

Mapping Visaginas:	International Summer School on Sources of Urbanity in Former Mono-functional Towns
Organization:	Laboratory of Critical Urbanism, European Humanities University
Date & Place:	14-27.8 2017, Vilnius and Visaginas, Lithuania
Target group:	Students in Architecture, Urban Planning, Cultural Studies, European Studies, History, Urban Studies, Design, Sociology, Anthropology and Geography and from Germany, Lithuania, Belarus and beyond
Certificate:	5 ECTS certificate will be provided after handing in a final paper
Application:	CV (1 page), Letter of Intent (1 page), recommendation
Fee:	German participants 850 €, from Lithuania & Belarus 60 €
Scholarships:	DAAD provides 5 GoEast scholarships for German participants
Info & Contact:	www.criticalurbanism.org , Dr. Benjamin Cope: urbanism@ehu.lt
Deadline:	31.5.2017

Mapping Visaginas

International Summer School on Sources of Urbanity in Former Mono-functional Towns

This Summer School is organized by the European Humanities University's Laboratory of Critical Urbanism in order to bring together students from Germany, Belarus and Lithuania in a two-week course on mapping social practice in relation to the built environment of the Lithuanian formerly mono-functional town of Visaginas – a satellite of the nuclear power plant erected in 1975. The school will be composed of a mix of lectures, seminars, excursions and supervised fieldwork, during the course of which the students will be guided in the process of how to research the social and spatial relations of contemporary Central- and Eastern Europe. The product of the students' work at the school will be to create an exploratory mapping project of a selected dimension of Visaginas and to contribute to the collective development of a scenario for the town's future.

In many respects Visaginas can be taken as a showcase of the risks involved in the transition from a town reliant on the external top-down allocation of resources and work force, to a town compelled to survive in a competitive environment of a multilateral and multi-scalar determination of resources and workplaces. The urban structure and services of Visaginas were planned and built from scratch in the context of the short-term economic abundance related to the project of the adjacent Ignalina Nuclear Power Plant (1975-2009). For this reason, Visaginas was considered to be one of Soviet Lithuania's best examples of a centrally planned mono-functional urban unit, highly successful in terms of architectural decisions, quality of living and human capital. From the 1990s – due to the gradual shutting down of the Ignalina Nuclear Power Plant as a consequence of Lithuania's EU accession, largely determined by the Chernobyl disaster in 1986 –, the town has stopped growing, with concomitant social phenomena of increasing unemployment, dwellers' anxiety about the future and around 20 percent population decline.

This situation is made even more troublesome by the combination of the town's ethnic and professional composition. Because of rapid Soviet-mode urbanization, Visaginas' population historically consisted principally of nuclear scientists, engineers, construction workers and their family members brought from the entire Soviet Union. What was then perceived as a Soviet elite today primarily leads to Visaginas being

labeled as a problematically Russian town. For inhabitants of the town, meanwhile, the prestige of the former nuclear power plant and the fact that the town's housing blocks were collectively constructed by inhabitants in the 1970s and 1980s facilitated local belonging and an identification with place. However, it is not clear what role the engineer's habitus and a collective identification with place can play in the new context of the present. From this perspective, Visaginas today can be treated as a perfect case for defining and exploiting the sources of urbanity in formerly mono-functional shrinking cities and towns in post-socialist conditions, as well as beyond.

The identification of sources of urbanity is a key task for a variety of locations in different regions of today's world in which relations of production, recreation and welfare are being radically transformed across multiple scales. The use of an existing built structure and applying new social technology for keeping urban areas alive and well integrated depends on two major variables – a town's infrastructural and industrial history on the one hand and the major structural vulnerabilities a particular location encounters on the other. The Summer School's aim is to qualitatively scrutinize and confront these two variables as manifested in Visaginas. This will be done through the critical mapping of particular test cases in the town, and, further on, proposing future scenarios for the town in a form of soft planning interventions and community projects.

The town's infrastructural and industrial history is characterized by the following features:

- A high density built area projected predominantly for residence and service uses, with larger sources of employment located beyond the town;
- An extensive presence of planned contact zones in the town, such as Soviet style public art, small plazas, micro green areas, a pedestrian avenue, and forest areas and the Visaginas lake used for leisure activities;
- A rich investment in terms of materials into residential buildings, buildings for public services and public space facilities;
- An 'Engineer's habitus' (pro- natural science, scientific progress, nuclear power, detraditionalization, etc.) as a dominant identity mark of the local population;
- A multiethnic and multilingual population with a broad common use of the Russian language;

The following features constitute the major structural vulnerabilities Visaginas encounters:

- The lack of a large employer such as the Ignalina Nuclear Power Plant in the near future;
- A decline in the uses of the infrastructure of educational institutions' (schools and kindergartens) as the major sign of depopulation and the major threat to urban structure;
- Mall solutions for the allocation of retail and services in the town, characteristic of Lithuania's urban economies;
- Labor migration and the growth of the number of empty flats in the town;
- A gradual hollowing out of local identity based primarily on professional belonging and the short-term history of the town's construction, rather than on national culture and tradition;

The Summer School will build on the results and feedback obtained during Summer Schools and workshops organized in Visaginas by the Laboratory of Critical Urbanism in 2015 and 2016. The results of the 2015 Summer School are available as a book 'Mapping Visaginas. Sources of Urbanity in a Former Mono-functional Town' published in November 2016, while the results of the 2016 Summer School will be published in 2017. Feedback obtained from participants in 2016 particularly highlighted the good spirit of collective work at the school and the fact that it was fruitful to have the opportunity to apply ideas learned in home universities to concrete issues that Visaginas is confronting. This agenda of engaging individual skills and knowledge in developing cooperative research on questions of significance for the town is a mode of work that we will continue in 2017. In addition, the good working relations established with our social partners in town – experts from the fields of governance, spatial planning, activism, culture and industry – and the encouragement they have given us is a significant foundation on which to develop this project further.

Partner:	Archfondas.lt
Language:	English is the common working language. Some knowledge of Lithuanian and/or Russian will be helpful.
Workload per week:	15 h lectures and seminars, 10 h group work, 5 h individual work
Fee:	Local participants 60 €, German participants 850 €
Costs covered:	Study materials, accommodation in hostel / flats in Visaginas and Vilnius, joint lunches & dinners in Visaginas, excursions in Vilnius
Application:	CV (1 page), Letter of Intent (1 page), short recommendation letter
Scholarships:	DAAD is funding up to 5 GoEast scholarships for German students German students have to apply both via urbanism@ehu.lt and at DAAD directly till 31.5.2017
Support:	German Academic Exchange Service was asked for support
Info & Contact:	www.criticalurbanism.org , Dr. Benjamin Cope: urbanism@ehu.lt