: the monument to Lenin was being demolished. Although the planned demolition of the monument had not been made public, news had still got round by word of mouth. Taking down the monument could have provoked political unrest, but after the putsch in Moscow on 19 August 1991, fear of the foreign Soviet army still based in Lithuania no longer seemed reasonable. It was hoped that after the putsch in Moscow Soviet army commanders would no longer take extreme action and bloody clashes with unarmed civilians would be avoided. So the road engineers who carried out the operation looped a rope round Lenin's neck: they thought this would make it easier to remove the statue from the pedestal, but while they were dismantling it, it broke at the knees because of the poor quality of the metal. Hanging by the noose, the sculpture of Lenin for the last time waved symbolically to the masses gathered in the square and was loaded onto a truck. These moments were captured by the photographer Antanas Sutkus. For several years the commander of the revolution 'rested' in a Vilnius art workshop until he finally found his place in Grūtas Park near Druskininkai. After the monument had been taken down, the assembled crowds rushed to collect the parts which had broken off during the demolition process. It is

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not known where some parts of the Lenin sculpture disappeared to – the right-hand toe, the loose legs, and parts of the broken pedestal.¹

This event, which has become part of mythology and marks the end of one historical period and the beginning of another, has become one of the most meaningful symbols of Lithuania's independence. The dramatic removal of the monument to Lenin can be said to have become one of the symbols of the collapse of the Soviet system in Eastern and Central Europe. Soon after, Lukiškės Square got its historical name back and its story was also re-written. The removal of the monument to Lenin – the physical removal of an obvious ideological sign – from one of the most public squares in the capital of Lithuania did not mean that public signs of Soviet ideology, which had been imposed for almost five decades, would suddenly disappear, all the more so since although the monument was dismantled, the Stalinist structure of the square remained unchanged from 1948 until 2017. The complicated relationship with the Soviet past has until now made it difficult to reach certain decisions and achieve a social consensus. Lukiškės Square, as one of the most important *lieux de mémoire*² of the capital Vilnius and of Lithuania, remains today a subject of debate, of memory culture, and a barometer of the political and social processes which were used to influence it, used while re-actualizing complex issues: what new historical narrative should be created; which historical events are meant to be forgotten and which are meant to be revived; in the end, how should the square be itself; according to the new narrative, what symbolic value should it carry in terms both of its functional purpose and of its qualities of memorialization? After all, a new visible ideological 'mark' should symbolize a new period in history.

Researchers of memory culture emphasize that a society needs a vibrant culture of memory to remember its past, to comprehend its present,

¹ The dismantling of the monument to Lenin is figuratively depicted in the recollections of a few contemporaries, see the documentary outline of Lithuanian Radio and Television 'We won: how the knees of Lenin broke', *Penkiolika minučių*, 25 March 2017, available at <https://www.15min.lt/naujiena/aktualu/istorija/mes-nugalejom-kaip-leninokeliai-neatlaikė-582-774154?copied>; also, see 'Kubilius: rugpjūčio 23-ąją reikia prisiminti ir kaip Lenino paminklo nuvertimo dieną', *Alfa.lt*, 23 August 2011, available at <https://www.alfa.lt/straipsnis/12232653/kubilius-rugpjucio-23-aja-reikia-prisiminti-ir-kaip-lenino-paminklo-nuvertimo-diena> (both last visited 23 May 2019).

² On the historical, cultural, and urban development of Lukiškės Square, see Eglė Mikalajūnė and Rasa Antanavičiūtė, eds., *Vilniaus paminklai: Kaitos istorija* (Vilnius: Vilniaus dailės akademijos leidykla, 2012); Lina Panavaitė and Saulius Motieka, 'Lukiškių aikštės Vilniuje urbanistinės plėtros evoliucija, pasekmės ir siūlymai', *Acta Academiae Artium Vilnensis*, 76 (2015): 139–45.

and to build a vision of the future. In terms of national movements or processes, therefore, the concept of 'national memory' becomes a particularly important topic, because it includes understanding, a kind of consensus about what we should remember and how. At the same time, we will not find a modern nation which has not experienced internal conflicts and 'memory wars'. National memory is hierarchical, which means that different social groups compete with each other to consolidate their memory in the public space through a hegemonized narrative. In the process of constructing the identity of a modern nation, tools such as the creation of a new historical narrative (the official versions of history presented in school textbooks), changes to the official calendar (new state celebrations, anniversaries), the creation of a new pantheon of heroes and 'martyrs', the remodelling of memorial spaces (new monuments, new *lieux de mémoire*, changes to the urban toponymy), as well as "memory conveyance tools" such as books, movies, and museums, all play a significant integrative role.³

In this way, memory policy encompasses many social practices and norms. Memory policy is as inevitable as the politicization of history. Another important aspect, highlighted by Aleksei Miller, is that so-called memory spaces created within a memory policy framework can be 'closed' (closely linked to a certain fixed interpretation of past events or personalities) or 'open' – creating an opportunity for dialogue and various interpretations.⁴ These interpretations often cause tensions between different social groups with different conceptions of history, aesthetic tastes, needs, and expectations. The interpretation of these tensions is closely related to discourses of power and dominance. According to the theoretical insights of Michel Foucault, the city is like a battlefield in which different social actors or their groups compete for legitimacy in order to control its system of meanings. One of the most important moments while capturing urban space in both its material and symbolic meaning is the creation of retrospective interpretations of the historic city that essentially reflect not the real events of the past, but create instead a myth of the past. Such myths are about the affirmation of identity and power. A specific feature of memory culture is its institutionalization and ritualization: this type of memory is formed by political regulation. Historical events and images are selected according to their perceived importance to

³ Alon Confino, 'Collective Memory and Cultural History: Problems and Method', *The American Historical Review* 102, 5 (1997): 1386–1403.

⁴ Alexei Miller, 'Russia: Power and History', *Working Papers*, 2 (2010): 14.

the present and the role that is being created for the future. Thus, the management of the discourse of the representation of the past is associated with the maintenance of social order.

The importance of such myths is emphasized in particular in cultural studies of memory,⁵ which investigate and explain the phenomenon of how images of the past function in the present. According to Jan Assmann, cultural memory is a system of values expressed through communicative practices and through various forms of actualization or deactivation of the past indicated in collective memory.⁶ Cultural memory is formally constructed and communicated through texts, images, rituals, and symbolic coding. Its object is not specific historical events or personalities but memories of them. Pierre Nora's theory highlights the importance of "les lieux de mémoire", revealing how political, ideological, and other factors influence changes in symbols of the past and their visual meanings. *Lieux de mémoire* (places of memory) according to Pierre Nora are perceived as symbolic objects, cultural symbols which create collective associations and have the power to bring together images of collective memory.⁷ In terms of the expression of memory culture in the city, the authors indicate one very important aspect, which is that it is closely

⁵ In Lithuania over the last decade studies of memory culture have intensified, see the following publications: Alvydas Nikžentaitis, ed., *Nuo Basanavičiaus, Vytauto Didžiojo iki Molotovo ir Ribbentropo: atminties ir atminimo kultūrų transformacijos XX–XXI amžiuje* (Vilnius: Lietuvos istorijos instituto leidykla, 2011); Alfredas Bumblauskas, Šarunas Liekis, and Grigoriū Potashenko, eds., *Naujasis Vilniaus perskaitymas: didieji Lietuvos istoriniai pasakojimai ir daugiakultūris miesto paveldas* (Vilnius: Vilniaus universiteto leidykla, 2009); Alvydas Nikžentaitis, 'Laikinios ir Lietuvos Respublikos sostinių kultūrinės atmintys: lyginamosios analizės bandymas', *Acta humanitarica universitatis Saulensis*, 9 (2009): 235–46; Vasilijus Safronovas, ' "Lietuviškosios" praeities aktualizavimas kaip tapatumo orientacijos raiška pokario Klaipėdoje', *Lietuvos istorijos metraštis*, 2 (2007): 59–84; idem, *Tapatybės ideologijų konkurencija Pietryčių Baltijos jūros regiono mieste: XX amžiaus Klaipėdos atvejo tyrimas (Daktaro disertacija)* (Klaipėda, 2010); Dangiras Mačiulis, 'Kolektyvinė atmintis ir miesto įvaizdis: Šiaulių atvejis', *Acta humanitarica universitatis Saulensis*, 9 (2009): 218–34; Rasa Čepaitienė, 'Sovietinio laikotarpio istorijos ir paveldo įprasminimo problemos Vilniaus mieste', in *Santykis su istorine praeitimi XXI amžiaus Vilniuje*, eds. Alvydas Nikžentaitis and Aivas Ragauskas (Vilnius: LR Seimo leidykla, 2004), 47–59; Rasa Čepaitienė, 'Kolektyvinė atmintis miestovaizdyje (Vilniaus atvejis)', in *Besiformuojantis ir formuojamas kraštovaizdis* (Kaunas: KTU leidykla, 2007), 86–101; Alvydas Nikžentaitis, ed., *Atminties daugiasluoksniškumas: Miestas, valstybė, regionas* (Vilnius: Lietuvos istorijos institutas, 2013).

⁶ Jan Assmann and John Czaplicka, 'Collective Memory and Cultural Identity', *New German Critique* 22, 65 (1995): 125–33.

⁷ Pierre Nora, 'Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Memoire', *Representations* 26 (1998): 12.

related to the cultural memory of the dominant community or the dominant historical narrative. This is particularly evident in capital cities. In this case, Vilnius is no exception – cultural memory in the capital is a mirror of the cultural memory of the whole country.⁸ All these theoretical insights contribute to a deeper perspective on the question: what role does a particular urban space play in the process of creating national identity by encoding elements of its historical construction or reconstruction?

Not by accident was an analysis of the changes in the memory culture in Lithuania (1990–2018), exemplified by Lukiškės Square, one of the main urban spaces in Vilnius, chosen as the object of research. It represents perfectly both physical changes in the form of urban space in different historical periods and altered semantic content. In other words, the history of Lukiškės Square can be treated much more broadly than just as part of a history of urban development: it also depicts a history of state symbolism. Lukiškės Square, like no other place or monument in Lithuania, is still the subject of stormy debate and arouses the passion of different social groups. At the same time, it perfectly reveals the phenomena which were previously rarely the focus of historical research – historical memory and forms of the expression of the past: representation and power. Therefore, the purpose of this article is to look at the causes and expressions of the conflict encrypted in this space, raising questions about what forms – ideological, architectural, urban, symbolic, or political – they have acquired and are still acquiring, what this says about post-Soviet Lithuanian memory culture and politics, and also to try to understand why there is still no monument in the square which would be meaningful in terms of Lithuanian history.

Lukiškės Square as a *lieu de mémoire*

Broadly speaking, a public square is a large, empty area which is an architectural and urban feature, part of the structure of a city. In cultural memory studies, the city square is more than just a physically visible structure: it is a place which has symbolic and ideological significance, in other words, a *lieu de mémoire*. What is the history of this *lieu de mémoire* in Vilnius? In the middle of the 19th century, in the very organically

⁸ Ludwig Steindorff, 'Glavno mesto kot simbol nacionalne države ve vzhodni srednji Evropi', *Zgodovinski Casopis* 54, 1 (2000): 77–87.

developing suburbs of Vilnius – Lukiškės, where there stood one-story wooden houses with gardens, a large square with a marketplace formed. The markets which operated on Pylimo and Tilto Street were later moved to the marketplace as well. St. George's (Georgijaus, or Jurgio) Avenue (1880) is the main thoroughfare of today's Vilnius New Town (during the Polish period it was called A. Mickevičius Street; during Soviet times it gained the name of Stalin and, later, Lenin Avenue; after independence it was named after Gediminas). In addition to this wide, newly-built street, a large empty space had opened up.

In the 19th century the Lukiškės suburbs that stretched to the west of the new avenue and a spacious, undeveloped space in the centre of this area were perceived as territory outside the city boundaries. Due to this remoteness and the other characteristics of this public space, the Vilnius Governor-General Mikhail Murav'ev in 1863 chose the square for the public execution of participants in the 1863 uprising. According to data provided by historians, 21 participants in the uprising – among them the leaders of the uprising in Lithuania, Kostas Kalinauskas and Zigmantas Sierakauskas – were publicly shot or hanged here. Executions taking place in Lukiškės Square were held in the area near the church of the Holy Apostles Jacob and Philip. According to Felix Ackermann, it is then that in the Lukiškės Square and the entry-points to it a “triangle of punishment” was formed by the tsarist authorities: the courthouse building, the public place of execution (the gallows) and the prison (the Lukiškės prison complex was finally completed in 1904).⁹

For a few decades, the square lay far from the city, but during the 19th–20th centuries as the city expanded, it grew closer. At the end of the 19th century, exhibitions of agriculture, circus performances, and film screenings were organized in the square; at the beginning of 20th century, the city theatre opened its doors and performances continued for several years. During the interwar period, when Vilnius was part of the Polish state, there were still markets and fairs on the square, but it was an important moment because the square also became a space for official commemorations and military parades. In 1921, a plate with the inscription “1863” was installed in remembrance of the victims of the uprising. This was the first time that the square had acquired not only the status of a utilitarian space, but also the status of a representative space and a memorial site.

⁹ For more, see Felix Ackermann, ‘Lukiškių kalėjimas kaip XX a. Vilniaus istorijos mikrokosmas’, in *Vietos dvasios beiėškant*, ed. Rasa Čepaitienė (Vilnius: Lietuvos istorijos instituto leidykla, 2014), 186–223.

In 1936, the square was named after Józef Piłsudski. After the occupation of Lithuania by the Soviet Union, new plans were drawn up for Soviet Vilnius, under which the square was to become one of the most important public spaces in the city, an area which together with the surrounding buildings would form the so-called ideological knot. The monument to Lenin was erected in the square in 1952 as a modified copy of the monument in Voronezh created by Nikolai Tomsii. The square was laid out according to plans drawn up by the Vilnius City Chief Architect Vladislavas Mikučianis.¹⁰ During the Soviet period in Vilnius, a “knot of symbols” was created, communicating an unambiguous ideological “message” to the public.¹¹ To achieve this goal, a complex of objects and toponyms – a visual focus (a monument to Lenin, embodying the revolutionary narrative), street names, and the function of nearby buildings (government buildings) – were used. Lenin Square became the symbolic centre of the city, an important representational focus of official Soviet memory culture. Since the beginning of the Soviet period it had been called Soviet Square and retained that name for some years; in 1952 it acquired the name of Lenin Square and became the main place for official Soviet ideological celebrations. During the Soviet era, the “triangle of punishment” formed by the tsarist government still functioned around the square and only the place and methods of execution changed.

During the period when independence was regained and in the first decades afterwards, rejection of Soviet heritage was intense and widespread, as was the destruction of signs of this particular hated foreign identity.¹² After Lukiškės Square had been liberated from its Lenin monument, it became not only one of the first symbolic sites of struggle with Soviet heritage in the Vilnius cityscape and a focus of the ‘re-writing the history’ but also a site of attempts to reconcile the memories of different social groups.

After the dismantling of the monument to Lenin, there were immediately new ideas for ways to use Lukiškės Square. One of the most popular ways to neutralize former Soviet ideological space is by its ‘decontemplation’ and because of that there was a desperate attempt by political forces at that time to replace the old monument with a new one, together

¹⁰ For more, see the memoirs of Vladislavas Mikučianis: Vladislavas Mikučianis, *Norėjam dirbti Lietuvoje* (Vilnius: Vilniaus dailės akademijos leidykla, 2001).

¹¹ Rasa Čepaitienė, ‘Interpretuojant daugiakultūrį Vilnių: kontekstai, problemos ir galimybės’, in *Naujasis Vilniaus perskaitymas* (see note 6), 59.

¹² Ibid.

with the creation of a completely new vision for Lukiškės Square.¹³ It was evident that a square with the monument to the commander of the October Revolution standing in the middle of it and constructed according to the main Soviet ideological canons could not be an example for further reconstruction projects of the square that were carried out with the aim of a fundamental transformation of that important city space. In the context of the problematic issue of what this vision for Lukiškės Square should be, we should focus our attention on the preconditions for the formation of cultural memory and on the memory policy implemented in the first decades of Lithuania after independence.

The Problem of Creating a Historical Narrative in the First Decade After Independence

After 11 March 1990 in the restored state of Lithuania the creation of a unified, coherent historical narrative was a complicated process. Naturally enough the newly-emerging state institutions were not immediately able to propose a memory culture strategy. After the restoration of independence, conventional typology suggests several basic types of historical narrative construction, Marxist, liberal, and national,¹⁴ but we must not forget the resistance of postmodern supporters to these three dominant historical narrative types, creating instead the so-called ‘small’ historical narratives which partly contest the great narrative of history.¹⁵ Political attitudes have also had a major impact on priorities for the selection of multiple narrative elements.

After the collapse of the great Marxist narrative, the ideological vacuum had to be filled quickly with appropriate new content. During the revival period, Lithuania’s right-wing anti-Soviet political forces were of the utmost importance. It was they who established the processes for the formation of a new identity and for seeking its origins in the past. As mentioned above, the focus at first was on Lithuania after the presidency

¹³ Giedrė Jankevičiūtė, ‘Sovietinis paveldas verčių konflikto akivaizdoje’, in *Patogus ir nepatogus paveldas: Mokslinio seminaro-diskusijos medžiaga* (Kaunas: UAB “Arx reklama”, 2016), 38.

¹⁴ For more, see Rasa Čepaitienė, *Laikas ir akmenys: Kultūros paveldo sampratos modernioje Lietuvoje* (Vilnius: LII leidykla, 2005).

¹⁵ Šarūnas Liekis, ‘Žydų paveldo atgaivinimas ir kultūrinė atmintis Vilniuje’, in *Naujasis Vilniaus perskaitymas* (see note 6), 202.

of Antanas Smetona.¹⁶ However, soon the idealization of this period caused not only historians but also parts of the public to realize that, in order to support the democratization of the life of the newly-restored Lithuanian state, Lithuania's 'velvet' authoritarian model was hardly a fitting example.¹⁷ This shift in memory culture was demonstrated in the results of public surveys carried out in 1991 and 1994.¹⁸

In the first decade of independence, emphasis on the 'national suffering' experienced during the Soviet period was particularly evident in the creation of a larger historical narrative. According to the historian Rasa Čepaitienė, exaggerated victimization and martyrology encouraged pessimism and passivity in society in the face of existing problems, while also preventing an adequate response to other issues or future plans.¹⁹ According to the sociologist Irena Šutinienė, post-totalitarian societies have indeed faced the daunting task of reconciling the memory of various groups to allow them to live together in a society without tension, while creating a common future both for victims of the regime and the former organizers and perpetrators of repression.

In relation to the repression of the past in societal memory and behaviour, the following strategies are seen most frequently: collective amnesia, when the burdensome moments are 'forgotten' and avoided in public memory; the transfer of shared guilt for killings, defeat, and other evils to separate groups of people and the demonization of these groups (for

¹⁶ As an example could be mentioned the years 1989–90 when the concept of a national school was announced by what at the time was the Ministry of Education of the LSSR. According to Šarūnas Liekis, this concept was based on reform of the education system, which was to change the model of secondary education introduced in the Soviet period and to create a new model based on the creation of fundamentally new content, on reformation of the structure of the education system, and on innovation in tools for learning and pedagogy. This step could be treated as a first attempt publicly to declare that independent Lithuania was the legal successor to inter-war Lithuania. For almost ten years Lithuanian history, as a history of national Lithuanians, played a unifying, consolidating role for the nation in the process of political mobilization. However in the early 1990s, Lithuania's aspirations for the EU and NATO membership led to a decrease in the importance of the popular interwar values – nationalism and monoculturalism – which no longer answered the new challenges of pluralism and multiculturalism. See *ibid.*, 204.

¹⁷ Čepaitienė, *Laikas ir akmenys* (see note 15), 297.

¹⁸ If in 1991 most of the respondents considered the interwar period to be the Lithuanians' 'golden age', in 1994 it became the period after 1988 – Atgimimas, see Irena Šutinienė, 'Tautos praeities interpretacijos ir nacionalizmo ideologija', in *Lietuvos socialinės panoramos kontūrai*, ed. Romualdas Grigas (Vilnius: Lietuvos filosofijos ir sociologijos institutas, 1998), 54–5.

¹⁹ Čepaitienė, *Laikas ir akmenys* (see note 15), 299.

example, ‘the bourgeoisie’, ‘communists’, ‘Nazis’); the relativization of responsibility and suffering (‘everyone who suffered’, ‘all collaborators’, etc.); victimization, as when the victim group or community are still perceived as victims; and the constant discussion and rethinking of memory, called “memory work” by Jürgen Habermas.²⁰ It is also important to note that the Soviet era is a complicated concept. Even now, it is quite common to interpret many ‘unpleasant’ phenomena today as part of the Soviet legacy, which usually has a negative connotation,²¹ and is most often associated with heritage which is dissonant, hard, ‘inconvenient’, or controversial.²²

Lukiškės Square – Only Urban or Memorial Space?

In 1995, the first competition for the reconstruction of the square was to be held in two phases. The first phase involved the creation of a purpose for Lukiškės Square and decisions about its future functions, whether representative, memorial, or recreational. In the second phase, it was decided to imbue Lukiškės Square with a new urban quality, to commemorate the history of Lithuania and Vilnius, and to reconstruct it accordingly. Only the first stage of the competition actually took place. Five prize-winning projects offered different visions of the square: to build public and commercial buildings on some parts of the square; to create recreational spaces and memorial zones. Although the second stage of the competition did not take place, a granite plaque with an inscription appeared in one corner of Lukiškės Square that same year: “This square will commemorate the memory of the unknown partisan and fighter for the freedom of Lithuania. 20 May 1995”.

In 1997, a competition was organized for the temporary reconstruction of the square, the aim of which was to redesign the square without imposing any particular memorial emphasis. In 1998, a second competition for the reorganization of the square was announced: it was seen as a kind of intermediate variant until there was a decision on the urban nature of the square – whether representational, memorial, or recreational. Although a

²⁰ Irena Šutinienė, ‘Posovietinė dilema’, *Delfi*, 25 January 2005, available at <https://www.delfi.lt/archive/posovietine-dilema.d?id=5917442> (last visited 23 May 2019).

²¹ Čepaitienė, *Laikas ir akmenys* (see note 15), 192.

²² Rasa Čepaitienė, ‘Disonuojantis, erzinantis, nepatogus? Pasmerkųjų politinių režimų palikimas Europoje’, in *Patogus ir nepatogus paveldas* (see note 14), 11.

winner was announced, the project remained unrealized. It should be noted that following the organization of these competitions, the issues of Lukiškės Square as an urban space, of its reconstruction, and of any monument or memorial were somehow separated from each other and consequently, in the absence of an understanding of the square as a single urban, cultural, and historical object, affected by the problems which developed later on.

On 11 February 1999, the Seimas of the Lithuanian Republic adopted a resolution on Lukiškės Square, announcing that it would become the main public commemorative and ceremonial square of the State of Lithuania with a memorial emphasis on struggles for freedom.²³ The purpose of the square was thereby defined as memorial and representative. The square and the buildings surrounding it gradually became memorial structures for struggles for freedom. Already in 1992 in a building near the square, the Museum of the Victims of Genocide opened at the former KGB headquarters (it had formed part of the abovementioned Soviet “triangle of punishment”); next to it, on Victims’ Street, a memorial was built, an altar made of stones brought from elsewhere by freedom fighters or their relatives. In 1998, the surnames of 195 victims of the Bolshevik Terror were engraved (by the sculptor Gitenis Umbrasas) into the foundation of the building housing the Genocide Museum. In 2006, on the initiative of the Brotherhood of the Laptev Sea Deportees a monument to the deportees to Yakutia was erected on Aukų Street (by the sculptor Jonas Jagėla).²⁴

The *status quo ante* remained, however, on Lukiškės Square. On 17 October 2000, a law was adopted ‘On Lukiškės Square in Vilnius’, indicating that the government would now be responsible for looking after the square. Then President Valdas Adamkus vetoed the law, arguing that

²³ ‘Resolution of the Seimas of the Lithuanian Republic No. VIII-1070 “On the functions of Lukiškės Square in the State Capital”, passed on 11 February 1999’, *Valstybės žinios*, 2 February 1999.

²⁴ The monument to the deportees from Lithuania who suffered and died in Yakutia was prepared for construction in the city of Yakutsk on the initiative of the Laptev Sea Brotherhood ‘Lapteviciai’ and the Lithuanian Community of Yakutia ‘Gintaras’. In 2003, the Mayor of Yakutsk approved the idea of erecting the monument and ensured the allocation of a site for it. In 2005, the monument was consecrated in Lithuania and prepared for sending to Yakutsk. However, the Yakutsk city government, having received the instruction from the Presidential Administration of the Russian Federation, changed its opinion, claiming that the monument to Lithuanian deportees was undesirable and refusing to receive it. For more, see: ‘Paminklas Lietuvos tremtiniam’, available at <http://genocid.lt/centras/lt/471/a/> (last visited 23 May 2019).

the issue of Lukiškės Square should be resolved by the Vilnius City government, taking into account the opinion of the Seimas. This meant reducing the official status of the square from national to municipal. According to the town planner Algis Vyšniūnas, the status of the capital's principal state square was designated as a "town square or street" at the disposal of the municipality, which is why politicians with municipal rank and public administration specialists focused their energy on public relations rather than action.²⁵ This in turn led to an endless debate about the purpose of Lukiškės Square and the issue of a monument: reconstructions of the square were put on hold and no result, as will be seen from further competitions and debates, has so far been achieved.

Lukiškės Square Issues in the Context of the Millennium Celebrations of the State of Lithuania

The issue of Lukiškės Square was revived again in preparation for the celebration of the Millennium of Lithuania. In 2006, following a resolution adopted by the Seimas, the Vilnius City Municipality prepared terms for a new Lukiškės Square reconstruction competition. They invited proposals for the creation of a modern memorial with an emphasis on freedom, reflecting the struggle for freedom and victory of the Lithuanian people.²⁶ This rather abstract description of a "memorial with an emphasis on freedom" created wide opportunities for various interpretations of the subject – how the monument should commemorate the struggle for freedom and immortalize the memory of those who died fighting for it, as indicated by the terms of the competition.

In February of the following year, Vilnius City Municipality organized creative workshops for proposals on public spaces in central Vilnius and access routes to Lukiškės Square. More than three dozen creative groups, not only artists and architects but also theorists, chose to participate. Vilnius City Municipality declared that the event sought to supplement and amend the proposal for the reconstruction of Lukiškės Square according to ideas expressed by the participants. It was emphasized that

²⁵ Algis Vyšniūnas, 'Lukiškių aikštė – socialinio užsakymo evoliucija. Paminklas laisvės kovų dalyviams ar simbolis "Laisvė"?', *Urbanistika ir architektūra* 32, 4 (2008): 208, 219.

²⁶ Vilnius City Municipality, 'Resolution "On the ratification of the conditions of the competition for the architectural-artistic project of replanning Lukiškės Square and creating the symbol of *Freedom*"', November 2006.

any monument should be compatible with the memorial and representational purposes of the square. In April, the municipality announced the terms of the future competition. The jury was composed of 21 individuals – members of the Seimas, representatives of state institutions, sculptors, and architects. In April 2008, the works of various artists were selected and exhibited at the Museum of Applied Art in Vilnius.

The contest, which created a huge new wave of discussions, took place in two stages but an overall winner was never announced. Second place was taken by a proposal from the design company of Šarūnas Kiaunė – to grow grass throughout the square, to arrange paths crossing the square asymmetrically, and to build a stela for a memorial in the southeast corner of the square.²⁷ Although all the groups agreed that in the square there should be some kind of symbolic object representing the state, what kind of state symbol it should be and what form it should take have been the subject of heated debate. In May 2008, the jury shortlisted seven entries for participation in the second stage. However, this phase also reached a dead end and at the beginning of 2009 the Chairman of the Competition Commission, Juozas Imbrasas, the Mayor of Vilnius, announced that the organizers had failed to inform the public about the progress of the project.²⁸

In a broader context, debates on memorialization in Lukiškės Square correlated with changes in the narrative of Lithuanian history as a means of shaping historical policy. In 1998, a new qualitative education concept had been developed – the ‘Living History Programme: Historical Culture for the Formation of Contemporary Consciousness’, devoted to a wide range of issues concerning cultural and collective memory in society.²⁹ This programme had also become a theoretical part of the introduction of the 2009 Millennium commemoration programme. An important qualitative shift had taken place – the main focus to date on the interwar history of Lithuania had shifted to other periods in Lithuanian history, with a

²⁷ ‘Competition for the arrangement of Lukiškės Square’, available at <http://www.architektusajunga.lt/las-konkursai/pasibaige-konkursai/lukiskiu-aikstes-vilniuje-sutvarkymo-architekturinis-konkursas> (last visited 21 October 2019).

²⁸ Paulius Gritėnas, ‘Užburtas Lukiškių aikštės ratas: diskusijos dėl paminklų tęsiasi nuo pat Lenino nuvertimo’, *Penkiolika minučių*, 6 December 2017, available at <https://www.15min.lt/naujiena/aktualu/lietuva/uzburtas-lukiskiu-aikstes-ratas-diskusijos-del-paminklu-tesiasi-dar-nuo-lenino-nuvertimo-56-892744?copied> (last visited 23 May 2019).

²⁹ The author of this programme is the historian Alfredas Bumblauskas. For more, see Alfredas Bumblauskas, *Gyvosios istorijos programa: istorinė kultūra šiuolaikinės sąmonės formavimui* (Vilnius: Kultūros paveldo institutas, 1998).

particular emphasis on the period of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. It is important not to forget the context of European integration, in which not only the Millennium of Lithuania was interpreted, but also the history of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania as a multicultural tolerant state and the prototype of the European Union.

The Living History Programme introduced a new emphasis in public discourse and historiography – the symbols of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, with their emphasis on multiculturalism and a spirit of tolerance, began to offer serious competition to the more nationalistic symbolism of interwar Lithuania. According to the historian Česlovas Laurinavičius, this revival of the vision of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania arose on the assumption that relations between Lithuania and Europe in the interwar period had been highly ambiguous. As a result it was decided to confine the more recent memory construction campaign to the fact of the occupation of Lithuania in 1940 and on these grounds to raise the issue of damage compensation, and the full potential of the history of ties between Lithuania and Europe was ‘transferred’ to the time of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania.³⁰ This is when the new emphasis on the Vytis (the Lithuanian coat of arms, an armoured knight on a horse) arose: it became part of the debate about the monument in Lukiškės Square, representing and uniting the heroic battles for freedom of the 19th and 20th centuries with the impressive history of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. The Vytis became axiomatic to plans for the Millennium.³¹ Thus, the monument to the Vytis in Lukiškės Square was logically thought to become a symbol connecting in one historical narrative the heroic battles of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and the 20th century struggles for freedom, symbols of which surround Lukiškės Square.

Differences of opinion on the monument in Lukiškės Square and the purpose of the square itself were not a novelty, but it was during 2008–9 that broader groups of people increasingly started to be involved. They began to criticize and question decisions made by politicians. On the other hand, the debate also revealed a clear division in public opinion. The older part of society proposed a monument with more traditionally perceived symbolism, while younger and more liberal people wanted a

³⁰ Česlovas Laurinavičius, ‘Klausimai minit Lietuvos vardo tūkstantmetį’, *Metai*, 7 (2009), available at <http://tekstai.lt/zurnalas-metai/5369-ceslovas-laurinavicius-klausimai-minint-lietuvos-vardo-tukstantmeti> (last visited 23 May 2019).

³¹ See Rasa Čepaitienė, ‘Nacionalinis pasakojimas versus lokalis istorijos’, in *Atminties* (see note 6), 229–64.

relaxed urban space and suggested a historically neutral object instead of a monument.³² In March 2009, the Commission postponed the decision-making process, because of public pressure and a failure to reconcile the interests of both sides. They chose to appeal to lawyers to mediate the conflict and its legal aspects. The Union of Lithuanian Political Prisoners and Deportees had previously contacted the conservative Prime Minister Andrius Kubilius and the then Mayor of Vilnius Vilius Navickas with a proposal to stop the Lukiškės Square reconstruction competition and change the jury.

On 12 March 2009 the Association of Architects had a meeting to discuss the issue and concluded that since the Council considered that stage two of the competition had not revealed a clear favourite, it would be expedient to complete this stage of the competition by selecting some of the most promising works. Taking into account the expectations of society, the economic situation, and trends in urban development, the objectives and conditions of the competition would be reviewed and the competition would continue later. The result – the final decision was to postpone a decision. According to the then Mayor of Vilnius Juozas Imbrasas, “there was a competition, but we did not force through a decision, ... the same men who had already spoken then came to a Commission of the Seimas. They argued that the variants presented by the architects did not match the patriotic spirit we sought. Therefore no one was in a hurry. We then listened to other opinions”.³³

Andrius Kubilius, the former Prime Minister of Lithuania (2008–12), said that the number of proposals received at that time was high and that representatives of the diaspora had been particularly active. “We didn’t proceed far, because the project needed money and at the time we didn’t have much. The question was delayed and was postponed”.³⁴ The project was stuck again with no result and the fight for memory continued. Basically, in this struggle, actively broadcasted in the public space, one can observe the collision of several major narratives of history. In the opinion of urbanist Algis Vyšniūnas, while trying to solve the question for

³² The public discussion on the Lukiškės Square projects revealed the opinions of different groups of society on the purpose of the Square. The majority of Vilnius inhabitants stated that there was a lack of vitality in the square and there should be more trees, greenery, flowers, and fountains; whereas former deportees and historians missed the symbolism of the eternal flame and the symbolism of the unknown soldier’s grave.

³³ Gritėnas, ‘Lukiškių aikštės’ (see note 29).

³⁴ Ibid.

Lukiškės Square, two separate models of Lithuania are battling each other, or two historical narratives – the partisan patriotic “give to your Homeland what you must”, and the second representing the “even then we worked for Lithuania” discourse.³⁵ This controversy surrounding the Lukiškės Square question, which is determined by two cardinal opposites, also reflects the general principle of the formation of historical narrative in Lithuania.

Battles for Memory

In 2010, the question of Lukiškės Square was revisited once again. The Lithuanian Cultural Heritage Department defined the boundaries of the territory of Lukiškės Square and confirmed which parts of it were of particular value. The list of objects to be protected included the plaque with the inscription “1863”, six benches, ten lighting fixtures, and a plan of a trapezoidal square.³⁶ In the same year, the Ministry of Environment of the Republic of Lithuania announced a Lukiškės Square competition and first place was taken by R. Palek’s ARCHstudio project *Tranquility (Taika)*. In the autumn of 2012, a competition for a monument was announced, the conditions of which included the requirement to integrate the Eternal Flame, the Tomb of the Unknown Partisan, national symbols, and also inscriptions identifying the different stages of Lithuanian struggles for freedom from the 5th century until 1991: the war for freedom since ancient times and the defence of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania; uprisings against Russian occupation (1794, 1831, 1863); the Lithuanian Wars of Independence, or Freedom Struggles (1919–20) and the Klaipėda Uprising (1923); key moments in the fight against Soviet occupation (1941, 1944–53/69, 1991). The economic crisis halted any decision on the monument for Lukiškės Square and it was revived again only in 2018, in celebration of the Centenary of Lithuanian statehood.

In a public arena controlled by politicians there were also some interesting private initiatives which did not set out to replace the ‘grand narra-

³⁵ Urbanist Algis Vyšniūnas expressed this opinion in his lecture in Šiauliai district Povilas Višinskis public library on 19 February 2019, see the recording of the lecture: ‘Susitikimas su prof. Algiu Vyšniūnu’, available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ByFcaB42Ej4> (last visited 23 May 2019).

³⁶ ‘Apibrėžtos Lukiškių aikštės teritorijos ir patvirtintos vertingosios savybės’, available at <http://testinis.kpd.lt/lt/node/1210> (last visited 21 October 2019).

tive', but to supplement it with an alternative version. One such alternative, in the abovementioned form of a 'small historical narrative', was the story of Brod (the name was derived from Broadway in New York, USA) – the name given to Lenin Prospect by Soviet-era hippies and others connected with Western culture. In October 2011, a monument to commemorate one of the most prominent Brod personalities, the musician and actor Vytautas Kernagis, and the Brod 'children' – the hippies, was created – a bronze bench with a guitar beside it (by the sculptor Daniel Sodeika and the architect Rimvydas Kazickas) and it was unveiled in Lukiškės Square.³⁷ The bench became a monument for the hippies, known as Brod's children, commemorating the fact that 40 years ago they had sat there playing guitars, talking, and protesting. The bench was made exclusively with the support of private individuals – Vytautas Kernagis' friends and other like-minded individuals – and was created on their initiative and with their funding. Those of Kernagis' companions and friends who had said they needed to immortalize the artist on Brod also took responsibility for making the idea come to life, with the money they had raised and with the installation of the bench.³⁸ In 2012, during the Vilnius Capital Days Festival on Lukiškės Square, the Latvian artists 'Frostiart Baltic' installed a huge sand sculpture of John Lennon. The pun, reflecting the artistic idea 'Lenin – Lennon', illustrated the break between the Soviet past and faith in a positive democratic future.³⁹

As a rule, issues around memory locations became increasingly lively in the periods preceding important public anniversaries. On 2 May 2017 the Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania, with 91 votes in favour and no

³⁷ In 2009, a bronze sculpture by the sculptor Romas Kvintas was unveiled in the centre of Nida to commemorate the actor and musician Vytautas Kernagis. For more, see 'Skulptūra Vytautui Kernagiui atminti', available at <http://visitneringa.com/lt/kapamatyti/tyti/skulpturos-paminklai/skulptura-vytautui-kernagiui-atminti> (last visited 23 May 2019).

³⁸ For more, see 'Paminklinis suoliukas Vytauto Kernagio kūrybinio kelio pradžiai jamžinti', available at <http://www.kernagis.lt/projektai/iamzinimas/> (last visited 23 May 2019). Another example mentioning private initiatives is the idea of the artist and photographer Saulius Paukštys and the art critic Saulius Pilinkus generated in 2015 to build in Vilnius a monument to John Lennon. Since the singer had no direct relationship with Lithuania and had never been here, the necessity for this monument in Vilnius was widely and publicly discussed. The initiators of the project believed that the monument would become a symbol of the generation who had grown up with the music of The Beatles. The monument was built using private funds on Mindaugas Street.

³⁹ For more, see 'Džonas Vinstonas Lenonas (John Winston Lennon)', available at <http://www.vilnijosvartai.lt/personalijos/dzonas-vinstonas-lenonas-john-winston-lennon/> (last visited 23 May 2019).

votes against or abstentions, adopted a resolution “On urgent action on the layout of Lukiškės Square in Vilnius and on building a memorial to commemorate the fighters for Freedom of Lithuania for the 100th Anniversary of the Restoration of the State of Lithuania”.⁴⁰ On adopting the resolution, the Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania took into consideration the fact that Lukiškės Square in Vilnius constituted the foremost public square in the state of Lithuania, with memorial emphases on the different fights for freedom, but eighteen years after the original resolution was passed by the Seimas, there had been no clarity on the completion of the works in Lukiškės Square until the commemoration of the 100th anniversary of the restoration of the state of Lithuania.

The Seimas asked the Government to allocate additional funds to complete the works at Lukiškės Square and approve the initiative of the Vytytis Support Fund to build a memorial to commemorate Lithuanian freedom fighters with a sculpture of the Vytytis. At the same time, the Seimas urged the Government and the Vilnius City Municipality, in co-operation with the Vytytis Support Fund, promptly to resolve all organizational issues.

Nevertheless the project faced financial problems with implementation because the funding which had been allocated by the Government was not enough even for the completion of the most important modifications to the layout and there were no funds allocated for the monument to Lithuanian freedom fighters. In addition, we should take into account that the idea to unveil a monument “For those who have struggled through the ages and died for the freedom of Lithuania” (in a form of Vytytis – the symbol of the nation and the state) on 16 February 2018 was endorsed and supported by public patriotic organizations. For example, on 30 November 2017 the Public Council of the Freedom Fighters’ Commission of the Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania released the memorandum addressed to the President, the Speaker of the Seimas, and the Prime Minister in regard to the urgency of erecting a memorial to the fighters for the freedom of Lithuania, with the symbol Vytytis, commemorating the

⁴⁰ ‘Seimas priėmė rezoliuciją dėl Lukiškių aikštės sutvarkymo’, 2 May 2017, available at <https://www.regionunaujienos.lt/seimas-prieme-rezoliucija-del-lukiskiu-aikstes-sutvarkymo/> (last visited 23 May 2019). Full text of the Resolution: ‘Rezoliucija dėl neatidėliotinių veiksmų siekiant sutvarkyti Lukiškių aikštę Vilniuje ir pastatyti Kovotojų už Lietuvos laisvę atminimo įamžinimo memorialą Lietuvos valstybės atkūrimo šimtmečio progai, 2017 m. gegužės 2 d. Nr. XIII-341’ available at <https://e-seimas.lrs.lt/portal/legalAct/lt/TAD/0e4f4ed0308d11e79f4996496b137f39?jfwid=rivwzvzvpvg> (last visited 26 August 2020).

centenary of the restoration of the State of Lithuania, by 16 February 2018.⁴¹ In November 2017, after a year and a half of reconstruction, the hoardings round the square were finally removed and it was revealed to the public. Remigijus Šimašius, the Mayor of Vilnius, presented the reconstruction works which had been carried out on the square and emphasized that “today we are walking for the first time in a European, rather than a Soviet-era square”.⁴² An extremely optimistic perspective was adopted to suggest how the public would be able to use the square – there would be interactive fountains and children’s playgrounds as well as a monument to be built on the basis of ideas selected by local citizens. For a whole month in November there were stands displaying different plans for the monument in the square.

Like any issues related to nationality, the question of whether the Vytis should be a traditional monument or a modern one with historical elements has provoked a massive public reaction. The will of the politicians has been challenged. These discussions have in part shown that democratization processes in Lithuania are growing stronger and that society is becoming more involved in decision-making and more actively expresses an opinion. On the other hand, they have also shown that the authorities and the public frequently disagree, and that it is not easy to reach a consensus. According to the architect Gintaras Čaikauskas, we can view the Seimas resolution as a political and legal document expressing the intuitive will of society to transform this former Soviet ideologized public space into a symbol of independent Lithuania. However, he continues, this physical and artistic expression of freedom has so far remained unfinished because the patriotic forces which acted underground during the Soviet period and created the preconditions for the collapse of the Soviet Union have not found a direct, sincere, and acceptable response in the imaginations of the artists so far involved.⁴³

⁴¹ Full text of the Memorandum: ‘Memorandumas dėl Lukiškių aikštės’, *XXI amžius*, 8 December 2017, available at http://www.xxiamzius.lt/numeriai/2017/12/08/liet_01.html (last visited 23 May 2019).

⁴² ‘Vilniuje po rekonstrukcijos atidaryta Lukiškių aikštė’, *Vilniaus diena*, 2 November 2017, available at <https://www.diena.lt/naujienos/vilnius/miesto-pulsas/ketvirtadienio-vakara-atidaroma-lukiskiu-aikste-835828> (last visited 23 May 2019).

⁴³ Gintaras Čaikauskas, ‘Atskirtys visuomeninėje aplinkos sampratoje. Būdingi prieštaravimai viešųjų erdvių formavimo pavyzdžiuose’, 3 March 2010, available at <http://www.architektusajunga.lt/nuomones/arch-prof-g-caikauskas-atskirtys-visuomenineje-aplinkos-sampratoje-budingi-priestaravimai-viesuju-erdviu-formavimo-pavyzdziuose/> (last visited 23 May 2019).

The commission formed by the government selected five projects. Almost all of them included the symbol of the Vytis, but some members of the Seimas and other public figures expressed resentment that the idea of a traditional monument to the Vytis had been abandoned. At the beginning of October 2017, the Ministry of Culture and the Centre for Contemporary Art presented the five best works selected by the expert commission: the Vytis Foundation project “Remember and Honour” (by the collective: Gintaras Čaikauskas, Kęstutis Akelaitis, Linas Naujokaitis, Rimantas Dichavičius, and Arūnas Sakalauskas); the work of the architect-theorist Tomas Grunskis and the Aexn Association “To Enlighten Through Truth” (this project proposed a shining altar in the shape of the Vytis cross, which would be responsive to human touch with interactive symbolic lighting elements on the paving); a project by the sculptor and designer Andrius Labašauskas (this project proposed installing a memorial wall in the square with tree motifs recalling partisan bunkers); the ethnographer Algimantas Lelešius put forward a plan for a memorial with nine small pools set in the shape of the Vytis cross; and the project proposed by Darius Žiūra, who makes films and art installations – his idea of the memorial was to involve every visitor coming to Lukiškės Square and to give the opportunity to perform the role of a symbolic guard of honour in virtual form: the portrait of the person would be scanned and the videos of people reflecting one’s emotion and civic position would then be displayed on projectors in the square.⁴⁴

The best project had to be selected both by expert opinion and by public vote, each weighted at 50 % of the final decision. Citizens were able to express their preference by voting online. While the online vote was taking place (3–16 November), there was a ‘battle for memory’ in the public space. At the end of the public voting period, several hundred people took part in a protest campaign organized by the public movement *Talka kalbai ir tautai* (Help for Language and Nation) and voiced their opinion.⁴⁵ In October, the Vilnius Forum Organizational Group had

⁴⁴ Evaldas Činga, ‘Penki pasiūlymai Lukiškių aikštės memorialui išsamiai pristatomi parodoje ŠMC’, 23 November 2017, available at <https://madeinvilnius.lt/pramogos/parodos/penki-pasiulymai-lukiskiu-aikstes-memorialui-issamiai-pristatomi-parodoje-smc/> (last visited 26 August 2020).

⁴⁵ See the speech of the historian and specialist in heritage protection Rasa Čepaitienė: Rasa Čepaitienė, ‘Lukiškių aikštė kaip vidinės kolonizacijos atspindys’, *Pro Patria*, 20 November 2017, available at <http://www.propatria.lt/2017/11/rasa-cepaitiene-lukiskiu-aikste-kaip.html>; also, see ‘Keli šimtai protestuotojų agitavo už Vyčio skulptūrą Lukiškių aikštėje’, *Delfi*, 17 November 2017, available at <https://www.delfi.lt/news/daily/>

distributed a petition calling for support for the idea of the Vytis. The petition stated that

“Despite the resolution of the Seimas, clearly expressed by the decision of the Seimas and the results of the public survey broadly supporting this decision, the monument planned in 1999 to the heroes of the struggles through the ages for the freedom of Lithuania has not yet been built. The endless discussion about the concept for the monument and the efforts of the Minister of Culture and some Vilnius Municipality politicians to prevent the erection of a monument symbolizing and affirming Lithuania’s statehood indicates the publicly undisclosed ideological and political context of a societal conflict which is becoming increasingly aggravating.”⁴⁶

There was a fear that the intention was to erase in various ways the concepts of nation and state from the historical memory of the population. In addition, there was a fear that these continuing actions amounted to the extermination of history policy and were essentially a continuation of the policy pursued during the Soviet period.⁴⁷ There was a call for the contest to be declared illegal and for the selection of an unlawful monument to be interpreted as demeaning and destructive to the idea of Lithuanian statehood. Since the monument competition had provoked social conflict it must be the case that the leading projects were somehow disdainful of the idea of the state; the freedom fighters too had intentionally caused a public backlash. It followed that the results of the design competition should be nullified and a new competition for plans for Lukiškės Square should be organized and monitored by “representatives of the public”.⁴⁸

However, despite the fears expressed by right-wing patriotic forces, after the online vote⁴⁹ and expert assessment, the Vytis did not win. The winner was Andrius Labašauskas’ memorial to the freedom fighters, “The Hill of Freedom”, and it was scheduled to be built on 1 December 2018.

lithuania/keli-simtai-protestuotoju-agitavo-uz-vycio-skulptura-lukiskiu-aiksteje.d?id=76382731 (both last visited 23 May 2019).

⁴⁶ For the full text of the Petition, see ‘Vilniaus forumas. Pareiškimas dėl Lukiškių aikštės memorialo’, *Pro Patria*, 22 October 2017, available at <http://www.propatria.lt/2017/10/vilniaus-forumas-pareiškimas-del.html> (last visited 26 August 2020).

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ ‘Vilniaus forumas: neteisėtas ir neskaidrus Lukiškių aikštės konkursas turi būti anuliuotas’, *Pro Patria*, 30 November 2017, available at <http://www.propatria.lt/2017/11/vilniaus-forumas-neteisetas-ir.html> (last visited 23 May 2019).

⁴⁹ For more regarding the results of the vote, see Jūratė Mičiulienė, ‘Lukiškių aikštėje – pagrindžio simbolika’, *Lietuvos žinios*, 28 November 2017, 5.

It seemed that after almost twenty years of unsuccessful attempts to erect a monument in Lukiškės Square, the city would finally see a result.⁵⁰ However, a few days later the Department of Cultural Heritage questioned the legality of the contest, claiming that the “The Hill of Freedom” project would damage some of the officially listed heritage characteristics of the square. The decision was unpopular with supporters of the second-placed Arūnas Sakalauskas and his Vytis sculpture but received support from some politicians. The selection procedures for the memorial were also questioned by representatives of the Seimas’ State Historical Memory Commission.

The delay over the question of Lukiškės Square has shown the political forces involved to be not only incompetent or uninterested in making decisions, but also incapable of reaching a compromise with the public opinion. This impression was heightened because the process of finding solutions to the Lukiškės Square issue had involved important anniversary dates – according to one of the draft laws advocating for the need to build the Vytis monument in Lukiškės Square. According to Laurynas Kaščiūnas, a conservative member of the Seimas, Vilnius has a particular historical and cultural heritage and has borne witness to a long, uninterrupted period of Lithuanian statehood and therefore the situation in which there is still no square in the city suitable for the proper celebration of state holidays is untenable. On the hundredth anniversary of the state and starting preparations for the commemoration of the 700th anniversary of the capital city Vilnius, and in commemorating the year 1949 with the 70th anniversary of the Partisan Declaration, the layout of Lukiškės Square was extremely important.⁵¹ He stated that he had spotted an opportunity to reconcile Labašauskas’ memorial project with a sculpture the Vytis.

The Mayor of Vilnius, Remigijus Šimašius, also took part in the discussions, supporting Labašauskas’ project and arguing that the discussion was not really about the Vytis monument or a memorial to freedom fighters – it was more a question of the fulfilment of promises and the right of citizens to decide for themselves:

⁵⁰ Mindaugas Jackevičius, ‘Lukiškių aikštėje iškils kalva’, *Delfi*, 27 November 2017, available at <https://www.delfi.lt/news/daily/lithuania/lukiskiu-aiksteje-iskils-kalva.d?id=76467223> (last visited 23 May 2019).

⁵¹ Eleonora Budzinauskienė, ‘Konservatoriai: sprendimo dėl Lukiškių aikštės vilkinimas kompromituoja seimą’, *Vilniaus diena*, 8 February 2019, available at <https://www.diena.lt/naujienos/vilnius/miesto-pulsas/konservatoriai-sprendimo-del-lukiskiu-aikstes-vilkinimas-kompromituoja-seima-900539> (last visited 23 May 2019).

“Vilnius is an open city with free and happy residents who have voted and have chosen to support the artistic idea of Andrius Labašauskas. In addition, I want to ask each member of the Seimas to consider the damage that the Seimas’ decision could cause to the law as a symbol in the eyes of society – and as one of the most important symbols of Lithuania.”⁵²

However, after all these discussions, there remains the question which emerged from the very first competitions: what does symbolize freedom? The range of interpretations relating not only to history but also to different value orientations was quite wide – for some people there was a direct relationship to the freedom fighters and the freedom they achieved; for others the interpretation was wider and more personal, involving not only the state itself, but also the human freedom of every citizen living in the state. When no place was found for the Vytis in the capital city of Lithuania, the sculpture was instead built with private funds in Kaunas.⁵³

It should be noted that if a list was drawn up of the most complicated state projects in Independence period, Lukiškės Square in Vilnius would definitely be near the top: since 1999 there have been eight competitions for the reconstruction of the square and the erection of a new monument⁵⁴ and all with no results. Lukiškės Square has been hostage to power games and games of political will for a long time. According to Almantas Samalavičius, the square may be in the centre of the city, but has been left on the margins of urban culture.⁵⁵ A number of politicians have stressed that the issue of monument in Lukiškės Square is unresolved, because public consultations, surveys, contests, workshops, and polls do not convince them that this kind of approach is capable of producing a really good quality result in connection with the wisdom and

⁵² Rima Janužytė, ‘Vilniaus meras dėl Lukiškių aikštės kreipėsi į aukščiausius šalies vadovus’, *Verslo žinios*, 13 December 2017, available at <https://www.vz.lt/laisvalaikis/akiraciai/2017/12/13/vilniaus-meras-del-lukiskiu-aiksteskreipesi-i-auksciausius-salies-vadovus#ixzz5lQhVRgqB> (last visited 23 May 2019).

⁵³ Jurgita Šakienė, ‘Vytis – jau prie Kauno pilies’, *Kauno diena*, 29 June 2018, available at <https://kauno.diena.lt/naujienos/kaunas/miesto-pulsas/vytis-jau-rieda-kauno-gatvemis-870481>; Mantas Jokubauskas, ‘Vilniui nereikalingu tapęs Vytis – jau Kaune’, *Delfi*, 29 June 2018, available at <https://www.delfi.lt/news/daily/lithuania/vilniui-nereikalingu-tapes-vytis-jau-kaune.d?id=78440927> (both last visited 23 May 2019).

⁵⁴ Greta Jankaitytė, ‘Kritikos strėlės: Lukiškių aikštės ir Vyčio įstatyme – teisinė painiava’, *Verslo žinios*, 15 December 2017, available at <https://www.vz.lt/verslo-aplinka/2017/12/15/kritikos-streles-lukiskiu-aikstes-ir-vycio-istatyme--teisine-painiava#ixzz5lQgxzwZu> (last visited 23 May 2019).

⁵⁵ Almantas Samalavičius, ‘Preke paverstos viešosios erdvės’, *Kultūros barai*, 2 (2009): 11.

creative responsibility of a good artist.⁵⁶ It has been suggested that if social consensus is no longer possible, it would perhaps be better to plant a meadow and leave that to the people instead. The very need for the monument is even questioned now. It would be seen as problematic to build a monument in haste without really considering the historical context.

Another important point is that post-war Lithuania's struggle for freedom, as demonstrated by the constructive, comprehensive search for a solution to the Lukiškės issue, does not provide the grounds for social consensus in Lithuania. It is easier to reach agreement on monuments to the grand dukes of Lithuania or personalities associated with the rebirth of the nation than to find a consensus on the commemoration of the post-war Defenders of Freedom. Claus Leggewie, speaking on European memory, says that today, European collective memory cannot tolerate political manipulation because the full context of open-ended historical situations and processes and different national and regional perspectives are not compatible with each other.⁵⁷ In other words, a single proper version and unified interpretation of historical events is impossible and therefore competing versions are presented for public debate. It can be said, however, that in the process of attempting to solve the issue of Lukiškės Square as a 'place of memory', some integration was achieved through the conflict that this involved. The most important thing is to reach some kind of consensus, even if the consensus is that there is no single consensus.

However, as a result of the role it has played in this conflict, Lukiškės Square has become rather a strange place: according to the terminology of local urban planning, it is not a square, but neither is it a municipal park; it cannot be termed a place of recreation, which would be attractive to the residents of Vilnius, or even a place of commemoration where symbolically important official state and public celebrations and ceremonies could be held. This is probably due to the fact that from the very beginning the issue of Lukiškės Square in terms of urban planning and the issues regarding the Lukiškės Square monument were always considered separately, when they should have been considered together in order to achieve a

⁵⁶ As an example, the opinion of the former Prime Minister Andrius Kubilius, see Gritėnas, 'Lukiškių aikštės' (see note 29).

⁵⁷ Claus Leggewie, 'Kova dėl Europos atminties iš naujos Vilniaus perspektyvos', *Bernardinai.lt*, 7 November 2017, available at <http://www.bernardinai.lt/straipsnis/2017-11-07-kova-del-europos-atminties-is-naujos-vilniaus-perspektyvos/165734>, last visited 21 October 2019).

complex holistic solution. A number of town planners have emphasized that when it comes to Lukiškės Square as the main square of the capital city of Lithuania, the issue is fundamental. This is because the problem of state signs, symbols, and monuments is relevant always as an element of state policy and it is necessary clearly to distinguish the basis of the artist's ambitions and the nation's identity, as well as the basis of the pride and self-esteem of the state itself.⁵⁸

Until the question of the monument in Lukiškės Square is resolved, the huge Vytis flag flies in the middle of the square, next to the Centenary Ring memorial (*Šimtmečio žiedas*) that was created in 2018, but is barely noticeable in the wide expanse of the square and consisting of four buried capsules containing the relics of the freedom fighters⁵⁹ with descriptions of them. This memorial site has been desecrated – one of the four capsules and a list of relics was stolen, another capsule containing relics was simply removed and left nearby. There were many different interpretations of the event in circulation, but in principle the media called it an incitement to anti-national hatred.⁶⁰ Jonas Burokas, a representative of the Union of Lithuanian Freedom Fighters, also had no doubt that it was an act of vandalism: “This is the remains of Soviet heritage, these are the acts of those who do not want the people who fought and died for the freedom of the homeland to be immortalized in Lukiškės Square”.⁶¹

Some Conclusions

To return to the question raised at the beginning of the article, namely, why a monument in Lukiškės Square which would be meaningful to

⁵⁸ See Vyšniūnas, ‘Lukiškių aikštė’ (see note 26), 201.

⁵⁹ The relics had been collected from all over Lithuania – from the Hill of Crosses, the main places of death of the Partisans and their desecration sites, as well as from the battlefields of Žalgiris, Saulė, Salaspilis. It is mostly soil or flags but there are also exceptional relics related to prominent partisan resistance personalities – the famous partisan's commander Adolfas Ramanauskas-Vanagas' clothing thread, partisan Antanas Kraujelis' hair strands, relics of the Lukšai family, and their descriptions.

⁶⁰ Ainis Gurevičius, ‘Viena pagrindinių paminklo Lukiškių aikštėje išniekinimo versijų – relikvijų vagi skatino nacionalinė neapykanta’, *Delfi*, 26 June 2018, available at <https://www.delfi.lt/news/daily/crime/viena-pagrindiniu-paminklo-lukiskiu-aiksteje-isniekinimo-versiju-relikviju-vagi-skatino-nacionaline-neapykanta.d?id=78412401> (last visited 23 May 2019).

⁶¹ Ibid.

contemporary Lithuanian society and state, and symbolize central emphases of the national historical narrative is still missing, it should be stated that this question, as the research has revealed, has many facets and levels. The ongoing debate over how Lukiškės Square should be memorialized and what historical narrative it should represent in regard to the culture and politics of the independent Lithuanian state reveals a number of different things.

First of all, we are still trapped in a complicated relationship with our past, especially with the Soviet legacy. This is illustrated by the nature of the debate and the nature of the memorial in Lukiškės Square. Both among political elites and in society itself, the idea that cultural resources must first and foremost be used to promote political and ideological interests is still much in evidence. This is because there is no solid, coherent historical narrative and society is divided into several camps, or two Lithuanian models – the patriotic (or partisan), for whom national symbols are vital for the survival of the nation, and the other, proclaiming the idea of a ‘new global Lithuania’, for whom national symbols in Lukiškės Square are approached from a more liberal point of view. This conflict between two concepts of freedom (responsible freedom and freedom which might be called voluntaristic or consumeristic freedom) really portrays a struggle for values, and so far this struggle is unresolved because of the unstable balance of power maintained by government policy on Lukiškės Square, while the public unexpectedly fluctuates between these two positions.

This conflict of values in Lithuanian society also entails a conflict between generations whose life experiences are very differently encoded – older people are nationally-oriented (a portion of them suffered the cruelty of the Soviet regime), while younger people are often neoliberal consumers. This was noted by James E. Young, invited to Lithuania in 2017 to help solve the question of Lukiškės Square and “look at the situation from different sides and possibly move on from an awkward point of controversy”.⁶² The Lithuanian population, though quite homogeneous from the point of view of religion, language, and ethnicity, has different age-related cultural experiences because half of the population was born

⁶² See the interview of Rasa Antanavičiūtė with James E. Young: ‘Nepabaigiamas atminties darbas: Lukiškių memorialo istorija tarptautinio eksperto akimis’, *Penkiolika minučių*, 21 December 2017, available at <https://www.15min.lt/kultura/naujienu/vizualieji-menai/nepabaigiamas-atminties-darbas-lukiskiu-memorialo-istorija-tarptautinio-eksperto-akimis-929-900328> (last visited 23 May 2019).

and raised in Soviet Lithuania and the other half in a more pro-Western, democratic, and liberal society.⁶³ For the liberal consumer, the existence of Lukiškės Square as a place of entertainment, with fountains in the summer and ice-skating in the winter, is likely to suffice whereas patriotic citizens feel hurt and outraged that the Lukiškės Square question still drags on, that the fighters for Lithuania's freedom have been left without a memorial, and that the square has become a chaotic space which does not convey a clearly patriotic message.

On the social level, the case of Lukiškės Square has shown that the involvement of the public in decisions relating to the democratic processes is increasing. As the art critic Skaidra Trilupaitytė has observed, the forms of consumption which stimulate constant change in democratic societies also change the physical boundaries of public space and our concept of it. Public urban space is a social and communicative sphere which promotes dialogue between citizens and democratic decision-making and these form part of the discourse of civil society.⁶⁴ However, as shown in this article, political forces often manipulate the democratic processes and choices made by local people.

In addition, it is clear that there is still a huge need for the voice of historians to be heard more loudly and for their active role in the formation of historical and political culture. The public debate over Lukiškės Square gives the impression that historians still doubt their ability to act in relation to the consciousness and values of their society. Various theories and interpretations, as the historian Aurimas Švedas has pointed out, are as a rule created in narrow academic circles, involving little interaction with public life.

Therefore, these important issues of historical memory are taken up by politicians who are not qualified to address them. And politicians seeking to consolidate different social strata, to enhance the prestige of the state, and raise national self-esteem use traditional measures which have stood the test of time: their reactions to the challenges of social processes are very situational and opportunistic; they use selectively the ideas of certain intellectuals and cultural figures or certain interest groups or lobby groups; and the fact that society often sympathizes with ideas which

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Skaidra Trilupaitytė, 'Viešoji kultūros, vartojimo ar *kultūringo vartojimo* erdvė? Vilniaus atvejis', in *Lietuvos kultūros tyrimai 2: Muziejai, paveldas, vertybės*, ed. Rita Repešienė (Vilnius: Lietuvos kultūros tyrimų institutas, 2012), 86.

emphasize continuity (or stagnation)⁶⁵ rather than change is also often taken into account.

It is likely that complicated historical experience has resulted in that a large part of society perceives the nation and the state in the 21st century not as two institutions united in pursuing a project of freedom and collective endeavour, but as the result of historical circumstance and special cultural destiny. The effect of the processes of de-Sovietization, Europeanization, globalization, and postmodernization on the self-perception of Lithuanian society first of all manifests itself in the answer to the question what does it mean to have been Lithuanian during the Soviet period, to have regained independence, to have become members of the EU, and to be on the highway of globalization in the face of the relativization of ideas and values?⁶⁶

It seems that when we speak of Lukiškės Square as a place of memory and of commemoration, this question, related to a clear definition of identity – who we are and how we are affected by our particular historical, cultural, and political context, remains crucial but still unanswered. The Lukiškės Square situation has shown that the conflict arising from the discussion of different perspectives on representations of the past as perceived by different groups in society and the demand for their resolution and reconciliation at the highest political level cannot be solved without answering this complicated, multi-layered, and multi-faceted question.

⁶⁵ Aurimas Švedas, 'Lietuvos idėjos paieškos: elito projekcijos', in *Epochas jungiantis nacionalizmas: tautos (de)konstravimas tarpukario, sovietmečio ir posovietmečio Lietuvoje*, ed. Česlovas Laurinavičius (Vilnius: LLI leidykla, 2013), 368.

⁶⁶ Ibid.