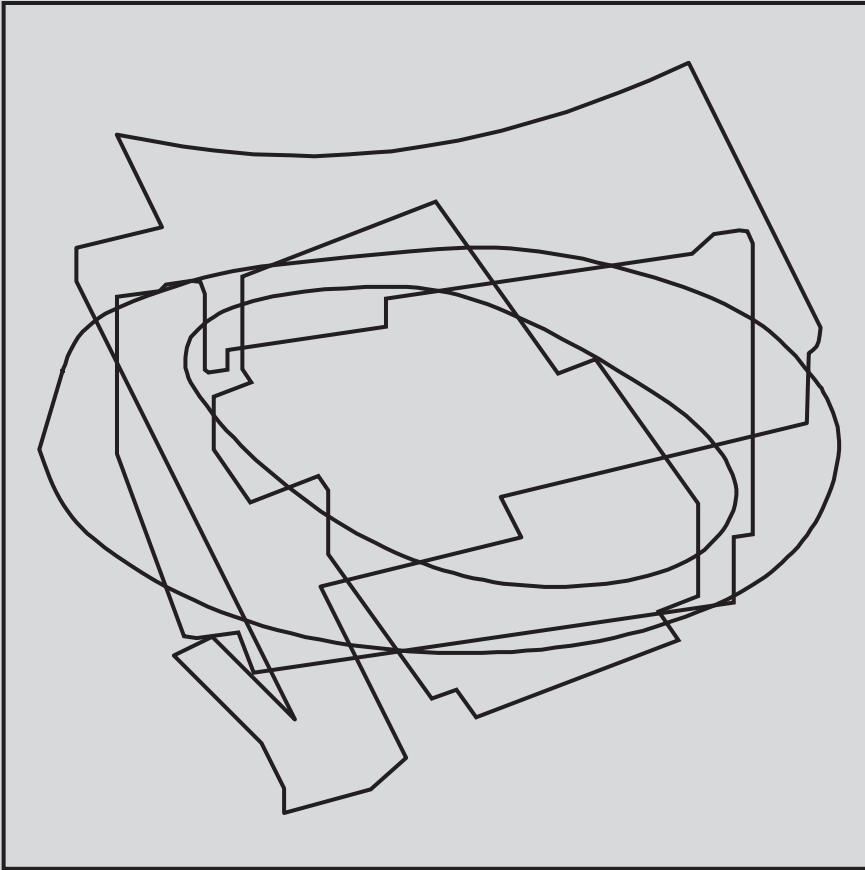


# HIBERNATING BUILDINGS



RECONSIDERING ABANDONED 20<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY LITHUANIAN ARCHITECTURE

MARTYNA KILDAITE

-Hibernating buildings-

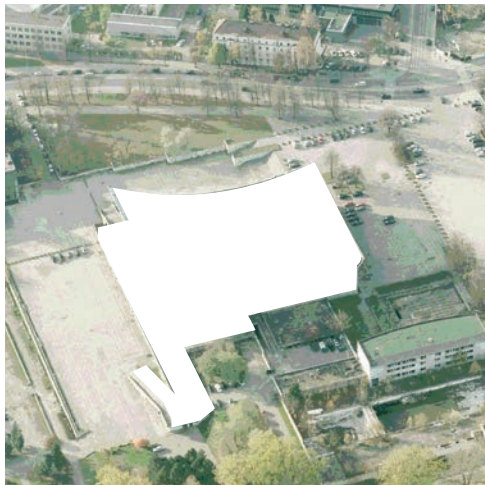
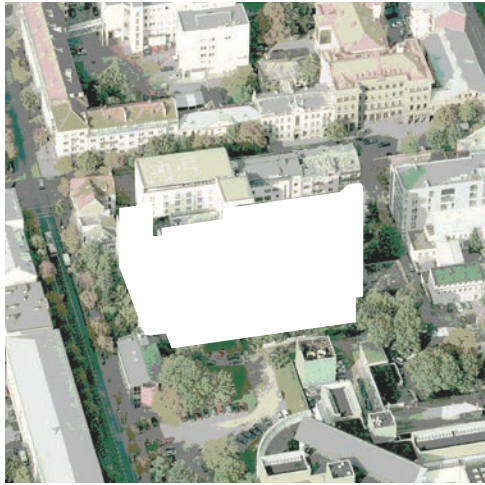
Reconsidering abandoned 20th century  
Lithuanian architecture

-Martyna Kildaitė-

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INSIDE

Koninklijke Academie van Beeldende Kunsten  
Royal Academy of Art  
The Hague

2021





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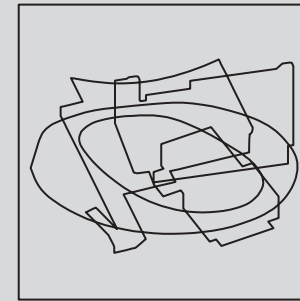


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photo from observations





- Introduction -



## Introduction



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-Hotel "Britanika"-  
photo from observations

Abandoned buildings are typical and conspicuous components of Lithuanian or any other post-communist country urban landscapes. Even in the busiest central parts of the cities in these countries you can notice vacant and inaccessible structures that are surrounded by protective fences. Unused or even unfinished structures became peculiar and controversial landmarks (or should I say anti-landmarks?) of Lithuanian cities and villages. Secured yet eventless architecture could be perceived as a zone of emptiness, where the time has frozen.

The phenomenon of abandonment is considered as a result of the cultural, social and political changes of the last century, beginning in the early 1990s when socialist authoritarian policies and planned economies were replaced by democracy and capitalism.

Changes in a country's political and economic systems have led to new ways of using existing architecture. Some buildings were reconstructed and given new functions, but some of them were abandoned or even destroyed.<sup>1</sup>

Therefore, it is not a surprise that most of the currently abandoned public buildings were built in the 20th century and are attributed to socialist modernist architecture. There are hundreds of abandoned or partly-abandoned Soviet period buildings that have distinctive architectural qualities, but have lost their public function and importance. It seems that these buildings did not pass the exam of economic, political, and social transformation and are trapped in the past because they do not fulfill any modern needs.

<sup>1</sup> Nekrošius L. "Sovietiniu metu architektura kaip kultūros vertybė. Vilniaus atvejis" | eng. "Contemporary Architecture as Cultural Value. Vilnius case", Journal of Architecture and Urbanism, 2012 Volume, p. 40



i-1  
-Palace of Concerts and Sport-  
photo from observations

When describing these (anti-)landmarks from the 20th century it is important to take into account not only their distinctive architectural qualities, but also societal values that they have accumulated over time. These abandoned buildings have both positive and negative cultural connotations.

Without a doubt, this controversial heritage is dividing society into two groups.

One part of society thinks that these buildings are outdated relics from the painful historical period. Another group of people perceives modernist structures as interesting and thought-provoking architectural structures worth preserving.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, this uncomfortable heritage contains various conflicts and contradictions. In the majority of cases, the consensus has not yet been reached and the strategies or guidelines on dealing with these objects have not been introduced. Consequently, some remarkable modernist buildings stand neither alive nor dead in the Lithuanian urban landscape.

<sup>2</sup> Petrulis V. "Architektūros paveldas kaip konfliktas: socialistinio palikimo vertės aspektas" | eng. "Architectural Heritage as Conflict: an Aspect of The Value of The Socialist Legacy" from scientific seminar-discussion material "Patogus ir nepatogus paveldas" | eng. "Comfortable and uncomfortable heritage", organised by National Commission for Cultural Heritage and Ministry of culture, 2015-04-02, [https://vkpk.lt/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/Patogus-ir-nepatogus-paveldas\\_leidiny\\_2016.pdf](https://vkpk.lt/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/Patogus-ir-nepatogus-paveldas_leidiny_2016.pdf), p. 43

Seemingly, this controversial and slowly decaying legacy requires either adaptation or even demolition. Nevertheless, due to the lack of unanimity and understanding how to deal with contentious structures, notable buildings are left unused, inaccessible to the public, but waiting for fresh ideas and investments. In the publication "How Long is The Life of a Building", which was released for the Estonian National

Exhibition at the 13th Venice Architecture Biennale, this phase of keeping a building empty and waiting has been defined as a period of Hibernation.<sup>3</sup> This period of Hibernation is used as a method to keep a building protected from complete decay with a minimal amount of maintenance, while development or demolition takes place.

<sup>3</sup> "How Long is The Life of a Building?" Publication of Estonian National Exhibition at the 13th Venice Architecture Biennale, curated by Tuune-Kristin Vailka, p. 180

Writer Tautvydas Urbelis asserts that architecture has a privilege to live through many lives.<sup>4</sup> However, what happens in-between different lives? How long could this interim stage last?

Anyway, I found the current in-between stage of hibernation extremely interesting. In this period of waiting, when anything is not yet agreed on, specific actions and experiments could take place. The span of hibernation could be devoted to the revaluation of the abandoned modernist heritage.

According to the concept of heritage protection and the actualisation policy, the tangible and intangible cultural heritage is the result of historical developments, creation, and self-expression. It is an integral part of the national identity. Everyone has an inherent right to use and acknowledge cultural heritage.<sup>5</sup>

What if I apply this approach to study the hibernating legacy in Lithuania from the second half of 20th century? I would like to interpret the period of hibernation as a phase that is valuable in and of itself, because abandonment is a consequence of significant socio-cultural and political changes. Redundant structures are witnesses to societal progress and became a part of urban identity of contemporary Lithuania. Could the rejection of initial importance of Soviet-era buildings be treated as a manifestation of freedom and democracy? Of course, a certain temporality is encoded in this hibernating legacy. Consequently, changes and improvements are possible or even inevitable.

I would like to celebrate this temporality and search for ways to document, use, and interact with this peculiar heritage.

<sup>4</sup> Urbelis T. "Britanika. Sovietinis gigantizmas ir kapitalizmo neuroze" | eng. "Britanika. Soviet Gigantism and Neurosis of Capitalism", Literatura ir menas, <https://literaturairmenas.lt/publicistika/tautvydas-urbelis-britanika-sovietinis-gigantizmas-ir-kapitalizmo-neuroze>

<sup>5</sup> Lithuanian Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Lithuania (2020), "Kultūros paveldo išsaugojimo ir aktualizavimo politikos koncepcija 2020" | eng. "The Concept of Heritage Protection and Actualisation Policy 2020", (2020-06-15, IV-735), <https://e-seimas.lrs.lt/portal/legalAct/lt/TAD/109da290af4211ea9a12d0dada3ca61b?jfwid=-wsolgungm>

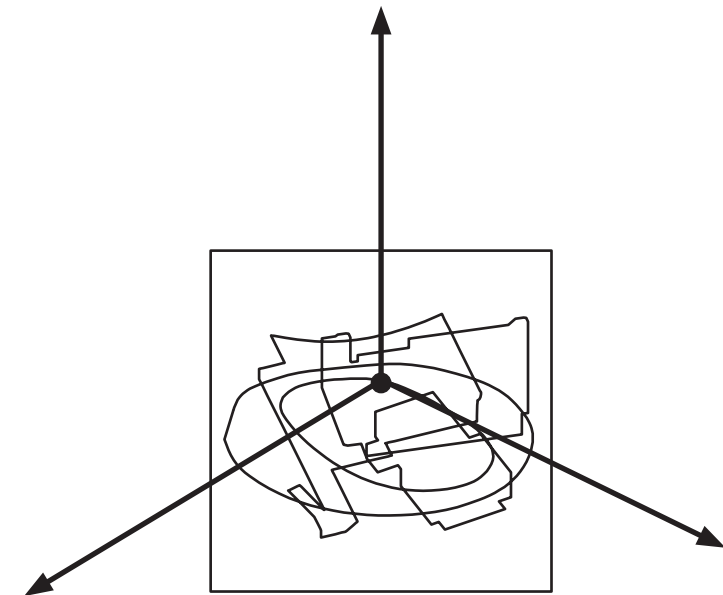
I assume that it is not an issue that these anti-landmarks are stuck in the in-between state of hibernation for 10, 20 or 30 years. The problem lies in the untapped potential. The values and usage of the hibernation period have not been realised.

In my opinion, it could add additional value to the urban landscape and cultural sphere, if the strategy of how to use this controversial legacy will be found.

The hibernation period is the right phase to reconsider conflicts and contradictions that are an integral part of the Soviet architecture by attempting to reach a consensus and use it for future development. An architect is not only an objective, but also a sensitive observer and mediator who could offer suitable research methods and interventions that juxtapose different notions about these buildings and stimulate constructive public debates.

Also, through discussions and architectural experiments the future potential of hibernating buildings could be found. I believe that it is possible to shift from passive hibernation to active indeterminacy and connect these structures with the present.

Therefore, my goal is to raise awareness by defining the value of the hibernation period and searching for ways to use and integrate hibernating (anti-)landmarks into social and urban structures. In the light of these considerations, the question arises:



How can the potential of hibernating structures be found ?



## Methodology

Rather than standing vacant and belonging only to the past, these redundant buildings should have continuity of their story. They could be perceived as part of our urban identity and uniqueness. In addition to the architectural characteristics, these structures have accumulated significant cultural meaning and memory. Therefore, I see a lot of potential in analysing the 'software' of these buildings, which could be used as an abstract material in design process next to the physical properties.

During this research, I will explore the pre-hibernation period, reevaluate the current state of hibernation and hypothesise about the active hibernation or the post-hibernation period. I will review the story of abandoned legacy, starting from grandiose ambitions to the signs of decay. By carefully evaluating changed political, cultural, and social contexts, I am searching for values that could help to unlock the potential of hibernating structures.

In addition, I feel a need to investigate specific cases of hibernating buildings. Thus, I have chosen 4 (anti-)landmarks and I will attempt to reveal the phenomenon, the extent, and the problems of abandonment. In order to re-discover the explicit and implicit value of hibernating heritage, I will use a combination of retrospective investigations and observations of hibernation.

### Retrospective investigations. Timelines

I will investigate series of decisions or circumstances that explain the decision to abandon a building and the consequent cultural and societal aftereffects. Therefore, I will create a timeline for each selected (anti-) landmark that depicts the development and subsequent abandonment of the building.

### Personal perspectives

This part of retrospective investigation reveals personal opinions, memories, and feelings of society towards the selected locations. I will ask people to share their thoughts about these buildings and I will complement them with personal insights that I have found in published interviews. Personal emotions are important because it could work as a bridge between hibernating buildings and present times. Some buildings lost their importance and were abandoned due to political changes, but the only thing that still could have relevance to the present are personal and collective memories. This research method helped me to detect meanings and values that these buildings have lost and acquired over the time.

### Observations of hibernation

Although conventional day-to-day activities have abandoned these buildings, some processes still take place in vacant spaces. Decay and hidden activities of street artists, in combination with protective actions by the authorities, keep these buildings alive. The observation and documentation of the current state of selected buildings could reveal additional meanings.

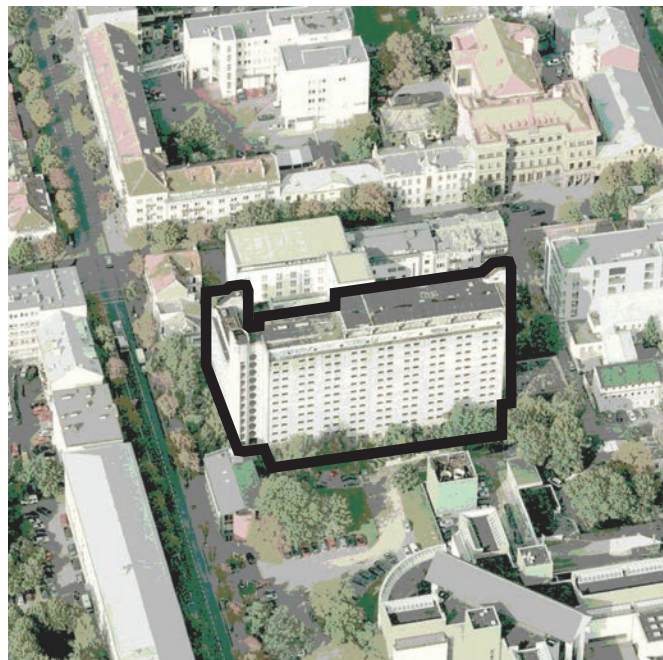
Therefore, the combination of these multifaceted research will provide an interesting panorama of hibernating legacy.



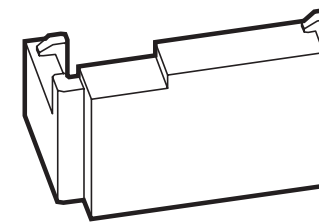
## -4 (Anti-)landmarks-

-Case studies-





i-2



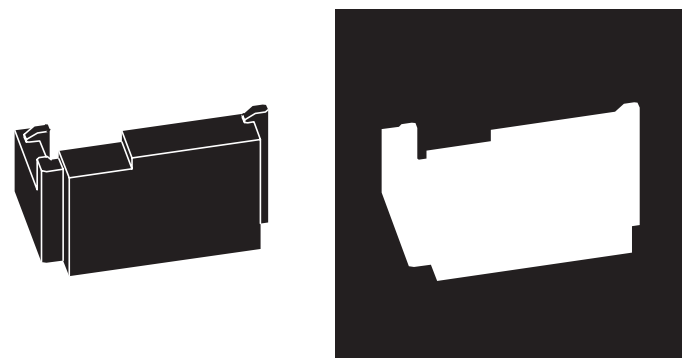
# -Hotel "Britanika"-

Architect: A. Paulauskas

Location: 54° 53' 45.87", 23° 55' 7.12"

Abandoned since 1990





-Hotel "Britanika"-

-Retrospective investigation-

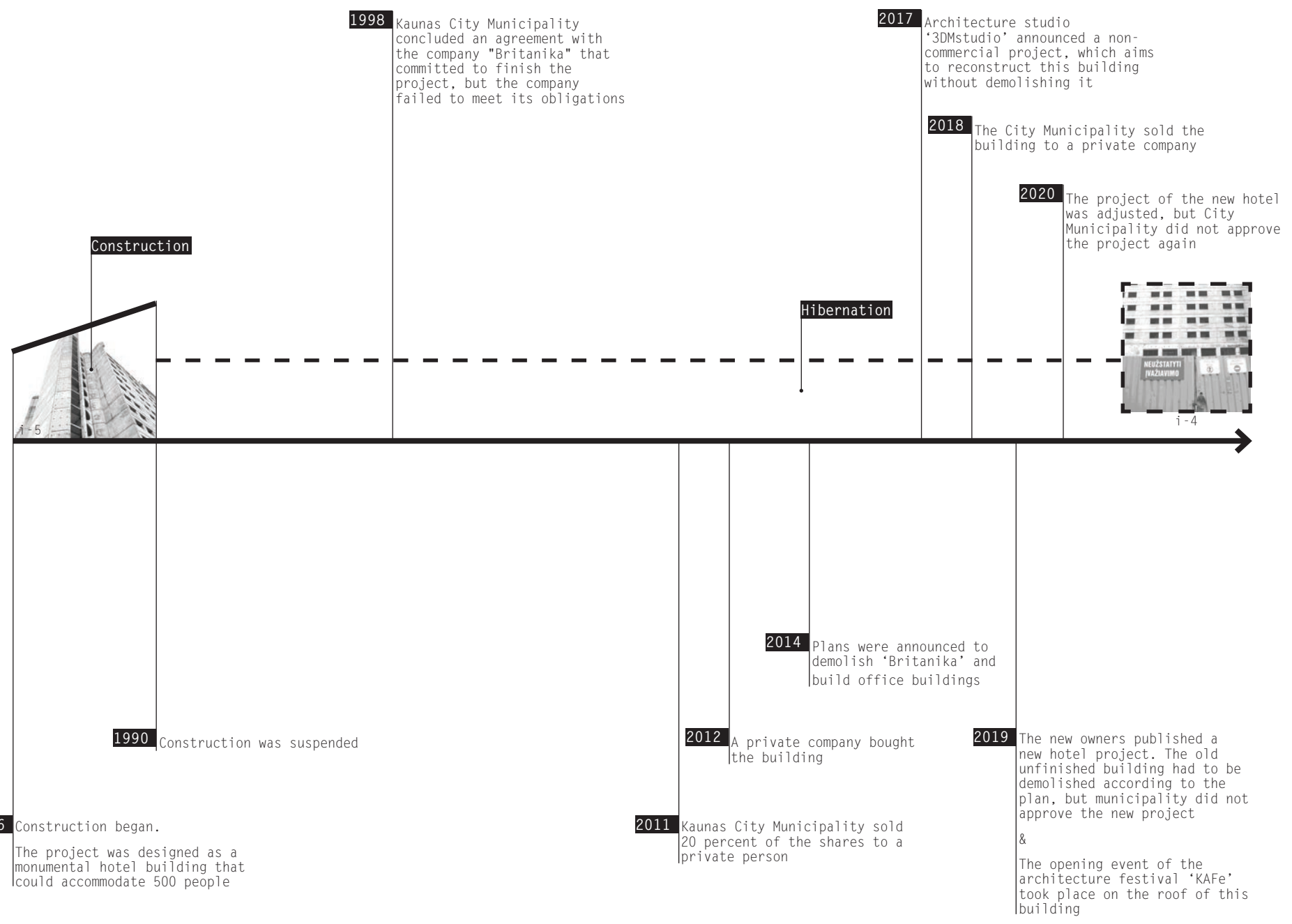
-Timeline-

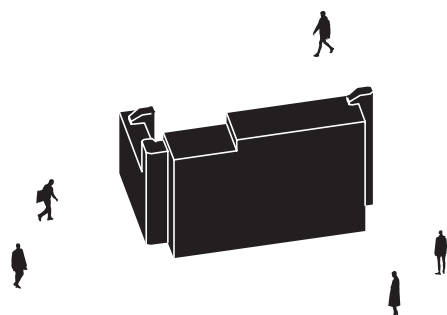


i-3



i-4





-Hotel "Britanika"-

-Personal perspectives-

-Daiva-

Kaunas resident

:

*When I came to Kaunas for my studies in early 90's, this building left me an impression of exorbitance and unreasonable ambitions. I mean, there is so much work, efforts and investments in these walls, but no benefit. It is a visual expression of a waste of resources. However, I would not demolish this hotel.*

*There should be some possibilities to reconstruct this structure and use it wisely. Maybe it could be transformed into social housing or housing units for students.*

-Mantas-

Illegal explorer

:

*This building is big. The bigger building is, the more interesting things could be found. The most attractive feature of this building is the panoramic view that can be observed from the top of the building.*

*All you have to do to get into this abandoned hotel is climb over the fence. There is no guard.*

**-Gintaras-**

**KAFē organisator**

:

*"'Britanika'" building became a symbol of this era. Proposals to demolish or reconstruct this building appear every few years, but nothing happens.<sup>6</sup>*

**-Linas-**

**KAFē visitor**

:

*When a building stands in the city for 30 years, it has a right to be preserved. It is a pity that this building is going to be demolished. The demolition of existing building and the construction of a new hotel is very costly and not environmentally friendly.<sup>7</sup>*

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<sup>6</sup> Podcast "Aikšteje", A024: "KAFē 2019 atidarymas. Reportažas nuo Britanikos viešbučio stogo" | eng. "KAFē 2019 opening event. Reportage from the roof of a "Britanika" hotel", <https://aikšteje.lt/a024-kafe-2019-atidarymas-reportazas-nuo-britanikos-viesbucio-stogo/>

<sup>7</sup> *ibid.*

**KAFē visitor**

:

*As I work nearby, I noticed that this place has become an entertainment area for teenagers. Probably this atmosphere, graffiti, and ruins attract them.*

*But there is also a sad aspect. Some people died in this building.*

*This building dominates the city skyline. If it were beautifully reconstructed, it could enrich the cityscape. I always wanted to visit this abandoned hotel. I was thinking to enter this building illegally, but I'm glad that I managed to visit this building during the official event.<sup>8</sup>*

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<sup>8</sup> *ibid.*



-Hotel "Britanika"-

-Observations of hibernation-

-Fencing-



i-6

-Signs-



i-4

-Barriers-



i-7



i-8

-Layer of protection-

-Traces of interaction-

-Urban language-



i-12

-Decaying-



i-10



i-13

-Greenery-



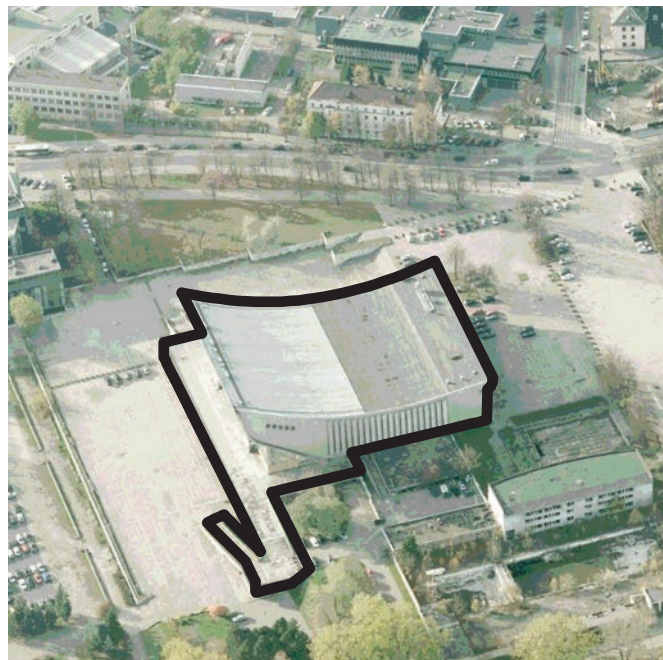
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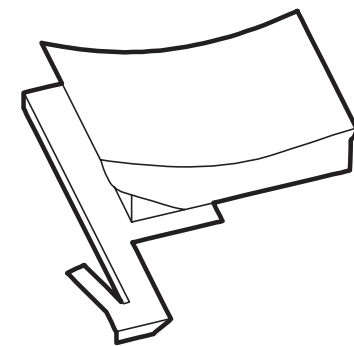
i-11



i-14



i-15

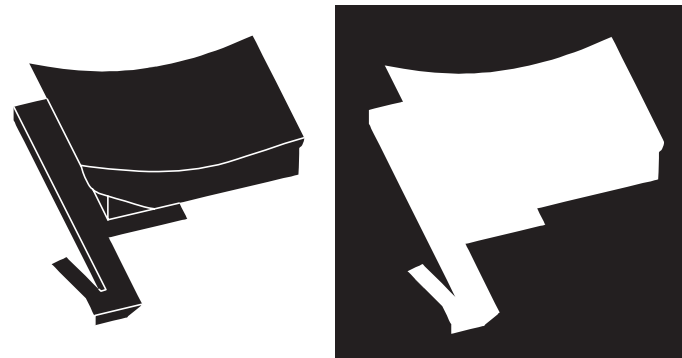


# -Palace of Concerts and Sport-

Architect: E. Chomaskas, J. Kriukelis, Z. Lianzbergis

Location: 54° 41' 28.59", 25° 17' 27.74"

Abandoned since 2003



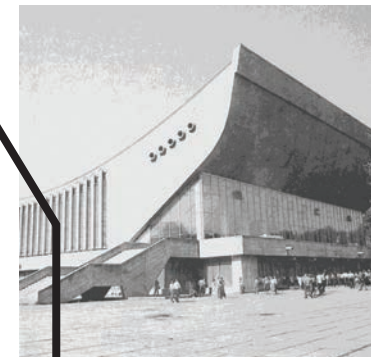
-Palace of Concerts and Sport-

-Retrospective investigation-

-Timeline-



i-16

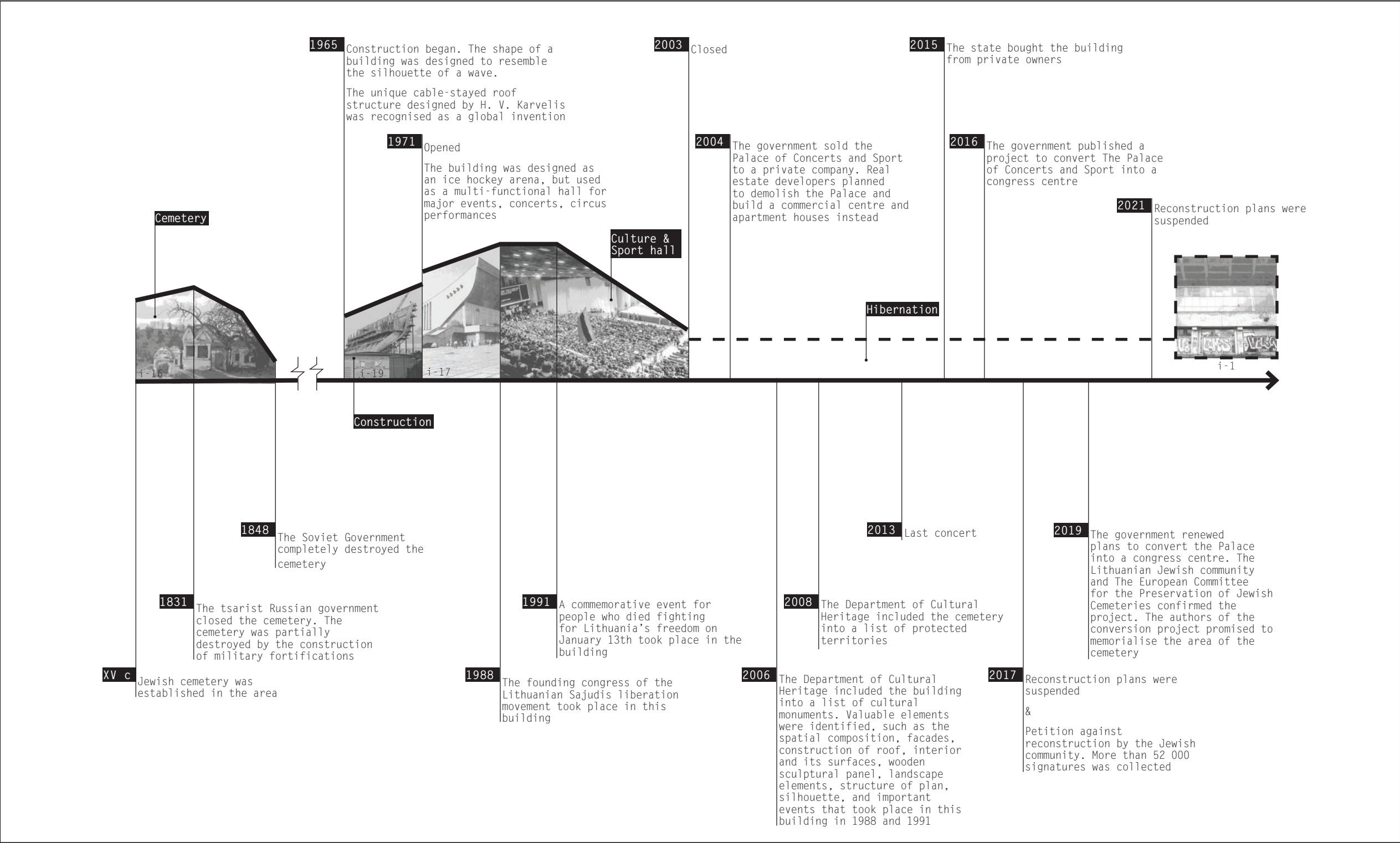


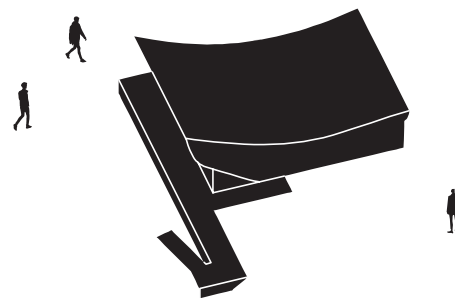
i-17



i-18







-Palace of Concerts and Sport-

-Personal perspectives-

-Josifas-

Member of Vilnius Jewish community

:

*Vilnius is known as a multicultural city. Therefore, there are many cemeteries since ancient times. Regardless of nationality, the dead should rest in peace. Unfortunately, we are not always able to ensure that peace. During the Soviet era, the history and culture of the city was greatly damaged, including this cemetery. The cemetery is an integral part of the city's history, culture and civic spirit. If we do not follow traditions or common sense, we could lose an important layer of our culture.*

*In 2015, I publicly said that the future project of the Vilnius Concert and Sports Hall should be reconsidered. Everything can be physically destroyed, but the story remains.<sup>9</sup>*

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<sup>9</sup> Parasonis J. "Josifas Parasonis. Ar tikrai Vilniaus koncertu ir sporto rumai - žydu kapinese?" | eng. "Is The Palace of Concerts and Sport Located on Jewish Cemetery?", LRT.lt, <https://www.lrt.lt/naujienos/nuomones/3/1265231/-josifas-parasonis-ar-tikrai-vilniaus-koncertu-ir-sporto-rumai-zydu-kapinese>

**-Vytis-**

**Guide**

:

*There was a lot of good music. Many bands from socialist countries have performed here. The quality of light and sound was unparalleled. The sound was so loud that everything trembled.*

*The young people sometimes secretly climbed on the roof of the building. It wasn't allowed, but curiosity was stronger than compliance with the rules. There is an impressive roof, a huge, very interesting construction.<sup>10</sup>*

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<sup>10</sup> Antanavicius U., Ledas V. "Fotopasakojimas apie Koncertu ir sporto rumus: kadaise Vilnieciu numyleti, dabar liudi apleisti" | eng. "Photo Story about The Concert and Sports Hall: it was loved, now it is sadly abandoned", 15min.lt, <https://www.15min.lt/media-pasakojimai/fotopasakojimas-apie-koncertu-ir-sporto-rumus-kadaise-vilnieciu-numyleti-dabar-liudi-apeisti-978?fbclid=IwAR3ayYN6I8qPxtazb1teCXq0ZR1znPwDtiJd-X3trp3wg0t5KcRSI8n0FSs>

**-Andrius-**

**Musician**

:

*When I was young, I thought that if I could perform on this stage at least once, it would be the fulfillment of all my dreams.*

*This concert hall has the optimal size and good acoustic qualities. If this Palace of Concerts and Sport were open, I would organise my concerts here.<sup>11</sup>*

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<sup>11</sup> Documentary by Lapinskas M, Narmontas R. "Vilnaus sporto rumai (II)" | eng. "Vilnius Palace of Sport (II)", DELFI.lt, <https://www.delfi.lt/video/laidos/dokumentika/vilniaus-sporto-rumai-ii-pro-kurias-duris-i-vyriausybes-loze-patekdavo-funkcionieriai.d?id=63312372>



-Palace of Concerts and Sport-

-Observations of hibernation-

-Barriers-



i-21

-Signs-



i-23

-CCTV-



i-24



i-22

-Layer of protection-

-Traces of interaction-

-Urban language-



i-27

-Greenery-



i-25

-Destruction-



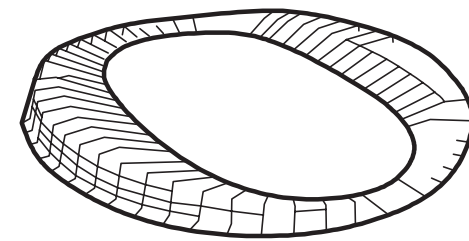
i-26



i-28



i-29



### -National Stadium-

Architect: A. Nasvytis

Location: 54° 42' 30.54", 25° 15' 28.4"

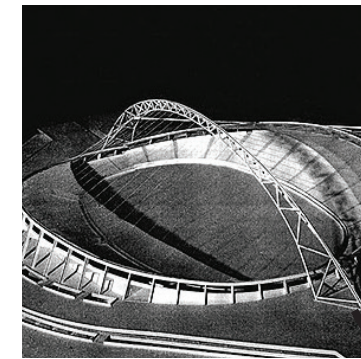
Abandoned since 2009



-National Stadium-

-Retrospective investigation-

-Timeline-



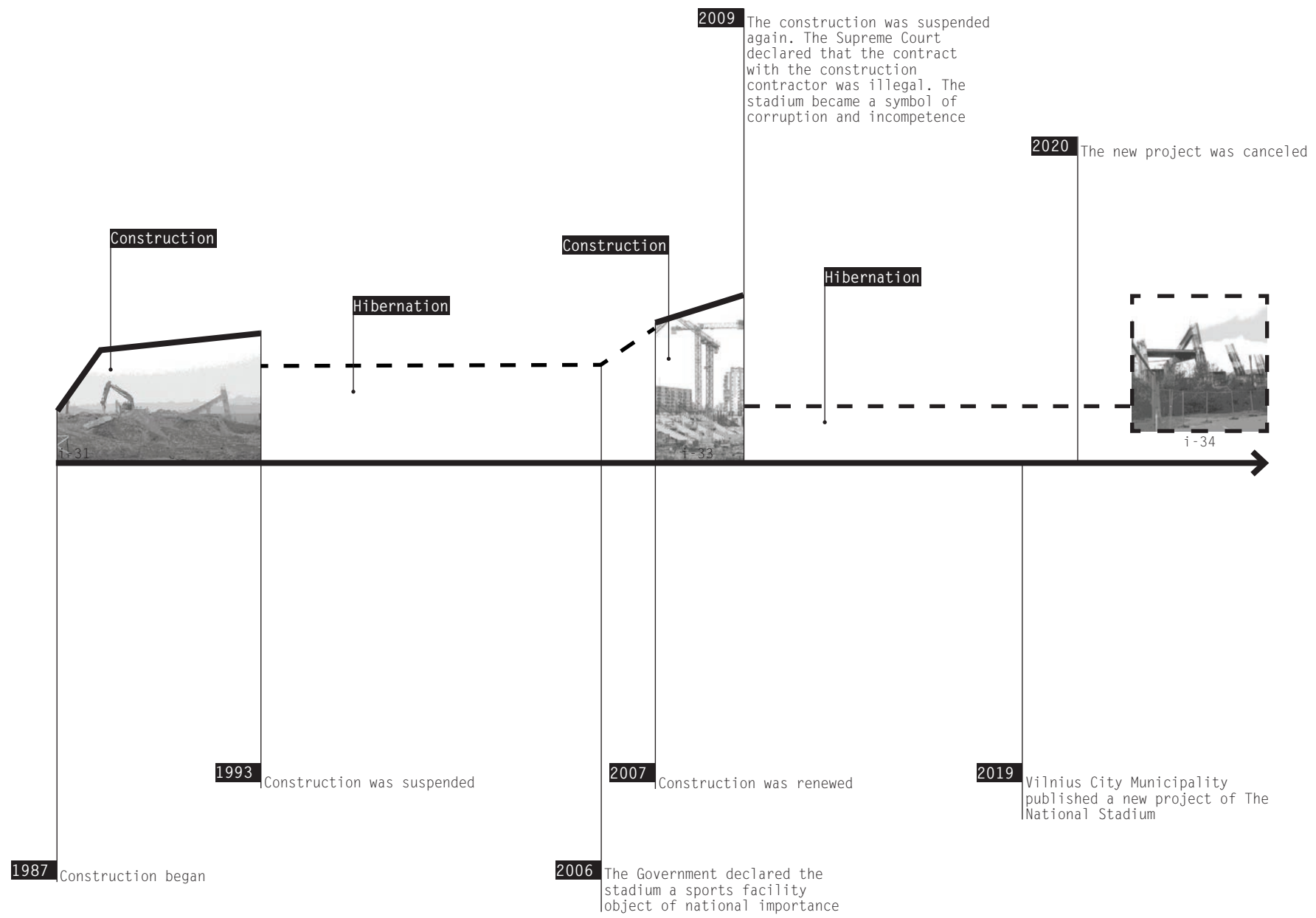
i-30



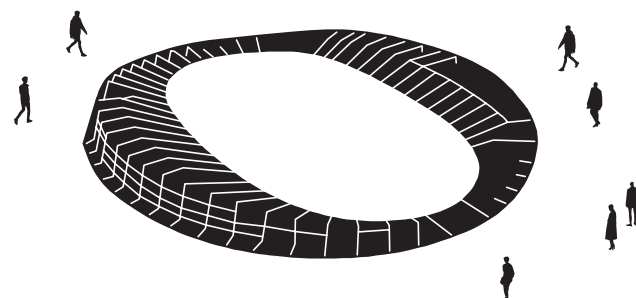
i-31



i-32







-National Stadium-

-Personal perspectives-

-Faustas-

Local, Public policy graduate

:

*The Stadium is more a political symbol than a practical solution. The completion of the stadium construction is a traditional pre-election promise that is forgotten immediately after the election. The necessity of this stadium is not explained beyond grandiose ambitions. There are only 6 A level football teams in Lithuania and it is debatable if a stadium will fix all problems with this sport in the country.*

*And I think there are better solutions to attract more people to sports, such as a sports complex instead of a stadium. Thus, for me this stadium reveals much deeper political problems. It reflects the inner structure of the state. There is a lack of initiatives and political leadership.*

**-Edmundas-**

**Football coach**

:

*My attitude towards this stadium is optimistic. Every time I look at the huge construction sites I see the same stillness, nothing changes, but I believe that these constructions will be completed in the near future.*

*The local football industry is suffering, because we don't have a national stadium. Also, we cannot be equal with other European countries and cannot expect a favourable attitude from FIFA or UEFA. On the other hand, it would be more rational to build a smaller stadium in another city, Kaunas, next to the university of Sports. The project is ready. Thus, I strongly believe that we will have more professional football, amazing events and fantastic goals very soon.*

**-Tautvydas-**

**Local**

:

*When I moved to a neighbourhood near this place and saw the Stadium for the first time in reality, the impression was not as bad or shocking as I knew this building from articles on the internet or TV. I perceived this skeleton of the stadium as a contradictory work of modern art or a monument for the Soviet mentality. Over time, this place became more and more gloomy and unattractive to me. I think this is the saddest place in Vilnius. Every year half-empty attractions take place near the stadium. This combination reminds me of a scene in a post-apocalyptic movie, where survivors try to get back to normal life. It is a miserable sight - empty attractions and the unfinished stadium next to wide dull street and soviet apartment buildings in the background.*

*Believe it or not, there is a legend that a mythical creature lives in the stadium and feeds on the poor and irrational decisions of the municipality.*

**General public**

:

*You can hear some jokes; that Lithuanians are so bad at football, but really good at mushrooming, so, it makes sense that a forest grows in our National Stadium.*



-National Stadium-

-Observations of hibernation-

-Fencing-



i-35



i-36

-Layer of protection-

-Traces of interaction-



-Urban language-



i-39

-Greenery-



i-37

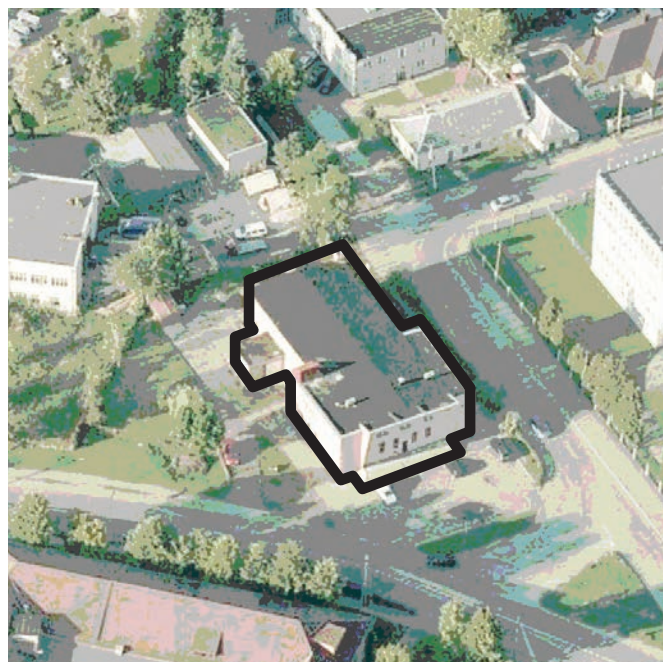
-Destruction-



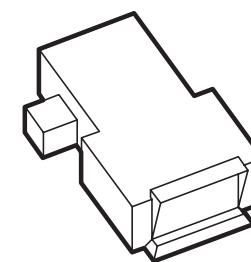
i-38



i-40



i-41

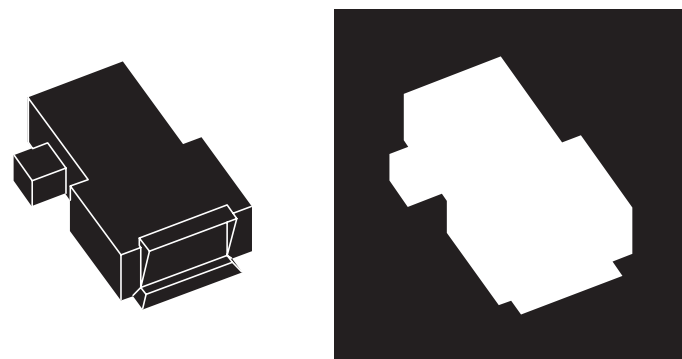


### -Cinema "Neringa"-

Architect: R. Dicius

Location: 54° 54' 33.67", 23° 52' 38.94"

Abandoned since 1990



-Cinema "Neringa"-

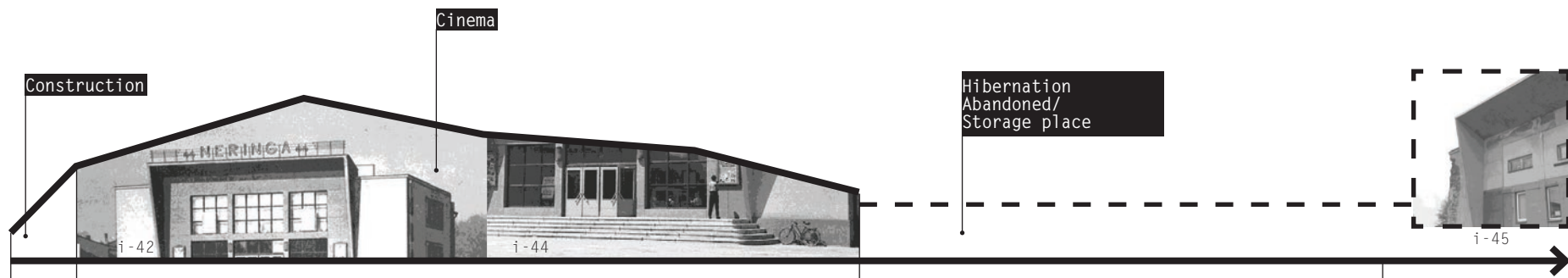
-Retrospective investigation-  
-Timeline-



i-42



i-43

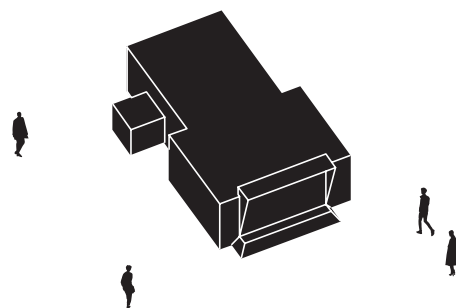


**1960** Opened  
It was the first widescreen  
cinema in the city. 280 seats  
(one hall)

**1958** A repetitive project was  
designed and construction  
began

**1990** The cinema was closed.  
A building was abandoned  
and lost its importance.  
Later this building became a  
warehouse.

**2017** "Gallery Weekend Kaunas"  
festival took place in this  
building



-Cinema "Neringa"-

-Personal perspectives-

-Irena-

Local

:

*When we were young, we often went to the cinema. It was a cheap and very interesting activity. Although cinema "Neringa" was quite far from our home and university, we still went to this movie theatre. We could watch a bigger variety of movies here and the screen was wider. However, at that time, this area was not very safe. So, I never went to this cinema alone, always with a company of friends.*

-Algirdas-

Local

:

*I worked in the factory nearby. Sometimes me and my friend went to watch movies during my work hours.*



-Zibuole-

Local

:

*I spend my whole childhood near this movie theatre. We often went to this cinema with school friends and teachers. I remember mournfully crying while watching a sad movie in this place. It was a popular movie theatre, but I do not think that building has much value now.*

-Jonas-

Local

:

*The cinema was closed thirty years ago. This building is used to store goods now. This building was really beautiful in the past, but the original appearance of the building has been changed - the glasswalls have been bricked up and only narrow windows have been left... I wish I could bring this building back to its original image. I have plans, but so far the building looks really sad.*



-Cinema "Neringa"-

-Observations of hibernation-

-Fencing-



i -46

-Signs-

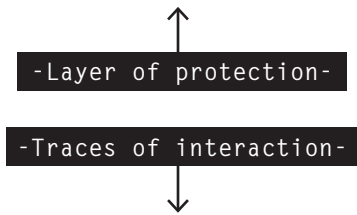


i -47

-Barriers-



i -48



-Decaying-

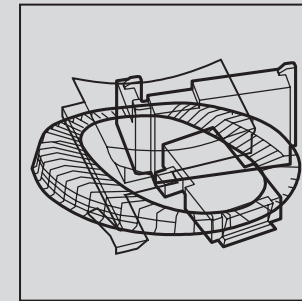


i -49

-Urban language-



i -50



-Pre-hibernation-

:

What does the history of hibernating  
(anti-)landmarks reveal?

## Ambitions



i-11  
-Hotel "Britanika"-  
photo from observations

Does every building grow out of ambition?

Architecture is a powerful tool to embody political, cultural or social aspirations. The built environment of the 20th century often has a touch of ideological intentions. In the former Soviet Union, the government claimed that the main ambition of architecture and urban planning was the construction of communism that would lead to the utopia of bright future.<sup>12</sup> But maybe not all ambitions are evident. Is it possible to uncover more layers of meanings that are encrypted in those buildings?

<sup>12</sup> Dremaitė M., Petrulis V. "Modernism in Soviet Lithuania: The Rise and Fall of Utopia", Archfondas.lt, <https://leidiniu.archfondas.lt/en/alf-02/dmarija-dremaitė-and-vaidas-petrulis-modernism-soviet-lithuania-rise-and-fall-utopia>

According to historian Rasa Cepaitiene, the totalitarian and authoritarian governments of the 20th century exploited art, architecture, and urban planning to create spaces and institutions that would support the regime.<sup>13</sup> The Soviet period in Lithuania was not an exception. During this era, architecture and urban planning became tools to demonstrate the power of the regime and form an ideologically programmed social environment. The political propaganda machine used buildings and public spaces to influence society's behaviour and attitude. For this reason, it is necessary to reevaluate the built Soviet legacy and its impact on society after the fall of the regime and consequent radical political transformation.

The identification of social meanings and messages of the previous political period is one of the most important tasks to sufficiently examine this uncomfortable heritage. However, professor Rasa Cepaitiene also claims that particular works of architecture can have several meanings that could not be easily identifiable and the reading of cultural codes becomes much more complicated. Specifically, nowadays it is difficult to distinguish 'imported' Soviet cultural attributes from the elements of National culture that were genuinely created during the Soviet era.<sup>14</sup>

It seems that during the Soviet era contradictions between strict 'imported' Soviet regulations and attempts to create and uphold local architecture traditions were a significant part of architects' profession.<sup>15</sup> At first sight, an architect appears as an obedient element of the Soviet state apparatus who participates in the construction of communism. Nonetheless, a famous Lithuanian architect Algimantas Nasvytis, said:

*"Architects were the ones who served as a buffer or as a shield, meaning, it is they who defended against the total encroachment of Soviet planning norms on Lithuanian life."*<sup>16</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Cepaitiene R.  
"Disonuojantis, erzinantis, nepatogus? Pasmerktuju politiniu režimu palikimas Europoje" | eng.  
"Dissonating, Annoying, Awkward? The Legacy of Condemned Political Regimes in Europe" from scientific seminar-discussion material "Patogus ir nepatogus paveldas" | eng. "Comfortable and uncomfortable heritage", organised by National Commission for Cultural Heritage and Ministry of culture, 2015-04-02, p. 6.

<sup>14</sup> ibid., p. 8

<sup>15</sup> Maciuka J. V., Dremaitė M. (2020) "Lithuanian Architects Assess the Soviet Era: the 1992 Oral History Tapes", Vilnius: Lapas, p. 92

<sup>16</sup> ibid., p. 122

According to a publication "Lithuanian Architects Assess the Soviet Era: the 1992 Oral History Tapes", Lithuanian architects often attempted to resist to Soviet planning norms.

They were very sensitive to the local historical and cultural environment.

Therefore, instead of implementing the government's ambitions in a formal manner without evaluating the local context, Lithuanian architects attempted to improve standard Soviet constructions and modify governmental regulations to fit local conditions as much as possible.<sup>17</sup> For example, they tried to avoid the demolition of existing buildings in the old towns or aimed to adjust new urban structures and buildings to the natural terrain. Also, local architects perceived Western modernism as an opposition to "Sovietness".<sup>18</sup> Therefore, they explored Western architectural tendencies and acquired professional knowledge from abroad.

They propagated Western architectural ideas, such as a dense structure of pedestrian paths in residential areas, respect of local nature or attempts to create humane environments in mass housing districts.<sup>19</sup>

It seems that the main goals of Lithuanian architects were to maintain a high professional culture and create location-specific humane architecture, despite the strict authoritarian building requirements.

<sup>17</sup> *ibid.*, p. 104

<sup>18</sup> *ibid.*, p. 70

<sup>19</sup> *ibid.*, p. 108

Ironically, Lithuanian architects gained awards and official recognition from the Soviet Union for their innovative, original and yet rebellious projects.<sup>20</sup> Their methods of silent rebellion against "Sovietization" of architecture led to a successful career in the Soviet system. The architects regarded this honour with a little bit of irony and called their dual actions silent cultural resistance. However, rather than 'cultural resistance', historian Marija Dremaitė suggests that subversive opportunism would be a more suitable term to describe this phenomenon because of architects' ability to take advantage of an opportunity and navigate between strict governmental regulations and dissenting ideas. Also, their oppositional architectural activities are encoded in details and expressed in ways recognisable only to relatively small groups.<sup>21</sup>

It is difficult to reflect whether these architects were silently subverting the system or were opportunists, or something in-between. In this case, it is difficult to distinguish personal professional intentions from the desire to resist "Sovietization". It seems that an ambition to create professional and location-specific architecture can go beyond authoritarian regulations. In order to create significant architecture one needs to read and feel the local context much deeper than just following official governmental requirements. Therefore, it would be unfair to perceive buildings from the Soviet era only as instruments of socialist ideology. In addition to ideological intentions, this heritage contains ambitions to create distinctive, high quality architecture by attempting to resist destructive or inhuman governmental ideas or just subtly rebelling.

<sup>20</sup> *ibid.*, p. 86

<sup>21</sup> *ibid.*, p. 92

I cannot unambiguously assess the architecture that was created in the Soviet era. From the very beginning, the pre-hibernation period, these buildings acquired discrepant ambitions.

It turned out that the build environment and landmarks that were supposed to be a tool to form a Soviet mentality have embodied hidden rebellious intentions. These meanings contradict each other, but they make sense only when they are consumed together. A silent and subtle rebellion cannot exist without an all-encompassing political environment.

It is unjust to be selective when talking about heritage.

Conflicting ideas and cultural paradoxes are interesting and worth to be uncovered.

## Memory

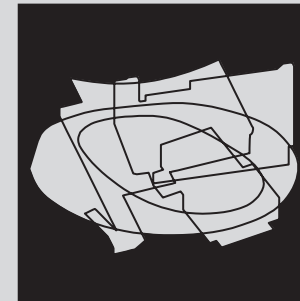
I believe that ideological, both pro- and anti-governmental, aspects were not always in the foreground. In addition to demonstrative political tokens or symbols of silent resistance encoded in buildings of second half of the 20th century, there is a layer of memory. Over time these buildings acquired various individual and collective experiences of everyday prosiness or non-intended encounters. People still tell stories about the past by remembering the buildings that are currently hibernating as important and active places, where they watched heart-touching movies, danced during rock concerts or illegally attempted to climb on the roof...

As historian David Crowley suggests that architecture simply cannot be detached from the experiences, both bad and good.<sup>22</sup>

Therefore, I believe that the layer of memory becomes an inseparable element of a building or site. Experiences and encounters forms a collective collage of emotional value that functions the software of a building. The connection of past experiences and physical structures determines the local identity.

<sup>22</sup> Crowley D. "The Fate of The Last Generation of Ultra-modernist Buildings in Eastern Europe Under Communist Rule", Archfondas.lt, <https://leidiniu.archfondas.lt/en/alf-02/david-crowley-fate-last-generation-ultra-modernist-buildings-eastern-europe-under-communist-r>





-Hibernation-

:  
What value have (anti-)landmarks  
acquired after they were neglected?

Hibernation



i-28  
-Palace of Concerts and Sport-  
photo from observations

Despite significant architectural characteristics and ambitions, some distinctive buildings are left unused and gradually lose their importance. This marks the point where the hibernation period begins. According to the data from the National Land Service, in Lithuania are over 14 000 non-residential buildings that are unused or unfinished.<sup>23</sup> Taking into account radical political and cultural changes in the early 90's, I assume that most unused or unfinished structures were formed during the Soviet era. Consequently, a lot of remarkable buildings are stuck between the past and the present. Because of their distinctiveness, yet emptiness, abandoned buildings became peculiar (anti-)landmarks of the Lithuanian urban landscape.

Appropriately, society has difficulties managing the built legacy of the past era. Architecture historian Vaidas Petrulis explained that in the Soviet Union, the driving force stimulating the creation of public spaces was derived not from consumer society, but from the official organisation of mass leisure according to the goals of the Soviet system. Instead of being a natural social process, it was politicized.<sup>24</sup> After the change of the system, these buildings were stripped of their usual social meaning. The decline of social importance has shaped the current stage of abandonment and emptiness.

<sup>23</sup> National Land Service under the Ministry of Agriculture of the Republic of Lithuania (2018), "Lietuvos respublikos nekilnojamo Turto registre iregistruotu statiniu apskaitos duomenys 2018 m. Sausio 1d." | eng. "data of Buildings Registered in The Real Estate Register of the Republic of Lithuania in 2018 January 1", p. 278

<sup>24</sup> Petrulis V. "Manifestations of Politics in Lithuanian Architecture: Examples of Architectural Dehumanisation during The Transition from a Soviet to a Post-Soviet Society", from publication edited by Dovidaityte L. "Art and Politics: Case-studies from Eastern Europe" (2007), Kaunas: Vytauto Didžiojo Universiteto Leidykla, p. 214



i-51  
-Hotel "Britanika"-  
photo from observations

In most cases when buildings lost their importance, they became empty and pointless.

When a building loses its purpose, the process of physical decay takes place. To prevent the distinctive yet socially irrelevant architectural structure from a complete collapse, deserted buildings were placed in the hibernation mode: the entrances were locked, windows were covered with wooden boards or metal mesh, the interior space was tightly sealed and segregated from the outside world. CCTV cameras and wired fence protect the hibernating architecture against external destructive factors, but at the same time the protective layer disconnects buildings from the urban landscape. It seems that hibernating buildings drown in passive waiting and silence.

Is it possible to (re)discover the relevance of hibernating buildings and reset their social meaning in the current political context?

What value do these structures still have?

1.



i-52  
-explorer at National Stadium-  
Screenshots from Youtube video  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xVdiEY7h1j8>

I started my exploration with observations, trying to identify the value of these desolate hibernating structures. First thing that I faced was the layer of protection. As I mentioned before, protective fences, warning signs 'do not enter', and barriers are a crucial element of keeping a building hibernating.

Notwithstanding, looking more closely at abandoned buildings, I found out that there are processes that take place. For example, isolated structures became an attractive space for street artists and subcultures. You can notice the tags and graffiti works on abandoned surfaces. By following digital footprints, such as location tags or hashtags in social media, I discovered that hibernating buildings became an attraction point for illegal explorers. They keep trying to get in abandoned and secured buildings, document their adventures and then publish them on the Internet. Consequently, you can get a tour of hibernating (anti)landmarks on Youtube. I could say that hibernating buildings contain a layer of (non expected) interaction.

*"A truly good place never remains uninhabited for long."*  
Tonu Onnepalu<sup>25</sup>

I think that the relation between two contradictory layers of protection and (unexpected) interaction generates an additional layer of meaning. I would like to call it the value of hibernation. How much is it purposeful?  
By interpreting this value of hibernation, it is possible to perceive abandoned buildings from different perspectives. The tension between the protective and interactive layers could reveal the distinctive character of hibernating heritage.

<sup>25</sup> Onnepalu T. "Perpetuity of Building", from "How Long is The Life of a Building?" Publication of Estonian National Exhibition at the 13th Venice Architecture Biennale, curated by Tuune-Kristin Vailka. p. 149

2.

Sometimes it seems time has been frozen in hibernating places. It is not a good thing that these buildings do not have relation with current times, but it means that historical layers are open for exploration and interpretation. Hibernating buildings could be perceived as evidences of elapsed time. I mean, physical structures from the second half of the 20th century illustrate and stand witness to historical narratives and contain cultural codes from the past era. During the discussion about abandoned Soviet buildings in Estonia, art historian Krista Kodres claimed that structures from last century are valuable not only because of their architectural or physical dimension, but because of their different semantic fields of meaning that they have accumulated. They are important because they act as cross-sections of culture.<sup>26</sup>

I believe that by investigating them we can know more about

past everyday life,

social behaviour,

cultural phenomena,

materials,

ideas...

<sup>26</sup> Round- table discussion: "How Long is The Life of a Building?", from "How Long is The Life of a Building?" Publication of Estonian National Exhibition at the 13th Venice Architecture Biennale, curated by Tuune-Kristin Vailka. p. 179

3.

Of course, the investigation of the past not always comfortable. The Soviet era has left the traumatic experience and the legacy from this period has contradictory meanings. Therefore, architecture historian Vaidas Petrulis suggests that it is also important to narrate difficult historical periods and identify the value of conflict.<sup>27</sup> Conflicts encourage to evaluate the experience from a contemporary perspective and evoke discussions not only about bright and nostalgic stories, but unpleasant ones too. A critical reflection of past events helps to prevent a collective amnesia and draws the guidelines to future cultural development. Traumatic aspects of historical past could be painful and distressing, but they are also noteworthy. Hibernating buildings could be perceived as a place for discussion and contradictions.

I think that when these controversial buildings become abandoned, the value of conflict became even stronger.

>The current state of decaying conflicts with the initial architectural ambition.

>Contemporary need for democratic spaces is the opposite to authoritarian urban planning principles.

>Nostalgia contrasts with painful historical traces.

>Capitalism is a contradiction to planned economy

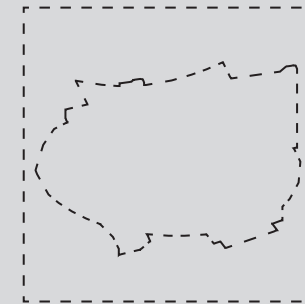
<sup>27</sup> Petrulis V. "Architektūros paveldas kaip konfliktas: socialistinio palikimo vertės aspektas" | eng. "Architectural Heritage as Conflict: an Aspect of The Value of The Socialist Legacy" from scientific seminar-discussion material "Patogus ir nepatogus paveldas" | eng. "Comfortable and uncomfortable heritage" organised by National Commission for Cultural Heritage and Ministry of culture 2015-04-02 [https://vkpk.lt/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/Patogus-ir-nepatogus-paveldas\\_leidiny\\_2016.pdf](https://vkpk.lt/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/Patogus-ir-nepatogus-paveldas_leidiny_2016.pdf). p. 48





i-53  
-Palace of Concerts and Sport-  
photo from observations

The value of hibernation, historical and cultural value, conflict value... Reading the multi-layered meanings of hibernating buildings provides a lot of material. But how could it be used creating architectural experiences?



-Post-hibernation-  
or  
-active presence?-

:

How can we get the authentic  
(architectural) experience out of  
hibernating structures?





i-51  
-Palace of Concerts and Sport-  
photo from observations

Post-hibernation or active presence?

By exploring hibernating buildings I faced slowly decaying concrete structures with encryptions of grandiose ambitions, historical value and cultural paradoxes. There is a lot of square meters that are segregated from the world and covered with a layer of dust, traces of illegal interaction, memories, and conflicts.

I have got a feeling that hibernating buildings are the unbidden, uncomfortable, but promising legacy. However, we have not learned how to use it yet. Thus, there is a need to find connections between these abandoned heritage sites and the present-day. How can passive hibernation be changed by active presence? And how can detected values of abandoned structures be acknowledged and exploited?

Hibernating buildings represents the utopia that failed and the world which no longer exists. It seems that these iconic yet irrelevant buildings are craving for a different kind of interaction.

## Multi-sensory fragility

The way how to relate with hibernating buildings could be found in creating a mesmerising multi-sensory experience. These significant buildings could provide encounters that trigger our perceptions and emotions. Architect Juhani Pallasmaa asserts:

*"Architecture is usually understood as visual syntax, but it can also be conceived through a sequence of human situations and encounters. Authentic architectural experiences derive from real or ideated bodily contractions rather than visually observed entities."*<sup>28</sup>

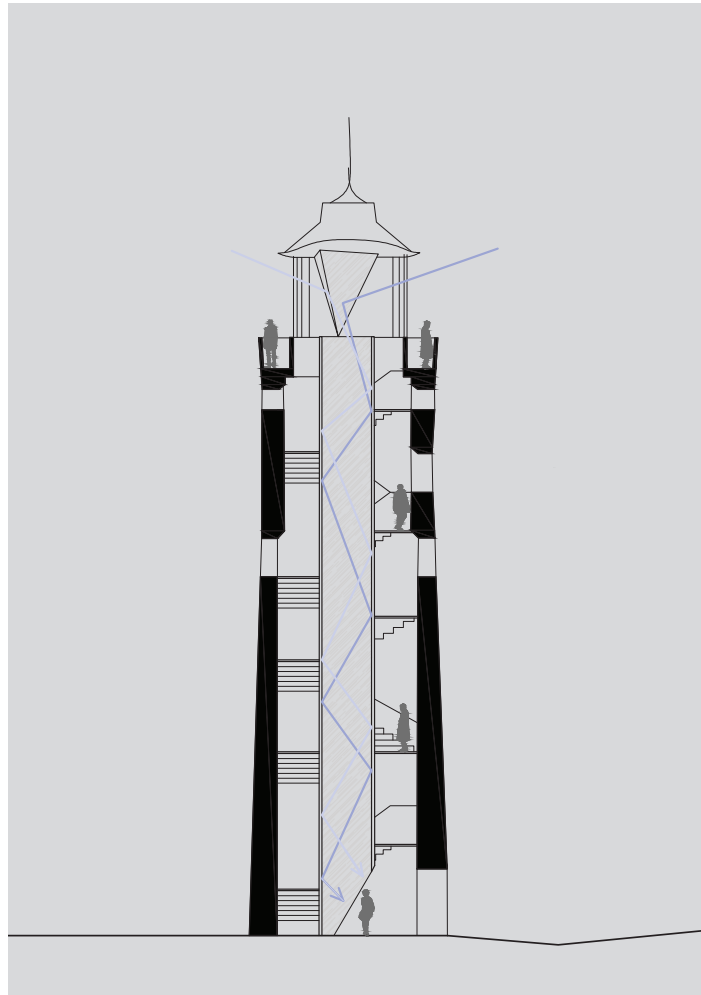
This sensitive approach encourages to carefully think about target users and create an immersive experience for them.

Materiality, nearness and intimacy could be used as tools to foster encounters with a building, its history, and current state. I think it is important not to fight with time that leaves marks and fractures on surfaces, but learn how to read these marks. Spaces, materials and imperfections can tell deeply engaging stories and let us explore values and paradoxes that are encrypted in buildings.

According to Juhani Pallasmaa, a multi-sensory experience refers to fragile architecture that avoids perfection and does not rely on a singular concept or image, but appreciates weakness and reveals itself through interactions.<sup>29</sup> It seems that fragile architecture is inclusive and open to additions, interpretations or new functions. That kind of architecture encourages participation and dialogue between the past and the present.

<sup>28</sup> Juhani Pallasmaa  
"Hapticity and Time. Notes  
on Fragile Architecture"

<sup>29</sup> *ibid.*



-Rubjerg Knude lighthouse-  
Section

Architectural interventions in old Rubjerg Knude lighthouse literally and figuratively can be considered as fragile multi-sensory architecture. This no longer working lighthouse is located on a rapidly eroding cliff. According to geological surveys, this lighthouse will be washed away by the sea in the near future.

JAJA Architects and BESSARDS' studio designed an intervention that allows the public to visit the historic structure while it still exists. In order to interpret the historic function of the lighthouse, a huge, vertical, wind-powered kaleidoscope-like structure was installed in the inner space of the building.

This kaleidoscope captures light and reflections at the top of the tower and sends it to the interior, creating a constantly changing play of lights. Also, a stairway around this structure was assembled, providing access to the top of the lighthouse.<sup>30</sup>

Visitors can experience a unique vertical interior space and observe the rapidly changing landscape of the seaside at the top of the building. The intervention generates encounters with a historical function, the interior space, the surrounding nature, and the destructive future of the old lighthouse. This experience reveals a story and the context of this historic building. In this case, I perceive architectural fragility not only as temporality of the build environment and urgency to interact with the lighthouse while it is still standing, but also as a scenographic sequence of experiences that, step-by-step, reveal the full story of the building and do not hide the impact of time or the pessimistic future.

<sup>30</sup> Divisare. "JAJA architects, Bessards' studio. Rubjerg Knude Lighthouse." Divisare. com. <https://divisare.com/projects/335106-jaja-architects-bessards-studio-rubjerg-knude-lighthouse>

I wonder, could hibernating buildings be considered as examples of fragile architecture? Is it possible to develop a scenario of captivating encounters that can tell multifold narratives of this strange legacy?

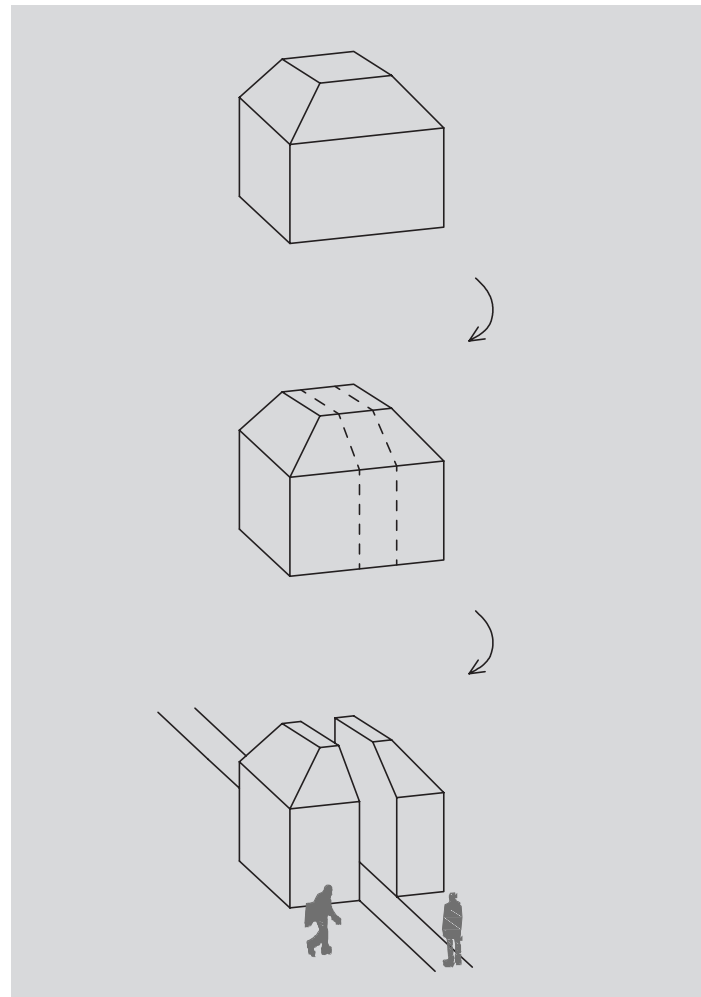
Although hibernating buildings were designed as imposing, representative, and outstanding landmarks, over time they adopted some qualities of fragile architecture. In this case, decaying structures and surfaces, complicated socio-political history and traces of illegal interactions could be perceived as valuable elements. I believe that it is possible to sensitively expose these features of fragility and connect them into an immersive experience.

Hibernating buildings could become places where people can touch, smell, observe and discuss about uncomfortable, but unchangeable history. By experiencing the multi-layered meanings of hibernation, people could participate in the continuation of today's story of these buildings and consider improvements or new functions of hibernating (anti-)landmarks. In this way, structures from the past could be experienced and organically supplemented by contemporary perspectives.

## Hardcore heritage

Another approach that offers new, sometimes even radical perspectives on historical structures is "Hardcore Heritage". This method was developed by a multidisciplinary studio called RAAAF [Rietveld Architecture-Art-Affordances]. The "Hardcore Heritage" approach does not aim to conserve or recreate historical legacy as it looked in the past.<sup>31</sup> Instead, "Hardcore interventions" generate new meanings and encourages to look for new relations between the past and the future.

<sup>31</sup> Rietveld E., Rietveld R. "Hardcore Heritage: Imagination for Preservation", *Frontiers in Psychology*. <https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fpsyg.2017.01995/full>



- 'Bunker 599' -  
Diagram

In order to create their built manifestos that allow to portray history in a new way, RAAAF use hardy instrumentality: elements of destruction, radical contextual changes or a combination of seemingly contradictory actions.<sup>32</sup> For example, in the former military area - New Dutch Waterline, RAAAF together with Atelier de Lyon suggested to open up the interior space of a bunker by slicing it in two parts.

The intervention was called "Bunker 599".<sup>33</sup> In this case, cutting through a bunker could be perceived as a physical collision of new future perspectives and cultural heritage. This intervention gave more cultural and monumental value to the New Dutch Waterline because after this alteration, "Bunker 599" was declared a cultural monument.<sup>34</sup> This project showed me that destruction also could be a design tool. It seems that the 'Hardcore Heritage' method transforms vacant or unused historical structures into physical statements that stimulate imagination and make history more accessible and open for interpretations.

In my opinion, a balance between destruction, radical additions, and creation of new meanings could be a strong impulse that can wake up currently hibernating buildings. A strategy of "Hardcore Heritage" could be an efficient way to uncover conflicts that are hidden in abandoned structures and generate present-day ideas about this uncomfortable heritage. Brave and provocative architectural language could provide a new significance of historical legacy.

<sup>32</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>33</sup> Rietveld Architecture-Art-Affordances. "Bunker 599" Raaaf.nl. [https://www.raaaf.nl/en/projects/7\\_bunker\\_599](https://www.raaaf.nl/en/projects/7_bunker_599)

<sup>34</sup> *ibid.*

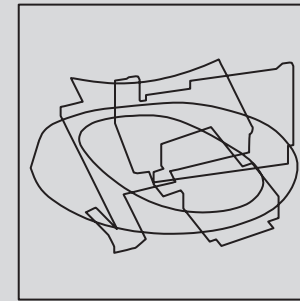


i-54  
-Hotel "Britanika"-  
photo from observations

Accordingly, these two seemingly opposite approaches could connect currently hibernating buildings with the present. Multi-sensory fragility refers to sensitive process-based inclusive experience, while the strategy of "hardcore heritage" works as radical, sometimes even shocking architectural alterations.

Nevertheless, both of these methods could help to make hibernating heritage more visible, accessible and tangible.

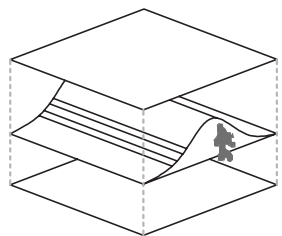
I wonder, could these two approaches be combined? Maybe "hardcore" interventions could work as a stimulus to draw society's attention towards hibernating heritage and then elements of fragile architecture could prompt to develop intimate relation with historical nuances... I guess, there is no single and correct formula. At least, there is enough space and unused square meters for experimentations.



-Instead of conclusions-

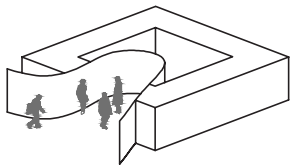


Lessons that I learned  
from hibernating heritage as an architect:



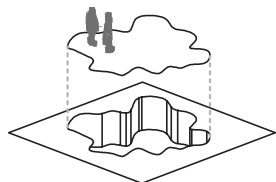
1.

Cultural paradoxes are interesting  
and worth to be uncovered.



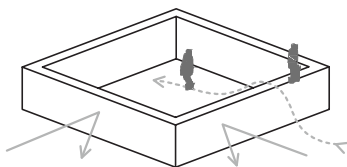
2.

Conflict is a value, if it is used for  
critical reflection and discussion.



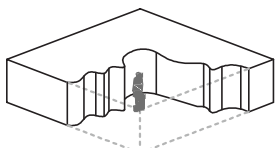
4.

Hibernating buildings provide a  
feeling of another reality. Try to  
feel that strange atmosphere.



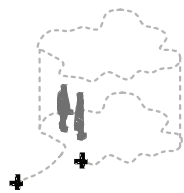
7.

Relation between two contradictory  
layers of protection and (non  
expected) interaction generates  
added value for hibernating  
buildings.



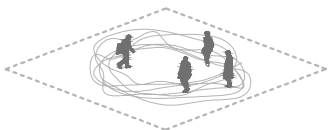
6.

Marks, street art and fractures  
testify to the story of a building.  
Try to learn how to read these  
signs.



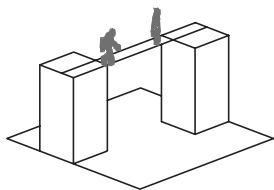
5.

Following digital footprints can  
reveal interesting information.  
Also, do not hesitate to leave your  
own digital imprint.



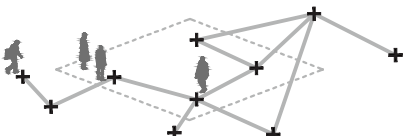
3.

Memories and emotions are  
inseparable part of a building.



8.

Explorers like to cross boundaries  
or feel the edge. Do not exclude the  
challenge out of the design.



9.

Encounters with multifold narratives  
of a building could make hibernating  
heritage more accessible and open  
for interpretations.



i-55  
-National Stadium-  
photo from observations

During this investigation I purified a relationship with this strange and uncomfortable hibernating heritage. I realised that these awkward anti-landmarks are a part of place where I came from, it means, they are a part of my identity. Yes, these buildings are physical leftovers of the uncomfortable historical period. They were neglected because this legacy reminds of ideas that are irrelevant to the contemporary democratic society. Thus, there is a need to accept and contextualise hibernating heritage with all traumas, peculiarities and painful historical paradoxes. It could be that a critical reflection on uncomfortable or contested legacy is a never-ending process. In order to accept this heritage and repurpose it, I need to reconsider it over and over again.

Nevertheless, I prefer everlasting critical questioning than passive hibernation.

I have already found out that this legacy contains cultural, historical, emotional meanings, value of conflict, interesting contradictions between the layer of protection and traces of illegal interaction. These qualities look promising and thought-provoking to me. Also, hibernating architecture is not unambiguous. It embodies ideas of authoritarian regimes as well as rebellious actions or politically neutral personal memories. That is why rejection and collective amnesia are not viable solutions. Furthermore, I feel responsibility to uncover values that I have found and provoke a constructive discussion. I strongly believe that architects could work as experimenters that search for ways how to overcome ignorance, contextualise hibernating buildings and put a democratic, present-day layer of meaning to them. Accordingly, sensitive or provocative (architectural) interventions could transform hibernating buildings into spaces where we can accept and discuss our complete story with all uncomfortable parts. Encounters with time and history encourage to interpret and re-interpret multi-layered meanings of this heritage. Also, openness and never-ending critical reflections can add a contemporary dimension to these distinctive (anti-)landmarks.

Thus, how can the potential of hibernating structures be found?

I could say, through endless confrontations with time, history, conflicts and local identity.

Acceptance and interaction are the keys.



i-  
-National Stadium-  
photo from observations

Acknowledgments

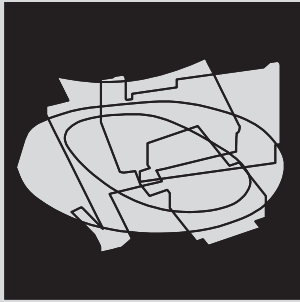
I feel grateful to all architects, politicians, artists, historians, and activists for stimulating cultural, social, and political transformations that determined strange, abandoned, yet extremely interesting hibernating heritage, but at the same time, democratic, free and safe environment to observe, raise questions and investigate contradictory topics. Thank you for shaping the foundation of my practise and experimentations.

My biggest thanks go to Daiva, Tautvydas, Faustas, Edmundas, Irena, Zibuole, Algirdas for sharing personal memories or thoughts and providing different perspectives on abandoned structures.

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