

Private Space in Soviet Cinema: Case Study of Riga

Jānis Matvejs, *University of Latvia, Riga, Latvia*

Abstract – The aim of this article is to discover the discourse of living spaces of Riga through the films of the Soviet period and to examine essential changes of private space in different residential structures. This study contributes to the field of human geography by conducting content analysis of a vast number of Soviet films with a focus on the development and spatial organization of apartments in Riga. The analysis of 264 films illustrates that living spaces are rarely portrayed in the Soviet cinema and they mostly provide intentionally formed idealistic information about the qualities and achievements of Soviet private space.

Keywords – Apartment, cinema, interior, private space, Riga, the Soviet Period.

INTRODUCTION

Living spaces are an essential part of cities. Moreover, spatial arrangement and socio-political connotation of these spaces are changing continuously, which challenges geographers to undertake new research methods in describing private spaces. There is no coherent framework within which to discuss cinema in its entirety. In addition to that, theoretical and methodological approaches analysing living space in cinema vary widely [19]. There has been a number of longitudinal studies involving cinema and city, which have reported, that regardless of narrative, genre and techniques used, films always describe a particular period of time [6], [15], [20]. Therefore cinema is an important methodological tool in describing both living space idealized by Soviet authorities and true living conditions of residents, and it allows to explain a city in a way that traditional and social science are not capable of [21], [33]–[34], [38]–[40].

The focus of this research is to describe the portrayal of Riga's private spaces during one of the most controversial stages in the history of Latvia – the Soviet period. Human geography tends to interpret cinematic images of a city and the processes within it as a cultural landscape. Thus, in studying film, understanding historical background and cultural values is central [19], since that allows to interpret the lived space of the past and enables to understand a historical place of residence, which is culturally created and intentionally organized over the city.

Ideological and economic considerations of the Soviet period were paramount – contemporary apartment must be standardized. Despite the fact that authorities stressed that communal rooms in the new living complexes will be more attractive and provide more intimacy and privacy than the former individual quarters [11], representation of residential space became a manifest of flaws in the living space. In a study of Soviet history and design, historian Susan Reid found that the domestic life has hardly been the dominant angle from which to study the Soviet Union [32]. Only few researchers have addressed the problem of urban development processes of Riga. However, no previous

study has investigated how private space of Riga was depicted in the films of the Soviet period.

I. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In order to better understand the subject, an advanced research approach was developed that exposes various processes and elements about the formation of Soviet Riga's cinematic landscape. The research consists of qualitative visual approach that offers an effective and critical way of describing private space, as well as of quantitative analysis that allows to examine similarities and disparities of lived space. Spatial analysis of Soviet Riga interrogates which sites were transformed in cinematic places but also acts as an archaeological tool that explores hidden residential setting during the Soviet period. Features of residential development and living space of the socialist city were identified through extensive analysis of literature, especially studying residential complexes of the largest cities of Soviet Latvia – Riga, Daugavpils and Jelgava.

264 films from 1945 through 1990 were randomly selected. The data about films for this study was collected using the database of the *National Film Centre of Latvia*. Initially, films were grouped based on the year of release, genre and director, in order to create comparable categories. Name of director did not occur for 11 (0.04 %) films. Content analysis of films was accomplished in which each film was divided into 5-minute intervals [16]. Grouping video material into 5-minute sequences allowed to review represented urban structures more critically by using appropriate data set. Secondly, each sequence was described by eight indicators, based on previous research about Soviet housing [30]–[32]: geographical location, social description, furnishing, appliances, representation of public or semi-public space, mise-en-scène, actor's monologue or dialogue, and filming techniques used.

The analysis of cinematic content of two genres – fiction (65 films) and documentary (199 films) – consisted of a comparison of films with actual urban processes and development of housing. In order to get geospatial data of cinematic landscape and describe representation of Soviet interior, the films were divided into three main groups depending on their geographical location of residential structure: city centre of Riga, suburb *microrajoni* and other area of Riga or countryside.

Mapping and analyses of the filmed sites reveals stratigraphy of texts written across residential living space in Soviet Riga. Collected quantitative data was stored in a spatial database (QGIS software) in order to employ methods of geographical information system on analysing and visualization of data. Various methods of geographical information system, including cartographical

approach, data frequency applying approach and spatial autocorrelation, were used to acquire more precise and data-based results.

II. DIVERSIFIED SOVIET SPACE

The architecture of Soviet times is not just a momentum to the epoch, but also an illustration of social ideals of the former leaders. City planning in Soviet Union was a political process where the city growth complied with normative locational guidelines [1]. At the end of the Second World War, the Soviet government was faced with a reconstruction task of gigantic dimensions. The wartime destruction of an already insufficient housing stock made post-war reconstruction unavoidable, thus the Soviet government turned to the needs of urban populations. While in the period between 1946 and 1950 about 52 % of dwellings in Riga were private houses, the proportion of such buildings decreased to 34 % throughout the 1950s, and 96 % of all housing stock built in Latvia in 1981 was a system of large-panel buildings [36]. Thus, the Soviet period significantly transformed both the exterior and interior of urban Riga.

During the Second World War, Riga experienced damages in urban structure. Nearly 155 dwellings were destroyed. That counts 7.9 % of Riga's housing stock in 1945. For the most part, dwellings were built for factory workers, for example housings on *Ropažu* Street (1947) were meant for employees of Machine Wagon Factory (*Rīgas Vagonbūves Rūpnīca*) or workers of Diesel Engine Factory (*Rīgas Dīzeļbūves Rūpnīca*) were allocated dwellings in *Vēžzaķu* island (1948) [36]. During the Stalin era, apartments also were granted exclusively for privileged citizens, known as nomenclature – industrial managers, military officers, engineers and award-winning workers whose enjoyment of material perquisites was supposed to inform the behaviour and redeem the privation of everyone else. These apartments were well planned, featuring many study rooms, spacious kitchens and a separate bathroom.

Although post-war construction and reconstruction still involved grandiose Stalinist designs, by the early 1950s, more and more projects relied on standardization and prefabrication [30]. Multi-storey buildings also served as a layer between already existing fire-resistant barriers [36]. During the late Stalinist era, officials additionally advanced rationalizing the measures in housing economy, such as organizational reforms between the centre and localities and better training and wages for construction workers [30]. In fact, in the period from 1945 to 1955, around 300 000 square-meters living space was built or restored. However, post-war housings had minimized comfort: tiny rooms, the hallway designed as a narrow corridor, kitchen area around 6 square-meters or even less [36]. Dwelling series M-1, M-2, and M-3 are considered the first generation of standardized Soviet apartment buildings in Riga. Their development started shortly after the end of the Second World War. The main building material of these apartments was bricks, while homes themselves had a relatively large number of wooden elements, such as flooring or wall panels [7].

Soon, Nikita Khrushchev, replacing Stalin as a leader of the Soviet Union, had to deal with housing deficit. In December 1954, Khrushchev made an uncompromising speech at the National Conference of Builders, Architects, and Workers, in which he ordered full industrialization of construction. The idea was to harness heavy Soviet industry for work on housing and to quickly end the housing crisis [17]. This idea was strengthened in the wake of Khrushchev's 'secret speech' to the Twentieth Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in 1956 that set the goal of resolving the housing shortage [3], [5], [9], [14]. Khrushchev's attempt to provide each family with a separate apartment – complete with modern amenities – comprised an initiative as emblematic of the Soviet Union during the 1950s and 1960s [41]. During this period, there were also signs of privatization of life: mass construction of prefabricated blocks with apartments for separate families, increased ownership of private transport, and intensified orientation towards circles of friends that led to rebirth of friendship [10].

The period from the mid-1950s to the beginning of the 1970s experienced an expansion of building materials and construction possibilities used in architecture, notably starting in 1959 when the first large-panel buildings were developed. The first residential neighbourhood in Riga, where the free building principles were used instead of traditional perimeter construction, was *Āgenskalna priedes* [36], [4]. The share of prefabricated parts increased rapidly, however, the hasty process of construction led to the decline of living standards by the end of the Soviet period [14]. Although technology of large-panels even doubled construction productivity rate (first experimental large-panel dwelling built in 1959 on *Saulgožu* Street by architects M. Ģelzis and Dz. Driba), until the mid-1960s most of the buildings were characterised by diminished living space and no auxiliary rooms [36]. In this period, modernized series of 467-A (architects L. Plakane and L. Ose, 1965) dwellings were developed. The main improvements were better thermal stability and sound insulation, more comfortable and spacious stairwells, and better apartment layout. At this stage, also the plasticity of dwellings is being sought for, for example by varying the use of the balcony and loggia [36]. That resembled the motto "better, faster and more economical" of housing construction process of the Soviet period. Subsequently, apartments of this period were characterized by space-saving idea, small kitchen area, issues with water penetration or excessive air permeability [40].

The first third-generation homes were introduced in the early 1970s. These apartments were about 5 % bigger than second-generation houses. Five-storey buildings were equipped with communal waste bins and elevators [36]. The 103-series dwelling can be regarded as an example of the third-generation housing. Furniture developers were also involved in making new living space together with architects and engineers. The most common version of the 103-series had three separate apartments on each floor – they could be one, two or three room living spaces. This group of houses had a non-standard façade (bricks were used in the construction of bearing walls), an improved layout and additional auxiliary rooms – all these parameters were suitable for

filling the gap in the historic centre of Riga [7]. Another example of third-generation apartments is the 602-series. For these dwellings architects used new finishes: glass tiles, ceramics and polymers. The task of the 602-series was to quickly and qualitatively meet the needs of citizens for a separate home. Housing provided different types of proportion of apartments, larger and more comfortable kitchen (up to 9 square-meters) and improved infrastructure [36], [7].

The main unit of the Soviet society was the family and its primary dwelling cell – an apartment [30], [31]. Throughout the Soviet period, residents experienced different types of living space. One of the most common configuration of the Soviet living space was communal apartments (*kommunalki*), in which members of different families shared the same kitchen, lavatory and interior hallways. *Kommunalki* were created in apartments that had belonged to middle-class and aristocratic families, situated in city centres in tenements. Usually they consisted of 3 to 6 interconnecting rooms. Attitudes and approaches towards collectivism varied. On the one hand, communal apartments were spatial expression of “public privacy” [10], [31]. Communal living could beget assaults on privacy raging from intrusions into intimate matters to formal surveillance, but also a sense of community and precious gestures of concern. On the other hand, even in an overcrowded *kommunalka*, in which disruptive behaviour would have made daily life especially unpleasant, residents sharing an apartment may have distanced themselves from the concerns of others, in the spirit that drove them to construct a sense of personal space [41].

Residential complexes (*microraioni*) were another integral part of Soviet residential structure. This spatial arrangement was the main structural part of a residential area, consisting of several groups of residential buildings and everyday civic culture institutions [4]. In order to advance socio-spatial homogeneity, each apartment in *microraioni* was provided with equal supplies [32]. These apartments represented the most desirable accommodation in Soviet times. People moved to *microraioni* from the communal apartments regardless of various disadvantages, such as low ceilings, small kitchens and poor sound-proofing, which were accepted because one family lived in each apartment, which had a pivotal meaning in the regeneration of private life [14], [35]. Soviet culture also became obsessed with the idea of homemaking and domesticity, that was accomplished primarily in the apartments of *microraioni*, thus personalizing the homogenous living space [3], [32]. In search for a new decorativeness one of the source of inspiration was folk art. Folklore provided an arsenal of ready-made forms and also set the stylistic keynote for decorative abstraction [11].

III. SOVIET CINEMATIC SPACE

The purpose of socialist realism was to limit cinematic representation to a specific and highly regulated faction of creative expression that promoted Soviet ideals. Moreover, tragedy and negativity were not permitted in urban representation. Instead, sentiment about flawless living standards was created by present-

ing common images, such as satisfied factory workers, youth, industries, new technology and standardized living space [28], [22]. Throughout the Soviet period, both urban and rural landscape in films are passive and distracted from the main character, and Soviet cinematography does not reveal genuine urban space with historically controversial objects, marginalized communities, untidy courtyards or garbage on the streets, the cities are portrayed from above or distance, idealizing the space and prohibiting arbitrary representation of dwellings [23], [35].

Living space in the cinema of the mid-1940s and during the 1950s is depicted as monotonous, continuing Stalin's artificial *grand style* with submissive crowds and enormous buildings. A great number of films from this period interpret the heroic scenes of World War II by using realistic scenes in showing everyday life [18]. The intention to maintain national identity is depicted by the activities that are taking place in the countryside (*Mājup ar uzvaru*, A. Ivanovs, 1947) [25]. Cinema supports the main policy of Stalin's regime of the 1940s (*Padomju Latvija Nr. 2*, N. Karmazinskis, 1945), rejection of the class struggle within the country and declaration of the creation of the united Soviet people, who had no national, ethnic, class or race problems. Genre modification of this period was generally, a war or historical drama and news-reel [8].

The Thaw period witnessed a dramatic resurgence in cinematic production, the aesthetic and political principles of which departed significantly from the cinema of the Stalinist years. The films of the Thaw period were motivated by an urge to interrogate and reanimate spatial experience, and through this project to raise questions of ideology, social progress, and subjectivity that were particularly pressing for post-Stalinist Soviet culture. The cinema of the Thaw sought to unfold the Soviet spatial realities rather than to forge their generalized understanding. Post-Stalinist spatial politics permeate Thaw-era cinema in manifold forms, above all in its representations and narratives of natural exploitation, urban transformation, and of travel and mobility of all kinds. The conquest of the Soviet Union's virgin lands finds a broad cinematic representation with films depicting agricultural developments and with a conventional resolution of conflicts structuring their narratives. More generally, movement toward, and between, the country's peripheral spaces became a common cinematic trope during these years (Fig. 1) [27].

The cinematic scrutiny of space in the Soviet culture of the 1950s and 1960s was rooted in an urgency to find new forms of social engagement. It was also propelled by a need to redefine the role of cinema in the wake of Stalin's death. The films of the 1960s aim to illustrate living space as anti-monumental [28]. During the late 1960s and 1970s, cinematography brings harmonious representation of the Soviet urban space to the end and creates a metaphor of enclosure by confronting historical buildings of the Old Town with modern architecture in the peripheral area [26]. During this period, Soviet cinema acknowledges the policy of “peaceful coexistence of socialistic and capitalistic systems”. Cities, furthermore, are transformed in this period's films not only through new construction but also through celebratory events and everyday people. Also, the relationship between the



Fig. 1. Escape from *microraioni* to glorified suburban area in film *Mans draugs nenopietns cilvēks* [Photo: Riga Film Museum Archive].

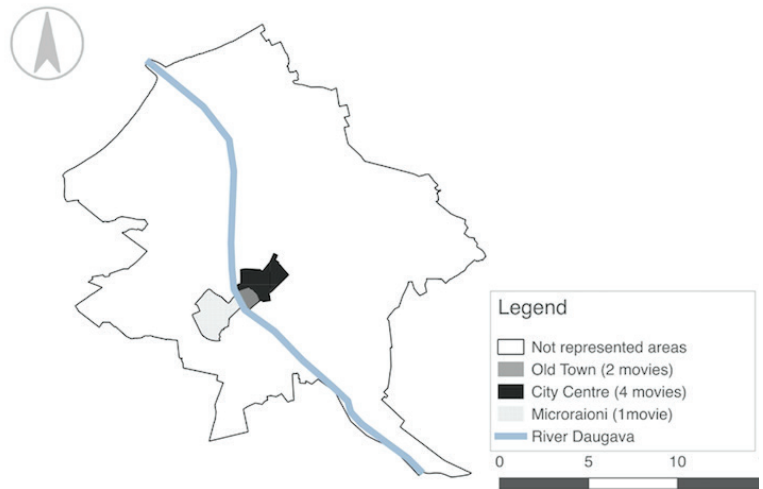


Fig. 2. Represented private spaces in reviewed films from 1958 to 1964 [Figure: J. Matvejs].

built environment, the cinematic screen, and the female body grows in the mid-1970s. For example, in Kira Muratova's film *Long Goodbyes* (1972) the room is filled with a number of random objects that are transformed into a protocinematic space, while the movement in the actual space of the room is perceived as movement within the space of the images. Genre modification of this period is more diversified, including historical drama, tragic comedy, melodrama and news-reels [8], [27].

Soviet films of the 1980s depict city in a manner of dystopic representation outlining aimless movement through the city [23]. Cinematography increasingly declines the portrayal of living spaces in the monotonous architecture of the Soviet city and draws its attention to the forbidden forms of living spaces – run-down neighbourhoods, waste-lands and wooden houses [23], [26]. The main themes of this period are a gradual rejection of censorship and free exchange of people and ideas [8]. This tendency of portraying everything negative in everyday life, along with imperfect public and private space, lack of facilities and untidiness, is described by Russian term *chernukha*, popular in the late 1980s. This genre was perceived as quasi-documentary portrayal of life as it really was (*Šķērsiela*, I. Seleckis, 1988) [Shcherbenok, 2011]. Besides traditional realism some grotesque and ironical films are made (*Apstākļu sakritība*, V. Beinerte, 1987).

IV. CINEMATIC REPRESENTATION OF SOVIET PRIVATE SPACE: RESEARCH RESULTS

The research about representation of Riga's living space consists of the analysis of 264 films. Cinematic representation has been analysed using three main geographical locations where residential structure was displayed: city centre of Riga (including the Old Town), suburbs or *microraioni* (*Āgenskalna priedes*, *Jugla*, *Imanta*, *Kengarags*, *Purvciems* and *Zolitūde*) and other areas

of Riga or countryside (*Mežaparks*, *Čiekurkalns*, *Grīziņkalns* and other areas). Most of the films (216 in total) depict centrally located governmental and cultural buildings, transportation systems and recreational areas. 35 films characterize interior of Riga city centre particularly. Only 24 of the reviewed films shed light on both the infrastructure and interior of residential complexes (*microraioni*). In 110 films, other areas of Riga and scenes of countryside are described by abandoned dwellings in Riga (wooden houses in *Zaķusala*), countryside estates (*Jūrmala*, *Cēsis*, *Kuldīga*) or transportation hubs (airport or terminal of public transport). 20 of these films elucidate the interior of less-populated areas of Riga and countryside.

The city centre of Riga experienced large construction processes, especially in the war-destroyed Old Town. In the end of 1940s and during the 1950s, only two fiction films illustrate the living space in the Old Town of Riga. Both films portray wealth and everyday life of inter-war *intelligentsia*. Also, four documentaries of this period depict satisfied residents and the construction process a residential building. In news-reels, apartment scenes are characterized by spoken text that highlights anniversaries and accomplishments of Five-year plans. For example, in *Padomju Latvija Nr. 16* (M. Čardiņa, 1948), the building process is being idealized: "... the first 56 apartments will be ready on the day of The Anniversary of the Great October Socialist Revolution". An apartment in the Old Town is portrayed as a socially uneven space, contrasting living spaces for persons of different occupation or marginalizing living space by divergence of scenes of elegant Old Town with a neglected worker area in suburbs (*Kā gulbji balti padebeši iet*, P. Armands, 1957).

At the end of the 1950s and beginning of the 1960s, representation of living space in the city centre and Old Town is dichotomous (Fig. 2). While interior is spacious and splendid in the films that portray inner-war period (*Latviešu strēlnieka stāsts*,



Fig. 3. Prototype of housewarming tradition in film *Elpojiet dziļi* [Photo: Riga Film Museum Archive].

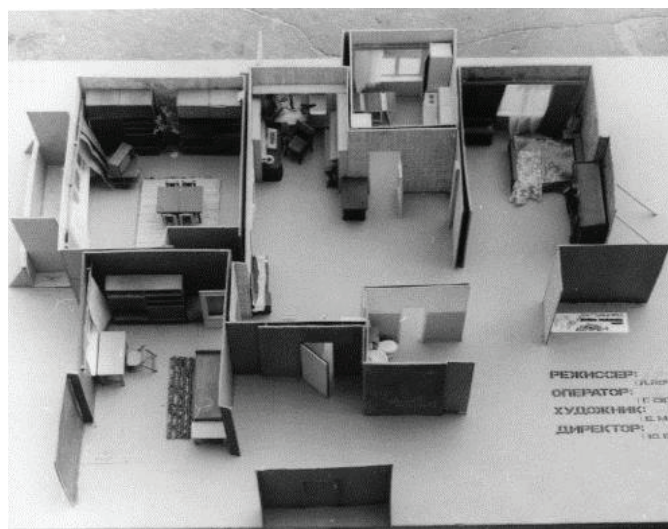


Fig. 4. Model of an interior for film *Laika prognoze augustam* [Photo: Riga Film Museum Archive].

P. Armands, 1958), the living space is narrow with limited appliances in films that illustrate the Soviet time. In contrast to previous stage, starting with the mid-1960s depiction of the Old Town decreased and the space is rather identified with poor people. Moreover, interior in the apartments of Old Town is narrow, dark and with limited household objects (*Divi*, M. Bogins, 1965). Also, representation of the city centre experiences socio-spatial transformation. The idealized living space of *intelligentsia* of the previous period, now transforms into a communal apartment, where all residents share the kitchen, hallway, bathroom and telephone. Sociologist Katerina Gerasimova states that communal apartments associate with the institutionalization of the spatial structure, which brought about a system of horizontal control [10]. The film *24-25 neatgriezās* (A. Brenčs, 1968) emphasizes that neighbours of the apartment do not know what happens around them, however they always hear everything. This phenomenon suggests a crucial quality of the Soviet living space: synthesis of public and private spaces.

The period between the 1970s and the mid-1980s is characterized by an increased depiction of living spaces in the centre of Riga. Fiction films show obstacles related to space-sharing and neighbouring in the communal apartments (*Tās dullās Paulīnes dēļ*, V. Beinerte, 1979). From the end of the 1980s, representation of private space of city centre has decreased. The research of Soviet cinema has also shown that the central space of apartment is the kitchen. It is worth noting that the kitchen is depicted as an ideology-free zone where woman arranges the space (*Dubultnieks*, R. Pīks, 1986; *Svītas cilvēks*, A. Rozenbergs, 1987). The kitchen of a one-family apartment becomes mythologized as the heart of a private home life and the privileged site of social relations in the Soviet period [29].

Another spatial configuration reviewed in Soviet films is residential complexes or *microraioni*. During the 1940s and 1950s,

only three documentaries (*Padomju Latvija Nr. 52*, N. Karmazinskis, 1946; *Padomju Latvija Nr. 43*, V. Šeļepeņš, 1949; and *Padomju Latvija Nr. 14*, H. Šuļatins, 1949) portray the construction of a five-storey residential apartment. Each film emphasizes the necessity of apartment allocation to industrial workers. Starting with the end of 1950s and beginning of the 1960s, for the first time, private space of *microraioni* is depicted in two fiction films (*Šķēps un roze*, L. Leimanis, 1959; *Kārkli pelēki zied*, G. Piesis, 1961). Soviet residential structures are represented more spacious, with more than one room and newest appliances. Moreover, these living spaces are resided by progressive young adults who conform with the Soviet ideology. For example, when the main female character Daiga of film *Šķēps un roze* moves into a new apartment, located in *Āgenskalna priedes*, she declares that “we should live so well now as no one has ever lived before”.

Representation of private space is avoided in documentaries of this period. Filmmakers rather portray the construction process of five-storey dwellings for factory workers in newly-built residential areas *Āgenskalna priedes*, *Ilguciems* and *Jugla* (*Padomju Latvija Nr. 9*, 1960). All five documentaries of this period illustrate both satisfied residents who appreciate the infrastructure of *microraioni* while meeting friends, visiting cafes and walking in the streets near dwellings (*Padomju Latvija Nr. 28*, 1961), and idealized house assemblage where gender-equal, diverse and multicultural labour force is building “better future for the Soviet citizen” (*Padomju Latvija Nr. 13*, 1959).

From the mid-1960s the focus was set on the continuous expansion of prior enterprises in order to reduce deficiency of commodities and services. Accordingly, these conditions advanced the construction of residential houses. Living space of *microraioni* is portrayed in four films (*Četri balti krekli*, R. Kalniņš, 1967; *Meldru mežs*, E. Lācis, 1971). However, due to limited information about filming location and fragmented depiction of these

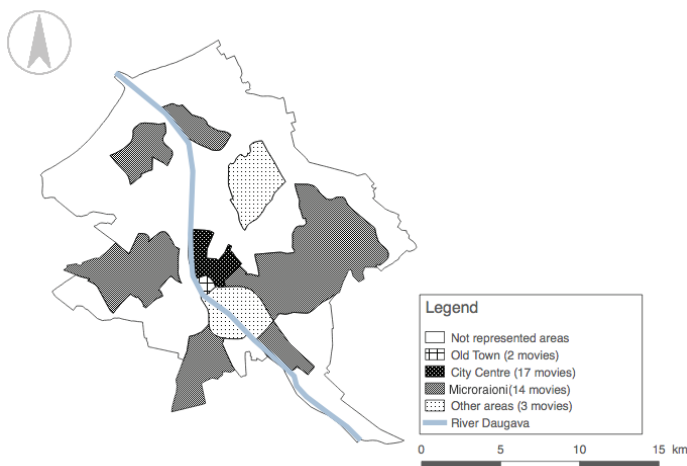


Fig. 5. Represented living spaces in reviewed films from 1972 to 1985 [Figure: J. Matvejs].



Fig. 6. Leaving city and heading to countryside in film *Limuzīns Jāņu nakts krāsā* [Photo: Riga Film Museum Archive].

spaces, it is impossible to determine exact districts in Riga, where the interiors had been recorded. The current study found that *microrraioni* already make an integral part of the city, where courtyards and front entrance to the living space becomes a space of social conflict. Moreover, the films illustrate a new socio-cultural tradition – *housewarming party* or *sālszmaize* (Fig. 3). Housewarming is an important component in representing living space of *microrraioni*, and it plays a key role in a mutual communication in the Soviet period. The apartments of *microrraioni* are represented as something desired for a long time. For example, the main character in film *Karalienes bruņinieks* (R. Kalniņš, 1970) asks her husband: “When do you think we will get our own apartment?”. On the contrary, the documentaries during the mid-1960s and beginning of the 1970s tend to portray interiors in combination with other private and public structures: balconies, kindergartens, schools and stores (*Padomju Latvija Nr. 3*, 1971).

Between the early 1970s and mid-1980s, lack of apartments gradually is defeated, however there is an increasing concern about the quality of living (Fig. 4). Depiction of living space in *microrraioni* increases (Fig. 5). Besides interior, films also represent interrelated and complex groups of spaces in these neighbourhoods – courtyards, playgrounds and parks, that supplement the portrayal of homeroom (*Dāvana pa telefonu*, A. Brenčs, 1977). Moreover, it is possible to compare the interior in Soviet films with French philosopher Michel Foucault’s social theory of panopticon, where the main character acts as a watchman, who rationally observes the external space (*Laika prognoze augustam*, J. Ločmele, 1983; *Pēdējā indulgence*, A. Neretniece, 1985). However, at the end of this period, residents in interiors of *microrraioni* are depicted dissatisfied. It is related to several flaws in the living space, such as narrowness of rooms, uniformity of the space and poor quality of construction materials (*Novēli man lidojumam nelabvēlīgu laiku*, V. Brasla, 1980). For example, Ilmārs,

the main character in film *Laika prognoze augustam* exclaims: “There is no water again! Why is there no water?”.

The period of the mid-1980s is characterized by the shift from centrally planned to market economy. Political reforms and the national revival movement also changed the perception of living space with emerging priorities of living standards and ecological solutions. During this period, filmmakers tend to depict neglected multi-storey apartment buildings from the distance, emphasizing the presence in urban structure of this type of dwelling. However, none of the reviewed films represent interior of the building.

The third reviewed geographical area of cinematic landscape is *countryside*. Although starting with the mid-1940s part of the existing state resources were allocated to the construction of socialist architecture, living space in the films is represented more as an important component of rural and not urban landscape. These aspects also appear in 11 reviewed films of the period between the 1940s and 1950s. Living space in the countryside is depicted as war damaged place with limited household objects in dwellings and older generation being the only individuals who reside on the property. In comparison, people in the rural areas are represented as humble and accepting ongoing political changes (*Dēli*, A. Ivanovs, 1946). In the films of this period the main spatial configuration in countryside is dim living room with limited appliances.

Significant modification of depicting rural residential space came into view starting from the 1970s. Representation of rural spaces increased (Fig. 6). Moreover, this study has shown that dwellings in the countryside are mostly portrayed together with episodes of Riga’s centre or *microrraioni*. These films emphasize the necessity of escape from urban environment (*Trīs dienas pārdomām*, R. Kalniņš, 1980). In most of the films that depict rural huserooms, central elements of the space are a large ta-

ble in the guestroom, loaf of bread, and the elders who arrange the space. This both defines a family and tradition space and becomes an antithesis for more advanced and modernized living space in the capital.

CONCLUSION

This research sets out to determine the manner and practice of representing living space in Riga in the Soviet period. This study has found that private space is frequently portrayed in the films of the Soviet period and thus forms an essential part of Soviet urban structure. The Old Town, city centre, *microraioni* and suburban areas of Riga are an integral part of the Soviet urban perception frequently represented in films. However, it is worth mentioning that the five development stages of Soviet living space described by Gentile and Sjöberg do not overlap with the stages of private space representation in films.

The analysis of fiction films has shown that between the mid-1940s and the end of 1950s films depicted living space in inner-Riga and rural areas. The themes of war-caused damages and splendid interiors of the apartments in Riga centre dominated throughout this period. *Microraioni* begin to be substantially represented in the beginning of the 1960s. A common feature of these films was the idealization of reinforced concrete panel residential apartments and depiction of progressive Soviet residents. Moreover, in this period, the portrayal of the Old Town decreased and the apartments of city centre experienced change from wealthy properties to communal living spaces, thus *sovi-etising* apartments and erasing the border between public and private spatial realms.

Starting with the 1970s and throughout the 1980s, an apartment in a *microraion* is a space where to escape from Soviet utopian everyday and from where to advance opposition against political control. During this period, residents are also preoccupied with the idea of cosiness, thus rearranging and improving the domestic space. At the end of the 1980s, representation of living space is dichotomous: while apartments in Riga are modernized and emphasize the future of communism, rural housing is a space where to escape from Riga's monotony.

The most obvious finding emerging from this research is that *microraioni* are frequently depicted in both documentaries and fiction films, thus becoming an integral part of visually represented space in the Soviet period. However, living space in *microraioni* is not cinematic and the portrayal of Soviet apartments is limited, especially in the news-reels, where representation of interiors is rather ignored due to the complexity to depict a narrow apartment and unwillingness to expose comfort and appliances in limited residential space. Filmmakers rather depict more spacious rooms in the countryside or luxurious interiors of the city centre. Moreover, this study has shown that although Soviet films have not accomplished their primary goal of restricting the perception of urban space and the fact that both residential districts and living spaces have experienced numerous improvements in recent years, it can be stated that the Soviet cinema is a crucial evidence that illustrates achievements in home arrangement and

cinematography, as well as qualities and expectations of society of that particular period.

REFERENCES

1. **Bater, J.** *The Soviet City. Ideal and Reality*. London: Edward Arnold Ltd, 1980. 196 p.
2. **Brīņis, J., Buka, O.** *Pilsētu un lauku apdzīvoto vietu kompleksu arhitektoniski telpiskā plānošana. Mācību grāmata*. Rīga: RTU, 2016, pp. 14–15.
3. **Buchli, V.** Khrushchev, Modernism, and the Fight against Petit-bourgeois Consciousness in the Soviet Home. *Journal of Design History*, Vol. 10, Issue 2, 1997, pp. 166–176.
4. **Buka, O., Volrāts, U.** *Pilsētībūvniecība*. Rīga: Zvaigzne, 1987. 252 lpp.
5. **Bunkše, E. V.** The Role of a Human Environment in Soviet Urban Planning. *Geographical Review*. Vol. 69, Issue 4, 1979, pp. 379–394.
6. **Clarke, D. B.** *The Cinematic City*. London: Routledge, 1979, 264 p.
7. **Strautmanis, I., Krastiņš, J., Buka, O., Asaris G.** *Arhitektura sovetskoj Latvii* (Страутманис И. А., Крастиньш Я. А., Бука О.М., Асарис Г. К. Архитектура советской Латвии). Moskva: Strojizdat, 1987, 319 p.
8. **Fedorov, A.** The Mass and Individual Terror in the Mirror of the Soviet and Russian Cinema (the Feature Films of the Sound Period) and Media Literacy Education. *European Research*. Vol. 101, Issue 12, 2015, pp. 778–771. <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2717935>
9. **French, R. A.** *Plans, pragmatism and people: the legacy of Soviet planning for today's cities*. London: UCL Press, 1995. 225 p.
10. **Gerasimova, K.** Public privacy in the Soviet communal apartment. *Socialist spaces: sites of everyday life in the Eastern Bloc* [Crowley, D., Reid, S., eds.]. Oxford: Berg, 2002, pp. 207–231.
11. **Gerchuk, I.** The Aesthetics of Everyday Life in the Khrushchev Thaw in the USSR (1954–64). *Style and Socialism. Modernity and Material Culture in Post-War Eastern Europe* [Reid, S.E., Crowley, D., eds.]. Oxford: Berg, 2000. 228 p.
12. **Gentile, M., Sjöberg, Ö.** Intra-urban Landscapes of Priority: The Soviet Legacy. *Europe-Asia Studies*, Vol. 58, Issue 5, 2006, pp. 701–729. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09668130600731268>
13. **Gentile, M., Sjöberg, Ö.** Space of Priority: The Geography of Soviet Housing Construction in Daugavpils, Latvia. *Annals of Association of American Geographers*, Vol. 100, Issue 1, 2010, pp. 112–136. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00045600903378994>
14. **Grava, S.** The urban heritage of the Soviet regime: the case of Riga Latvia. *Journal of the American Planning Association*, Vol. 59, Issue 1, 2007, pp. 9–22. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01944369308975842>
15. **Hay, J.** Piecing together what remains of the cinematic city. *The Cinematic City* [Clarke, D.B. ed.]. London: Routledge, 1997, pp. 211–214.
16. **Hazan, A.R., Lipton, H.L., Glantz, S.A.** Popular films do not reflect current tobacco use. *American Journal of Public Health*. 84, 1994, pp. 998–1000.
17. **Jász, B.** Hidden Modernism: Architecture Theory of the Socialist Realist Gap. *Periodica Polytechnica Architecture*, Vol. 49, Issue 1, 2018, pp. 92–97. <https://doi.org/10.3311/PPAr.12168>
18. **Kaganovsky, L.** Postmemory, Counter-memory: Soviet Cinema of the 1960s. *The Socialist Sixties: Crossing Borders in the Second World* [Gorsuch, D. Koenker ed.]. Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2013, pp. 235–243.
19. **Kennedy, C., Lukinbeal, C.** Towards a holistic approach to geographic research on film. *Progress in Human Geography*, Vol. 21, Issue 1, 1997, pp. 33–50. <https://doi.org/10.1191/030913297673503066>
20. **Lukinbeal, C.** Cinematic Landscapes. *Journal of Cultural Geography*, Vol. 23, Issue 1, 2005, pp. 3–22. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08873630509478229>
21. **Lukinbeal, C., Zimmermann, S.** *The Geography of Cinema – A Cinematic World*. Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag GmbH, 2008. 205 p.
22. **Mazierska, E.** Squeezing Space, Releasing Space: Spatial Research in the Study of Eastern European Cinema. *Cinema, State Socialism and Society in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, 1917–1989: Re-visions* [S. Bahun, J. Haynes, eds.]. 2014, p. 9.
23. **Nāripea, E.** HOME and AWAY: Urban Representations in 1980s Soviet Estonian Cinema. *Spec. issue of Place and Location: Studies in Environmental Aesthetics and Semiotics*, 2003, pp. 405–431.
24. **Nāripea, E.** Medieval socialist realism: Representations of Tallinn Old Town in Soviet Estonian feature films, 1969–1972. *Spec. issue of Place and Location: Studies in Environmental Aesthetics and Semiotics*, IV, 2004, pp. 121–144.
25. **Nāripea, E.** National Space, (Trans)National Cinema. Estonian Film in the 1960s. *A Companion to Eastern European Cinema* [Imre, A., ed.]. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2014, pp. 244–255.
26. **Novikova, I.** The Cinematic City and Itineraries in Riga, Tallinn and Vilnius. *Urban Semiotics: The City as a Cultural-Historical Phenomena*. [Pilschchikov, I. ed.]. Tallinn: Tallinn University Press, 2015, pp. 119–142.
27. **Oukadero, L.** *The Cinema of the Soviet Thaw: Space, Materiality, Movement*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2017. 228 p.

28. **Prokhorov, A.** *Springtime for Soviet Cinema. Re/Viewing the 1960s*. Pittsburgh: Russian Film Symposium, 2001. 50 p.
29. **Reid, S.** The Khrushchev Kitchen: Domesticating the Scientific-Technological Revolution. *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 40, Issue 2, 2005, pp. 289–315. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022009405051554>
30. **Reid, S.** Khrushchev Modern: Agency and Modernization in the Soviet Home. *Cahiers Du Monde Russe*, Vol. 47, Issue 1, 2006, pp. 227–258.
31. **Reid, S.** The meaning of home: “The only bit of the world you can have to yourself”. *Borders of Socialism*. [Siegelbaum, L. H. ed.]. *Private Spheres of Soviet Russia*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006, pp. 145–162.
32. **Reid, S.** Communist Comfort: Socialist Modernism and the Making of Cosy Homes in the Khrushchev Era. *Gender & History*, Vol. 21, Issue 3, 2009, pp. 465–498. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-0424.2009.01564.x>
33. **Rose, G.** Teaching visualised geographies: towards a methodology for the interpretation of visual materials. *Journal of Geography in Higher Education*, Vol. 20, Issue 3, 1996, pp. 281–294. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03098269608709373>
34. **Rose, G.** *Visual methodologies: An introduction to the interpretation of visual materials*. London: Sage, 2007. 304 p.
35. **Roth-Ey, K.** Finding a Home for Television in the USSR, 1950–1970. *Slavic Review*, Vol. 66, Issue 2, 2007, pp. 278–306. <https://doi.org/10.2307/20060221>
36. **Rubins, J.** *Rīgas dzīvojamais fonds 20. gadsimtā*. Rīga: Jumava, 2004. 104 lpp.
37. **Rudovska, M.** Expired Monuments: Case Studies on Soviet-era Architecture through the Kaleidoscope of Postcolonialism. *Kunstiteaduslikke Uurimusi*, Vol. 32, Issue 3/4, 2012, pp. 77–80.
38. **Sanders, R.** Developing geographers through photography: enlarging concepts. *Journal of Geography in Higher Education*, Vol. 3, Issue 1, 2007, pp. 181–195. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03098260601033118>
39. **Scherbenok, A.** This is not a pipe: Soviet Historical Reality and Spectatorial Belief in Perestroika and Post-Soviet Cinema. *Slavonica*, Vol. 17, Issue 2, 2011, pp. 145–155. <https://doi.org/10.1179/136174211X13122749974320>
40. **Varga-Harris, C.** Homemaking and the Aesthetic and Moral Perimeters of the Soviet Home During the Khrushchev Era. *Journal of Social History*, Vol. 41, Issue 3, 2008, pp. 561–589. <https://doi.org/10.1353/jsh.2008.0051>
41. **Varga-Harris, C.** *Stories of House and Home: Soviet Apartment Life During the Khrushchev Years*. New York: Cornell University Press, 2015. 296 p.



Jānis Matvejs (b. Riga, 1991) received the degree of Bachelor of Arts from the Latvian Academy of Culture in 2014 and the degree of Master of Geography from the University of Latvia in 2016. Since 2016, he has been a PhD student with the University of Latvia. The topic of his thesis is “Architecture and its representation in Soviet cinema: the case of Riga”. He participated in several international conferences on geography, the latest being “Nordic Geographers’ Meeting 2017” at Stockholm University. His current research interests are urban landscape, city and suburban space, cinematography, cultural geography, visual methods in geographical research.

CONTACT DATA

Jānis Matvejs

Faculty of Geography and Earth Sciences, University of Latvia

Address: 1 Jelgavas St., Riga, LV-1004

Phone: +371 29878918

E-mail: janis.matvejs@gmail.com