

Transformation of the historical heritage and spatial perception of Ilūkste

Aija Ziemeļniece 

Latvia University of Life Sciences and Technologies, Latvia

Abstract. The development plan of the Upper Daugava Region (2022-2027) identifies Ilūkste as a potentially strong development centre of regional importance. The plan is designed to improve the quality of roads of regional importance infrastructure development and tourism in the Ilūkste area.

This document encourages the initiation of serious cultural landscape research for Ilūkste. The scale of the existing Daugavpils development, the visibility and proximity of the city do not weaken and create strong competition for Ilūkste, but on the contrary - strengthen the revival of Ilūkste as a historic centre alongside a large-scale settlement. That means that on opposite banks of the Daugava there are two different urban spaces with different cultural and historical layers and scales.

The preservation of cultural heritage is increasingly being discussed in the forums of the European Union, highlighting the values that are being lost in warfare and in the wastefulness of national economic policies. The problem of heritage conservation is also present in areas where there is no war, but where mistakes have been made due to the ineptitude of the political authorities. This is also true of the Latvian Awakening in the 1990s, when, after the occupation, "business as usual" still continued. With the collapse of collectivisation and the development of private enterprise, no attention was paid to the concepts of landscape, viewpoints, silhouettes, landmarks, climaxes, etc. The smaller the scale of the cultural landscape, the deeper the cracks of neglect that are left in the cultural landscape. The small town of Ilūkste is one example in Latvia.

The loss of the intrinsic spatiality of a historic small town risks transforming not only the perception of place and people at a local level, but also at a regional and national level, thereby changing the character and uniqueness of a nation's living space.

Natural and man-made elements are constantly changing, seeking to adapt. Biological processes, economic and political power, generational change, rapid technological development can all influence the development of an area. As one changes, another is subjected to change, resulting in a complete or partial transformation. This is most evident in small towns, which have long been subject to political change and the outflow of the younger generation to the metropolises. Historical space is thus also surrounded by indifference and neglect. The current municipality of Ilūkste has energetically set to work to recover the historic identity of the settlement, conscious of both the revival of the former Jesuit church and convent and the dismantling or renovation of aesthetically poor-quality buildings.

Keywords: building silhouette, wooden heritage, sacral architecture

Introduction

The Livonian Order's Selija, bordered to the south by Lithuania and to the north by the Daugava River, was able to attract people who travelled both downriver and overland, creating new settlements. One of these was Ilūkste, first mentioned in ancient records in 1559 as a town on the land of Count Kasper Sieberg, owner of the Pilskalne (*Šlosberga*) manor, on the left bank of the Ilūkste River – at the crossroads – or at the ford of the Ilūkste River [5]. Here the land routes of central Selenia, Lithuania, Belarus and Daugavpils converged and Ilūkste began to develop as a trade centre [6]. The land roads were mainly built along the river banks to prevent travellers from getting lost. After the eastern part of the Duchy of Courland and Semigallia came under Polish rule in 1561, or under the rule of Polish nobles, the territories developed as trade and craft centres typical of Poland, serving a wider area. The second type of settlement was the manorial centre with a church, mills, taverns. The third was the farmstead. The town of Ilūkste became the economic, cultural and educational centre of Selenia thanks to its favourable location [5; 6]. Ilūkste's geographical location next to the Ilūkste River has contributed to the strong development of a roadside settlement, which was enhanced by its proximity to the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, the Russian province and Poland. The economic development of Ilūkste was



Fig. 1. Spatial axes - east/west (Līksna-Ilūkste-Šlosberga) and north/south (Subāte-Lithuania) [author's diagram, 2023]

ensured by trade crossroads and the movement of people down the Daugava: Old Believers, Orthodox, Jewish merchants, Lithuanian Catholics. A very diverse mix of denominations, which has contributed to the development of churches of different denominations at the crossroads (4). Due to its location - at the crossroads of roads from Selenia, Lithuania, Belarus and Daugavpils - Ilūkste began to develop as a trade centre and, after joining the Russian Empire in 1798, was the centre of the Ilūkste Castle Court (*Hauptmannschaft Illuxt*). This is especially true when serfdom was abolished in the territory of the Kurzeme province in 1819. The St. Petersburg-Warsaw highway (1840), the construction of the Dinaburg – Tiltzite or Daugavpils – Königsberg railway (1873).

The front line of the First World War passed through the town without leaving a single house [8]. This started the destruction of the town.

The cultural space of Ilūkste was given a positive multicoloured character at the beginning of the 17th century, with the development of the German-Baltic culture of the Reformation and the Duchy of Courland-Semigallia, and the conservative-Catholic layering of identity: the farming skills, language, mental peculiarities, traditions of different ethnic groups. Each denomination had its own churches, which were located in one place and formed the centre of the settlement.

The aim of the study: to reflect the features of the cultural and historical buildings of Ilūkste and the impact of spatial transformation.

Research objectives:

- to survey the historic wooden heritage of the small town, its scale and perception along the Ilūkste River;
- to assess the viewpoints of the historic centre – alongside the 1970s–1980s typical high-rise residential buildings;
- assess the aspects that cause a loss of place identity and visual expression in the landscape.

The Ilūkste cultural landscape from the historical centre is marked by the A-R transversal axis with its dominant features: on the left bank of the Daugava – the former Daugava River. On the right bank of the Daugava – the Līksna church with the verticality of the bell towers. The other axis of the cultural landscape, or the cross axis in the N-S direction, is formed by the natural substrate or the beds of the Daugava and Ilūkste rivers. In the silhouette of the landscape in the early 20th century, the two spatial axes were united by several dominant features: Bell towers of the Catholic church in Līksna, Ilūkste, ex. The bell towers of the Jesuit church, the spires of the Lutheran and Catholic churches in Ilūkste. On the other hand, the former ensemble of the Schlosberg manor completed the spatial axis with a picturesque natural base.

The collection of historical materials about Ilūkste shows the character of the construction of the small town. A settlement whose historical centre was made up of churches of various denominations with high bell towers on an impressive scale, grouped around a single church square, forming the so-called sacral centre. At the back of the churches, on the other hand, were the dirt roads of the 1890s, driven in by ox carts. Along the roadsides, small one-storey wooden houses, a small arable land and pastures. Wooden buildings have one chimney – the only element of the building that does not use wood, but boulders and clay. A meagre existence in a conservative Catholic tradition also created a contrast in the landscape.

The carriageways or roads were made wide so that the fire disaster would not spread to the opposite side of the development with its wooden houses and cattle sheds. Rows of trees were planted on both sides of the road to keep out dust and provide shade. Several larch trees can be seen along the roads in Ilūkste, which testified to the presence of a White German identity in the town.



Fig. 2. Historical Jesuit Cathedral
[research material of SIA "AIG"; arch. I.Dirveiks, 2021]



Fig. 3. Ilūkste from the north [Ilūkste Local History Museum]

Between the church square and the Ilūkste River is the former Jesuit church and convent, where a spectacular orchard was planted. It is possible to reconstruct the site of the orchard, recovering its historic scale in the landscape along the left bank of the river. Between 1754 and 1769 the Jesuits built a church with two high towers in Ilūkste. The Jesuit mission in Ilūkste was elevated to a residence of the order. The church was destroyed during the First World War. At present, its foundations have been cleared and conservation is possible, developing a spatial museum-like renovation.

The monastery (Fig. 2) – designed by Jesuit architect Jakob Ruoff. The corridors and the monks' living quarters are covered with high cross vaulted ceilings. Ilūkste was one of the most important Jesuit centres in the Duchy of Courland and Semigallia. The building has preserved its original layout and is one of the few monastic complexes that exist in Latvia from the 18th century [7].

The Jesuit church and convent were a very strong visual dominant, clearly showing not only the architectural culmination of the form, but also conveying the spiritual values of the cultural space. In 1917, Ilūkste was granted the right to become a town, but it did not regain its former importance. All the churches were destroyed, including the large Catholic church, which was not rebuilt after the war, but in 1955 the ruins were blown up.

Materials and Methods

The two world wars and the economic and political pressure from Russia in the 1950s-1980s have contributed to the destruction of the cultural space of a historically rich sacral centre in Latvia.

Methods used in the study:

Comparative method – architectural-historical research - historical buildings and their context in the rural landscape, scale, perception, identity research;

Cartographic method – assessment of the structure and development of Ilūkste;

Photo-fixation method – valuation of photographic material for cultural heritage;

Monographic or descriptive method and development of a rationale.

The identity of the landscape can be read in the characteristics of the watercourses – the width and serenity of the Daugava and the meandering of the Ilūkste. Until the 19th century, the river Ilūga. The spires of the churches in Ilūkste and Līksna were visible in distant vistas (Fig. 3). At the turn of the 19th/20th century, economic activity, crafts and trade began to shape the socio-economic development and the spatial and landscape order of the area, with the historic centre and surrounding residential areas, with increasing certainty. This led to clearly defined spatial axes and their intersections between the natural substrate elements (riverbeds, hills along the riverbanks, estate valley) and the historic trade routes (Fig. 4). In the course of the 20th century, Latvia's changing economic and political conditions have profoundly transformed the cultural and historical values of the place - the economic prosperity of the area and the spiritual values of the community.



Fig. 4. Šlosberga - Ilūkste - Līksna as an axis of the cultural and historical landscape
[author's scheme, 2023]

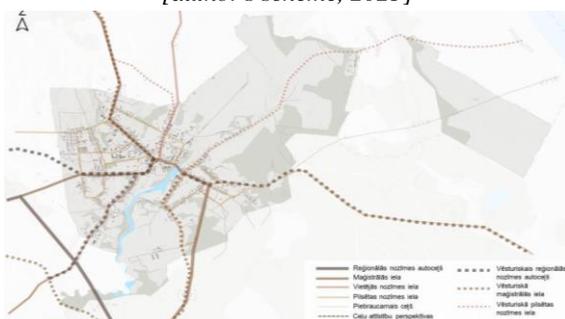


Fig. 5. Ilūkste street and rural road network at the beginning of the 21st century
[A. Ločmele scheme, 2023]



Fig. 6. "The location of the 'gate' for the entrance road with the lane leading through the lane to the dwellings. Symbol of the blessing of the place
[photo by the author, 2023]



Fig. 7. Boulder pavement of the old highway to Pristāņi
[photo by the author, 2023]

Results and Discussion

At the beginning of the development of measures to preserve and protect the cultural and historical image of Ilūkste, it is necessary to identify landscapes whose spatial structure and character of elements are particularly important for the perception of the silhouette and urban image, selecting certain areas for which the primary objective is to create a sense of place. One of the conditions for the recovery and integration of the historic image of Ilūkste is the creation of a cultural landscape protection or connecting network, which includes planning solutions, the location of place-specific elements and the incorporation of Ilūkste's most characteristic structural elements within the cultural landscapes.

For the identification of cultural landscapes in Ilūkste, the study is based on an initial assessment of historic sites and characteristic elements, as well as on the identification of the contemporary situation, determining the form, features and boundaries of potentially protected elements of the currently preserved historic areas. The identification of the character of the areas is not only based on an assessment of the physical condition of the actual site, but also on the role of local people in selecting spatial elements, natural features, built character, street pattern and individual objects that are key to the perception of the place and serve as symbols of Ilūkste among residents, visitors and people

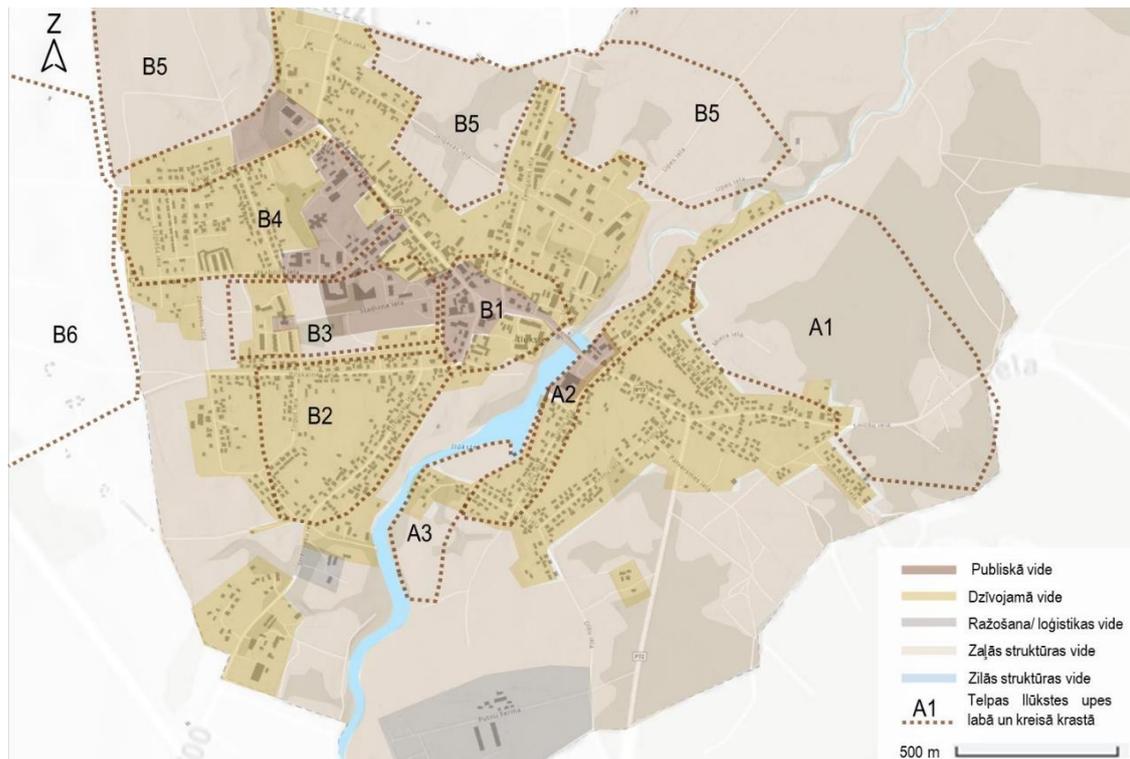


Fig. 8. Compositional and spatial structure of Ilūkste urban plan [A.Ločmele scheme, 2023]

A: The right bank of the Ilūkste river: 1. The eastern part is forest landscape; 2. Low-rise wooden heritage - residential buildings - 19th/20th centuries; 3. Floodplain meadows. B: The left bank of the Ilūkste river: 1. Sacred heritage zone (18th/19th century) - historic centre; 2. Low-rise residential buildings between the river and Pilskalnes Street (1960s-1980s); 3. Large-scale buildings between Pilskalnes and Jēkabpils streets (20th/21st century); 4. Low-rise residential buildings between Jēkabpils and Gravju streets (20th/21st century); 5. Agro landscape (1970s); 6. Landscape space of Šlosberga Manor

connected with the small town. The built fabric of Ilūkste can be divided into 9 smaller scale landscape spaces, defined by transparent boundaries - different building character and land use, roads, woodland border, river, agro landscape. The boundary lines are not unambiguous, but there are clearly readable smaller-scale parts of the urban areas that form the central spatial structure of Ilūkste.

The south-eastern part of the city, or the GOOD bank of the river, consists of a distinct natural base with floodplain meadows, woodland and landforms. The coast is characterised by a high proportion of biodiversity, a defined spatial composition of roads and buildings. The forest road leads eastwards to the historic site of the *Pristanĵ* (ferry) over the Daugava opposite the majestic Līksna Church. It is a cultural and historical link that led from the province of Courland on the left bank of the Daugava to the province of Vidzeme on the right bank of the Daugava. This maintains a very strong cultural and historical intrigue. The impressive bell towers of the Līksna Church can be seen in the distant view from the Ilūkste country road.

The right bank of the Ilūkste River is spatially most strongly influenced by the landscape, which is made up of a wooden heritage of low-rise buildings

with outbuildings and plots of land with root gardens. Behind the gardens are pastures for livestock. The herds have disappeared, but the meadows remain, a testimony to the former nature of farming. The spatial scale of the landscape has not been lost.

In turn, the longitudinal axis of the street is repeated in succession - a row of street trees, a belt of shrubbery, the rhythm of the residential buildings, the courtyard area with the outbuildings that close the courtyard. To the rear of the outbuildings, a root garden, a potato and beetroot field with the most fertile topsoil, because manure was dumped on it. Behind the garden land is pasture. This is most clearly read along Oak, Spring and Sand Streets, forming an iconic cultural landscape that should be noted as a museum of the economic life of the 1940s-1970s. The above vividly describes the historical economic pulsation of Latvia (Fig. 9). The low-rise housing with gardens and pastures ends with a wide wooded landscape. The floodplain on the right bank of the river protects the natural substrate from the intensity of development and keeps open distant views along the banks of the river, ensuring the sustainability of the natural substrate. This applies to both banks. The view lines to the former monastery are particularly picturesque.



Fig. 9. The right bank of the river. Wooden heritage for low-rise housing. Plot subdivision with strips of pasture, root gardens, outbuildings and dwellings [author's scheme]

The north-western part of the city, or the bank of the river **KREISAIS**, includes the historic centre of the city, which is characterised by a central building composition. The historic centre has suffered in both wars. The burning of part of the wooden buildings in the Second World War created large areas which were filled in with standard high-rise housing in the 1960s and 1970s, bringing an alien scale and architectural form. This is the case for the wedge-shaped development between Jēkabpils Street and Pilskalnes Street. The low-rise buildings between the river and Pilskalnes Street have been preserved, dating from the 1950s-1960s and with historic building heights.

The historic centre consists of a sacred heritage zone with a forecourt of churches and a circular movement around it. The visual expression of the churches is obscured by overgrown giant trees in the sightlines.

The low-rise development on the right bank of the river ends with a wooded area, while the development area on the left bank has a more pronounced relief and ends with an agrarian landscape extending to the wooded park of Schlosberga Manor.

The landscape of the left bank of the river is completed by the **ensemble of the Šlosberga manor** with elements of the natural base – an old valley, a millpond, a watercourse, a park. The site of the manor is one of the points of the studied landscape, which forms the compositional axis of the cultural space. It is oriented in the west-east direction and connects the two banks of the Daugava: Šlosberga – Ilūkste – Līksna. The old country roads are a distinctive tapestry, starting in Leishmalē, crossing the former Lūksberg and the former Lūksberg. It begins in the Duchy of Courland and extends across the Daugava into the former Livonia. A spatial axis characterised by a dense layering of sacred landscapes.



Fig. 10. Giant tree branches cover wooden buildings [photo by the author, 2023]



Fig. 11. View from the pasture to the street. The scale and character of the wooden heritage elements [photo by the author, 2023]



Fig. 12. The lightest ground at the back of the barn, where manure was dumped for the root garden, potatoes and beetroot [photo by the author, 2023]



Figure 13. Log hull exposed after removing the poplar from the window [photo by the author, 2023]



Fig. 14. Behind the shutters of a luxurious residential building - the inner courtyard pulsates with economic life
[photo by the author, 2023]



Fig. 15. Historical form of the street frontage along the long axis of the street - shrubbery strip, longitudinal frontage [photo by the author, 2023]



Fig. 16. Framing decorations and shutters of Ilūkste buildings. The skills of local Latgale woodworkers
[photo by the author, 2023]



Fig. 17. Historical gate of the former Šlosberga (Pilskalne) manor [photo by the author, 2023]



Fig. 18. New building ex. Schlosberg Manor Park near the central bay [photo by the author, 2023]

The transformation of the cultural landscape was hit hardest by the *political conjuncture after the Soviet occupation in 1940, which demanded adaptation to the requirements of Sovietisation* [3]. Large farms, typical multi-storey residential buildings, machinery hangars. Much of this is currently being dismantled because of the mass livestock farming and the primitivism of mechanisation has lost its relevance today. The transformation of functional activity is a ious turning point in the cultural landscape, promoting reconstruction, restoration, renewal.

Conclusion

The different scales, dominants, culminating points, sightline lengths, viewpoint backdrops, depth plan and foreground of the perception of the landscapes together provide a very dense information material characterising the cultural space in question. On the other hand, a more detailed view provides a more accurate assessment of the architectural and artistic solutions of the historic site and the colouring of the elements of the natural substrate.

For more than 100 years, Ilūkste has managed to preserve the historic farming character of the settlement without changing the scale and style of its buildings. This is not a spatially fragmented but a spatially dominant characteristic of the place:

- preservation of the historic residential area, based on its wooden heritage and craft traditions;
- the preservation of the wooden heritage and the economic zones creates the opportunity to shape the landscape of the reserve museum together with the natural substrate (watercourse, floodplain, woodland, topography);
- Christian values are closely inherited and continued, creating a context for urban space and church gardens;
- Awareness of the large-scale spatial axes provides an opportunity for the development of the eastern part of Selija and cross-border tourism infrastructure (Subāte, Zarasai); preservation of the pristine landscape and natural substrate of both banks of the Identity River;

- floodplain meadows on both banks of the river protect from the intensity of development and keep distant views open, while also ensuring the sustainability of the natural substrate;
- The change in the economic and political structure of the country has given the opportunity to dismantle the Soviet-era slums and, with EU funding, to develop reconstruction, restoration and conservation in the cultural space;
- In the last five years, with the intensification of economic development in Latvia and the centralisation of education, health and business institutions, an avalanche of young people has started to leave small towns. This is a trend that is neglecting cultural and historical values.
- The opposite of this is also true: re-emigration. A new generation is returning to the cultural environment, investing in it and starting businesses based on organic farming trends.

References

1. Development Plan of the Upper Daugava Region 2022-2027 Daugavpils City Council, 2022.
2. Chancellery of the President of Latvia, State Heraldry Commission, 2008. Coats of arms of Latvia. Neputns. p.231.
3. **Mintaurs, M.** The history of architectural heritage protection in Latvia. Mēputns, 2016., p.252
4. **Piļka, A.** *Ilūkste Augškurzeme metropolis*. Jelgava : Jelgavas tipogrāfija; 2022.; p.147
5. **Strods, H.** *History of the Latvian Catholic Church: 1075-1995*. Rīga: Poligrāfists, 1996.; p. 160; p. 162.
6. **Strods, H.** *Selija senāk un tagad*. Jumava ; 2011; p.121
7. **Vaivods, J.** *History of the Catholic Church in Latvia: the Recatholization of Latvia*. Rīga Metropolitan Curia, 1994; p. 324
8. History and Local History Museum. Ilūkste.

AUTHORS:

Aija Ziemeļniece, Dr. arch., is an editor of the internationally cited journal “Landscape Architecture and Art”. She is a Professor at the Department of Landscape Architecture and Planning of Latvia University of Life Sciences and Technologies. She has published more than 20 scientific articles on the concept of cultural and historical heritage preservation and has presented papers at scientific conferences. She is a member of the Latvian Union of Architects. Being a practising architect she has implemented projects for public and residential buildings. E-mail: aija@k-projekts.lv
ORCID iD: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7096-5850>

Kopsavilkums. Augšdaugavas teritorijas attīstības plānā (2022.–2027.g.) Ilūkste ir ievērtēta kā potenciāli spēcīgs reģionālas nozīmes attīstības centrs. Izaugsmes plāns ir veidots ar ieceri, uzlabot reģionālas nozīmes ceļu kvalitāti un Ilūkstes apkaimes tūrisma infrastruktūras attīstību. Dokumentā minētais rosina aizsākt nopietnu kultūrainavas izpēti darbu Ilūkstei. Līdzās Ilūkstei – Daugavpils apbūves mērogs, pilsētas atpazīstamība un tuvums nevis vājina un rada spēcīgu konkurenci Ilūkstei, bet gluži pretēji – stiprina Ilūkstes – kā vēsturiskā centra atdzimšanu līdzās lielmēroga apdzīvotai vietai. Tātad – pretējos Daugavas krastos – divas atšķirīgas pilsētelpas ar dažādu kultūrvēsturisko uzslāņojumu un mērogu.

Aizvien intensīvāk kultūrvēsturiskā mantojuma saglabāšanā tiek runāts Eiropas Savienības forumos, akcentējot vērtības, kas zūd kara darbībā vai valsts ekonomiskās politikas ietekmē. Zaudējot mazpilsētas vēsturisko telpiskumu, ir risks transformēt ne tikai vietu un cilvēku uztveri lokālā līmenī, bet arī reģionālā un valstiskā nozīmē, tādējādi izmainot nācīgas dzīves telpas raksturu un unikālītātes iezīmes.

Dabas un cilvēku radīti elementi spēj nemitīgi mainīties, meklējot pielāgošanos. Teritorijas attīstību var ietekmēt – bioloģiskie procesi, ekonomiski politiskā vara, paaudžu maiņa, strauja tehnoloģiskā attīstība. Mainoties vienam, pārmaiņām tiek pakļauts cits, rodot pilnīgu vai daļēju transformāciju. Vispilgtāk tas ir attiecināms uz apdzīvotām vietām, kuras ir ieguvušas uzplaukumu 18./19.gs., un tad seko politiski notikumi, kas ir izpostījuši un apturējuši kultūrtelpas attīstības gaitu. Savukārt, 21.gs. sāk. posms spilgti iezīmē jaunās paaudzes aizplūšanu no mazpilsētām uz metropolēm. Līdz ar to arī vēsturiskā telpa nonāk aizmirstības ietekmē. Patreizējā Ilūkstes pašvaldība ir enerģiski ķērusies pie darba, lai atgūtu apdzīvotās vietas vēsturisko identitāti, apzinoties gan bij. jezuītu dievnama un klostera būvapjomu atdzimšanu, gan koka apbūves mantojuma vērtības.