JUST Sleeping District ?
Lazdynai for Lunatics

Table of Contents

Introduction

JUST Sleeping District? Lazdynai for Lunatics" is the practical element of the course "The Production of Space in the Digital Age" on the Masters of Critical Urbanism at the European Humanities University in Vilnius. The course explores both the potential that digital mapping technologies offer for critical studies of spatial issues, and also considers how digital technologies are impacting on ways of perceiving, managing and experiencing spaces.

The JUST project is developed in partnership with *Architektūros fondas*, and makes grateful use of their local insights and expertise in the history of modernist architecture in Vilnius. It also seeks to add another layer to work on Lazdynai done by the *Vietos.org* project that interviewed residents about their perceptions of where they live and, on the basis of the evidence thus gathered, developed design propositions for the district.

In its method of work, JUST 3 aims to take academia beyond the classroom and to experiment to see how theoretical ideas interact with lived spaces. It explores how spatial interventions can be used to test academic ideas, to produce new knowledge and thus act as a basis for building new projects and possibilities for the space in question. The aim here is, the spatial and temporal limitations of university work notwithstanding, to treat the district not as an object but as a partner in an evolving production of ideas to question prevailing trajectories of development and open up new possibilities.

The project is the third installment of the JUST (Jamming Underused Socialist Treasures) urbanism project in which we explore the potential of experimental engagements with the socialist modernist heritage of the city of Vilnius. Thus far, we had focused on the jamming of particular objects, the Tauro Ragas Beer Bar, the Amphitheatre in Vingis Park and the Palace of Sports. This year we extend our attention to a whole district of socialist modernist housing, for the problem and perhaps the potential of cities after socialism is that they contain not just dots of socialist heritage, but large swathes of the built infrastructure that were constructed under the ideological premises of a system very different from the one in which they now function. By engaging with Lazdynai we want to explore what new questions thinking about a wider scale of modernist infrastructure might pose about the heritage of socialist modernism and about social justice?

Lazdynai was an obvious choice for when it won the Lenin Prize for architecture in 1974, it was the first occasion the prize had been awarded to a whole neighbourhood. It was a pioneering district: the first sleeping district in Vilnius separating spaces of work and those of leisure, promoted as 'socialist excellence' through a utopian vision of the improvement in quality of living that could become possible through high standards of prefabrication, and one that blended the intense planning of socialist

modernism with a sensitivity to context imported from modes of planning seen by the architects in Scandinavia.
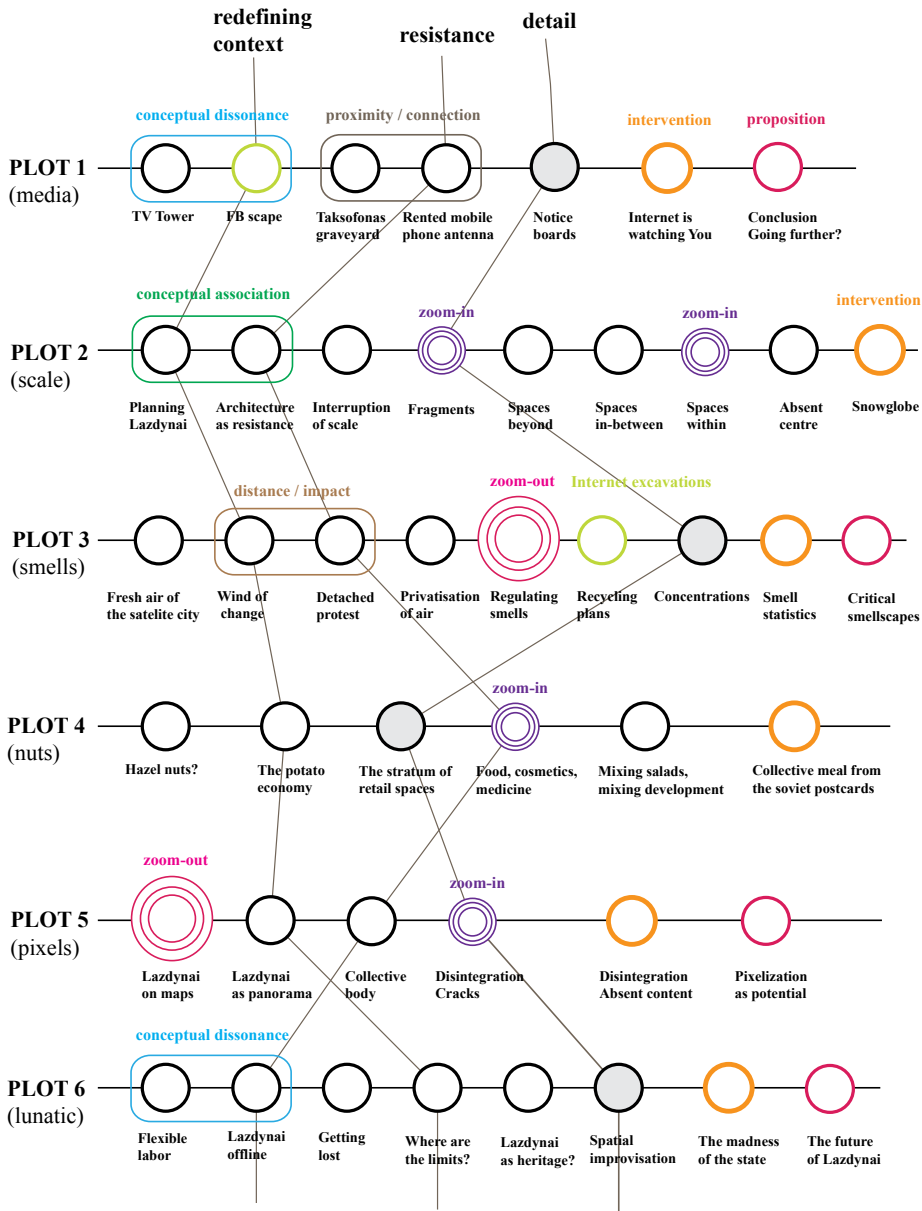
For residents of Vilnius at the time, as well as for the party delegations coming to inspect it, Lazdynai did indeed seem a socialist treasure: a district that offered the promise of new, improved, modernised living conditions and that, through subtle relations with its surrounding topography, escaped the monotonous repetitiveness of other socialist housing districts. Today, perceptions of the district are rather different, with it being seen as a neighbourhood in decline and a periphery in search of a new identity.

The entry point for the project was the idea that what marks the difference between socialist and post-socialist urbanisation is a diversification and multiplication of the contexts in relation to which the district functions. Within this transformation, digital technologies play a complex and variegated role, just one of which is to dissolve the boundaries between spaces of work and those of rest. Thus, what we have tried to do, using a mix of online research and field-explorations in the district, in combination with a performative excursion around Lazdynai, is map a series of plots through which to understand more fully the contexts in which today's Lazdynai works.

We use the word plots to designate the maps or routes we propose through Lazdynai since in English plot has a range of uses. You can plot a route, or locations or data on a map, or you can sell a plot of land, while the dramatic fabula of a play or film is also known as its plot. On the contrary, if you've lost the plot, you've gone mad. Thus, inspired both by our fieldwork in Lazdynai and the Situationist notion of the derive, we want the word to indicate the action of proposing a route both topographical and conceptual through the diversity of the space of Lazdynai, a proposition that is also a narrative, weaving together various strands to make a dramatic unfolding in time. Our multiple plots are only a few propositions of the many that might be made and we invite readers to contribute others. While we acknowledge that we run the risk of losing the plot, we believe that engaging with this multiplicity of contexts is fundamental to the contemporary urban condition.

The project seeks to use the possibilities opened by digital mapping technologies to multiply the perspectives from which a space can be mapped and thus to respond to the call by Henri Lefebvre quoted by Neil Brenner: "How many maps ... might be needed to deal exhaustively with a given space, to code and decode all its meanings and contents? " * How does a sleeping district function outside the tight spatial logic of socialist planning: what are the problems and potential of Lazdynai for lunactics? This publication documents those activities and provides material on which to build further work on the district.

* Brenner N (2009) *A Thousand Leaves: Notes on the Geographies of Uneven spatial development*. In: Keil R, Mahon R (eds) *The New Political Economy of Scale*. Vancouver, B.C.: University of British Columbia Press, 27-49: 33

redefining context

resistance

detail

PLOT 1 (media)

conceptual dissonance

proximity / connection

intervention

proposition

TV Tower | FB scape | Taksofonas graveyard | Rented mobile phone antenna | Notice boards | Internet is watching You | Conclusion Going further?

PLOT 2 (scale)

conceptual association

zoom-in

zoom-in

intervention

Planning Lazdynai | Architecture as resistance | Interruption of scale | Fragments | Spaces beyond | Spaces in-between | Spaces within | Absent centre | Snowglobe

PLOT 3 (smells)

distance / impact

zoom-out

Internet excavations

Fresh air of the satelite city | Wind of change | Detached protest | Privatisation of air | Regulating smells | Recycling plans | Concentrations | Smell statistics | Critical smellscapes

PLOT 4 (nuts)

zoom-in

Hazel nuts? | The potato economy | The stratum of retail spaces | Food, cosmetics, medicine | Mixing salads, mixing development | Collective meal from the soviet postcards

PLOT 5 (pixels)

zoom-out

zoom-in

Lazdynai on maps | Lazdynai as panorama | Collective body | Disintegration Cracks | Disintegration Absent content | Pixelization as potential

PLOT 6 (lunatic)

conceptual dissonance

Flexible labor | Lazdynai offline | Getting lost | Where are the limits? | Lazdynai as heritage? | Spatial improvisation | The madness of the state | The future of Lazdynai

10

Notice boards

In the context of the above-mentioned communicational innovations, it is striking that in Lazdynai intensive use is still made of the notice boards placed by the benches situated at the entrances to the staircases of the housing blocks. These are used for a range of advertising or communicational functions by a variety of parties, including offers for repair work to flats, advertisements for language schools, notes about lost pets, etc.

The low tech nature of the medium and the apparently careless nature of the stylistics of some of these paper messages should not always be taken at face value. Some, as in the case of egplus.lt, are accompanied by impressive and professional looking websites. Clearly, for a firm offering such repairs of flats, Lazdynai is considered a target area and the low tech highly localized mode of communication of flyers on staircase notice boards is considered a worthwhile element in the firm's development strategy.

Fragments

At the opposite extreme from the TV Tower are traces of Yiddish writing on fragments of gravestones from the Užupis Jewish Cemetery used in the construction of walls surrounding a now crumbling basketball court adjacent to the Lazdynai Russian-Polish language middle school. This almost lost trace of the multi-ethnic history of Vilnius is visible on the internet, whereas it is unmarked in the physical space of the district and, especially after rain, almost impossible to spot.

These micro-scale pieces of historical evidence, both in their almost invisibility in the physical space of the district and in their English language visibility on the internet, are significant. Like other bits of gravestones from the Užupis Jewish Cemetery used in other districts of Vilnius (such as Antakalnis) constructed at the same time, these details point both to the important place of Jewish communities in the historical composition of Vilnius and the complex processes through which this presence has been effaced through various layers of forgetting, one of which was the Soviet modernisation of the city.

They are also significant for revealing the international configurations through which the questions of Jewish history become (or struggle to become) visible in different ways in various towns and cities in Eastern Europe. In this context, the internet is a tool for committed individuals to make visible micro-scale evidence and bring it into relation with international debates on the ethics involved in commemorating the great tragedies of history and institutions of various sorts engaged in the process of bringing this about. The contrast between the minor nature of the trace remaining in the physical landscape and the enormity of the debates raises the question of how the interaction between universal injustice and a specific local context can occur. And if so much can be learned from a fragment of a gravestone in the wall of a ruined basketball court in a school in Lazdynai displayed on the internet, then where should attention be directed in searching for material to better understand the context of a district?

Intervention : Snowglobe

Esther Leslie returns to Walter Benjamin's interest in collecting snowglobes to argue that these banal, even kitsch, objects are more contradictory and interesting than we give them credit for. Emerging in Vienna at the end of the 19th century, snowglobes were a product of a combination of technological innovation and the citizen mobility of modernity. Fitting in the hand, they present us with a synecdoche of a space we have visited: one landmark in miniature stands in lieu of the experiences we had or the fantasies we invested in visiting a given city. At the same time, these symbols of spaces are frozen, distanced, "reified" to use Lukac's language behind glass or later plastic, inaccessible to touch and indeed lifeless. They come to life only briefly in the moment of being shaken, when the flakes (or grains of rice or whatever they may be) suspended in water enhanced with glycol (or anti-freeze) will fall for some moments bringing the scene to the illusion of life, but a strange kind of frozen life distanced in snow.

Leslie argues that for the author of the "work of art in the age of reproduction" these objects on a cusp between handicraft and mass production enraptured on account a strange ambiguity: oscillating somewhere between a celebration of reproductivity, but also as it were lamenting the aura of being in space that is fleetingly awoken by our physical engagement in shaking the snow globe.

It is our idea that making a snow globe for Lazdynai in the age of digital production could pose a series of different questions about scale, post-modernist work, commodification and the relation between city and winter weather. The first question of course would be that despite the fact of it being a protected heritage district, the idea of making a Lazdynai snow globe seems absurd. Why? - is it the lack of tourists or the fact that the district's heritage is that of socialist modernism? The second, connected question would be that of how to miniaturise Lazdynai. For Lazdynai is a district where it is invidious to decide what is iconic: to reduce Lazdynai to one object, such as the TV Tower (which in any case is outside of the district) would be anathema to why the district was celebrated.

As we argued above, it is rather the spaces between, the composition of the district as a whole and its relations with its natural context that are key to the district. This aspect resists the reduction of the district to a single point as commodity, just as the district itself, despite its heritage status, stands outside paradigms of commodification. The third element would be a demystification of the status of snow. For in Lazdynai, the snow that in association with Vienna might connote fairy-tales, is rather connoted with the severe winters that contribute to the disintegration of the modernist infrastructure that gives the district its heritage status. It is also the winter heating bills, expressed on real-estate sites in terms of month by month payments, which are a major obstacle to Lazdynai being perceived as a desirable place to live. Thus, rather

than a sense of nostalgia or fantasy, freezing Lazdynai in a snow globe might be seen as a gesture of bitter realism. The fourth question is that of the value of freezing space as an object in an age of the digital production and availability of images of spaces in a bewildering array of scales on a wide range of apparatus. In the age of mobile app's and google glasses, what would a Lazdynai snow globe evoke about being in space. The final issue is that in an age of globalised technical production networks, snow globes can be produced in DIY form – thus, homemaking Lazdynai snow globes might challenging the extended production networks in which the district is now enveloped.

It is for these reasons that the project of a Lazdynai snow globe might be an interesting avenue for further work on the district.

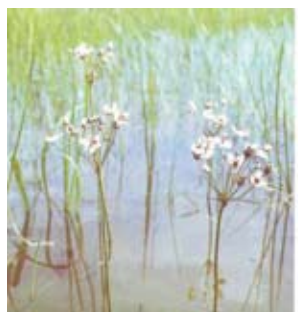Кислица
обыкновенная

Лопух
паутинистый

Осот
огородный

Стрелолист
обыкновенный

Рогоз
широколистный

Сныть
обыкновенная

Сусак
зонтичный

Иван-чай
узколистный,
кипрей