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Theoretical Writings on Architecture in the Latvian SSR, 1945-1991

Abstract

Theoretical Writings on Architecture in the Latvian SSR, 1945-1991 is an overview of the ideas represented in theoretical writings during the period of Soviet Latvia. In the context of this research, theoretical writings are understood as general and original views and judgements on architecture. The article provides an overview of the main topics and most prolific authors. The systematisation and interpretation of the main themes are based on consideration of the actual developments in architecture and building realisation, of the inevitable presence of Soviet ideology and rhetoric, and of parallel historical developments in the territory of the USSR and the West. In the course of the research, theoretical articles are accepted as part of Soviet Latvian architectural history. The topic of the paper is deemed to be relevant as society has undergone a period of neglecting Soviet heritage, yet in recent years recognition and appreciation of Soviet architecture has begun in both a Latvian and European context.

Keywords

architecture, theory, Latvian SSR

Introduction

Architectural theory, parallel to design practice, shapes the discourse about architecture, analyses developments, methods and ideas, summarises observations, makes a prognosis about the future, and forms the basis of architectural education. So far, writings on architecture in Latvia have not been studied and analysed according to their historical period; thus, there is a lack of a general overview on the ideas and persons that have shaped theoretical concepts in thinking about architecture in the past. The field of architectural theory also lacks attention in current architectural education, which is related to the absence of traditions and of succession among theoreticians. This has resulted in a vague impression of the theoretical notions, problems and interconnections within the discourse in the context of Latvia and beyond, a lack of tradition and continuity, and a weak basis for knowledge and understanding of the global context.

Significant initiatives to advance research in this context include the anthology of theoretical articles by Latvian architects *Latviesu arhitektu teoretiskie raksti un manifesti 20. gs.* (*Latvian architects' theoretical articles and manifestos in the 20th century*), edited by architects Janis Lejnieks and Zanda Redberga and published in 2007, as well as the initial publication from the doctoral dissertation *Eizena Laubes teoretiskas atzinas* (*Eizens Laube's theoretical insights*) by architect and researcher Sandra Levane. It came out in 2009 and comprises a study of one author's theoretical work. If there were any doubts before then, these studies confirmed that it is possible to talk about architectural theory in Latvia.

The period of Soviet Latvia from 1945 to 1991 was chosen as a seemingly marginal and divergent historical stage of Latvian history. The selection promised to provide an idea of the theoretical ideas and thinking and the intellectual knowledge and techniques that were available and employed in Latvian architectural and urban planning practice from the end of WWII until the 1990s.

The choice of period is also related to the ideological and rhetorical factor in Soviet-era theoretical perspectives, which inevitably becomes the background and interest in a review of architects' writings from this time. Western architectural history shows consideration for constructivist and Stalin-era architecture, allotting it specific chapters in history books, but when regional Soviet modernist architecture is evaluated, the overriding idea is of a degraded, abandoned and homogenous environment created by planning bureaus. Even in the 21st century Eastern Europe is regarded as "Europe's surplus" (Pjotrovskis, 2012). This can also be applied to theoretical architectural writing: there is a common conception of the Soviet era as comparable to a "black hole", where nothing was written or anything that was written falls into the category of ideologized and standardised propaganda texts created in the framework of restricted KGB-controlled information space.

Preconceptions about Soviet architecture also exist in Latvia. They manifest themselves in negative attitudes and protests against Soviet architectural heritage (even an initiative to tear down the current Ministry of Agriculture building). Intensive implementation of building façade insulation projects threatens to destroy Soviet-era buildings' original forms, proportions and aesthetics. Overall in the first decades of the 21st century there is a growing interest among architectural researchers in Soviet architectural heritage, including architects' theoretical writings [1].

The study will focus on the theoretical work of architects, art historians and other authors active in the Latvian SSR, encompassing the period from the end of WWII and Latvia's re-annexation by the USSR in 1945 until the renewal of Latvian independence in 1991. In the framework of the research, the author has compiled theoretical architectural writings from the period, composed a historical overview,

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Since the 2000s, this has been evidenced by a "reappraisal" of Soviet heritage in various monographs, exhibitions and retrospectives in Latvia and abroad dedicated to individual architects and Soviet modernist architecture, for instance, in the context of the Latvian Pavilion of the 14th Venice Biennale of Architecture.

identified prominent and prolific authors, and carried out a systematisation and interpretation of the predominant issues and ideas.

The concept of architectural theory

To determine the selection criteria for the research material and understand the origins of the term *theory* and its interpretation under the Soviet regime, it is necessary to explain the notion of architectural theory. The word *theory* can be defined as a conception or perception, a mental scheme for implementing something, a method, or systematic conditions or principles that need to be followed (Johnson, 1994). "What was seen could enter into the public discourse" – such is the origin of the polysemantic Greek word *theoria* [2]. Aristotle used the term *theoria* to denote the process of contemplation or reflection and its object and differentiated between three concepts: *theoria* – an activity whose goal is to obtain knowledge of the universal and eternal; *poiesis* – an activity resulting in concrete objects rather than knowledge; and *praxis* – an activity that initiates changes in the source material. In his view, humans have a natural longing to know and understand reality as fully as possible. Plato, meanwhile, spoke of theory as a unique construct, a superior form of "higher" seeing as only a philosopher can see (Fisher, 1998). In neoplatonic thinking, theory was treated as a scientific category denoting observation and reflection (Fisher, 1998). In bridging the gap between the understanding of the concept in ancient Greek philosophy and how it is understood today, it is important to note the legacy of postmodernism starting in the 1970s, when theory became an ideology among artists and architects and it was difficult to separate art and architectural objects from theory – the reference became more important than the idea.

The Roman author, architect and engineer Vitruvius differentiated between intellectual and practical knowledge in architectural education as early as the first century in his essay *De Architectura* (Vitruvius, 1960), but it is assumed that the term *architectural theory* was first used starting at the beginning of the 17th century, when division between theory and practice was truly introduced in architecture. Harry Mallgrave (2005) speaks of modern architectural theory starting in the second half of the 17th century, when the terms *theory* and *modern* appeared. He confines modern architectural theory to specific years [3] – 1673 to 1968 – yet as late as the first half of the 19th century, architectural theory was considered together with architectural history. In 1818 architectural history and theory were separated into distinct yet complementary disciplines at the *École des Beaux-Arts* in Paris with the creation of two separate departments (Scruton, 2007).

Until the 1950s theoretical writings were mainly related to architecture's visual aspects or *venustas* as Vitruvius referred to them (Scruton, 2007), and they were perceived as a component of general art history. Only after this period did architectural theory come to be regarded as a much more complicated field, one that ought to be a discipline in its own right.

In further clarifying the term *theory*, it is interesting to consider Jonathan Culler's (2007) work, where, in looking for an answer to the question of what *theory* is in the context of literary theory, he indicates two directions: theory as a consolidated body of assertions and theory as "speculation". If we apply this to architectural theoretical writings, we find that theory can also be mere conjecture, written thinking about a topic and exploration of future possibilities. Theory constitutes works that succeed in unsettling and reorienting thinking in fields to which they seem not to apply; theory often comprises "criticism of self-evident concepts", analytical and speculative attempts to question habits, reflexive thinking about thinking which looks into the categories

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Related Greek words include "theoros" – spectator in a theatre or at athletic competitions or public events; "theorein" – watch carefully, contemplate (defines sight as central among the senses); "theos" – divine being (describes seeing from a divine perspective); "theatron" – theatre; "theoria" – official delegation from one Greek polis to another that was witness to an event.

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In 1673 Claude Perrault, in officially translating Vitruvius's texts, started to use the word "theorie", which became the standard in all architectural theoretical discussions.

we use in interpreting literature, and other discoursive practices – such are Culler's (2007) considerations related to what *theory* is. One can agree with the author that a hallmark of theory is its limitlessness – that it is an immeasurable mass of texts that keeps on growing (Kalers (Culler), 2007) – since, firstly, new texts appear with original contributions or answers to predecessors' ideas and, secondly, as evidenced by Soviet-era architectural texts, the same ideas and topics often repeat themselves.

In general, architectural theory in the Soviet context can also be defined as written viewpoints on architecture. Architectural theory analyses ways in which architecture can be created, experienced, perceived and critically evaluated – theoretical ideas reflected in a written text that is published or available in a manuscript – taking into account the segregation of architectural theory, architectural criticism and architectural history. Writings that can be regarded as architectural criticism (critical observations, reviews, reports, written portraits, interviews, analyses or evaluations of architectural objects) and studies related to architectural history are used as sources if they express original generalisations or help in revealing interconnections and serve as references for historical facts. Regarding the selection of materials and choice of writings, criteria include authors' suppositions, opinions, innovative relationships with architecture, universal ideas and original conceptions. Like other cultural phenomena in the Soviet Union, architectural theory was strongly ideologized and it developed, as the Lithuanian philosopher Arunas Sverdiolas (2012) writes, in a closed space that can be compared to a bottle – isolation and public life artificially maintained in a restricted space. Architects' theoretical thinking in Soviet Latvia was influenced by the ubiquitous presence of bureaucracy and by the manipulation of public opinion, which would later leave a mark on the lifestyle and mentality in the post-Soviet milieu as well.

Architectural historian Epp Lankots (2012), in her article *The neo-avant-garde and historiographic activity*, which looks at the historiography of Soviet Estonia's modern architecture in the context of the concept of contemporaneity, confirms a problem that the present study also had to reckon with in the course of its development: "In getting to know historical texts [...] one must face a series of questions about how to interpret the tangible presence of the past." In other words, assessment of such texts is encumbered by Soviet Marxist-Leninist doctrine, which transforms them into formal essays with architectural theories founded on Soviet-era intellectual baggage – that is, questionable information – which is why a critical approach is needed in reading and interpreting them.

In researching this topic, studies and other texts were used that were published by various authors – including architects, city planners, art historians, and philosophers – in the Latvian SSR from 1945 to 1991 and fall within the scope of architectural theoretical writings. Most often the texts were published in periodicals. The following selection criteria were applied: articles related to architecture, city planning, trade and construction that focus on theoretical issues of architecture and city planning and general questions of art and aesthetics. Writings conceived by Latvian architects in exile are not analysed as a full-fledged component of Soviet Latvian architectural theory in the framework of this study.

Chronology

One of the tasks in the course of the research was creating a clear chronology to show the political and socioeconomic turning points in the Latvian SSR, the changes in power in the USSR, the most significant buildings, projects and architectural events – for instance, architectural exhibitions or critical decisions – and turning points in theoretical thought originating outside the USSR. In examining architecture as a complex phenomenon, it is necessary to look at the respective historical period, also taking into consideration the volume, influence and nature of information coming from "outside". The study critically evaluates the influence of ideology and compares it with major ideas in architectural theory in the global context, their relevance today and their assessment by later scholars. In analysing the writings, it was also necessary to consider the dependence of Latvia as a Soviet republic on common

architectural and construction norms and the totalitarian ideological and aesthetic demands that went along with this. Such dependence defined architects' thinking and manifested itself in their writings. The study is divided chronologically into four sections:

1. a look at architectural theory at the beginning of the 20th century;
2. Soviet Latvian architectural theory in the post-war context until 1954;
3. a survey of theoretical ideas from 1955 until 1960;
4. the 1970s and ideas in the period of 1980-1991.

Given that architectural developments are also influenced by the priorities of those in charge, in the course of the research characteristics of the time contingent on the persons in power in the USSR were also considered. Ways of systematising the writings that would divide the theoretical material into specific topics were rejected as unsuitable [4]. Such a division would not be able to provide an objective idea of the research topic, though it could be used to analyse the work of a single author or study a specific thematic orientation.

A survey of architectural theoretical writing at the end of the 19th century and beginning of the 20th century

This study's chronology begins at the end of WWII, when Latvia experienced re-annexation and, together with 13 other countries, was forcibly included in the Soviet "family" for nearly half a century. The instability and confusion wrought by six years of war also meant a hiatus in the architectural theoretical thinking and writing that had started in Latvia at the beginning of the century and matured during the interwar period. Pre-war and interwar Latvian architectural and theoretical thinking developed alongside that of other European countries, so that before turning to the main purpose of the study – analysis of architectural theoretical writings in Soviet Latvia – it is necessary to look at the second half of the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century.

Research dedicated to architectural history and emphasis on architectural theoretical issues began in Latvia in the 1870s with the theoretical work of pedagogues at the Riga Polytechnic Institute (RPI), founded in 1869. The German-Latvian architect Gustav Hilbig's work *Ueber architektonische Formenbildung* (*On architectonic forms*) was published in several instalments in the newspaper *Riga(i)sche Stadtblatter*. A manuscript on the history of construction norms was written by the architect Julius August von Hagen, but the 1908-dated document has not survived (Latvijas Enciklopedija, 1995). The architect and art historian Wilhelm Neumann distinguished himself with notable research work; starting with his earliest known publication in 1885 (Grosmane, n.d.), he completed more than 60 books and treatises, concentrating on such topics as Baltic art history or medieval architecture in Riga and the Baltics, the Riga Cathedral in particular (Latvijas Enciklopedija, 1995). The architect Heinz Pirang, a professor at RPI from 1910 to 1915, was the author of around 100 publications related to issues surrounding architectural theory and history as well as city construction and monument protection (Latvijas Enciklopedija, 1995); he also authored a study of mansions in the Baltics, *Das baltische Herrenhaus* (*The Baltic manor house*) (1926-1930). The architect Eduard Kupffer, also on the faculty of RPI, authored several publications, including the monograph *Das Arbeiter-WWohnhaus* (*The workers' tenement house*) (Buka et al., 1995).

The architect Eizens Laube [5] began his extensive theoretical activity in 1908. His work in architectural theory spanned almost sixty years, ending in 1965 with the philosophical publication *Cilveks – sevi* (*The human being – in himself*) in the exile journal *Architekts* (*Architect*). Sandra Levane (2009) has researched

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For instance, architectural language, national or regional identity, the relationship between the new and the old, architecture's social objectives, the home, the architects' profession.

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Eizens R. Laube (1880-1967) – architect, RPI professor, LU Faculty of Architecture professor, architectural theorist; went into exile in 1944, first to Germany, then to the US.

Laube's theoretical oeuvre, counting more than 60 publications of varying length in the professional and public press, two books and an unpublished English-language treatise, *Manifestation of Architecture*. Laube's main interests were "fundamental insights on the subject of architecture" (Levane and Krastins, 2009) and looking for answers to the question "what is architecture?". In acquainting oneself with Eizens Laube's writings, one is inclined to agree with Levane and Krastins (2009) that his "legacy in Latvian architectural theory is unique in its volume, in its topical and temporal scope, and in the depth of its content". During the interwar period Laube continued to write about issues surrounding national architecture, Latvian national architecture in particular, and about the general understanding of architecture, for instance *Latvijas arhitekturas radisana* (*The creation of Latvian architecture*) (1922), *Arhitekturas izpratne* (*Understanding architecture*) (1930), *Latviskais arhitekturas stils tagadne* (*The Latvian style of architecture today*) (1936), and *Arhitekturas gars atjaunota Latvija* (*The spirit of architecture in sovereign Latvia*) (1939).

In general, publications at the beginning of the 20th century before WWI mostly dealt with building in practice, questions of style, modern construction and home design. The press reflects architects' discussions on city planning issues and large construction projects, for instance the Riga Latvian Society House or the Riga City Art Museum. 1919 saw the founding of the University of Latvia's Faculty of Architecture (a regrouping of the RPI), which became the centre of all architectural life and hosted the principal movements of the time: neo-eclecticism, functionalism and national architecture (Krastins, 1992). In the 1920s, given the publishing opportunities and freedom of the press in the newly democratic Latvia, the amount of writing and the breadth of topics grew – architects "had something to say". The most important event of this period was the publication of the monthly professional journal *Latvijas Arhitektura* (*Architecture of Latvia*) starting in 1938 (Krastins, 1992). The journal covered a broad range of architectural issues and, as Liga Alksne (1989) writes, addressed not only practical matters but also theoretical problems, "taking them to the level of philosophical generalisations". The journal's activities were discontinued in 1940.

Regarding the interwar period, the work of art historian Boris Vipper should also be mentioned; from 1924 to 1940 he published research not only on art history, but also on architecture, for instance, the essay *Arhitekturas valoda* (*The language of architecture*), which came out in the volume *Makslas likteni un vertibas* (*Art's fortunes and values*) in 1940 (republished in 2005). The architect Pauls Kundzins authored a synopsis of the history of art and styles and a compendium of the rules of perspective. He actively researched folk building in his dissertation *Dzivojama rija Latvija* (*The residential barn in Latvia*) (1933) and his other writings. The architect and pedagogue of artistic spatial forms Pauls Kampe theorised on issues surrounding the variety of architectonic forms and architectural and art history in his work *Dazadu materialu arhitektoniskas formas* (*The architectonic forms of different materials*) (1922). The architect Arnolds Lamze can be regarded as the founder and pioneer of urban construction theory in Latvia. Theoretical work was also carried out by Arturs Krumins, Aleksandrs Birzenieks, Janis Rutmanis, Pavils Dreijmanis, Peteris Arends, Teodors Rusins and Janina Jasenas.

As Janis Krastins (1992) writes, the main issues in theoretical writings during the period of the Latvian Republic were "profiling architectural styles of the time and the problem of a national style". 1940, which marked the first Soviet occupation of Latvia during WWII, brought drastic changes in political orientation and, along with them, an interruption of the work accomplished until then. 1945, when Latvia was re-occupied by the USSR, marks the starting point of this study's focal period. The onset of the war was the beginning of a time that has been called the hardest in the history of the architectural profession (Dripe, 1989) – more than 50 years of occupation. In 1941, in lieu of the journal *Latvijas Architektura*, the magazine *Tehnika un Celtnieciba* (*Technology and Construction*) became the monthly edition of Latvian SSR Engineering Technological Workers and Architects, but only one issue came out (1941) that included a section on architectural issues, and it was introduced with an appeal from the Organising Committee of the Latvian

SSR Architects' Union to "All Latvian SSR architects" to come up with a new architecture, the formula for which would be the same throughout the Soviet period: "national in form, socialist in content".

1945 to 1954: Ideologization

WWII and the occupation of Latvia interrupted the development of architectural theoretical thinking in writings and studies that had begun at the end of the 19th century and had already progressed quite far at the beginning of the 20th century and in the interwar period, having taken place, until the war, alongside that of other European countries. Any succession in theoretical work was broken off in 1944, when three-fourths of the around 200 professionally educated Latvian architects fled the regime and went into exile in Sweden, the US, Canada, Australia and other countries, including architects that had distinguished themselves with notable theoretical achievements in the interwar period, such as Eizens Laube, Pauls Kundzins, and Pavils Dreimanis.

All cultural activities and artistic fields, including architecture, were tailored to the ideological requirements of socialist realism and, as art historian Maija Rudovska (2010) writes, in the evaluation of post-war architecture it is important to take into account these newly introduced socio-political and ideological conditions. The doctrine of socialist realism was the only permissible creative method, as stipulated by the USSR starting in 1932 based on Soviet aesthetic theory (Pelse, 2003). Its central idea was mass education and "learning from the classics", which was understood as a return to the formal language of classical order architecture. 1948 is regarded as the beginning of the introduction of Stalinism's "strict guidelines" in the cultural world, including architecture, where anything bourgeois, capitalistic and functional was condemned, while there was a return of neoclassicism, order architecture, and a compiling of styles from other epochs, leading to such conclusions as the one made by architect and pedagogue Sergey Antonov, that "architecture cannot survive without order" (Lejnieks, 1998). Socialist realism was created to fill the need for realistic art and architecture that would be understandable and easy to perceive for the socialist people.

Texts reflecting architectural developments – along with the socio-political and ideological stipulations of Soviet leader Stalin's totalitarian regime, the application of socialist realism to architecture, and the introduction of censorship – can be regarded as the most direct outcome of the ideology propagated by the regime. In the course of the research, it was found that the political background shaping theoretical thought in the Soviet Union was a powerful and inextricable influence and that it is impossible to avoid the presence of propaganda in the texts; thus, a critical approach is needed in reading them.

Within this period, texts of interest are found mainly in periodicals: the weekly newspaper *Literatura un Maksla* (*Literature and Art*), published from 1945 until 1992 as a newspaper for artists' unions, including the Architects' Union, with the subtitle *The Newspaper for Unions of Soviet Latvian Writers, Composers, Artists and Architects*; the newspapers *Padomju Students* (*Soviet Student*) and *Cina* (*Struggle*) and the journal *Maksla* (*Art*), which came out from 1952 until 1994. Certain scientifically grounded studies related to the research topic can also be found in *Latvijas PSR Zinatnu akademijas vestis* (*Annals of the Latvian Academy of Sciences*), issued by the Latvian SSR Academy of Sciences. Not a single professional architectural journal was published in the period. In the first five years after the war, i.e. until 1950, architecture-related texts were largely ideologized appeals from the communist regime, encouragements to struggle against the bourgeoisie, and declarations of Soviet architectural objectives – or they were informational publications regarding admission to the Faculty of Architecture, descriptions of architects' studies, information on competitions and new buildings, and job advertisements for architects. Within the framework of the regime, publications were censored and subject matter was strictly regulated.

It was important for Stalin's regime to cultivate an active struggle with supporters of capitalism, to fight the national bourgeoisie and spurn Latvian nationalists for the purposes of ideological education, and to criticise any non-

Marxist approach to science and any seepage of bourgeois ideas into thought. It seems that for these reasons, at the end of 1950, the University of Latvia Faculty of Architecture was closed, and the following year architects could continue their education at the Faculty of Construction Engineering. This goes to show that architects, once creative personalities, were now not only functionaries but also humble construction workers. In terms of education, the fundamentals of Marxism-Leninism stood above all else, and architectural theory was understood as a scientific activity in the study of history rather than the expression of independent thoughts and ideas.

During this period, architects tried to find answers to the questions of how to construct Soviet architecture and what the nature of such architecture was to begin with. For one thing, in the period of the Soviet system, it seemed essential to raise public understanding of general and professional issues in architecture, since communist ideology was aimed at educating the people and the masses. Soviet architects had to perform "a hard, grandiose and lofty task", because "the people are expecting [...] comprehensive, practical and at the same time architectonic – that is, artistic – solutions to the most important problems in contemporary construction" (Padomju Jaunatne, 1945). The answer to the question "how should we build?" was "good, fast, cheap and neat" (Dmitrijevs, 1947). Ernests Stalbergs (1951), at the time chairman of the Soviet Latvian Architects' Union, defined the practical tasks of Soviet Latvian architects precisely: planning workers' villages, designing kolkhoz centres, exploring the social realist method, seeking out and researching the national form, designing city square and highway ensembles, standard design, using standard units in designing residential buildings and facades, adhering to socialist economics in construction, and obeying government decisions.

The Soviet architectural and urban construction ideas established by Stalin, which were comparable to urban planning methods in other totalitarian and authoritarian states, were applied at a complete remove from any real context – they did not take into account cities' economic development, the prospects for territorial development, the natural conditions, the dynamics of the building processes and the spatial features of the given locations. The Riga General Plan, completed in 1952 under the leadership of Russian émigré Jevgenijs Vasiljevs, fully reflected the communist government's conceptions of the ideal city (Lejnieks, 1998), where ensembles and squares became the main elements. Architecture historian Jurijs Vasiljevs (1953) explained the ensemble as a spatial category that creates harmony and unity, formulating the main principles of its design: an ensemble must blend the artistic with the practical, its main element is the square, an ensemble must include public buildings, as a rule one should construct buildings of the same height with the same components, and the principal enemy of ensemble construction is private property. With the aim of providing housing to residents, so-called standard design was developed, which was still technologically and stylistically different from the evolution of standard projects in later years. This period also saw the beginning of a contempt for historical styles and wooden architecture that lasted into the mid-1980s.

Although Soviet rhetoric, with its all-embracing formula "socialist in content, national in form", gave official permission to speak of national stylistic features in architecture, the concept of *national* and explanations of its interpretation in architects' texts of the Soviet era are vague and ambiguous. As architect Ivars Strautmanis confirmed in a conversation [6], the aforementioned slogan could encompass all sorts of things, it could be interpreted according to one's wishes, and without the context of the Soviet regime, it was nothing bad in itself, since, for example, it granted permission to study history. According to the theory of socialism, the emphasis on national features was based not on a sense of national supremacy but on Soviet patriotism, which would unite peoples' national features and traditions in a "friendly" manner; therefore, it was necessary to write especially about the uniqueness of Latvian culture, its antiquity, its distinctiveness and special features compared to the cultures of other peoples, and its "benefits". Architects were advised to follow the development of architectural forms, to approach architectural heritage creatively and critically and, in creating architecture,

to unite inherited cultural-historical values, elements of national art, and progress as the concept was understood in Soviet rhetoric. Architects needed to manoeuvre among these abstract stipulations, to avoid praising pre-Soviet architectural heritage too much, to draw inspiration from historical constructions and interpret them in the "correct" spirit of socialist realism. The theoretical writings of authors of the time (architects Karlis Pluksne, Peteris Berzkalns, Ernests Stalbergs, Alberts Bajars, Valentina Valeskalne, Emma Aizsilniece, Velta Ramane, Voldemars Susts, Gunars Priede, construction engineer Janis Jagars and others) dealt with events in the architectural field, yet publications within this ten-year period were saturated with demagogy, ideological slogans, and empty pathos, while the "endless possibilities for growth" remained only words.

1954-1955 is taken as the endpoint for this period and section, as it was marked by dramatic changes in the USSR, including in the architecture of Soviet Latvia. In general, it should be concluded that in the first ten years following the war, theoretical thought was radically different from what Latvian architects had begun in the first half of the 20th century. It constituted a complete renunciation of personal judgment and vision, given the introduction of compulsory propaganda into publications and the adherence to subject matter determined by centralised Soviet authorities.

The second half of the 1950s and the 1960s: Excess prevention and international modernism

The de-Stalinization process and the decree of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and the USSR Council of Ministers signed by Khrushchev in 1955 *On the Prevention of Excess in Design and Construction* drastically changed the course of development of Soviet architecture, also marking a transition to a new period of architectural theory. Stalinist architecture was replaced by late international modernism, with its most characteristic features: simplicity, dynamics and asymmetry of forms and scales; rejection of facade décor; contemporary materials; and the aesthetics of machinery. From then on, the attractiveness of buildings and constructions was to be achieved by organically coupling the architectonic form of the building with its task, which could be identified as the relationship between form and function celebrated by modernists; indeed, modern architecture was officially legalised.

Most texts of interest in the second half of the 1950s and in the 1960s are still found in periodicals – the highest percentage of relevant articles for researching the topic is found in the weekly newspaper *Literatura un Maksla* and the journal *Maksla*. But compared to the previous decade, this period can already be regarded as including noteworthy publications in the form of books and article collections. In 1958, the book *Latvijas PSR arhitekturas mantojums* (*The architectural heritage of the Latvian SSR*) was published with six solid historical studies of architecture, covering such topics as Riga's medieval architecture, stone and wooden architecture in Latvia, 18th and 19th-century architecture in Riga, and features of manor architecture and sites. In 1962, the State Publishing House of Latvia published Igor Bartenev's *Parrunas par arhitekturu* (*Architectural discussions*), which was translated from Russian and intended as a guide for students of people's universities (adult education centres). However, the book's significance for architecture students and professionals in Latvia is unclear. 1966 saw the publication of *Laikmetiga arhitektura Padomju Latvija* (*Contemporary architecture in Soviet Latvia*), which, as written in the book's description, "recounts the development of contemporary architecture in Soviet Latvia from 1955 to 1965". In 1967, *Telpa, kas sakas ar mums* (*Space that starts with us*) came out – a collection of thematic articles by architects Ivars Strautmanis and Bruno Artmanis that was quite innovative for its time. In 1958, on the basis of the State University of Latvia, the Riga Polytechnic Institute was reinstated, and in 1969 it published a bilingual collection of articles, *Arhitektura un pilsetbuvnieciba Latvijas PSR* (*Architecture and urban construction in the Latvian SSR*).

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Author's conversation with the architect Ivars Strautmanis, 25 April 2013.

In the first five years after the "upheaval", architects' texts were dominated by discussions on the changes made in architecture by the aforementioned decree. Ivars Strautmanis (1957), a young architect at the time, noted that "none of the creative activities in recent times has undergone such dramatic changes as architecture". The new style of socialist architecture in Soviet Latvia was called "post-war", "contemporary" or "today's" architecture, avoiding use of the term *modern*. The main topics of architecture-related texts of the 1960s are as follows:

- the essence of Soviet architecture and the tasks of architects;
- territorial zoning ideas in urban planning, compositional planning of housing estate ensembles and the multiplicity of spatial organisation;
- standard design and industrialisation;
- small towns and rural settlements, where the main idea was to abolish the difference between the city and the countryside;
- coming up with a conception of the contemporary home;
- the creative working method of the Soviet architect, principles for creating new types of public buildings and organising space, architectural composition;
- architectural aesthetic concepts and questions of taste and its cultivation;
- issues of national form, preservation of heritage;
- the synthesis of art and architecture;
- the standpoint on capitalist countries' architecture.

The Khrushchev thaw made it possible to get current information on Western architectural developments inside the Iron Curtain. Authorisations were given to travel to Western countries, books obtained with difficulty were passed from hand to hand, architects enthusiastically studied publications in the available architectural journals. Starting in 1959 architecture-related articles were officially allotted space in the newspaper *Literatura un Maksla*, but in spite of architects' wishes, a specialised professional journal would not appear until the 1990s. Various functionaries still had the duty to officially indicate and instruct on what topics were desirable and acceptable and which ideas and trends were to be considered "correct". An architect had to be able to "correctly" interpret "the features of societal life, to perceive and experience the conception of beauty characteristic of the era, to find expressions characteristic of the cultural spirit of one's people, and to synthesise and fuse all this into a uniform trend and embody the idea in new buildings" (Miezis, 1958).

It was officially assumed that the principles of open space planning postulated by international modernism met the needs of the socialist population – the Soviet people's environment should also be shaped as "a broad and unified continuation of free and natural space" (Driba and Susts, 1964). *Flowing* and *floating* space were terms introduced to describe the new methods of organising space and to create functional boundaries not for physical space, but for psychological space. In reality, these principles underpinned the desire of the authorities to "screen" each person's private life by minimising the possibilities of private space, since this was where ideas unfavourable to the regime could arise.

From the 1950s to the 1970s, residential neighbourhoods in the Latvian SSR were constructed according to standard design as in the rest of the Soviet Union. Soviet urban construction ideas followed international modernism's city planning principles, which envisaged the rejection of perimetrical construction and the transition to so-called free planning. By the end of the 1960s, authors were already writing critically about ornamental building layouts that could only be perceived from a bird's-eye view and about the degree of artistic expression afforded by utilitarian housing estates' architecture (Vasiljevs, 1968), maintaining that an architectonic ensemble could not be created from mediocre buildings and that buildings of a single type created monotony. In the 1960s, the future of small towns, villages and rural settlements was determined by the objective of making the Latvian countryside more like the cities (Lejnieks, 1990). The exchange of ideas regarding the future of small towns and rural settlements intensified with the question of whether to build "nicer and better" or to build with preservation of architectural heritage in mind. Today, the results of collectivisation and

rural urbanisation can be seen in the semi-abandoned kolkhoz centres that were artificially created.

Permission to study historical architecture was granted by Lenin's theory of the importance of individual cultures in the development of the newly created Soviet culture as well as by the assertion that national forms in Soviet culture could not be genuine and true if they ignored Soviet architectural heritage. Architects' writings in the 1960s also included reflections on how to interpret the slogan "socialist in content, national in form" – in such contexts as the necessity of respecting the aesthetic traditions of the people, finding an appropriate use for every material, or of lending tasteful harmony to a structure through simple and restrained means of expression. However, the *national* could be interpreted in various ways and discarded as uneconomical and obstructive if necessary.

Discourse on the perception of architecture and the psychological effect of buildings on their users became relevant. Living in the Soviet space could be compared to life in a "work camp", where a well-rested and efficiently functioning workforce was important; thus, there was official discussion of the influence of architecture on a person's capacity to work. In Latvia and throughout the USSR architecture was posited as a cultivator of the Soviet population's aesthetic tastes, lifestyles, and opinions. In the socialist milieu, beauty was generally placed in the same category as convenience and cheapness; accordingly, the qualities of a beautiful home were usefulness and purposefulness.

Commemorative architecture and sculpture flourished throughout the USSR. Artistic improvements were also needed in the unified housing estates. In the 1960s, the concept of synthesis entered into architects' theoretical writings, and Ivars Strautmanis is rightly considered to have played a central role in this regard, relating the concept to both the interaction between architecture and art and interdisciplinary collaboration in the practical realisation of buildings. An acting professor and doctoral candidate at the time, Strautmanis composed the thesis *Sintezes loma jaunas telpiskas kvalitates radisana* (*The role of synthesis in the creation of new spatial quality*), which may be regarded as the beginning of the synthesis concept's scientific-theoretical use in architecture (Davidsone, 1967).

The 1970s: In search of expression

In the 1970s, which are remembered in Soviet history as Brezhnev's era of stagnation and for the Soviet economic crisis, architects' theoretical writings were generally engaged with the search for expression, with efforts to enhance the informational and emotional potential of architecture, and with the possibility of finding diversity in the framework of standard design. Such was the result of rapidly constructing homogenous and unattractive residential developments, of the unfinished housing estates, of the utility structures left half built, and of the lack of historical and cultural strata. Nevertheless, the answers to the question of how to create a multifaceted, finely tuned environment were rather general, and one of the means called for was the use of architectural heritage and the preservation of historical continuity.

The Western world had entered into a situation where the principles of modernist architecture and urban planning turned out to be inadequate in terms of the zeitgeist. The stylistic tendencies of the period were termed *postmodernism*, as in Charles Jencks's 1975 essay *The Rise of Post-Modern Architecture* and his 1977 bestseller *The Language of Post-Modern Architecture*. Although the concept figured as early as the 1930s, Jencks was the first theorist in the 1970s to apply it to the paradigm shift in architecture – from modern to postmodern. The term quickly took root, becoming a "label" in Western architectural theory. But the spirit of postmodernism was not yet "felt" in Soviet Latvia in the 1970s – not in the architecture, not in architects' theoretical writings (Strautmanis, 1983). Architects were tired of prefabricated standard design structures and frustrated with the quality of construction. Since renouncing the principle of usefulness was not an option for the Soviet authorities, in the 1970s there was frequent criticism of Western architecture – that in its search for individuality, it was turning into a curiosity; that the irrational factor of

emotional effect was becoming an end in itself. The paradox of the architectural profession under the socialist system in that decade, "lots of design, little construction", contributed to the formation of informal avant-garde and "paper architecture" groups. As Janis Lejnieks (1998) writes: "At the end of the 70s, the utopia of official Soviet architecture had created its anti-utopia – in the form of young architects' conceptual projects."

The Soviet Latvian periodicals that already published texts on architecture in the 1970s – *Literatura un Maksla, Cina, Padomju Jaunatne,* the journals *Maksla*, *Zvaigzne* (*Star*), *Karogs* (*Flag*) – were joined in the period of 1978-1981 by the thematic periodical *acd* (*arhitektura, celtnieciba, dizains*) (*architecture, construction, design*), published by the Latvian Scientific and Technical Information Research Institute. The publication's subtitle heralded *The work experience of Latvian SSR architects, builders and designers*. In 1977 a Latvian-language version of Ivars Strautmanis's doctoral dissertation came out, *Dialogs ar telpu* (*Dialogue with space*) (Figure 1), followed in 1978 by the Russian-language edition.

Regarding urban construction in the 1970s, it is possible to distinguish several predominant issues of varying scale: the question of the architectonic spatial composition of the development of Riga's centre, architects' reflections on high-rise silhouettes in Riga's centre (the "city and sky" dialogue), and the concept of how building compositions are perceived at high speeds. Evalds Fogelis, taking the zoning scheme in Limbazi as an example, believed that a city's individuality could be exploited and elevated to a new quality as a "different self" (Lejnieks and Redberga, eds., 2007).

Under the system of Soviet collectivisation, former farmsteads were not considered suitable for workers' everyday life. Although the official objective was to make the countryside more like the city, architects could not ignore the historical logic of the opposite. Overall in the course of the decade, respect for historical buildings among both architects and the authorities grew, as if foreshadowing the changes of the 1980s that led to the rehabilitation of historical styles and wooden architecture and the reassessment of Old Riga as a valuable and unified historical whole. Publications continued to address the synthesis of architecture and the arts; the reasons for this concept's appearance in socialist society could be purely practical: the empty walls, the rough unplastered concrete and the bleak open spaces were not acceptable to the Soviet people, so the easiest official response was incorporating applied art elements into interiors. There were often critical remarks that the synthesis of art and architecture was mostly limited to the interior design of cafés and restaurants and that it was always the same decoration, only with a different name.

In the future, the tasks of Soviet and Western architects will include solving an increasingly complex set of issues, which will facilitate the development of architecture as an interdisciplinary field – such was the prediction made by Voldemars Susts (1970), and in the course of that decade, theoretical studies and writings also proved it. As a theoretical field, architecture became increasingly complex, architects also had to be sociologists, statesmen and economists, and thinking about architecture involved interdisciplinary research on humankind: sociology, medicine, physiology, psychophysics, psychophysiology, ecology, ergonomics. Research was done on issues of subjective perception, on sense of proportion, on the peculiarities of objective sense of sight. The concept of *synthesis* that came into fashion in the 1960s did not lose its relevance in architects' writings in the seventies. At this time architects' interest in semiotics reached a peak, and it became a seemingly ideal tool to criticise modernism for its lack of symbolic meaning. The most important publication in this time and context was Ivars Strautmanis's *Dialogs ar telpu* – the aforementioned Latvian-language version of his doctoral dissertation *Arhitekturas informativi emocionalais potencials* (*The informative-emotional potential of architecture*), which he defended in 1972. Here he describes architecture as an important medium for information about the spatial environment: it creates a dialogue between society and the environment. Strautmanis (1977) viewed the built environment as a perpetual source of signals and visual background, allowing the

beholder to read and interpret its aesthetic and semantic information based on his / her experience or preconceptions.

The transition to the next decade was marked by the Days of Architecture in 1979 with their slogan "For each city and each inhabited place, its own face", which offered an assessment of the preceding period and accurately reflected the wishes and interests of society – people wanted to live in comfortable, distinctive homes and they were not indifferent to the courtyard and the street (Strautmanis, 1979). International modernism was gradually replaced by the search for regional character. The exhibition *What will be the fate of regional architecture?* initiated the topic of regional architecture, which became an important discourse in Soviet Latvian architecture in the eighties and remains relevant for architects in the 21st century.

1980 until 1991: Postmodernism, the search for regional character

"In observing the new architecture of the last few years, it must be concluded that it is saturated with the spirit of our time, unfortunately from a rather murky ditch. Though we can think along with the spirit of the eighties, we are often forced to realise the spirit of the seventies, sixties or even earlier years."

Hardijs Ledins (1986)

The Soviet Union was gradually approaching its collapse: the 1980s brought changes in the countries of the union, from war to liberalisation of art policies, and a long-lasting political crisis set in. The politics of Gorbachev, the last Secretary General of the USSR, comprised two basic elements: openness (*glasnostj* in Russian) and reorganisation (*perestroika* in Russian). In the mid-1980s in Latvia this helped pave the way for the Third Awakening and other events that led to the factual restitution of independence in 1991. Architects' publications still criticised the unfinished construction ensembles and residential districts in Riga, as the two-thousandth-scale building concepts developed by the planning bureaus were rarely implemented in full. To save money, many of the planned structures were never completed, and resources were missing for the development of outdoor utilities. Janis Lejnieks (1990), in studying the architecture of the occupation, writes that the 1980s witnessed "a fading of architectural theory in the Soviet sense, where an academic science sets out to tailor architects' work to official aesthetics" and that such architectural theory was supplanted by professional philosophy and, to a certain degree, ethics. Architectural theoretical and research activities continued to be pursued by Ivars Strautmanis, Gunars Melbergs, Gunars Asaris, Olgerts Buka and others, while Janis Krastins, Janis Lejnieks, and Janis Dripe began their research and publicistic work. As Lejnieks [7] recalls: "It seems that around 1978, Inta Lehmusa-Briede invited me to write a commentary on the diploma papers of RPI (Riga Politechnic Institute – author's note) architects in *Padomju Jaunatne*, then Miks (Mihails – author's note) Savisko was invited to write on the relationship between architecture and the environment in the journal *Maksla*, and that's how it went... Those responsible for architecture on the editorial boards of newspapers and journals proposed topics that were deemed suitable. Censorship continued." Still, the 1980s were also the heyday of one of the most expressive and – outside the context of the Iron Curtain – one of the most contemporary architectural thinkers in terms of both his ideas and his research methods (Figure 2): the architect and multimedia artist Hardijs Ledins.

In the course of the decade there was no change in the roster of periodicals that published architects' writings. However, in 1989, an attempt was made to revive the journal *Latvijas Arhitektura* (editor-in-chief Uldis Pilens). Only one issue came out, and that was the end of the story until 1995, when the publishing house *Baltika* started a journal for the architectural profession: *Arhitektura. Dizains. Interjers. Darzs* (*Architecture. Design. Interior. Garden*). In 1981, Ivars Strautmanis, by then a professor in the Faculty of Architecture and Construction of the RPI, came out with the book *Profesija – visa dzive* (*Profession – all of life*), which described

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Author's e-mail correspondence with architect Janis Lejnieks, May 2013.

the specifics of the architectural profession, its place and role in society, and the broad scope of architects' activities; it was intended for anyone interested in architecture. In 1987 Olgerts Buka and Uldis Volrats published the first urban planning book in the context of Latvia, *Pilsetbuvnieciba* (*Urban construction*).

In the context of the eighties, it seems important that at least theoretically, social responsibility came to the attention of Soviet architects; under the slogan "nature – a human being's home", architects tried to demonstrate their responsibility to the environment. We can also speak of a continuation of the ideas of the avant-garde and paper architecture begun in the 1970s, when young architects' encounters with bureaucratic reality in the planning bureaus led to a desire to express their ideas in conceptual proposals.

At the beginning of the 1980s, reflection on the organisation of the spatial structure of the city played an important role in theoretical writings; an attempt was made to determine the optimal layout for high-rise buildings in light of Riga's topography: architect Evalds Fogelis's *Rigas telpiskas organizacijas shema* (*Riga's spatial organisation scheme*) seems noteworthy in relation to urban planning theory. Architects' writings deemed that high-rises constructed in Riga's centre were a failure. In the 1980s, Janis Krastins re-established the relevance of art nouveau and eclectic architecture through his studies, and in the second half of the decade architects began to protest against the demolition of 19th-century wooden architecture.

The changes that took place in Western architecture in the 1960s and 1970s reached Latvia while it was still part of the Soviet Union in the 1980s, and the stylistic designation *postmodernism* finally appeared in its architectural lexicon. From 1983 until the 1990s, architect Hardijs Ledins undertook a mission to expound on postmodernism in his publications, using the "bible" of theoretical ideas and postmodern concepts – the writings of Charles Jencks that were available to him. Ledins's theoretical studies and discussions dealt with human living space and the need to improve the quality of the residential environment in housing estates. Expressions of postmodernism in the context of Soviet Latvian architecture can be interpreted as regionalism or national architecture, and the search for Latvian identity in the context of the Third Awakening was realised as an exploration of Latvian folk building and heritage. The results of collectivisation, the urbanisation of rural areas, the replacement of historic country estates with three-story standard design constructions – all this was deemed a foolish mistake in publications of the time. At the beginning of the 1990s, the architects' group *Maja* (*House*) entered the scene. With the quintessence of its activities, the manifesto *Centrs* (*Centre*), it advocated a return to the traditional Latvian lifestyle, rejecting architecture as a mere game of forms and seeking out orderly premises as the basis for an orderly life (Literatura un Maksla, 1991).

At the end of the 1980s, shortly before independence was regained, architects reflected in their writings on the intellectual shortcomings of the past (Pilens, 1988) and on the developments in communist politics, economics, society, culture and architecture. Janis Dripe (1988), in his article *Lielais barjerskrejiens* (*The great hurdle-race*), acknowledged the general discomfort in facing the absurdity of the past, what with buildings that were "out of place" and "completely unnecessary" and the grandiose and unfulfillable promises and plans of the party – the metro, the target programmes for housing construction, the cultural venues that never got beyond the planning stage. As for Soviet architecture itself, Janis Lejnieks (1990) asked rhetorically: "[...] why is it that for the past 50 years we have been looking for architecture in construction? Can an abnormal society give birth to normal architecture?" To this day, the ruins of residential, public and agricultural buildings resulting from Soviet mismanagement remain a feature of Latvian cities and the countryside, and the distorted thinking of the time has left lasting impressions on society. While a nihilistic assessment of Soviet architectural heritage was characteristic amidst the awakening in the late 1980s and the return of independence in the 1990s, in the 21st century, Soviet architecture is being assessed from a greater distance, so that original and

valuable features can also be seen in it. Just like the architecture, the theoretical writings composed in the Latvian SSR are regarded as Soviet architectural heritage, and exploring the theoretical positions of the time allows for a better understanding of the history of Soviet architecture. In the course of this research, we could firmly establish that architectural history cannot be regarded separately from the theoretical ideas of a period, and vice versa: theoretical ideas cannot be examined if they are "pulled" from their historical context. In the Soviet era, architecture was impacted by the ideological and economic directives established by the regime. The effects of this were equally reflected in architects' writings. At that time, it was not possible to avoid the presence of propaganda clichés in texts, but by recognising the ideological footprints we can read the theoretical articles through a critical lens.

Conclusion

Architectural thinking in the Latvian SSR developed in isolation from architectural ideas in the West, thus significantly impeding the theoretical development of architecture in the post-Soviet milieu. However, in general, the period from the end of WWII to the restoration of Latvian independence in 1991 cannot be described as homogeneous or as a time without theoretical views on architectural changes and development. The beginning of the period marked a drastic break in the development of theoretical thought, when it was restricted to the doctrines of Stalin's socialist realism. Another cardinal turning point was Khrushchev's de-Stalinization policy and the prevention of architectural "excesses", bringing Soviet architecture closer to the principles of modernism in Western architecture. In the 1970s, the search for individuality in architecture came as a response to the homogeneity of housing estates; architects formulated views on urban construction that were, to a certain degree, innovative. The 1980s, in turn, gave rise to ideas of postmodernist regionalism, a search for architectural character that involved a return to Latvian national consciousness. The period of the Latvian SSR was also interwoven with certain concepts and architectural problems that, though interpreted in line with the ideology of the Soviet regime, were nonetheless related to theoretical discussions that took place both before the occupation and after the restoration of Latvian independence, for example, the synthesis of art and architecture or the language of architecture, which was addressed by Boris Vipper in the interwar period, developed by Ivars Strautmanis during the occupation, and further addressed in the 21st century by Janis Taurens.

If we take architectural theory to mean an author's original, independent views and the search for new theoretical concepts, then the writings of Ivars Strautmanis on the semantics of architecture or the theoretical work of Hardijs Ledins could represent some of the rare examples of such theoretical writing in Latvian SSR architectural theory. However, the term *architectural theory* can also be understood as comprising views that justify the buildings architects design, general thinking on architecture and the prevailing discourse of the age, and in this way architectural theoretical material becomes broader, and it is possible to make generalisations and classify ideas even when their origin lies not in the author's personal conviction, but in the ideological stipulations and standardised phrases of the regime.

The main problem encountered in the course of this research was the great number of architectural theoretical articles and the research scope that covered more than half a century. For this reason, in continuing the research, it would be necessary to more thoroughly explore certain topics that are essential to architectural theory – as in a study devoted exclusively to the synthesis of art and architecture. Continuing this work might also require greater insight into individual authors' personalities and the genesis of their theories. Also, further development of the work would require broader reflection on historical aspects and global developments in architecture. Research on the elements of Soviet ideologies, of Leninism-Marxism and Stalinism, and their influence on art and architecture would also be important for a more complete understanding of the subject, and it would be useful to identify members of the architectural bureaucracy and their role in architectural developments.

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Figure 1. The cover of Ivars Strautmanis's book "Dialogs ar telpu" (Riga: Dina Suhanova, 2016)

Figure 2. Collage of newspaper articles
(Riga: Dina Suhanova, 2016)

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