

SHORT TERM SCIENTIFIC MISSION (STSM) SCIENTIFIC REPORT

This report is submitted for approval by the STSM applicant to the STSM coordinator

Action number: COST Action 18137 on Middle Class Mass Housing
STSM title: Policy Interventions of Large Housing Estates in the Baltics
STSM start and end date: 15/02/2020 to 01/03/2020
Grantee name: Johanna Pirrus

PURPOSE OF THE STSM:

The purpose for the STSM was to conduct additional fieldwork for my doctoral thesis I hope to defend in 2020. The aim of my research is to compare the Baltic experience and provide insight of small-scale public and civic interventions in mass housing areas that might be applicable in other geographies. This nicely coincides with the WG3 package that focuses on the relations between housing and residents' quality of life, with special attention to ITC's countries.

First, I wanted to do some additional research in Vilnius, mainly to get a better understanding of the urban planning and governance context. For that I carried out semi-structured expert interviews with NGO representatives I could not reach during my previous time on location. In addition, with the help of the host institution and Marija Dremaitė in particular I aimed to get a better understanding of current urban policy and planning situation in Vilnius.

Secondly, I wanted to incorporate Latvian case (Riga) into my research. In Riga I conducted semi-structured interviews with key experts – architects, urban planners, civic activists, NGO members and policy analysts. Also, with the help of the host institution, I aimed to better my understanding of Latvian urban policy context.

DESCRIPTION OF WORK CARRIED OUT DURING THE STSMS

My stay in Vilnius at Vilnius University, Faculty of History with my host Marija Dremaitė was very fruitful. Beforehand I had already made arrangements to meet up with one of the NGO representatives. Marija Dremaitė helped me with contacts with others and gave me insight on interesting and research relevant literature. I managed to carry out 3 additional interviews with 5 people altogether (I already had 5 interviews with 8 people done during previous fieldwork). I gained more knowledge of the current urban development trends in Vilnius and of different stakeholders at play. I also attended a doctoral seminar and did additional research on Baltic context oriented scientific literature. All additional time was spent on writing the article.

Since I wished to add Riga to my research to have coverage of the Baltics, fieldwork in Riga had a lot to offer. First I had a preliminary meeting at Riga Technical University, Faculty of Architecture with my hosts Sandra Treija, Alisa Korolova and Uģis Bratuškins with whom I aimed to get a preliminary overview and lay down my schedule during my stay in Riga. First off I joined a seminar for architecture and landscape architecture students that presented their design ideas for municipality owned public spaces. One of these areas is in Zolitūde (mass housing area in Riga). I managed to conduct 5 interviews with NGO representatives, city planning officials, researchers and urban practitioners (8 people) on the record. Off the record I was able to talk with activists and researchers (5 people). I believe I managed to get a good overview of current urban policy context in Riga with focus on mass housing area development in particular. In addition, I attended a public workshop for residents in Purvciems, another mass housing neighbourhood. I also gathered relevant scientific literature.

DESCRIPTION OF THE MAIN RESULTS OBTAINED

The main result is the research article (authors myself and my supervisor Kadri Leetmaa) that is currently in the final stages of writing and is about to be sent in for internal review process for the special issue of Journal of Housing and Built Environment “Housing Estates in the era of marketization – governance practices and urban planning”.

Secondly, I was able to gather relevant interview data and generate a nice overview of research and scientific articles concerning mass housing in the Baltics.

Thirdly, I was able to create new connections between Estonian, Latvian and Lithuanian NGOs, activists and researchers with whom I exchanged already published works.

FUTURE COLLABORATIONS (if applicable)

I already made plans for future collaboration with Alisa Korolova, concerning eco gardening/urban gardening in Riga and Tallinn/Tartu.

As I am also part of Estonian Urban Lab (which is a NGO that aims to promote collaborative planning practices), I was able to exchange new ideas with various activists and NGO representatives in Vilnius and Riga.

In conclusion, based on my experience in Vilnius and Riga, I see many possibilities for joint or collaborative research in different areas, e.g. geography, architecture.