

From "Skansen" to "Shanghai": Embodiment and Perspectives of Cultural-Historical Identity in Šnipiškės, Vilnius

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Cultural value, place, place identity, place-making.

Abstract

The article examines the evolving cultural-historical identity of the Giedraičių sub-ward in Šnipiškės, Vilnius. It employs a qualitative, interpretative approach that utilises case study methodology and ethnographic elements to investigate the changes in place identity and its physical embodiment. The research identifies cultural and historical identity features as markers in the built environment that can enhance place-making and connectivity between places. Key findings show that the cultural-historical identity of the Giedraičių sub-ward in Šnipiškės is shaped by historical narratives and socio-cultural dynamics, with names such as "Skansen" and "Shanghai" reflecting the multi-layered past of the place. The study concludes with recommendations for urban planning that integrate these identities to encourage community engagement and preserve local heritage amidst urbanisation pressures. This study offers valuable insights into the interplay between place identity and urban development and argues for culturally sensitive approaches to urban planning.

Introduction

The preservation of collective memory remains crucial, even in times of homogenization through globalisation, which calls into question the preservation of spatial and cultural continuity and the uniqueness of places shaped by the intertwining of man-made environments and social spheres. In Lithuania, one of the post-Soviet countries, the leap from the prevailing ideas of modernism and functionalism to global culture is particularly pronounced, often resulting in placelessness – a phenomenon in which places lack distinctive character and a meaningful connection to their cultural-historical context. An example of this is the New Vilnius Centre, developed in Šnipiškės after regained independence, which has sparked questions among the public and experts [1]–[4]. It should be noted that during the entire period of independence, no architectural vision was created for the entire Šnipiškės area which could integrate not only functional solutions at the city level but also the specificity of the place, its history, culture and identity. The neglect of historical and cultural experiences essential to human well-being and emotional needs, which is evident in Šnipiškės and was particularly characteristic of the 20th century, was and is widely criticised [5], [6], [7].

This research focuses on a specific area – the preserved historical neighbourhood in the Giedraičių sub-ward of Šnipiškės, which is directly adjacent to the area of high-rise buildings. This area is a cultural, architectural and social phenomenon characterized by changing and overlapping identities that are strongly connected to architecture and reflected in its transformations.

The main focus of this article is the study of the changing cultural-historical place identity of the Giedraičių sub-ward. The key objectives of this research are as follows:

1. To examine the evolving cultural-historical identity of the Giedraičių sub-ward.
2. To identify specific cultural-historical identity features in the built environment that could inform place-making in the Giedraičių sub-ward.
3. To apply relevant theories to situate place identity in a broader historical and cultural context.

1. Theoretical Background

Any discussion about the identity of a place first requires an examination of the fundamental concept of place itself. Since humanist geographers in the second half of the 20th

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century expanded the conceptual understanding of place and differentiated it from the mere experience of space by recognizing that space is transformed into place when it is imbued with human meanings, activities and an identity within the physical environment [8], place studies have retained their scientific relevance. Currently, science treats the concept of place as a dynamic and interactive perspective that encompasses social, cultural and psychological meanings of place that can be expressed in philosophical and poetic forms [9].

Over the past 40 years, scholarly interest in place identity has grown considerably, with research publications peaking after 2010. During this period, the focus gradually shifted toward the humanities and social science disciplines. Research on place identity includes the study of cultural-historical dimensions and sheds light on the role of art and culture in shaping urban identities [10], [11], [12]. The study of cultural identity has proven particularly valuable for urban planning, as traditional urban forms have evolved as long-term adaptations to local climatic conditions, available resources and other site-specific factors [13], [14]. Scientific literature emphasises the influence of the built environment on people's physical, mental health and well-being [15], [16], [17], which directly correlates with environmental quality, defined by various values, including place identity.

The theoretical framework for this study draws extensively on the seminal work of several key theorists to examine place identity as both a measurable and a lived experience. Matthew Carmona's work on urban design provides a framework for understanding place identity through his theory of "place values". The author proposed the "ladder of place qualities", which serve as tangible and intangible indicators of the value of a place and collectively contribute to its uniqueness and significance [18]. Some of these qualities embody cultural and historical values and shape local identity.

Christopher Alexander's focus on spatial patterns emphasises the integral relationship between spatial form and human experience, the complexity, connectivity and layering features of historical, i.e. natural, cities [19], [20]. Alexander's insights allow us to view the formation of a cultural-historical place identity as a long and complex process that leads to established connections between people and spatial form, some of which are worth protecting, some revitalising to ensure the continuity of collective memory. And Yi-Fu Tuan's notion of *topophilia* (love of place) [21] bridges these ideas by demonstrating how deep emotional bonds between individuals and their surroundings ultimately reflect and reinforce the identity of a place and vice versa.

The combined theoretical framework provides a basis for understanding the complex dynamics of cultural-historical identity in the historic Giedraičių sub-ward by examining it as a dynamic interplay of measurable features, spatial arrangements, and emotional bonds. This approach is particularly pertinent in the context of postcolonial urban development, where the challenges of preserving cultural heritage, promoting human well-being, and accommodating modern urban needs converge.

II. Materials and Methods

This study uses a research model frequently employed by representatives of humanistic geography – the case study. This qualitative, interpretive research incorporates elements of ethnographic inquiry to reflect more deeply and objectively about the identity of a place as a particular cultural field – a phenomenon that manifests itself over time. The work includes a considerable amount of visual material taken by the author in the area under study, and draws on assessments and opinions expressed in public, as well as first-hand testimonies from local residents. In this study of cultural-historical place identity, the author captures and analyses objects as "indirect subjects" – "cultural individualities" (representing empirical memory) – that, as specific features of generalised fields – archetypes – can act as manifestations of these archetypes in a given place and can function as catalysts, according to Vytautas Petrušonis [22].

This study focuses on the cultural-historical identity of one of the most rapidly changing administrative areas – the Giedraičiai sub-ward in Šnipiškės. The cultural-historical identity is expressed in the physical location, which is known by various names: Šiaudinė, Skansen, Shanghai and, more recently, Wooden Šnipiškės. These are historically evolved and newly assigned names for more or less the same geographical area, which characterise different eras and different aspects of the place. While Šiaudinė is the oldest historical name of the area and is essentially no longer in use, Wooden Šnipiškės is the most recent one, associated with recent efforts to draw attention to this part of the city, revitalise it, strengthen local identity and improve people's connection to it.

Šnipiškės Skansen is a protected cultural heritage area that was established in 1993. However, the objects and urban fragments that characterise the local identity in the Giedraičių sub-ward are spread far beyond the official boundaries of the heritage area (Fig. 1).

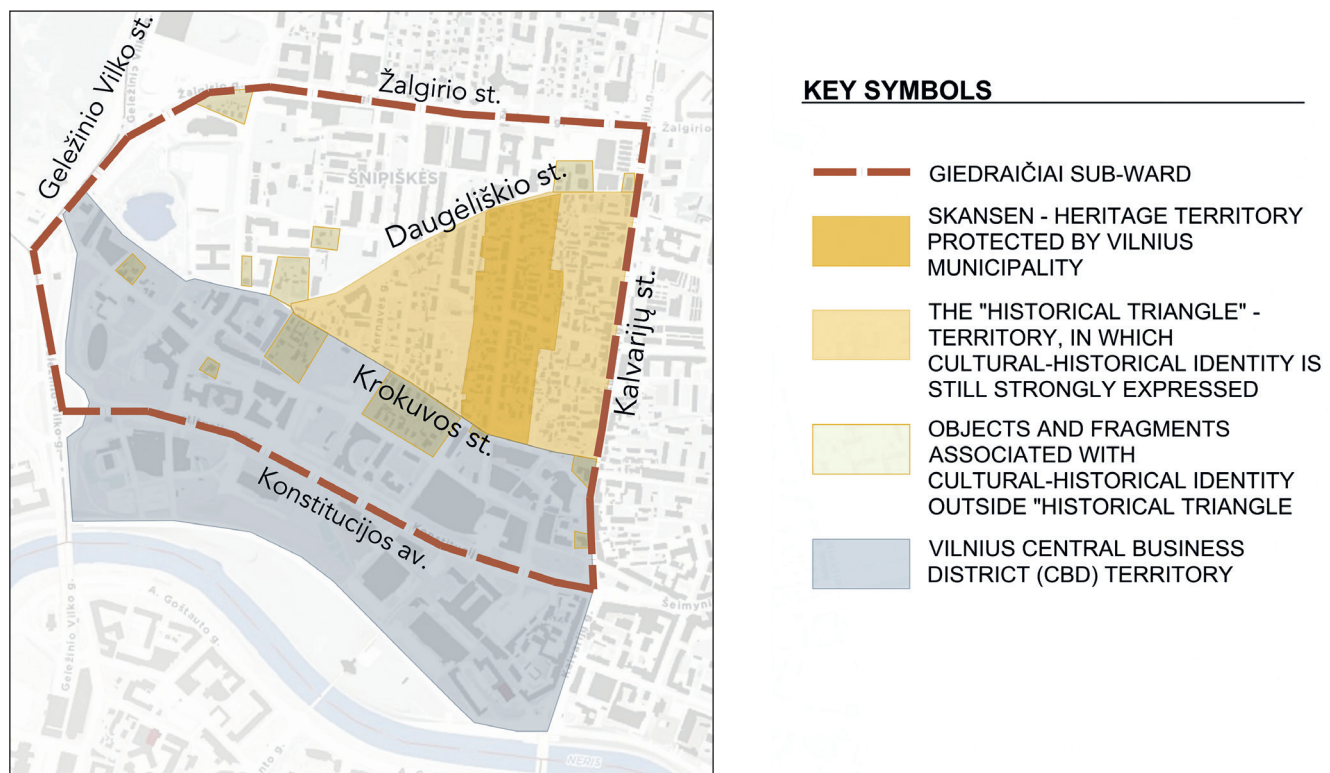


Fig. 1. Giedraičių sub-ward [by the author].

III. Materials and Methods

The concept of identity is primarily associated with human psychology. Places are referred to as such and not mere spaces because they have an identity [11]. Identity is synonymous with personal uniqueness, a necessary condition for subject X to be recognised as X and distinguished from others [24]. If human identity is defined as a personal sense of self that is characterised by a sense of continuity and includes a) physical, psychological and interpersonal characteristics that are not shared with any other individual, and b) different affiliations (e.g. nationality) and social roles [25], could the identity of a place then possibly be considered as a set of identifiable environmental elements characterised by continuity and specific physical and sociocultural features not fully shared with any other place, and in this context, social functions rather than social roles?

The identity of a place is defined by how the individual perceives it or how it is anchored in the collective imagination of the group [24]. There are four ways in which people connect with a place: through naming, control, humanising and memorising [26]. This study highlights people's desire to control a place by transforming and humanising places and objects through care, decoration, landscaping, and maintenance. Naming a particular place or object serves as a process of identification. Such practices can be found in old Lithuanian folklore, where

the mere mention of a name leads to the manifestation and anchoring of an object to a particular place.

Cultural-historical identity as continuity and memory is a crucial aspect of our physical environment, much like the strangeness and recognizability in our favourite books and narratives that give us a sense of depth, solidity, and resonance [27]. Šnipiškės, one of the oldest historical suburbs, has a complex history that was largely erased from Vilnius and public memory during the occupation. However, the historical environment reveals layers of uniqueness through socio-cultural features that have been given new names. Sustainability principles but may not always be easily articulated. By integrating theoretical insights with practical experimentation, sustainability aesthetics can be more holistically understood, bridging the gap between abstract ecological concepts and tangible, user-centred design outcomes.

The theoretical analysis has revealed the interconnections between tacit and explicit knowledge in the realm of sustainability aesthetics. While explicit knowledge offers measurable and codifiable guidelines for sustainable design, tacit knowledge enables designers to intuitively apply sustainability principles through creative, context-sensitive solutions. Experimental design, particularly within a constructivist framework, provides a method to uncover this implicit knowledge, enriching both the understanding and application of sustainability aesthetics in design practice and in shaping the environments.

The methodology developed for this research provides a structured yet flexible approach to analyzing student

design outcomes and reflections in a qualitative manner, integrating both tacit and explicit knowledge dimensions with ecological aesthetics. By employing a four-stage data collection (empathizing with the environment and problem identification, idea generation, creative process and prototyping, testing, completion of the project and presentation) and analysis (general overview, thematic analysis, cross-analysis, and interpretation) processes, the developed methodology enables a nuanced exploration of how sustainability aesthetics is conceptualized and expressed through design. This qualitative approach allows for the categorization of visual and written data, revealing recurring themes and insights that bridge theoretical concepts with practical design outcomes. The first stage of application of the methodology and obtained preliminary results confirm the suitability of this approach for the qualitative exploration and categorization of sustainability aesthetics.

IV. Skansen: A Manifestation of Historical Identity

A. Context

Despite the increasing number of glass office buildings in Šnipiškės, especially in the Central Business District (further CBD), residents associate Šnipiškės mainly with the remaining historic suburban neighbourhood known as Skansen. This name was officially given to the area around Giedraičių Street as a "top-down" title in order to emphasise that this is a heritage area. The term Skansen derives from its association with the oldest open-air museum of historical architecture and traditions, founded in the late 19th century in Stockholm, Sweden. The nearest equivalent in Lithuania is the Ethnographic Museum in Rumšiškės.

The area under study developed in the second half of the 19th and early 20th centuries against the backdrop of rapid population growth in 19th-century Vilnius. According to Laimonas Briedis, Šnipiškės had developed into a special cultural centre for the Jewish community of Vilnius at the same time [28]. Between 1860 and 1897, the population of Vilnius grew from 60 000 to 155 000 due to industrial expansion, which led to a significant shortage of housing. As a result, between 1890 and the early 20th century, extensive wooden residential buildings were constructed around Giedraičių Street, which serves as the central axis of Skansen statybos [29], [30]. Observing the development along Giedraičių and other main streets shows a break in the natural transformation of the area from a wooden, rural suburban environment to a more urban environment characterised by the brick buildings typical of city centres and old towns, especially after the Second World War and during the occupation period. Today, however, the wooden buildings that have remained in the city centre until the early 21st century play a crucial role in defining Šnipiškės' uniqueness and give the district a rural character. This impression is reinforced by the strong contrasts between Vilnius Skansen and Vilnius CBD.

B. Wooden Architecture

Most of the wooden houses in this area are relatively simple constructions consisting of interlocking wooden frames. They are typically low and characterised by elongated rectangular floor plans, gabled roofs and modest decorative features. One particularly striking example of this simple architecture, which acts as a "marker", remains at the intersection of Krokuvos and Kintų Streets (Fig. 2) and has remained unchanged since artist Tina Bara documented it.



(a)



(b)

Fig. 2. House at 47 B Krokuvos St.: (a) Artist: Tina Bara. 2022 NDG, Participant in the exhibition "Restless Bodies: East German Photographers 1980–1989." Photograph from the video film "The Tedium" (1983–1989); (b) The same house in 2024.

Some wooden houses have taken on urban features that are atypical of rural architecture. The second floor is often a fully-fledged living space (Fig. 3). One of the most interesting examples of this type of house is located at 10 Giedraičių Street and has a gabled roof with a change of pitch in the middle.



Fig. 3. Urban wooden houses: (a) 10 Giedraičių St.; (b) 11 Šilutės St. (Šilutės and Fino St. corner); (c) 49 Krokuvos St. [photos by the author].

The overall cultural-historical identity is reinforced by the preserved authentic details of the wooden houses, such as external wooden staircases, verandas, wooden windows, shutters, doors, gates and other facade elements (Fig. 4).



Fig. 4. Authentic wooden elements [photos by the author].

C. Ceramics

Historically, Šnipiškės was a centre of ceramic production. The abundance of clay encouraged the locals to produce bricks, tiles, encaustic tiles and pottery [31]. 19th-century workshops included brickworks, lime kilns and sawmills. The bricks produced here were used throughout Vilnius, including for the impressive baroque church of St. Peter and Paul [32]. The preserved brick buildings and tiled roofs reflect this history of the place, even though the ceramic tiles were often replaced by slate under the

Soviets. The preserved decorative stoves can also be found in fairly simple buildings.

D. Masonry Architecture

Despite the prevailing image of Šnipiškės as a historic wooden suburb, it is impossible to ignore the role of the remaining brick buildings in shaping the identity of this area. There are many single-storey brick buildings with simple, concise forms, some plastered, some unplastered, and some of them have wooden attics (Fig. 5).



Fig. 5. Single-storey masonry buildings in the Giedraičių sub-ward: (a) 6 Daugėlišio St.; (b) 56 Krokuvos St. [photos by the author].

The taller brick buildings in the study area are generally two-storey and only a few three-storey buildings, sometimes with a high attic (Fig. 6). A particularly beautiful building with rounded corners is hidden in the courtyard of 17 Giedraičių Street, designed by the prolific architect Anton Filipovičius-Dubovikas. Another building at 39 Lviso Street (Fig. 7) is characterised by its simplicity, moderation, massive volume, high gable roof and decorative round windows on the second floor. Its design is reminiscent of a country house from earlier times.



Fig. 5. Masonry buildings in Šnipiškės: (a) 17 Giedraičių St.; (b) 45 Giedraičių St.; (c) 39 Lviso St. [photos by the author].

E. Urban layout

When discussing the cultural-historical identity of Šnipiškės Skansen, it is important to recognise that its greatest value lies not in individual buildings or their details, which are perhaps not as opulent as in other historic suburbs, but rather in its morphological homogeneity. The preservation of a similar urban layout over a large area with its spatial integrity and uniform design is considered one of the key aspects of urban authenticity, as highlighted in previous studies [33]. Šnipiškės has preserved its original, regular street network from the 19th century. Most of the streets are narrow, surrounded by trees and gardens and partially cobbled, making them ideal for pedestrians and cyclists. Some of the courtyards here are also cobbled.

Another important historical and urban feature frequently mentioned by residents is the possibility of passing from one courtyard or street to another through internal passageways within the urban blocks, which was once widespread but is now only found in certain locations.

This reflects the historical connectedness of the area and the sense of community among the inhabitants. One such passageway, the connection between Šilutės and Saracėnų streets, known as “the narrowest street in Šnipiškės”, has become a popular tourist attraction.

F. Greenery

The abundance of greenery can also be linked to the historical memory and its continuity, as gardening was widespread in Šnipiškės [31]. Even today, there are still many well-tended courtyards, vegetable gardens and flower beds. Some locals emphasize the sense of community fostered by sharing the harvest and the joy of gardening. Nowadays, the lush greenery attracts a variety of birds.

G. Identity

The cultural and historical diversity of the Giedraičių sub-ward perfectly illustrates the multi-layered character of a “natural city”, the liveliness of the place [20]. The identity

of Šnipiškės Skansen is characterised by archetypes and their features (Table I), all of which are related to the history of the area. While maintaining such an identity can help preserve valuable urban and architectural elements and the spirit of the place, it can also hinder natural development, limit people's activities and creativity.

Strictly preserving "Skansen-ness" as a museum quality in a real living environment that was once a poor suburb, by rejecting people's need for contemporary comfort and living conditions, can lead to rejection of the place rather than attachment to it.

TABLE I
Summary of Features that Create the Identity of Šnipiškės Skansen [by the author]

Object		Features
Urban objects		
The territory under study	Spatial unity of morphological structure	Archetypal buildings of similar size and dimensions with sloping roofs that form the local urban fabric.
	Historic street network	Regular street network between older, irregularly arranged streets. Straight, narrow streets from the 19th century surrounded by greenery, with some cobblestones still in place.
	Inner courtyard connections within blocks	Narrow pedestrian passages connecting courtyards, streets with internal connections within blocks that are only partially preserved.
	Courtyard structure	It is typical of the area for courtyards to function as semi-private spaces, with smaller private gardens usually surrounding the buildings and enclosed by fences.
	Greenery	Well-kept gardens, flowerbeds, and tree plantings. Traditional fruit trees, decorative trees and shrubs, and flowering plants characteristic of the region. Local vegetables and spices.
Architectural objects		
Residential buildings	Rural wooden houses	Simple volumes of buildings, rectangular floor plans, with pitched roofs, wooden walls, with or without cladding, original wooden construction. Simple porches, uninsulated attics, sometimes with or without symbolic decoration. Small wooden windows. Some have remaining historic roof tiles, decorative stoves inside.
	Urban wooden houses	Higher, larger buildings, more complex volumes and roof forms. Larger window openings, wooden windows and door frames, accentuated roof cornices, ornate wall corners, other details of facade decoration, larger porches – verandas. Living attics. Horizontal shingle cladding in urban style. Some with remaining historic roof tiles and decorative stoves inside.
	Brick (unplastered) houses	Yellow brick facades with an ornamental arrangement of bricks. Decorative building corners, cornices and window openings. Wooden windows. The usual narrow facades at the corners of buildings at intersections are usually more decorative, i.e. existing/former entrances.
	Brick-plastered houses	One to three-storey buildings, usually of laconic form, with horizontal lines and cornices, decorative upper edges of window openings, but rich ornamentation of all facades is not common; the usual narrow facades at the corners of buildings at intersections are usually more decorative, i.e. existing/former entrances.
Auxiliary buildings and structures	Fences	Historically characteristic low, latticed wooden fences, some fragments of stylised historical fences have been preserved. The function of the fence is to define a boundary and not to isolate or protect.
	Other auxiliary buildings	Other historically established courtyard buildings, such as sheds and outbuildings, as well as roofed external wooden staircases, contribute to the overall architectural composition and authenticity.

V. Shanghai: Neglect, Adaptation and Vernacular Freedom

H. Context

Šnipiškės Skansen is also unofficially called Shanghai. It is unclear when exactly this name came into use after Lithuania regained its independence. It is likely that the term was adopted from prison slang, as in the Russian criminal world, it means a place where criminals congregate or a chaotically and randomly populated suburb [34].

Shanghai is like the flip side of Skansen, a parallel reality. The name "Shanghai" is often used by the media to attract attention and has a negative connotation when describing the physical and social environment. The 2010 exhibition "Shanghai Rhapsody" by photographer Aurimas Strumila and the 2010 documentary "Šanxai Banzai" by director Jūratė Samulionytė have cemented this identity in public discourse. In 2014, the members of the "Fotokablys" club showed the poverty, simplicity and seemingly unchanged village life of the area from the last century in their exhibition "Found in Shanghai".

Šnipiškės Shanghai is a vivid reminder of the area's poverty, neglect and criminal element. For a long time, it was considered one of the least desirable places to live in Vilnius, not only because of the neighbourhood itself but also because where one lives often reflects one's social status [35]. Residents recall experiences such as frequent robberies, the shame of classmates when they invited friends home, and the fear of driving home at night on Giedraičių Street. At a certain point, Shanghai embodied everything negative about the place. Even when people adapt to their surroundings and eventually stop noticing them, these surroundings continue to affect their subconscious and ultimately influence their emotional and even physical well-being [22]. So, when the environment influences people and their decisions, and they in turn influence (or neglect) their environment, a cycle of neglect is created that is fueled by unfavourable historical circumstances of the 20th century and continues to this day.

Headlines like "The biggest disgrace of Vilnius, called Shanghai, is ridiculed" [36] fuel a negative perception of the

neighbourhood. In a 2024 article titled "Crooked sheds and outdoor toilets: residents of so-called Shanghai say they are attached to the place", business representatives cite dense development, small plots, shared properties, dilapidated houses, slow renovation, and outdated facilities [37]. The municipality's approach of considering Šnipiškės as a temporary and changeable area does not help the area to recover, organise and survive. An example of this is the public lecture, "The past and the future of Šnipiškės", given by the former chief architect of Vilnius in 2019, in which he presented the past as a historical environment and the future as shiny CBD office buildings.

I. Placelessness

The new "Shanghai-ness" can be described as a spreading "placelessness", to use E. Relph's term – a denial and non-recognition of the existence of place that leads to typical landscapes [8]. The reconstruction of Giedraičių Street, which has no connection to its historical environment, is an example of this placelessness. This "Shanghai-ness", a multiplication of placelessness, can be seen in the destruction of the historic architecture by modern heating, cooling and ventilation systems, etc., which are installed on the facades of the buildings without regard for the context or any attempt to conceal them.

J. Contrasts

In an essay competition for students, which took place during the 26th International Thomas Mann Festival, the theme was "Cultural Landscapes. Neighbourhood". And one of the winners writes in her essay entitled "Shanghai is my neighbour" about her mixed experiences – cherished wooden houses, children, cats, tulips, lilacs, cherries and apple trees, but at the same time the poverty that shocks the eye, collapsing balconies, garbage-filled yards, drunk and injured people on the street and barefoot children [38]. In a radio program "The District" about "The contrasting Shanghai of Vilnius in Šnipiškės", urban anthropologist Jekaterina Lavrinec mentions the colour and material contrasts that appear on the building facades (Fig. 7) as an expression of the fact that the building belongs to several owners [39].



Fig. 7. "Patched-up" buildings [photos by the author].



Fig. 8. Vernacular architecture [photos by the author].

K. Apartment Buildings

In this area, before World War II, it was common for house owners to rent out small apartments and rooms, part of which were nationalised and distributed to new residents under the Soviet Union and then privatised after Lithuania regained its independence, turning the houses into apartment buildings. The individualistic method of "personal façade" renovation is quite common in Šnipiškės. While it is characterised by temporariness, it also reflects a certain creative freedom, especially since similar examples, where residents are given the freedom to design their facade segment, can be found in professional experimental design [40].

L. The Vernacular

The physical manifestation of the Šnipiškės' Shanghai identity in the built environment can be attributed primarily to various vernacular architectural features characterized by simplicity and temporariness. These include fences, outbuildings, storage sheds and outhouses, outdoor toilets and various non-original architectural elements (Fig. 8). Numerous outbuildings of various shapes and materials were added to the houses due to the installation of legal and illegal utilities.

Authors who have written about Šnipiškės have noted that these new structures, outbuildings, alterations and additions were built alongside the earlier unified architecture and its surroundings. In this way, traditional architectural forms that were once recognisable were often deformed, hidden and damaged [40]. The general

abundance of such structures gives the impression of neglect and contributes to Šnipiškės being associated with disorder, chaos and garbage. The problem goes beyond neglect or improper maintenance and also includes the use of atypical building materials, plastic windows and similar elements.

A common element of vernacular architecture is a storage shed or woodshed (Fig. 9). Their frequency reflects the functional needs of the area, as most older houses are heated with firewood and many of these houses per se function as multiple dwellings. The wide variety of fence designs with different profiles, patterns and colours adds both charm and a sense of chaos to the overall character of the area.

M. Greenery

The old streets and courtyards of Šnipiškė are characterised by lush vegetation, including both wild, self-reproducing plants and cultivated gardens. This creates a continuous green backdrop that bathes the entire area in a lush canopy of leaves in summer months. The greenery and biodiversity of the district give it the character of an old park or garden with a certain mythological, poetic and literary flair. The lush vegetation in this architectural landscape with low buildings also has a pronounced psychological effect. Considering that numerous studies have confirmed the stress reduction associated with spending time in nature [41], this self-propagating and cultivated green landscape, which is an element of Shanghai's identity, can be considered a stress-reducing environment.



Fig. 9. Storage shed or woodshed.

N. Identity

The identity of Šnipiškė's Shanghai is elusive and ambiguous. It represents an altered, rule-breaking version of Skansen, whose lifestyle is reflected in the physical environment (Table II). It also has a special appeal, stimulating the imagination and conveying a sense of exoticism, which was playfully captured in 2022 when residents named a new square in Šnipiškės "Dragon

Meadow" in reference to Shanghai in China. The Residents mention not only the poverty they experience but also their attachment to this place [37]. This is probably because, according to Yi-Fu Tuan's work, places like Shanghai in Šnipiškės only become familiar and meaningful when you spend a lot of time in them – they become "places as fields of care" and stand in direct contrast to visually conspicuous "places as public symbols" [32, 477].

TABLE II

Summary of Features that Create the Identity of Šnipiškės Shanghai [by the author]

Object		Features
Urban objects		
The territory under study	Spatial unity of morphological structure	Deformed and damaged. New multi-storey residential buildings with unusual heights and volumes for the area, with flat roofs, appear among the historic buildings, as do new private houses with unusual volumes, roof shapes and facade materials.
	Historic street network, other public places	Unlit, unkempt, pothole-strewn, unpaved historic streets. Typically, remodelled streets and public places that do not fit the historic or colourful character of the area.
	Inner courtyard connections within blocks	Disappearing as residents become more isolated from one another.
	Courtyards	The shared courtyard, functioning as a semi-private space, is often unkempt, unpaved, and lacking lighting.
	Greenery	Unkempt gardens and fruit trees. A lot of self-grown vegetation. It grows in courtyards and along streets and creates a strong sense of natural environment.
	Water column	Water columns are scattered throughout the area – for a long time, the only source of water for residents without a city water supply.
Architectural objects		
Residential buildings	Wooden houses	Old, deformed wooden houses, often with additional, unstable outbuildings, non-original construction, distorted by age, neglected, collapsing balconies, poor condition of doors, and missing window shutters. Non-original details – plastic windows and doors. Often old slate roofs. Buildings that have been "patched up" by several owners, with facades in different colours and materials. The visual unity of the street facades is disturbed by the appearance of modern heating and ventilation elements.
	Masonry houses	Historic, unkempt buildings with vernacular or non-original details such as outbuildings, plastic windows and metal doors. Facades often peeling, unkempt. Often with slate roofs. Street facades are often visually disturbed by elements of modern heating and ventilation systems.
Auxiliary buildings and structures	Fences	Different and atypical materials and heights of fences. Fences are often blind.
	Other auxiliary buildings	Small, temporary buildings: outdoor toilets, woodsheds, storage sheds, dovecotes. Often clad with vertical boards, deformed. Storage sheds – woodsheds – long, shallow, low structures built usually along the property edge, sometimes serving as a fence/ boundary between the yard and the street. Some metal garages have been preserved. They stand alongside earlier uniform architecture and create a chaotic appearance. Abandoned wooden structures provide a habitat for biodiversity where small mammals can live.



Fig. 10. Exhibition on Šnipiškės Square (design by P. Čeikauskas – Pidžin; text and illustrations by A. Gabrėnienė; local residents' ideas, opinions, statements, observations), 12 September – 12 October 2024.

VI. Wooden Šnipiškės: Materialising Cultural Narratives

As Šnipiškės Skansen shifts towards Šanchajus, the territory declines, and paradoxically attracts more interest from researchers, tourists and residents of other parts of the city. A survey conducted in 2023 found that 60 % of respondents believe that the wooden architecture should be preserved, underlining their appreciation for the unique character of the neighbourhood [42]. The increased visibility and interest in this area are due to the stark contrast between its historic surroundings and the neighbouring Central Business District (CBD) of Vilnius. In the academic literature [8], this increased visibility and heightened sense of reality are often associated with dramatic situations such as competition or conflict with other places.

In 2024, Vilnius Municipality commissioned a study on "Wooden Šnipiškės", which was carried out by "ID Vilnius" and "Bluma". One of the aims of this study is to characterise the unique spirit of the area. This reflects a broader effort to re-evaluate the wooden historical heritage and the relationship between the inhabitants and this place. The organisers raised the issue of renaming the area. The residents voted overwhelmingly in favour of "Wooden Šnipiškės", a name that adorns the map "Wooden Šnipiškės" created by local artist Pijus Čeikauskas-Pidžin in 2022 for the "Dragon Meadow". This reflects a desire to distance itself from the association of Skansen with museum-like artificiality and the negative image of Shanghai, to embrace renewal and reflect the changing social landscape. The municipality and the community are actively working on this regeneration, as demonstrated by initiatives such as "Šnipiškės Open Courtyards Day", organized by local residents and artists, and an exhibition designed to attract the attention of residents and the government by presenting the values of the place, the needs and perspectives of the place in a playful way that is linked to Shanghai's identity (Fig. 10).

The abundance and fluctuation of names illustrate not only the colourful diversity and multi-layered identity of

the place, both in a positive and negative sense, but also the need of the city's community, its inhabitants, to connect with it. This reflects Edward Relph's observation that a person's relationship with a place is as necessary, varied and sometimes unpleasant as our relationships with other people [8, 141].

VII. Discussion

The study shows that both the material structures and the immaterial cultural-historical layers contribute significantly to the distinct identity of the Šnipiškės and thus fit into the theoretical framework. It is crucial to draw attention to the quality and value of places in postcolonial contexts, and place identity is one of the ways to understand the multi-layered relationship between places and people, which includes psychological, social and cultural aspects [40]. This research highlights not only the lingering effects of colonial-era policies that promoted placelessness and neglected both places themselves and the relationships between people and place, but also the inherited and persistent indifference to place and human well-being, even after independence was achieved. The study shows how the physical environment is impoverished due to the weakened bonds between people and their surroundings, and how the negative identity of "Shanghai" reflects the trauma of a coercive system.

The research also demonstrates the instrumental nature of cultural-historical place identity, highlighting its potential to promote sustainability, preserve authenticity, ensure cultural continuity and create spaces that foster community engagement. However, it also warns that place identity can be easily manipulated to serve specific purposes and create a "target landscape", distorting the true identity of place [44], [45].

It is important to recognise some limitations of this study. In this study, the author has focused primarily on the elements of the physical, built environment as an expression of identity in physical space, but has not included more detailed studies of the inhabitants and architects. Vytautas

Petrušonis emphasised in his studies the importance of both physical and non-physical entities that form identity. He argues that the interests of all entities related to the area – both direct (such as community representatives, politicians and designers; including the community itself) and indirect (elements of the physical environment) – need to be considered [22]. Therefore, supplementing the study with broader perspectives from residents, the community and designers would allow for a broader and deeper understanding of the cultural and historical identity of this place in the future.

The author believes that this research contributes to a more nuanced understanding of places and the changing relationship between place and people in the context of socio-economic change. Furthermore, a comparative study of place identities, particularly in similar postcolonial contexts, could potentially reveal universal patterns related to the transformation of place identities and inform effective place management strategies that maintain both cultural continuity and vitality.

CONCLUSIONS

The identity of a place is a complex and dynamic concept. It is shaped by people's experiences and emotions, which are closely linked to and manifest themselves in the physical environment. The identity of a place includes a historical aspect (historical events, legends, narratives), a cultural aspect (local traditions, rituals, the way people live in a particular environment), a physical aspect (buildings, public spaces, the landscape and its elements), and a psychological aspect (the emotions people feel for and about the place). The identity of a place is important when examining people's relationships and attachment to a place, as it indicates the quality of a place.

The place identity of Šnipiškės Skansen stems from the unique cultural and historical context of the place, which includes the preserved historical urban structure, architecture, sustainable lifestyle, sense of community and the positive relationship that residents have developed with the place. Šnipiškės Skansen is about preserving cultural and historical memory and ensuring its continuity. However, due to persistently unfavourable historical circumstances, the "markers" that make up Skansen's identity are disappearing. The strict protection of a place that results from a "top-down" identity and the prioritisation of ethnography over place and the needs of the inhabitants can limit the activities and comfort of the residents and have a counterproductive effect on their attachment to the place.

The place identity of Šnipiškės Shanghai is an alternative version of Šnipiškės Skansen. Shanghai's identity is defined by the broken connection between the city, its residents and the place. It is composed of the negative historical and social aspects that have emerged in the context of chaotic environmental changes, poverty, crime, and a sense of insecurity. Characteristics of Shanghai's identity in the physical environment include disorganised, spontaneous, vernacular architecture, neglected and unkempt public spaces and buildings, an unusual use of materials for the place, a disregard for historical context in the redesign of streets and buildings, and the emergence of typical elements and images. Shanghai also stands for creative freedom to change its surroundings. It is attractive because of its exotic character, the greenery, and the diversity of its chaotic surroundings, which stimulates the imagination and the desire to take an interest in the environment.

Wooden Šnipiškės is an emerging identity of Šnipiškės, combining elements of both Šnipiškės Skansen and Shanghai. This identity points to the enduring importance of the cultural and historical environment of the Giedraičių sub-ward and the need to find a new, contemporary form of continuity for the identity of this place. The nearby Central Business District has significantly increased the visibility of the site and given it a new meaning. The city's effort to create a new identity is an attempt to rethink the meaning of the place and people's relationship to it, an attempt to recognise the value of the cultural and historical heritage of this place. Wooden Šnipiškės could become a place that encompasses the entire Giedraičių sub-ward and serves as an example of the successful preservation of cultural and historical heritage and its successful integration into contemporary urban development.

This study shows that different aspects of place identity need to be considered when developing long-term strategies for territorial development. The study of the cultural-historical identity of the Giedraičių sub-ward and its features shows the significant potential for creating a high-quality place through the preservation, strengthening and integration of existing place values with newly created development:

- a) green spaces for a decelerated lifestyle – recreational value;
- b) unique, colourful and vibrant appearance – as an identity value, essential for the development of an important tourist destination;
- c) cultural value of a historic suburb;
- d) social and environmental value manifested in residents' attachment to the place and mutual cooperation as part of a sustainable lifestyle.

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