

DOI <http://dx.doi.org/10.3846/cpc.2014.07>

## CAUGHT IN THE WAITING GAME: COMMUNITY, CREATIVITY AND EVERYDAY LIFE IN ŠNIPIŠKĖS

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*Received 10 September 2013; accepted 16 January 2014*

By applying the metaphor of the communal apartment to the district of Šnipiškės, I seek to analyze the complex forms of neighboring and community that developed, and how they have changed in the Post-Soviet context. Ambiguous city plans have left many residents feeling overlooked and suspended in a prolonged situation of uncertainty and anticipation. However, far from remaining passive, residents who feel forsaken by the state, discouraged by the financial crisis, or surrounded by negligent neighbors nevertheless assert their agency by acting creatively as the upkeepers of order and as “authors” of the everyday (Certeau 1998: 138) leading to new revaluations of place that privilege autonomy and ways of “making-do”.

**Keywords:** *kommunalka*, housing, urbanization, space, post-Soviet, *bricolage*.

### Introduction

“Let’s Begin!” shouts hard-hat-clad Vilnius mayor Arturas Zuokas into a walky-talky as three obedient material handlers rear their jaws and start to gnaw at the colossal concrete “skeleton” of the derelict relic of the Soviet period – the half-finished hotel “Sputnik”. This looming phantom that had haunted the Vilnius landscape for over twenty years was bowing out to make room for a glass-and-steel spectre of the neoliberal spirit – an A-class business center funded by a Norwegian firm. The ceremonial

demolition was accented with the Mayor’s laconic yet motivational speech. He re-evoked the myth of a period in the recent past (2002–2008) and promised to bring back that time “when the right bank of the Neris river was the largest construction site in the Baltic States and in this region.” This demolition was turned into a symbol marking the return of construction: it marked a “historical moment”, “again the new start”, and this time, Zuokas claimed, they were going to “finish building the city”.

The desire to project an attractive image of a modern, western, and global city has led

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governments in many post-Soviet Eastern European capitals to undergo dramatic urban redevelopment projects. These sometimes radical transformations have heightened social inequality and occasioned complex spatial contradictions marked by stark contrasts in the built environment. The district of Šnipiškės in Vilnius, stands as a striking example of this process. It is a distinct enclave situated in the center of Vilnius which has witnessed waves of depopulation and repopulation as well as processes of Soviet and post-Soviet modernization. At present, located in the newest modern center of Vilnius on the right bank of the Neris River, Šnipiškės is subject to new urban planning imaginaries that see part of it as a modern and prestigious area open for business and expensive new housing complexes. This vision has partially materialized over the last decade. A cluster of skyscrapers including the new seat of the city government (2002) and the “Europa” complex composed of a business center tower, a shopping mall, a luxury apartment tower, and a public square were erected along the new six-lane “Constitution Prospect” as cultural symbols in the urban landscape that benchmark the country’s successful “transition” to a market economy and accession to the European Union in 2004. Although the vision for a modern city center dates back to the 1960s when Soviet urban plans reserved Šnipiškės as the site for an “architectural hill”, the plans were never brought to completion, leaving an area of unpaved streets and single-storied wooden houses that date back to the nineteenth and twentieth centuries situated just behind the city’s tallest skyscrapers. To this day the understood inevitability of the neighborhood’s eventual transformation continues to be used by municipal authorities as justification for not providing basic infrastructure to the area. At the same time, the historicity of the wooden district has become a subject for conservationists’ plans.

The district of Šnipiškės can thus be seen as contested space that involves multiple actors, namely those of the public sphere such as the

mayor and city planners, heritage preservationists, as well as private enterprises invested in the district. On the other hand, there are the residents who inhabit the wooden homes of the neighborhood that is locally referred to as “Shanghai”<sup>1</sup>. In this article I focus on their experiences and the spaces of negotiation that have emerged amongst themselves and in relation to public actors. I will provide a diachronic analysis of the way people have lived in Šnipiškės in order to show how the sentiments of waiting and uncertainty have remained constant despite broader structural changes or personal reevaluations of place. I argue that post-Soviet rearticulations of space, namely, its modernization, Europeanization, and heritagization are experienced as profound uncertainty, loss, and ambivalence by many residents in Šnipiškės. New urban imaginaries launched by the state fostered residents to reshape their lives through reconsiderations of private and public space, compete amongst themselves over the restructuring, appropriation and materiality of space, and negotiate over definitions of citizenship and community. My insights are based on ethnographic research conducted during three months of fieldwork while living in this area of Šnipiškės in the Summer of 2011. My methods include participant observation and in-depth interviews conducted with 30 residents between the ages of 20 and 85.

The history of the wooden part of Šnipiškės tells the story of a place that isn’t supposed to exist. It was once a village-like suburb that became incorporated into the urban fabric as the city expanded. Most of the wooden houses

<sup>1</sup> *Shanghai* is an unofficial nickname for this neighborhood used by both Šnipiškės “locals” and other residents of Vilnius. I have argued elsewhere that it has emerged as an articulation of difference felt by this district in relation to the rest of the modernizing city. Indexed by dirt, disorder, and other negative associations, this nickname carries orientaling connotations that draw a correlate to the real Shanghai in China that is imagined as a shanty-town. The territory of Shanghai in Vilnius is roughly situated in the area between Lvovo, Linkmenu, Žalgirio, and Kalvariju streets.

were built on small plots of land between 1890 and 1930 which were home to a large Polish and Jewish population. The district witnessed a drastic depopulation during and after World War II.<sup>2</sup> During the Soviet period the vacant wooden houses of Šnipiškės were used by the State as a reserve of temporary dwellings to alleviate the housing shortages until newer apartment complexes were built. The living spaces within the buildings were redistributed to house a large rural population that was brought from villages in Lithuania or other parts of the Soviet Union, especially Russia, Belarus and Ukraine to provide a labor force for a rapidly industrializing city. Such a rearrangement of dwelling space in Šnipiškės is similar to that of communal apartments in St. Petersburg, which have been researched and theorized as a unique social experiment of Soviet society that persists to the present day (see: Boym 1994; Gerasimova 2002; Humphrey 2005; Semenova 2004; Utekhin 2003).

In the post-Soviet era, the communal apartments have come to be interpreted as invisible or “hidden” spaces backstage of the city’s spectacular facades (Azarova 2008). Perceived by some as an anachronistic embarrassment, the *kommunalka* represents a different everyday reality that contradicts the desired and projected image of a modernizing Russian city. Similarly, the district of Šnipiškės is perceived by many Vilnesians as “out of place” – as a slum (*lūšnynas*) that does not belong in the center of the Lithuanian capital. However, the insider view and valuation of residents of both *kommunalkas* and Šnipiškės demonstrate more nuanced, ambivalent and multivocal relationships to these places. The

metaphor of the *kommunalka* is especially apt for discussing the “lived space” (Lefebvre 1991: 33) of this neighborhood because it invokes the complex and contradictory texture of social relations and experiences that include both conviviality and conflict, communality and fragmentation, emplacement and escape. In the following section I will trace these parallels in greater depth.

### Sharing space in the *Kommunalka* and in Šnipiškės: a particular texture of social life

The Communal Apartment, commonly referred to as a *Kommunalka*, is a phenomenon associated with the Soviet Union. The Bolsheviks confiscated and redistributed living space in urban centers as a response to the housing shortage that resulted from the increased migration to Moscow and St. Petersburg between 1917–1930<sup>3</sup>. I. Utekhin (2001) has conducted extensive research documenting the everyday life and social relations of communal apartments that persist in present-day St. Petersburg, Russia, and other post-Soviet cities. Through an examination of peoples’ morals and motives underlying the most mundane domestic activities, I. Utekhin, among others (Boym 1994; Humphrey 2005) shows how the social space of the *kommunalka* could be read as a microcosm of Soviet society where the ideals of Communism in practice paradoxically fostered distrust, envy, and a heightened sensitiveness

<sup>2</sup> The majority of the residents of Šnipiškės suburb before the war were Polish, and this district was also home to a particularly large Jewish community (Agranovskij, Guzenberg 2011: 524). The extermination of almost all of Vilnius’ Jewish population under German occupation, coupled with the flight or repatriation of Polish residents to Poland in the years after the Soviet army gained control of Vilnius in 1939 resulted in a major depopulation of this neighborhood.

<sup>3</sup> The communal apartment, although partially a practical solution to an intense housing shortage, was also supposed to function as an ideological tool of the Soviet regime to level-out class differences and increase social control. The rejection of bourgeois, individualistic ideals under these conditions was supposed to bring about a sense of camaraderie between people, “leading to the formation of a true collectivist personality” (Utekhin 2003). However, the tactics that the residents developed for maintaining order and justice and maximizing privacy between themselves sometimes contradicted the broader communist rhetoric and ideals.

which required developing tactics to maintain boundaries to one's own space and self.

Certain key associations can be pulled from communal apartment living that would help to formulate a metaphor for describing Šnipiškės. The situation of imposed communality and emplacement in dense living conditions, and the constant need for repairs, sharing basic facilities and cluttered common spaces with neighbors of different backgrounds, ethnicities, ages, professions and family sizes is a situation reminiscent of communal apartments. Furthermore, practices of eavesdropping, thefts, and slander between neighbors, as well as the construction of a specific "local memory" composed of narratives about former inhabitants and scandalous incidents amongst them are aspects that color the experience of everyday life both in a *kommunalka* and in Šnipiškės.

Spatially, the scale and layout of the situation in Šnipiškės is a somewhat "expanded" version of a *kommunalka*. Not only were the actual houses subdivided amongst a number of families, but also sheds, stables and barns were turned into living quarters. If the kitchen in the St. Petersburg communal apartment was the site of working out disputes, or casually chatting, then in Šnipiškės the common space of the yard (*kiemas*) becomes such an area. Behind a multi-family house, or tucked between clustered wooden buildings, the yard created a "transparent" social space that often guaranteed frequent interaction with neighbors whom one couldn't help but know things about, quarrel with, befriend, help out, or suspect. This was the space for communing over coffee, punishing one's neighbors by ignoring them, or resolving conflicts, since, as one woman claimed, "well, what can you do? you still have to live with them". In the *kommunalka* people developed tactics to maintain their dignity and self in order to coexist in such close-quarters. So too in the yards of Šnipiškės people tended only their own garden plots, kept their sheds locked, and had a separate outhouse for each family. If there was no space in the yard, public outhouses were built on the street to service the

cluster of surrounding houses<sup>4</sup>. Other domestic practices extended into outdoor public areas as well, since inhabitants of several houses used to wash laundry at water pumps located on the street, which blurred the lines between public and private space.

I. Utekhin discusses the "quasi-family" feel fostered by relations amongst people in a communal apartment where neighbors were "pry to things about each other that otherwise would be known only by close relatives". Likewise in Šnipiškės, some residents spoke of the feeling that the neighbors within "the fortress" of the yard, or in some cases the street felt like a "big family". Marta, aged 50 who grew up in a nine-family house recalls the vivid social atmosphere of her childhood as a golden age: "what was especially unique, in my understanding about this district was some sort of uncommon friendship... neighborliness. Absolute warmth! From everyone." Similarly to the communal apartment, certain forms of "mutual support" between neighbors such as taking care of each other's children (which could involve scolding not your own on the street), or looking after the sick and elderly next door had once been common in the social space of Šnipiškės, and were still practiced amongst some of the long-time neighbors who got along. Most informants claimed that there was no "community" in Šnipiškės having in mind an institution that would organize events or lobby for the district's interests. Rather, as one woman put it, the community is "sort of local – right here"<sup>5</sup> meaning it is composed of the people one knows, and is not based on a district-wide sense of solidarity. Instead, the cohesive or explosive social group involves the neighbors within the house or

<sup>4</sup> When toilets are situated in the public space of the street, people devised tactics for keeping privacy by using "little buckets" in their rooms indoors or in their personal sheds.

<sup>5</sup> "Nu tos bendruomenės tokios kaip ir... nėra. Ta bendruomenė va tokia vietinė va čia. Kiek žmonių pažiūsti ten toj gatvėje, kas nu nemažai čia ta prasme, nu einam sveikinamės. Bet kad butu kažkokie renginiai, kad kažkur vat ten... ne, to nėra."

cluster of houses who share the yard (*kiemas*). Those informants who grew up here share a common knowledge about most of the neighbors on their street, recognize “familiar faces”, exchange greetings, and may know each other by nicknames that bond neighbors through an informal familiarity.

Associations of life in a *kommunalka* evoke a noisy space of intense communication, marked by a certain crowdedness, constant commotion, and a flux of frequently changing tenants who mingle with older, long-time residents<sup>6</sup>. Soviet Šnipiškės could be thought of as a neighborhood in transition inhabited by transients. Because this district was used as a reserve of temporary housing during the Soviet period, the number of people in any given house fluctuated over time as families were given apartments elsewhere or neighbors passed away. The remaining neighbors could expand their living quarters by appropriating these vacant rooms as their families grew larger. If this was still not enough, then people might improvise and build their own “appendixes” to the house. Adolescents might seek a space away from the adult gaze by appropriating empty firewood sheds or garages as a hang-out places or *stabas*.

### Post-Soviet rearticulations of space: the paradox of privatization

The fall of the Soviet Union and the advent of private property in 1991 brought about a new way of conceptualizing space and personhood for the residents of Šnipiškės. It also required new strategies for implementing change in this neighborhood. “If you haven’t privatized, you’re nobody”, reasoned one woman (70). By paying in vouchers one could claim ownership of one’s apartment. However, for various reasons, not everyone took advantage of this right, which

would have allowed them to not only privatize their portion of a rather precarious building, but also to become owners of a share of the common land in the yard, which became prime central real estate in the new market economy. The residents of Šnipiškės quickly learned to reconsider their living spaces according to the values of the market – that there is no value in the wooden house itself, but rather only in the land that is found beneath it: “they just buy the land here, you can take the house with you when you go”. As the vision for a new city center began to take shape, investors became interested in purchasing large plots of land, which meant they needed to negotiate with all of the owners of a house or several houses.

Privatization is seen by many in Snipiskes as marking a key moment that, perhaps did not initiate, but furthered fragmentation, inequality and tensions amongst neighbors. Some people tried to explain this shift by reasoning that “maybe people were simpler back then”. For example, Angela (30) remembers how neighbors shared the common space of the yard to cook *šašlykai* whereas today, they avoid contact:

*Before in the yard there was this (emphatically) table spread! Fried bread! Here’s some tea! We were really much more like a community. But now there’s none of that. Or it’s minimal. Sure there’s some saslykai, but those neighbors come out and cook, then we sneak out and cook ours on the same grate, but no longer together. And that really shows. Especially since independence, when all of this privatization started.*<sup>7</sup>

According to Angela, the reorganization of public space into private space resulted in a disintegration of community relations and people’s moral worlds. This staggered not only the use

<sup>6</sup> Many residents blamed the endurance of this district on the overcrowded conditions, since upon demolishing a house, the state had to provide an apartment for each of the families living there.

<sup>7</sup> „Kažkoks (emphatically) kieme ten koks staliukas, kepta duona, čia arbatėlė! Visi tokie čia tikrai, nu tikrai buvome kaip bendruomenė, labiau jautėsi. Kiek dabar tarkim, to visiškai nėra. Nu ten minimaliai ten būna tų šašlykų ten jau. Jie išsikepa, mes ten toj pačioj šašlykinėje išlendam, pasikepam ta prasme, bet jau nebe kartu. Ir tas nu labai jaučiasi. Va būtent nuo tos nepriklausomybės, kai jau ten prasidėjo visi šitie išsipirkimai.“

of common space but also social relations. The once social area of the yard of the *kommunalka*-like space was still common, but not shared.

Some people appropriated their space by renovating it, giving a “patchwork” quality to the facades of the houses as each owner transforms their portion of the building according to their own tastes and means. At the broader neighborhood level privatization is felt by the way people have made space impenetrable by building walls, fences, and keeping dogs. These individual decisions have fragmented the space of the district by restricting the web of labyrinthine footpaths that many people remember as once allowing for more fluid movement through the yards of *Shanghai*.

Privatization also changed the dynamics concerning future development of the district. It empowered some people in negotiations with the state by guaranteeing a degree of leverage to those who wanted to stay. As Irena (60) put it “we knew that we’re here, we have our own, and nobody can come and tell us to leave”. Privatization also meant that all the responsibility for house repairs depended on the owner’s initiative. Nevertheless, despite the agency that privatization supposedly guarantees, people still do not feel completely in control of their own homes.

During the economic boom, many people were faced with the challenge of making sense of the circulating new value economies which raised questions of whether they should sell the apartment, how much to ask for it, and how to coordinate the sale with the rest of the neighbors<sup>8</sup>. This meant that despite the agency and rhetoric of individualism granted by privatization, neighbors in the *kommunalka*-like situation remain extremely interdependent. This has led some to feel resignation or resentment towards their neighbors whose differing incomes and desires required them to adjust their own

hopes and expectations. Alma, a retired factory worker, who lives in a one-story wooden house shared with three other owners feels a certain resentment: “I’m at the end of my time, as they say. We’ve had our life here. I always wanted to move out, to live in a modern apartment.” Even though she had received a handsome offer, her lawyer neighbors at the other end of the house had already remodelled and modernized their part and were unwilling to sell at any price. The third neighbors had moved out and left their property boarded up and in disrepair. Alma’s perspectives for selling look grim indeed and brought her around to reevaluate her situation: “on the other hand, it’s good. I can step outside into the fresh air... I have these flowers that I really love. I grow cucumbers. Where could I have them in a new house? Five tulips and that’s it. Here it’s a pleasure for me.” This shows how there is power-play inscribed in the built environment, as those who are better off and comfortably settled impact the agency and hopes of their neighbors who may be less fortunate.

A common theme experienced throughout this neighborhood is the uncertainty caused by waiting<sup>9</sup>. Throughout the Soviet period inhabitants were suspended in a state of anticipation and limbo while waiting for the city’s plans to take shape, which discouraged actively “homing” themselves. As one retired construction worker, age 70, explains: “up until the 1990s there was talk of demolishing everything here. So nobody did anything. We had no say in the matter since this was all state property <...> So we waited five years, but nothing happened, then we bought it out.”<sup>10</sup> One woman even re-

<sup>9</sup> In the Soviet period people waited for their house to be demolished, they waited to receive a new apartment; many had to wait a while for the State to repair parts of the house. In the post-soviet decades people wait for an offer to sell, waiting for land prices to increase, waiting for neighbors to sell, waiting for skyscrapers to be built next door.

<sup>8</sup> Because large plots of land were needed for the large-scale modern buildings projected for the area, one also became dependent on the intentions of the other neighbors not only within one’s house, but also those next door.

<sup>10</sup> „Čia buvo kalbos iki 90-ų metų... viską griaut. Nu, tai nieks nieko ir mes nedarėm. Ruošėmės – tai nieko nedarykit. Mes penkis metus pralaukėm, žiūrim nei mus griauna nei ką. Į komitetą nuvažiuovom – sako jūsu orderių nēr, nežinom kur jie yra.“

called not buying furniture for a year after her wedding because they were always being told they were on the verge of demolition. Hence, waiting in a suspended situation of uncertainty fostered an ambivalent attitude toward the place. As some put it, “we have been living on a suitcase for the last forty years”, which indicates a state of constant expectation and preparation for a displacement that never happened. The readiness to leave at any moment, implies a fleeting relationship to place, with no reason to become “rooted” or to invest resources.

Between 2000–2007, market pressures led to a dynamic economic boom, which is remembered by residents as a time when speculation peaked and wooden houses were torched to make space for new constructions<sup>11</sup>. While the large-scale skyscrapers were under construction, people living in the wooden houses waited with bated breath for either a threat or an offer to sell. Thus even though the dynamics and power structures changed, the experience of waiting and uncertainty continued over from the Soviet period, albeit on different terms, which nevertheless impacted people’s plans or initiatives.

The notion of “horizon of expectation” as used by the historian Reinhart Koselleck (1985) refers to the way our interpretation of the past influences the way we envisage the future and thus impacts the goals that we set for ourselves in the present. While living in *Shanghai* in Šnipiškės, the horizon of expectation for many inhabitants is a very subtle matter that combines both the experience of anticipating demolition (which is still part of the horizon of expectation for many) as well as its perpetual deferral. Since “experiences release and direct prognoses” (Koselleck 1985: 262), when imagining the future of the district, many

residents forecast a similar pace of development, dismissing ambitious municipality plans, such as the construction of a tramway, as something that will take place “only a hundred years from now”. The uncertainty regarding the plans of the State has resulted in apathy and resignation for many of the elderly residents: “What can you even feel? Who knows what’s going to happen here? I won’t live to see anything better. The way it is now, that’s how it will be”<sup>12</sup> (Vilma, 70). Nevertheless, these feelings of disappointment and resignation are often coupled with efforts to make space liveable.

### “By our own efforts”: *Bricolage, tactics, and acts of everyday creativity*

The recent economic crisis of 2008 dashed people’s hopes of selling their property at peak prices. The tense atmosphere of anticipating change subsided as wooden houses stopped burning and companies bankrupted leaving large constructions half-finished. People again had to readjust to the new circumstances. This economic crisis coupled with rising energy prices has fostered new revaluations of place. While people once waited to be moved, some are now reconsidering that they are actually in a very good situation: they realize the convenience of being in the center of the city but also the privilege of having a backyard where they can grow their own fruits and vegetables. Some value their relationship with their neighbors and contrast it to the anonymity and “matchbox” existence in a high-rise apartment block that were once so desirable, but are now losing popular esteem. Sentiments of not wanting to move were often linked to economic factors that reveal the theme of control. For example, Vytas (50, engineer) has reconsidered heating with firewood as a privilege that allows him to independently regulate his own heating rather

<sup>11</sup> In fact, cases of arson that cleared space for new constructions were so frequent that the number of fires in the district in the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century exceeded the number of fires over the entire nineteenth century. Some residents joked in a jaded tone that these fires became “a traditional part of the Šnipiškės landscape.”

<sup>12</sup> „ką čia gali jaustis, kas čia žino kas čia bus? Aš jau tikrai nesulauksiu nieko geresnio, o jau kaip yra taip ir bus“ (Vilma, 70).

than having to dread the utility bill each month. Hence, the lack of modern comforts comes to be reinterpreted as an empowering alternative to the dominant discourse (and price tag) of “progress”.

Feeling bypassed by the moment of opportunity and overlooked by municipal authorities, residents have resorted to do-it-yourself repairs to their homes in order to make them “livable”. For some, the unpaved sandy streets have allowed for easy digging to hook up to a neighbor’s water supply. The effort put in to patch things up and upkeep a certain order and aesthetic become a point of pride and a way of asserting distinction against the negligence of one’s surrounding neighbors and the neglect of the state. As one woman who had covered her part of the house in plastic siding put it: “No one fixes anything here, no one does anything. See? How dreadful they are! But we fixed up a little here.”<sup>13</sup> Another woman (age 60) who had renovated her house felt that she breached a certain norm by doing so: You see, if someone’s building something, fixing up, then for sure one of the neighbors is writing complaints! <...> If you’re just sitting there all careless (*apsileidęs*), then everything is fine. But if you start to move, in the sense of fixing up something, even if it’s with your own money and efforts, well then that’s seen as very bad. “Endless conflicts” were also typical of life in communal apartments, and one tactic of resolving them was to turn to an outside authority (Utekhin 2003: 99). In Šnipiškės house renovations have become a sensitive issue in the neighborhood and disputes are most often over questions of property and what the neighbors are doing with it. Envy may be linked to the way “any manifestations of individualism or uncommon behavior were discouraged” in the communal apartment where there was a “general mistrust of individual achievement” (Boym 1994: 149).

Inhabitants engage in everyday creativity through acts of bricolage which include resourceful ways people engage in do-it-yourself repairs, landscape their gardens, piece together outdoor pavilions, or circumvent rules. Michel DeCerteau sees “ways of operating” as part of the procedures of everyday creativity (1984: xiv) and uses the term *bricolage* or the “artisan-like inventiveness” to refer to the “clandestine forms taken by the dispersed, tactical, and make-shift creativity of groups or individuals already caught in the nets of “discipline”(xiv). *Bricolage* is a way of “making do” with “whatever is at hand” given one’s circumstances or material surroundings. In Šnipiškės this might involve practices such as taking trips to the toilets on the third floor of the Europa shopping center rather than using the outhouse in the yard. Another woman jokingly talked about how people carried off parts of the burned houses for firewood, “they’re cleaning up the neighborhood in the process! Everything here is done by our own efforts”, implying a certain sense of autonomy where resourcefulness and making-do is valued and appreciated.

The urban imaginary that proposes to preserve the houses lining Giedraiciu street is circulating amongst the residents as one of the possible futures for Šnipiškės. In general people living here have not come to a consensus about the value of the buildings, however, they all agree that the place “needs fixing”. Discord surfaces when ideas of order tend to conflict. Some perceive the district as a “slum” where “everything must be demolished!”. Others see it as “a pearl” that must be preserved since “nowhere else in Europe does such a “village in the city” exist! ” There is also little consensus as to who is responsible for the fixing. Boris, 80, whose apartment happens to be in this zone intended for preservation, offers a compromise to the state, claiming he’ll do all the handy-work but that he should be provided with the materials. Others, like Romualdas who sees himself as a “patriot” of Šnipiškės, distrusts the state and prefers to fix up the place himself. While

<sup>13</sup> „Niekas čia nieko neapkala, niekas čia nieko nedaro. Va, matai kokie baisūs. A mes čia truputį apsitvarkėm.“

remodeling his home, he packed a large pothole in the street in front of his house with debris from the repairs. The way he spoke about his efforts made it clear that he felt he was taking better care of the neighborhood than the municipal authorities: “this is all my work <...> I don’t need the eldership. It’s better if they don’t interfere, if they don’t get in my way. They’ll just do a poor job and ruin it.”

Gerald Creed warns against an uncritical use of the term “community” and draws attention to its “complex constitution as a group of people, a quality of relationship, and a place/location” (Creed 2006: 2). He argues against the idea that processes of fragmentation and individualization in Eastern Europe mark disintegrating social relations and a loss of community. Instead, G. Creed believes that the conflicts characteristic of atomization “testify to the extensive relations and expectations that produce recurrent disappointment and, more important, are actually a component of community relations” (Creed 2011: 137). One could consider the *kommunalka* as a rather unconventional type of “community”. A community that is bounded in a certain space or locality and composed of a group of people of very different lifestyles amongst whom the quality of relationships are polysemous and ambivalent, rife with comradery or conflict, friendship, tolerance, or friction. Such a situation requires what R. Sennett calls “complex forms of cooperation”, by which he means working with people who are different, and whom we may not like.

## Conclusions

Drawing upon the metaphor of a post-Soviet *kommunalka* allows us to glean insight into the emergence of the rather particularly heterogeneous socio-spatial organization, shifting neighboring relations, and negotiations over public and private space in Šnipiškės. Considering the space of Šnipiškės

as a post-Soviet *kommunalka* reveals interpersonal relations between neighbors and how most people in Šnipiškės have experienced the post-Soviet transformation as a loss of community, security and order, which is felt in the rearticulations of both the layout and the use of space that is becoming less porous, and more individualized.

In the case of Šnipiškės, it would be a morbid simplification to assume that a community of residents of the wooden houses have actively remained “rooted” because of their affinity for the place and their refusal to budge in the face of urbanizing processes encroaching upon them. My results show the situation is much more nuanced and multivocal. While there are some residents who have developed a strong place-attachment to the “atmosphere” and daily life in the district, even declaring themselves to be “patriots”, there are others who despise living there and have been longing to leave for decades. Most residents feel a profound ambivalence as they’ve been readjusting their values and expectations as they reassess and repair their living situations in light of the shifting political, economic and social context.

With regard to urban plans, many residents of Šnipiškės feel suspended, and excluded in a void between action and planning, that is, in a zone of uncertainty and unknowing. Regardless of one’s attitudes about the district and regardless of privatization and the sense of empowerment it brought, many residents continue to perceive the fate of this neighborhood as inextricably linked to the will of state power. At the same time, in a context of rapid social change there is a lack of consensus at the “grass-roots” level amongst the values, hopes, incomes and desires of people who have been readjusting their selves differently to cope with intense transformations. The gap between planning and action on the part of the State has brought many residents to feel overlooked but also to act creatively and independently – to make do and and take a certain moral pride in their agency.

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## BELAUKIANT LIKIMO: BENDRUOMENIŠKUMAS, KŪRYBIŠKUMAS IR KASDIENYBĖ ŠNIPIŠKĖSE

Vaiva Aglinskas

Remiantis etnografinių tyrimų medžiaga, teigiama, kad po Antrojo pasaulinio karo Šnipiškių rajono apgyvendinimas darė įtaką įvairaus lygmens bendruomenių ir žmonių kaimyninių santykių raidai. *Komunalkės* sąvoka suteikė galimybę per bendruomeninių erdvių kaitą atskleisti žmonių perėjimo iš sovietinės į posovietinę sistemą patirtį. Parodoma, kaip prasidėjusi privatizacija ir dalies žmonių tapimas savo būstų šeimininkais sudarė sąlygas atsirasti naujiems individualizuotiems žmonių santykiams. Diachroninė medžiagos analizė atskleidžia žmonių gyvenimo Šnipiškėse kasdienę patirtį. Todėl teigiama, kad, nepaisant sisteminių pokyčių visuomenėje ir žmonių norų, Šnipiškių gyventojai dėl valdžios sprendimų neapibrėžtumo išgyveno nuolatinio laukimo ir netikrumo būseną.

**Reikšminiai žodžiai:** *komunalkė*, būstas, urbanizacija, erdvė, posovietinis miestas, *bricolage*.