Article

Urban (Un)Sustainability: Cases of Vilnius's Informal and Illegal Settings

Tomas Kačerauskas (ORCID)

Department of Philosophy and Cultural Studies, Faculty of Creative Industries, Vilnius Gediminas Technical University, 10221 Vilnius, Lithuania; tomas.kacerauskas@vgtu.lt

check for updates

Abstract: The current analysis addresses cases of both informal and illegal settlements in Vilnius, Lithuania. By using semiotic means (specifically, semiotic squares), the author presents the Romani district (*tabors*), as well the Šnipiškės district, describing the circumstances of their emerging and comparing these cases. In addition to that, the philosophical questions about the dichotomies 'formal/informal', 'temporal/eternal', 'order/chaos', 'legal/illegal', 'sustainable/unsustainable' are discussed. On the one hand, illegal buildings serve as a signal about too high a barrier of bureaucracy, about a surfeit of law and even about the violation of certain rights. On the other hand, some urban districts can become illegal because of a changed urban vision reflected in a new General Plan. The paper also analyzes the issue of public interest. Additionally, the tendency of democratic society to turn into bureaucratic society is analyzed. The paper addresses sensitive issues related to sustainable development of cities, intercultural dialogue and equal opportunities.

Keywords: informal settings; urban sustainability; social minority; semiotic square; urban development

1. Introduction

The question concerning what is formal and what is informal in the urban environment is ambiguous. On the one hand, every city and its urban spaces have been planned in order to be sustainable, i.e., to satisfy the needs of the inhabitants and to avoid chaotic development. As a result, the General Plan becomes the main law of urban development. Another aspect of such politics is to avoid or minimize poverty [1]. On the other hand, the visions of planners sometimes neglect communities' interests, traditions of the districts and historical circumstances. Sometimes, there is a clash between the dynamics of urban processes and the 'old' plan. Finally, urban life is a spectacle with many initiatives [2], unseen processes and even the resistance [3] to any formality that is inseparable from ideology [4]. Graffiti, skateboarding [5] and even demonstrated poverty in homelessness [2,6] can be treated as such a kind of resistance. That is why such concepts as the aesthetics of everydayness have been widely analyzed appealing to the various urban cases around the world [4,7,8].

Semiotic means have been widely used in different social sciences including urban sociology. Scholars use a semiotic approach by analyzing street numbers as metonyms [9], aesthetics of urban space [10], aspects of everyday urban life [11], architectural ideas [12,13], heritage tourism [14], material commemoration in urban space [15] etc.

The term 'illegal settlement' is ambiguous. First, it covers residential constructions built without any permissions, usually in the suburbs of a city. Second, it covers buildings that do not satisfy the General Plan of a city. The latter situation can have some reasons, for example, too ambitious a General Plan according to which certain urban regions must be changed. In its different chapters, the paper analyzes both cases in Vilnius. Scholars analyze different aspects of illegal settlements including illegal urban suburbs [16], illegal areas beyond any regulations [17], unlicensed buildings [18], poor slums [19,20] mostly in under-developed countries, as well as in Central and Eastern Europe [21]. In

the cities of Latin America, Africa and Asia, illegal/informal settlements are particularly common and have been analyzed as the result of uncontrolled/unsustainable urbanization [22–25], as well of migration [26]. Due to migration, the phenomenon of illegal/informal settlements appears also in Western Europe [27–29]. In Western Europe, Romani people have usually been related with illegal/informal settlements [28,29]. Scholars analyze illegality mostly in the first mentioned sense.

Besides this, scholars [21] pay attention to some aspects of distinction between such closed phenomena as informal and illegal settings, as well to evolution from first to second. In the paper, informality has been treated as an aspect of illegality. On the one hand, informality can be treated as a first stage of illegality. On the other, informality has been associated with a creative, innovative and unusual approach [30–36].

The Romani, known also as Gypsies or Roma, are an itinerant ethnic group originating from the northern Indian subcontinent. The Romani came from India about 1500 years ago. Regions with significant populations of the Romani are as follows: Egypt (1,700,000), USA (1,000,000), Brazil (800,000), Spain (650,000), Romania (617,000), Turkey (over 500,000), France (over 350,000) and Bulgaria (over 325,000). In some Central and Eastern European counties, estimates of the percentage of Romanis in these counties' population is pretty high (10.33% in Bulgaria, 9.59% in Macedonia, 9.17% in Slovakia, 8.32% in Romania, 8.18% in Serbia). Although more than two million people use the Romani language, many Romani are native speakers of the languages in their country of residence [37]. In Lithuania, the Romani people speak in different dialects of the Romani language although they also know Lithuanian and/or Russian. They adopted Christianity or Islam. In Lithuania, the Romani are either Catholics or (Russian) Orthodox. Two characteristics distinguish the Romani people around the world. First, their nomadic way of life. Second, their tribal relationships with a baron as the head of a community. As mentioned, public opinion has related Romani people with illegal/informal activities including the building of illegal settlements. For example, in Sofia, Bulgaria illegal Romani homes have been destroyed and their inhabitants have been replaced [21]. In this paper, the chapter "The case of the Romani *tabors*" deals with a similar case in Vilnius. This case has been compared with different cases in Vilnius concerning illegal/informal settlements.

It seems that the degree of informal settings in Vilnius, Lithuania is very low compared with Latin American or some Asian cities. However, the analyzed cases serve to raise basic questions about formality and informality, about legality and illegality, about order and chaos, as well as about sustainability and unsustainability in the urban environment. As a result, the paper deals not only with the analysis of two different Vilnius cases but also with the meta-level by appealing to the philosophical issues of urban (un)sustainable life. The aim of the paper is not as much to recommend how to prevent illegality in urban life as to discuss the nature and different aspects of illegality/informality.

2. Methods and Materials

2.1. Empirical Contribution

The article analyzes the illegal settlements in Vilnius's Romani district. The other analyzed case is the old Šnipiškės district that does not satisfy the contemporary General Plan anymore. Additionally, some other ambiguous cases are mentioned. The paper cites the debates on these subjects in Lithuanian media (mostly Web portals) in the period from 2013 to 2017. Most of the analyzed debates are in Lithuanian and some in English, all of which were published in the local (Lithuanian or Baltic) internet media (Web portals). This period was specifically chosen because of politicians' attention to the problem during this period. However, the empirical data are only a point of departure for the discussions on cultural dichotomies to be interpreted from the semiotic point of view.

2.2. The Design/Methodology Approach

The work is a case study of informal settings in Vilnius, Lithuania. Since any interpretation is based on certain theoretical attitudes, the analysis of the case study follows an interdisciplinary perspective

that combines a semiotic approach, social criticism and cultural regionalism along with the historical approach. The historical facts have been used both for the explanation of the phenomena analyzed in the paper and for a better understanding of the tendencies concerning informal urban settings.

By applying the semiotic approach towards urban environments, scholars use collecting data in the form of notes and photographs [9], principles of dichotomy in a system of signs [15,28], Roland Barthes' punctum/stadium dialectic [11], principles of structural anthropology [13], meaning-making, and identities analysis [14]. By using a social criticism-based approach towards urban settlements and fabrics, scholars criticize a city government that neglects its public mandate [12], the political sources of tensions in workers homes [38], and the inactivity of city government towards urban sprawl [39].

The concept of the semiotic square was coined by the Lithuanian-French semiotician Algirdas Julien Greimas [40–42]. Usually, the semiotic square has been applied for structural analysis of the relationship between semiotic signs. The semiotic or Greimas square could be treated as a type of extended dichotomies. Scholars apply the semiotic square by analyzing human cognition [43], heuristic aspects of social existence [44], educational process [45], (anti)brand meanings [46] and even Western astrology [47]. Besides this, it has been used in literary criticism [48]. In the paper, the semiotic square is used for analysis of the characteristics of illegal/informal settings.

2.3. Research Limitations/Implications

The paper draws on opinions on informal settings in the cases noted that have been compared in order to generalize the analyzed issues from a semiotic point of view. However, the different opinions cannot be comprehensive. In some cases, it is difficult to classify a setting as an informal one. In any event, it depends on the juridical environment and on social trends.

2.4. Originality/Value

First, this paper is the first analysis of Vilnius informal settings from the semiotic point of view. Second, the paper suggests a framework of social criticism combined with semiotic analysis. Finally, the paper tests some cultural dichotomies such as formal/informal, temporal/eternal, legal/illegal, center/rim, old/new, surplus of law/deficit of law, sustainable order/unsustainable chaos, justice/injustice.

3. The Case of the Romani *Tabors*

According to Wikipedia [49], the Vilnius Romani settlement (tabor, in Lithuanian *taboras*) is the largest concentration place of Romani people in the Baltic states. In fact, we should use the plural form 'tabors' instead of the singular since there are three settlements including the Upper, the Lower and the Rodūnia way's tabors. All of them are located in the rim of Vilnius. The names 'Upper' and 'Lower' associated with Vilnius castles that represent legal sources (Lower Castle) and the center of power (Upper Castle) of the historical Lithuanian state (Grand Duchy of Lithuania—GDL) with its 500 hundred years of history. The rebuilding of the Lower Castle following the restoration of the state of Lithuania in the nineties of the 20th century was a symbolic act to re-establish the 'sustainable' order independent of any wars and occupations. We will see that the mimicry of Romani settlements' names hides—by contrast—temporariness and illegality. On the one hand, the contrasts help us to see the extent of the phenomena including those of informality. On the other hand, contrasts are the tools of semiotic analysis with such procedures as semiotic square. In our case, the dichotomies are as follows—formal/informal and eternal/temporal (see Figure 1).
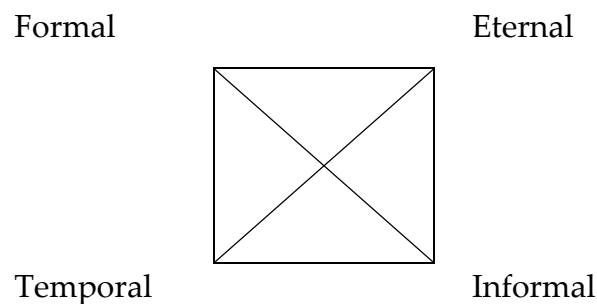
Formal　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　Eternal

Temporal　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　Informal

Figure 1. Semiotic square 'Formal/Temporal'.

In contrast to the history of GDL and its epicenter in the Upper and Lower castles, the history of the Vilnius tabor is very new. They have been established at similar times, in the fifties of the last century, as a result of the Soviet law on settled life. Here, we face the paradox as follows. The illegal settlements were established as a response to a legal requirement of settled life. Until that time, the Romani people had been illegal, more precisely, on the edge of public life because of their nomadic life. The location of the Vilnius tabor is not accidental. On the one hand, they are in the capital city that is the center of public life in the country. It is a kind of legal claim to rule all Lithuanian Romani people. On the other hand, they are on the very rim of Vilnius, set aside from official legal space. It is a kind of no-man's-land, outside governmental power but with an autonomous legal system, the authority of which is the Romani baron. However, the status of the latter changed from the leader who leads his people through a hostile land into the less risky but also less popular representative of 'otherness' and the position of mediator between the epicentre of legality and its rim.

There is the forest Užusienis next to the tabor. The word 'Užusienis' means 'outside the border'. It is characteristic that the tabors are outside the border of the main inhabitants' culture and even of legality. In general, the toponyms including names of the forests are very conservative, only the hydronyms are more conservative. As a result, the choice of the Romani people concerning the location was retrospective, i.e., the place has been chosen according to the toponym but not conversely. During the time of GDL, it meant 'outside the city'. However, this choice was made partly by the government and partly by the Romani people. We will see that this mixed responsibility—and as a result mixed legality and illegality—is characteristic of different aspects of the case.

Despite 'closed' locations on the rim of Vilnius, the three tabors are very different. It shows not only the different origin of their inhabitants and different relationship with the dominant region but also the breakdown of the rims themselves. There are 'lechis', i.e., native Lithuanian-Polish Romanis in the Upper tabor while there 'kotliars', i.e., Romanis from Moldova in the Lower tabor. The 'lechis' are Catholic while the 'kotliars' are Orthodox. Additionally, they speak different dialects of the Romani language [50]. The differences are obvious also in their living conditions. The Upper tabor has electricity and even satellite TV while the Lower tabor is poorer and smaller.

Although the tabors are on the rim of Vilnius, the connections are good because of two city bus lines and the Kirtimų railway station nearby. Additionally, it is next to the main international airport in Lithuania. It seems strange but taxis are very often to be seen. The communication with the city is mutual since the tabor has a pull for some citizens. We will see that the city government sees here different kinds of illegality—not only illegal buildings but also illegal activities such as dealing in drugs or the stealing of electricity. In other words, one kind of illegality complements other kinds of illegality and leads to the unsustainability of whole city. The media [49,51] reflects this opinion, too.

The paradox is as follows. The alien 'kotliars' have been at their present locations from earlier (since 1947) than the native 'lechis' (since 1956). Additionally, a block of flats as the island of legality is actually in the Lower tabor. This contrast can be explained by the attempt to control and to regulate the movement of such dynamic people as the Romani in the Soviet Union. The first and only legal block of flats was actually intended to prevent the movement of Romani from Moldova and Ukraine or to

serve as a barrier against further migration. On the other hand, all the illegal houses (about 80) testify to the lack of Soviet social policy and an overly high barrier of bureaucratic obstacles for building a house. Finally, it shows also the tendency to criminalize any civic initiative in such a totalitarian society as that of the Soviet Union. In 2016, the tabor consisted of 80 small wooden buildings that were all illegal except for the aforementioned block of flats. In some years, their number was reduced from 100. On the one hand, this tendency reflects the general demographic situation in Lithuania, although the number of Vilnius inhabitants increases. On the other hand, it is the result of a governmental policy that combines both forcible means and social guarantees proposed to the Romani people. This policy has been formed because of two reasons. First, it is part of the European trend to support national minorities. Second, the Romani houses are purportedly antecedents of illegal activities (not only buildings) to be eliminated.

Usually, the tabors are on the rim of official memory. However, the government of the city remembers periodically this 'city in the city'. That was the case for Vilnius's mayor Artūras Zuokas in 2013. The intention of Vilnius's mayor was to 'clean' the city's rim from any kind of illegality, of unsustainability and from aesthetic pollution. We face a similar kind of aesthetic pollution in case of homeless people [6]. Since the visit of the mayor was a public action, it was a contrast to the secret activities of Romani people. As a result, it was a clash between the center and a rim, as well as between legality and illegality. Figure 2 shows these relations in the form of semiotic square.
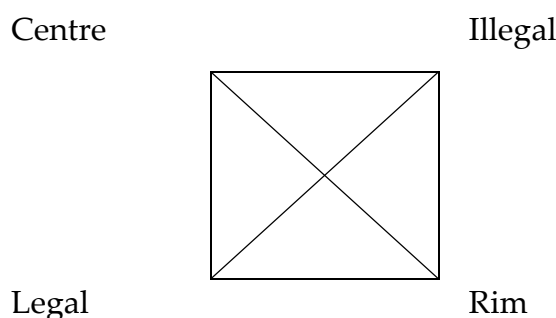

Centre　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　Illegal

Legal　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　Rim

Figure 2. Semiotic square 'Centre/Legal'.

However, the visit of the Vilnius mayor was also a spectacle to demonstrate such values as legality, order and beauty. Later, a subsequent Vilnius mayor, Remigijus Šimašius, with an electric saw in his hands, made a show before the cameras for the removal of illegal plants that impeded construction of a new bicycle path. The question arises as to whether a spectacle in contemporary spectacle society [2,52] does not overshadow the very disjunction of legal/illegal. On the one hand, the spectacle points up the dramatism of any clash including one of legality and illegality, as well of the center and a rim. On the other hand, the spectacle is a kind of simulation and hyperreality [53], in which any contrasts lose their borders. The plants creeping up everywhere are the symbols of loss of borders. We face the situation of an unclear border between legality and illegality also in our next case: that of the Šnipiškės district.

Everything promised an easy victory for the legal center represented by Vilnius's mayor. Zuokas was accompanied by the police officers in order to ensure this victory. The hostility from both sides was demonstrated. The messages of the visit were as follows. First, the Romani people are breakers of the law and of urban sustainability by building illegal houses and by stealing electricity. Second, the illegal houses must be destroyed. Third, the Romani people must be replaced from here and integrated into Lithuanian society. Fourth, the society must distance from the assailants such as Romani people from Romania and Moldova. Finally, yet importantly, Zuokas was presented as the hero of the fight against illegality in the entire spectacle. According to the plan, all Romani people had to be replaced some years after 2014 [51]. It should be noted that the Zuokas plan had no final date—only a starting point. Here, the dimension of temporariness includes the aspect of eternity, too. The guarantees of the plan were European Union funds (700,000 euros for three years), Lithuanian social policy and Romani

tribal relations. The last aspect presents a major paradox. On the one hand, Romani people would need to wait for a social flat in the building of their tribesmen. On the other hand, the tribes would be broken up in order to disperse the Romani tribes and to integrate them into Lithuanian society.

However, the Zuokas plan failed despite some destroyed houses and some families relocated to social flats. There are some reasons for this. First, the European funds were too small to cover the relocation of 500 people. Second, the Lithuanian social system was not so good as to be able to ensure social flats for Romani people. Third, the hostility of society was too great to allow for integration the Romani people both at the micro level (blocks of flats) and the macro level of social structures. Fourth, the tribal relations of Romani people were too strong to simply be cut. That is why no other mayors tried to change the status quo by risking their image. As a result, new illegal houses appeared instead of destroyed houses.

4. The Case of Šnipiškės

In Vilnius, there are other cases of illegal buildings. One of them is the case of Vilnius's Šnipiškės district. It is a new center of Vilnius characterized by skyscrapers of the municipality, banks and of private companies, alongside the National Gallery, Vilnius University's hospital, with some hypermarkets, a Catholic church and many old wooden private houses without the equipment characteristic of contemporary times. In contrast to the tabor, most of the houses are legal, or, to be more precise, they were built before contemporary and even Soviet building regulations. Šnipiškės consists of two historical districts: Skansenas and Piromontas. Most of the private houses in Šnipiškės are from the interwar period although the beginning of the district reaches back to the 16th century, after construction of the Green Bridge (The bridge has been named The Green Bridge since the 18th century). In any event, these houses are included in the state register of so-called immobility and some of them are in the register of cultural objects that are under state protection. However, these houses became the main obstacle for the development of this new center. In Vilnius's General Plan, the main document for the city's development, there is no place of these houses in Šnipiškės. As a result, legal houses become illegal in virtue of changed urban planning. On the other hand, Šnipiškės also has semi-legal buildings such as metal garages and a basketball field. In other words, it is a district in the city center with salient contrasts, including new buildings and historical relics. Here we face a clash between ways of life that represent different temporal dimensions. On the one hand, the skyscrapers embody the future and project eternity. On the other hand, as the new buildings have not been tested by time in contrast to the historical houses. Still, the latter have been tested by time but are fragile because of the new neighborhood developments. Once again, we face the dialectics of temporality and eternity. As a result, the semiotic square could be as shown in Figure 3.
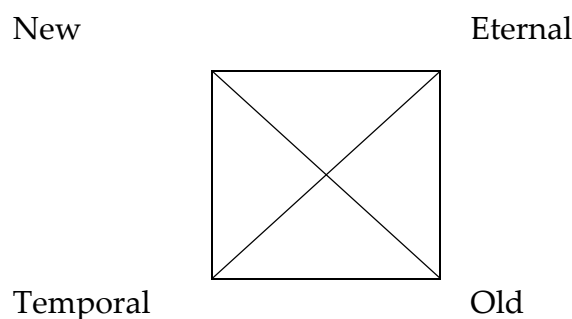
New   Eternal

Temporal   Old

Figure 3. Semiotic square 'New/Temporal'.

According to the General Plan, some groups of buildings (such as those in Skansenas) must be protected while some spaces must be turned into green public zones to balance more populous blocks of flats in some streets. In other words, the General Plan suggests a kind of compromise. The question arises whether and to what extent a compromise satisfies the public interest. What concerns the latter,

it is a most delicate issue in urban life that covers very different interests of inhabitants, investors and city government. The guardians of public interest are the procurators who have their own interests, too. In Vilnius, there was a case where an international chain hotel was built to replace an unused football stadium. After a complaint concerning the public interest to have a stadium, the procurators forced the National Land Service (NLS) to break the agreement with the investors who had obtained all the necessary permissions to build the Marriott hotel. The positive decision of NLS would result in demolishing the nearly built hotel. This case shows that any legal building in a democratic state governed by the rule of law can become illegal overnight. It reflects the surplus of both laws and interests in the democratic state that slowly becomes a bureaucratic unsustainable state. It could be called a creeping bureaucratization that threatens to paralyze any initiatives in a democratic state. In turn, bureaucracy is exactly what generates the illegal buildings since it can reflect too high a barrier to be overcome as we saw in the case of Vilnius tabor. In other words, the surfeit of law leads to a state of chaos. As a result, there is another semiotic square. It is depicted in Figure 4.
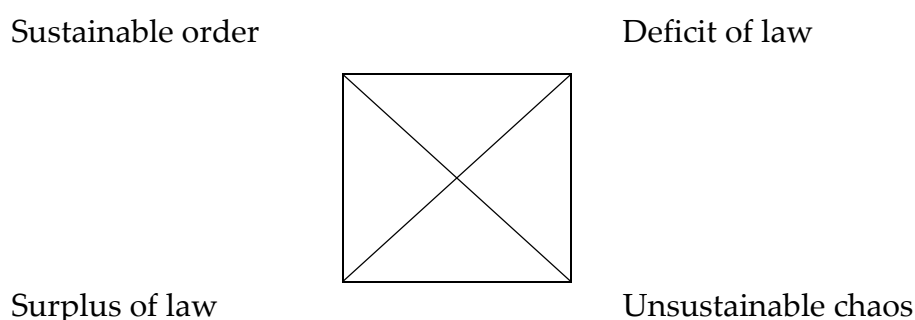

Sustainable order　　　　　　　　　　Deficit of law

Surplus of law　　　　　　　　　　Unsustainable chaos

Figure 4. Semiotic square 'Order/Surplus of law'.

The case of the hotel Marriott became a Gordian knot that has been cut only by the national government according to which the public interest in this case was, in essence, not to follow the public interest. The national government had an interest in avoiding an international scandal and to send a message to international investors that Lithuania is not a juridical jungle and not an unsustainable region.

On one hand, the tendency toward chaos in the environment of a surfeit of law reflects the dynamic development of any society. On the other, it shows that the multiplication of both juridical decrees and supervisory institutions does not strengthen the juridical system of the state. On the contrary, it leads to the collapse of the entire juridical-political system, i.e., to the unsustainable situation. What is interesting here is that the largest pressure for the juridical surfeit follows from the democratic system per se while the majority forces the politicians to 'make order' in public life, i.e., to delegalize more and more initiatives. There are just two limitations. First, the majority is not well organized and does not form any united stream. Second, the majority has the interests that coincide only sometimes in the face of a common enemy. We can remember Plato [54] who has described the development of democracy into tyranny. For Plato, it was a kind of temporality-eternity dialectics while the society changes its forms by moving in a circle. The question inseparable from our cited cases is as follows. If some public issues can be solved only by intervention of the highest authority (national government), then maybe our democratic states are already police states. It seems that the limitation of such a tendency lies in the variety of the interests, i.e., the lack of public interest. In other words, the limitations of global unsustainability are only the local chaos represented by contradictory laws and by sporadic reactions of state institutions to people's claims.

In the case of Šnipiškės, we also have people's claims. After the aforementioned General Plan had been declared, the best organized inhabitants of the district flooded the municipality with petitions concerning various issues. First, the new buildings would reduce the natural light for other houses. Second, some trees and bushes would be cut during construction. Third, informal parking places

would disappear. Fourth, the informal basketball field would be removed. Paradoxically, the two latter arguments are based on the right to the informal or even illegal buildings. Since the claims appeal to the public interest, in this case the latter are based on the right to the illegal buildings.

Indeed, the symbolism of light is apparent here. The petition points out that the right to light is fundamental and even a natural right, even if some building regulations have not been violated by those building the tall structures that obscure light. Additionally, light has the religious and epistemological connotations. Blumenberg [55] has shown that 'light' is the most common word in the New Testament. Light symbolizes the transparency of decisions and consequently the very validity of law. That is why the reduction of light has been treated as a kind of theft, i.e., an illegal act per excellence. Moreover, light is related with truth and knowledge, and is beyond any legal requirements and building regulations. According to this line of argument, there are certain rights (such as the right to 'light' inseparable from the truth) that are beyond any temporal laws. In some cases, this being 'beyond' has been treated as illegal. For example, the claim of Šnipiškės' inhabitants to have more light than defined by building regulations and even to prevent any new building in the district is illegal from the point of view of Vilnius's General Plan [56].

The other side of the lightness/legacy juxtaposition is that of justice/injustice. The issue of justice is inseparable from the issue of public interest, on the one hand, and from the issue of civil disobedience, on the other. If the inhabitants are frustrated by the ignoring of their natural rights (such as the right to light), they believe to be set free for actions of civil disobedience. Incidentally, the conception of civil disobedience can be derived from John Rawls's theory of justice. According to Rawls, 'each person is to have an equal right to the most extensive scheme of equal basic liberties compatible with a similar scheme of liberties for others' [30,57]. Additionally, 'social and economic inequalities are to be arranged so that they are both (a) reasonably expected to be to everyone's advantage, and (b) attached to positions and offices open to all' (ibid). The civil disobedience follows from the right to have a just society with minimum of inequalities. The paradox is as follows: the right to justice becomes a reason for illegal action and consequently of injustice. However, some contrasts and inequalities are necessary for the very notions of welfare and even for a just society. Only by comparison with pure economic and social conditions on the rim of Vilnius can we define good conditions for the center. On the other hand, the welfare of society in the center obligates improvement of the environment on the city's rim. Sometimes this mania of improvement leads to the trampling of certain rights including the right of a national minority to live together as was the case of the Vilnius tabors. As a result, we face a kind of civil disobedience of Romani people who protest by dealing in drugs. Is it not a kind of compensation: illegality for injustice? In the case of both the Vilnius tabor and the Šnipiškės district, we face the contrasts and inequalities between the center and the rim. In the case of Šnipiškės, the rim is too close to the center, the heart of which it is becoming. Being too close, the center and the rim obliterate each other's essence. The growth of a capital city results in the expansion of the center towards certain the rims which are inevitably overshadowed not only by skyscrapers but also by new trends in social life. The new trends include also the understanding of justice and of the public interest. The Figure 5 shows the dialectics of lightness, darkness, justice and injustice in the case of Šnipiškės.
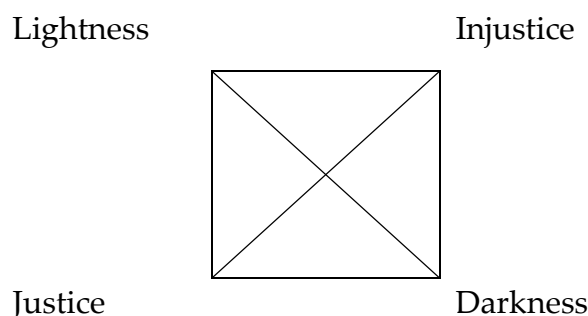

Figure 5. Semiotic square 'Lightness/Justice'.

5. Discussion and Conclusions

Semiotic squares can elucidate the dialectics and the paradoxes of formal and informal, legal and illegal settings. Additionally, they appeal to more fundamental dichotomies such as order and chaos, justice and injustice, lightness and darkness, temporality and eternity, as well sustainability and unsustainability. Each element of any pair depends on the other element both on the ontological/axiological and the logical/hermeneutical plane. In turn, we face dialectics of ontological/axiological and logical/hermeneutical planes, too. As a result, the case study leads to more basic philosophical questions.

In all the analyzed cases, the question of illegal settlements is ambiguous. It seems that the illegal buildings must be destroyed in order to prevent injustice and even unsustainability in a democratic society. Alongside this is the notion that the rule of law in a state must be guaranteed. However, the illegal buildings signalize too high a barrier of bureaucracy and a surfeit of law. The latter is characterized by contradictory laws and can lead to social unsustainability instead of the keeping of order.

In the case of the Vilnius tabors, illegality/informality is a consequence of twofold injustice. First, the right to mobility of the Romani people was violated after the law of settled life was introduced in the sixties of the 20th century. Second, the right to be together is violated when Romani people are dispersed to the social houses. The illegal actions such as dealing in drugs can be treated as a response to the injustice. On the other hand, the dealing in drugs is the result of poverty in this Vilnius rim that stands in stark contrast to the rich center. The poverty of Romani people is also the result of their disintegration into Lithuanian society. However, the disintegration is an aspect of their tribal relations. Some Romani people have made a successful musical career but only after being educated within mainstream Lithuanian society. As a result, we face a choice as follows: either the right to Romani traditional life including poverty or the right to welfare in the dominant social environment. Which right is more fundamental? The case of Vilnius' Romani illegal/informal activity is result of too high a bureaucratic threshold. Speaking more broadly, it signals evolution from democratic to bureaucratic society in European and extra-European countries. As a result, it results in a sprawling (unsustainable) city.

In the case of Šnipiškės, the buildings are legal. However, there is a clash between a new vision of Vilnius's center and the old infrastructure that includes wooden houses, stone streets and chaotic surrounding plantations. Here, we face a strange kind of poverty when the plots of land are the most expensive in the city but the buildings on them are among the humblest. According to the General Plan for the city a part of the district must be protected while other parts must be turned into a modern zone with new buildings and parks. In other words, a part of the district would become 'illegal' because of the changed social environment and the dynamism of the city center. The questions are as follows. Do the inhabitants of an old district have the right to the status quo? Do they have the right to their usual landscape without any skyscrapers and blocks of flats that overshadowing their houses? What about the wider public interest? Since there are different interests of different social groups, what criterion of public interest should trump the others? Which should be used a criterion of the majority, of activity or of benefit? The latter criterion brings us back to the question of the beneficiary. Is it the community of a city district or the city in general? Is the public interest itself a kind of compromise? The case of Šnipiškės signals overly ambitious political intentions embodied by a General Plan that neglects the interests and traditions of certain urban inhabitants. As a result, it results in such unsustainable consequences as public protests and even civil disobedience.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

References

1. Das, V.; Randeria, S. Politics of the Urban Poor: Aesthetics, Ethics, Volatility, Precarity. An Introduction to Supplement 11. *Curr. Anthropol.* **2015**, *56*, 3–14. [CrossRef]
2. Gerrard, J.; Farrugia, D. The 'lamentable sight' of homelessness and the society of the spectacle. *Urban Stud.* **2015**, *52*, 2219–2233. [CrossRef]
3. Frers, L.; Meier, L. Resistance in Public Spaces: Questions of Distinction, Duration, and Expansion. *Space Cult.* **2017**, *20*, 127–140. [CrossRef]
4. Goonewardena, K. The urban sensorium: Space, ideology and the aestheticization of politics. *Antipode* **2005**, *37*, 46–71. [CrossRef]
5. Ong, A. The path is place: Skateboarding, graffiti and performances of place. *Ride J. Appl. Theatre Perform.* **2016**, *21*, 229–241. [CrossRef]
6. Untea, I. Homelessness in the urban landscape: Beyond negative aesthetics. *Monist* **2048**, *101*, 17–30. [CrossRef]
7. Kusmane, A.S. How to measure the impact of spatial aesthetics on the everyday in Soviet housing estates? *Landsc. Archit. Art* **2016**, *9*, 7–20.
8. Rao, A. The word and the world: Dalit aesthetics as a critique of everyday life. *J. Postcolonial Writ.* **2017**, *53*, 147–161. [CrossRef]
9. Crosby, A.; Seale, K. Counting on Carrington road: Street numbers as metonyms of the urban. *Vis. Commun.* **2018**, *17*, 433–450. [CrossRef]
10. Amen, M.A.; Nia, H.A. The dichotomy of society and urban space configuration in producing the semiotic structure of the modernism urban fabric. *Semiotica* **2018**, *222*, 203–223. [CrossRef]
11. Cockain, A. Riding and reading the Shanghai metro: Signs, subjectivities and subversions on and around line#8. *Soc. Semiot.* **2018**, *28*, 533–554. [CrossRef]
12. Iqani, M.; Baro, G. The branded skyline? A socio-semiotic critique of Johannesburg's architectural adverts. *Afr. Stud.* **2017**, *76*, 102–120. [CrossRef]
13. Stojiljkovic, D.; Trajkovic, J.R. Semiotics and urban culture: Architectural projections of structuralism in a socialist context. *Soc. Semiot.* **2018**, *28*, 330–348. [CrossRef]
14. Su, R.; Bramwell, B.; Whalley, P.A. Cultural political economy and urban heritage tourism. *Ann. Tour. Res.* **2018**, *68*, 30–40. [CrossRef]
15. Krzyzanowska, N. The discourse of counter-monuments: Semiotics of material commemoration in contemporary urban spaces. *Soc. Semiot.* **2016**, *26*, 465–485. [CrossRef]
16. Antonic, B.; Djukic, A. The phenomenon of shrinking illegal suburbs in Serbia: Can the concept of shrinking cities be useful for their upgrading? *Habitat Int.* **2018**, *75*, 161–170. [CrossRef]
17. Amado, M.; Poggi, F.; Martins, A.; Vieira, N.; Amado, A. Transforming cape vert informal settlements. *Sustainability* **2018**, *10*, 2571. [CrossRef]
18. Cete, M.; Konbul, Y. Property rights in urban regeneration projects in Turkey. *Arab. J. Geosci.* **2016**, *9*, 459. [CrossRef]
19. Mulyani, L. Gambling with the state: Land titles and personhood rights among the urban poor in Indonesia. *Asian J. Law Soc.* **2015**, *2*, 285–300. [CrossRef]
20. Uzun, B.; Simsek, N.C. Ankara entrance urban regeneration project. *Habitat Int.* **2015**, *49*, 157–164. [CrossRef]
21. Ivancheva, M. From informal to illegal: Roma housing in (post-)socialist Sofia. *Intersect. East Eur. J. Soc. Politics* **2015**, *1*, 38–54. [CrossRef]
22. Fard, H.R. Urbanization and informal settlement challenges: Case study Tehran metropolitan city. *Open House Int.* **2018**, *43*, 77–82.
23. Madhavan, S.; Donatien, C.S. Measuring extended families over time in informal settlements in Nairobi, Kenya: Retention and data consistency in a two-round survey. *Demogr. Res.* **2018**, *38*, 1339–1358. [CrossRef] [PubMed]
24. Zhan, L. The political economy of informal settlements in post-socialist China: The case of chengzhongcun(s). *Geoforum* **2011**, *42*, 473–483. [CrossRef]
25. Zulu, E.M.; Beguy, D.; Ezeh, A.C.; Bocquier, P.; Madise, N.J.; Cleland, J.; Falkingham, J. Overview of migration, poverty and health dynamics in Nairobi city's slum settlements. *J. Urban Health Bull. N. Y. Acad. Med.* **2011**, *88*, 185–199. [CrossRef] [PubMed]

26. Bastia, T.; Montero, B.J. Between a guest and an okupa: Migration and the making of insurgent citizenship in Buenos Aires' informal settings. *Environ. Plan. A Econ. Space* **2018**, *50*, 31–50. [CrossRef]

27. Ascensao, E. The slum multiple: A cyborg micro-history of an informal settlement in Lisbon. *Int. J. Urban Reg. Res.* **2015**, *39*, 948–964. [CrossRef]

28. Chaudhuri, I.N. Community mobilization for slum upgrading through sanitation in Roma informal settlements in the Paris region. *Front. Public Health* **2017**, *5*, 213. [CrossRef]

29. Davis, M.F.; Ryan, N. Inconvenient human rights: Water and sanitation in Sweden's informal Roma settlements. *Health Hum. Rights* **2017**, *19*, 61–72.

30. Adomaitytė, G.; Žilinskaitė, V.; Sederevičiūtė-Pačiauskienė, Ž.; Valantinaitė, I.; Navickienė, V. Shift of Creativity Concepts: From Mysticism to Modern Approach. *Filosofija Sociologija* **2018**, *29*, 203–210. [CrossRef]

31. Brzozowska, B. 'Creative city' as a brand—The case of Łódź. *Creat. Stud.* **2016**, *9*, 3–14. [CrossRef]

32. Inishev, I. Embedded creativity: Interconnections between materiality, visuality, and agency in everyday perceptual settings. *Creat. Stud.* **2018**, *11*, 70–84. [CrossRef]

33. Mester, B. Cities as centres of creativity in the east-central European nation building. *Creat. Stud.* **2018**, *11*, 129–141. [CrossRef]

34. Piskunova, L.; Starostova, L.; Yankov, I. The architecture of constructivism: The creative transformation of aesthetic codes and narratives. *Creat. Stud.* **2018**, *11*, 56–69. [CrossRef]

35. Staniulytė, E. Kūrybinis miestas: Nuo teorinės koncepcijos prie praktinio įgyvendinimo [Creative city: From the theoretical conception to practical implementation]. *Filosofija Sociologija* **2017**, *28*, 84–88.

36. Zolfani, S.H.; Maknoon, R.; Juzefovič, A. Leadership, music and creative society: A philosophical analysis of possible future. *Filosofija Sociologija* **2017**, *28*, 20–28.

37. Wikipedia. 2018. Available online: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Romani_people (accessed on 19 November 2018).

38. Jia, K. Migrant workers home and its practices on shaping the culture and community of 'New Working Class': A criticism on cultural-political activism in contemporary China. *Cult. Stud.* **2017**, *31*, 941–967. [CrossRef]

39. Brueckner, J.K.; Largey, A.G. Social interaction and urban sprawl. *J. Urban Econ.* **2008**, *64*, 18–34. [CrossRef]

40. Greimas, A.J. *Du Sens*; Editions du Seuil: Paris, France, 1970.

41. Greimas, A.J. *Structural Semantics: An Attempt at a Method*; McDowell, D.; Schleifer, D.; Velie, A., Translators; University of Nebraska Press: Lincoln, NE, USA, 1983.

42. Greimas, A.J.; Cortes, J. *Semiotics and Language: An Analytical Dictionary*; Indiana University Press: Bloomington, IN, USA, 1982.

43. Tao, Y. Apple in the semiotic square: Apples's advertising slogans and Greimas' semiotic matrix theory. *Chin. Semiot. Stud.* **2017**, *13*, 193–201. [CrossRef]

44. Pelkey, J. Greimas embodied: How kinesthetic opposition grounds the semiotic square. *Semiotica* **2017**, *214*, 277–305. [CrossRef]

45. Kukkola, J.; Pikkarainen, E. Edusemiotics of meaningful learning experience: Revisiting Kant's pedagogical paradox and Greimas' semiotic square. *J. Retail. Consum. Serv.* **2016**, *32*, 117–130. [CrossRef]

46. Ostergaard, P.; Hermansen, J.; Fitchett, J. Structures of brand and anti-brand meaning: A semiotic square analysis of reflexive consumption. *J. Brand Manag.* **2015**, *22*, 60–77. [CrossRef]

47. Douglas, G. Greimas's semiotic square and Greek and Roman astrology. *Semiotica* **1997**, *114*, 1–19. [CrossRef]

48. Corso, J.J. What Does Greimas's Semiotic Square Really Do? *Mosaic J. Interdiscip. Study Lit.* **2014**, *47*, 69–89. [CrossRef]

49. Wikipedia. 2018. Available online: https://lt.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vilniaus_taboras (accessed on 29 August 2018).

50. Žemaitis, A. Gypsies (Romani People). Available online: http://www.truelithuania.com/gypsies-124 (accessed on 29 August 2018).

51. 15min. Su Policijos Palyda į Čigonų Taborą Įžengusį Merą Artūrą Zuoką Romai Pasitiko Užgauliomis Replikomis. 2013. Available online: https://www.15min.lt/naujiena/aktualu/lietuva/vilniaus-meras-arturas-zuokas-cigonu-tabore-ieskojo-nauju-nelegaliu-statiniu-56-3563262 (accessed on 29 August 2018).

52. Debord, G. *The Society of the Spectacle*; Nicholson-Smith, D., Translator; Zone Books: New York, NY, USA, 1994.

53. Baudrillard, J. *Symbolic Exchange and Death*; Grant, I.H., Translator; Sage: London, UK, 2016.

54. Plato. *The Republic*; Reeve, C.D.C., Translator; Hackett Publishing Company: Indianapolis, IN, USA, 2004.

55. Blumenberg, H. *Paradigmen zu Einer Metaphorologie*; Suhrkamp: Frankfurt am Main, Germany, 1998.
56. Radžiūnas, V. Šnipiškės Kyla Prieš Planuojamas Statybas, Delfi. 2017. Available online: https://www.delfi.lt/verslas/nekilnojamas-turtas/snipiskes-kyla-pries-planuojamas-statybas.d?id=74656474 (accessed on 29 August 2018).
57. Rawls, J. *A Theory of Justice*; The Belknap press of Harvard University Press: Cambridge, MA, USA, 2003.