



Aesthetics of Architecture



Erasmus+

Lecture 6. Aesthetics of architecture and challenges regarding the culture and society

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6.1. Introductory remarks

The place of aesthetic potential of architecture in the life of society and culture is still not well defined. What is naturally more related to internal architectural issues in architecture (form, function, beautiful appearance) is still dominated inside architectural activities.

The significance of the representation of cultural content, social cultural memory in architectural means, which in turn works at aesthetic level, is still not sufficiently understood. At the same time, there is no trust to many of architects, the role of experts is exaggerated.

6.2. Ignoring cultural connotations in presentation of architectural objects peculiarities. Problems related with giving too much importance to inner aspects of architecture (form, function, spectacularity)

We want to talk here more about socio-cultural content of architecture. For the time being, architecturology and cultural heritage theory are dominated by the cultural heritage description categories that are more related to universal qualities of the heritage locality and of the objects found therein, and are actually dissociated from the specific cultural context, from an individual 'biography' of the object.

The aforesaid characterisation of objects is grounded on the individual psychology categories that could not be related to the cultural context. It is unfortunate that to the form of architectural objects were given too much attention.

6.2. Ignoring cultural connotations in presentation of architectural objects peculiarities. Problems related with giving too much importance to inner aspects of architecture (form, function, spectacularity)

In the Lithuanian legislation on cultural heritage protection, the value of objects that determines their protection is identified statically, in an absolute and contextually closed manner.

Specific physical objects – elements of building forms - are often considered as qualities. An object (namely object or its element) may be a bearer of a certain quality, but it shall not be identified with the quality.

Heritage descriptions contain practically no cultural ideas, connotative and denotative references are not adjusted either.

6.2. Ignoring cultural connotations in presentation of architectural objects peculiarities. Problems related with giving too much importance to inner aspects of architecture (form, function, spectacularity)

Unfortunately, foreign heritage descriptions contain practically no cultural ideas and cultural connotations as well.

The aforesaid can be illustrated by the description of the residential house of Walter Gropius, one of the most prominent modernist architect, located in the USA (Gropius House National Historic Landmark Nomination), and by the description of Casa Batlló, the building additionally attributed to the object 'Works of Antoni Gaudí' by the document of the World Heritage Committee.

6.2. Ignoring cultural connotations in presentation of architectural objects peculiarities. Problems related with giving too much importance to inner aspects of architecture (form, function, spectacularity)

The main reason of this attitude towards the cultural heritage is a relict effect of the classical worldview. It is related with the work of principle of spatiality inherent.

The principle of spatiality in classical rationalism requires complete articulation of the matter outwards (available for external observation) as the condition of the things that could be generally known about the matter; as if the act of phenomena observation does not change the essence.

6.2. Ignoring cultural connotations in presentation of architectural objects peculiarities. Problems related with giving too much importance to inner aspects of architecture (form, function, spectacularity)

In the mentality of architects, the manifestation of the spatiality principle is testified by the following:

- 1) in urban design, context is often understood as the closest buildings
- 2) when physical attributes of the building are considered the most valuable qualities of the cultural heritage object
- 3) when it is said 'why the comparative analysis of landscape is required if everything is well seen on the map'
- 4) when discussion of the value, benefit, possible functions of objects considers no cultural context of the functioning of the object.

6.2. Ignoring cultural connotations in presentation of architectural objects peculiarities. Problems related with giving too much importance to inner aspects of architecture (form, function, spectacularity)

This is the latter issue wherein the important role is played by cultural connotations displaying the social cultural memory of the social community and appearing on the plane of collective psychology.

Texts regulating the activity and containing sufficient connotative possibilities stimulate an abductive solution grounded on integration of the existential experience of researcher or architect.

The New Testament may be referred to as the example wherein Christ bringing his teaching operates the generally comprehensible comparisons (as connotations), i.e. metaphors what are the certain kind of helpfull „understanding tools“.

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Talking about the knowledge that figures in social space and allows to actualize considerations about the quality of architecture we can refer to the knowledge, that can be named as specific "awareness devices" or, borrowing philosopher M. Mamardashvili's term - "intelligent bodies".

Indirect reasoning and operating in the frame of *bottom-up* approach is essential quality of this type of knowledge. It is very important to integrate such "intelligent bodies" into the structure of legal regulative documents governing the changes of built environment.

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We apply the notion „intelligent bodies“ to authentic lifestyle patterns defined on the base of localism concept; it is basically the knowledge about the unique features of the built environment, related structures and elements, cultural ideas, archetypical qualities of architectural objects.

The mentioned entities possess features of subjectivity and the designer collaborates with them in the „dialog“ mode.

It should be stated that not only members of the community but also the mentioned entities participate in the forming of built environment.

6.2. Ignoring cultural connotations in presentation of architectural objects peculiarities. Problems related with giving too much importance to inner aspects of architecture (form, function, spectacularity)

References

Petrušonis V. Nauja kultūros paveldo objektų aprašo koncepcija = A New Concept of Cultural Heritage Description. In: *Paveldo brydės = The Heritage Traces*. Vilnius: Savastis, 2017, p. 9-28.

6.3. Exaggeration of the role of experts

Expert knowledge role in the architectural activity is of great importance. Expert knowledge – i.e. ideas that are communicated to the participants of the design process and are usually embodied in urban regulations, descriptions of cultural heritage objects and conclusions of expert evaluations.

The quality of project solutions and the results of their implementation especially positively depend directly on from the expert knowledge recording mode that is based on the contextually open meta-language.

Such way of recording allows ensuring constant relation with the act of perception (observation) which takes the entire time of preparation of the project and, if necessary, helps flexibly modify design solutions based on newly revealed data, also taking into account the public interest.

6.3. Exaggeration of the role of experts

The textological analysis of the main legal document that is Lithuania determining the criteria of the value, selection and definition of immovable cultural properties significance level (2016) testifies that this document pushes in objects descriptions operate with a different type of meta-language, the main feature of which is absolute closeness from the cultural context.

Expert knowledge about the object of a cultural heritage may appear both implicitly (in the expert or observer's consciousness) or explicitly (as a legal act, certain manual, explanatory (interpretative) semantic dictionary or computerized intellectual system).

The knowledge presented in an explicit form has to combine the denotational and connotational characteristics.

6.3. Exaggeration of the role of experts

Unfortunately, the main obstacle to realise such combination in the inventories of protected objects is the prevailing classical rationality provisions in the mentality of specialist's community.

Today's descriptions are almost exclusively dominated by denotation descriptions and devoted mainly to form and function. Expert evaluations carried out by individual („external“) experts are the main source of expertal knowledge now.

Sadly, this considerably weaken the field of architectural quality management, not allowing regulations, descriptions (of course, only if they are designed so that they can properly represent the explicit expert knowledge, based on in-depth analysis) to effectively perform their role which they can do as catalysts of the creative thinking of architects and also to make impact on the architectural process in the interests of the community in general.

6.3. Exaggeration of the role of experts

Using the criteria of productive thinking culture, where mental flexibility is defined as one of the essential components of intelligent activity, we can conclude that the document defining the criteria for assessing, selecting and determining the level of significance of immovable cultural properties has been prepared unreasonably, unwisely.

There is nothing to wait for if operated with absolute, non-assertive statements, when ignoring the cultural context, social and cultural memory (object-related cultural ideas, connotations) is not appreciated, and the reflections are based only on the area of current interest.

6.3. Exaggeration of the role of experts

Analysing the degree of competency of the specialists involved in the preparation of regulatory documents, we see that these documents are produced by incompetent specialists who use superficial categories of descriptions, do not take into account the fact that system of knowledge has network nature, their proposed description schemes are overly theoretical, poor, they are dealing with classifications that are inappropriate for solving practical problems, they operate “inert” rather than “sensitive” knowledge.

In order to improve the situation, architects' education must reject the provisions of classical rationality, and by educating professionals, teach them to work with “sensitive” (conditionalized from cultural – ecologic point of view) knowledge.

6.3. Exaggeration of the role of experts

It is also important in the education process to enhance the competency to act according to the criteria of productive activity, where an important place takes on reflection, which helps to better understand the meaning of data in various (both historical and contemporary) sociocultural contexts.

This would help community of professionals to understand that regulatory legislation must be developed on the base of contextually open meta-language, that would allow constant reconsideration of project ideas, during the process of design, as well as would be diminished need for „external“ expertise.

All this, in turn, would allow architects to work more creatively, making the best use of their personal existential experience.

6.3. *Exaggeration of the role of experts*

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