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The Mysteries of the Courtyards of Lodz and Vilnius- Similarities and Differences

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Abstract. At the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, both in Lodz as well as in Vilnius, tenement houses began appearing, which were always accompanied by a bigger or smaller space which constituted a semi- public courtyard. The size of these interior courtyards underwent change along with the evolution of these cities and their construction laws. Today, the courtyards of Lodz and Vilnius uncover the true tale of the city. All of them bustled with life in days past, being the places of residents hustling and passing each other by, the places of trading for street merchants, and playgrounds for children. Today, many courtyards have gone empty, changing their function and most often becoming a parking space for cars belonging to local residents. Some dark, cobblestone ones with buildings in bad shape deter people, while others – restored, well-lit, throbbing with life – invite people in. Unfortunately, most of the courtyards are in very poor shape, which requires immediate intervention. The most common cause of this passive approach is a lack of funds. One can only hope that still, step by step, changes for the better will be taking place. Perhaps courtyards will become the business cards of these beautiful, interesting cities; maybe they will become places which are worth admiring, and which are worth spending time in. The classification of the courtyards in Lodz and Vilnius allows us to consider the similarities and differences in their appearance and management. Through this article, the author aims to allow for a closed look at these spaces, which play an important role in the city. She attempts to answer the question of how these courtyards affect the cities' residents. The changes which are taking place are pointed out, their influence on the environment, the residents, and their modern-day function is shown.

1. Introduction

The turn of the 19th and 20th century was a special time for the development of both Lodz and Vilnius. Important technical, economic and social transformations took place then, which caused an intensification of urban processes.

Both cities present many common characteristics, but also differ in many ways. In inner city divisions, at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, the architecture formed in a similar fashion. The rapid growth in the number of residents during that time caused a rise in need for inexpensive housing, which largely influenced the development of a specific type of home – the tenement house, which was accompanied by a small or larger open space, which took on the form of an internal courtyard. The size and shape of these courtyards changed along with the evolution of cities and construction regulations [1].



2. Research method

The research, done through subject literature study, were conducted through the method of observations made during field work, as well as based on the photographic documentation done by the author of the work. Important research material was collected by the author from the residents of these cities. A complement of this information consisted of archival materials collected through WAPŁ the local branch of the National Archives in Lodz, and WAP – The National Archive branch in Vilnius. Based on field interviews conducted by the author, as well as the collected archival materials, three basic types of inner-city courtyards can be distinguished in Lodz and Vilnius. These are courtyards with an open arrangement, courtyards with a closed arrangement, and combined courtyards with a closed arrangement or combined closed-open arrangement. In Vilnius, as well as in Lodz, most courtyards have an open arrangement. A type of courtyard characteristic of inner-city divisions in Lodz is the well courtyard, a closed-arrangement courtyard surrounded with buildings on all four sides. These types of courtyards can also be found in Vilnius, however, they are not as common as they are in Lodz, and the surrounding buildings are not as tall; the buildings do not reach more than two stories in height. The rarest courtyards in both cities are interconnecting type courtyards with a n open-closed arrangement. In Lodz, stretched out agricultural and building plots of weaver settlements of the past, as well as large divisions of buildings stemming from the handicraft-based beginnings of the city have become its heritage, and it is these plots which most often took on this arrangement. The courtyards of Vilnius are narrower and smaller than those of Lodz, and a typical element which is often seen in the inner-city divisions is a bow thrown over the courtyard, which connects two side buildings; this is something we will not find in Lodz. Such courtyards can be found, among others, by Pilies St. 38, (Figure1) of by Didzioji St.11, (Figure 2). A very important element, which brings together and simultaneously divides two worlds: the exterior (the street by which the tenement houses stand) and interior (the courtyard, usually confined by annexes) is the gate [2]. Gates constitute a strong, characteristic elemnt in the composition of the fron facade. They have a practical function, because they close off the premises. They can also have an aesthetic function, if they are thoroughly adorned, then the gate informs us of the prestige of the building, its rank or availability [3].



Figure 1. Pilies St. 8, Vilnius

Figure 2. Didzioji St. 11, Vilnius

The classification of the courtyards of Lodz and Vilnius, based on their tourist values, which have the greatest meaning when it comes to the essence and knowledge of a city, allows us to notice the differences and similarities in their appearance and management. The space which accompanies inner-city buildings, which is supposed to be used by their residents, can become a distinctive spot if we get

to know it and give it value through the adequate management of the area, or exposing and highlighting that which already exists. One can consider the following factors: historical value (architectural detail, keepsakes of past eras, elements of small architecture), aesthetic value (the technical state of surrounding buildings and pavement) and the management (function, services, greenery). Both in Lodz as well as in Vilnius, most courtyards have an open arrangement, and unfortunately most of them are very neglected. The pavement in these places still consists of well-used sett paving filled in between with sand and asphalt, and the walls of the buildings scare off the viewer with their appearance. In Lodz, most of such courtyards can be seen by the streets: Kilińskiego, Sienkiewicza, Zielona, Traugutta. In Vilnius, we can find them among others by Pylimio St., Saviaciaus St., or Basanaviciaus St. However, many restored courtyards have an open arrangement, with remodelled pavement, with interesting developments, hiding keepsakes from the past after previous residents. There are certainly more such courtyards in Lodz, and they can be found mainly in the city's center. They are situated among others at Piotrkowska St.125, Piotrkowska St.51, Piotrkowska St.107 (Figure 3), Piotrkowska St.147 or Sienkiewicza St.18.

These courtyards make the impression of organised, clean spaces. On these courtyards we can find old cast iron manholes, sewage hatches with Russian or German writing, a cast iron mud remover, a wooden sukkah, or a bollard standing by the gate. In Vilnius, the courtyards are typically smaller and greener, and the keepsakes from the multi-cultural past of the previous residents appear sporadically. Some examples of courtyards in Vilnius with an open arrangement are those by Ligones St.7, (Figure 4) or the courtyard by Pilies St.8.



Figure 3. Piotrkowska St.107, Lodz



Figure 4. Ligones St. 7, Vilnius

In the inner city quadrants of both cities, a significant group of courtyards is created by those which have a closed arrangement. These are so called well-courtyards, which – in Lodz – are typically closed off by the tenement house and the annexes, whereas in Vilnius the space of one of the annexes is usually occupied by an outbuilding. Standing in one of them, one has the impression that time has stopped, not having changed a thing for many years. In Lodz, they can mainly be seen at Rewolucji 1905 r. St., Wschodnia St., and Jaracza St. In Vilnius, at Piliamo, Sodu and Sopeno Streets. At Piotrkowska Street 89 (Figure 5), Piotrkowska St.67, or Piotrkowska St.102 we can find enclosed well-kept courtyards, whose road surfaces and walls of the buildings have been renovated and additional services or gastronomic functions and more greenery make them recognizable, and people

want to stay there. In Vilnius, such courtyards appear at Pilies St.6, Stikluc St.7 or Sv. Kazimiero St.3, (Figure 6).



Figure 5. Piotrkowska St. 89, Lodz



Figure 6. Sv. Kazimiero St. 3. Vilnius

The last type of courtyards, the least common in both cities, are the combined courtyards, which mostly have an open-closed arrangement that allows passage from one part to the other and exit to a completely different street. These yards, like the previous ones - mostly restored, often contain an interesting element or architectural detail reminiscent of the former residents of the city. Examples of such courtyards in Lodz are among others: the yard at Piotrkowska St.88 (Figure 7), in which an interesting wooden structure is hidden- a former Jewish sukkah, and also the courtyards at Piotrkowska St.80 and Piotrkowska St.90 or the courtyard at Próchnika St.10. The Vilnius examples include courtyards located at Saviciaus St.11, (Figure 8), Pilies St.38 and Basenevicas St.16a.



Figure 7. Piotrkowska St. 88, Lodz



Figure 8. Saviciaus St. 11, Vilnius

Both the Vilnius and Lodz courtyards are connected with the fact that the facades of buildings surrounding the inner courtyards are usually devoid of architectural detail and are limited to inter-floor divisions and simple window frames. The main accent is the staircase division, which is usually closed in the result. Waste plasters from walls or damaged door and window joinery leaves a lot to be desired. The Lodz courtyards, unlike the Vilnius ones, are much more likely to attract, thanks to cognitive as well as occupational values, not only the residents, but also tourists. These are interesting courtyards,

teeming with life in the summer months, where the ground floors of buildings are occupied by numerous clubs and restaurants, and where small architecture, interesting architectural detail, or a strange wooden structure adjacent to a brick wall, foreign language inscription on the wall or hatch reminds of former residents. Less is happening in the Vilnius courtyards, rarely the ground floors of the buildings are adapted to the restaurants, equally rarely an interesting element that testifies for the multiculturalism of the city can be found. However, they are greener than the courtyards of Lodz, trees and green vines climb the walls of buildings and sometimes wooden galleries along the walls of the annexes give a special nature to these places. In each of these cities we can find very interesting backyards, different from all others. In Vilnius, it can be, for example, an inner-city, richly decorated courtyard with arcades, roof windows and an open staircase located at Pilies St. 32, (Figure 9). While, in Lodz, unheard of elsewhere, the courtyard at Piotrkowska Street 3, (Figure 10), where the walls of the tenement house and the annex were covered with pieces of mirrors, creating an amazing mosaic resembling tufts of flowers.



Figure 9. Pilies St. 32, Vilnius



Figure 10. Piotrkowska St.3, Lodz

3. Conclusions

What functions meet today's courtyards in the city centers of these cities? In the past, they were all meeting places for residents, where calling of traders and laughter of running children were heard. Today, many of them deserted, changing their function and becoming only a parking space for cars belonging to local residents. Some are dark, cobbled, devoid of greenery, with buildings in a very bad condition deterred, others restored, lit up, teeming with life thanks to the new development, revived and invited again.

The Vilnius and Lodz courtyards deserve attention as they form part of the urban landscape, that serves the people and identifies with the history of the city and its residents. Many of them reveal a real urban story. Restored streets and facades of buildings are constantly changing their face, which results mainly from the need of the moment and time in which we live. Therefore, it is worth getting to know them and taking care of them so that they become the showcases of cities. It is obvious that success will only be possible if the actions of the authorities and the local community are combined. One can only hope that still, step by step, changes for the better will be taking place.

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