



Aesthetics of Architecture



Erasmus+

Lecture 2. Aesthetics of architecture on the way into complex of interdisciplinary fields

2.1. Introductory remarks

2.2. Issues of sustainability, culture and ecology that have been lost in the era of international modernism. Shifting of architecture aesthetics into complex interdisciplinary fields developing new ideas enriching processes of creative practice

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2.1. Introductory remarks

In the 1960s legacy of modernist architecture was criticized, especially the transformation of historic city centers and creation of massive residential complexes. Urban renovation often meant widespread demolitions, and huge residential complexes were built in their place.

Postmodernism began to emerge, a movement that directly attacked the prevailing ideas of modernism, again seeking to revive the traditional language of architectural forms to make architecture more recognizable than it was in the International Style.

The fact that the form inevitably dictates the function was also considered by contemporary architect theorists such as John Simonds and Kevin Lynch. Simonds said that as soon as he looked into the building, his person would recognize the function of the building.

2.1. *Introductory remarks*

Critics explain that urban structures often become recognizable precisely because they have symbolic meanings alongside functional values.

Let us emphasize that the provision that form inevitably reflects a function associated with the above-mentioned "total outward-looking" syndrome inherent in classical rationality, with the "self-understanding" of the form, without realizing that data of cultural context are important for perception, recognition.

Other important problem related with international modernism was ignorance of local context and thus the interests of such kind of subjectivity as *genius loci*.

The idea of *genius loci* as a sort of duplicate personality, as a partner or as intermediary with whom to consult when managing the locality, is important not only in archaic, traditional cultures.

2.1. *Introductory remarks*

The fact that we still often cannot see the environment as something alive (also grasp the *genius loci*) is due to the relic of classical worldview – objectivistic treatment of environment, and understanding other subjectivities only as object of action, of manipulation.

Today most scientific models related with solution of problems of cultural identification in architectural sphere are too much based on observational principles that hardly fit technological requirements of assistance for architectural creative activity.

There are numerous works on the phenomena of the spirit of place, but these texts feature many general ‘impressionistic’ statements. Everyone says that it’s important to feel and protect that spirit. Yet these elevated comments feature little instrumentalism.

2.1. Introductory remarks

It remains unclear, what to do to appreciate the *genius loci* in the city. What information could help that? Is it an institutional action or is it rather related with deeply individual work of the creator, working on city development?

These are issues related to the sustainability, continuity and ecology of culture and civilization, not only in terms of preserving and nurturing nature, but also in fostering culture.

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According to Thomas Spector, the problems of contemporary modern architecture were particularly evident in the 1960s, 1970s and 1950s years.

At that time, the morally accentuated mission of international style architecture - to improve the state of society by appropriate projects, thus avoiding the socialist revolution (as happened in Russia in 1917) - reached its apogee and soon the role of modern architecture associated with social reforms began to diminish, especially after the criticism set out by the Jane Jacobs and Robert Venturi.

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This led to the abandonment of unjustifiable expectations, overly large moral claims of modern architectural movement.

Postmodernism began to emerge in US architecture in the 1960s, a movement that directly attacked the prevailing ideas of modernism, again seeking to revive the traditional language of architectural forms to make architecture more recognizable than it was in the International Style.

Robert Venturi, the leader of the movement, has published a controversial book entitled "Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture". Modern architecture seems to change direction.

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Leading architects retreated, their legacy was criticized, especially the transformation of historic city centers and massive residential complexes. This was especially the case in the US, where modernists in the 1950s did a lot of urban planning.

Urban renovation often meant widespread demolitions, and huge residential complexes were built in their place. The infamous example is the Pruitt Igoe residential complex (built in 1952-1955 in St. Louis), destroyed in 1972, after being completely degraded, it became a symbol of the concentration of social evil in the modern city.

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Ch. Jencks explains that an object that, as we understand it, should fully embody the functionalist doctrine "form follows function" (as one of the main principles of international modernism), can often be appropriate for the purposes we have not imagined.

For example, in southern Italy, some people have used a toilet bowl for washing grapes, and northern Greek villagers have been using the fireplace.

The fact that the form inevitably dictates the function was also considered by contemporary architect theorists such as John Simonds and Kevin Lynch. Simonds said that as soon as he looked into the building, his person would recognize the function of the building.

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Lynch has recently been criticized for being limited to a purely denoting level of communication in the image of the city (we will recall five types of environmental elements - paths, boundaries, districts, nodes and landmarks) that are important to the image, ignoring the connotations associated with urban forms.

Critics explain that urban structures often become recognizable precisely because they have symbolic meanings alongside functional values.

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Let us emphasize that the provision that form inevitably reflects a function associated with the above-mentioned "total outward-looking" syndrome inherent in classical rationality, with the "self-understanding" of the form, without realizing that data of cultural context are important for perception, recognition.

Other important problem related with international modernism was ignorance of local context and thus the interests of such kind of subjectivity as *genius loci*.

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While managing the urbanized environment from the cultural point of view, it is important to take into account the interests not only of the local population but also of other subjectivities related to certain locality such as:

- 1) people who are living in other places, but the place where the reorganizations are planned is important for them too;
- 2) those who are not born yet;
- 3) those who have already died, but participated earlier and left environment to us.

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Namely, the latter ones may be most associated with the historically established subjectivity that can be associated with the concept of genius loci.

The idea of genius loci as a sort of duplicate personality, as a partner or as intermediary with whom to consult when managing the locality, is important not only in archaic, traditional cultures.

C. Norberg-Schulz analysing the works by A. Aalto, Le Corbusier, Ch. Moore, L. Kahn and other prominent architects, applies the fact of respectation of historically developed genius loci as an integral criterion of successful project.

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The fact that we still often cannot see the environment as something alive (also grasp the genius loci) is due to the relic of classical worldview – objectivistic treatment of environment, and understanding other subjectivities only as object of action, of manipulation.

Today most scientific models related with solution of problems of cultural identification in architectural sphere are too much based on observational principles that hardly fit technological requirements of assistance for architectural creative activity.

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Today the studies of genius loci are closed in a circle of theorists. Their effort does not reach the practical field of city development issues. That is also prevented by lack of legal documents, regulating the supply of information for projects.

It is necessary to seek for possibilities of operating data on factors that contribute to the location's development, study them and define them in a way to be suitable for the implementation of practical discussions.

The issue of appreciating genius loci is becoming increasingly relevant in the large city centres due to the increasing scale of investments.

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There are claims that cities can hardly have a global compositional idea due to market conditions. We believe that everything depends on the 'optics' – the way we look at the global compositional idea of the city. We also offer an idea of an encoded transcription of such a compositional idea, which would not hinder development and investments.

Any regulatory coding for activity is based on the metalanguage of the description. That is an auxiliary technical language, which is used to define social standards and procedure of their observance (in general case the metalanguage is a language, used to talk about another language).

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Being the basis of coding, it promotes action based on that code. When a metalanguage is closed, seeking to maintain the identity of the formal structure described, it will ignore the future conjuncture – a dialogue with unknown impulses will be impossible, thus resulting in de facto destruction of the structure on the action plane.

The essence of such closed metalanguage is that the act of message is interpreted as independent from the act of perception (observation).

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In a different metalanguage – a metalanguage that is contextually open to circumstances – the act of message supposes a close relation with the act of perception (observation), the message appeals to the situation as a joint experience of the producer and recipient of the message.

Therefore, the transfer of the message is based not only on a detailed relation between the content and reality, but the mechanics of consideration, enabling the sender of the message to define a connection with the recipient, which is needed in a specific situation.

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An example of an inflexible, closed metalanguage is a direct regulatory requirement to build something on a certain location, without giving basis for the demand.

Our claim is that an appropriate choice of the metalanguage to ensure consideration and restructuring would enable modification of conjunctural impulses in a form, corresponding to the interests of all subjects (including the spirit of the place).

By convention we will refer to one of these as the metalanguage of consideration and the other – as directive metalanguage.

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Directive metalanguage, which features dissociated schemes, does not consider or plan any possibilities of social interaction, it also doesn't consider or plan for any adjustments of such schemes, they are regulated 'directly'.

That is a clear ('ontologically inflexible') directive on what must be done or preserved. Additional information (both available now, but unconsidered yet, and the one that will be available in the future) on the essential qualities of the object is undesirable.

Thus, what type of metalanguage predominates the documents that regulate urban planning?

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An analysis of various legal documents has shown that currently directive metalanguage plays the major role.

The fact that a description of a location's cultural identity must be done indirectly – by defining the conditions in terms of becoming rather than being – and that it requires 'external' process models and templates, which could be interpreted equally by all participants of the process (living in any period of time), has already been discussed in my papers.

The essence of an 'external' model is that it contains an indirect description of the situation using the language of consideration. It contains auxiliary codes, the system of which remains unchanged in all possible cases.

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These auxiliary codes (similar to a system of notes in music) should better be organised by using spatial, temporary and concept units that are easy to identify.

How should we express a building construction code, which fits the cultural identity of the location and appreciates the manifestations of genius loci in a specific place?

While preparing a project it is necessary to make sure that the planned solutions fit the code of the location's identity – the set of determinants of genius loci. Because a failure to consider the identity code results in a risk of losing the formed identity.

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In this case, the identity code refers to a conceptual construct, which introduces the 'location's memory', organizing and guiding the activity on the operational dimension (in essence, that is a system of determinants to ensure the continuation of genius loci, which represents the cultural memory of the location in a reduced form).

If the project preparation process does not consider the location's memory, the location may lose its cultural identity. Appreciation of the manifestations of genius loci also relates to the compositional idea of the city or its individual locations.

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The symptoms that refer to manifestations of genius loci include combinations of denotative and connotative semantic units.

Denotative and connotative characteristics of locations and related objects must also be provided in an explicit form. Both denotative and connotative characteristics must be provided with a legal status.

Competent planners with appropriate skills, solving creative tasks, would be capable of creative interpretation of the normative requirements using their inner thesaurus.

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Unfortunately, since our consciousness is predominated by classical rationality, pushing connotations into descriptions of valuable objects, territorial planning regulations and, at the same time, the field of promotion of the manifestations of genius loci, is quite impossible.

According to M. Mamardashvili, classical rationalism is characterised by the principle of spatiality, i.e. the requirement of external articulation of an object (available from external viewing) as a condition of our knowledge about it; the act of observation, purportedly does not change the essence. Thus, we are unconsciously forced to use directive metalanguage for object descriptions.

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Orthodox psychologists believe that objects are constituted of their properties. James Gibson states that ‘we look at objects and see the opportunities they provide, rather than qualities’. ‘An opportunity is an invariant combination of variables ... An opportunity-related meaning will be noticed first than we perceive the material, surface, colour or form. According to Gibson, perception of opportunities does not presuppose object classification.’

We must bring together the form and content in descriptions of architectural objects, because studies, examining the nuances of the form, style or author personality alone, constitute only a part – a preparatory part of cultural study; that is culture in a narrow sense.

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Culture in the wide sense manifests only with the revelation of the peculiarities of becoming That is a reflection of the work in cultural ideas.

Upon getting to know the recent methodological tendencies of cultural heritage assessment, we could state that subjectivity is not yet present in the environment of the actants, participating in the observation and assessment process, or the objects within, also that cultural ideas are perceived not on the instrumental plane of becoming (which can naturally be related to archetypes and other constructs of collective psychology), but on the plane of a specific 'being', enclosed in time.

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In order to define genius loci, the authors of the collection use the categories of individual psychology, which presuppose a very narrow cognitive field, making the data about it impossible to be communicated to a community of planners or defined in legislation.

Aesthetic experiences are another important aspect.

Those, who know the cultural ideas, embodied in a piece of architecture (i.e. someone with a more developed competence and thesaurus), will have more material for aesthetic experience. That is related to the openness of the aesthetic experience, when connotations invoke pre-reflective – multivariate understanding of the object-related images, promoting the catharsis (purification), known in aesthetics.

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This takes a natural course, when the subject, observing the object, already has previous knowledge, which modifies his value model.

Those, who do not have such knowledge, but can influence the survival or transformation of the elements of the object managed and, at the same time, the modification of the spectre of cultural ideas that the object embodies, can access the said knowledge explicitly – in the form of external text (description).

Relations are defined by legislation. Relations may refer not only as relations, marked with social-cultural memory between subjects as usual, but also relations with specific subjects, such as historically developed subjectivity, embodied in a location or an architectural piece.

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Statements in regulations would better be replaced with simpler non-psychological logic – by simply defining significant object types and defining the appreciation of their role on all relevant structural scales (i.e. by considering the variety of spaces and the differences in their size), making a positional assessment of the working boundaries of the categories of each scale.

In all times people did their best to demonstrate what they held most significant – the public and guests used to be demonstrated the most significant objects; they had the best possibilities of visibility in the environment of visual effect (they were visible for larger number of people for a longer period of time).

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Thus, a regulation must indicate types of objects, which, in certain situations, need to be ensured a defined degree of visibility. Any people from any culture of any time understand that logic.

The emphasis here is not on the 'visual', because the visual basis in this case is superstructural. If the project does not include a certain situation, which creates a positional opportunity (through spatial, temporal, thematically-defined conceptual aspects) for the manifestation of the major values that introduce the compositional idea, then it will not be possible to observe this visually, experiencing all positive and negative aspects that unexpectedly reveal during the contemplation.

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Operating with unverified theoretical models, where morphological qualities are represented as categories, which belong in a cognitive field of a certain group of observers, breed dogmatic solutions. The process of city development should include as many points of social consideration as possible, which, upon receiving new relevant information, would enable flexible recursive restructuring of the idea (when the process involves a review of not only the measures, but goals as well, should it turn out that these goals do not meet the direct compositional idea). So far such points of comprehensive reconsidering of the consideration in our practices of territorial planning are scarce.

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The focusing compositional idea (the idea of cosmic harmony) must be defined beyond the space of the project and it is a strategic vision, defined in the space of the competence of the community and its representatives, rather than the designers and their clients (being the space that is not merely 'law enforcement' and manifestation of the code, but rather a plane of introducing legislation and the code itself).

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