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### **Architect Ernests Štālbergs (1883–1958) and Latvian School of Architecture**

(Diss.: Architect Ernests Štālbergs (1883–1958))

The proposed theme is development of modern architectural education in Latvia in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century with its main protagonist architect and professor Ernests Štālbergs. As the dissertation will be a monographic study I want to analyse architect's creative life under different political regimes – rapid changes influenced not only Štālbergs architectural projects but also pedagogical work. His example illustrates difficulties faced by most of the Latvian intellectuals with beliefs that contradicted prevailing doctrine of Soviet regime.

Ernests Štālbergs was one of the Latvian architects who got his professional education in Imperial Russia. In 1914 he graduated from the Department of Architecture at Academy of Arts in St. Petersburg. Having worked for some time in Russian architectural schools as a lecturer, in 1921 he as a high professional and authority with strict academic traditions and approved pedagogical system was invited to become an assistant professor at the Faculty of Architecture at University of Latvia. Before that he also helped his prospective colleagues to develop study program for faculty – the approach was innovative: all classes were organized in workshops with the same curriculum each led by one teacher and differed only by their creative orientation determined by the artistic credo of each teacher.

At first there were two workshops – A and B. Former was run by so-called court architect Eižens Laube (1880–1967) and focused on interpreting the heritage of classical architecture. Latter was headed by architect and well-known researcher of vernacular building traditions Pauls Kundziņš (1888–1983) and turned to national and regional characteristics of architecture. In 1922 Štālbergs opened the third Architectural Workshop C which dealt with functional architectural solutions and was the only one with particular direction towards modern architecture.

Workshop C soon became well-known and prestige, and for almost thirty years meant the most progressive architectural education in Latvia. Štālbergs pedagogical methods were severe but eventually made his students deeply respect his knowledge, expertise and approach

to architectural problems as well as his personality. Pedagogical elements of Workshop C were connected with Štālbergs personal ideas about architecture – the main problem was “form follows function” – rational architecture, not so much a specific architectural style. He encouraged his students to draw freely, preferably using soft pencil, and not become inflexible draftsmen. Students had assignment to design one object in specific urban situation, gradually more and more complicated (from small forms in first year to big structures in graduation project). Štālbergs mobilized student capability by making them deal with the same topic and asked publicly present their work every time and then discussed problems together with other students and workshop assistants. Štālbergs appreciated each original and uncommon idea, but harshly criticized perfunctory work and arrogant students. His former student Teodors Nigulis said that Štālbergs taught to accept critique and those who could do it became great architects.

Special notion and impact on new architects his workshop had in Soviet era — despite communist doctrine his pedagogical approach was still very western and modern. For architecture students in Stalin’s era this was the only opportunity to study modern architecture because at that time the only acceptable creative method was “Socialist Realism” which in architecture meant “new forms” developed out of references to historical styles, particularly Classicism. Despite the fact that Štālbergs received title of an academician, became professor and director of different scientific and architectural institutions soon he had to resign from all these positions because of repressions against all independent thinkers.

Repressions took place in 1950, when Soviet authorities began vicious campaign against western-thinking professors and academic staff by calling them “nationalists” and “cosmopolitans” simultaneously. They were accused of “bringing in” worthless “rationalist architecture” and were forcibly replaced with less educated and narrow-minded lecturers and staff from Russia and Ukraine that had no connection to local or western architectural traditions and values. Štālbergs retired in the same year after a humiliating critique in newspapers about his creative viewpoint and pedagogical approach, organized as a part of the same campaign.