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The Legacy of Lithuanian Urban and Semi-Urban Vernacular Architecture and Possibilities of Its Preservation

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Abstract: Interest in vernacular architecture and vernacular buildings has grown significantly during recent decades. Nevertheless, despite the number of important studies that have been proliferating, there is a lot of material in various geographic localities that still requires further scrutiny. Vernacular architecture in the post-Soviet/post-communist space is one such area. In the Lithuanian context, vernacular buildings have been long neglected and marginalized in research projects, even though traditional Lithuanian architecture (previously often referred to as "folk architecture") has been quite well-researched and remains an object of interest. There are, however, certain particular forms of contemporary vernacular architecture—urban and suburban in particular—that have rarely been scrutinized for numerous reasons. The former suburb of Šnipiškės, now being converted into a new center of the city of Vilnius, is an area where modern housing and office towers co-exist with older vernacular buildings. Having been constructed in different historical periods and socio-cultural contexts, they represent the features of local vernacular architecture as well as certain relations to rural vernacular architecture. As an urban quarter, Šnipiškės is comparable to the *kampungs* (or urban villages) that exist in Indonesia and some other countries. The peculiarities of vernacular buildings in Šnipiškės are discussed in this article. The other type of vernacular discussed is the suburban "collective garden" house, largely constructed during the Soviet period when city-dwellers were allowed to maintain small pieces of land for individual semi-urban farming and erect simple structures on their sites. After the fall of the regime, this type of house underwent numerous changes: some of them, designed with the help of architectural professionals, were eventually reshaped and reconstructed by their owners according to the "Do it yourself" principle. Both types represent a culture of contemporary urban and semi-urban vernacular architecture. As cities in the eastern part of Europe, including Lithuania, are undergoing rapid and often heedless transformations, understanding the value of vernacular buildings and preserving some legacy of surviving vernacular structures of various types is culturally important.

Keywords: Šnipiškės; Vilnius; vernacular architecture; traditional buildings; urbanism; collective gardens; suburbs

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1. Introduction

The meaning and the value of vernacular architecture have been neglected for a long time in the history of Western culture. Captured by visions of progress and the promise of modernity, Western societies have been marginalizing the sphere of the vernacular until a number of authors started questioning these attitudes in the seventies and eighties of the last century. One of them was the historian and philosopher Ivan Illich, who reconsidered the notion of vernacular values in his book *Shadow Work*. Illich claimed that the term "vernacular" "comes from an Indo-Germanic root that implies 'rootedness' and 'abode'. *Vernaculum* as a Latin word was used for whatever was homebred, homespun, homegrown, homemade, as opposed to what was obtained in formal exchange. The child of one's slave

and of one's wife, the donkey born of one's own beast, were vernacular beings, as was the staple that came from the garden or the commons. If Karl Polanyi had adverted to this fact, he might have used the term in the meaning accepted by the ancient Romans: sustenance derived from reciprocity patterns imbedded in every aspect of life, as distinguished from sustenance that comes from exchange or from vertical distribution" [1] (p. 57).

Somewhat earlier, architectural historians had turned their eyes to the vernacular sphere, acknowledging an early human drive to build and construct their environment solely by themselves, without the help of persons who were eventually labeled professionals. The American architect and scholar Bernard Rudofsky compiled the highly acclaimed New York exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) and its catalog, eventually known as *Architecture without Architects*, as early as 1964. Though Rudofsky used various terms, such as "non-pedigree", "non-professional", etc., in addition to the word "vernacular" [2], vernacular finally came to be a standard term to describe certain products and activities that essentially differ from those that are produced and marketed by professionals and in a formal and/or industrial mode.

Architectural scholar Paul Oliver was one of the early researchers who conceptualized vernacular architecture and provided working definitions that were accepted by many scholars inquiring into the sphere of vernacular architecture and building. He emphasized the importance of vernacular legacy. According to Oliver, "A culture without the presence of its history is a culture without roots and, very possibly, without meaning. The habitations of mankind are the scene of most of our activities from birth to death; the temples and shrines, meeting houses and communal social structures are the places where people meet their fellows, and commune with their deities. In scale and in detail, the vernacular offers antidotes to the architecture of power, to monumentalism and the profligate use of resources. It touches the well-springs of inheritance and points in many ways to technologically undamaging, culturally acceptable and symbolically significant buildings in compatible landscape environments" [3] (pp. 25–26).

Since then, interest in vernacular architecture and building has expanded, and various geographic territories that contain the legacy of vernacular buildings have been researched and well-documented. The post-Soviet space still remains largely unscrutinized in this respect, however, and therefore this article offers an attempt to discuss urban and semi-urban vernacular issues in post-Soviet Lithuanian culture.

Later, in the article, an exploration of current urban and semi-urban vernacular architecture in Lithuania and its capital, Vilnius, is provided. Peculiarities of this legacy are discussed, and the prospects and possibilities of preserving this kind of vernacular architecture are also briefly touched upon.

The contemporary Lithuanian urban vernacular is intricately related to the traditional vernacular [4]. We use the term "traditional vernacular" in this context to discern this legacy from the urban vernacular that exists in contemporary culture. Thus, further in our research the term "contemporary vernacular" is used to describe the type of buildings that came into being during the modern period (as well as post-modern) phase and are built now mostly in cities and towns by their owners of occupants themselves.

A short comment on traditional vernacular type. The earliest vernacular house in the territory of Lithuania was a construction with small vertical logs; its shape and plan were either oval or square. The oldest type of dwelling was a house with a fireplace. The other old type of dwelling was a house with a furnace and other devices for heating the building in the cold season. In traditional vernacular dwellings, the furnace was large and made up either $^{1}/_{3}$ or $^{1}/_{4}$ of the whole building. The furnace was first made of stone and eventually of baked clay, and it was usually located in the corner near the entrance. The dwellings also contained walls, ceilings, doors and windows. It was from these two early types that forms of later traditional Lithuanian vernacular architecture evolved [5–8]. Wood was the most usual material for vernacular dwellings.

It must be admitted that if traditional vernacular architecture have been significantly researched and is protected by Lithuanian laws regarding cultural and architectural heritage,

this largely does not apply to the sphere of contemporary vernacular the value of which has just been started to be appreciated by architectural and urban researchers. The society at large and politicians have a very limited understanding of this type of non-professional building type. Thus, further research and education is needed in order to challenge the current indifference to contemporary urban and semi-urban vernacular architecture.

2. A Note on Materials and Methods

This article falls within the category of conceptually driven research rather than technically oriented research if one adopts the reasonable and well-grounded classification offered by Ashraf M. Salama [9]. The authors opted for a primarily qualitative rather than quantitative view of their research object, drawing from architectural history, anthropology and phenomenology. The research was based on the method of structural analysis, which was helpful in determining the structural regularities of the object subjected to analysis from various points of view. The method of comparative analysis helped to determine the peculiar forms of manifestation of vernacular architecture and, at the same time, to identify their relationship with traditional and professional architecture. The research presented in this article was generally carried out by means of inductive analysis—from individual facts to summarizing knowledge—based on the analysis and selection of texts and illustrative material from Lithuanian and international sources. The on-site study of research objects, their photofixation and summarization, and the systematization of the collected material were especially important parts of the process.

3. Contemporary Urban Vernacular: The Case of Šnipiškės

3.1. Brief Historical Overview of the Area

If one takes a closer look at the expanding contemporary cities of Lithuania in the twenty-first century, one can find a variety of attention-grabbing manifestations of vernacular architecture. Some cases are particularly curious just because clusters of vernacular buildings exist right next to the most progressive, dynamically developing, economically promising urban areas. One such example that can be considered in this context is the area of the former suburb of Šnipiškės in Vilnius, where the newest, largest, most modern buildings of the city center are often found in the visually contrasting neighborhood of what remains of old Šnipiškės.

Šnipiškės—historically one of the oldest suburbs of Vilnius and now part of the city center—started to develop in the early sixteenth century, mostly due to warehouses for merchandise being erected on the right bank of the River Neris. This process was accelerated when a wooden bridge with brick supports was constructed, according to the charter of Ulrich Hosius, on the road leading to the city of Ukmergė on the other side of the river in 1532–1534. Several noble families acquired lands in the suburb, buildings to house foreign envoys (those of Muscovy and the Tartars) were built on the orders of the city's magistrate, and glass and ceramics manufactories started to operate in the area. The church of Saint Maria Theresa (eventually demolished in the mid-nineteenth century by the flood) was erected in the eastern part of the present-day territory of Šnipiškės, then known as Žvejai (fishermen's district) [10]. A Jewish cemetery was established in Šnipiškės, though the exact date of this event is unknown. According to historian Elmantas Meilus, the cemetery existed from at least the end of the sixteenth century as the charter of 1593, issued by the Polish king and the Lithuanian Grand Duke, granted Jews the right, among other things, to have a cemetery in Šnipiškės and build a fence around it [11]. The cemetery existed until 1831. In addition, the Church of Saint Raphael the Archangel was built in the suburb in the eighteenth century and later handed over to the monks of a religious order (Ordo Clericorum Regularium pauperum Matris Dei Scholarum Piarum).

In general terms, Šnipiškės underwent a more significant process of urbanization in the nineteenth century under Russian rule (the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth ceased to exist at the end of the eighteenth century), especially after the imperial Russian military was stationed in the area and barracks for soldiers were built there. Since that period,

the suburb of Šnipiškės has become an integral part of the city of Vilnius. The area was significantly redeveloped after World War II by Soviet urban planners with the aim of modernizing different parts of Vilnius.

The most essential transformation of Šnipiškės as far as its layout, structure and architecture are concerned occurred in the post-Soviet period. In the last two decades, Šnipiškės has been converted into a new center of Vilnius as the municipality decided to move its headquarters to the right bank of the River Neris. Following the municipality's lead, several banks and businesses moved their offices and headquarters into the area, and new housing projects were implemented at the same time. Consequently, many vernacular buildings in the area were demolished because of redevelopment projects. The process of establishing the new center of Vilnius was highly controversial, contested and fuzzy and has been subjected to criticism [12–15].

In the popular media, some parts of Šnipiškės have been occasionally compared with slums, and even if this comparison is somewhat exaggerated, one should have in mind that "Slums have been a consistent part of urban development, in pre and post-industrial Europe and America in particular, long before it became a phenomenon predominantly associated with the developing regions" [16] (p. 314). As part of Vilnius, however, Šnipiškės (Figures 1 and 2) perhaps has more in common with the so-called urban villages (*kampungs*) that exist in contemporary Indonesia and Malaysia (Figures 3 and 4). As this comparison has not been studied so far, we leave this comment open fur further exploration and research on possible analogies of Eastern European urban vernacular areas and urban villages that exits in these far-away countries.

Figure 1. The central part of Šnipiškės. Photo by A. Gabrėnas.

3.2. Characteristics of the Urban Area and Local Vernacular

A particularly exceptional part of the area of Šnipiškės is enclosed by the Kalvarijos, Žalgirio, Lvovo and Linkmenų streets, within which the constructions of old suburban houses and farm buildings still remain. During the Soviet era, households in Šnipiškės were subjected to changes as the suburbs were nationalized, a process according to which a house previously belonging to one owner was divided into several residential units [17]. This led to the transformation of buildings with a single architectural expression into structures that were often visually divided from the outside. It can be said that the property redistribution that took place in Šnipiškės directly led to the marginalization of the local living environment—where there are many owners who have smaller parts of one house and a yard at their disposal, there are many different approaches to function, aesthetics or order. Living in a house divided into several apartments probably never seemed to be a particularly attractive prospect, which attracted lower-income residents to Šnipiškės,

who managed their living environment with the simplest, most readily available, or most affordable means.

In this district (Figure 5), unlike anywhere else in Vilnius, many structures were invented and constructed by the residents themselves. They built, rebuilt, renovated, repaired and re-repaired the dwellings with their own hands. There are many buildings that appeared at different times, superstructures appeared next to and on top of previously built houses, repairs were made to different facades of the same house, the sizes and locations of openings were changed or appeared, various types of roof shapes and materials, storerooms, woodsheds, gazebos, garages, outdoor toilets in yards or various types of extension, fences of different sizes and materials, and yard coverings can be found, and there are deliberate and random ways of landscaping plots. It should be emphasized that these processes took place using the previously solid architecture and the old buildings' surroundings. In some of these variously improved, repaired and reconstructed buildings, the original architectural idea can still be seen. These are often simple—one might say traditional—elongated buildings with simple gable roofs, not high, with inexpressive or non-existent porches, modestly decorated shutters, and cornices.

Figure 2. A street in Šnipiškės. Photo by A. Gabrėnas.

Figure 3. A *kampung* in Semarang, Indonesia. Photo by A. Samalavičius.

Figure 4. A *kampung* in Bandung, Indonesia. Photo by A. Samalavičius.

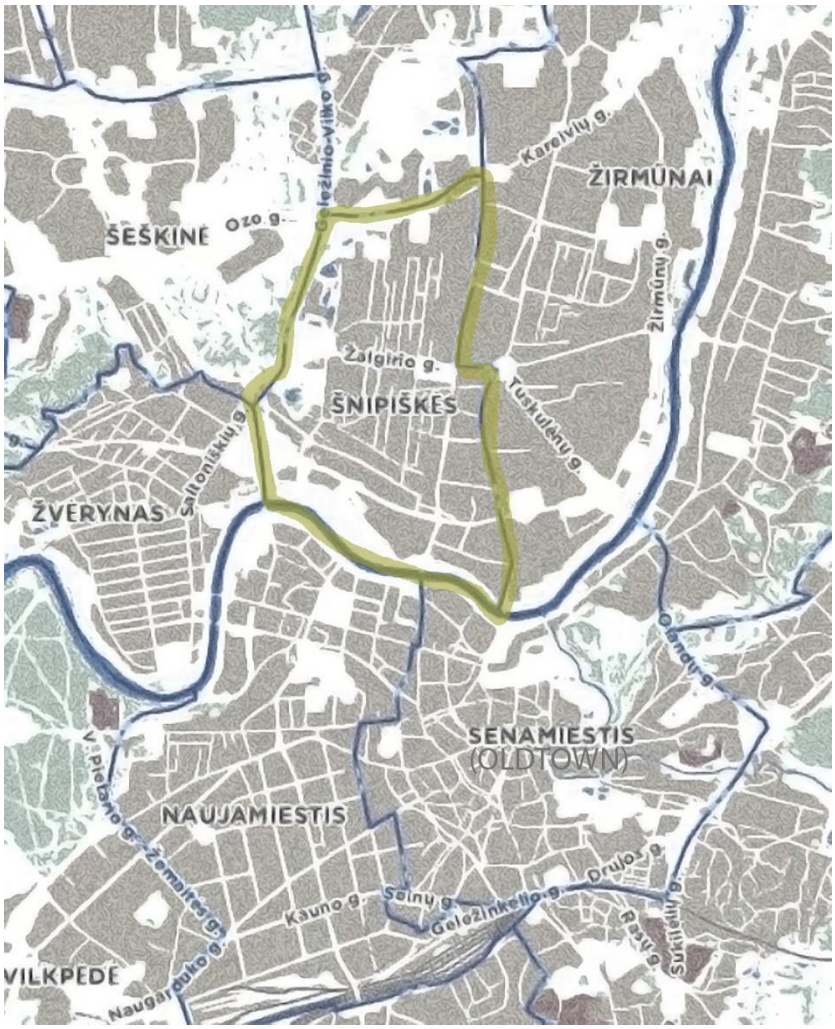

Figure 5. A map of Vilnius with the location of Šnipiškes. Image by A. Gabrėnas.

There is also a peculiar tradition of townhouse construction here. Such houses are larger and sometimes more complex in volume, with higher roofs, and often the roofs cover the whole residential second floor of the building. Today, many of these buildings

belong to several owners and are a negative illustration of the nationalization processes that took place in Šnipiškės (Figure 6). Once recognizable and common forms of traditional architecture are now mostly deformed, hidden or damaged. The general abundance and appearance of such structures led to the impression of the place's abandonment, and in the popular media, Šnipiškės was called, for example, Shanghai [18], thus associating it with disorder, chaos, and being a garbage dump. However, it should be noted that in such an environment, full of randomness, disorder and disorganization, there are objects whose aesthetics are attractive and interesting, especially considering the conditions in which they appeared.

Figure 6. Wooden dwelling in Šnipiškės. Photo by A. Gabrėnienė.

That a handcrafted result—without the involvement of a professional architect or builder—can be attractive and have an expression that can be appreciated as artistic has already been noticed by architects, who, creating appropriate conditions, have experimented with such structures themselves. In this context, it is worth mentioning the architects Susanne Ussing and Carsten Hoff (competitive, unrealized project New Types of Housing Blocks, 1970–1973) [19] or the Pritzker laureate Alejandro Aravena (Quinta Monroy housing project, Iquique, Chile, 2001; Villa Verde housing project, Constitución, Chile 2009–2013) [20,21]. These developers were united by the idea that by providing a certain professionally designed building base, the foundations of structures can enable the people living there to create and further develop the structure themselves. On the one hand, these are examples of more social, inclusive, and economical architecture, and on the other, they are compositionally interesting formations where, among the professionally thought-out, pre-set frames, parts of buildings created by the people themselves later appear and are very diverse from a visual point of view. A similar process is taking place in Šnipiškės, yet in this particular urban area, the buildings of more or less solid original architecture continue to evolve according to the needs of the local population, changing or being filled with new forms, materiality, etc.

3.3. The Materials, Construction and Architectural Details of Vernacular Dwellings in Šnipiškės

It should be noted that not all of these evolutionary improvements have been successful. Some of them have already turned into piles of garbage due to unsuccessful structural or functional solutions, natural wear and tear and the like. However, in some buildings and their plots, despite the use of very simple means, one can see signs of not just random but consciously created aesthetics. Smooth or profiled metal (tin) sheets can be used to improve

the binding and appearance of walls over time, and the smooth tin sheets are sometimes also painted. Often the facades are clad with vertical and horizontal wood paneling of various profiles (sometimes even imitating half-logs). This is how the walls of not only wooden but also brick houses are cladded (Figures 7 and 8). There is also the reverse option when a wooden wall is covered with bricks or plaster. A more practical solution, but incomparably more discouraging to the eyes of a professional, is to finish facades with plastic paneling, under which additional insulation is sometimes hidden. Perhaps the oldest wall repair material in Šnipiškės is ruberoid, which was used to cover the facades of wooden rental houses. In some places, repairs are made with sheets of oriented strand board (OSB). All these versions of facade repair illustrate the external materiality of various extensions, and integrity or uniformity with the materials already used in the building is rarely sought here.

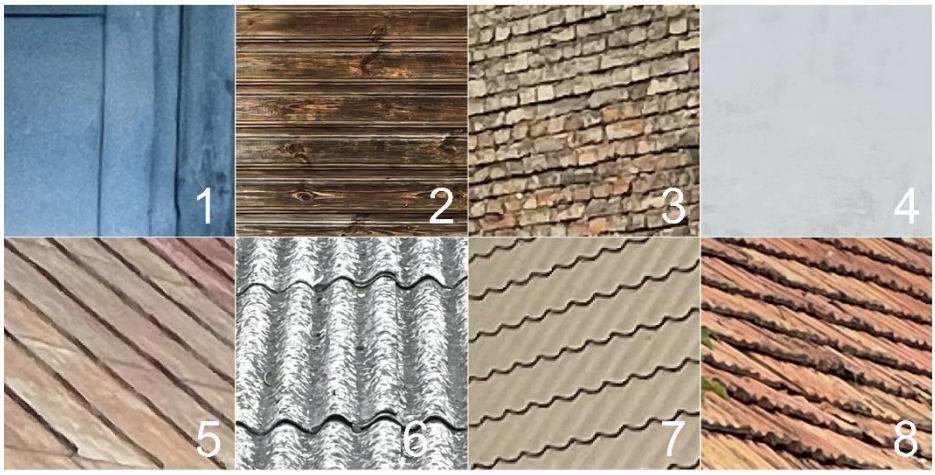

Figure 7. Building materials in Šnipiškės: 1—metal sheet, 2—wooden cladding, 3—bricks, 4—plaster, 5—rolled tin, 6—asbestos, 7—steel, 8—clay tiles. Photos by A. Gabrėnas.

Figure 8. Building in green color: wall—metal sheet, wooden cladding, roof—asbestos, rolled tin. Building in white color: wall—bricks, roof—steel. Photo by A. Gabrėnas.

Another particularly visible part of the buildings are the roofs, which in the oldest buildings are covered with rolled tin, which is often already rusted and patched. The roofs of a large number of buildings make use of corrugated gray asbestos sheets. The most recently repaired roofs are covered with profiled sheets of variously colored tin/steel or composite materials (Figures 7 and 8). Some places have clay tile roofs. As for the openings of buildings, it should be noted that the sizes of windows and doors are "corrected", reduced, or increased, and sometimes their location is changed. Often, new openings are

installed according to the current need in order to have a separate entrance to a part of the building or to let daylight into it. Traditional wooden windows are rarely reproduced here with the same material. The new windows are usually plastic, and the previous division is rarely repeated in the new one. The shutters provide an interesting detail; if preserved, they are often of the original wood, sometimes painted in different colors by the owners. There are also plastic protective shutters, roller shutters, as well as simple metal bars. Doors, both old and new, are most often made of wood, but some are wooden and covered with metal sheets or plywood. In some places, standard so-called "armored" doors are installed, or they may be simple wooden doors that can be bought at a building materials store.

Where businesses or services are located on the first floors, there are glazed doors with metal or plastic frames. Various farm buildings are also built from a wide variety of materials—wood, metal, asbestos sheets, OSB panels, plastic, etc. As with residences, several types of materials can be used for the construction and repair of auxiliary buildings. Next to the buildings or on their walls and roofs, there are various technological devices (electricity and gas meters, heat pumps, etc.) that become part of the overall appearance of the buildings' exteriors. Metal mailboxes can also be found near the boundaries of yards (Figure 9), the enclosures of which are no less diverse. Here, next to a wide variety of wooden structures (vertical/horizontal boards and slats, etc.) and walls and fragments of masonry, there are metal mesh and frame fences or metal and asbestos sheets simply stuck into the ground. In some places, fences are constructed using standardized concrete, metal or wooden elements sold in a building materials store. The ingenuity of the local residents can be surprising, for example, through the use of a bamboo fence.

Figure 9. Metal mailboxes in Šnipiškės. Photo by A. Gabrėnas.

All this variety, often existing in one building in one yard, creates an incredible variety of shapes, textures and colors, which reflects the economic capabilities, construction skills and aesthetic understanding of the local people. However, in all the disorganization and disorder of such an environment, sometimes one can see constructions that happened by chance but are visually attractive (Figure 10).

Figure 10. A gate near a dwelling house in Šnipiškės. Photo by A. Gabrėnienė.

Some local people are truly artistically inclined and are able to create expressive, consciously composed environments with the simplest of tools. Šnipiškės is an example where contemporary architecture has strongly changed from its original state; due to various circumstances, it was rebuilt and expanded by the residents and, in many cases, offers vivid examples of vernacular architecture. Examples of such architecture can be found both in cities and elsewhere. Still in Vilnius, in the districts of Žvėrynas or Užupis, there are interesting contemporary vernacular structures. In other cities, such as Panevėžys, there were and, to an extent, still are less affluent parts of the areas of individual and mostly wooden residential houses (in Šiauliai st. and Donelaičio st.). However, of course, one will not find as concentrated a variety of independently and seemingly randomly—even chaotically—created environments there as can be seen in the case of Šnipiškės, as discussed above.

4. Semi-Urban Vernacular: The Legacy and Transformations of "Collective Garden Houses"

4.1. The Legacy of Soviet Design and Vernacular Adjustments

The so-called "collective garden houses" can be considered another manifestation of more recent non-professional/vernacular architecture in Lithuania (Figure 11). This is a type of building where the owner could participate the most in its creation and where the hand of a professional (in its design or even its construction) was not necessary. The

architectural researcher Matas Šiupšinskas has emphasized that collective gardens became a rare oasis of individual construction during the Soviet era. Although collective gardening was encouraged in the Soviet Union, the existence of a garden house—a summer house—was not officially defined. Although there were "government" garden house projects and their parts were even manufactured in factories, it was not uncommon for garden owners to build houses of various sizes (up to 25 m^2 or even 45 m^2) and aesthetics from materials found anywhere or sometimes even stolen by the gardeners from state building sites [22]. Today, "normal" residential houses are built in what were formerly collective gardens instead of garden houses, especially near big cities, but there are also still structures that recall the times of poverty and restrictions and which are interesting in their expression. It would be difficult to say exactly which of them were built according to a typical fashion, but there is no doubt that even garden houses built in this way often acquired original elements that the owner liked.

Figure 11. Garden house in Pupojų st., Vilnius. Photo by A. Gabrėnas.

Among the houses with the simplest form are buildings with a gable roof, which are almost square in plan. The angle of the roof can be very varied, however, and the shape of the volume itself could be variously transformed; for example, the same gable roof could be divided into two parts of different heights or have additional canopies to cover the windows and balconies of the second floor, recesses or extensions appeared on the first floor by entrances and stairs, etc. Sometimes such houses had extensions—verandas, storerooms, carports, or simply an above-ground part covering a larger basement floor. It should be noted that it was precisely these elements that strongly determined the fact that it was not easy to find identical garden houses. Perhaps some of the most modest garden houses in terms of their form had single-pitched roofs. Such houses were usually one-story, did not have an attic and were smaller in volume.

Individually, such small garden houses had a more ingeniously modified roof, which, for example, could have a low four-sided shape. In this regard, we should mention the tent-shaped garden houses, which were essentially gable roofs built directly on the ground, under which doors and windows were installed at the ends of the structure. Here again, various terraces, verandas, outbuildings, and "breaks" in the roof itself appeared in and around the form itself. Sometimes they were such that the original forms became difficult to recognize. Another feature that determined the appearance and certain originality of the garden houses is the raising of the already discussed forms on plinths of various heights and configurations, where additional auxiliary sauna rooms were often installed. Such

plinths made it possible to build a garden house with a more complex layout and sometimes to install balconies, verandas or even greenhouses on the wider part protruding from under the house. Such plinths were sometimes so high that they looked similar toa full-fledged floor and often gave the garden house a unique appearance, as if the building itself were raised up. Garden buildings with other functions, which were also often examples of great human ingenuity, are worthy of being discussed separately. These buildings include outdoor kitchens, bakeries, storerooms, greenhouses, outdoor terraces/canopies, well houses, and other auxiliary buildings.

4.2. The Structure, Plan, Materials and Other Peculiarities of Garden Buildings

While the main garden house was mostly rectangular in plan or modified to be such, the auxiliary buildings might be regular, oval or polygonal in plan. On the other hand, the structure itself might sometimes deliberately be given the appearance of a windmill or a mushroom, for example, by fitting decorative wings to it or by placing a corresponding semi-circular roof cap on it. These and other details were added completely without restraint, as on buildings for which there was no project and whose creation was entirely at the will of the owner and depended only on his imagination and whims. These buildings were sometimes overly utilitarian or laconic, even visually primitive, but they could sometimes be an illustration of the builder's true craftsmanship with various complex, intricate details. It is worth noting here that in all garden buildings, some of these details were stylizations of ethnographic elements characteristic of traditional historical architecture. The variety of materials used, both in the garden houses and in other garden buildings, was great. Perhaps the main material was wood, which was used both as a building material for the construction of walls, roofs, doors and windows and for the decoration of walls, both inside and outside. Wood was also perfect for beautifying various railings, columns, stairs, openings, and parts of the roof (Figure 12). It is such a universal material that every craftsman can easily manage that it allowed for the realization of the strangest structural and decorative ideas. In collective gardens, one can find structures that almost resemble fairy-tale illustrations (Figure 13).

Figure 12. Garden house in Gvazdikų st., Vilnius. Photo by A. Gabrėnas.

Figure 13. Museum "Girių aidas" in Druskininkai, designed by Algirdas Valavičius in 1971. Photo by A. Gabrėnas.

When discussing contemporary vernacular (sometimes called "build-it-yourself") structures, it is worth remembering the highest wooden residential building in Arkhangelsk, born without any official permits and projects (started in 1992, demolished in 2008) and built by the controversial local businessman Nikolay Sutyagin. The building was 44 m high and dominated the city skyline [23]. The house was visually reminiscent of a castle or a tower from a children's fairy tale and was proof that sometimes neither specially designed structures nor new technologies need to be used: the natural physical and aesthetic properties of wood allow one to build a structure in the shape they dreamed of. In Lithuania, a building that can be considered in the context of such literary aesthetics is the wooden museum "Girios aidas" in Druskininkai (designed by A. Valavičius, 1971), imitations of whose decorative elements can also be found in some buildings in collective gardens. Art historian Laima Laučkaitė identified this structure as a wooden artifact characterized by Soviet-era folk art, folklore motifs, traditional peasant construction, modern architecture, and natural elements [24] (Figure 13).

Another common material in collective gardens was brickwork. Silicate and, occasionally, ceramic bricks were used here. Sometimes both types of bricks were used, and in one house, a different brick color was used to highlight openings or to introduce other decor. In newer, more modern versions of garden houses, various cement and silicate blocks are used for wall masonry, which is sometimes plastered and painted. In some houses that have already been repaired, the walls are covered with plastic boards. Reinforced concrete blocks or field stones were used for the foundations. With regard to the roofs, gray or pink asbestos panels were probably used most often. Occasionally, the roofs were covered with rolled tin or steel sheets. Metal is sometimes used for railings, columns and stairs. It is noteworthy that, considering the materiality of the collective garden buildings in general, they are mostly built from the simplest materials, where the uniqueness, originality and interest of each building are determined by the already mentioned variety in building volumes, shapes of openings, and differences in details. The personal contribution of each owner of such a garden house may be minimal, but a distinctive facade detail, cladding or roof color makes each of these garden houses original and relatively unique and, at the

same time, makes the overall picture very diverse, even somewhat chaotic. However, the variety of forms, colors, materials, and details of garden houses is testament to the creative nature of man and the desire to be at least somewhat unique (Figure 14). In addition, it is also testament to the desire to escape from the strictly organized urban environment and sometimes from specific, architecturally monotonous residential areas.

Figure 14. Building materials of garden houses: 1—wooden cladding, 2—bricks, 3—plastic boards, 4—field stones, 5—gray asbestos panels, 6—pink asbestos panels, 7—rolled tin, 8—steel sheets. Photos by A. Gabrėnas.

It should be noted that collective gardens remain an area of somewhat independent architectural experimentation and creativity. It is possible to build garden structures of up to 80 m^2 on collective garden plots without going through the procedure of obtaining a construction permit [25]. Thus, building in a collective garden can be legally done both as part of a project or without a wider project, sometimes with the help of a professional architect or, most often, simply by building it yourself. It is interesting that there is even a supply of small garden buildings, where manufacturers offer structures that usually resemble a rental house, which is often decorated as a house with traditional ethnographic architecture, for private purchase. It is usually a low-rise building with a square plan and a gable roof extending over the terrace, which is usually at the front of the house. Windows, doors, terrace railings, and other elements are often decorated, divided into motifs reminiscent of rural architecture [26]. Despite the stylized appearance of such cabins, there is a large selection of them, which indicates the demand for them and the buyer's aesthetic desire for elementary buildings that look as if they had invented and built them themselves and in which objects of the most diverse purposes and modern expressions appear. Other buildings and objects built by manufacturers or the people themselves are also sold. An interesting example that can be mentioned in this respect is the wooden children's playhouse in Panevėžys Country, which has a clear utilitarian shape, is built from wood, an easily processed material, and most importantly illustrates the attention of the builder to the physical and spiritual needs of his children (Figure 15).

Figure 15. Wooden playhouse for children in Panevėžys County by Ramūnas Kęstaitis, 2021. Photo by A. Gabrėnas.

5. Discussion

It should be noted that the cases of both Šnipiškės and collective gardens are interesting from social and cultural points of view, revealing the human tendency toward a variety of forms, materials and colors. The whimsical existence of such areas reminds professional architects that order, organization and rationality are not always attractive and sometimes seem monotonous and even repulsive to the person who has to use the designed environment. Such examples of vernacular architecture are a reminder that the main context of an architect's work is a person and that an empathic, attentive consideration of a person's needs and his ability to feel and create a sustainable environment with his own hands is necessary [27,28]. It is the pursuit of individualized, human-scale architecture that has allowed MVRDV (Nieuw Leyden, Netherlands, 2013) and COBE (Kids' City Christianshavn, Copenhagen, Denmark, 2017) to create truly excellent examples of modern residential or public environments [29,30].

Vernacular architecture has been an object of serious research for decades. Such important classical studies as books by Paul Oliver [31,32] or such studies as volumes co-authored by Oliver, Velinga and [33] as well as book edited by Nezar AlSayyad and Jean-Paul Boudier [34] represent the growing interest and achievements in research on vernacular buildings in various parts of the world. More lately there has been a focus on urban vernacular as an equally legitimate study area [35].

When assessing contemporary urban and semi-urban vernacular architecture in Lithuania (and possibly in other post-Soviet societies), it is important to bear in mind that until

recently, the term "vernacular architecture" hardly existed in local research discourses as during the Soviet era, other, more ideologically loaded terms were preferred, such as "folk architecture". More recently, such categories as "traditional architecture" were applied mostly to the rural architectural heritage, which is several hundred years old. It should be noted, however, that in post-Soviet research discourses, the category of "traditional architecture" has been applied to the legacy of rural vernacular architecture, and "vernacular" as a descriptive term was and still is rarely used by Lithuanian architectural scholars. Accordingly, as one can judge from the usage of terms that dominate in the field of architectural research as well as the general attitude toward non-professional and especially more recent architecture and buildings, urban and semi-urban vernacular buildings have either been totally neglected or culturally marginalized as having neither aesthetic, economic nor symbolic value.

Some contemporary vernacular architecture—especially buildings of the so-called "collective gardens" of the Soviet era—often demonstrates some remaining features of industrial design together with many deviations that were done in the post-Soviet period as owners largely reshaped and reconstructed these kinds of buildings by themselves, not with professional qualifications but simply because of aesthetic taste. Thus, quite often, these buildings in urban territories that recall slum areas are mixed with ambitious villa types of architectural structures built by more affluent owners as well as high-rise office towers that co-exist in the same area (as in Šnipiškės), standing in stark contrast to each other.

It is quite natural that some contemporary vernacular buildings (most of the relics of "collective gardens", etc.) are destined to be pulled down because development, redevelopment and renovation projects are continually being implemented, especially in large cities, such as Vilnius. Vernacular architecture of this type does not fall into any category of architectural heritage that is protected according to Lithuania's current legislation. Quite often, the owners themselves demolish the buildings for various reasons, or new owners of semi-urban vernacular buildings choose to pull them down and instead build objects more in line with their tastes or, alternatively (and perhaps more regularly), hire professional architects to design new structures providing more comfort and representing a different aesthetic quality. In other cases, vernacular buildings have been pulled down or reshaped by their owners or those who acquired such properties from their previous owners.

Nevertheless, some cases are far more controversial. The vernacular buildings of Šnipiškės make up a special case. First and foremost, some of these structures represent some undeniable features of traditional architectural styles and building techniques and are interesting examples of vernacular architecture. Being designed and built by people rather than architects, they contributed to the atmosphere of this former suburb that has turned into a new urban center. In addition to being a part of a unique legacy of vernacular values, aesthetics and techniques deeply rooted in rural traditional/folk architecture, they also represent patterns of vernacular culture, are strongly related to cultural memory, and are attractive to local people as well as tourists as a rare case of *rus in urbe* that one hardly encounters in contemporary European cities and capitals.

On the other hand, in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, many dwellings in Šnipiškės experienced significant transformations and distortions. Some buildings have deviated from the patterns of traditional rural architecture. Some of the adjustments, especially those that were done during the Soviet era, when such materials as silicon bricks were commonly used, enacted further deviations from original patterns and led some parts of the district to resemble a slum area. Dwellings possessed by the least affluent inhabitants gradually either deteriorated or were repaired by their owners so that they ultimately lost any original qualities they may have had (related to materials, internal and external structure, finishing, etc.). Several fires also occurred in Šnipiškės during the post-Soviet period—four devastated the area in 2007, destroying a number of wooden dwellings and larders, and, according to media and police reports, they were set deliberately. This caused further damage to vernacular buildings in the area and destroyed some of them completely, paving the way for new constructions on these sites. Thus, bearing in mind the

earlier significant transformations of the area's urban structure, the enforced redevelopment projects, and the condition of some of the dwellings in Šnipiškės, issues of protecting the remaining vernacular architecture have become more complex and complicated.

Nevertheless, bearing in mind the importance of the former suburb of Šnipiškės, its old history, and its potential attractiveness for tourism and other causes, the remaining vernacular buildings have the potential for further preservation and protection. It might be added that more and more dwellers of Lithuania's capital have started to realize the cultural potential of such formerly neglected and abandoned areas like Šnipiškės. Thus, attempts to redevelop this area while only considering the market value of immovable property do not seem to appeal to people who care about the history and multi-cultural character of Lithuania's capital city and who instead are interested in protecting at least some of its topological and cultural character.

6. Conclusions

To sum up, it must be admitted that the chances of survival of the discussed forms of vernacular architecture are far from high. Some vernacular objects—elements and parts of structures—are too small, seem too random, or are temporary. Larger structures, such as garden houses, are often viewed by professionals with skepticism or, in some cases, even negatively as examples of stylization or simply kitsch and architectural hooliganism. Therefore, formal protection of the most interesting and colorful objects is unlikely. Objects of vernacular architecture that are difficult to classify, register and generalize live their lives by appearing, changing and disappearing according to the various wishes of the most diverse people. On the other hand, as calls for sustainability are getting louder and louder, vernacular architecture responds to a considerable part of them. The secondary use of materials and objects, the nurturing of old property by extending its lifecycle for as long as possible, and the creation of personal, non-standardized, unbought and sometimes unique things give a modest hope that vernacular architecture will not disappear but will instead take on new, vibrant and diverse forms.

The example of Šnipiškės that was analyzed in more detail in this article represents the living urban vernacular that inevitably faces numerous problems and challenges. It is subjected to natural change, as owners of dwellings are moving to other areas and seek more comfortable habitats. It is also threatened by new development projects that are insensitive to architectural traditions and the value of vernacular. On the other hand, such objects as Šnipiškės make an interesting case of contemporary urban vernacular that require much more research than is currently available. By promoting research into the vernacular domain it is possible to base the value of such largely neglected areas and suggest new uses for such urban areas. The legislation protecting such urban areas and various forms of vernacular both old and new still needs to be developed in order to make their survival possible.

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