

How Rural Becomes Rurban – Rural Manor Residencies in the Urban Context: Lithuanian Case

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ABSTRACT. The focus of this research is rural manor residencies, which in the course of history functioned in the agricultural and natural settings and currently became absorbed into urbanised areas. The methodology of the research has included the analysis of literature, historical and contemporary maps, and photographic surveys of the manor residencies in the territory of Kaunas city. The aim of our research has been to identify the trends of research in the area of rural-urban interface and to determine the characteristics of management and preservation of Lithuanian manor residencies under the urban pressure.

KEYWORDS: built heritage, heritage management, Kaunas, Lithuania, manor residence, revitalisation, urban sprawl

The research deals with two supposed antagonisms: urban and rural, the cities and the manors, and concentrates on a particular case of Lithuania while analysing in a wider context of Europe. The urban territories had considerably expanded in the European countries, including the countries behind the “iron curtain”, during the 20th century. The territorial expansion of cities accelerated by the industrial construction methods inevitably affected the surrounding natural and agricultural land with built heritage properties. M. Antrop [1, 9] has noted that the shift of focus of territory development towards the urban needs: “thinking, valuing and planning the countryside is done mainly by urbanites, and future rural development is mainly focused upon the urban needs.” He uses the term of functional urban regions to describe these massive changes and new types of landscapes. M. R. Costa and D. Batista [2, 36] describe the character of new landscapes. They note that in the transition from rural to urban, hybrid, changeable landscapes appear. During the middle of the 20th century, the researchers had invented numerous terms to describe these processes and their outcomes: *urban fringe*, *edge-cities*, *peri-urban*, *post-*

suburban, *peri-urban interface*, etc. These terms were later challenged because the transitional landscapes between a city and countryside were not considered to be the result of solely urban-driven processes; thus, new terms were introduced, such as *rurban* or *ruralurban*, emphasising the interaction of rural and urban realms [3, 5]. In our research, we use terms *rurban* and *rural-urban interface* in order to underline the potential of rural realm to influence the character of these new landscapes.

The aim of this article has been to demonstrate the preservation challenges of the manor residencies in the rural-urban interface in Lithuania in a wider context of literature. In order to accomplish this, we have analysed the literature, historical and contemporary maps, and performed several photographic surveys in the territory of Kaunas.

I. THE TRENDS OF RESEARCH

The problems and new possibilities presented by the radical physical and socio-cultural transformations of the rural and natural environment due to urbanisation generate the increasing attention of researchers worldwide, including Lithuania. We have distinguished several trends of research relevant for the topic under the analysis:

1. Social urbanisation. Literature shows that social urbanization is one-way process in constant progress, and it will inevitably affect the rural heritage through changes in values, attitudes, lifestyles and, consequently, in management. As G. Adell notes that since the 1960s in the Western World, the city has been increasingly viewed not as a particular place but as an urban experience, which has become, in a sense, universal. The basic urban functions were transferred from a central city to suburbs and further to the still larger decentralised “urban field” [3, 6].

2. Urban sprawl and its effects. The review of literature has demonstrated that the majority of the studies, such as the researches by J. R. Miller *et al.* [4], R. I. McDonald *et al.* [5], are devoted to the effects of urban sprawl on natural territories. G. Overbeek and I. Terluin [6] have presented ten case studies of rural areas under the urban pressure and identified such threats as the gentrification and the claims of rural land for housing, transport infrastructure, economic and tourist activities. J. Bucas [7] identified the negative effects of urban sprawl on the productive agricultural and natural land, the historic urban centre and the general image of the city.

3. Changes and potential of rural heritage in the context of rural-urban interface. The increasing number of publications on the threats and possibilities presented to the rural heritage by the territorial expansion of cities and the spread of urban lifestyle and values in this decade reflects the relevance of this research area. M. Fonseca *et al.* [8] discussed the complex heritage preservation problems on the outskirts of uncontrollably

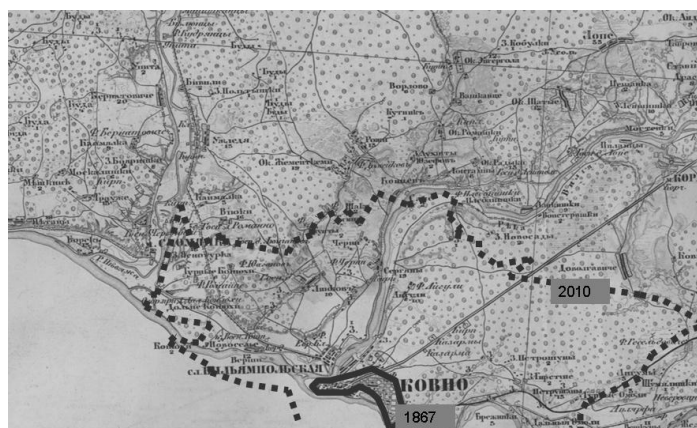


Fig. 1. The rural landscape shaped by village settlements, manors and interconnecting roads in the precincts of Kaunas, Lithuania. Fragment from the military map of the Russian Empire, 1865–1867 [19]

expanding Brazilian cities. J. Jureviciene [9] analysed the state of the rural relics in urban environment in Lithuania. G. Swensen and G. B. Jerpasen [10] have considered how the planning process affects cultural heritage in two Norwegian semi-urban areas. M. R. Costa and D. Batista [2] investigated the challenges of integration of vernacular rural settlements with heritage values into urban development in the coastal areas in Portugal. C. J. A. Mitchell [11], C. J. M. Mitchell and S. B. de Waala [12] analysed the destructive processes affecting the heritage in the rural communities, whose development was oriented towards the commodification of the attractive features of rural environment. This phenomenon, referred to as the “creative destruction”, causes socioeconomic, cultural, and spatial changes in the rural areas resulting in the loss of their authentic aura. The links between the manor residencies and development of urban territories are under consideration as well. For example, C. Steenbergen *et al.* [13] analysed how the prominent residential ensembles had influenced the development of surrounding urban fabric. W. Fijalkowski [14] considered the negative influence of the ecological changes caused by the increasing urbanisation on the heritage of Royal Willanow residence in Warsaw. J. Vitkuvienė [15, 16] identified the problems associated with the changing environment of the residencies of manors and distinguished different stages of these changes.

II. PRESENT SITUATION, MANAGEMENT CHARACTERISTICS AND CHALLENGES

M. R. Costa and D. Batista [2] note that studies of particular rural-urban interface situations can reveal how vernacular buildings and building complexes can be integrated into urban areas with appropriate development techniques. This has encouraged highlighting the characteristics of heritage management in the rurban zones in the Central and Eastern context and namely in Lithuania.

1. Historical characteristics of the Central and Eastern European manor residencies. The Central and Eastern European manors, from one point of view, were similar to the extra-urban residencies of the noble and royal families of Western Europe, which were connected with the urban settlements and even influenced their development, and at the same time the majority of them were identified as the antipodes to the cities by the historians [17, 27–32]. These manors were pre-eminently oriented towards the agricultural production [18, 147], which was mainly exported to Western Europe. In this respect, manors even hindered the development of cities and urban culture in this region. The residential and management centres of the manors often were the prominent architectural ensembles with large gardens and played a role of cultural centres in rural areas. Together with plenty of small farms and villages they determined the character of the Central and Eastern European landscapes (Figure 1). These historical urban-rural antagonisms make the issue of urban-rural continuum even more complex.

2. Characteristics of urban expansion. Analyses of urban expansion patterns of Lithuanian urban settlements demonstrate rapid shifts from rather compact development to low-density urban sprawl [20, 66]. J. Bucas [21, 135] described the character of development of Lithuanian landscape as “emergent”:

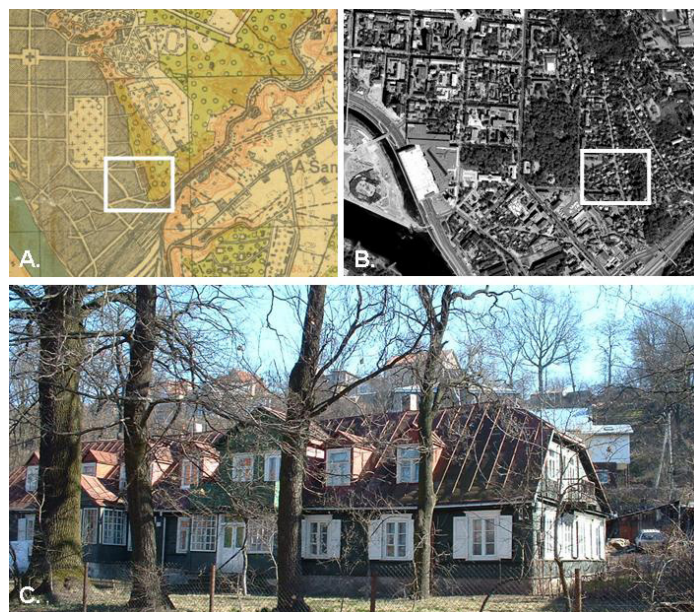


Fig. 2. Manor house on Bugos Str. in the territory of Kaunas is an example of the early stage of absorption of rural residencies into urban environment: A. map of the area in 1928 [24]; B. contemporary (2010) orthophoto [25]; C. view of the main building



Fig. 3. Dynamic rural-urban interface on the northern outskirts of Kaunas: A. orthophoto in 2005, B. orthophoto in 2010 [25]

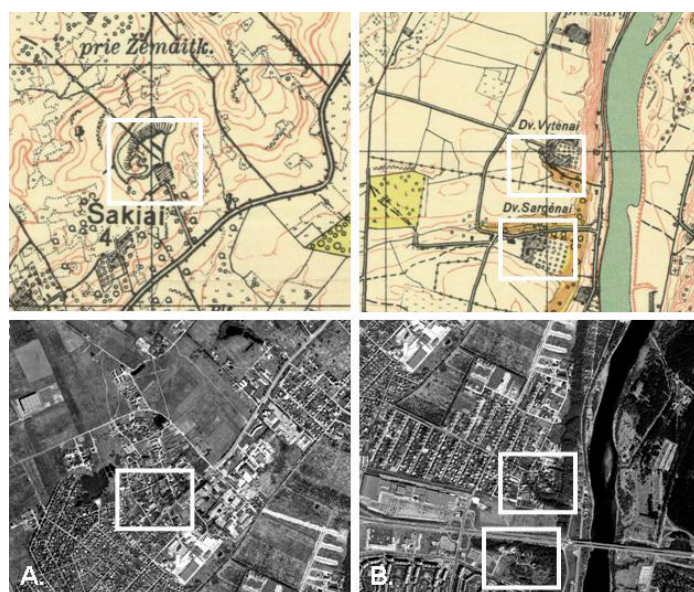


Fig. 4. Manor residencies on the outskirts of Kaunas: A. Sakiai (Sargenai) manor residence in the map of 1928 [24] and contemporary (2010) orthophoto [25]; B. Vytėnai manor residence in the map of 1928 [24] and contemporary (2010) orthophoto [25]



Fig. 5. Negative effects of urbanisation on Marva manor residence on the western outskirts of Kaunas: A. map of 1928 [24]; B. contemporary (2010) orthophoto [25]; C. State of the manor house in 1999; D. Site of the residence in 2005

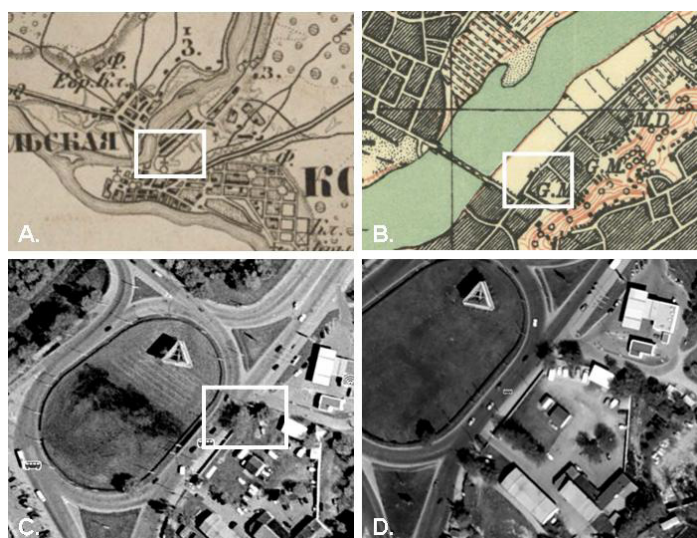


Fig. 6. Decline of the manor house on Jonavos Str. in the centre of Kaunas due to intensive urbanisation: A. Kaunas and the site of the manor in the map of 1865–1867 [19]; B. map of the area of 1928 [14]; C. Manor house and its site in 2005 [25]; D. Site after the demolition of the manor house [25]

the radical changes in land management and landscapes were caused by the radical political shifts and reforms. The change in urbanisation patterns in Lithuania can also be characterised this way. D. Bardauskiene and M. Pakalnis [20, 66] underline the specific character of the urban growth and expansion in Lithuania of the communist and post-communist periods. They note that Lithuania has inherited compact cities and landscape diversity since 1990, but the contemporary situation is quite different: “migration of citizens from cities to the suburbs is induced by the open market and “ad hoc” territory planning”, “after regaining the independence the main driving force of the growth has become a private housing sector”, “cities are surrounded by chaotic urban structures (urban sprawl) and poor landscapes”. They note that the urban expansion in contemporary Lithuania was strongly influenced by the real estate “bubble” in 2006 and 2008. Lithuania like numerous other Central and Eastern European countries is

currently facing the problem of hardly regulated urban sprawl (Figure 3). Current character of urbanisation in Lithuania can be described as the chaotic spot expansion of the compact settlements. J. Friedmann [22, 29–44] and I. T. Berend [23, 269–280] indicate a level of corruption in the post-communist societies, which results in non-transparent decision making. This creates the situation, when actual development does not follow the master plans and other official guidelines. Consequently, the residencies of former manors are being increasingly absorbed into the urban fabric without any special considerations (Figure 4).

3. The experience and consequences of the Soviet regime.

The policy of the Soviet regime had caused many specific social and heritage preservation problems in the countries that made part of the communist bloc. These are the lost cultural continuity, the alienation of the society from its heritage, lost territorial and spatial integrity of the heritage properties due to nationalisation and adaptation to various new purposes, etc. These problems become even more complex in the context of the dynamic rural-urban interface. G. Overbeek and I. Terluin [6, 21] argue that the fair relationship between the rural and urban areas should be reached when both can benefit from the exchange of goods and services. Their study demonstrates that such balance is possible when the rural areas are viable and communities are able to express their interests. In cases of the lost social viability of rural areas, cultural continuity and continuity of function, the effects of urban pressure can be much more complicated. The case of the Central and Eastern European rural manor residencies demonstrates that the loss of function, the absence of socioeconomic viability and local actors to defend the rural interests turn a green light for the uncompromised urban expansion. Abandonment or inappropriate use and maintenance cause the decline of valuable and attractive features of these rural heritage objects, which would otherwise attract interest from external actors, including institutions and developers (Figure 5). The weak civic society of the post-communist countries [23, 269–280, 26, 21–79] may also explain the unconcern of the public institutions and local residents about the peri-urban rural heritage.

Undervalued built heritage objects often are absorbed into the urban environment without any respect to their historic property limits or valuable architectural and landscape features. The problems of preservation of historic property limits are much more complicated in the post-communist countries. The properties of large rural ensembles, nationalised by the Soviet regime, during the process of privatisation were subdivided into the smaller lots owned by different owners. Even the larger historic buildings became the property of several or more owners [27, 346]. The subdivision of the property and the multiplicity of owners with different intentions and social problems usually become an obstacle for rehabilitation of the ensembles even in their authentic setting. In the urbanised areas, where the pressure for new development is much stronger, it becomes even more difficult to retain the historic rural property. In the worst case, the heritage elements of rural landscape can be totally erased creating a new urban landscape (Figure 6).

The clash between the manor residence and the new suburban residential development often results in the social conflicts as new upper- or middle-class residents view the residence with

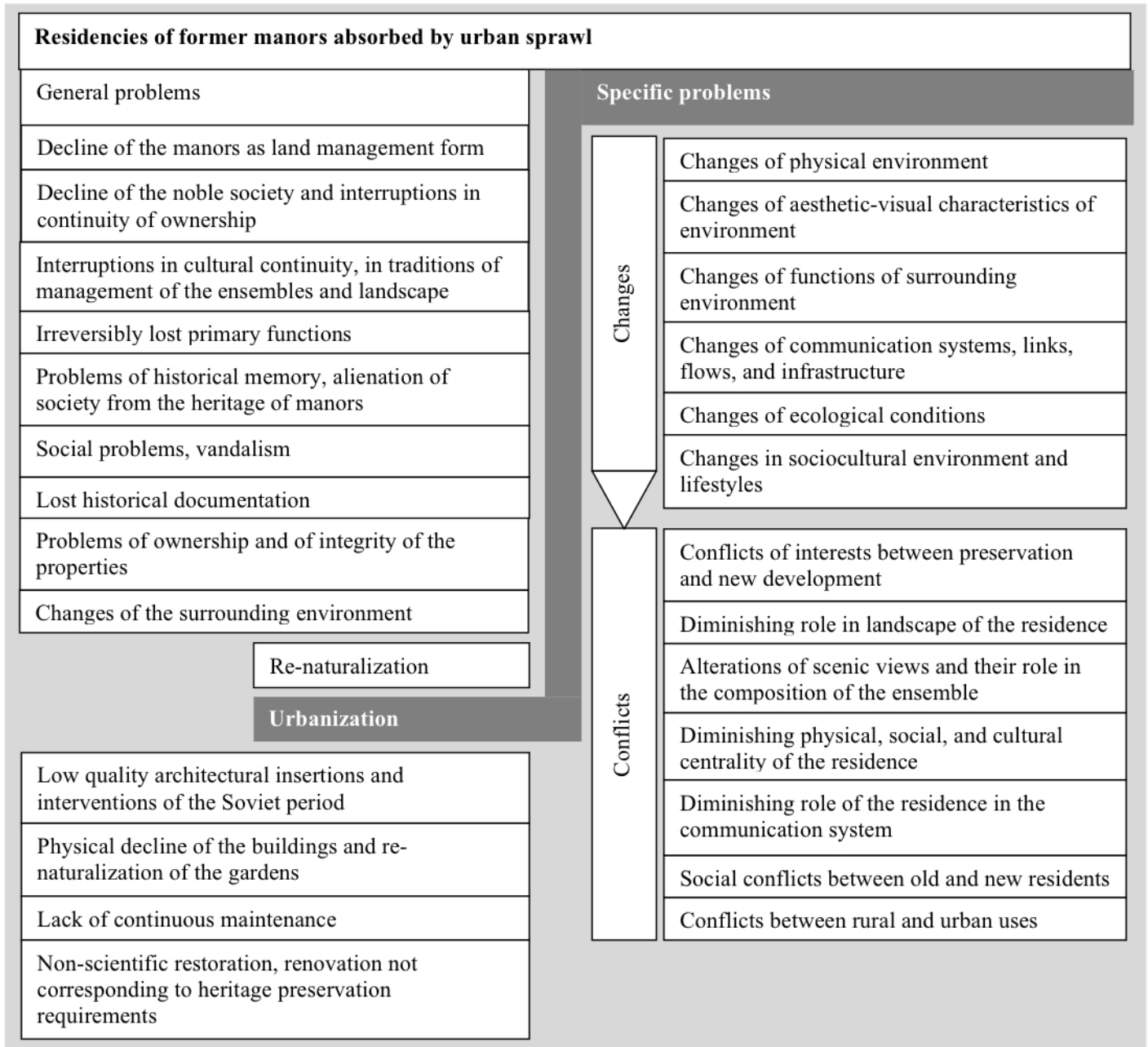


Fig. 7. Problems of preservation of the manor residencies in Lithuania and the problems specific to the residencies affected by the urban sprawl [15,16, 27, 28, 29]

its lower-class residents as a slum or social threat. The social problems, such as increasing social inequality, in rurban areas are described by other researchers [2, 47, 3, 1]. As a result of the destructive policy of the communist regime, mainly residents of low social status occupy the buildings historically owned by the noble society; this makes the issues of social conflicts even more important in the management of rurban areas. The general problems of preservation of manor residencies in Lithuania and the problems specific to the residencies affected by the urban expansion are summarised in Figure 7.

4. Potential for innovations. Despite the negative effects of urbanisation on the heritage of manors, the analyses demonstrate that this type of rural heritage still possesses a considerable potential for shaping peri-urban areas (Figure 8). For example, the interview of heritage preservation and land management

experts conducted in our previous studies [30, 9] demonstrated that the interviewed experts had almost unanimously concluded that the residencies of manors possessed the greatest potential of preservation and use in urban development. They identified that the manor residencies could become centres of newly planned urban areas, could be adapted to the recreational needs, and become the “green islands” in the city. M. R. Costa and D. Batista [2, 46] note that, in contrast to the dispersed individual buildings on small properties, which are most often used or re-used as housing, the larger building clusters can be adapted to other functions within contemporary cities. They distinguish the manor farms with privileged locations near consolidated urban centres and high-quality architecture. This justifies the need to consider separately the integration of the manor residencies into urban development.

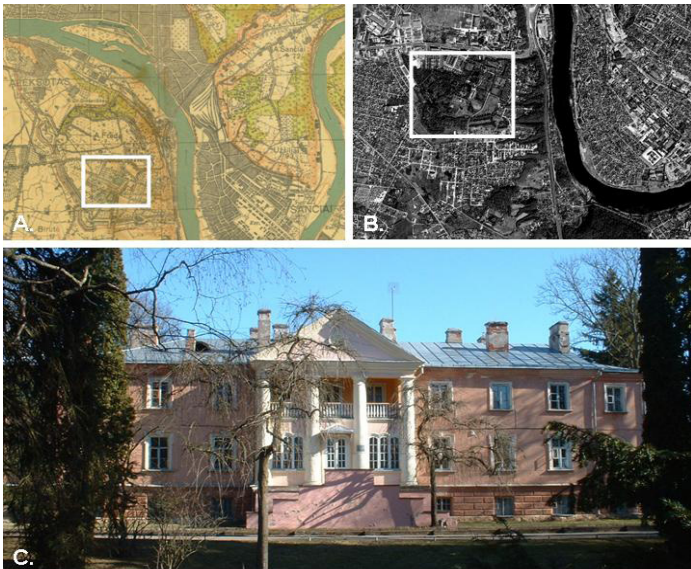


Fig. 8. Aukštoji Freda manor residence demonstrates that the concentration of social interests and high cultural value can positively influence the integration of the rural heritage into urban environment: A. map of 1928 [24]; B. contemporary (2010) orthophoto [25]; C. view of the main building

CONCLUSIONS

1. The urban expansion absorbing the residencies of former manors of rural origination is a relevant phenomenon demonstrating how the rural built heritage can become the subject of urban problems and how new types of landscapes – rurban, rural-urban – emerge.

2. The interface or even clash of rural and urban territories and lifestyles cause different threats for this already vulnerable heritage of Lithuanian manors: unfavourable shifts in ecological situation, the loss of valuable architectural and landscape features, and the disregard of historical property limits.

3. The ambiguous situation of the Central and Eastern European manor residencies under the pressure of rapid urban expansion, which lost not only their original function, but also the original environmental settings, presents not only the preservation challenges, but also the particular possibilities for adaptive reuse and rehabilitation. The presumptions are made that they can influence the development and quality of rurban places in multiple ways. This demonstrates the need for further research on the integration of these residencies into urban development considering the research trends and characteristics distinguished in this research.

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