

KAUNO TVIRTOVĖS FORTAS

A Model of Cultural Heritage
Revitalization
through **Education** and **Innovation**

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A Model of Cultural Heritage Revitalization through Education and Innovation:

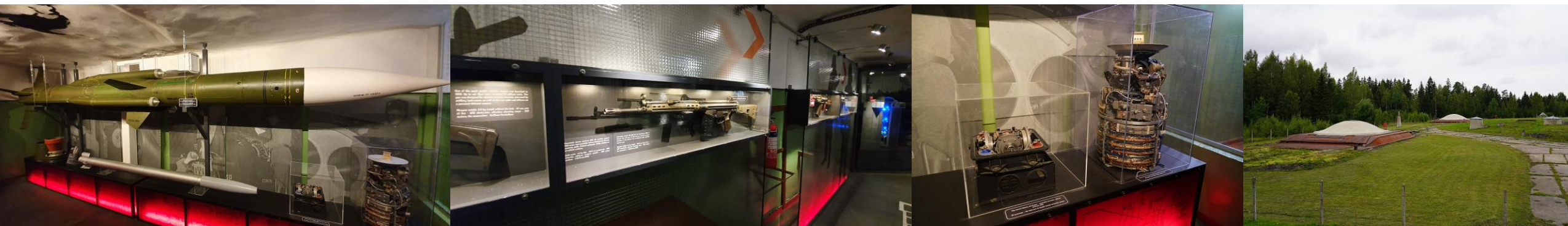
- **Kaunas Fortress VII Fort** – a former military fort transformed into an educational and scientific center
- **Cold War Museum (Žemaitija National Park)** – a Soviet missile base converted into a historical museum

Both sites demonstrate how complex and sensitive heritage can be adapted for modern society through education, memory preservation and public engagement.

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Why Military Heritage Needs Revitalization?

- Military heritage **cannot rely on restoration** alone
- Its original defensive **function is obsolete** and cannot be recreated
- Without **a new purpose**, such sites risk becoming abandoned or irrelevant
- Finding a new, **socially valuable function** is the most complex challenge



The Dark Complexity of Military Heritage

Military heritage often carries **difficult and controversial narratives:**

Kaunas Fortress VII Fort:

- Russian Imperial military history
- The horror of a WWII Nazi concentration site

Soviet underground nuclear base:

- Nuclear weapons and global threat
- Soviet occupation and control
- Soviet army as a source of trauma

This is the historical
background in
which my work
began



Beyond the Museum Approach

Creating a museum is the **most common approach** to heritage preservation.

However, not every heritage site can or should become a museum

Alternative functions can be **equally valuable**:

- education and research;
- community spaces;
- innovation and experimentation;

The key challenge is to find a function that is meaningful, sustainable, and context-sensitive



Cold War Museum – Historical Background

Located in **Žemaitija National Park, Lithuania**

- Established in a former **Soviet underground missile base**
- Built in the 1960s as part of the USSR nuclear weapons system
- Housed **medium-range ballistic missiles (R-12)** with nuclear warheads
- Functioned as a **highly secret military facility** during the Cold War



Transformation into a Museum

- Decommissioned after the collapse of the Soviet Union
- Opened to the public in 1996, **2012**
- **First museum of its kind in Europe**
- Preserves authentic infrastructure:

underground launch silos;

military equipment;

control systems;

- Focus on Cold War history and **nuclear threat awareness**



Meaning and Challenges of Revitalization

Represents a **very difficult heritage**:

- nuclear weapons – top secret information
- global tension and fear
- Located in a **natural protected area** → contrast between nature and military past
- Functions primarily as a **museum and memory site**
- Demonstrates how even **highly militarized spaces** can be adapted for **public**



Popularity and Public Recognition

- One of the most unique Cold War museums in Europe
- Frequently described as a **rare opportunity to visit an authentic nuclear missile base**
- Highlighted as a **major tourist attraction in Žemaitija National Park**
- Noted for its **immersive and authentic visitor experience**
- Recognized for presenting Cold War history in a **powerful and accessible way**

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Parengė **Ema Miliūnaitė**

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Popularity and Public Recognition

“The only Cold War museum in Europe located in an authentic underground missile silo”

(Lithuanian National Encyclopedia, VLE)

“A rare opportunity to visit a real Soviet nuclear missile base”

(Lithuania Travel / National Tourism Information Centre)

“One of the most unique attractions in Lithuania”

(Lithuania Travel)

“An authentic and immersive Cold War experience”

(Atlas Obscura)

“An eerie reminder of the Cold War, hidden deep in the forests of Lithuania”

(CNN Travel)

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Cold War Museum

4.6  (163 reviews) #1 of 9 things to do in Plateliai



Historical Legacy of Kaunas Fortress VII Fort

Built in the late 19th century as part of the **Kaunas Fortress defensive system**

Represents multiple historical layers:

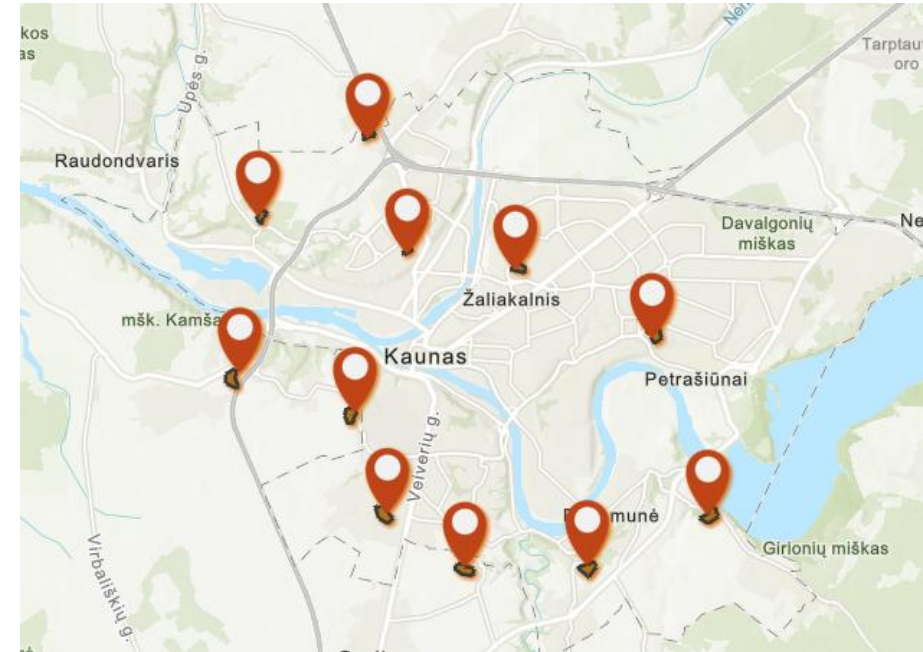
- Russian Imperial military architecture
- World War II atrocities (Nazi concentration site)
- Soviet-period neglect and repurposing
- Lost its original function and identity over time
- Today, it serves as a foundation for **revitalization through new meaning and use**



Why Not a Museum at VII Fort?

Kaunas already has **multiple fortress sites**, creating strong competition for attention

- **Limited tourist flow** reduces the sustainability of a traditional museum model
- The local cultural **economy** alone **cannot support** another museum-scale institution
- A museum would risk becoming **static and underused**
- It would not fully realize the potential of the site for **active public engagement**



Therefore, a different function was needed — one that creates **continuous value for society**

Education as a Revitalization Strategy

Education transforms heritage into a **living and active space**

- Provides **continuous and sustainable use**, not dependent on tourism
- Engages society through **hands-on, experiential learning**
- Creates **long-term value** by investing in future generations
- Allows integration of **science, culture, and history** in one place

Heritage becomes a
platform for **learning,**
innovation, and
impact



From Heritage to Laboratory

- The fort was transformed from a **passive historical site** into an **active scientific environment**
- Original military spaces adapted into **functional laboratories and learning areas**
- Infrastructure redesigned to support **experimentation, not exhibition**
- Heritage becomes a **tool for inquiry, not only observation**
- Combines **historical context with modern scientific practice**

A unique model:
**fortress as a
laboratory**



Laboratory Infrastructure and Activities

- Fully equipped **chemistry and biology laboratories**
- Access to **instrumental analysis** (e.g., chromatography, spectroscopy)
- Designed for **real experimental work**, not demonstrations

Students perform:

- experimental design
- data collection and analysis
- interpretation of results
- Supports **inquiry-based and research-oriented learning**

Students act as
**young
scientists, not
passive learners**



Student Research and EUCYS Achievements

- Students develop **real scientific research projects**
- Participation in **national and international competitions**
- Representation at **EUCYS (European Union Contest for Young Scientists)**
- Research topics address **real-world problems at university-level research standards**
- Heritage site becomes a **platform for knowledge creation**
- Demonstrates that heritage can generate **tangible societal value**

From
preservation to
impact on future
generations



Final Thought:

- Value is not created by funding alone
- True value comes from **ideas**
- Ideas are created by **people**
- Heritage revitalization succeeds when sites become more than structures

•When fortresses
are no longer just
bricks and walls,
but **communities**
and **people**





EDUKACIJOS CENTRAS

**KAUNO
TVIRTOVĖS
FORTAS**

AČIŪ UŽ DĖMESĮ.