

EVOLUTION OF PUBLIC HOSPITAL ARCHITECTURE DURING THE INTERWAR LITHUANIA

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ABSTRACT

When Lithuania became an independent state, most hospitals were operating in unsuitable buildings. Therefore, many new modern buildings for hospitals had to be built in various cities. However, the changes in hospital architecture during the interwar period still remain unexplored. Therefore, by analysing the key examples, the current article discusses the evolution of hospital buildings during the interwar Lithuania.

Keywords: modern architecture, hospitals, Lithuanian architecture, modernism, hospital architecture.

INTRODUCTION

Even though during the interwar period quite a few new hospital buildings were built in Lithuania, the evolution of architecture revealed by these buildings still remains scarcely studied. Until now, only a few Lithuanian researchers have delved into this subject in broader context (Šimulytė 2007, 2–3), while other studies are limited to the analysis of individual hospital buildings (Kilinskaitė, 2013).

Despite that, a lot of historical sources related to the design of new hospital buildings can be found in the Lithuanian Central State Archives and Vilnius Regional State Archives. These archives store many original design projects of the interwar hospital buildings, documents related to their design, construction. Furthermore, information related to the design

and construction of hospitals, as in the case of other buildings, was widely published in the periodicals of that time. In addition, there are some foreign studies related to the general evolution of hospitals in the Western countries (Willis et al. 2019).

The novelty of this article lies in the aim for the first time in the historical context of interwar Lithuanian architecture to analyse several cases representing the most original and typical hospital buildings that would help to understand the evolution of such buildings of that time. Therefore, from a chronological point of view, using analytical and comparative methods based on unpublished archival material (original hospital design projects, documentation related to their design), the various periodicals of that period (articles) and studies of foreign architectural historians, the article tries to reveal the evolution of the architecture of interwar Lithuanian hospitals and the main tendencies and causes of this process.

CONSTRUCTION OF NEW PUBLIC HOSPITAL BUILDINGS DURING THE INTERWAR LITHUANIA

After Lithuania became an independent state, in addition to all the other significant issues, care was taken to protect public health by developing the system of institutions dedicated to that purpose. The most important medical care providers were public hospitals. In total, there were about forty public hospitals in Lithuania at that time (Meškauskas 1987, 297).

While some hospitals were established in special buildings constructed during the tsarist period, others were housed in unsuited premises (Tallat-Kelpša 1932, 4). A situation was similar in other types of public buildings, as many of them at the beginning of independence period did not meet the minimum standards of cleanliness, space, and comfort. Consequently, efforts were made to build new edifices to have at least a required minimum of new public buildings (schools, hospitals, etc). Thus, these buildings were considered as one of the priorities for larger towns (LCVA, 377–8–169, 72).

It is known that during that period entirely new public hospital buildings were erected in such towns as Alytus, Kaunas, Kėdainiai, Klaipėda, Lazdijai, Marijampolė, Mažeikiai, Panevėžys, Raseiniai, Šakiai, Šiauliai, Tauragė, Telšiai, Zarasai, while in other towns, as in Rokiškis and Utena, hospitals were modernized by building new annexes to older buildings (Sniegulis 1938, 6). Also, there were plans to build new hospital buildings in Biržai, Kaišiadorys, Kretinga, Ukmergė, Vilkaviškis, but these were not realized until the end of the independence period. This shows that there was a need to have modern hospitals in larger towns of Lithuania and this

may have led to the search for new architectural possibilities to make these buildings as suitable as possible for performance of their function.

The largest public hospitals belonged to municipalities, except for Red Cross, which also had a few hospitals in Lithuania. Consequently, it was their responsibility to take care of their modernization and they largely financed (using their own finances or loans) this process. Also, many new buildings for such hospitals were mainly designed by local architects (known as building engineers and technicians), who worked in municipalities and designed other public buildings as well, such as schools, etc.

ASPIRATIONS TO MODERNIZE HOSPITALS IN LITHUANIA IN THE 1920s

In the view of the pressing situation, when “hospitals were in need of new premises and equipment” (Sniegulis 1937, 374), the first attempts to improve their situation began in the early 1920s. For example, in 1923 the project of the new building of Mažeikiai Hospital was implemented (arch. B. Helcermanas). It was a wooden one-storey building, the exterior of which was typical of traditional architecture. Similar approach was during the modernization of Panevėžys Municipality Hospital. There, between 1923 and 1927 special buildings were designed for the main, surgical, and contagious diseases departments, mortuary, laundry. All of them except the main building were intended for temporary use only and lacked architectural innovation – constructed of wood and traditional in appearance. Largest of them was the main two-story building (arch. G. Gumeniukas). According to the standards of that time, the building was quite modern – had central heating, special treatment rooms and masonry construction. The exterior of the building reflected the tendencies of the country’s architecture of the period – the main symmetrical façade was emphasized by a massive pediment, columns, pilasters, typical of neoclassical stylistics. Moreover, inside the building all the rooms were arranged according to the laws of symmetry, not convenience.

DESIGNING NEW HOSPITALS IN LITHUANIA OF THE EARLY 1930s

The beginning of the 1930s in the context of Lithuanian hospital architecture can be associated with attempts to observe the achievements of other countries in the construction of such buildings. After the decision to build a hospital in Šiauliai in 1930, a city and municipality delegation



Figure 1. Project of Šiauliai hospital (not built), 1931 (Vilnius Regional State Archive)

went to Berlin and Dresden in Germany to get acquainted with the latest hospital buildings. This suggested that abroad such buildings were both internally and externally designed to be fully adapted to their function, which was not a common feature of Lithuanian hospitals at that time. Arguing that Lithuanian architects had not yet had “sufficient experience in the construction of hospitals” (LCVA, 862–1–2649, 98), German architect Paul Wolf was invited to make a design proposal of the new hospital in Šiauliai. The study found that this was one of the first times when a foreign architect was invited to design a public hospital.

To hold a small competition for the design, local specialists G. Gumeniukas and V. Landsbergis-Žemkalnis were also instructed to make a design proposal (Figure 1). For example, in the latter project an important external accent was to be the large balconies, and the unadorned façade with continuous strip windows, for the first time showing the influence of modernist aesthetics, which could have been a big novelty in Lithuanian hospitals (VRVA, 1171–1–255, 1). However, the building was not built, as the projects were thought to be overly ambitious and expensive.

It can be said that the interest in the latest trends of foreign hospitals had been stimulated by the efforts to carry out comprehensive modernization of hospitals in Lithuania. Such processes had already started in the Western countries, where the interiors of the new hospitals were designed with the latest medical achievements and requirements in mind. The exterior of such buildings also changed when the latest architectural style – modernism – was applied. The changes in their architecture “embodied the ideas and

appearance of hygiene, efficiency, functionality” (Willis et al. 2019, 214). Therefore, modernism in hospital architecture was not just an aesthetic change. The programmatic aspirations of modernism, such as functionality, sunlight, fresh air, purposeful layout of rooms, etc., also resonated in hospital architecture, where these architectural possibilities “began to play an active role in the treatment and healing of patients” (Willis et al. 2019, 214).

The newest architectural trend of modernism had not yet had a significant influence on Lithuanian architecture, and it was thought that the most important accents of modern hospitals were “not the latest achievements in art or architecture”, but the interior installation and functionality of the building, for these hospitals, according to doctor F. Tallat-Kelpša, to “be a good and genuine institutions for correction of human health” (Tallat-Kelpša 1932, 14).

For example, a significant event in hospital development was the construction of the municipality hospital in Tauragė in 1932–1933 (arch. K. Reisonas) (Figure 2). The focus here was on the internal modernization. An irregular corner plan was applied. In such plan, the premises were functionally divided. The basement was intended for auxiliary rooms, one side of the ground floor and the second floor for the patient wards, while the other side was intended for administration, reception, the maternity and surgical wards. This innovative subdivision of the premises was based on the orientation of the building on the plot, as the aim was for the wards of the patients to face southwest – to receive direct sunlight not only to better illuminate the wards but also for treatment. This allowed to design massive balconies with exits from the wards in the southern part of the hospital. In addition, the treatment rooms were modern by the standards of that time – the operating room was illuminated with special lamps, the X-ray department had a research laboratory and bathtubs. Nevertheless, the exterior of the building was in the style of simplified historicism. The study found that a similar historicist appearance was also characteristic to the new buildings designed in 1933 for Zarasai (arch. J. Kadžys) and Šakiai (arch. A. Aleksandravičius) hospitals. The latter, however, was later redesigned and acquired a more modern looking exterior.

The fact that the internal modernization coincided with the influence of newest architectural trend – modernism can be justified in the case of Klaipėda Red Cross hospital (arch. R. Steikūnas), which was built in 1933. It was designed with a simple, minimalist look, which showed the impact of modernism. The façades, due to the desire for practicality, were diversified by wide windows to have well-lit rooms and loggias, which were intended for patients as a therapeutic measure, since access to them was provided from the wards. This can be considered as an attempt to reflect the latest architectural trends of foreign hospitals at that time, where open spaces

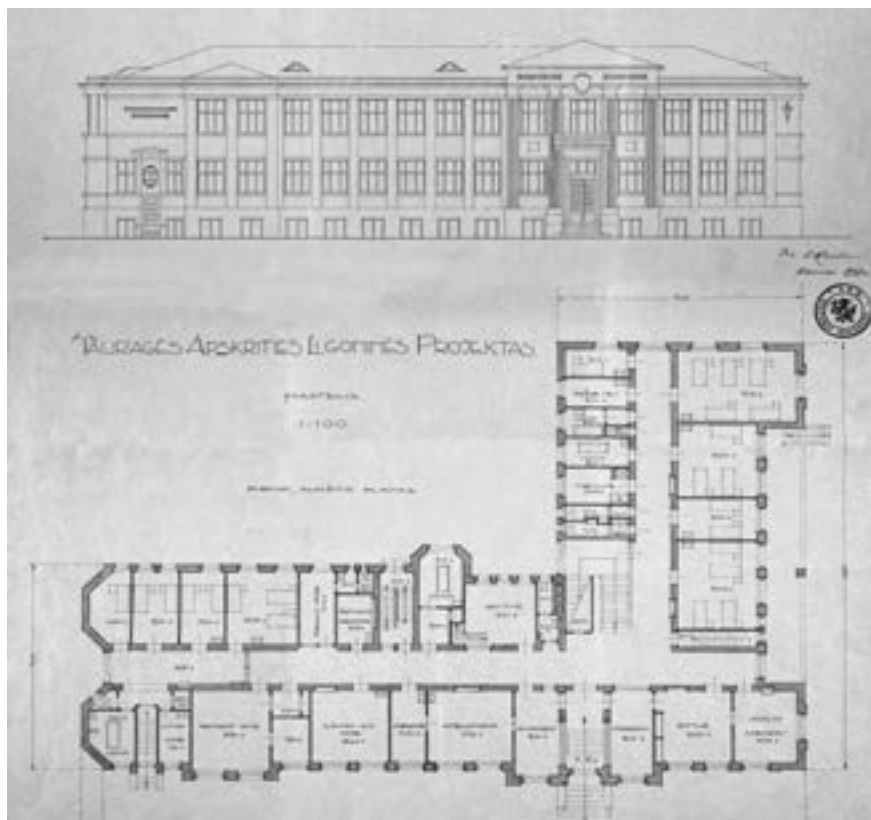


Figure 2. Project of Tauragė hospital, 1931 (Lithuanian Central State Archive)

emerged as common design elements, which “became an integral part of clean lines of modernism and were seen as a means of treating patients” (Willis et al. 2019, 178). The building was divided into two functional zones. The main corps was dedicated to treatment and the other part to the wards. Mechanization of the building was also implemented – it had ventilation and central heating systems, elevators for people and food supply – accents that were supposed to facilitate the functioning of the building.

GROWING INFLUENCE OF MODERNISM IN HOSPITAL ARCHITECTURE IN THE SECOND HALF OF THE 1930S

By the mid-1930s, the influence of modernism on Lithuanian architecture was obvious. Many new buildings were designed with a modern look, as Lithuanian architects at that time, according to architect A. Šalkauskis, were interested in the latest “architectural trend”, which was modernism

(Šalkauskis 1935, 266). Some studied in the Western countries or visited them to get acquainted with the latest architectural achievements, and applied the acquired experience in the design of various buildings, including hospitals. Thus, the fact that modernism influenced the evolution of hospital architecture is related to the overall spread of this style in Lithuania, which manifested itself in various types of buildings. Furthermore, in the context of hospitals, the architecture of such buildings during this period began to be considered a significant factor in their modernization. It was noticed that “the building itself with its beautiful, aesthetic lines, cozy, harmonious appearance” should serve to create the image of a modern institution and treat patients – for example, be well-lit, well-planned, meet the latest medical requirements and correspond to the latest architectural trends (Tallat-Kelpša 1935, 26).

Also, to encourage municipalities to modernize hospitals, in the mid-1930s “Hospital Management Rules” had been approved by the state government. They stipulated, for example, that “all patient rooms must be adequately heated, ventilated and lit”. The need to separate auxiliary rooms from those intended for treatment was stressed, as well as space requirements for the patient wards were specified (no less than 7.5 m² for each patient), since in some hospitals, the patients, were usually cramped due to the lack of space (Vyriausybės žinios 1936, 9). The study found that these rules led to greater changes inside the buildings, while their exterior-specific requirements were not applied, and the buildings were designed according to the stylistic intentions of their designers.

For example, the growing influence of modernism and overall modernization was reflected in the new buildings of Kėdainiai (arch. J. Dačinskas), Alytus (arch. S. Taškūnas) and Seinai (Lazdijai) municipality hospitals (arch. K. Garmus). They were designed in 1935–1937 in modern style, which by then had also become a creative trend of their designers. It is known that around the same time J. Dačinskas, S. Taškūnas, K. Garmus were designing other buildings, such as private houses and schools, their design influenced by modernism. Consequently, the new hospital buildings in these municipalities had typical design features of modernism – smooth shapes, calm, ascetic appearance, lack of decorative elements and large open spaces (Figure 3). These were seen not only as a stylish trend, but also as accents to serve the needs of the patients, as balconies and loggias were intended to be “used for sunbathing and relaxation” (Dačinskas 1937, 377). The premises of these buildings in an irregular corner plan were divided according to their function because this was one of the requirements, which was probably influenced by the plan of the earlier hospital in Tauragė. For example, the design rules for the new hospital in Alytus stated that the building and its plan “must be clear, without many curved,



Figure 3. Project of Kėdainiai hospital, 1935 (Lithuanian Central State Archive)

angled corridors and have the most comfortable shape possible without complex constructions” (LCVA, 1567–3–396, 168). The desire to provide comfort to patients was also expressed, as the patient rooms were spacious, and most had only two beds. The efficiency of the buildings was ensured by mechanization. Ventilation, food elevators, water supply, boiler rooms were installed. The study found that these were one of the most modern hospitals in Lithuania in their time, where the newest architectural trend was successfully combined with the comprehensive modernization.

Despite being influential, ascetic modernist aesthetic was not the only stylistic trend in Lithuanian hospital and overall architecture in the 1930s. While some architects thought that the architecture must change according to times, and therefore it was only natural to design buildings in modernist, “western” style (VRVA, 1171–2–78, 23), there were also others who were



Figure 4. Project of Marijampolė hospital, 1936 (Lithuanian Central State Archive)

of the opinion that if the building fully met the functional requirements, the exterior could be designed regardless of the latest stylistic trends and “the dispute over the primacy of classicism, romanticism, or modernism must be secondary; first of all, attention must be paid to the immediate tasks of the building” (Bielinskis 1939, 126).

An example of this is the new Marijampolė Municipality hospital (arch. A. Lukošaitis) designed in 1936 (Figure 4). Comparing this building with other analogues, the elements of classical architecture, such as simplified pilasters, profiled cornices, have appeared on its exterior. Thus, the building had a less modern look than the other analogues. Nevertheless, the exterior of the building contained an advanced modern medical facility. The long part of the building, which housed all the wards, had balconies and terraces for the convenience of the patients. Like other hospitals, this one incorporated many innovations that were not present in the old tsarist hospital building – elevators, modern operating room, heating systems, the latest treatment equipment (LCVA, 1361–1–447, 1). A similar path was followed in designing the new Mažeikiai hospital building in 1937. Here, arches of various sizes were used in the entrance part, and a colonnade motif was inserted in the curved part of the façade, where the loggias were placed. As a result, the building acquired a slight hint of classical architecture, but was designed with the latest medical advances inside.

The study found that despite the design of several conservative-looking hospital buildings, modernism continued to influence the architecture of such buildings in the late 1930s. Examples of this are the new buildings designed in 1938 for municipality hospitals in Telšiai (arch. S. Stulginskis) and Raseiniai (arch. A. Adamonis). The exterior of these buildings was designed with the typical modernist aesthetics – divided by rows of windows, smooth, minimalistic walls without excess decorations, emphasized by central open spaces. For example, an important external element in the new Telšiai hospital (Figure 5), was the central loggia and in the new Raseiniai



Figure 5. New building of Telšiai hospital, 1940s (Samogitian museum “Alka”)

hospital – its large balconies. It was not only an additional place for sun treatment and fresh air for the patients, but also an integral part of the overall appearance of the buildings. Thus, by giving up excessive decorativeness, these buildings symbolize the influence of functionality and modernity that shaped such buildings of the era. It can be said that modernist aesthetics in these buildings was creative intentions of their designers. For example, S. Stulginskis was thought to be “a very talented modernist architect”, who, in addition to the new hospital, designed other modernist looking public buildings in Telšiai – gymnasium, “Alka” museum building, which was thought to be “very beautiful” (Architektas Stulginskis išvyko į Šiaulius 1938, 4). Because of their design and internal modernization, which consisted of contemporary equipment, these buildings were seen by contemporaries as “the most modern” specimens of such type in Lithuania (Milėnas 1938, 8).

CONCLUSIONS

To sum up, it is worth emphasizing that the analysed examples of hospital buildings designed in various towns of Lithuania show that in the interwar period such buildings underwent significant changes. These changes took place not only on the outside, but also on the inside. Even though the first hospital buildings began to be built in the 1920s, major changes in such buildings began in the 1930s. At that time, new stylistic

trends in hospital architecture emerged quite early, but the main aim until mid-1930s was to transform and modernize hospitals primarily internally rather than externally. That was to be done by applying new principles of planning, functional zoning, providing the latest treatment equipment, and so on. As a result, in the early 1930s, only few new hospital buildings reflected stylistic innovations.

The study found that a major stylistic break in hospital architecture began in the mid-1930s when the design of new hospital buildings that responded to the latest architectural trends externally and to the latest medical requirements internally commenced in several Lithuanian municipalities. Essential features of such buildings became balconies, terraces and loggias, wide windows, minimalist forms, undecorated, simple façades, giving meaning to the ideas of the modernism, as well as the desire to adapt the buildings not only internally but also externally for optimal treatment.

To conclude, it can be said that in the 1930s, the new Lithuanian hospitals underwent the most important transformations, and the influence of modernism in their architecture, while not universally adapted, changed the appearance of the buildings. Therefore, the spread of modernism in the architecture of hospital buildings can also be perceived as a natural consequence of changing ideals in architecture and the modernization of hospitals when progressive external aesthetics, which was widely applied in architecture at the time, could also respond to a progressive medical institution inside. Thus, the study found that the evolution of hospital architecture during the Interwar Lithuania was shaped by two major factors – the changing ideals in overall architecture and the increased requirements for hospital modernization.

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SLIMNĪCU ARHITEKTŪRAS ATTĪSTĪBA STARPKARU LIETUVĀ

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ANOTĀCIJA

1918. gadā Lietuvai atkal kļūstot par neatkarīgu valsti, daudzas slimnīcas darbojās nepiemērotās telpās, un tādēļ pilsētās tika uzcelts daudz modernu slimnīcu ēku. Joprojām nav pētītas pārmaiņas Lietuvas starpkaru posma slimnīcu arhitektūrā. Rakstā aplūkota slimnīcu ēku arhitektūras attīstība Lietuvā starpkaru periodā.

Atslēgas vārdi: modernā arhitektūra, slimnīca, Lietuvas arhitektūra, slimnīcu ēku arhitektūra.

KOPSAVILKUMS

Rakstā analizēta aktuāla, bet līdz šim maz pētīta tēma – jauno valsts slimnīcu ēku attīstība starpkaru Lietuvā (1918–1940). Lielākā daļa slimnīcu tolaik jaunajā valstī darbojās nepiemērotās ēkās, tāpēc dažādās pilsētās bija jāuzbūvē daudzas jaunas, modernas ēkas slimnīcu vajadzībām. Rakstā apskatītas šī perioda galveno jauno Lietuvas slimnīcu dizaina īpatnības un attīstība. Uzskatāms, ka tajā laikā notikušās ārējās un iekšējās izmaiņas būtiski ietekmēja Lietuvas slimnīcu arhitektūras attīstību, tādēļ tās var uzskatīt par nozīmīgiem, lai arī mazpazīstamiem Lietuvas starpkaru arhitektūras paraugiem.