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Graduated from Tallinn Art University in 1994, with a *Bachelor's degree in architecture*, earned his *MA in Architecture* from the University of Notre Dame (U.S.A.) in 1996. Worked for Estonian architectural firms and real estate developers until opening his own practice in Tallinn in 2000. His work concentrates on traditional residential buildings and on conservation projects.

I principi progettuali sui beni culturali. ***About the design principles on cultural heritage sites and historical buildings.***

Il saggio illustra gli approcci che devono essere considerati quando si progetta un nuovo edificio in un contesto storico, quando si propone un'estensione di un edificio storico o si interviene su edifici vincolati. Nei siti storici si trovano spesso nuovi interventi che anche se seguono le indicazioni scientifiche per il restauro e il recupero di aree storiche però non dialogano con i caratteri dei luoghi. Un altro punto, che riguarda la composizione delle facciate, è la nozione di consolidamento strutturale che adotta nuove opere a vista e che John Smylie ha descritto.

Considerando l'architettura una pratica artigianale e artistica e abbandonando i concetti di Smylie è possibile promuovere maggiore armonizzazione diminuendo i conflitti che i nuovi interventi causano.

This paper focuses on the approaches that should be considered while designing a new building in historical site, proposing an addition to an historical house or dealing with restoration of listed buildings.

Yet in historical sites we quite often find new buildings or additions to old ones that obey all those official rules and requirements sometimes almost with scientific precision and still manage to produce an outcome, which is not in keeping with the character of their neighbours. Another point, which regards the articulation of facades and pertains to some fundamental design principles, is the notion of visiostructural reinforcement, which John Smylie has eloquently described.

Considering architecture a craft rather than art and departing from the notion of visiostructural reinforcement we can promote harmony and diminishing conflicts.

This paper focuses on some of the strategies and approaches that should be considered while designing a new building in historical site, proposing an addition to an existing historical house or dealing with restoration of listed buildings.

I claim that most local authorities who supervise the design in historical sites have several rules, guidelines, advises, requirements etc, regarding building volumes and suitable uses, materials used, colour schemes, techniques of measuring, reporting, documentation and even regarding the approval of the design by various commissions consisting of experts of architecture, [art] history, archaeology, planning and so one.

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I argue that a few important principles have not been included or have deliberately been omitted from the long list of requirements that one who works in historical environment, be it then a single monument or an entire medieval town, has to take into consideration.

Most architecture schools consider innovation and being inventive a value per se. Very often invention itself is taken for art and the ultimate goal for an architect is a freedom to express his or her artistic fantasies.

First, I think that especially in case of historical sites, but not only, the design of new buildings and additions to the old ones cannot be considered art but has to be seen as craft. According to many contemporary art theorists, art must be radical. If it is not radical, it is usually not considered art in its contemporary meaning. And being radical most often means being different.

Today, the result of architect's work is generally considered art and the same principles of evaluation are applied for architec-



1. Visio-structurally positive facade.

ture than those used for judging sculptures, paintings etc. There are many theories and views explaining the "need and duty" of an artist to be radical and it is not the aim of this paper to examine these paths of thinking. It is enough to say that one of the most widespread of those theories is the idea of Zeitgeist and hence the "need to express one's time". In case of architecture the notion of Zeitgeist is quite often linked to the idea of being honest and truthful in design. Desire to be faithful to one's time and to be faithful to materials used often leads to most contrasting results with historical surroundings and is often used as a pretext if not as an excuse to explain the evident disharmony between a recent new building and its historical neighbours. Returning to defining architecture as craft instead of art, J.H.Crawford has explained

it eloquently: "We need to reach agreement that architecture and city design are not art forms, that they are extremely important and useful crafts whose conduct should be guided by artistic principles but not viewed as art. /.../ I will concede that in the case of Acropolis, a work built as an expression of aesthetic and spiritual values, architecture did in fact reach the heights of art. In normal practice however, architecture is not art." [1] In explaining the fundamental differences between art and craft he refers to Stewart Brand, who in turn dwells on the opinion of folklorist Henry Glassie: "If a pleasure-giving function predominates, the artefact is called art; if a practical function predominates, it is called craft." Craft is something useful made with artfulness, with close attention to detail. So should buildings be.

Art must be inherently radical, but buildings are inherently conservative. Art must experiment to do its job. Most experiments fail. Art costs extra. How much extra are you willing to pay to live in a failed experiment? Art flouts convention. Convention became conventional because it works. Aspiring to art means aspiring to a building that almost certainly cannot work, because the old good solutions are thrown away. The roof has a dramatic look, and it leaks dramatically.”[2]

The lesson from this is to be humble, especially when designing in historical environment, to respect the old and time tested solutions, not to be inventive for the sake of being inventive, not to praise something that has never been done before just for the reason it has never been done before. To be humble enough to learn from the solutions that past has given us and to be humble enough to admit that there is no architecture without imitation. Somebody who claims that he will be using the language he has invented by himself, will not be taken seriously because this language is not understandable to others, and will most likely be seen as arrogant for purposefully ignoring the common behavior. Even authors of the most bizarre architectural forms tend to claim that they had been imitating a form, event, situation or some completely randomly chosen object. So it seems to be logical to assume, that architects are always consciously or subconsciously imitating something.

I think that especially in case of working in the settings which are closely related to historical sites or buildings it will be more and more important to define the object of imitation. It does make a difference whether we imitate an idea of a dwelling and base the design of a new building onto that idea or we imitate an idea of the most up to date machine which, among other operations is capable of doing, can provide a space to live in. I am not arguing that a design derived from the aesthetics of a machine must automatically be ugly. I am arguing that it would not be humane because it deviates from

the principles which enable human beings to relate to dwellings through the laws of tectonics, through appropriate uses of different materials and deploying different building types and forms in different locations. Nobody doubts that laws of nature can produce the most sublime impressions and emotions. The laws of constructing machines can pave the way for producing more and more effective machines, but the ultimate goal of a machine always remains to be efficient.

At the beginning of the 21st century where tolerance and compassion towards other human beings, awareness of environmental concerns, searching one's roots and ancestors, acknowledging the existence and rights of other living creatures are commonly accepted important issues, it would be fair to assume that [human] nature in general would be of greater value than efficiency of whichever machinery. Even the notion of *Zeitgeist* should encourage the contemporary architect to stress those values. However, when working in historical sites, one has to be at least aware of, if not strictly to follow the commonly accepted principles which are stated in the Charter of Venice and demand a contemporary designer to express “his or her time” and make new parts in historical setting or attachments to a historical building clearly recognizable and different from historical ones. This is the trap which causes most of the trouble with new inappropriate buildings in historical sites. Quite often it is not poor detailing of a building or not so well proportioned facades that create the sense of disharmony and conflict, but the deliberate refusal of the architect to accept to express the most fundamental principles of nature, the principles of tectonics in general. It is the conflict which rises from using different paradigms that causes the feeling of uneasiness, disharmony, disbelief, unsafety.

Despite the fact that it would be better to agree upon the definition of architecture as craft rather than art, most of contemporary architects consider themselves artists in the first place

and the outcome of their work as art.

“The poet, like a painter or any other artist must of necessity imitate one of the three things: reality past or present, things as they are said or seem to be, or things as they ought to be.”[3] This is the concept of imitation in Aristotelian sense and its ultimate goal as described by D. Porphyrius is: “Finally, the aim (purpose) of imitation in art is to afford an emotional delight that accompanies the pleasure of recognition of what is true for us”.[4]

There seems to be strong resistance in most contemporary architecture schools towards teaching the appropriate design of details, towards teaching how to learn from great buildings of the past and how to use the knowledge they can offer. This reluctance to learn from the past is not understandable for me, since it is acceptable, favoured and very often mandatory to depart from time tested methods in every other field of human activity apart from architectural design. I can only guess that this reluctance is propelled by the idea of everlasting progress and growth which creates its own principles and by the idea that today's world is far too different from that previous to the so called era of machine aesthetics.

Perhaps the idea which could help to avoid producing conflicting design especially in historical sites is to train architecture students to understand the principles according to which the facades of historical buildings have been composed. In other words, to dedicate a bigger part of a curriculum to introducing the principles of tectonic and explaining what are the purposes of various building elements which quite often are only described as decorative details belonging to certain stylistically defined period in history of architecture.

There is a common underlying principle according to which the facades of traditional buildings have been composed. It is about transmitting the loads from the higher parts of building to the lower ones and finally to the ground. If a facade tells the observer this story and helps to understand the intricate



2. Visio-structurally negative facade.

play of different elements and parts of the building, and if the parts are proportioned justly and relate harmoniously to each other, there is hardly any conflict in the facade. As a result, the observer is pleased by the "emotional delight that accompanies the pleasure of recognition of what is true for us". This delight is again not only derived from beautifully elaborated details but also from the feeling of assurance, safety and recognition of natural laws which one gains from looking at a facade of a traditional building. And on the contrary, if a long strip of a glass facade supports the massive bulk of stone wall above it, then is obviously visually intriguing, perhaps interesting and challenging as often described, but it would not be able to deliver the feeling of safety, the recognition of the play of forces of nature

behind the facade. The psychological effect the composition of a facade has on the observer, has been described by John Smylie as a visio-structural reinforcement.[5] In the first case of the traditional, logically composed facade, he calls it visio-structurally positive solution, that is a solution which supports the tectonic logic of the composition of different parts of the building and through it conveys the sense of recognising natural laws reflected in the facade. Therefore it is described as positively stimulating the observer by offering a conscious and subconscious relation with nature. In the latter case the observer is left without a hint to tectonic logic and is introduced to the realm of completely different reasoning. There are various theories explaining such kind of compositions, but they

have one thing in common – they all agree that they depart from different paradigm. They depart from the aesthetics and compositional logic of a machine, not those of nature. Sometimes they use the argument of expressing one's time or even that of the necessity of being destructive to justify the "expression of mechanical approach" to the facades. However, they never admit the necessity to provide the observer the feeling of safety and recognition of natural values. They rather stress on the need to provide the feeling of tension and conflict. Therefore J.Smylie calls this kind of composition visio-structurally negative. I argue that no facade of a traditional building has ever been built in order to express the tension and logic of a machine as its first goal. Traditional buildings have always followed the principles of the so-called visio

NOTE

[1] Crawford, J. H., *Carfree Design Manual*, International Books, Utrecht, 2009, p 38.

[2] Crawford, J. H., *Carfree Design Manual*, International Books, Utrecht, 2009, p 39.

[3] Porphyrios, D., *Classical Architecture*, McGraw-Hill Inc Publishing, 1992, p. 11.

[4] Porphyrios, D., *Classical Architecture*, McGraw-Hill Inc Publishing, 1992, p. 24.

[5] Hardy, M., *The Venice Charter Revisited: Modernism, Conservatism and Tradition in the 21st Century*, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2008, p. 573.

structurally positive solutions. Therefore, when working in historical environment, it should be required to follow this very basic principle also in a contemporary design. And this in turn requires the humble approach described earlier, requires to be willing to learn from the past and give up the desire to design something never seen before just for the sake of it, something conflicting with its surroundings rather than harmoniously blending with them.

Therefore, if those two principles were added to the list of strategic guidelines and rules regarding design process in historical sites and accompanied with requirements about using materials typical for the given area, it seems to me that it would help to avoid two fundamentally different design approaches standing next to each other and causing stress by insisting on differences.

Instead of considering architecture a craft rather than art and departing from the notion of visio-structural reinforcement we can promote harmony by rendering out similarities and diminishing the conflicts. However, in order to do that, several so far generally accepted ideas about interventions in historical sites must be reconsidered.