

LITHUANIA

Lithuanian Manor Heritage and Problems of its Protection

A manor (estate) is a tangible expression of land ownership and management arrangements the origin of which dates from before the establishment and prosperity of the Lithuanian State. The historic manor with its multiple functions is the main and most stable land-based institution characteristic of Lithuanian countryside. Formerly, manors were the property of the State (the King, Grand Duke of Lithuania or State institutions), church, noblemen: in the recent ages, they turn to the property of owners with very different background.

Eventually, the size of the Lithuanian manor and its general planned spatial structure as well as the pattern of land-tenure and land-ownership changed. Over various periods of development, manors could include a farmstead (or a few farmsteads), manor land, so-called "palivarkai", villages, boroughs, and could even include towns or parts of towns, rivers, lakes and forests, meadows, industrial complexes, roadhouses, networks of roads and byways, hydraulic engineering facilities and other functional elements. Manors differed from one another both by their infrastructure and cultural environment as well as by economic capacity and social structure.

The manor as a major economic unit and tool of State management was validated by all three Statutes of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania (1529, 1566, 1588), i.e. in a codified legal form. Besides, for many ages, the place of the manor in the Duchy of Lithuania and Grand Duchy of Lithuania was defined by customary law that used to be even more reliable and morally stronger than the written law.

The system of manors can be connected directly with the development of Lithuanian statehood and agriculture as well as with more general European traditions. For a range of ages, it ensured the spread of European household culture across a major part of the Lithuanian territory.

Development of the historic network of Lithuanian manors resulted in a cultural landscape tradition and population structure of the country in the form of the network of Lithuanian countryside settlements, boroughs and towns. Furthermore, the network of manors was able to ensure even spread of material and spiritual culture in the major part of the Lithuanian territory for many years.

In the Soviet period, manors were confiscated and nationalised, and the rural settlements and land-tenure patterns were gradually and methodically destroyed. Manor houses and other buildings were also devastated, mishandled or damaged due to incompatible uses. However, a range of ruined manors, "palivarkai", settlements and boroughs typical of "valakinis" countryside² are still extant. Many manors were adapted for use as offices of State farms (sovkhozes) and collective farms (kolkhozes), household, training and cultural centres as well as outpatient departments. Workers of collective and State farms were also accommodated in so-called "kumetynai"³, and in other buildings associated with the manor.

Lithuanian manor heritage is an essential, particularly significant part of the cultural heritage typical of the Lithuanian countryside, however, no real statistics on the whole manor heritage is yet available. Some 10000 manors, "palivarkai" and manor places are known, however the official statistics on manor heritage contains no such figure. Regarding physical remains of fully or partially intact former manor settlements or the old agrarian systems, neither

heritage protection records nor overall official statistics are kept. According to population census data for Lithuania (without the Klaipėda and Vilnius regions) for the year 1923 there existed 3508 manors and "palivarkai". According to the official Soviet scientific publications of 1964, Lithuania contained over 4000 former manors (approximately 500 large, 1500 medium-sized and 2000 smaller). The Lists of Historic and Cultural Monuments compiled over the Soviet period included only 125 manors, fragments and elements (individual structures) thereof. At the beginning of 1995, the State Register of Cultural Heritage of the Republic of Lithuania listed 823 manors and "palivarkai". However, over the last decade, this figure was reduced considerably: over 230 manors were removed from the State Register of Cultural Heritage and this trend continues. Statistics on the sites of manors and "palivarkai", on former manor settlements, towns, boroughs and other elements are not kept. Records on the remaining manors, "palivarkai" and fragments thereof are not kept either. Monitoring of the manor heritage is also unavailable. Some 1000 places incorporate the settings of former manor houses and some 800 green spaces trace their origin to the manor parks.

Protection of manor heritage needs to be considered as a part of the landscape design process and this presents particular difficulties related to its integration into the State Strategic Planning System. As early as 2002, the State Commission of Monument Preservation developed a concept for dealing with preservation of the manor heritage of the Republic of Lithuania and integration of this heritage into public life. The Commission introduced principles and guidelines for the integration of manor heritage into the legal and State strategic planning system of the Republic of Lithuania. The Manor Heritage Preservation Programme was formulated and approved by the Government of the Republic of Lithuania in 2003.

In general the state of conservation of Lithuanian manors is critical, especially the state of objects without an owner. Legislation requires municipalities to take care of such heritage items but the legislation is not enforced. Other, privately owned, manors (or parts of manors) are in poor condition because their owners are incapable of maintaining or/and managing them appropriately. Legislation is in place to compulsorily acquire poorly maintained cultural heritage properties; however, partly due to lack of funds, the legislation is not used. Under these circumstances, the manor heritage as manor farmsteads and their remains have been decaying rapidly. In the protected territories, the state of manors and "palivarkai", former manor settlements and their landscape setting is also poor in many cases.

The best conserved manors or associated buildings are those managed by Museums (national and municipal). For the time being, some manors or associated buildings are already adapted or being adapted for new purposes. In a number of cases museums are being created to raise awareness of manor culture. Elsewhere, their original purpose is being restored. Some former manors have already started farming or horse breeding; in other cases this involves the restoration of mills, sawmills, dairies and greenhouses as well as plant nurseries. However, the general physical state of manor heritage is poor. Especially rapid decay threatens to destroy the unique wooden heritage of Lithuanian manors, and issues relating to the management and protection of historic plantings remain problematic.

There is still a shortage of principles covering built, movable social and spiritual heritage of the manor culture. In terms of protection, the manor heritage is still being treated as limited to farmstead or "palivarkas". And even protection of the integrity of this part of manor heritage is not sufficiently protected by national legislation, such as laws for the Protection of Immoveable Cultural Values, for the Protected Territories, for Territorial Planning, for the Construction and Land Reforms, for the Real Estate Register and Real Estate Cadastre, etc.

Sustainable land management and administration has not yet been established on a strategic level and implementation of the land reform is inconsistent, failing to comply with the main landscaping regulations. The actual area of the manor and integrity thereof are neither protected nor validated by laws. In the planning and approval process, implementation of measures to protect the cultural heritage is not ensured. Many manors have been returned and privatised dissociating them from their traditional lands. These decisions were damaging the cultural heritage, landscape elements and unfavourable to farming.

The accelerating deterioration of Lithuania's manor heritage is due to five main factors:

- Uncertainty about the place of the manor in the emerging national economy;
- Uncertainties of ownership;

- Lack of building maintenance. In particular, the poor condition of roofs causes accelerated deterioration;
- Lack of funding;
- Inappropriate actions by State institutions.

Lithuanian manor heritage has the potential to greatly enrich local communities regions and districts of Lithuania, highlighting their distinct character. Local authorities should radically change their attitude towards these cultural sites. In many European countries, cultural heritage is regarded by the local authorities and local communities as a precious cultural asset and the ownership of these assets is considered as the matter of honour and prestige.

The State of Lithuania should urgently address preservation of its national manor heritage in its widest sense. This is the only way to preserve at least a small part of Lithuanian identity and culture and present Lithuania to Europe and the world as a nation with a deep-rooted cultural identity and representative of pan-European culture.

Algimantas Gražulis, architect

¹ a type of farmstead; known as Folwarks in Polish or Vorwecks in German

² called this way after the Valakas Land Reform

³ special houses for manor farm labourers



A timber manor house in Pavilkijys manor estate requiring urgent maintenance (Photo: Indrė Kačinskaitė, Centre of Cultural Heritage, 2004)



Remains of the famous Pavlovas' Merkinė manor estate in decay (Photo: Indrė Kačinskaitė Centre of Cultural Heritage, 2007)



Remains of the Gothic Revival Svedasai manor palace in northern Lithuania (Photo: Indrė Kačinskaitė, Centre of Cultural Heritage, 2003)



Ruins of a former stylish palace in Vasuokeliai manor estate (Photo: Indrė Kačinskaitė, Centre of Cultural Heritage, 2003)