

# REFLECTION

## **The relationship between the theme of the graduation lab and the subject/case study which was chosen within this framework (location/object)**

One of the explored aspects of urbanism research theme Complex cities, is how spatial planning and strategy making, contribute to the diminishing environmental threats and weak governance. 'Complex Cities' emphasize relations among design, planning, and politics. The chosen subject and site is responding to these relations. During the graduation, I have tried to connect aspects of spatial planning, strategy, and guidelines for small-scale design interventions and decision-making model proposals. The project's location is the partly historical suburb, partly socialist housing estates neighbourhood in Vilnius, Lithuania. Lithuania is one of the countries that have been for 50 years a part of a communist block. Central planning and planned economy highly influenced the form of cities, traditions of spatial planning and the habits of people to use space. After becoming independent, cities went through a complex period of transition from communist ideology to free market economy. Places like the post-socialist neighbourhoods do not receive enough attention from the municipalities and are becoming deteriorating places of the city with growing social problems. The city planning and strategies do not take enough attention for revitalizing those areas, and there are no strategies for improving them. The deterioration of the neighbourhoods is the result of market-led planning. The development of the city is happening in outskirts of the city while the socialist housing estates are left neglected and losing the young and with higher education level social groups. With the research, I tried to find out what and how planning policies and strategies could help to revitalize the neighbourhoods and what could be the different approaches of planning make the areas more attractive for the residents and investors.

## **The relationship between the project and the wider social context**

Analyzing the issue of socialist and other deteriorating neighbourhoods of the city and how spatial planning influences the development and what planning guidelines could be made for the revitalizing those areas, is important for the wider context: On the one hand, the majority of residential neighbourhoods in Lithuania that host the largest number of people are the socialist housing estates. They are neglected by municipalities, and if the living quality in those areas continues to decline, people will continue moving out to the suburbs, and this can lead to major social and environmental problems of the city. There is a necessity to find ways to adapt these areas to current needs of people and to attract the new developments for creating a social mix in the area. There is a threat to those areas becoming "the dead zones" of the city in between the city centre and the suburbs. It is relevant to create the alternatives for the suburbs and to avoid of having so-called "dead zones" around the city centre. It is important to decrease threats of socio-spatial fragmentation on the city scale and to prevent the socialist housing estates from degradation. The issue of territorial planning is relevant to Lithuanian cities in general. All areas: suburbs, inner cities, and socialist housing areas are planned without coordination or understanding the local needs. Planning is based on standards and norms. Graduation project emphasizes a need for one spatial plan, guidelines and preparation and implementation of plans through the participatory planning approach. The plan which would guide people to the area improvement and encourage to take care of their environment.

## **The relationship between research and design**

The design goal of the project was to create a neighbourhood plan for a sustainable urban regeneration, which would be the alternative planning method to the existing one and would provide the guidelines for the improvement and development of the area by involving the residents and other stakeholders in planning processes. In order to propose a regeneration plan for sustainable development, it was important to define what sustainability and sustainable urban development are. The theoretical research gave the guidelines how to develop a neighbourhood plan - sustainable urban regeneration has to be done through an integrated approach, and at the local scale, it is important to form the sustainable communities and involve citizens in the planning process. Thus, the research on participatory planning and helping tools was done. It was concluded that online applications could help to involve communities to participate more actively in the planning process and also to make it more transparent. In order to create an interactive tool framework the references of the existing interactive tool and how do they work were analyzed.

To find out the key issues and principles how the post-socialist city of Vilnius and Soviet micro-district developed the socialist city and socialist housing estates were analyzed. From the analysis, it was clear that in post-socialist cities there is an issue of migration to the suburbs, and the housing estates built in Soviet times are neglected. Socialist housing estates are under threat of degradation and social segregation. Thus, social mix, and attracting young people, families in those areas are important. When preparing a neighbourhood plan, this led to the solutions, that the new developments and different typologies of housing have to be provided.

From a research of Vilnius, it is clear that district of Naujininkai is in a need of revitalization, but any of the revitalization, regeneration plans were prepared. The municipality does not have enough financing for revitalizing these areas, financial support from the private sector is needed. However, conditions for private sector developments have to be provided. Otherwise, the practice in Vilnius shows that developments are happening chaotically and not taking into account the surrounding areas and public interest. Thus, in a proposed plan a spatial vision for the neighbourhood was provided which all (re) constructions have to follow. In the plan, the possibilities for new constructions are provided in order to attract investments in the area.

The analysis of Naujininkai defined the weaknesses and strengths of the area. A broad analysis of its spatial and the social issues were carried out. Research helped to understand the problems and values of the place. It helped

to design an urban structure of a neighbourhood and to define the parts which need to be strengthened, where could be a starting point for revitalization.

The inspiration for spatial initiatives on socialist housing estates was taken from the analysis of mass housing restructuring examples in Germany.

The aim of the research of a spatial planning system was to find out how it is related to the issues of the city and the district, and how prepared plans try to tackle the issues of the area.

From the analysis, it is clear that the current planning documents do not provide one vision and plan for a development of neighbourhood unit. Planning is fragmented, based on zoning and detailed planning for individual parcels. Plans do not provide guidelines, and there is a very weak public participation culture, participation happens only in the public projects.

The proposed plan provides a spatial development plan, where all the (re)developments have to follow it, and the guidelines which encourage people to (re)develop their neighbourhood and actively participate in planning. An interactive tool is proposed to ensure transparency and participation in a neighbourhood planning and implementation process.

## **Methods are chosen for the graduation project:**

The methods used for research were a literature review, mapping, other desk research and site visit.

The literature review was used for understanding sustainable urban development and regeneration principles and general concept of participation in planning. The literature of post-socialist city helped to understand the context and current urban processes in Vilnius. As the focus of the project is socialist housing estates, it was necessary to comprehend development principles of them.

The research of spatial planning system was done mainly reviewing the literature of the law on territorial planning and reviewing the planner's view and comments on it. Analysis of current spatial development plans - comprehensive plan of Vilnius and detailed plans in Naujininkai shows how the spatial planning documents influence development patterns of the city and the district.

For the context analysis of Vilnius and Naujininkai, the methods like the statistics, data, and analysis of planning documents were used. It helped to understand a spatial, social structure of the city, and define the main urban development issues.

Mapping method helped to define the different building typologies, the historical structure and heritage. It was necessary to recognize different terrain heights and how it influences the structure of the neighbourhood. The spatial and functional structure of the neighbourhood analysis helped to establish pros and cons of the current structure, identify which parts need to be redeveloped and restructured.

The field work was also an important method for Naujininkai analysis. Visual analysis and evaluation of the site were done during the site visit; it revealed the physical condition of houses and public space. Moreover, by visiting and experiencing different neighbourhoods their street life, safety feeling can be compared. Mapping and site visit analysis of the site helped to provide a spatial design for a neighbourhood.

Methods used for design. Analysis of the examples of interactive planning tools helped to create a framework for an interactive tool, where a neighbourhood development plan could be integrated. The analysis of mass housing estates reconstruction in Germany helped to provide the guidelines for the opportunities of spatial initiatives for the redevelopment of socialist housing estates.