

Contemporary
Ruins:

a study of the
unfinished in
Latvia

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Introduction

Along with concerns of sustainability in construction, the act of building transformation becomes more and more discussed in the architecture field. Building transformation is directly linked to the dimension of time and what we consider finished in architecture. From conception to realization and the building's full lifecycle, construction is a process that inherently demands a certain quantity of time.

The lack of reflection for the necessity of new projects and poorly administered funding has led to a particular kind of built landscape in the European countries in the last decades – *the unfinished*. While drawn projects can lay in a shelf, unfinished construction projects install a permanent mark in their environment. They often remain in this state for decades.

The presence of incomplete buildings can be marked all around the globe, especially in the urban areas of low- and middle- income economies. The social and cultural reasons behind their incompleteness depend on geographical location, but from first visual glance they all seem to fit under the same category – unfinished.

This thesis focuses particularly on the case of post-Soviet Latvia. It is chosen to be the main study location as the cultural field I am most familiar with.

Until 1991 the country was under the wing of the Soviet Union. With the collapse of socialism in Europe, capitalism took over the Baltics and the country.

As a nation of 1.9 million Latvia occupies a proportionally large territory where half of population lives in the capital Riga. The phenomenon of abandoned buildings is widespread. This refers to both finished and unfinished constructions. However, the unfinished buildings are the focus point of this work. As archaeology sites, they demonstrate in extreme a collection of social conditions, cultural circumstances, political and economic strategies. Neither truly Eastern country, nor fully Nordic, Latvia is a part of the Baltic realm. The collection of unfinished projects in Latvia reflects it. They consist of post-Soviet relics dating from 1991 when the financial backbone of projects was hit by the collapse of the planned market economy. These are contrasted by lasting manifestations of the economic crisis of 2008 and the general culture of construction under free market economy.

Considering the persistent presence of unfinished architecture in both local scale of Latvia and globally, "Contemporary Ruins: a study of the unfinished in Latvia" affirms that a certain quantity of unfinished architecture is in the European landscape to stay.

The present research does not aim to propose solution-oriented strategies to create an intrigue for trendy transformation design strategies, nor to nourish a romantic attitude towards raw and imperfect architecture. With an aim to abolish a moralizing point of view, this research rather seeks to learn from the given circumstances.

The mere existence of unfinished works should be celebrated as an indicator of underlying conditions. The research objective is to translate their presence, to reflect on the contemporary society and how we perform the act of construction nowadays. Task is to perceive, analyze and describe the reasons behind the unfinished; to observe the social, economic, and cultural environments through them; to seek the limits between what is perceived as finished, and what unfinished nowadays.

The research method proposes definitions of the term *unfinished* through seven case studies in Latvia. The work collects both objective and subjective observations of the particularities of each of the following case studies.

Acknowledging that unfinished projects is not only a local phenomenon but rather a global one, the local case studies are examined through comparisons to case studies and projects in other geographical locations, mostly in Europe.

This helps to position the local situation in a wider perspective and discover how contemporary architecture practices transform the notion of the *unfinished* in Europe.

The case studies invite to question the relationship between construction and politics, abandonment, and neglected use. How is the state of *finished* or *unfinished* currently defined in architecture, law, and social perception?

The ruinous character of these buildings poses questions on the notion of collective memory, monumentality, and aesthetics of the incomplete. The proposed definitions are interested in the construction methods revealed by the deconstructed state. How does the notion of the finished impact the state of the unfinished buildings? How are the contemporary practices changing the concept of the unfinished in relation to transformation projects?

On global scale interest towards the unfinished is fragmented, depending on the country. The situation in Spain was depicted by curators of the Spanish pavilion “Unfinished” in Venice Biennale of Architecture 2016. Series of photos, theoretical projects and transformation projects bring attention to the effects of the 2008 economic crisis in Spain. In Italy artist collective Alterazioni Video has mapped unfinished public buildings to announce a new architectural style.

The series of incomplete works are put forward as a style, recognizing them as monuments. This work in Italy is followed by Gaetano Licata, who analyzes unfinished private dwellings in the book *Maifinito*. The unfinished has been widely discussed in Greece. The research project “Labor, City, Architecture: Towards a Common Architectural Language”, led by Pier Vittorio Aureli at The Berlage Centre for Advanced Studies in Architecture and Urban Design in the Netherlands between 2010 and 2011, explores how urban form in Athens produces a commonplace habitat.

Students are eager to discover the topic in thesis. A former student in EKA, Estonia, Ulla Alla proposes a 30 year pause to rediscover the role of architect through maintenance architecture and to readapt the abandoned architecture by announcing it a free space.

In the context of Latvia, abandoned construction sites are forgotten by architectural or legislative research. It is usually the media which shows the most interest towards specific cases.

The following chapters provide an overview of the current situation of the unfinished heritage in Latvia and the capital city Riga. The *unfinished atlas of Latvian contemporary ruins* is collected to search case studies. It indicates the most often found typologies and structural principles present in the landscape.

Atlas is followed by a dictionary of 7 chapters. The chapters contain an anthology that collects local case studies selected from the atlas, architectural references, artworks, and written works to construct definitions that formulate the concept of the unfinished. Each chapter is assigned a building element to characterize the definition topic in a metaphorical manner.

The collected information forms the first larger architectural research of the *unfinished* in Latvia. The proposed visions of the meaning of completeness can be used to define how the notions of transformation, conservation and regeneration change. While the research focuses on the context of Latvia, hopefully the dictionary can be relevant also for other geographical locations as the local situation does not present solely local conditions.

1

Unfinished atlas of Latvian
contemporary ruins

Unfinished atlas of Latvian contemporary ruins collects construction sites that have been abandoned for a long period of time. As indicates the Ministry of Environmental Protection and Regional Development, Latvia currently is governed under thirty-six regional municipalities and seven city municipalities. I sent emails to all the building authorities of municipalities inquiring to send addresses of the brightest examples of building sites with an expired building license. Sixteen of them answered. One response informed that there are none in the concerned city because they have already “*cleaned and tidied up everything*”. Another municipality answered that “*there is nothing bright in our region when it comes to buildings and structures.*” Answers that communicated specific coordinates can be found in the atlas. Municipalities always maintain lists of new construction projects, but they do not always keep separate listing of projects with an expired building permit. Many maintain lists of buildings in a “status of slum” (*grausta statuss* in Latvian). The lists include buildings that are considered to disturb the environment around it or are dangerous. This includes abandoned construction sites that are already deteriorated. For most cities, these lists are not public, but the capital city Riga is an exception.

In Riga information is collected on a public online webpage¹. The government institution “Riga City Council Department of Property” manages it. Citizens can submit indications about buildings in a wretched state based on observations. Applications are reviewed by the government body to be added to a public map for following decisions about warnings, fines or demolitions. Abandoned construction sites are listed together with “finished” buildings. This website is the main source of atlas coordinates for Riga.

Other examples of buildings include places drawn from memory or through conversations with family, friends, and acquaintances.

Two teams

The collected information sustains a ground to clarify the main tendencies between objects. Firstly, most of the unfinished works are positioned on private property. Secondly, two main groups form the ensemble. First group contains **post-Soviet relics** - construction sites abandoned in 1991 after the collapse of USSR. Second group are **fresh ruins** - projects evolved during last 30 years in the free market period.

Largest part of the post-Soviet relics are apartment blocks. Variations of typologies were built throughout the territory of Soviet Union. More exceptional examples are buildings with public or industrial functions, such as hospitals, culture centers for the collective farms, schools, a sanatorium, offices.

Fresh ruins include large scale projects from a variety of typologies. Apartment development projects, infrastructure, a clinic, industrial building, sports facilities etc. But private dwellings form the largest share of this group. Atlas exemplifies dwellings mostly only from Riga because in the scale of the country information is dispersed and the dwellings continuously transform. Private houses are a complex topic because it is often the inhabitant's own choice or circumstances that cause to leave the space in an underdeveloped state.

The two groups are easily separable by observing their construction methods and materials. They identify the building methods of each period. Post-Soviet relics are characterized by red and white brick façades or by exposed concrete panel assemblages. Apartment blocks follow serial projects. Both maternity hospitals are of circular plan shape.

Concrete forms the main building materiality of the fresh ruins.

Between the examples from the atlas most fresh ruins are situated in Riga or its periphery. Post-Soviet relics are present throughout the country. But the unfinished apartment blocks are no more to be found in the capital city.

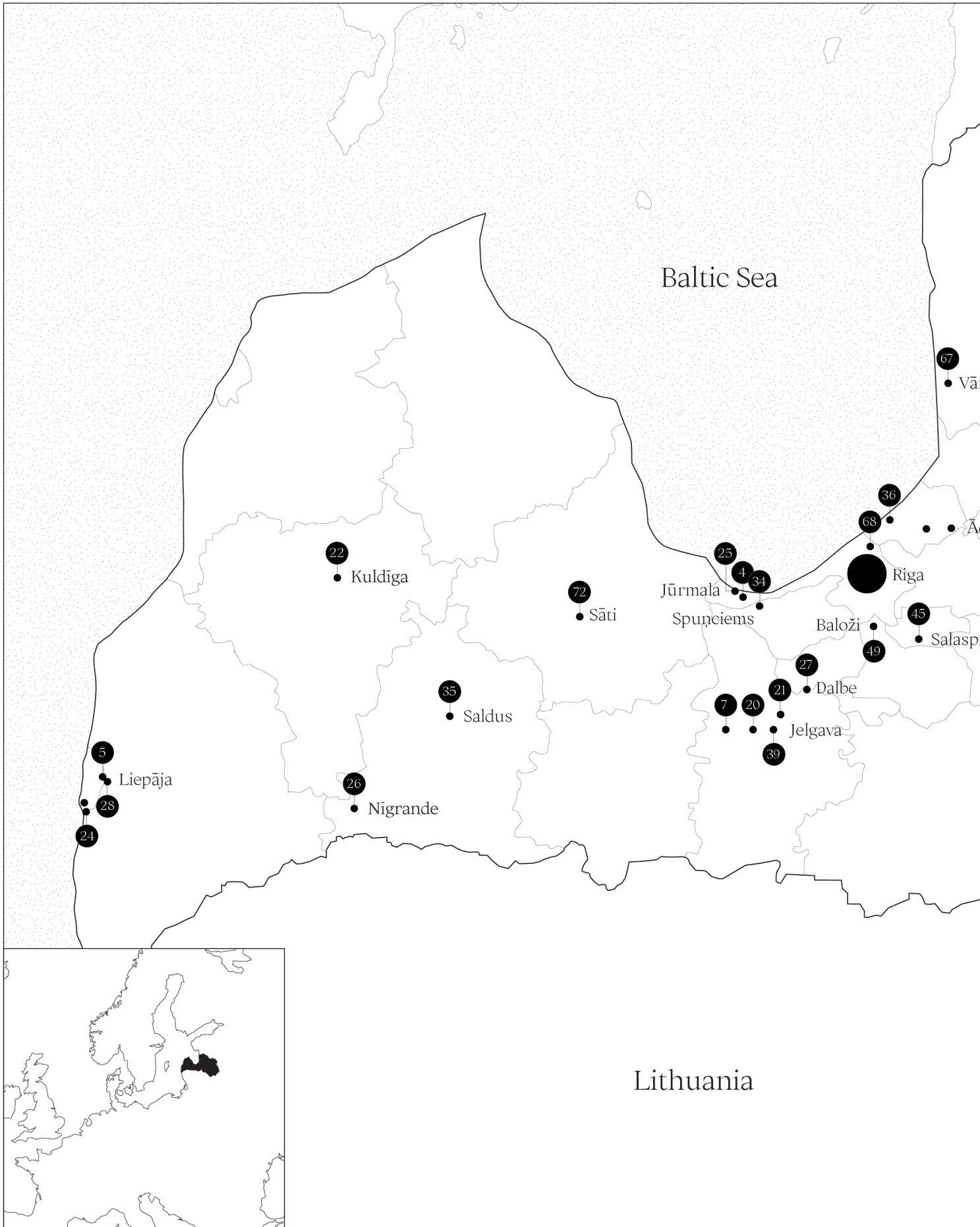
The oldest ruin in the atlas is a bridge that dates from 1939 and belongs to neither of the groups. There is a large gap between the date of abandonment of this prewar bridge and the sites from 1991 on.

Is Riga already finished?

A popular legend about Riga says that a fish, sea monster or a spirit (depending on who tells the story) periodically leaves the waters of river Daugava to ask a passerby if the city is finished (*"Vai Rīga jau gatava?"*). If a respondent ever affirms that it is in fact finished, the city together with its inhabitants will drown in the waters of Daugava. Different versions of the story have been told for centuries. Until now the city remains in construction. Like Riga, also the atlas remains unfinished because the built landscape continues to transform.

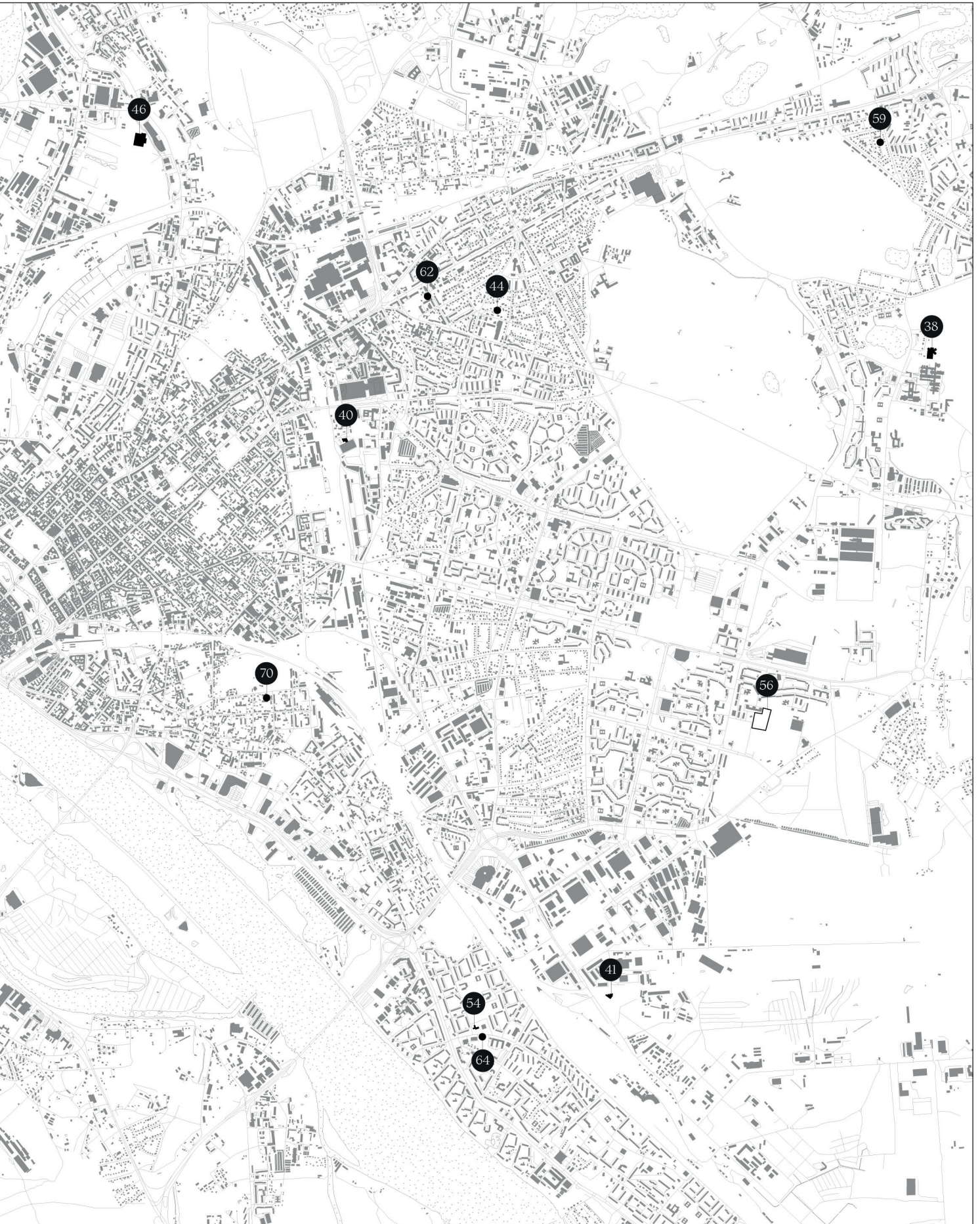
Notes

1. Riga City Council Department of Property, <https://grausti.riga.lv/>.











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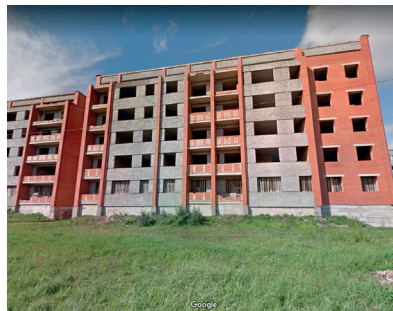
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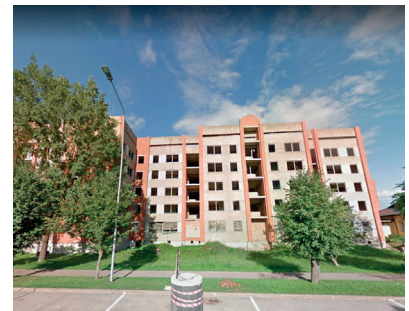
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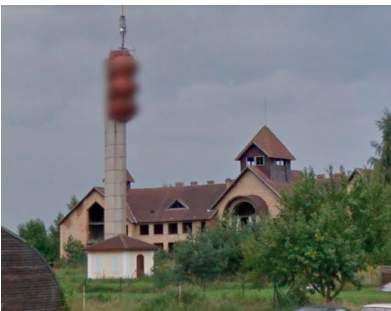
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Image sources:

Google Earth
Riga City Council Property Department, *grausti.lv*
Photos by author

2

Latvian dictionary of the *unfinished*

Latvian dictionary of the unfinished collects self-written definitions of the notion “unfinished” in the contemporary architecture practice.

Seven building examples from the unfinished atlas of Latvian contemporary ruins are analyzed in detail. Three examples are chosen as construction sites that remain from Soviet period and three have been conceived in the last 30 years. One of them dates from before World War II.

Each example is contextualized through architectural references, artworks, and written works. Together they form essays that provide context for the definitions. As media is the information source that currently has paid the most attention to the unfinished buildings in Latvia, quotes from local newspapers accompany the chapters to present the public perception of these cases.

Language influences or expresses human perception of life, environment, interactions. If so, also the state of completeness experiences different nuances in each language. To describe the local attitude towards the research topic, the following glossary of Latvian words illustrates the most often used terms in literature, media or by official bodies in connection to unfinished architecture. Some of them will reappear in the following chapters but some remain only in the glossary to provide a cultural context. Source of explanations is the online Latvian dictionary “Tēzaurus”. Explanations have been self-translated from Latvian to English.

Nepabeigts (word structure: ne-pa-beigts)

adverb

1. Denotes an action, course of action or a state without reference to a starting or ending moment (usually a verb, its form); imperfect.

Beigts

adverb

1. One (animal) that has lost its life; dead.
2. Very ill; crippled, incapacitated (a person); weak.
3. Lost (about property). Used, consumed.
Disappeared, vanished.

Jaunceltne

noun

1. A building that is to be built, is under construction or has just been completed.

Grausts

noun

1. Old, unusable building
2. Coffin
3. Old, weak person.

WINDOW | to ethics and aesthetics

un . finished

2.1

Follows independent principles of ethics and aesthetics.



Case study description

Location: Dantes Street 3, Vārzas

Initial typology: Residential dwelling

Date of photos: August 2021 and January 2022.

Photos by author.







“People call to say that they have lived in their house for three, four years and they have completely forgotten that they must officially put it in service. When we start to explain to them that it is even a legal responsibility, they start to think. There are people who say they don’t live in the house, they just guard it, even though they have cactuses and orchids on their windowsills and curtains on their windows.”

Andris Ziemelis for LSM, November 2021

Building on Dantes Street 3 is a dwelling located in the summer house district Vārzas, Limbažu municipality. The small village was established in the Soviet period. Factory workers received free land as a work reward. So it happens that my grandfather was one of them. In addition to the land, new owners obtained a standard building project to be appropriated. Now the so-called historic part of the village presents similar buildings, each with unique personal interpretations. Some façades are covered with plaster, others show exposed Soviet white brick. The building in the image, however, has been built later, already in the 1990’s.

From exterior perspective dwelling’s level of use remains a mystery. But year from year new elements appear visible on the façade. While some openings remain clad in wood, a few glazed windows have been installed in the last few years. The wood contrasts the exposed concrete blocks. Several types of blocks can be found in the masonry. A curtain in the top window indicates that the building is not completely abandoned. But what exactly makes it look unfinished?

In the essay “The architecture of the Unfinished and the Example of Louis Kahn” (2006) Neil Levine follows how perception and aesthetics of the unfinished changed throughout time in architecture and art. Author argues that decoration has a crucial part in what we define as a finished object.

In the field of arts, both Leonardo and Michelangelo were afflicted at various points in their careers by an inability or lack of will to complete some of their art works. From the two, history assigns Michelangelo to be responsible for elevating the unfinished to an aesthetic. In early 19th century his works inspire and are appropriated to serve the modern idea of the suggestive, ambiguous, and subjective. The finished is contrasted as superficial, mere virtuosity, detached from individual expression, and divorced from the complexities of the contemporary life. By the third quarter of 19th century the subjectivity and lack of conventional finish becomes the defining characteristic of modern art through impressionism. (Levine, 2006)

Dwelling in Vārzas

The Aesthetic of the Unfinished

In architecture, tracing the aesthetic of the unfinished is not as clear. While the Tower of Babel clearly gained its meaning through its state of incompleteness, the deliberately unfinished remained an oxymoron in classical architecture. Buildings such as Alberti's church of San Francesco at Rimini (c 1450.) and Palazzo Rucellai (late 1450s) are both historically unfinished but are read as such mostly to reconstruct the architects' original intentions. As Levine puts it: *"For buildings to function, it would seem, they must be finished."* The Guggenheim Foundation in Venice (former Palazzo Venier del Leoni constructed in eighteenth century) strikes as odd because only the ground floor was constructed but it is still used and thought of as finished.

The shafts of Gioulio Romano's Palazzo del Té outside Mantua (1526-31) make the more significant point that in classical architecture finish was merely a matter of decorative or ornamental elaboration of construction. Finely decorated barrel vault and lintels are supported by Tuscan Doric columns that are indeed designed to look unfinished. But the lack of finish does not reach further than lack of appropriate dressing. This explains how until 18th century finish is mostly referred to as the decorative part.

Marc-Antoine Laugier's postulation of the primitive hut in the second half of the 18th century triggers the self-conscious division between the construction and its decoration. Archeology sites and ruins excited architects' imagination and triggered deliberate creation of ruinscapes.

The "Temple of Modern Philosophy" at the Château d'Ermenonville is a curated ruin. It was designed by Hubert Robert for the gardens of Marquis de Girardin in 1770. A follower of Enlightenment ideas, Girardini wished to represent hopes for the future with the temple. Only six columns find place in the temple itself. They are inscribed with names of famous philosophers of the time. Seven other columns lie waiting next to the temple when future philosopher names can be inscribed on them to complete the building. This temple reveals the beginning of modern. A contradiction remains that this not truly a ruin but an intentionally unfinished architecture.

This paradoxical relationship evolved new representational language in 19th century. The cutaway aerial perspective by Joseph Gandy for John Soane's project of the Bank of England (1830) illustrates the ruin state of the building before its completion (FIG 1.2.). A storm has past the over the structure revealing a state of ruin and at the same time a site in construction. But it still suggests that a building is finished only after receiving its finishing.

This act of disassembly throws into relief the dissembling appearance of the finished product. The unfinished thus serves as a critique of the finished and becomes a model for how the contemporary architect might proceed in rethinking the past. (Levine, 2006)

The use of exposed materials such as metal and bare masonry in 19th century was first received with rejection. It was perceived as too blunt and direct. Frank Lloyd Wright's work eliminated the decoration in favor of shape and material read as one. At the time American critic Montgomery Schuyler described his early works as *"rude, incomplete and unfinished"* (quoted by Levine, 2006). But they revealed a new understanding of the relationship between structure and its decoration. (Levine 2006)



FIG 1.1.
Temple of Modern Philosophy,
Château d'Ermenonville, by
Hubert Robert (with René.Louis
de Girardin), c.1770



FIG 1.2.
Bank of England, London, by
John Soane, 1788-1833. Cutaway
aerial perspective, Joseph Gandy,
1830. Soane Museum, London.



FIG 1.3.

Concrete blocks restitute missing clay bricks in the project for PC Caritas in Melle, Belgium. November 2021. Photo by author.

From the 19th century on the use of material in its raw aesthetic has gradually detached from the need of a finishing. The project for PC Caritas by architectural firm De Vylder Vinck Taillieu in Melle, Belgium is relevant to define the contemporary condition of the unfinished from two points of view. Firstly, the project transforms a historic building expected to be demolished into a space with no precise use. The commissioner, a psychiatric clinic, established it as a place of continuous transformation and thus never really finished. Secondly, interventions are clearly stated through materiality. Materials convey the division between the existing and the intervention. (FIG 1.3.) By now such use of materiality has become a frequent architectural practice. (Plevoets and Cleempoel, 2019)

Back in Latvia a project by architectural practice ĒTER treats an unfinished dwelling in Mārupe, Rīga like an object *as found*. Clients seek to inhabit the one floor high ruin built in concrete blocks. Transformation aims to maintain the existing building shape and maintain the concrete blocks with graffiti exposed in the interior to build upon the site's history. (FIG 1.4.)

Meanwhile a private building from FIG 1.5. in Romanian city Odorheiu Secuiesc suggests a different character of incompleteness. The building has not been unfinished from its departure point. But by applying the insulation without covering it, the façade suggests a level of decomposition. In a way, this building has a unique material language. In contemporary buildings the largest part of the wall consists of the insulation layer. However, this is never exposed, for pragmatic reasons of durability. The condition of the unfinished permits a state of fragmentation.

Two levels of *unfinished* can be defined between the examples from Latvia, Romania, and Belgium. In Italian two terms divided as *incompiuto* and *non-finito* characterize the distinction. In the book *Maifinito* (2014) Gaetano Licata describes these terms in relation to artworks:



FIG 1.4.

Fragment from a 3D scan from the unfinished dwelling before its transformation in Mārupe, Rīga. 2021. Image by ĒTER.



FIG 1.5.

Image of a building with exposed insulation in Romania. July 2021. Photo by author.

Incompiuto referred to artworks, [...] simply refers to the fact that the work has not been finished.

Non-finito can refer to artworks, which include a component of intentionality in the incompleteness of the piece of art.¹

The same terms easily also apply to architecture. First term describes architecture where the state of the unfinished is unintentional. In the case of unfinished dwellings in Latvia this usually implies conditions of economy, indifference for visual qualities and illegal construction independent from the wishes of the public body.

The second term describes architecture as intentionally unfinished to transfer a certain position, aesthetic, or a message. Its ethical principles define aesthetic value which lies in its unfinished condition. As seen in the examples, both states can overlap. What has previously been circumstantial can later also be interpreted with an intentional gesture.

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Iconography

I.1. Parisette, *The Temple of Modern Philosophy*, 2006. Source: Wikimedia Commons

I.2. Joseph Michael Gandy, (1771 - 1843), *A Bird's-eye view of the Bank of England*, 1830. Source: John Soane's Museum, London.

I.3. Image by author, November 2021.

I.4. ÈTER, *VillÆ*, 2021. Source: courtesy of the authors.

I.5. Image by author, July 2021.

¹ Michelangelo's works like "Slaves" or "Captives" (1513-16) and the "Rondanini Pietà" (c.1555-64) already at the epoch were often coined with the term *non-finito*. (Levine, 2006)

RAMP | for ruins in transition

un . finished

2.2

Incomplete versions of future in a liminal state.



Case study description

Location: Sāti, Irlava municipality

Initial typology: Railway bridge

Date of photos: August 2021.

Photos by author.







“The municipal authorities promise to ensure that the bushes at both ends of the bridge are cleared. Especially in summer, the tree canopy obscures the structure.”

Neatkarīgās Tukuma Ziņas, October 2008

Historic castles, manor estates or churches are the commonly found old age ruins found to tell stories about the history of Latvia. But some contemporary ruins are also defined as signs of past to be preserved. The so called “Bridge to nowhere” hangs over river Abava in the countryside village Sāti. In 2008 it was listed as a monument for the “European Heritage Days”¹ under the topic of “Unusual heritage”. The 55 m long narrow track railway bridge was constructed between 1939 and 1940 as a part of the intended Tukums - Kuldīga railway line during the period of first Latvian independent state. It is believed that engineer P. Pāvulāns designed it. As the World War II broke out and the German army entered the territory, construction of the railway was halted. (Altbergs, 2008, 63) As the army shortly attempted to finish the railway, the bridge has remained as a memorial of war times. It is now a destination point marked in the official tourism webpages of the region.

This ruin of dual and ambiguous symbolic attraction. On one hand it symbolizes the project of the first independent Latvian state. On the other hand, it represents a war trauma. Even if it was never directly touched by a tragedy. This bridge is a unique example of an unfinished structure that has gained historical value. A structure born as a ruin is a monument of war similar to ruins that were deconstructed by force.

The bridge has now reached a state where it no more changes by human intervention. Work of transformation is left to nature. No active work is done to delay decay, yet inaction becomes an act of preservation to replace the need for completion or deconstruction.

Bridge to nowhere in Sāti

¹ “European Heritage Days” aim to widen access and foster care for architectural and environmental heritage. The annual programme offers opportunities to visit buildings, monuments and sites, many of which are not normally accessible to the public or are yet underestimated. (www.europeanheritagedays.com/)



FIG 2.1
 Bridge to nowhere
 in Riga, Daugavgrīvas Street.
 December 2021. Photo by author.

Bridge to nowhere in Riga

A construction of an overhead trunk road near the Zunda canal in the Riga left bank district has created a cut of platform leading to nowhere. The construction was part of the Daugavgrīvas highspeed road renovation in 2013. The bridge was supposed to provide access for the Lithuanian shopping mall chain “Akropole”, to be built on a former agricultural machinery factory area. The industrial buildings were removed from the territory and the bridge access was built, but plans changed and the chain has since built the project in another location of the city. The remaining infrastructure can now be found of the map with the same name as the one in Sāti: “Bridge to nowhere”. The bridge offers a wide panorama viewpoint over the city, appreciated as a picturesque place for taking photos or just hanging out but its future remains questioned.

Ruin analogy

Both structures receive different levels of sensitivity. While the older bridge represents a memorial, the new bridge embodies a certain failure to bring an idea to the intended result. Structures unfinished in the recent years can hardly expect the same regard as structures with an age value. There is a difference between what is considered as monumental ruins and what is perceived simply as a product of society. While both can possess similar qualities of decay, the difference lies in their significance and appreciation.

In “Philosophical Perspectives on Ruins, Monuments, and Memorials” Renee M. Conroy (2020) investigates the admiration for contemporary urban decay and the *rust lust*. The contemporary interpretation derives from the term *Ruinenlust* used by the English writer Rose Macaulay in “Pleasure of ruins” (1953). Conroy refers to the post-industrial cities in the Rust Belt region of United State, such as Detroit. Both locals and visitors, urban explorers and photographers come to admire the crumbling towns.

The case studies invite author to question what renders certain abandoned spaces counterparts to classical ruins while others lack aesthetic appeal. To what extent appreciating an industrial ruin is analogues to admiring Parthenon or Egyptian pyramids? The different levels of romanticization that the previously viewed bridges receive leads to apply these questions also to the unfinished infrastructures and buildings. To rephrase one of Conroy’s research questions: should unfinished buildings be regarded as real ruins or are they merely ruins in the making?

In the introduction of the anthology “Ruins” Brian Dillon (2011) animates that according to Rose Macaulay the ancient Greeks and Romans had little real aesthetic feeling for the ruin as such. But they became the inspiration for later enthusiasts. The classical ruin as an object of admiration in Western art emerged during the Renaissance. Achievements of antiquity inspired Romantic preoccupation of nostalgia as exemplified in the literature, poetry, painting, and gardening of the epoch. The classical ruin is gradually reclaimed by nature. (Conroy, 2020)

The aesthetic significance of *Ruinenlust* is highlighted by Donald Crawford. There is are dialectical relationships implied in ruin appreciation. He describes it as a complex experience in which “*our perceptual consciousness shifts back and forth between an awareness of the ruin as the human resistance to natural forces and consciousness of the forces of nature as the destroyer of the most carefully planned human monuments.*” (quoted in Conroy, 2020) Because ruins are a combination of man-made forms and of organic nature, their emotional impact is ambiguous. It is hard to differ if aesthetically ruins belong to the realm of art or the realm of nature. (Zucker, 1961)

The two orthodoxies leading the debate on renovation and conservation practices of monuments in 19th century illustrate the tension between preservation efforts and the natural degradation requisite to perceive the remnant as a *real* ruin rather than as an imitation. One of them was the restoration movement initiated by Eugene Emmanuel Viollet-le-Duc (1814–1879) in France. The other was the anti-restoration or conservation movement led by John Ruskin (1819–1900) and his student William Morris (1834–1896) in England.

Interventions in France proposed by Viollet-le-Duc dealt with the task of restoration in an extensive manner. In certain instances, the interventions involved adding completely “*new parts*” to the building, albeit “*in the style of the original*” (Vaccaro, 1996). Viollet-le-Duc’s was criticized by John Ruskin. He described this kind of restoration as “*a destruction accompanied with false description of the thing destroyed.*” (Ruskin, 1989, 194) Ruskin rejects the possibility of restoring the original spirit of building.

He highlights his conservationist philosophy, which is premised on the rejection of the destructive aspects of Viollet-le-Duc's restorations. This approach prefers protection, conservation, and maintenance of monuments. From this perspective, age and natural decay contributes to the beauty of a building. Signs of aging were essential element of architecture. In the bottom of the discussion lies the different understanding of the concept of authenticity, even though the word itself was hardly mentioned by Viollet-le-Duc, Ruskin, or Morris. (Plevoets and Cleempoel, 2019,)

In the essay "Der Moderne Denkmalkultur: Sein Wesen und seine Entstehung" the Austrian art historian Alois Riegl (1858–1905) suggested that the anti-restoration movement found authenticity in monuments exclusively for their age-value. (Plevoets and Cleempoel, 2019) Aesthetic appreciation is influenced by signs of age earned through time. Carolyn Korsmeyer reaffirms that the age value has a central role in the aesthetic character of a *real* ruin when she asserts:

"The fact that a ruin does not invite repair distinguishes it from damaged buildings that might be reclaimed and reused. Ruins are thus different from rubble and objects recently damaged, for while the destruction of war or nature may have wrecked a structure during some point in its history it is the passage of time that completes a ruin, rendering it something of value—including aesthetic value—in its own right." (quoted in Conroy, 2020)

To explain how classical ruins differentiate from recent ruins, Conroy (2020) uses the term *ruin resonance*. Ruin resonance refers to aesthetic characteristics that all ruins have. With this virtue decaying structures capture our attention as more than simple debris. As the author describes:

Ruin resonance

"Ruin resonance is the familiar but mysterious magnetic quality possessed by some deteriorating edifices in spite of their acknowledged gloominess and tendency to function as unintended memento mori. [...] As I characterize it, ruin resonance is a response-dependent aesthetic property that facilitates episodes in which we dwell both on and in the ruined location, engaging the site in multiple ways (physically, contemplatively, imaginatively) as a result of its incompleteness. It also tends to generate sustained reflection on the abandoned or decaying structure as a multifaceted symbol of civic strength, human frailty, and the inevitability of cycles."

Classical ruins require to reflect in a dyadic manner between what is perceived and what can only be imagined (what was and what is). The encounter of new ruins can also be characterized by similar experience. But what differentiates new ruins is that the experience is complemented by a third facet exactly because it has been ruined recently (what was, what is, what could be, what should be). History does not remain a mystery. Recent ruins still attract to think about their appropriation.

The classical ones are perceived as independent monuments of history. The classical ruin is an object *as found* while the new ruin civic engagement calls to give the site a clear function (to renovate, to preserve, to repurpose etc.). (Conroy, 2020)

Classical and contemporary ruins can be separated accordingly as **passive** and **active** entities. The classical ruin is perceived as a passive entity. The temporal detachment from the history of ruins initial circumstances of decay permits their museification and monumentalisation that sustains their conditions in a given state. Meanwhile, contemporary ruins remain active. Their transformation is still projected, and their contemporary appropriation is not suspended.

In contrast to industrial ruins discussed by Conroy, unfinished buildings are born as ruins. They never left from the liminal phase that architecture transits before it reaches a defined state that can be perceived as suspended completion. They remain “*incomplete versions of the future rather than ideals of the past.*” (Storr, 2018, 42) The non-complete is a mechanism that invites a viewer to complete in his mind the possibility of becoming. (Bar-Eli, 2014, 167)

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Iconography

- 2.1. Images by author, December 2021.

FACADE | of political figures

un . finished

2.3

Is generated by passion for new beginnings and the creative enthusiasm of liberalism.



Case study description

Location: Slimnīcas 1, Jūrmala

Initial typology: Apartment block building

Date of photos: December 2021.

Photos by author.











“If Jūrmala wants an image, if it does not want to imitate the European Capital of Culture only on paper, then it is necessary to act. It seems to me that there are examples in Riga where dangerous buildings are simply being demolished.”

An inhabitant from Jūrmala for LSM, 21st July, 2021

A five-floor apartment block in Slimnīcas Street 1 in the seaside city Jūrmala is a post-Soviet relic. In USSR mass housing was built following series of typology models. This apartment block is of series 103 with load-bearing red brick partition walls, exposed wall ends in the façades and concrete or sandwich panels. Application of the model began in 1970s but continued until 1990s. (Garkāje, 2019)

Apartment block buildings were part of the Soviet regime tools used for ideological control. Construction was a priority. Each citizen was to have their own housing. Many new districts were erected from nowhere, even entire new towns or villages. (Groskaufmanis & Ozola, 2019, 5)

To compare, now only one tenth of the entire residential building foundation has been built since 1991. Especially during the period of 1990's, right after the collapse of the Union, very few new housing construction projects were built. Exception was the continuation of certain block housing projects initiated during the previous decade just like the building in Jūrmala. (Groskaufmanis & Ozola, 2019, 5)

Another exception were private dwellings conceived by the upcoming elite who often did not see their dreams completed due to unregulated business competition and criminality. Now the fetish of private dwelling is blooming. It embodies the yearning for a solitary private corner. Individualistic living space contrasts the USSR living model of densely inhabited apartment buildings. For many a “modern” house in the periphery of the capital city symbolizes a story of luck about a successful career in the independent Latvia. Prosperity is believed to be reached by individual efforts rather than a unifying goals of a society as a whole. Private housing symbolizes financial independency and autonomy of land detached from the surrounding public space. This explains the large amount of unfinished private dwellings in the Latvian living repository, such as the case study in Vārzas from chapter 1. (Groskaufmanis & Ozola, 2019, 6)

Slimnīcas Street 1

The destiny of USSR period block buildings after 1991 enlightens society's desire to distance from the previous era and to seek different living conditions. In the free market economy, late Soviet building apartments are of the lowest worth. Housing from 19th century, interwar period or contemporary period come in higher value. Late Soviet housing is a space of minimal square meters. Now larger space is in high demand. Few people will esteem as a high standard to live in the typical 40 m² Soviet apartment, divided in small rooms by walls. (Ījabs, 2019, 13)

Low value partly explains slow interest from Latvian society to complete abandoned apartment building sites in the post-Soviet era. To rebuild offers new higher return investment possibilities. Demolition is viewed as a quick solution. In a certain way possibility to demolish enables a ground zero that erases the sore history of 20th century. Inhabitants living near by the ruin in Jūrmala have demanded the local municipality to take the building down several times but municipality refuses to do so until the building is in a dangerous structural state.

Difficulty to resume such projects lies also in the arrival of new social dilemmas. Previously people were only inscribed in their housing. Responsibility on the public area lied on the shoulders of the State. Now they become private owners who are responsible not only for their apartment, but also for the entire building. For the study case the cadastral register shows that the building is divided in many properties through apartment units and is sold as such too. Its future lies in the hands of a large group of people from different economic, national, and cultural backgrounds who struggle to find common language and hesitate to sacrifice short term benefits for long term benefits of the common good.

A renovation can also be an investment project of private building owner or an intention to ameliorate the urban landscape by the municipality. An example of a renovation conducted under municipalities' guidance is found in the city Smiltene. As the municipality reported during my research for the atlas, an unfinished apartment block building from series 103 in Daugavas Street 7a was transformed in 2018 (FIG 3.1). After the existing structure was verified for bearing capacity, the façade was complemented with the missing enclosing elements, insulated, and repainted. Traces of the original building materiality and texture are nowhere to be seen.

As demonstrated in the *unfinished atlas of Latvian contemporary ruins*, post-Soviet relics are not a rare local find. Yet, they did not become abandoned already in the Soviet period but in the post-Soviet era which followed. The observation that almost all the examples stand abandoned only since the political change of 1991 onwards invite to question how social systems trigger unfinished built environment.

It is not to say that abandoned buildings or long construction projects were not present in Soviet period. Indeed, the so called *dolgostroj* projects were an acknowledged problematic already in the Brezhnev period of the Soviet Union. (Kashapov, 2011) But the term designated a different problematic than the contemporary ruins generated by market economy.



FIG 3.1
Apartment building renovation
in Smiltene
Source: Smiltenes NKUP

Dolgostroj

Dolgostroj signified projects of protracted construction. Except for private dwellings, project contracting authority was a public authority such as the state, *kolkhoz* (the collective farms) or universities. Projects did not run out of financial support. But due to inefficiency of the planned economy model by 1980s shortage of construction materials was common. Still, circumstances obliged to continue construction works even if the right materials were not available. Sometimes this implied low building quality because of poor material choice or inadequate construction methods. But leaving a building unfinished was equaled to incompetent governance of resources.

Now the term of *dolgostroj* is still used in Russian language but designates the post-Soviet relics - building sites initiated in the Soviet period and left unfinished after 1991. Such unfinished architecture in Latvia is a direct result of the political change. Construction sites found their financial and material supply from the State cut and their future lied in the hands of private investors new to the system. Privatization of the State property permitted opportunistic chaos. Faced with the possibility to privatize property and companies, individuals grabbed what they could, with little concern of the sustainability of choices. The period is characterized by wild-capitalism, lack of state autonomy due to close coupling of political and economic roles and self-interest as legitimate motives for actions. (Bandelj, 2016)

The Latvian environment under market economic system later in the 2000's is depicted by Reinis Hofmanis (1985) in a photography series "Sale (Pārdod)" (2010). Hofmanis documents handwritten sale signs planted in empty plots of land or on unfinished buildings in a snowy landscape. Author refers to a difference he has observed at the time between the selling customs in Latvia and West Europe where land is sold more often through real estate companies. (Rotčenkova, 2010, 42) In addition to examining objects, the photographs illustrate the consequences of the global economic bubble burst of 2008 which left the Latvian landscape with traces of fast-built and half-finished buildings.

In terms of unfinished works, DeSilvey and Edensor (2012) assign communism and capitalism the same level of responsibility, though they establish a distinction between the "*banal mismanagement*" of collective aspiration found in the former and the failed "*abundance*" promised by the latter. Latvia is a ground which demonstrates both.

The perception of incompleteness primarily studied nowadays focuses on the failure of capitalist or *neoliberal topographies* directly after the burst of the property bubble in 2008. In the wake of Ireland's unfinished estates following the crisis Kitchin et al. (2012) defines neoliberal topography as the landscape which resulted from prioritizing private economic revenues over the actual necessities of a society. (Arboleda, 2017)

Ruins testify to the frustration of utopian capitalist aspirations (Matos, 2012), becoming "*the site of a critique of the ideology of progress*" (Schönle, 2006, 653). Moreover, considering ruins as part of the built environment, they represent the suspended ambitions of the empowered actors within any society, because space is "*expressive of the ideals of a dominant political regime*" (Light and Young, 2010, 6).



FIG 3.2
From series "Sale (Pārdod)" by Reinis Hofmanis. First exhibited in the art space "kim? / FK gallery" in 2010.

Neoliberal topography

Widely researched is the case of Italy. Artist collective *Alterazioni Video* hundreds of unfinished public works built around Italy over the last 50 years in the project *Incompiuto Siciliano*. Their erection correlates with dilapidation of public funds by political actors, corruption, and mafia networks. Italy did not have to experience a property bubble in order to acquire its collection of unfinished works. Italian case of unfinished public works belongs to a different era of modernization, but Pablo Arboleda (2017) argues society's behavior has not been dissimilar with the circumstances in countries affected by the bursting of the property bubble in 2008. Both Italian case and the Latvian one in the last 30 years reveal the failure of initiating limitless constructions funded by limited resources.

The approach of *Incompiuto Siciliano* elevates the unfinished works as an architectural style. Their approach feeds on sarcasm, humor, and satire to elevate the value of disregarded ruins. Their approach is strongly positivist. It permits people to relate closer with the conditions and explore critical connotations within the phenomenon's origin (Arboldea, 2017). As noted by DeSilvey and Edensor (2012), modern ruins have a "critical power" with the potential to open alternative readings of modernity and notions of progress. Thus ruins can be disruptive vehicles, offering new ways of looking at these.

What generates both post-Soviet relics and the unfinished buildings from the years after is an urge to start fresh, to prove oneself, to grow and to push forward. To continue the positivist approach of *Alterazioni Video* and open up new readings of progress in a growing economic, this chapter appropriates the manifesto of *Incompiuto Siciliano* and defines the unfinished as generated by passion for new beginnings and by the creative enthusiasm of liberalism. (2018, 18)

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Iconography

- 3.1. Smiltēnes KNUP, 2019. Source: <https://smiltenesknup.lv/?p=3127>.
- 3.2. Reinis Hofmanis, *Sale (Pārdod)*, 2010. Source: <https://kim.lv/en/reinis-hofmanis-sale/>.

I
Alterazioni Video is an artist collective founded in 2004 in Milan, Italy. They gained wider recognition with the project *Incompiuto Siciliano*. Since 2006 the collective has catalogued more than 600 unfinished public buildings and infrastructures in the country. In collaboration with the practice Fosbury Architecture results are gathered in the book "Incompiuto Siciliano: The Birth of a Style".

FOUNDATIONS | of time

un . finished

2.4 One that does not exist without the finished.



Case study description

Location: Lielirbes 17a, Rīga
Initial typology: Apartment tower
Date of photos: January 2022.
Photos by author.











"I see Panorama Plaza. Gigantomania typical of Moscow in the miniature Pārdaugava. It would have been better to cut their money short. Even before construction. We wouldn't have to look at rare teeth in Riga's mouth now."

Pēteris Bajārs in SestDiena, August 2009

The *Panorama Plaza* towers in the Riga left bank region Pārdaugava are struggling to embody the symbol of growth and development that they initially aimed for. The project visualized a complex of four apartment towers and an office building at their feet. Only the office building and two of the towers in the height of 26-floors and 31-floors are completed and in active use. The third one remains only 16-story high.

A joint venture of Latvian and Turkish development companies initiated the project in 2004. By 2005 construction works begun. The first two towers were completed during the economic boom. Yet, the financial crisis of 2008 suspended the construction of the remaining two towers when the investors bankrupted in 2010. (LETA 13 Jun. 2011) A subsidiary company "Ektornet Residential Latvia" bought the complex and the unfinished tower in 2011 to sell it to "Rossel" in 2012. The Russian owned company has since been the owner of the real estate. (LETA 9 Sept. 2013)

In 2009 artist Andris Vītoliņš depicts the half tower in a painting "Skyscraper" as it was standing for 16 years (FIG 4.1.). It makes part of a series called "Dream houses". The work appeared in the contemporary art festival "Survival kit" alongside photos of Arnis Balčus in 2010. Exhibited images depicted unfinished buildings, half abandoned houses and offices. They illustrated the burst of the real estate bubble in Latvia. (Teivāne, 2010, 53)

In winter 2021 a crane next to the unfinished tower appeared and displays that active construction has resumed after a 16-year pause. Construction of the 4th tower is planned for 2024. (Varianti 22 Dec. 2021)

Towers like *Panorama Plaza* are landmark objects. When left unfinished, they have nowhere to hide. Here an empty concrete structure stands against visually completed towers. Their visual contrast speaks about the dimension of time in ruins.

Photographer Alexander Gronsky (1980) has collected images of the same places but in different time in series "Schema" (FIG 4.2.).

Panorama Plaza



FIG 4.2. "Schema" is a photographic sharade that consists of diptychs and triptychs shot between 2005 and 2015 in different countries across the world. Differences in the angle, place or time of photography encourage the viewer to compare images with each other. Authors: Alexander Gronsky and Ksenia Babushkina.



FIG 4.1.
Andris Vītolīņš
“Skyscraper”
From series “Dream Houses”
2009
acrylic on canvas

In reference to this work photos (FIG 4.3.) in the following page depict the unfinished tower and the inhabited tower from similar angle to position a time travel. The inhabited tower is the future for the unfinished tower, the unfinished is the past of the other. Next to each other they play with the perception of time and space.

Marc Augé describes that the charm in experiencing unfinished public works has to do with “*the palpable presence of time, of a form of “pure” time that enkindled the brutal coexistence of elaborate architectural forms and wild nature.*” (2018) As active entities contemporary ruins embody a collection of temporal and historical paradoxes. Their decay is a concrete reminder of the passage of time. Ruins set us both in the past and in the future. (Dillon, 2011, II) And as Brian Dillon puts it: “*the cultural gaze that we turn on them is a way of loosening ourselves from the grip of punctual chronologies, setting ourselves adrift in time.*”

To think about architecture as unfinished means to think how time meddles with architecture. Where in time is the unfinished set? When does something become unfinished?

Like *Panorama Plaza*, the concrete skeleton of Piraeus Tower in Pireas, Greece stands exposed for 30 years. In 2010 Aristide Antonas proposes a strategy to refurbish the unfinished façade. The design proposes the tower as a monument of cancellation. The tower was constructed as a technically challenging structure to demonstrate modernity of the seven-year dictatorship in Greece (1967-1974). The time the structure has been standing unfinished rather speaks for the lack of success. It would be absent-minded for an architectural intervention to attempt a deletion of this notorious past. Antonas proposes to maintain the concrete structure partly exposed through a glazed facade. Glass is contrasted by reused metal cladding on other elevations. (FIG 4.4.) The strategy of embracing the existing oddities becomes a tool to reach local specificity. (Antonas, 2010)



FIG 4.4.
The Piraeus Tower, 2010.
Image by Aristide Antonas.



FIG 4.4.

Elevations of two *Panorama Plaza* towers that face each other. January 2022. Photo by author.

Dimension of time is a central topic of the Spanish pavilion “Unfinished” in Venice Biennale of Architecture 2016. Lack of reflection for necessity of new buildings during an economic boom resulted in many abandoned construction sites and urban areas in Spain after 2008. The pavilion demonstrates the insanity of the period “*when consideration of change, adaptability and evolution over time was removed from the formula for making architecture*”. (Carnicero, 2016, 7) Exhibition consists of photographic documentation of sites, theoretical projects, and a collection of constructed transformation projects around Spain.

To contextualize the approach of curators Jacobo García-Germán (2017) comments on the possible misreading of the exhibition. He defies the three possible interpretations that are easily associated with projects dealing with the unfinished. Firstly, the unfinished could be a call for low-cost, self-made architecture for actors who are suspicious about the act of construction and rather search immediate solutions. Secondly, the unfinished can present a groundwork that purely seeks trendy authenticity through raw and unpolished aesthetics. Thirdly, the unfinished can be imagined as a breeding ground for a cultural shift away from capitalism and existing power structures.

But García-Germán disclaims such approaches because they imply a type of fundamentalism. His critique of these approaches lay on the argument that an architecture based on established paradigms (parametricism, minimalism, ecology, participation and etc.) does not open to appropriation and thus a level of unfinishedness that permits a reading of history. Unintentionally they risk pushing the unfinished to become “*the ultimate paradigm to end all paradigms*”. These approaches discern “*a degree of limiting ideology and a sense of discrimination toward all other value systems and working protocols*”. The fear is that such extremes would polarize the profession. Practitioners aligning with the politically correct paradigms risk to exclude as legitimate the practices who align with the *status quo* or supposedly lack a commitment to the contemporary moral.

Unfinished business

In the bottom of his critique lies the invitation to see architecture as an *unfinished business* that rejects complete ideas based on defined theories. Instead, it invites to open architecture to the cultural appropriation through gradual process. (García-Germán, 2017)

He uses the early work of Olafur Eliasson as an example which illustrates the procedure. Instead of offering the audience a distilled work that has been perfected and finalised in the art studio or laboratory, the moments to define the artwork are left to when it meets the public. The state of unfinishedness does not lie in materiality. It refers to the cultural appropriation of the art work.

The other side of the card to approach architecture as *unfinished business* is to perceive the existing built environment as a constraint upon which we can leave an important but impermanent mark. Through the concept of the unfinished we may understand the desirability of a perpetual state of evolution of the constructions that define our societies. The architecture of the unfinished leaves a door open to the underrated, and to ideas and interventions of the future, many of which we may not yet be aware of. The original trace of Diocletian's Palace in Split could be considered as a project that ended in the fifth century with the construction of the residence for the Roman emperor. However, it is more interesting to understand it as an unfinished project that began with the definition of the floor plan of the palace and still today continues serving as a master plan for the city. An aerial view (FIG 4.5.) reveals the historic rectangular perimeter of the palace as well as its ancient main halls which are today transformed into piazzas, public buildings and other urban spaces. The houses that have been built over the years since the fall of the Roman Empire, instead of starting from scratch, assumed the remains of the palace as found objects available for reuse. The layout of the palace originally responded to the functional individual needs of the emperor, but also was sufficiently generic to allow its transformation throughout the following centuries into a contraction that today belongs to the public realm. (Carnicero, 2017; Plevoets and Cleempoel, 2019)

To reject established paradigms, to build upon interventions over evolution of history and to enable changing appropriation means to leave architecture to evolve through its own devices. *Unfinished* assumes the positive sense of this word. This illustrates why the constructed projects from around Spain exhibited in the pavilion are transformation projects that alter both contemporary and historic existing buildings, or architecture built as capable of transformation. In Carnicero's words, the projects represent architecture "*born out of renunciation and economy of means, designed to evolve and adapt to future necessities and trusting in the beauty conferred by the passage of time.*" (2017) Such architecture relates as something that is unfinished and in constant state of evolution. It understands lessons from the past and takes in account the process of gradual change and need for time in construction.

An alteration work in architecture leaves indications that the building has been rendered into a state of suspended completion but it maintains a level of incompleteness which allows the building to become an element of continuity. (Scott, 2008)

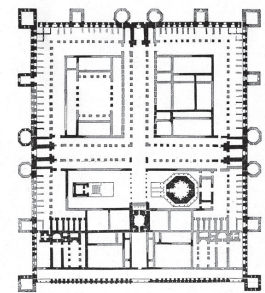


FIG 4.5.
Palace of Diocletian,
reconstruction plan

Such positivist position towards the state of continuous transformation relates to what Robert Storr acknowledges in an essay “Unfettering Reveries: The Incompiuto Siciliano”. Storr points out that love for ruins is particularly a Western culture obsession. It implies preference of the old and used rather than the new. In contrast Japanese and African cultures open more to the process of maintenance and change of the building under the belief that *“the building itself is only as old as it happens to be according to whatever is done to make it better.”* (Storr, 2018, 42)

The value of something unfinished fluctuates in time and can be traced along lines that move away from the immediate present towards the future and towards the past. (García-Germán, 2017) While a precise moment that something becomes unfinished cannot be pinned exactly because it means making a conclusion, unfinishedness can be defined as something that strives for completeness. Thus, the unfinished does not exist without the finished and *vice versa*.

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Iconography

- 4.1. Andris Vitolīņš, *Skyscraper*, 2009. Source: authors courtesy.
- 4.2. Alexander Gronsky, *Schema*, 2015. Source: <https://www.alexandergronsky.com/6069674-schema-2015#43>.
- 4.3. Aristide Antonias, *Piraeus Tower*, 2010. Source: <https://www.aristideantonias.com/tag/archaeologies/project/piraeus-tower/link/68>.
- 4.4. Images by author, January 2022.
- 4.5. Architecture, Sculpture, and the Industrial Arts Among the Nations of Antiquity, *Palace of Diocletian*, 2007. Source: Creative Commons.

COLUMN | in landscape

un . finished

2.5

Dialogues with landscape while
nature takes back control of places.



Case study description

Location: Dambja 8, Riga
Initial typology: Sports center
Date of photos: December 2021.
Photos by author.











The unfinished grid structure in Dambja Street 8, Riga was supposed to be a sports center. But construction stopped in 2007. For now it sleeps in a grassland, spotted with trees and reeds. The territory is distanced from the main roads. During the green seasons, the ruin hides behind trees. But winter season takes away leaves and reveals a further view. The building plan composes several wings of column and slab structure. The forest of columns dialogues with the surrounding area.

From the main street the ruin is hardly visible because a shopping mall stands in front. The two are divided by a small water stream. A hundred years ago this stream was a river of 25 meters width. The ruin now lays on the former riverbed of Sarkandaugava to which also the whole district owns its name.

Industrialization established in this part of Riga in the first decades of 20th century. It used the water flow to transport goods. (Lidaka, 2004) The artificial Ūdru ditch connected the factories with Sarkandaugava river. A map from 1938 illustrates the urban layout before World War II. (FIG 5.1.) The two water flows delimited a triangular green zone where now the unfinished building stands.

During the Socialist period industrial territory continued to expand. The industrial territory spread in a vast manner with dispersed low-rise architecture. Industrial waste from factories polluted the water. To hide the damage and expand available building territories, the river was gradually filled up. A map of 1988 shows that the river has lost its width by half compared to pre-war period. The aim to occupy more territory transformed the river into a small and polluted stream. By 2022 only fragments of it remain (FIG 5.2).

Currently the industrial territory is characterized by scattered urbanism. Buildings with industrial function create large intermediate spaces of non-permeable paving grounds for roads and car parks.

Center for flora



FIG 5.1 (left)
Map of Sarkandaugava neighborhood around 1938. The Sarkandaugava River stretches deep into the city's pastures.



FIG 5.2 (right)
Google Maps satellite view of Sarkandaugava neighborhood in 2022. Study case building is highlighted.

The territory around the unfinished building remains one of few green islands. Actually, it should be seen as a rather happy event that a conquest over nature takes pause here. Delimited with a fence, nature slowly takes back control of this place.

Until now the building has conserved well. Meeting records from recent Riga Building Board inform that construction works should resume at some point. But for now, snow and moss inhabit the concrete surfaces. Even though a roof guards the concrete, snow manages to enter through the open sides. In “Pleasure of ruins” (1953) Rose Macaulay paints a picturesque image of recent decay:

“New ruins have not yet acquired the weathered patina of age, the true rust of the barons’ wars, not yet put on their ivy, nor equipped themselves with the appropriate bestiary of lizards, bats, screech-owls, serpents, speckled toads and little foxes which, as has been so frequently observed by ruin-explorers, hold high revel in the precincts of old ruins (such revelling, though noted with pleasure, is seldom described in detail; possibly the jackal waltzes with the toad, the lizard with the fox, while the creech-owl supplies the music and they all glory and drink deep among the tumbled capitals). But new ruins are for a time stark and bare, vegetationless and creatureless; blackened and torn, they smell of fire and mortality. It will not be for long. Very soon trees will be thrusting through the empty window sockets, the rose-bay and fennel blossoming within the broken walls, the brambles tangling outside them. Very soon the ruin will be engulfed, and the appropriate creatures will revel.”

For now, trees do not thrust inside this concrete structure. But they sprout all around it. When something is left untouched by human intervention, nature soon reestablishes its role. Left alone by humans, ruins at some point become incubators of natural urban enclaves. In 1885 Richard Deakin surveyed the flora that vegetate Colosseum of Rome. He found more than 420 species growing both on the ruin and in the ground surfaces. Ruinous conditions of generated a unique environment.

Aveliina Helm, an Estonian biologist, arguments cities provide an indispensable role in maintaining biodiversity in the future. A mere hundred years ago grasslands were the most common habitat type around the Baltic Sea. By now grassland communities have almost vanished from the Baltics and Europe. (Helm, 2018)

Urban sprawl continues to occupy precious wildlife territories. Existing nature conservation and wildlife protection strategies struggle to ensure the environment needed for many species. To reconsider these strategies Helm emphasizes the need to transform how nature is nurtured in cities, urban settlements, and suburbs. Biologist invites to diversify flora in cities, to allow grass to grow high and to reduce paved ground. Human prejudice about what is poor maintenance or lack of order makes part of what blands urban nature. Grassland species do not inhabit mowed lawns or orderly parking lots. (Helm, 2018)

Aveliina speaks of incorporating nature in our daily habits and changing our practice of maintenance to allow flora to sprout in the cities. But the territory around the unfinished ruin is not vegetated intentionally. The bush around it is neither really wild nor domesticated. It is an urban wilderness cultivated by failed projects. The dialogue between the built and the wild is what creates the specificity of this place. The unfinished structure becomes a second nature (Goethe, 1885) of the landscape.

An example where unfinished project has cultivated a unique relationship between an urban settlement and islands of nature is found in Văcărești Natural Park in Bucharest. An incomplete concrete wall delimits a former wasteland that has transformed into protected nature reservoir.

In 19th and 20th century the grounds of Văcărești district on the edge of the city held a monastery with industrial workshops. The establishment was later reorganized as a prison. An earthquake in 1977 damaged the existing structures. On the rubbles of the ruins, the formerly communist state deemed this place to become an artificial lake as a part of the modern-socialist Bucharest project. The existing built district around it was partially erased to rebuild a new apartment block district, a mega project that would fit the mega lake.

Contradicting recommendations of engineers, the project foresaw the lake to raise above ground level. The walls, made of poor material, did not endure the moment when first water artificially entered the reservoir. The leaking walls remained abandoned in their incomplete state.

Throughout 1990's and early 2000's it became known as the "Pit", a place to get rid of all things unneeded. (Cotoi, 2021)

Urban ecology

Văcărești Natural Park



FIG 5.3
Delta Văcărești in Bucharest,
Romania. October 2012.
Photo: Mihai Petre.

Between garbage, cardboard houses and all things possible, water continued to occupy the historically swampy territory. By 2010 the conditions in the “Pit” cultivated a unique environment where plant and bird types characteristic to a river delta live together with escaped domestic turtles and other small animals. From a failed hydrologic engineering ruin the image of Văcărești transformed to an urban delta worthy of protection. (Cotoi, 2021)

Calin Cotoi highlights that this nature enclave is astonishing particularly due to its position in urban environment. A panorama view (FIG 5.3) exposes the contrast between watery reed fields and industrial territories, socialist living districts, recent high-rise buildings. Its value lies in the inversion that urban and ecological environments present. (Cotoi, 2021) This wilderness is a result of an urban ecology fractured by failed infrastructure.

Similarly, the unfinished ruin in Riga strikes as particular because of the dialogue between green habitats and the industrial environment around it. The period it stands unfinished has offered time to reevaluate the role of nature in contemporary urban settlements. Sometimes doing nothing is the best for something. Before the question: “What should we do?” we should be asking ourselves: “What if do less?”. Let the stones lay there, let the reeds expand a bit, let the river flow where it flows. Let our eyes get used to the organized chaos that ruins hold around them and within them, let our hands rest when nature takes back control of places.

What if we do less?

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Iconography

- 5.1. *Sarkandaugava around 1938*. Source: <http://www.sarkandaugavai.lv/2013/04/fitoremediacija/>.
- 5.2. Google Earth satellite image, 2022.
- 5.3. Mihai Petre, *Lacul Văcărești*, 2012. Source: Wikimedia Commons.

CORRIDORS | of legislation

un . finished

2.6

The grey zone of legislation.



Case study description

Location: Sedas 8, Riga

Initial typology: Maternity hospital

Date of photos: December 2021.

Photos by author.







“In recent years, the municipality has been actively informed that young people are staying in the building and its territory. Adult men are also looking for scrap metal, baking sausages on the roof.”

Latvijas Sabiedriskie Mediji, 2nd March 2016

Checkered cylinders rise in the sleeping neighborhood of Mežciems in the east of Riga. Once intended as a maternity hospital in the 1980s for the growing demography of the Latvian Socialist Soviet Republic, the project took a break in the 1990's with the collapse of the Soviet Union. The building measures a built area of 25 285 m² and associates a reference to the term *white elephant*. But time has not damaged its structure and demolition is not planned. Currently, the company “Cadaceus Development” is working on a redevelopment plan to turn it into a rehabilitation center. The project would complement the adjacent hospital complex “Gaiļezers”. As the company website informs, the project completes the existing structure and adds an extension to the lower part of the building. Project visualizations illustrate white cylinders that lay on a glazed base. The architectural character feeds on the perception of a hospital as a sterile and white environment.

Since the privatization era of 1990's the future of the building has been left in the hands of private owners. For 30 years the building was passed from one owner to another. Until now the private investor has submitted a demand for a building permit in the Riga Building Board and the project is planned to be completed by 2026. For now continued activity denotes the future of this ruin but as a Latvian saying goes: “Don't say hop before you have jumped.”

**Maternity hospital of
Mežciems**

This case study and the following paragraphs aim to exemplify the complex economical and legislative context and problematics involved to overtake both large scale and small-scale unfinished projects. The chapter speaks about how the current laws have cultivated existence of unfinished ruinscape and what is their current legal treatment. The examples situate the unfinished buildings as a political ground for new legislative adaptations.

In 2021 *Dienas Bizness* interviewed a board member from the company which redevelops the hospital. Gunārs Kosojs pointed out the missed opportunity of a Public-Private Partnership (PPP) deal which would unite the private investor's efforts with the interests of the municipality. The point to mark here is the strategy to apply to the interests of the municipality .

Conversations with municipalities in Latvia during the research for the unfinished atlas of Latvian contemporary ruins lead to believe that it is in fact often the municipalities who show the largest interest to deal with the unfinished projects. They are indeed motivated to develop the visual identity of a city or a region. But unfinished buildings are most often private property. The most common present-day tool in the hands of a municipality is land taxation.

The Construction Law defines unfinished buildings under the category of *environment degrading structures*⁴ together with simply damaged buildings either due to natural occurrences or owners' negligence. Currently the law on Immovable Property Tax in Latvia imposes a tax from 0.2 to 3% from building cadastral value on environment-degrading buildings or buildings that have not been transferred in service after the expiration date of the building permit. A building permit is given for 8 years but it can be renewed. Each municipality can define their own tax level in the given range. The raised tax came in power in 2014 but is planned to be further raised in 2022.

Environment-degrading buildings can also be expropriated from the owner under certain conditions. Municipality can enforce a demolition of a building in a dangerous state, but it is done in rare cases. In such situations demolition work is carried out by the municipality from its own budget. The bill is then issued to the owner but often remains neglected.

To compare, in Switzerland legislation obliges to demolish abandoned construction sites in a year after the works have stopped before they even become dangerous to public safety. They are announced as illegal. (Cueni, 2015) In Latvia legislation does not oblige to demolish. This causes the need to define responsibilities in case of accidents in the building.

The owners of buildings with a status of dilapidation are obliged to delimit the building to unauthorized persons. Securitization levels can go in far extents. This is understandable because the openings of unfinished structures are dangerous. Indeed, several deaths of teenagers have been reported in the Mežciems hospital. It has been fenced repeatedly. By now metal fences with razors and warning signs are installed to detain uninvited entrants. Ground floor openings have been filled with masonry. Cameras watch the surrounding area. But the building attracts teenagers and urban explorers who continue to find new ways to cross the enclosures. Strategy of keeping people out does not always work.

Legal grey zones

I

Construction Law Art.3.2.:
 3.2. environment degrading structure - a structure that meets one of the following criteria:
 3.2.1. damaged by natural disaster or accident (including fire, flood, etc.), to be restored to its previously intended function, but has not been restored within one year;
 3.2.2. the action or inaction of the owner, possessor or user has caused the structure to lose its original visual appearance and has a negative impact on the urban landscape;
 3.2.3. it has been abandoned for more than one year (building permit has not been renewed), has not been conserved and is accessible to unauthorised persons.

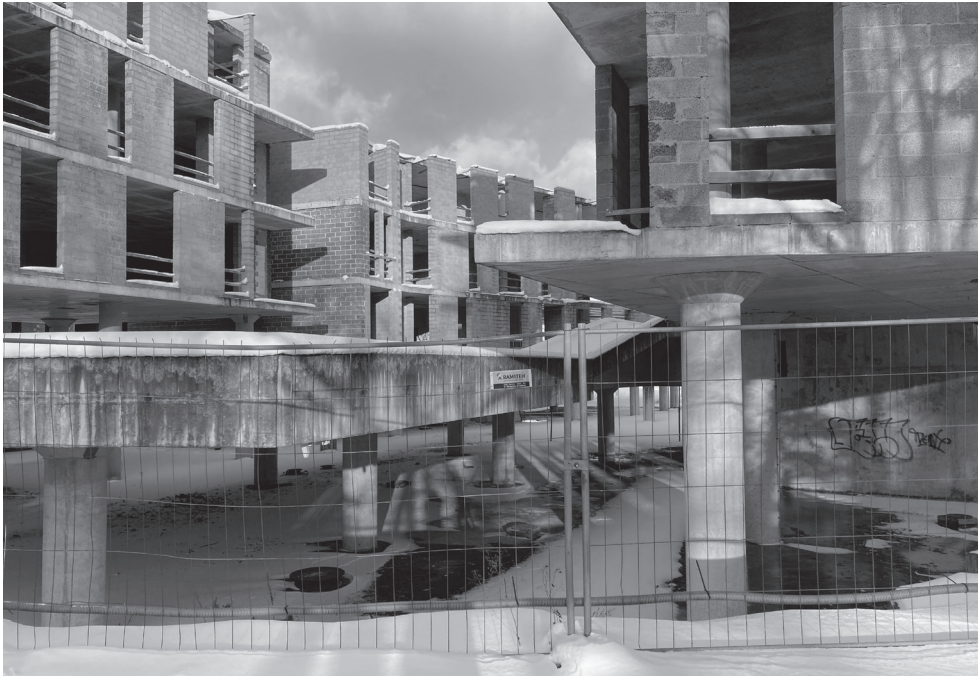


FIG 6.1.

Unfinished apartment complex development project in Brēmenes Street 1a. Fence delimits the territory and window openings are partly secured with wood installations. December 2021. Photo by author.

A construction site next to a lake in Ķīpsala district of Riga partially demonstrates a potential in a securitization method (FIG 6.1.). The territory is fenced according to the legislation. But the openings in the façade have also been secured with simple interventions. The wood planks remotely resemble a far more intentional intervention in Italy.

In 2018 the Brussels-based design practice Rotor was invited by Manifesta12 contemporary art and culture biennale to reflect on a controversial area north of Palermo (FIG 6.2.). For forty years an incomplete housing development colonizes Pizzo Sella, the central hill of Monte Gallo. The intervention picks up routes of hikers, herders, pilgrims, goats, and boars to stitch back Pizzo Sella. One of the houses is secured and transformed into a belvedere. The observatory serves breathtaking views and is a place to meet, rest and find a shelter. (Rotor, 2018)

This intervention creates a space that can be narrated as a *free space*. The term is used as interpreted in the thesis “30 years of pause” by Ulla Alla for Estonian Art Academy. Alla analysis two unfinished buildings in Tallinn. Visits of the sites and a general resistance to new construction projects initiate her demand to free abandoned spaces from designated user activities, assigned top-down rules and entrenched rhythms. While *de jure* abandoned and forgotten property always has an owner, the places are *de facto* ownerless. Free space can be completely public and the fences guarding them should be taken down. Our residual spaces, unfunctional and unnecessary spaces, antisocial landscapes are a freedom. (Alla, 2020)



FIG 6.2.
*Da quassù è tutta un'altra cosa /
 From up here, it's a whole other
 story.* Intervention by Rotor for
 Manifesta12, 2018 in Palermo,
 Italy. Photo by Rotor.

Alla's thesis is rebellious in its character to intentionally trigger a controversial reaction. Proposition of a free space that belongs to no one is often perceived as anarchic or rebellious. But a link can be drawn to squat movements from around Europe, from Netherlands to Switzerland. What starts off as a defiant gesture, initially illegal from the States perspective, transforms into new forms of laws and living practices.

Several legal frameworks exist to transform abandoned buildings which are still inhabitable but *de facto* ownerless. In Lausanne, Switzerland the association ALJF was formed in 1988 to join the fight for the right of housing. Today, it still provides its members with affordable housing through loan-to-use contracts. The association negotiates the occupancy of vacant buildings (often public) for a fixed period, ranging from six months to several years. (Tiphaine, 2020)

Back in Latvia the association Free Riga opens abandoned buildings to organizations, businesses, people working in culture or simply activists to get involved in the empty house revitalization movement. Buildings are temporary given both public and private owners to the association to gradually integrate them back in the life of the city. (Kolāte, 2019)

These two associations work on an inventory method that searches which buildings in the city are abandoned and vacant. But the state of vacancy of a completed building is equivocal. The criteria to decide if a building is available depends on its safety, duration of abandonment, financial data and of course the rules of the country and local municipality.

Meanwhile unfinished buildings have not yet been inhabited. In an incomplete state they are theoretically ownerless as soon as the works are frozen. As places of challengeable ownership, they have a potential for new uses and thus law adaptations even in their incomplete state. Even if they are rarely directly inhabitable.

The educational initiative LABORATORIOROSAR launched a collaboration between local institutions and students in Rosarno, a village in Calabria region of Italy, demonstrates it. Project aimed to ameliorate poor living conditions of migrants who come to work there in the agriculture industry. The village of Rosarno is characterized by the presence of many unfinished buildings and a high number of uninhabited residential properties to the extent of about one third of the total. Several initiatives were proposed in a workshop. One of them, Returnable cities, builds upon the two conditions. This is a project of intermediation protocols and an association which works onsite to lay the foundations for implementing transformation projects, based on the philosophy of reintroducing the empty properties owned by Rosarno citizens into the life cycle and meet the migrants' needs. The architecture project encompasses social and immigration policy contents that motivate it. (Licata, 2014)

In both examples the occupation of abandoned places is possible because it is realized under the pretext of temporality. Such possibilities could hardly be imagined if a long-lasting occupancy would be demanded. But civil activity which engages with their built environment can trigger reactions that adapt legislation. The given examples propose that unfinished buildings are situated in a grey zone of legislation. For the case of Mežciems by it applies in a large scale, be it through possibilities of Private-Public Partnership deals or other strategies. But this state empowers evaluations of given legislation to permit new possibilities and open interpretations. Law system remains unfinished itself.

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Iconography

- 6.1. *From up here, it's a whole other story*, 2018. Source: Rotor
- 6.2. Photo by author. December 2021.

RUBBLE | after demolition

un . finished

2.7

Opens up to new value standards
through deconstruction.



Case study description

Location: Barona 88A, Riga

Initial typology: Administrative center

Date of photos: August 2015 and December 2021.

Photos by Ieva Čika (©LETA) on p.98-99 and by author on p.100-103.











“Everyone who drove the tram to Ezerkrasti could watch the demolition of the building this autumn.”

Anatolijs Suškovs for Kurzemes Vārds, 9th December 2014

On 8 August 2015 a frozen construction site on Barona 88A in Riga was torn down. The project made part of Soviet relics and was abandoned in 1990's. After the works stopped the construction site didn't receive proper preservation procedure which led to deterioration of materials. The building was identified to be in poor structural state and thus destined for removal.

Most information available online about the object refers to its deconstruction. Even the city mayor delighted the event with his presence. The dismantling of an encumbrance has been more acknowledged than its short existence. Demolition is not only a common treatment for unfinished buildings but any urban objects that disfigure an image of order and control. Almost any removed building could have been taken as a study case. What differs the unfinished buildings from other ruins and this example in particular?

What led the choice of this example is its urban context. The void left by demolition finds its place in perimetral urban fabric. A five-floor apartment building on one side and two floor brick buildings on the other two sides mark it as an in-between space. In winter the empty plot is covered in snow or mud, in summer with low cut grass. A void that permits new possibilities has been a more appropriate condition than a decaying structure full of problematics. It had lost its freshness and future possibilities.

Demolition of unfinished buildings find their particularity in the fact that they never reached a functional state and became obsolescent as soon as the project was abandoned. To simplify, obsolescence as a phenomenon relates to the worth of a commodity. When it no longer serves profit, it is replaced. Besides value is found in the process of replacement. (Abramson, 2016) When an unfinished building cannot give value through use, its removal opens new doors. In “Industrial Ruins: Spaces, Aesthetics, and Materiality” Tim Edensor describes the obsolescence of abandoned objects in ruined factories:

Barona Street 88A

Ruins in reverse

“Abandoned objects in ruined factories [...] evoke such rapid obsolescence although many of these artefacts, being unfinished, never attained the status of commodity and were never admitted to the circulation of things between factory, shop, home and disposal. In this sense, they can be conceived as victims of the devouring quest for the production of new commodities, entities whose becoming was curtailed through the sudden obsolescence of the things they were going to become.” (2005)

Unfinished buildings can be interpreted as the artefacts of these factories. They elicit sudden obsolescence before they reached what they were to become. In opposition to the Romantic ruins which usually fall into ruin in the process of *“shifts in favor of nature”* (Simmel, 1965), they have almost the opposite trajectory. Whole buildings are recognized as waste before they ever became appreciated. They have much in common with what Robert Smithson refers to as *ruins in reverse* in his essay and photographic series *“A Tour of the Monuments of Passaic New Jersey”*. These are buildings that *“don’t fall into ruin after they are built but rather rise into ruin before they are built”*.

The ruin in Riga finds its place opposite of other empty plots touched by demolition. One of them is the former location of a hockey arena *“Sporta Pils”*. The arena was taken down to be replaced by an apartment district. Whenever I asked family or friends if they remember anything about the unfinished buildings that was taken down, they only found reference to the location by pinpointing the former arena where the Latvian National Hockey team used to exercise. Urban memory is constituted by individuals’ experiences within the place itself and through its history and social environment. Buildings with history of use win over unfinished buildings through a legacy of personal encounters.

When the collective *Alterazioni Video* asked people walking the streets of Italian cities and villages if there are any unfinished buildings around, most answered that they don’t know any. These buildings hide behind fences, trees and can easily be overlooked. One does not miss what one does not know.

The Italian artist Loredana Longo¹ rereads sudden obsolescence and urban memory in her work *Demolition #1*. In 2011 September 4 artist documents the demolition of an unfinished building skeleton in Modica, Italy built by the *“Istituto Autonomo Case Popolari”* during a construction boom in the 70s. But the work starts long before the demolition itself.

When describing the artists’ work Michele M. Cammarata asks:

“Is it possible to draw what others write? Or sing what other people took a picture of? And even see in the same picture, drawing or story something that others cannot see? The whole phenomenological world passes through the eyes of those observing it, and interpreting it their way. What is that? Is it a landscape?... and that old skeleton - maybe dating back to the 70s - what is it? ... can you see it?”

Urban memory

Demolition #1

¹ Loredana Longo (1967) is an Italian artist. She works in the fields of installations, video, photography and design. She held a number of group exhibitions and solo shows in Italy and abroad. She lives and works between the city of Catania and the Filandia, Pieve a Presciano, Arezzo (loredanalongo.com).



FIG 7.1
DEMOLITION#1 squatter, 2011
stills from a 3 min and 30 sec
long video.

Indeed, it is true that not all people can see and give value to things in the same way, and that our eyes, our gaze are used to them and we cannot see them any longer. Through her work the artist seeks ways of reexamining existing value systems. Ordinary things are extraordinary for her. She rejects prejudice to find meaning and value in unexpected places.

Through her work the artist seeks new beauty standards which are more contaminated with the increasingly common images of violence, destruction, and cultural abandonment of the contemporary world. Her projects refer to the *aesthetic of destruction*, a state which opens up to new standards of beauty.

The work *Demolition #1* offers a change of perspectives. Images FIG 7.1. illustrate a sequence of frames that depict the demolition. But recording of the collapse is only a part of the project. Action and operations over time intertwine thought and matter in a transformation process. Project can be read as three steps: “Vision”, “Action”, “Recording”.

First step acknowledges the value of a building that has never been inhabited or completed. By referring to the building as a physical subject, judgments of value, such as nice/ugly or illegal/legal, are rejected. Because the building has been a part of the landscape for three decades, it can also be referred to as “visual heritage”.

Second step to change how the building is perceived is through action. Artist temporarily squats the empty structure. She inhabits the space with objects, colors and affections means to make people “see” it. The act of squatting finds presence on the edge of danger and precariousness

Third step is to record the demolition. But for Loredana this is not a state of an end. Instead, it creates a state of change. Materials are available for something else. The deconstruction debris are made into bricks to tell the story of the unfinished building and its short occupation. Artist uses the bricks later in other installations. (Cammarata, 154)

We live in a stratified world where acceptance of what is given becomes a particular way of understanding the passage through places when they offer us unchanging forms for years. Both the case in Riga and in Italy stood in the urban environment as frozen statues testifying wasted opportunities and resources. Opposed to the habitual vision certain moments can take place that can radically change positions of our internal and external landscapes. An organized and thought-out demolition represents an immediate and sudden solution to a construction that goes from the meaning of the physical and material structure of the things that surround our usual movement to make a change of perspective. The *unfinished* is thus defined to open up for new value standards through deconstruction.

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Iconography

- p.98-99 Ieva Čika, *Grausts Krišjāņa Barona ielā 88A*, 2015. Source: LETA
- 7.1. Loredana Longo, *Demolition #1*, 2011, Source: <https://loredanalongo.com/works-2011-demolition>.

3

Afterword without a conclusion

The more I watch contemporary ruins, the more I get used to them. I look at them from distance. In photos they are enchanting, and they don't disturb me. The more I think of the best future for them the more I realize I don't know any. It is more interesting to observe society through them.

To illustrate it I will use the way Lucius Burckhardt describes design process in "Design is Invisible" (1980). Architectural objects? Of course, we can see them. A designer can give them any given form and consider how they function. In external realm the objects can be divided as towers, apartment buildings, doors, walls, windows, bus stops, benches or garbage bins. Such classification is not without consequences: it leads namely to that concept of design which isolates the object.

But there are also other ways how to divide world. He does not isolate a house, a street or a newsstand in order to perfect its design and construction; instead, he distinguishes an integral composite such as the street corner from other urban composites. The newsstand thrives on the fact that my bus has not yet arrived, and so I buy a newspaper; and the bus happens to stop here because this is an intersection where passengers can change to other lines. "Street corner" simply tags a phenomenon that encompasses, above and beyond the visible dimension, elements of an organizational system comprised of bus routes, timetables, magazine sales, traffic light sequences and so on.

To think of an unfinished building as a separate object is to isolate it as an autonomous design task, an object to be completed, to make it better, to make it function, to make the financial investment worth it. But that is only a superficial manner of understanding the problem. The unfinished stands in relation with integral and external composites, material and invisible. It is a phenomenon defined by past and present relations between events, thoughts, habits. The neighbors or passersby interact with it and say "What a shame, when will they fix this up?", politicians announce to demolish the building right before an election they want to win, a bird flies by and finally finds a refuge, an ecologist sees opportunity of gardening the wilderness cultivated by the ruin.

These links expose organizational-institutional systems that relate not only to the ruins present but also to the past.

The motivation to write this thesis came from an interest on how we estimate worth of things; what stands between a value of new object and the worth that something gains with age. In between we find objects that no more are new, but which are not yet filled with history that appropriates them. I set the unfinished buildings also in this category because they have never been worn, but their life clock has not yet been lanced. They remain in the state of transition. In this in-between state we observe new possibilities of what has not yet been made.

Unfinished buildings signify both symptoms of social history and both a possibility to learn from mistakes. Or to quote *Matrix Resurrections* (2021): “*Did you know hope and despair are nearly identical in code?*” The contemporary ruins generate despair about how one arrived here, but it also cultivates hope that in the future we will know better.

To observe the unfinished buildings has meant to mentally detach from new beginnings that emerge from empty concepts. These buildings symbolize limits of necessities. They encourage the urge to build upon historical models and embrace traces. Their mere existence seems to be an inevitable step in a learning process. Gap between what is finished and what is unfinished is self-defined and the *complete* is ever changing and in close relation to the notions of transformation, culture and living comfort.

The unfinished structures are a great inspiration for literature, painting, poetry and architectural projects because they trigger ambiguous emotions where personal reflections interlay with how we are positioned in a group or a society. The creative works then provide a window on a different version of the contemporary ruins that enable to translate the varied information embedded in them.

By now images of abandoned spaces, ruins and demolition works have invaded the popular level of perception. Conditions have cultivated the beginning of what seems to be a new epoch of architectural practice.

The stigma that finds solutions to social problematics through new construction projects finds its set. By now general rejection of new construction projects circulates the academic environment. This rejection finds refuge in occupying and transforming the built environment that we really do have plenty. But to refer again to writings of Jacobo García-Germán (2017), architectural paradigms lead to a fundamentalism that divides the practice and discrimination between conflicting ideologies.

The study of the *unfinished* in Latvia has led me to paradoxical questions that already stir the contemporary world. The unfinished buildings express limits to physical needs. But they also express the human wish to build new, to prove oneself, to express, to celebrate their capabilities. Neither one, nor the other is close to disappearing from the table.

What are the ways to make new beginnings but still build upon historic traces that take in consideration the value of experience and time in architecture?


Should new construction be denied as a practice in general?

Are there ways to construct with minimal resources but with new perspectives?

Can we dream that instead of asking a rhetorical: “What should we do?”, we think seven times and ask: “How can we do less?”

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