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TRADITION IN CONTEMPORARY ARCHITECTURE ON THE EXAMPLE OF THE NETHERLANDS

TRADYCJA WE WSPÓŁCZESNEJ ARCHITEKTURZE NA PRZYKŁADZIE HOLANDII

Abstract

The issues concerning the meaning of “tradition” in architecture have been causing discussions and a lot of interest in many environments for many years. Distrust arising from this issue is the result of its often misunderstanding, most often as a restricting canon or set of norms, principles that we should follow. Attempting to move away from defining tradition in architecture as brassbound, which imposes some restrictions on perceiving it as dynamic and enabling reproduction, but also creative reinterpretation, leading to innovation, can become an inspiration. According to the author, the tradition is not only a canon that requires passive reproduction, but it can become a much broader category, which, although it refers to the past, is open. The category of tradition in architecture defined in this way is important in the perspective of the present. It can become an important reference point. By perceiving it as dynamic, and having an impact on the shape of modern architecture, tradition can become a more useful research tool that allows conclusions to be drawn not only in relation to the past but also to the present.

Keywords: tradition, innovation, architecture, world of values, culture, identity

Streszczenie

Problematyka dotycząca znaczenia „tradycji” w architekturze od wielu lat wywołuje dyskusje i duże zainteresowanie wielu środowisk. Nieufność pojawiająca się wobec tego zagadnienia, jest wynikiem często błędnego jego rozumienia, najczęściej jako ograniczający kanon, czy też zespół jakiś norm, zasad, które powinniśmy przestrzegać. Podjęcie próby odejście od definiowania tradycji w architekturze, jako skostniałej, która narzuca pewne ograniczenia na rzecz postrzegania jej jako dynamicznej i umożliwiającej odtwarzanie, lecz także twórcze reinterpretowanie, prowadząc do innowacji, może stać się inspirującym. Tradycja zdaniem autorki nie jest jedynie kanonem, który wymaga biernego odtwarzania, lecz może stać się kategorią o wiele szerszą, która mimo iż odwołuje się do przeszłości, jest otwartą. Tak zdefiniowana kategoria tradycji w architekturze jest ważna w perspektywie terażniejszości. Może stać się ważnym punktem odniesienia. Poprzez postrzeganie jej jako dynamiczną, i mającą wpływ na kształt współczesnej architektury, tradycja może stać się bardziej użytecznym narzędziem badawczym, które pozwala na wysuwanie wniosków, w odniesieniu nie tylko do przeszłości ale również terażniejszości.

Słowa kluczowe: tradycja, innowacje, architektura, świat wartości, kultura, tożsamość

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1. INTRODUCTION

In the nature that surrounds us, which is rich in shapes, architecture is an expression of human co-existence with the world of matter, one of the ways of arranging and implementing it in this world. It is also a manifestation of human superiority over matter, subjecting it to practical life needs. It is imposing the matter of shapes, which is an expression of the spiritual life of man, thus satisfying his needs for beauty and aesthetics.

Due to the situation that in its surroundings there will be other buildings of specific sizes, shapes and structures, one should take into account the environmental conditions in which the matter is located. The relationship between the architectural work and the real world is marked in one more important detail, it is not only the physical world and still life, but also man. Each building has real utility, which is fully reflected on the structure. Only knowing the building purpose, its functions to be fulfilled in human life, people who are to live in a given building or visiting it, fulfilling certain activities in it, makes it possible to understand the sense not only in planning the interior but also in shaping the mass, forms, and selection relevant factors that affect clarity, quality and aesthetics. And these are permanent features, not changing, independent of time.

“Identity” belongs according to Professor Z. Zuziak to the basic culture concepts. Speaking about the “identity of the place” we refer to a set of features regarding both spatial forms and the manifestations of life associated with them. In this case, we mean those features that determine its identity, but are also inseparably connected with the world of values.

2. WORLD OF VALUES

Value is an invisible and elusive spirit, it comes and goes unexpectedly, while visible and concrete things remain the same.

W. Stanley Jevons,
economist and historian

The claim that man lives in a world of values is a reflection of the real situation. Not only philosophy is interested in values, but also it can be understood in the logical-mathematical or economic sense. The issue of values has been present in philosophy since ancient times. For Plato, it is the highest value that unites goodness, beauty and truth. The world of values is theoretically still open, full of questions and controversies. It is difficult to define the issues to be dealt with by the philosophy of values, because the term ‘value’ itself is defined in various ways. The multitude of concepts, directions and philosophical schools that deal with the issue of values results in the fact that there is no single philosophy of value. “Value” is a general term which the scope of meaning is various detailed values, specified such names as “good”, “utility”, “efficiency”, “truthfulness”, “nobility”, “beauty” etc. Many of these concepts concerning values, are a subject of long-established disciplines, not just philosophical ones. Philosophy has always devoted a lot of attention to some of these values. This applies especially to ethical, aesthetic and cognitive values, with the truth at the forefront.

Sociology in relation to the urban spaces distinguishes between instrumental values, situational values and existential values.²

They are the result of human needs and the interdependence of human life in urban space.

Relations between the spatial environment and the social environment generate important social processes: identification, integration, information-communication, cognitive, selection of decision making and achievement of goals, emotional, aesthetic.

3. THE NETHERLANDS: DE STIJL, AMSTERDAM SCHOOL

In the Netherlands, a small country, you can see how tradition in architecture is important in the perspective of the present, becoming an important reference point. If it is perceived as dynamic and influencing the shape of contemporary architecture.

During the First World War, the Netherlands was a neutral country, which meant that many artists sought their refuge here. They could not return to France, Germany, Italy, Russia, so they created under the pressure of war in the Netherlands. Art has never been so alive before. The various schools were established: Amsterdam, Rotterdam, Haski, Leyden. All artists organized exhibitions, and architects created. One group influenced the other: cubists, futurists, expressionists. Everything was accompanied by the idea of changes in every aspect. The new spirit of the age needed a new idea.

In Europe, the architecture of modernism was significantly influenced by the designs of Antoni Gaudi, who is considered the father of one of the leading currents of modernist architecture – expressionism. His design inspiration was often found in Dutch construction. Dutch modernism was based not only on trends in Europe, but also resulted from national achievements. One of the leading modernist architects of the Netherlands was Hendrik Petrus Berlage.

He was the author of the project for the Amsterdam Stock Exchange, which became a model for the creators of the Amsterdam School. The Berlage project referred to the Dutch building tradition, was something completely new and aroused much controversy. The most important novelty was basing the structure on a cast iron skeleton covered with brick. The use of brick was a nod to Dutch tradition – just like the gable roof of the stock exchange building or storey of a building.

The achievements of Berlage had a direct impact on later architects, creating between 1910 and 1930. The school brought together several talented architects of the new generation coming out of the studio of one architect, Eduard Cuypers, nephew of the creator of the Rijksmuseum.

² „The instrumental values” are: the functional nature of the space (division into streets, squares, fields, interiors, etc.), ease of reading the architectural and urban layout and its socially perceived status (old-new, nice-inaccurate, etc.). Situational values contain physical and mental feelings security or threats, the ability to identify social and cultural categories with a given space, a sense of openness or anonymity, the ability to perform selected social roles and the opportunity to pursue one’s own prestige and personality. Existential values include all those that are the source of emotions, provide aesthetic and intellectual impressions, and incline to discover the values contained in objects and objects of symbolic importance, as well as in architectural and landscape surroundings. *Strategia Rozwoju Miasta Oświęcim na lata 2014–2020*, pp. 53, 54, http://web.um.oswiecim.pl/strategia-uwagi/strategia_rozwoju_miasta_oswiecim_na_lata_2014-2020.pdf (access: 16.07.2016). A. Majer, *Socjologia i przestrzeń miejska*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, Warszawa 2010.

His students: Michel de Klerk, Johan van der Mey and Piet Kramer became leaders of the Amsterdam school and had a great impact on the aesthetic change of the city.

It was important for the development of the city of Amsterdam that at the end of the 19th century there was a large wave of people settling in the city. The increasing number of inhabitants forced them to create living conditions. In 1901, the Housing Act was issued, which created favorable conditions for financing workers' settlements by the city. In this way, a branch of housing estate expanded, the development of which was set by the Amsterdam school. Buildings and entire complexes for large groups of residents were produced in the suburbs; they were, for those times, very aesthetically attractive, built of brick, with original shapes of windows and doors, but they duplicated the old urban principle of Amsterdam – the houses had to be similar and not much different from each other.

At the Rotterdam school, they wanted to replace the brown world with a white one. These two colors reflected the difference between the “old” and “new”. The brown world was imagined as lyrical, sentimental, white was characterized by the simplicity of colors and structure. In 1916, Doesburg published an article – a series of essays on new painting, initiated “De Stijl” based on total innovation, universalism of tradition, the one that so many people are, which is not creative according to him.

Piet Mondrian, one of the first De Stijl artists, starting to write the first paragraph of the article in the first issue of “de Stijl” wrote that the life of modern cultural man gradually turns away from nature, becoming more and more abstract life. The spiritual character of abstract art was emphatically accented by van Doesburg, who believed that all the works that are born of the spirit must depart from the external forms of nature, and depart from it completely when the spirit reaches perfection. The fact that the art of Mondrian and Doesburg had its source in pre-war Cubism confirmed each of them.

The significance of the Dutch De Stijl was in many fragments related to the European movement called constructivism. De Stijl's rationalism was based on understanding the claim to a new, ideal world that was created on the principles of art. It was considered avant-garde, and was reflected in painting, sculpture, and architecture. The universality of her work was evident in the work of the artists who participated in it: apart from the painter Piet Mondrian, architect Theo van Doesburg, Rietveld, Pieter Oud, Robert van Hoff, Jan Wils, and many others.

De Stijl has become a source of inspiration for many projects and is only compared to the projects of the Bauhaus school. The Ouda style matured under the influence of cubist and futurist art. Most of the early members of de Stijl worked in almost complete isolation until van Doesburg joined them.

Oud was an active member of the de Stijl group. In 1918 he became the chief architect of Rotterdam and developed his activity in the environment of a group producing cheap housing in the Spangen districts in 1918 and Tusendijken in 1919. As the flagship team included: Kieffhoek (1925–1927) and Hoch van Holland (1924–1927) It was characteristic that it was very economical, standardized, extremely disciplined, but very useful and sought after in the environment of poor people.

We associate Neoplasticism above all with the name of Piet Mondrian and his painting; similar paintings were painted, for example, by Theo van Doesburg, whose magazine De Stijl gave the name to the entire direction in the art of the 1920s. although perhaps the most representative works of this field are paintings, probably because of the person of Mondrian, it should be borne in mind, however, that the spirit of neoplasticism was also created by artists from other fields: artistic craftsmanship, and mainly all architecture.

The architecture of De Stijl in the 1920s and 1930s was characterized by “*nieuwe bouwen*” features: angular shapes, abandoning ornaments, striving for open space, “flexibility” in interior design, e.g. by moving walls. An example of the application of these principles can be the first architectural implementation of Rietveld, colloquially called the house of Mrs. Schröder. Simplification of the block into a cuboid with almost identical facades and the use of divisions with vertical and horizontal lines, and the colors: white, black, red, yellow, blue are the basic features of this architecture. It was revolutionary and extremely modern construction, despite being cheap and with the aspiration to create it in a mass way. Unfortunately, it quickly lost its Mondrian expression, colors and entered modernity.

4. HAGA – SCHILDERSVIJK DISTRICT – CONTEMPORARY HOUSING BUILDING

The city of Hague has also developed its style. And the construction that came into being later combined the features of all schools, with strong links with traditional Dutch architecture. The Schilderswijk District can be used as an example.

It is located in the southwestern part of Hague, near the city center, and near the Holland Spoor train station. The first establishment of the Schilderswijk District was made around 1850 – 1910, while the fragment analyzed in the article in the years 1890–1910. The housing development that appeared in this district was in the possession of the city and was intended for people employed in industry, with low income. High construction costs, and mainly all foundation works, have resulted in the need for optimal land use, the use of relatively cheap materials, and the use of minimum standards used in housing. The plan of this district shows the characteristic nineteenth-century workers’ housing developments. Long, straight streets, sometimes 72 to 320 meters long, with high-density housing development, with gardens in front of the houses and in the middle of the quarter, deserve attention. (about 70–110 gross flats per ha) The buildings in the district varied from single-family terraced to multi-family houses.

The block of multi-family buildings was characterized by a longitudinal system with a pitched roof, the façade was made of brick, with longitudinal windows, and the so-called “Hague portico” characteristic only for the city of Haga. It particularly gave the façade character, was open to the street. Apartments on individual storeys had entrances going through the portico directly into the street (Ill. 1.).

The poor technical condition of the buildings located in the district and the surroundings forced the city authorities to carry out the so-called the ‘urban renewal’ program. From 1970, the renewal of the city’s Hague became a local policy of the city, covering especially the areas of the nineteenth century buildings. Since 1971, such activities have been undertaken also in the Schilderswijk District, and in the area presented in the article since 1981 Urban renewal was to serve as an impetus for flourishing, various projects began to appear in the districts. Noteworthy is the design of Oranjeplein – Schilderswijk, the Portuguese architect Alvaro Siza. He proposed an unusual for these times and this type of projects, drawing the inhabitants of the project into the whole process. During the talks, attention was drawn to vehicular and pedestrian traffic, temporary and permanent parking spaces, service functions, educational functions, and in particular to amenities related to elderly and disabled people, places of recreation and integration of residents. About 1500 inhabitants

for a period of several years had to move out of their apartments to return to their former places after building new ones.

The character of the analyzed district has changed slightly as regards the social aspect and the character of the place. They were used in the facade of the new building material such as brick, window arrangement and the so-called "Hague porticos". The corners of the buildings were also borrowed. Siza in his project tried to recreate the values: material, cultural, spiritual places. Thanks to this, the city team has not lost its quality, uniqueness, identity and climate. A lot of residents also stayed in it, despite the fact that the rents increased significantly (Ill. 1, 2).

And yet the city is a place to create material for the development of civilization values: material, cultural, aesthetic-emotional, spiritual, as well as processes: communication and social exchange, identification, information, and many others. Always the quality of the urban environment generated the quality of life of the inhabitants.

Anthropology of the place³ recognizes that "rooting" binds people, focusing on people who were born in a given place and who remain in it for a long period of time. This may not only mean that the "natives" are people from certain places and belong to them, but they are people somehow "trapped" in these places. "Identification with a place that gives a sense is inseparably connected with" rooting " safety. It restores places, districts, emotional sense, the possibility of a network of relationships between man and place. Thanks to the sense of belonging to a given territory, rooting with the place, micro groups are formed.

Places and housing complement each other. In the absence of them, man becomes spiritually homeless. The value of the place is a leading element in urban spaces.⁴

5. SUMMARY

Tradition in architecture is a dynamic category that allows you to study the relationship between the present and the past. This is not just a descriptive category, but also a value category.

The concept of tradition in architecture can apply to any work of a designer, especially one who wants to be considered a valuable architect. The individual talent of the architect and the ability to use tradition are not without significance. In the concept of tradition, norms and message are important, thus becoming a message through teaching about it.

On the one hand, the vision of tradition as a pattern allows for its continuity and, on the other, does not allow for change before fossilization. It then becomes an unwanted legacy that limits freedom and openness, and sometimes liberation from it becomes difficult. At this time, only the work of a unique, strong individual that sets new rules and norms, which become tradition over time, allows the role of old principles to be reduced.

³ "The conceptual status of the anthropological site is ambiguous. It is only an image, partly materialized, which is created by people inhabiting it about their relationship to the territory, their relatives and others." M. Augé, *Nie-miejsca. Wprowadzenie do antropologii hipernowoczesności*, Wyd. Naukowe PWN, Warszawa 2012, p. 37.

⁴ *Ibidem.*



III.1. Schilderswijk District – Urban renewal



III.2. Schilderswijk District – Urban renewal

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