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Review of the project

„THE URBAN EXPRESSION OF CULTURAL FUNCTIONS“

by Tomas Butkus

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Tomas Butkus's „THE URBAN EXPRESSION OF CULTURAL FUNCTIONS," is an intelligently-developed project on the role of culture in cities, particularly Lithuanian cities, proposing Klaipeda and Vilnius as case studies. The author reads contemporary cities as made up of events, not physical forms, thus expressing the broader shift from production of physical objects to goods and services in the economy. Advancing the understanding of urbanism in terms of immaterial, cultural phenomena makes a good deal of sense to me as it corresponds to contemporary reality. Butkus's interpretation of the city in terms of enclaves also seems like a promising move to me. It allows us to imagine ways of building upon the existing diversity within Lithuanian cities.

This project is certainly worthy of publication and I am glad to support it. My question for Butkus would be whether the creative cities model is sustainable or whether we might need to rethink it for the present day. Given the economic crisis of the last few years and the end of the debt-based economy, might it be possible that alternative economic (and by implication urban) models need to be constructed? On the one hand, these might involve a renewed focus on more creative types of production, so that instead of focussing on merely services and finance, we might turn toward manufacturing at some level (for example, custom, short runs of objects). Another thought, however, which is appropriate within the Lithuanian context would be to think about the post-Soviet situation and the way that culture has developed there, with less influence from the market than in the east. For example, no matter that some artists do make livings from

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their sales in galleries and others from teaching, the structure of the art system is very different in Vilnius than in places further to the West and much less beholden to the market (for example, what is the role of Fluxus Ministerija in the art market? Probably not much). In other words, I wonder if Butkus's discussion couldn't be furthered by investigating some of the contradictions within a "Western" idea of the cultural sector versus a more Lithuanian (or rather hybrid Lithuanian/post-Soviet) approach that is not so easily transparent to the market? So, too, the issues of depopulation in cities like Berlin and Vilnius seem to be worth examining. There is some substantial work on the topic of shrinking cities. Is it possible to see this as a benefit to a more sustainable, cultural model of the city, as opposed to perhaps a more flawed one elsewhere?

Still, these are all points intended to stimulate an already strong project even further. I am delighted to read this work and hope to see it in press soon.

Sincerely yours,



Kazys Varnelis