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THE RICOCHET OF *LENINOPAD* AND THE SECOND WAVE OF DESOVIETIZATION OF LITHUANIAN PUBLIC SPACE

ABSTRACT

The article analyses the influence of the desovietization of Ukrainian public space (known as Leninopad), which started in 2014 as part of the 'second wave' of the dismantling of Soviet monuments in Lithuania. Two well-known cases that have sparked the most debate among experts and the public are discussed in detail: the removal of the socialist-realist sculptures from the Green Bridge in Vilnius in 2015, and the removal of a monument to the writer Petras Cvirka in 2021. The conclusion is that in the post-Soviet and post-socialist region, in response to Russia's increasingly aggressive foreign policy, shifts in the politics of history have become a pretext not only for attempts to cleanse public spaces of the remnants of the Soviet symbolic landscape, but also for solving local political problems, or for the need for decommunization as a pretext for the economic development of vacant urban areas.

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INTRODUCTION

According to art critic Boris Groys, all contemporary iconoclasm[1] is essentially of post-socialist origin. He suggested that, having looked at the mass demolition of Soviet ideological idols in Central-Eastern Europe at the time of the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Americans would do the same to monuments of Saddam Hussein in Iraq during the 2003–2011 war. He suggested that the terrorist Islamic State, which was originally an ally of the US in its fight against the Assad regime, would also appropriate the iconoclasm of the Eastern Europeans by destroying and looting the monuments of ancient civilisations in Iraq and Syria in 2014–2015.[2] Although this can only be considered a hypothesis – presented without taking into account different socio-cultural contexts – subsequent events have shown that the post-soviet and post-socialist countries of Central and Eastern Europe have had to return once again to the desovietization of their public spaces, which did not seem to be completed in the 1990s. At the beginning of independence, a radical change in the Soviet symbolic landscape began that was mainly related to the rejection of the former political regime and its symbols, and to the efforts to restore pre-Soviet national statehoods or to create new ones. These processes have been most pronounced in the Baltic states, in the western part of Ukraine (to some extent), and in Moldova and the Caucasus republics. Meanwhile, the second wave of the desovietization of public space was mostly inspired by Russia's aggression against Ukraine, which started in 2014 and led to the occupation of the Crimean Peninsula and the hybrid war in the eastern Donetsk and Luhansk regions[3].

The Maidan revolution of 2013–2014 became a new impulse for the spontaneous desovietization of the Ukrainian public space, which was first and foremost influenced by the desire to end the rule of the pro-Russian oligarchs (which can be described as *ideologically motivated vandalism*). Meanwhile, the subsequent events related to the more systematic

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[1] The author calls the destruction of ideological monuments 'iconoclasm', linking it to the (quasi)religious context, where the new ideology (the new faith) cannot tolerate the idols of the old cult in the public sphere. In the first sense, 'iconoclasm' is the destruction of religious images and religious art. This phenomenon is primarily associated with the iconoclasm of Byzantium in the eighth and ninth centuries as a struggle over the veneration of icons between the military-secular authorities and the monasteries. The Byzantine emperors, especially Constantine V, ordered the covering, confiscation and destruction of paintings and relics of saints, and they persecuted and tortured icon worshippers. The Second Council of Nicaea legalized the veneration of icons.

[2] Marija Semendjaeva, 'Boris Grojs: "Za predelami SŠA nel'zja ob'jasnit' ničego, krome Supermena"', *Afiša Daily*, 25 March 2015 <https://daily.afisha.ru/archive/vozduh/art/boris-groys-za-predelami-ssha-nelzya-obyasnit-nichego-krome-supermena/> [accessed 28 January 2021].

[3] Rasa Čepaitienė, 'Two waves of rejection of Soviet monuments in Lithuania', in *Communist Heritage in Belarus and EU countries: the Problem of Interpretation and the Relevance of Conservation*, ed. by Aliaksei Lastouski, and Iryna Ramanava (Konrad Adenauer Schiftung Belarus, Wilfried Martens Centre for European Studies, 2021), pp. 58–72.

and consistent organization of *Leninopad* – not only in the larger cities but also throughout the territory under the control of the Ukrainian government – can be interpreted as *tactical vandalism*,[4] used as a response to the doctrine of the so-called 'Russian world' that had been used by Russian propaganda to justify its aggression against Ukrainian sovereignty. The removal of Soviet symbols that had escaped the first wave of desovietization in the 1990s was a way of preventing claims to these territories, in the same way as the destruction of cultural objects that had no military significance but were important for the enemy's identity was carried out during the war in former Yugoslavia in 1991–1995.[5] That the tactics of *Leninopad* – which included the destruction of not only monuments but also other 'ideologically charged' relics of Soviet art and propaganda that remained in public spaces – were perceived as a means for Ukrainians to defend themselves against Russian cultural influence and political claims to control the public space of neighbouring countries would be shown by the cases of both the unrecognized Transnistria Republic of Moldova (TRM) and the separatist Republics of Donetsk and Luhansk, which were established in 2014. In these territories, which were torn from their native Moldova and Ukraine by Russia, the Soviet symbolic landscape remained frozen; this, among other factors, led to the invention of the history of the 'statehood' of these quasi-states and their inclusion in the wider Russian imperial/Soviet narrative.[6]

   Leninopad, which originated in Ukraine but spread to the Baltic States and Poland, led not only to the purification of the symbolic landscape but also to the need for a deeper understanding of and critical reflection on the Soviet material and mental heritage, while also seeking a new national myth and collective identity that could unite a society divided by various socio-politic sections. Many exhibitions, photo albums and documentaries were created to capture and reflect on the phenomenon of *Leninopad*,[7] in which they tried to document what happened later to the toppled statues of Lenin and other Soviet activists and the places where they had stood.[8] Researchers noticed a certain memory disruption:

4   Stanley Cohen, 'Sociological Approaches to Vandalism', in *Vandalism: Behaviour and Motivations*, ed. by Claude Lévy-Leboyer (Amsterdam: North Holland, 1984), pp. 51–61.

5   Dario Gamboni, *The Destruction of Art. Iconoclasm and Vandalism since the French Revolution* (London: Reaktion Books, 1997), p. 38.

6   Aleksandr Voronovič, 'Istoričeskaja politika v nepriznannych respublikach Pridnestrov'ja i Donbassa v postsovetskom kontekste', in *Politika pamjati v sovremennoj Rossii i stranach Vostočnoj Evropy. Aktory, instituty, narrativy: kollektivnaja monografija*, ed. by Aleksej Miller, and Dmitrij Efremenko (Sankt-Peterburg: Izdatel'stvo Evropejskogo universiteta v Sankt-Peterburge, 2020), pp. 610–27.

7   For example, the 2017 exhibition "FALLEN: Revolution – Propaganda – Iconoclasm" at the University of Essex explored, among other topics, the phenomenon of the Ukrainian *Leninopad*. Meanwhile a photo project by Niels Ackermann and Sebastien Gobert, "Looking for Lenin", presented in the same year, analysed what happened to the removed Soviet monuments afterwards, etc.

8   Donald Weber, 'The mighty have fallen: toppling statues in the name of decommunisation', *The Calvert Journal*, 14 September 2016 <https://www.calvertjournal.com/features/show/6696/decommunisation-ukraine-lenin-statues-donald-weber-photography> [accessed 15 October 2021].

former ideological icons disappeared from public spaces, but these locations were mostly left empty.[9] The search for a creative reinterpretation of these spaces, usually initiated by representatives of the non-governmental sector or individual artists, revealed that it is not new monuments in the place of the toppled ones that are more appropriate for post-Soviet society, but temporary artistic projects and installations *in situ* that encourage the public to openly discuss this complex past. Somewhat echoing the practice of the museification of these ideological objects after the first wave, attempts to collect and publicly exhibit these specific objects were made.[10] However, this museification affected only a few of these monuments and works of art. Most of the toppled statues ended up in storage or were destroyed, melted down for scrap metal, or sold to private art collections.

Although Russia's official reaction to the Leninopad in Ukraine was largely negative, in some ways it also occurred in Russia, where there were several cases of the anonymous toppling or destruction of Lenin monuments.[11] Meanwhile, in Belarus, the first wave of desovietization of public space, as elsewhere, passed in the early 1990s, but it was superficial and did not bring qualitative changes in society and the ideological landscape.[12] Thus, the influence in Belarus of the Ukrainian events of 2014 was manifested in the fact that the Belarusian *Leninopad* was determined not by political reasons but by the physical decay of these statues. In this way, some Soviet monuments were removed from city squares or companies' premises.[13] There was also domestic vandalism or, in contrast, efforts to create open-air art collections or museum exhibitions.[14] For example, in 2014, an open-air museum of Communist monuments was established in the city of Zhlobin.[15]

The 'first' and 'second' waves of desovietization of public spaces in some post-Soviet countries took the form of: 1) the cleansing of Soviet symbolic spaces and relics, which usually irritated and provoked protests from

9   Arsenij Avakov, *Lenin s nami?* (Char'kov: Folio, 2017); Oleksandra Hajdaj, *Kam'janyj bist'. Lenin u Central'nij Ukrajini* (Kyjiv: K.I.S, 2018).

10   One can mention Szobor Park in Hungary, Muzeon in Moscow, Grutas Park in Lithuania, similar open-air museums of Soviet sculptures under construction in Ukraine, Kazakhstan, etc.

11   'Lenin bez golovy: v Pervoural'ske otorvali golovu s pamjatnika voždju', *Novye izvestija*, 16 July 2017 <https://newizv.ru/news/incident/16-07-2017/lenin-bez-golovy-v-pervoualske-otorvali-golovu-s-pamyatnika-vozhdyu-ddd469a2-22d6-4686-a455-30769333bd5f> [accessed 4 April 2022]; 'Leninopad dobralsja do rossijskogo Volgograda', *Novoe vremja*, 28 October 2014 <https://nv.ua/ukr/world/leninopad-dobralsya-do-rossiyskogo-volgograda-17983.html> [accessed 4 April 2022].

12   '7 punktov dlja dekommunizacii i desovetizacii Belarusi', *1863x*, 8 December 2017 <https://1863x.com/desovetization/> [accessed 15 October 2021].

13   'Dèkamunzacyja po-belorusski. Kakich Leninych i drugich Čapaevych podvinuli iz centra i počemu', *Hrodna life*, 22 September 2017 <https://ru.hrodna.life/articles/dekamunizacyiya-po-belorusski-kakih-leninyih-i-drugih-chapaevyih-podvinuli-iz-centra-i-pochemu-foto/> [accessed 4 April 2022].

14   'V Belarusi nadrugalis' nad pamjatnikami Leninu: opublikovany foto i video', *Apostrof*, 22 April 2017 <https://apostrophe.ua/news/society/accidents/2017-04-22/v-belarusi-nadrugalis-nad-pamyatnikami-leninu-opublikovany-foto-i-video/93965> [accessed 4 April 2022].

15   'V Žlobine pojavilsja "Park skul'ptur sovetskoj èpochi"', *Govorim.by*, 20 January 2014 <https://govorim.by/gomelskaya-oblast/zhlobin/novosti-zhlobina/115677-v-zhlobine-poyavilsya-park-skulptur-sovetskoy-epohi-foto.html> [accessed 5 April 2022].

Russia;[16] 2) neglect of these 'cleansed' spaces. The former manifested itself in the removal of Soviet monuments and the installation of the pantheon of pre- or non-Soviet heroes (in the Baltic states, this meant the restoration of the signs of interwar statehood, the restoration of historical justice, and the creation of new monuments to medieval rulers to highlight the long and rich tradition of statehood that is also characteristic of some other post-Soviet republics). Thus, cities in Lithuania, Belarus, and Ukraine were decorated with monuments to medieval dukes and hetmans. Such nationalization of public space is also quite pronounced in the Caucasus and in Central Asian post-Soviet states. Reflections of Soviet-era national tragedies should be mentioned: signs of honouring the heroes of the post-war anti-Soviet struggle in the Baltic States; Holodomor memorials and monuments in Ukraine;[17] monuments of the 1931–1933 famine in Kazakhstan, etc. However, the second process of neglecting or even vandalizing these public spaces reflected the ideological indecision of states such as Lithuania, or the fear of overloading public squares with symbols, the appearance of which usually leads to public disputes.

The case of Lithuania shows both the general tendencies of the region and its specific features. The first wave of symbolic landscape change here was characterized by a fairly consistent implementation of the anti-communist narrative in public discourse. This manifested in spontaneous action by ordinary people, mainly initiated by veterans of the anti-Soviet underground and the organizations of political prisoners and deportees that were active at the time. However, after public spaces had been cleansed of the symbols of the former regime, most of them remained empty for several decades, despite various plans and proposals to fill them with attributes of national memory. This may have been a reflection of democratization and the general European attitude to avoiding the nationalism that can arise when the opinions of ruling groups and the public are associated with closed-mindedness and ethnocentrism. Some public spaces in Vilnius are good examples of such physical and symbolic emptiness. It is worth remembering the fate of the square on Pylimo Street, which was

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[16]   The most well-known case is the conflict between Estonia and Russia over the relocation of the so-called 'Bronze Soldier' in Tallinn in 2007.

[17]   In 2006, on the initiative of President Viktor Yushchenko, the construction of the main Holodomor memorial in Ukraine started. It stands on the impressive slope of the Dnipro River in Kyiv, between the Soviet WWII memorial – The Park of Eternal Glory – on one side and the Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra monastery on the other, thus complementing the aura of local sacredness of this particular place with signs of the nation's tragedy. The Memorial complex opens a sculptural composition of weeping angels – a symbolic 'gate' to the Memorial. An alley of rowan bushes (symbolizing the memory of Holodomor victims) is constantly increasing in length due to the State Protocol and Ceremonial of Ukraine, which states that delegations of foreign leaders who visit the Memorial have to plant a bush. A sculpture of a girl commemorates children who died of hunger in 1932–1933. The central object of the Memorial is a candle-shaped building dedicated to the Holodomor Museum, where the memorial books of the Holodomor victims are stored. More: National Museum of the Holodomor-Genocide, 'History of the National Museum of the Holodomor-Genocide', *National Museum of the Holodomor-Genocide*, [n.d.] <https://holodomormuseum.org.ua/en/history-of-national-holodomor-genocide-museum/> [accessed 7 April 2022].

reconstructed and opened to visitors only in the summer of 2021 (the monument to Soviet partisans and underground fighters that had been there since 1983 was removed in the 1990s, and this public space had remained neglected for a long time). However, the most famous case is the never-ending story of the reconstruction of Lukiškės Square. It must be said that this square – which became the main ideological site of the Lithuanian SSR after the dismantling of the monument to Lenin in 1991 and despite numerous governmental attempts and public initiatives to erect a modern commemorative marker to anti-Soviet resistance in this place – remains ideologically indeterminate to this day.[18] It would seem that the "problem of Lukiškės Square" exists mainly due to social groups that oppose proposals to honour freedom fighters there or to install the Tomb of the Unknown anti-Soviet Partisan. On the other hand, there are quite a few Vilnius residents who are interested in the fact that the square could be turned into a recreational zone, without any special ideological symbols or connotations. There have also been artistic attempts to address this issue. For instance, at the beginning of September 2012, during the 'Capital Days' in Vilnius, for several weeks a sand statue of John Lennon with a guitar in his hands stood in Lukiškės Square; it was dedicated to the 50th anniversary of The Beatles, but maybe it was a witty play on words regarding the sonic similarity of the words *Lenin* and *Lennon* (the creators of this temporary monument were the Latvian artist group *Frostiart Baltic*[19]). This and other cases not covered here would indicate that people's relationship with relics of the Soviet era in Lithuania is still complicated.

The Ukrainian events of 2013–2014 and the beginning of massive decommunization of public space in Ukraine has had a significant impact on the renewal of this debate in countries where the issue already seemed resolved. So, the purpose of this article is to take a closer look at the influence of the Ukrainian *Leninopad* on changes in Lithuanian public spaces since 2014. The key question is to what extent do the cases discussed in more detail below reflect general trends in the region, and to what extent are they determined by local socio-political peculiarities?

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[18]   Algis Vyšniūnas, 'Lukiškių aikštė – socialinio užsakymo evoliucija. Paminklas laisvės kovų dalyviams, ar simbolis "Laisvė"?', *Urbanistika ir architektūra*, 4 (2008), 201–20; Lina Panavaitė, and Saulius Motieka, 'Lukiškių aikštės Vilniuje urbanistinės plėtros evoliucija, pasekmės ir siūlymai', *Acta Academiae Artium Vilnensis*, 76 (2015), 139–57; Gintautas Tiškus, 'Lukiškių aikštės Vilniuje reprezentacinių savybių tyrimas', *Mokslas – Lietuvos ateitis / Science – Future of Lithuania*, 10 (2018), 1–7; Živilė Mikailienė, 'Memory Culture and Memory Politics in Lithuania (1990–2018): the Case of Lukiškės Square in Vilnius', in *Official History in Eastern Europe*, ed. by Korine Amacher, Andrii Portnov, and Viktori Serhiienko (Gottingen: Fibre, 2020), pp. 237–66.

[19]   Mindaugas Jackevičius, 'Lukiškių aikštėje vietoje Lenino iškilo Lennonas', *Delfi.lt*, 31 August 2012 <https://www.delfi.lt/news/daily/lithuania/lukiskiu-aiksteje-vietoje-lenino-iskilo-lennonas.d?id=59425237> [accessed 2 March 2022].

THE CASE OF THE GREEN BRIDGE SCULPTURES

As sociologist Rasa Baločkaitė notes, "both in Lithuania and in other countries of Central Eastern Europe, the first wave of revisionism did not affect those heritage objects that can be called 'ideologically ambiguous': monuments to artists who collaborated with the Soviet regime; squares, streets, schools named after them; sculptures, etc., glorifying working people; monuments dedicated to the victory of the Soviet Union in World War II; buildings of architectural significance (cinemas, sports halls and cultural palaces, stadiums); cemeteries of Soviet soldiers, etc.".[20] This is the case of the Green Bridge statues in Vilnius.

One of the oldest bridges in the city, Vilnius Green Bridge, which has existed since the Middle Ages, has been repeatedly reconstructed and rebuilt. Its last reconstruction was carried out in 1894, after which the bridge looked completely different as it was covered by an arched steel structure. The bridge was blown up in 1944 with the retreat of Wehrmacht troops. Its remains were destroyed by the attacking Soviet troops. The plans for the new bridge were prepared by the Leningrad Design Institute in 1952 and realized by the Engineering Regiment of the Baltic Military District. The new bridge was created in the Stalinist 'great monumental style' and renamed 'Ivan Chernyakhovsky bridge' in honour of the memory of the Soviet general who led the liberation of Vilnius and died soon after in a battle in East Prussia. This general was solemnly buried in one of the main squares of Vilnius (now Vincas Kudirka Square) near the Green Bridge, and a monument by one of the most important Soviet sculptors, Nikolay Tomsky, was erected on his tombstone. Thus, the shape of the Green Bridge at that time was part of a wider semantic system of a symbolic landscape. Four sculptural compositions on the bridge corners, depicting a working peasant couple, young builders, students and Red Army soldiers, visually established the program of creation of communism in Lithuania. Statues embodying youth, idealism, enthusiasm, heroism, romance, futurism and the abundance of a utopian society were created by famous Lithuanian sculptors. In times when Stalinism was coming to an end in the USSR, it was only beginning to gain momentum in the newly annexed Baltic republics. Three of the seven authors of the sculptures of the Green Bridge (Juozas Mikėnas, Bronius Pundzius, and Petras Vaivada) already had experience with working in the style of socialist realism as, in 1946 in Kaliningrad, they had been tasked with creating the Victory Monument of the Soviet Army.

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[20]   Rasa Baločkaitė, 'Sovietinis paveldas Vidurio Rytų Europoje – antroji revizionizmo banga?', *Kultūros barai*, 2 (2016), 18–22.

During the slow socio-cultural transformations of Soviet society, the ideological significance of the Green Bridge changed. In the post-Stalinist period, the statues lost the weight of direct indoctrination and became simply an eye-catching decorative accent of the capital of the Lithuanian SSR. Probably due to these processes of neutralization of the ideological value of the statues after the collapse of the USSR and the beginning of the desovietization of the Lithuanian public space, the bridge retained its socrealistic form because the sculptures depicted not specific historical figures but personalized allegories of the ideal representatives of the prosperous 'classless' future communist society. In 1990, the historical name 'Green' was returned to the bridge and it was granted the status of a state-protected object. The efforts to reinterpret the meanings of the bridge would be described on plaques mounted on the pedestals of the statues, explaining in Lithuanian and English the historical context of the emergence of these objects. Later, these sculptures became a source of inspiration and a stage for various artistic or social actions. They were artists who most actively advocated for their preservation in situ. These artists tried to give the statues a new, unconventional meaning and thus reinterpret them. The well-known artist Gediminas Urbonas was one of the first to try to find a way to 'suppress' the ideological 'messages' of the statues. His 1995 work "You Come and Go" comprised mirror cubes covering the heads of the "Agriculture" sculptural composition. This temporary work became widely known and was later used on the covers of several art catalogues and scientific publications. In turn, another sculptural group depicting two young men decorated the cover of a brochure published by the LGBT community, which provoked the anger and protest of one of its still-living authors, Bronius Vyšniauskas. The artist Gytenis Umbrasas, known for non-standard solutions to making sense of the capital's public spaces, in 2004 decorated the slopes of the embankments near the bridge on both sides with compositions of live flowers that formed the inscription "I love you – I love you too", which attracted the attention of inhabitants and tourists. During the Christmas period, the bridge sculptures were sometimes even covered with Santa Claus hats. However, not all similar attempts to establish a dialogue with the statues were so friendly or neutral. They were repeatedly attacked by vandals, who especially did not like the composition depicting Soviet soldiers, which was often showered with red paint.

The installation of the 'Chain' sculpture, hung under the Green Bridge by the artist Kunotas Vildžiūnas (together with co-author Martynas Lukošius) in 2009, can be considered a successful attempt to re-establish a discussion about a complex and inconvenient past. This work became part of the wider Vilnius Bridge Decoration Programme, one of the events

of the international "Vilnius – European Capital of Culture 2009" project, during which various works of art appeared under several bridges in Vilnius. Thus, at that time, it seemed that the long-lasting value conflict between citizens who were or were not 'in favour' of the preservation of the Green Bridge statues would be solved not by destroying things but simply by adding something to both the image of the bridge itself and its meanings. If this bridge's sculptures reflected an essential feature of the Soviet system, namely its propensity for façadism, the 'Chain', which was invisible from the top of the bridge, embodied its true essence: enslavement and lack of freedom. Therefore, it was only in combination that these artistic accents exposed the foundations of the Soviet totalitarian regime and became an eloquent didactic tool for children and young people – residents of Vilnius and foreign tourists who want to get to know the recent past of this city and Lithuania.

The last attempt to give the bridge a new meaning before the removal of the statues was a project of the architect Audrius Ambrasas, who proposed placing the sculptures in cages and reinforcing them with metal structures in 2014 during the Vilnius Street Art Festival. In this way, this artist reacted with a dose of irony to the growing public controversy regarding the cultural value of the statues by proposing to symbolically transfer them into a certain museum context and thus neutralize their ideological meanings. However, the project did not receive the approval of the city authorities, probably because the fate of the statues had already been determined.[21]

The socrealist statues – as representations of Soviet ideology and reference examples of the aesthetics of 'Stalin's empire' style – were removed in July 2015 under the decision of the newly elected Vilnius municipal council on the pretext of "an emergency condition that poses a danger to passers-by". This decision was political and clearly influenced by Ukrainian events as the beginnings of *Leninopad* had been widely discussed in the Lithuanian press as a precedent and a pretext for the dismantling of the Green Bridge statues.[22] Until the moment of their removal, there was a fierce debate among the Lithuanian public about whether these statues were honourable objects of national cultural heritage or hateful material witnesses of the former alien regime and the doomed communist

21   Rasa Goštautaitė, 'Dissonant Soviet monuments in post- Soviet Lithuania the application of artistic practices', *Baltic Worlds*, 12 February 2021 <https://balticworlds.com/dissonant-soviet-monuments-in-post-soviet-lithuania/> [accessed 5 April 2022].

22   Šarūnas Černiauskas, 'Ar Žaliojo tilto skulptūros nekeliaus Kijevo Lenino pėdomis?' *Delfi*, 9 December 2013 https://www.delfi.lt/news/daily/lithuania/ar-zaliojo-tilto-skulpturos-nukeliaus-kijevo-lenino-pedomis.d?id=63487460 [accessed 26 April 2022]; 'Nukeliamos sovietinės Žaliojo tilto skulptūros: argumentai už ir prieš'. *Kauno diena*, 19 July 2015 <https://kauno.diena.lt/naujienos/vilnius/miesto-pulsas/pradeti-zaliojo-tilto-skulpturu-nukelimo-darbai-701648> [accessed 15 April 2022]

ideology.[23] For now, the statues are stored on the premises of a municipal enterprise and their future is unclear. In March 2016, by unanimous decision of the newly elected Council for the Evaluation of Cultural Property of the Department of Cultural Heritage, the sculptures also lost their status of cultural property of local importance, as was granted to them in 1993.[24] This decision was taken without addressing the fact that the issue of the artistic and historical value of these statues was once raised at the beginning of 2015, when the majority of the members of this Council decided to let them keep their protection status of "objects of cultural heritage". This would indicate that there was no consensus among the heritage experts themselves on this issue. So, the Green Bridge sculptures can be considered a vivid example of "dissonant heritage".[25] In this case, the problem of the separation of 'ours' and 'alien' is still relevant and publicly discussed in Lithuanian society. This is because the authors of the sculptures – the best Lithuanian sculptors of that time – had worked under the conditions of Stalin's repressions, when the Soviet regime very brutally consolidated its power in the country and the official canon of 'socialist realism' was the only politically acceptable form of artistic expression. So the 'problem' of the Green Bridge statues emerged in 2015 as a combination of different internal and external, political and cultural reasons. The debates on their fate were also strongly influenced by intense media attention.[26] The internal causes can be attributed, first of all, to the inevitable physical degradation of the statues and their loss of aesthetic quality, which led to the growing need to restore them or remove them to a place where they would not pose a danger to passers-by (although it is not known whether this danger was actually real). The city municipality has repeatedly announced a competition for the restoration of the sculptures; however, due to the 'political sensitivity' of the issue, no conservation company has come forward to undertake their restoration. The Russian Federation offered to pay for their restoration; later, after their removal was postponed, the mayor of one of the cities of the neighbouring Kaliningrad *oblast* even asked for them to be transferred, but these proposals did not attract the attention of

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23   *Debatai dėl praeities Lietuvos internetinėje žiniasklaidoje,* ed. by Živilė Mikailienė (Vilnius: Lietuvos istorijos institutas, 2019); Rasa Baločkaitė, 'The New Culture Wars in Lithuania: Trouble with Soviet Heritage', *Cultures of History. Forum,* 12 April 2015 <https://www.cultures-of-history.uni-jena.de/debates/the-new-culture-wars-in-lithuania > [accessed 1 April 2022].

24   Valdemaras Klumbys, 'Balvonams ir jų pakalikams suduotas vieningas atkirtis, draugai! Valio!!!', *Delfi.lt,* 17 March 2016 <https://www.delfi.lt/news/ringas/lit/v-klumbys-balvonams-ir-ju-pakalikams-suduotas-vieningas-atkirtis-draugai-valio.d?id=70605212> [accessed 5 April 2022].

25   John E. Tunbridge, and Gregory J. Ashworth, *Dissonant Heritage. The Management of the Past as a Resource in Conflict* (Chichester: John Wiley and Sons, 1996).

26   Skaidra Trilupaitytė, 'Medijų kultūra ar "atminties transformacijos"? Žaliojo tilto atvejis ir kiti paminklai', in *Nacionalinis tapatumas medijų kultūroje,* ed. by Žilvinė Gaižutytė-Filipavičienė, and Vytautas Rubavičius (Vilnius: Lietuvos kultūros tyrimų institutas, 2011), pp. 84–102.

the Vilnius authorities.[27] Patriotic groups, meanwhile, were fundamentally opposed to the restoration of the sculptures, arguing that the money needed for this could be invested in other more worthwhile things. In addition, opponents of the statues questioned even the very idea that they had any value at all. However, the main argument of the supporters of removal or demolition was the trauma that arose every time people looked at these statues, especially those who had suffered Soviet repression. The sculptural group of Soviet army soldiers – considered a symbol of occupation – were the cause of much of these people's dissatisfaction. Representatives of the organizations of former Gulag prisoners and anti-Soviet freedom fighter veterans often emphasized this emotionally saturated argument, although in this case there was a delicate dilemma: to destroy only these – the most hated statues – or all of them?[28] And since the flag held by one of the soldiers depicts a sickle and a hammer, attention was drawn to the fact that Lithuanian legislation had banned Nazi and Communist symbols in 2008, although it should be noted that these legal norms do not apply to objects of cultural heritage.

The external reasons for the escalation of this issue meanwhile could be attributed to the gradually growing concern in this region's small countries regarding the resurgent and increasingly openly demonstrated ambitions of Putin's neo-imperial Russia. As a form of systematic desovietization of public space, the Ukrainian *Leninopad* often served as an argument for enthusiasts of the demolition of the Green Bridge statues and other surviving Soviet monuments,[29] despite the fact that the historical contexts here were quite different. In the official discourse at the beginning of its independence, Lithuania, as mentioned above, was already able to fairly clearly and consistently assess the Soviet period, while in Ukraine such an approach remained regionally fragmented until the events of 2014.

Although the Green Bridge statues have received a lot of attention from specialists and the public, there has nevertheless been a rush to demolish them without consistent analysis and clarification of their historical and artistic values, especially their rarity and exceptionality. This bridge was the only object of its kind in Lithuania (although historically there have been other bridges with statues). Bridges decorated with sculptures usually attract the attention of tourists and become significant signs

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27   'Sovietsko valdžia prašo Vilniaus savivaldybę perduoti Žaliojo tilto skulptūras', *15 min.lt*, 28 July 2015 <https://www.15min.lt/naujiena/aktualu/lietuva/sovetsko-valdzia-praso-vilniaus-savivaldybe-perduoti-zaliojo-tilto-skulpturas-56-518515?copied> [accessed 25 March 2022]; 'Dėl Žaliojo tilto skulptūrų – iš Rusijos grasinimai prezidentei', *Delfi.lt*, 8 February 2015 <https://www.delfi.lt/news/daily/lithuania/del-zaliojo-tilto-skulpturu-is-rusijos-grasinimai-prezidentei.d?id=67114660> [accessed 25 March 2022].

28   Author's interview with former political prisoner A.S. on 11 August 2015.

29   Šarūnas Černiauskas, 'Ar Žaliojo tilto skulptūros nukeliaus Kijevo Lenino pėdomis?', *Delfi.lt*, 9 December 2013 <https://www.delfi.lt/news/daily/lithuania/ar-zaliojo-tilto-skulpturos-nukeliaus-kijevo-lenino-pedomis.d?id=63487460> [accessed 26 April 2022].

of a city – even its well-known symbols: for example, the Old Bridge in Florence, the Bridge of the Holy Angel in Rome, Charles Bridge in Prague, or the Anichkov Bridge in St Petersburg. However, the most interesting thing is that, despite the variety of visual forms of Stalinist propaganda, few bridges with statues were built in the USSR, and even less remain. Therefore, the closest analogues of the Green Bridge statues in post-Soviet space are the Victory Bridge on the Leningrad Highway in Moscow, with sculptures created by the abovementioned Nikolay Tomsky in 1943; the stations of the Moscow–Volga and Volga–Don river shipping channels and their gateway; and especially one of the bridges in Kharkiv, the capital of the Ukrainian SSR during the Stalinist era. The Kharkivskyi Bridge was built in 1954 and dedicated to the 300th anniversary of the reunification of Ukraine and Russia (arch. A. Mezherovsky; sculpt. A. Ovsiankin). One of the sculptural compositions depicted a Russian and a Ukrainian holding hands,[30] while another represented a worker and a kolkhoz woman, which is reminiscent of the Green Bridge in Vilnius. However, there are also significant differences between these two bridges. The Kharkivskyi Bridge has only two sculptural compositions, both of which are embedded on the west side of it. It is possible that the motive of the worker and the peasant, noticeable on both the Green Bridge and on Kharkivskyi Bridge, is a certain variation of the famous "Rabochij i kolhoznica" sculpture by Vera Muchina, unveiled in Moscow in 1937 near the VDNH complex. The statues of the Green Bridge embody in much more detail the program of Soviet totalitarian ideology, which aims to create the ideal people of a future prosperous society: a working class, peasants, intelligentsia, the Red Army, etc. Unfortunately, the Green Bridge has also become a sh arp tool for the manipulative use of history that demonizes and manipulates the 'Soviet inheritance' in the current political struggles; it is even a kind of 'scapegoat' for all the failures of the post-Soviet transformation of the country.

Subsequent attempts to make sense of the bridge by artistic means[31] or commercial advertising were temporary, so its condition after the removal of the sculptures could also be attributed to the already observed abandonment and emptying of public spaces that were created during the Soviet era. Among the temporarily implemented artistic projects on the Green Bridge, the "Megareality Goodness Activator" installation stands out. The concept of this project was developed by the photographer Saulius

30   Ngeorgij, 'K istorii Char'kovskogo mosta', *LiveJournal*, 22 May 2015 <https://ngeorgij.livejournal.com/102988.html> [accessed 29 January 2019].
31   Evaldas Činga, 'Ant Žaliojo tilto – nauja instaliacija', *Made in Vilnius*, 11 September 2019 <https://madeinvilnius.lt/naujienos/ant-zaliojo-tilto-nauja-instaliacija/> [accessed 30 January 2022]; Austėja Mikuckytė-Mateikienė, 'Ant Žaliojo tilto atsiras Ambraso siūlomos konstrukcijos: "nukeltos skulptūros tapo radioaktyvios"', *LRT.lt*, 9 April 2021 <https://www.lrt.lt/naujienos/kultura/12/1383581/ant-zaliojo-tilto-atsiras-ambraso-siulomos-konstrukcijos-nukeltos-skulpturos-tapo-radioaktyvios> [accessed 30 January 2022].

Paukštys and implemented by sculptor Šarūnas Arbačiauskas in April–
September 2018.[32] In an interview, Paukštys told me how this idea came
about: "when the competition for installations on the Green Bridge was
announced by the municipality, my first thought was the wind. For several
years, we regularly sailed on a pontoon boat on the Neris and noticed that
the wind whirls all the time at the Green Bridge, where the river makes
a little bend; it could be stronger or weaker, but it always blows. So, the idea
was that the wind would be involved in the installations. One more thing:
in my opinion, art must participate in life, respond to problems in societ-
ies, reflect expectations, sometimes ridicule phenomena that are occurring,
sometimes rejoice, and so on. In most cases, works of art should contain
elements of humour and satire. Thus, another idea prevailed in the cre-
ation of the 'Megareality Goodness Activator', namely the ironic rendering
of important meanings for society: *Truth*, *Conscience*, *Determination*, *Cour-
age* – very important qualities both personally and for society as a whole.
Unfortunately, when looking at the life of Lithuania in recent decades, it
is very clear that these characteristics are variable and take on different
meanings as the government changes, etc. Thus, what for one government
was conscience or truth for another means something else; with the change
of powers, attitudes towards these fundamental values also change, and
some phenomena disappear catastrophically in general".[33] According to
Paukštys, during the creation of the installation, attention was paid to
the re-establishment of the fundamental values supported by society. This is
how the windswept *Courage*, *Determination*, *Truth*, and *Conscience* sculptures
appeared on the bridge, which, with the help of the kinetics of the wind,
constantly changed direction, ironically demonstrating that the location
and meaning of these values were constantly changing. Since it was known
in advance that the installations on the Green Bridge would exist only for
half a year, these works were not criticized. Therefore, the humorous play
of the kinetic elements of the installation had to help the audience to un-
derstand their meanings more easily. Sculptor Šarūnas Arbačiauskas com-
bined various kinetic engineering solutions and modern elements: each part
of the installation had different moving elements and different structur-
al formations which – with a change in lighting, the strength of the wind,
the angle of observation, etc. – formed a changing image. As expected, this
installation received mixed reactions and reviews.[34] According to the artist,

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32 Toma Vidugirytė, 'Žaliąjį tiltą papuošė keturios vertybių vėjarodės', *Kauno diena*, 20 April 2019
    <https://www.diena.lt/naujienos/vilnius/miesto-pulsas/zaliaji-tilta-papuose-keturios-vertybiu-
    vejarodes-910168> [accessed 30 January 2022].
33 Author's interview with Saulius Paukštys, 31 July 2021, Vilnius.
34 'Naujos Žaliojo tilto puošmenos – menas ar kičas?', *Lietuvos rytas*, 9 April 2019 <https://www.lrytas.lt/
    kultura/meno-pulsas/2019/04/09/news/naujos-zaliojo-tilto-puosmenos---menas-ar-kicas--9908662/>
    [accessed 30 January 2022].

some critics were offended by the very idea of playing with such a serious concept; others perceived it as criticism or ridicule of the government's policy; still others were surprised by the unusual engineering of the installation, but most welcomed it. However, the art critics who analysed it missed the sharper contrast of the weathervanes with the environment and criticized the excessive bluntness of the idea.[35]

In the autumn of 2019, one of the pillars of the Green Bridge was decorated with Donatas Norušis's installation "Family", which echoed the growing public debate on the rights of the LGBT community and the civil status of non-traditional families. It is interesting that the author of this installation made a direct connection with the previous form of the bridge: on this pedestal, a composition of two young builders once stood, which could also be interpreted as a homosexual couple. Another highlight of this installation is the search for the optimal semantic links with the city, reflected in the choice of materials: iron, concrete, plastic and wood. According to the author, "these materials were chosen to replicate the urban environment that surrounds each of us. The image of people among these elements creates narratives that vary depending on how everyone looks at this work – what the experience of the viewer is".[36] This artistic decision made it possible to create effects of ephemerity and transparency, which are associated with the uncertainty of the issue of the rights of homosexual persons in the legal system.

So far, the most recent artistic installation to appear on the bridge was "Signs of the Green Bridge" in 2021, by the well-known architect Audrius Ambrasas, which was selected from among the many works submitted to the municipality's "I Create Vilnius" competition.[37] As mentioned above, this idea – empty iron cages – had been proposed by the author previously, when the socrealist sculptures were still in place. According to Ambrasas, the artistic installation on the Green Bridge, with no sculptures left and no idea who could replace them, completes the overall architectural composition of the bridge. "When we retreated, looking at the entire bridge, it became a bridge with finished pylons, because with only bare pedestals it seemed that something was missing. After removing the sculptures, the composition was somewhat disrupted. As an architect, it hurts

35   Jūratė Žuolytė, 'Ekspertų meninės instaliacijos ant Žaliojo tilto neįtikino: šlamštas eksponuojamas kaip geras means', *Delfi.lt*, 10 April 2019 <https://www.delfi.lt/kultura/naujienos/ekspertu-menines-instaliacijos-ant-zaliojo-tilto-neitikino-slamstas-eksponuojamas-kaip-geras-menas.d?id=80867613> [accessed 30 January 2022].

36   'Ant Žaliojo tilto iškilo nauja instaliacija „Šeima"', *LRT.lt*, 11 September 2019 <https://www.lrt.lt/naujienos/kultura/12/1096651/ant-zaliojo-tilto-iskilo-nauja-instaliacija-seima> [accessed 30 January 2022].

37   'Ant Žaliojo tilto iškilo meninė instaliacija', *Made in Vilnius*, 27 August 2021 <https://madeinvilnius.lt/naujienos/miestas/ant-zaliojo-tilto-iskilo-menine-instaliacija/> [accessed 30 January 2022].

my heart when a work of architecture is unbalanced".[38] In Ambrasas' opinion, when the Soviet sculptures, which were considered ambiguously, were demolished in the 1990s, this was at the beginning of Lithuanian independence. Those that remained could be seen as a relic of history that simultaneously neutralized the ideological pain. The empty cages aroused a variety of emotions and interpretations: the ideology has withdrawn, but what is left in its place?

THE CASE OF THE MONUMENT OF THE WRITER PETRAS CVIRKA

In 2020–2021, new initiatives to demolish the rest of the Soviet period monuments were launched in Vilnius. This time, the city's municipality drew attention to the sculpture of the writer Petras Cvirka (sculpt. J. Mikėnas; arch. V. Mikučianis; built in 1959; included in the list of cultural property of local importance in 1992). Could these initiatives also be attributed to the "second wave" of the desovietization of the public places discussed above, or were the roots of this value dispute completely different?

If the decorative sculptures of the Green Bridge embodied not specific persons but abstract allegories, then the Petras Cvirka monument commemorated a person whose biography was associated not only with his literary merits but also with active participation in the first Soviet occupation. Although talk of the need to remove this monument had been circulating for a long time, in 2019 the Genocide and Resistance Research Centre of Lithuania (GRRCL) prepared a historical-expert conclusion confirming that Petras Cvirka had actively collaborated with the structures of the occupying Soviet government in his political-social activities in 1940–1947, and this had had consequences for the fate of the State of Lithuania and its citizens. In August 2021 – after considering the requests of the Minister of Culture Simonas Kairys and Vilnius city municipality – this provided the basis for the Council of Experts on Immovable Cultural Heritage under the Department of Cultural Heritage to remove the monument of Petras Cvirka from the Register of Cultural Property. Soon after, Vilnius City Council decided to remove it physically too,[39] even though it had been created by of the most famous sculptors of the time and this was the only remaining

38   Kristina Buidovaitė, 'Instaliacijos ant Žaliojo tilto autorius A. Ambrasas: "Man skauda širdį, kai architektūros kūrinys išbalansuotas"', *Lietuvos rytas*, 31 August 2021 <https://www.lrytas.lt/bustas/architektura/2021/08/31/news/instaliacijos-ant-zaliojo-tilto-autorius-a-ambrasas-man-skauda-sirdi-kai-architekturos-kurinys-isbalansuotas--20593830> [accessed 30 January 2022].

39   'P. Cvirkos paminklas išbrauktas iš kultūros vertybių registro, nukėlimas – rugsėjį', *Statyba ir architektūra*, 24 August 2021 <https://sa.lt/p-cvirkos-paminklas-isbrauktas-is-kulturos-vertybiu-registro/> [accessed 30 January 2022].

authentic example of Stalinist public space design in Vilnius. The monument was not even saved from removal by a 'preventive performance' called "Remember not forget not remember", which was organized by two women artists Eglė Grėbliauskaitė and Agnė Gintalaitė, who covered the surface of the sculpture with fake sackcloth – a sign of oblivion and the passage of time.[40] The municipality did not give permission for this action, and this decision led to a conflict between Vilnius municipality and these artists.

    In general, the process of the removal of the sculptures from the Green Bridge was repeated: the controversial decision made by heritage experts, which was opposed by other experts,[41] paved the way for the dismantling of the monument of Petras Cvirka and the purification of its surroundings from unwanted connotations. Meanwhile, the Lithuanian Writers' Union, which was joined by the Lithuanian Artists' Union, the Lithuanian Art Historians' Society, and the Lithuanian section of the International Association of Art Critics (Aica), publicly spoke out against the removal of this monument on the grounds that it would lead to the signs of historical epochs being destroyed and the public spaces of the city being aesthetically impoverished.[42] After the official decision to remove the monument from the lists of cultural property, the philosopher Nerijus Milerius noted: "It is possible to postpone it, but what after that? Is there a more detailed concept of what could be there? Is the monument to the collaborating writer removed only to make this square a 'neutral' place for history, or does this square have to convey any clearer narrative of history? Will it not be the case that, by erasing the unfavourable signs of history, we will begin to live in the eternal present, in a timeless, comfortable, candied space without the sharper corners and cataclysms of history?".[43] It may be added here that Vilnius has historically been characterized by waves of demolitions of monuments in the wake of political regime changes, which have helped to cleanse the city of the signs of earlier epochs.[44]

40   'Sostinėje menininkės "samanomis" dekoravo Petro Cvirkos paminklą, savivaldybė tam priešinasi'. *Lietuvos rytas*, 12 November 2021 <https://www.lrytas.lt/kultura/meno-pulsas/2021/11/12/news/sostineje-menininkes-samanomis-dekoravo-petro-cvirkos-paminkla-savivaldybe-tam-priesinasi-21374532> [accessed 30 January 2022].

41   Audronis Katilius, a well-known heritage expert and architect-restorer, commented on the decision of the Council of Experts as follows: "The Bolshevik mindset of our super-patriots has not changed in the 30 years of independence. The red partisans and underground fighters who were in power in the Soviet era still occasionally understood their own darkness and heard what scientists, artists and other intellectuals were saying… The present-day ones, fighting for the votes of the large darkness, or with other interests, allow themselves to hear nothing. I don't think it's just obtuseness, although that's part of it. It is easier to demolish than to build in order to be noticed. Cultural awareness, respect for the history that we have all lived through, for our Lithuania, are perhaps alien concepts. […] The corner of Pylimo and Pamėnkalnio Streets will finally be an empty lot. In such a place!". Written interview with Audronis Katilius, 27 August 2021.

42   'Lietuvos rašytojų sąjungos valdybos pareiškimas dėl Petro Cvirkos paminklo', *7 meno dienos*, 31 May 2019 <https://www.7md.lt/kronika/2019-05-31/Lietuvos-rasytoju-sajungos-valdybos-pareiskimas-del-Petro-Cvirkos-paminklo?fbclid=IwAR3mGh_8OwYirTVZ_UlN6hrtpFp4qMEiIuGHdq8Lox-YjgZwrqAm-B89owo> [accessed 6 February 2022].

43   'Petro Cvirkos paminklo anatomija (diskusija)', *Literatūra ir menas*, 26 August 2021 <https://literaturairmenas.lt/publicistika/petro-cvirkos-paminklo-anatomija?fbclid=IwAR2sb3QFZxkNnG4VfeG6Lu9858pkBVwoRx7PH6HysTzNuA7DknfAr2lT6F4> [accessed 6 February 2022].

44   Rasa Antanavičiūtė, *Menas ir politika Vilniaus viešosiose erdvėse. 20 a. pirma pusė* (Vilnius: Lapas, 2019).

However, perhaps the most profound essence of this value conflict is explained the literary researcher and former minister of culture, Mindaugas Kvietkauskas. He noticed that in modern political struggles it is popular to wrestle with the memory of long-dead persons, absolutizing the guilt of their collaboration and devaluing their literary merits, but this in no way leads to practical desovietization.[45] In this way, some writers who lived and created during the Soviet period and were honoured by the regime (Liudas Gira, Petras Cvirka, Salomėja Nėris) are still valued controversially; however, they have not been memorialized. So, only some cultural figures begin to be demonized and become 'scapegoats' of a kind, but this struggle with the past is already inconsistent enough. For example, the bust of writer Liudas Gira was removed from the Old Town of Vilnius and moved to the outskirts of the city in 2013, but the street bearing his name remained. Meanwhile, the name of Salomėja Nėris – the best Lithuanian poetess – is still commemorated in Vilnius by a gymnasium bearing her name, a bust next to it, and a street in the Fabijoniškės district.

French polymath René Girard, who has studied the phenomenon of 'scapegoats' as a religious idea and cultural practice, sees this phenomenon as a clear sign of the moral crisis that has arisen in society.[46] However, Girard wrote about specific individuals or groups of people who become targets of political or religious accusations and persecution by society, while in the above cases we are dealing with a symbolic struggle in which the purification of the public space from the commemorative signs of 'guilty' persons is based not on the desire to create greater social harmony but on quite selectively 'restoring historical justice'. However, it is said that the real reason for the removal of Cvirka's monument was property developers' interest in obtaining space in the city centre for the construction of new buildings. Thus, the renewed disputes over the surviving material signs of the Soviet era in Lithuania can also be considered as substitutes for solutions to the long-term moral consequences of Lithuanian society's cooperation with the Soviets, which divert attention from this intractable problem.[47]

45   Mindaugas Kvietkauskas, 'Prakeiktoji poetė', *Bernardinai*, 25 November 2014 <https://www.bernardinai.lt/2014-11-25-prakeiktoji-poete/> [accessed 28 March 2022].

46   René Girard, *Le bouc émissaire* (Paris: Grasset, 1982).

47   The most recent case is the proposal to demolish the socialist-realist Vilnius Airport, "guilty of being Soviet". This issue came up in 2018, when Dainius Kreivys, a member of the Seimas, formally addressed the Department of Cultural Heritage, asking for the removal of this object from the list of Tangible Cultural Properties. Practically the same 'not worth it' arguments were repeated in 2021 by the Minister of Transport and Communications, Marius Skuodis. Erika Alonderytė, and Roma Pakėnienė, 'Nusitaikė į Vilniaus oro uostą: tarp svarstomų siūlymų – jį griauti', *Lietuvos rytas*, 7 September 2021 <https://www.lrytas.lt/bustas/architektura/2021/09/07/news/nusitaike-i-vilniaus-oro-uosto-pastata-tarp-svarstomu-siulymu-ji-griauti-20673829> [accessed 28 March 2022].

CONCLUSIONS

The radical changing of public spaces is characteristic of the processes of creation of various post-colonial and post-authoritarian states, so the case of the former USSR is no exception here.[48] In post-Soviet countries, this process of decommunization has been protracted in time and still has not been completed. Russian political scientist Sergei Medvedev compares these processes with a straight line: "this is decolonization. The relocation of the 'Bronze Solder' in Tallinn, Columbus, and the *Leninopad* in Ukraine are all its markers. In my opinion, this is a completely natural process, especially in the context of Russia's war against Ukraine. Such monuments are perceived as symbols of a state that behaves aggressively".[49]

The first phase of change in cities' public spaces, as was most clearly manifested in the removal of Soviet ideological monuments in the 1990s, was by no means systematic and complete in all countries. The examples of symbolic landscape changes discussed above show that the rewriting from a national perspective of the history of post-communist states has become an uneven, controversial, complicated and step-by-step process. In some places, it was mainly limited to strategies of conscious oblivion: the purification of the national culture from the signs of communism and of political and mental dependence on Russia. In other states it relied more on the postulates of formal, legal lustration,[50] thus affecting only some supporters of the previous regime, while in other countries both of these perspectives were combined. Manipulation of ideological monuments by rejecting, ignoring, or adapting them to new political needs, or, in contrast, justifying Russia's neo-colonial revanchism, became especially pronounced in the second decade of the twenty-first century, when Russia's growing aggression in the region is an attempt to regain control of its neighbouring countries. Ukrainian *Leninopad*, inspired by increasing Russian socio-political influence and the subsequent invasion, also inspired the states of the region to be concerned about their ontological security. So, the second wave of Soviet monument demolitions that started in 2014 was more sensitive to the regional context and was influenced by it.

As the cases discussed in detail in the paper show, there is still no consensus about remaining Soviet ideological relics among politicians,

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[48]   Shaun Tyan Gin Lim, and Francesco Perono Cacciafoco, 'Reflections on the Politics of Place (Re)-Naming: Decolonisation, the Collapse of Totalitarian Regimes, and Government Changes', *Academia Letters*, 956 (2021), 1–7.

[49]   Andrej Čerkasov, 'Ne vandalizm, a dekolonizacija: politolog o tom, počemu k snosu pamjatnikov nužno otnosit'sja spokojno', *Current time*, 21 June 2020 <https://www.currenttime.tv/a/toppling-monuments-interview/30679979.html> [accessed 5 April 2022].

[50]   1 February 2000 "The Law on Lustration" came into force in Lithuania, allowing former KGB and other Soviet special services personnel and secret collaborators to confess and register with a special commission. The data of those who have done so are classified and kept for 75 years.

experts and the general public, even in the Baltic States, which from the beginning have been characterized by fairly consistent efforts of desovietization. The 'second wave' of ideological space cleansing also did not become a prerequisite for deeper knowledge and understanding of the Soviet period but was content with a superficial solution, motivated by local political and economic interests. However, this superficiality and ideological inconsistency has been countered in Lithuania, as in Ukraine, by artists' initiatives to reinterpret sites or objects associated with significant locations of Soviet memorial culture. This has been made possible through the implementation of new visual languages and messages, making it possible not only to establish a peculiar dialogue with the inconvenient past but also to react critically to contemporary political issues, thus contradicting totalitarian monumentality and ideological monologism with transparency, fragility, irony and ambiguity.

The discussed cases from Vilnius are striking examples of how the attempt to desovietize public space has become a perhaps temporary, manipulative, even accidental political tool rather than a long-term and coherent program that could lead to more significant changes in society's mentality and Soviet era re-evaluations, including the question of personal and collective responsibility for collaboration with a foreign totalitarian regime. Despite many attempts to present the debate on the value of the Green Bridge sculptures in Vilnius as merely a dispute over aesthetic taste, the political background of the arguments used by both parties in the debate was dominant. Meanwhile, the question of the artistic value of Cvirka's monument has been overshadowed by the examination of his biography and the search for moral guilt, although researchers have stressed the inconsistency and bias of these aspirations,[51] and have also found evidence that not everything in his biography is so unambiguous.[52] Opponents of the removal of these statues were mainly cultural heritage specialists and representatives of the cultural intelligentsia who highlighted the historical and artistic value of these objects as representatives of a bygone era. The supporters of demolition were mainly representatives of conservative, anti-Soviet, patriotic forces (although this distinction remains superficial and rather problematic because reliable sociological studies on citizens' opinions, linked to their ideological orientation, have not been carried out on this issue).

51   Valdemaras Klumbys, 'Po Cvirkos. Kas toliau?', *Delfi.lt*, 24 September 2021 <https://www.delfi.lt/news/ringas/lit/valdemaras-klumbys-po-cvirkos-kas-toliau.d?id=88230521> [accessed 24 April 2022].

52   Darius Pocevičius, 'Kuo iš tikrųjų apkaltintas Petras Cvirka? (I dalis)', *Delfi.lt*, 6 September 2021 <https://www.delfi.lt/news/ringas/lit/darius-pocevicius-kuo-is-tikruju-apkaltintas-petras-cvirka-i-dalis.d?id=88115755> [accessed 24 April 2022]; Darius Pocevičius, 'Kuo iš tikrųjų apkaltintas Petras Cvirka? (II dalis)', *Delfi.lt*, 8 September 2021 <https://www.delfi.lt/news/ringas/lit/darius-pocevicius-kuo-is-tikruju-apkaltintas-petras-cvirka-ii-dalis.d?id=88116235> [accessed 24 April 2022].

Meanwhile the question of the monuments and memorials created to honour the Second World War Soviet soldiers was never asked in Lithuania until 2022. However, the Russian war against Ukraine has awakened countries' fears in this region regarding the potential use of these objects by Russia in justifying its 'right' to these territories. It was discovered that the remaining Soviet memorials and monuments could be used not only for commemorative purposes but also in the real geopolitical battles of the present, which has aroused ontological insecurity. Therefore, being aware of these threats, the states in this region took appropriate action. For instance, in 2017 Poland supplemented its law on the prohibition of propaganda of communism and other totalitarian regimes with a provision that paved the way for the dismantling of the remaining Soviet-era monuments, obelisks, bas-reliefs, and memorial plaques; thus, Poland began removing the Soviet military legacy from town and city squares (about 500 objects in total). This, of course, caused outrage in Russia.

It could be concluded that the relics of Soviet-era memorial culture that still remain in Lithuanian public space are hostages to internal and external ideological struggles and a kind of simulated moral purification. This would also be shown by initiatives to demolish the surviving memorials and monuments to Soviet soldiers in Lithuania following Russia's attack on Ukraine on 24 February 2022. Perhaps we can already call this a manifestation of the 'third wave' of symbolic landscape cleansing?

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