PERMANENCY OF STRUCTURE

How can forms of unnoticeable architecture turn into a new quality which is, in many cases, a durable value preserved for posterity? Historical, repeatable quarters of development create a different whole each time. Contemporary districts and complexes continue this model. However, it is accompanied by various, new forms of buildings and details which are the effects of the designers’ creation and realize the need of changeability.

Keywords: architecture, housing, urban structure, detail

The theme of the conference seems unusually vast, which is indicated by the multitude of its theses, but also unusually difficult which is also indicated by their number as well as descriptive form. Fleetingness and durability are notions related to the flow of time, whereas the definition of time itself is a serious challenge for philosophers and physicists. Thesis no. 6 attracted my attention. It says, There is also the duration of unnoticed architecture, forms without any clear features, sometimes noticed only as the matter of urban complexes demarcating their space. This paragraph seemed especially interesting to me even though the term unnoticed architecture met my strong opposition. On second thoughts, however, I realized that it was not a pejorative notion, just like a weak form is not a negative term. If a defined structure shaped by unnoticed architecture or, in other words, weak forms becomes a noticed value worth preserving, we ought to wonder how a new value, which is durable, admired and imitated in many cases, is created by forms that are rather unimportant individually and sometimes do not even deserve to be called architecture.

While developing this topic, let us have a look at the classical structure of a city built of quarters of buildings which co-create public spaces. Every time, in spite of the repeatability of their parameters and shapes, these simple elements composed of tenement modules produce a different, unforgettable whole. The first, obvious association is the structure of the Old Town in Kraków, Wrocław, Strasburg or Stockholm. Despite the obvious values of their components – buildings which form the frontages, we usually drink in the harmony of a structure, its colours and atmosphere. Perhaps smaller or bigger changes which could appear in the architecture of individual buildings would not have a decisive impact on our evaluation of the value of a complex which is expected to persist as a testimony to the ability to shape spaces with the help of unnoticed architecture.

Following this trope, we can get to areas which are not historically conditioned and see how the form of an urban quarter built of weak forms is applied in contemporary residential areas. Its glorious comeback in the idea of a sustainable housing environment proves how strongly it is fixed in man’s consciousness in
spite of modernists’ urban experiments. The concept propagated by Richard Rogers as the most suitable manner of shaping residential areas is based upon this form. A similar, slightly modified, way was used by Ralph Erskine in Millennium Village – a symbolic estate of the turn of the twentieth century. We encounter a similar manner, with certain deformations referring to historical structures, in an important example of the 21st century housing structure – the Bo01 residential district in Malmö. We must not pass over a series of designs and implementations in the spirit of New Urbanism whose representative Leon Krier properly copies historical urban layouts treating them as a useful model for the twenty-first century. There is something special in this duration of urban forms in spite of evident violent changes in the pace of life, the multitude of events and the appearance of new individual forms but still against the well-known background of an urban layout. This background allows architectural celebrities to become popular, makes them shine and quietly waits for the decline of an experiment. Personifying the urban structure of a city, we can say that its wisdom is the wisdom of long ages of experience.

Like in most cases when we reach for tradition, we might say that it all began in ancient Greece and Rome… The structure of the residential areas of ancient cities was based on squares. As Tadeusz Wróbel writes, the area of Miletus’ quarters was 51.60 × 29.90 m, while in Priene: 47.20 × 35.40 m. The size of the medieval quarters in Old Kraków is quite similar. New cities, such as Nowa Huta, also used the module of a square even though it was much bigger considering the introduction of diverse functions to their interiors. It does not change the fact that this spatial layout was still understandable and predictable for an outsider and proved the duration of a recognizable structure.

Contemporary districts, complexes and entire cities, constructed in the spirit of sustainable design, still maintain the same model. Sometimes their quarters are incomplete or deformed which adds dynamism to a composition and introduces the factor of surprise. However, designers still use a similar urban module because a human being is still a virtually unchanged module. It is not out of the question that mental changes proceed faster than physical changes. Anyway, the possibilities of moving on foot, an increasingly popular form of motion in residential structures, determine the durability of a historically known and acknowledged structure.

The fifth thesis formulated by the organizers refers to the problem of fatigue caused by the language of forms. It may be the recipients’ fatigue but it seems that the true beginning of the new is the creators’ fatigue. It is an obvious thing, as research proves, that architects evaluating architectural or urban layouts pay most attention to their form and look for novelties. Such a reaction is understandable. It led Pablo Picasso through the blue and pink period to cubism or Arnold Schönberg to dodecaphonic music. Creators bored with repeating well-known forms carry out experiments. Some of them are unsuccessful, some stay in consciousness for a longer time, some become the seeds of genuine revolutions. However, they do not mean a total departure from the traditional form. Returns are plain to see in music, painting and sculpture, first of all in architecture and urbanism which are hooked on how and in what form as well as what for and for whom.

We can only ask ourselves if young people who grow up in the world of changeability, elusiveness and countless attractions search for them unconditionally in all the symptoms of the surrounding reality or maybe they accept the traditional structures. Focus research carried out on some groups of young people by Stanislaw Krzaklewski brought interesting results which are related to the discussed issue to a certain degree. This survey was expected to show how the participants interpret the term intimate with reference
The twin urban structures of historical parts of Krakow and the new Bo01 district in Malmo in contrast to the different forms of buildings as well as architectural and urban details.
to a residential complex – an old-fashioned term as it might seem. The research proves that intimacy is a perceived, significant and desirable phenomenon in residential areas associated with such features as a small scale, a layout which secures the feeling of togetherness or a relatively small number of residents. These features are conductive to the choice of a place of residence. Thus, we can say that young people accept the traditional structure of urban interiors with the abovementioned features. A question remains if these new structures are and will be as beautiful as the historical ones or their beauty will be based on something else. As it has been already written, well-known complexes based upon the principles of sustainable development repeat a familiar layout – both the recalled European Bed ZED, Bo01 or Millennium Village and some other complexes constructed under different circumstances, such as the Saudi Masdar. However, they are accompanied by various new forms of buildings and details satisfying the willingness to introduce novelties which seem to be very important to young generations.

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