

PROCEEDINGS ARTICLE

On Collision versus Approach of Architectural Heritage Protectors and Environmental Modernization Trends

Igor A. Bondarenko^{1,*}

¹Scientific Research Institute of the Theory and History of Architecture and Urban Planning, Branch of the Central Institute for Research and Design of the Ministry of Construction, Housing and Communal Services of the Russian Federation, Moscow, Russia

ABSTRACT

The concern for the preservation of architectural monuments unites those who are adherent to conservative cultural values. However, the complexity of the problem is due to the fact that their opponents – adherents of the idea of radical modernization of historical settlements – rely on a long tradition, according to which it is necessary and progressive to destroy the old and to create something new in its place. It turns out that protection of the heritage demands a destruction of one of the foundations of traditional culture. Calls for compromises of interests of preservation and urban development do not lead to reconciliation of the parties, as they argue against the destruction of the authentic and unique artifacts or against hampering creativity of contemporary urban planners and designers. The author of this article proposes not to obscure the problem, but to solve it on the basis of recognition of the historically unprecedented novelty of the current cultural paradigm. He concludes that the time has come to reject radical renewal of the historical heritage, nowadays called a non-renewable cultural resource. Architectural innovations should be a priori delicate with the heritage and have sufficient spatial isolation from it.

ARTICLE DATA

Article History

Received 22 January 2022

Revised 27 January 2022

Accepted 25 November 2022

Keywords

Architectural heritage

Preservation

Adaptation

Modernization

Renovation

Environmental harmonization

1. INTRODUCTION

Protectors of architectural heritage advocate the preservation of traditional cultural values, while supporters of the radical modernization of historical settlements also rely on a long tradition, according to which it is necessary and progressive to destroy the old and to create something new in its place. It leads to a paradoxical conclusion that the protection of heritage requires the destruction of one of the foundations of traditional culture. The clash of the opposing sides is often explained by the fundamental divergence of the concepts of culture and civilization. It seems that cultured people are burdened with knowledge of the past and are concerned about the conservation of museum values, while energetic pragmatists are not cultured, but are well integrated into the civilizational process, which is a priori progressive. The purpose of this article is to revise the solidity of such views on the areas of heritage

protection and the design of new architectural objects in the collision of parties. The author's starting position is that civilization is a product of culture, and it cannot exist without some cultural content, without its historical heritage and high humanitarian goal setting [1]. A desire to update the environment and to modernize the architecture is laid at the very foundation of traditional culture. That is why today it is so difficult to convince the supporters of architectural and urban reconstruction.

2. TRADITION OF PRESERVATION OF THE HERITAGE

The history of architecture contains many examples of careful approach to the buildings made by ancestors. They were, obviously, ranked by their importance and duration of existence. People could easily part with secondary decaying buildings, but in every possible

*Corresponding author. Email: igor.bondarenko.54@mail.ru

© 2022 The Authors. Published by Athena International Publishing B.V.

This is an open access article distributed under the CC BY-NC 4.0 license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>).

way supported the primary ones, which gained more and more authority and mystical power over time. Clearly, the key objects in this respect were cult ones.

Studying the pagan magic, G. Frazer singled out two main types of its practice, which he called 'contagious' and 'imitative' [2]. Such definition well clarifies the original motivation for the preservation of the most important relics and the architectural structures erected above them, which, in fact, served as monumental reliquaries. The first type of magic is especially noteworthy, because it required some protection of the authenticity of the very matter of an existing object that received the status of sacred, and the second one was in need to maintain the formal similarity of the new with the revered old.

The propensity to preserve the architectural heritage was also explained by the suspicion, typical of a traditional society, for everything unusual, unknown, coming from somewhere outside. The dominance of tribal relations predetermined adherence to the samples inherited from the ancestors and touched with their authority. People preferred to live in the old way, so as not to break away from their land, the graves of their relatives, and their sacred places. Although there were cases of completely conscious destruction of buildings in which evil spirits settled down and misfortunes occurred [3]. The shrines of conquered peoples were destroyed or radically transformed by the enemies. People had to migrate, to start life anew in some other places. But they always tried to reproduce their native environment in a foreign land, thereby forming persistent signs of ethnic self-identification. However, they had to adjust to new conditions and to adopt the prevailing tastes.

Modern times are usually associated with emancipation from medieval traditions, flourishing of free thinking and scientific progress. It should be recalled, however, that the core value of the epoch, since the Italian Renaissance, discovery of the beauty and grandeur of the architecture of Ancient Rome, then Greece has become. Enthusiastic studies and creative reproduction of classical monuments were initiated. This continued through the Baroque era, and in the era of Classicism, and Eclecticism. No wonder, some authors extend the concept of 'historicist architecture' to all those eras [4]. The listed styles, of course, have their own distinctive features, but the pathos of joining the 'Golden Age' of architecture was common to them – according to the principle of the aforementioned 'imitative' magic. At the same time, the principle of 'contagious' magic remained effective as well – in relation to the fixed and conserved remains of genuine architectural masterpieces.

An inner need to find, to study, and to collect monuments of architecture and other types of arts

and crafts increased markedly at the era of Romanticism, which coincided with the flourishing of various kinds of stylizations. In the 19th century, many historical buildings ceased to exist, but, at the same time, a persistent desire to manifest itself to preserve almost all the architectural and artistic values accumulated by the humankind was manifested, including those in distant exotic countries and among aboriginal peoples. To preserve at least in drawings and in books, in order to nourish modern culture with them and to rely on them in creative searches, which should be an inquisitive for the heritage of the historical past.

But this development trend was not the only one. Studies in the field of Eclecticism gave rise to such free experimentation with forms and styles, which led to the setting of an ambitious task to create a fundamentally new style, one that has never happened in history. So it appeared, shaped as if in an alchemist's laboratory. Today, we admire this style calling it 'Modern' in Russian (it is Art Nouveau). However, many contemporaries did not want to stop on it and dreamed of a revolution, both social and aesthetic. The legacy has become a burden for them [5]. This is a source of our great difficulties with the protection of architectural monuments.

3. TRADITION OF MODERNIZING THE HERITAGE

Although architecture resisted the passage of time, nevertheless, it was created on earth and was always somehow integrated into the natural environment, which had variability. Very consistently, it was built into the system of tribal, communal and state relations, the stability of which was not absolute as well. Therefore, dilapidation, destruction, and restructuring of buildings were completely natural. Under the dominance of traditional culture, however, modernization of architecture, as well as all spheres of life, for the most part, had a measured cyclical character. The obsolete was replaced by a new one. But that new one was not innovative, but traditional, that is, new only physically, but in fact it was the same, only reborn, 'rejuvenated' [6].

A well-known Japanese example is the reproduction in new materials, but the former shapes the Ise Shrine every twenty years. It is said in one of Russian sources that the troubles that had befallen the village had been caused by the exhaustion of its life [7]. The decay of logs, as well as their devouring by fire, was perceived humbly, one might say, philosophically, because everything in this world comes to an end.

Then, a good owner considered it his duty not to condone the natural elements, but to resist them. In this regard, the Domostroy's instruction that one must constantly take care of maintaining order and cleanliness in the house was very significant. In such case a person would live 'always... anew', that is, he or she would have the quality of unchanging novelty, eternal youth, characteristic of paradise! [8]. Thus, in a medieval source, we find an orientation, in fact, to the restoration, even the 'museification' of useful buildings for the sake of their durability.

A comparison of a well-maintained dwelling with paradise is also significant in the sense of its ability to shape the mood for every possible improvement of those existing. This attitude is unacceptable for modern scientific restoration, but it played an important role in the past, when religious and mythological consciousness prevailed. Radiant images of another, imperishable world inspired people both to heroic deeds and to spiritually inspired creativity.

Going beyond the usual world, the creation of a completely new, unprecedented architecture was also envisaged by tradition in relation to moments of positive historical shifts. Only this was not allowed for everyone and not always. Also, one must distinguish between the appearance of desirable, anticipated architectural innovations and alien, distressing and humiliating ones, caused by conquest and disaster. In any case, ordinary people had to adapt to innovations, submitting to the authority of leaders, princes, kings, high priests. The course of history can be imagined as a series of peaks, when new architectural patterns were born, from which lines of more or less modest mass imitations fell downward.

An epochal modernization of the pagan culture, and its architecture as well, was produced by the spread of monotheistic religions. The very image of the Christian church initially possessed a fundamental novelty, for it came 'not from this world'. But that trend was rapidly enrooted, turning into their key and integral symbol.

With the approval of the Christian worldview, archaic ideas about the eternal cycle of life got weakening. There was a certain mental straightening of the line of historical development with its eschatological expectations of the end of the world and the transformation of the world. It could explain the birth of a completely new architectural phenomenon of medieval Europe: Gothic. Only the leading figures of the Renaissance and the Enlightenment, enchanted with the classical antiquity, could reproach the Gothic architects for belonging to the barbarians, the Goths.

As for Russia that believed in its being chosen by God, a strong creative impulse arose, which gave rise to very original architectural images. Unfortunately, the self-development of Russian architecture was put to an end in the 18th century.

Noteworthy is the courage with which 'enlightened' kings and emperors acted, convinced that as messengers of heaven, they would lead their peoples to light and universal prosperity. Through their persistent efforts, many deep life traditions were rejected, classified as dark superstitions, and forcibly replaced with something completely new, forcing people to change their habitual way of behavior, as well as their ways of thinking and feeling, and their desires. Total urban redevelopment and 'remodeling' of the Russian Empire is a clear example of the merciless destruction of medieval heritage in the name of triumph of the European-style civilization.

4. THE CULT OF NOVELTIES

The Enlightened Absolutism could not fully embody its speculative ideals in reality. But it formed a trend aimed at active transformation of the existing world for the sake of a better future. That trend was picked up by the bourgeoisie when the rapid development of capitalism began, programmatically associated with the industrial revolution and scientific and technological progress. It began to seem to many that the era of such an accelerated production of material goods has come, which would automatically lead to the formation of a global human civilization, free from the vices of the past. Therefore, the priority of creating an economic and technocratic 'basis' for its socio-cultural 'superstructure' became a popular concept, which became the justification of 'production for the sake of production' and entrepreneurship for the sake of enrichment.

The nihilistic attitude towards cultural heritage as something burdensome, hindering the progress of mankind greatly influenced the formation of the public consciousness of the 20th century. The October Revolution 1917 in Russia was considered to be the starting point of a new era. The whole past has receded into the realm of prehistory, which has lost its significance. This revolutionary paradigm was slightly softened, but not abolished, by the Stalinist policy of appealing to the best cultural achievements of previous centuries. Industrialization, collectivization, electrification, rationalization, and innovation remained state priorities.

The left movement in art has spread throughout the world. Its main distinguishing feature began to be

considered novelty, originality, not burdened with any dependence on historical models. What is this phenomenon from the traditional point of view? There was nihilism, overthrow of authorities, renunciation of ancestors, voluntary outcast. Such assessments have already been given, but they are not enough. I would state the excess of the permissible measure in relation to the reproduction of a normal system for the renewal of life, and with regard to the usurpation of authority for this by the masses of ordinary architects, striving for glory. The result is a profanation of the sacramental. It is covered with pragmatic and pseudo-democratic slogans that sanction the devaluation of cultural values [9]. Propaganda of atheism also worked for us.

I foresee the objections of the advocates of the avant-garde art as an elitist, highly intellectual activity which made some sense due to rejection of such art by ordinary people. I could answer in such way: yes, a high status of that art implies a separation from the sphere of profane; however, it is impossible to get the sphere of sacred without wide public recognition. It is much easier to stay in the realm of infernal.

Refusal to build fundamentally any new socio-economic relations in our country helped to rehabilitate the historical and cultural heritage. Concern for the preservation and restoration of architectural monuments has increased significantly. The method of imitation of architectural patterns of the past was also revived. Much has been said about the need to appreciate, to maintain, and to revive the signs of the originality of historical settlements [10]. At the same time, the priority of scientific and technological progress remained undeniable. We have the legacy of history behind us, in our cultural baggage, but we certainly strive forward, into an unknown future, where there is no certain culture yet. The cult of innovation has not lost its charm; and it remains abstract by nature, and therefore international. It is clear in the example of the Moscow housing renovation program aimed at the demolition and radical restructuring of entire districts with a focus on neo-avant-garde international models [11]. Although the word renovation implies a rebirth, a regeneration of what was in these places before.

5. CONSOLIDATION OF MODERNITY AND HISTORY

The strengthening tendentious tradition of aggressive modernization of the environment should be recognized as untenable one. Its ideological foundations, characteristic for autocracy, have disappeared long ago; it has also lost the halo of the romanticism of scientific and technological progress.

It became clear that modernization should not be allowed for the sake of modernization or for the sake of money alone. The constructing complex should not develop itself without a humanistic goal. Of course, it is impossible to deny the benefits of promising scientific and technological developments, as well as creative searches in the field of architectural shaping. They must continue, but not to the detriment of a valuable heritage. In this regard, it is worth recalling the wise Russian proverb: 'they do not seek good from good'. There is no need to modernize what already looks great, has developed over the centuries, and is precious not only for specialists, but also for common citizens and visitors.

It is important to preserve authenticity of monuments of architecture, as of any other valuable pieces of art. It has long been comprehended and recorded in the Venice Charter. Consequently, historical buildings must be protected not only from internal foreign injections, but also from the external aggression of the newly emerging environment. In other words, we ought to leave them alone so that they can store and radiate their own, primordial 'aura'. It is impossible to grossly flirt with the heritage and force it 'to live' according to the imposed and alien rules. This is what the logic of traditional culture teaches: the young should treat their elders with respect. Many examples of the manifestation of the opposite logic have accumulated, but it does not mean that it will always be so. The time must come to return to the normal order of things. This is evidenced by some studies and project proposals of recent years, aimed at developing the most convincing approaches to solving the problem of a balanced, mutually respectful and conflict-free interaction of different temporal and diverse elements of the urban, suburban, and rural environment [12].

It is encouraging that the boundaries and generally accepted criteria for the very concept of modernity are blurring. The process is facilitated by the acceleration and expansion of information flows that bring countries, continents, their sights and cultural heritage of different genres and eras closer together. The former pursuit of changing tastes and fashions has lost its power. Now, everyone is free to choose what he or she likes and what best suits the situation. Completely different artistic manners and styles coexist peacefully, which allows them not to disappear after a period or season, but to persist, endlessly layering on each other. The avant-garde art could not win and completely replace classic. In a number of cases, they were more or less successfully combined, but even more revealing is the independent existence of both – without concessions and compromises – and without the hierarchy imposed from above.

6. CONCLUSION

History should not be idealized. Not every model and not every tradition is worth relying on. Times change and give rise not only to positive, but also to negative phenomena. The cult of innovative transformations of reality that prevailed in the recent past, today, cause obvious damage to our efforts aimed at humanizing the environment and achieving sustainable development. In fact, the trend of permanent architectural innovation has long exhausted itself since the compositional techniques of Modernism were tritely replicated and lost their originality. Now architects should be concerned not so much with novelty as with the individual expressiveness and relevance of their works.

Protectors of architectural and urban heritage should be considered not retrogrades, engaged in senseless resistance to the progressive course of history, but fighters for justice, 'new revolutionaries' rejecting a vicious tradition, more precisely, an unhealthy growth that appeared in recent centuries on the most ancient universal tradition of updating life and turned into a 'marker of anti-culture'. It is getting increasingly clear to many. After all, even representatives of that camp of business people with whom the champions of heritage preservation have to fight, it began to seem unacceptable to repeat the statements that sounded so famously in the recent past that we are destroying the obsolete so that it does not interfere with building a new world. Anybody hardly wants to be known as an uncultured vandal.

It leads to a gratifying conclusion that the tradition of updating the historical environment is returning to its more moderate state [13]. It means raising the profile of significant works of architecture that deserve to be protected from interference, both inside and outside. It is possible to predict an increase in the role of both background development, and security and buffer zones that protect buildings of different quality from unwanted collisions. At the same time, new buildings can be designed original, but only if there is sufficient spatial separation, excluding functional and visual aggression. Respect for sovereignty is a guarantee of good neighborliness.

Capturing and making sense of such positive mental shifts is encouraging, despite that much is still moving by inertia. And it should give strength to those who are keenly worried about the fate of architectural and urban heritage, seeing it as a non-renewable resource of the material and spiritual culture of mankind.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This study is based on research supported by the Program of Fundamental Research of the Russian Academy of Architecture and Construction Sciences and of the Ministry of Construction, Housing and Utilities of the Russian Federation, 2022.

REFERENCES

- [1] I.A. Bondarenko (Ed.). *Architecture and Culture of Russia in Historical Interaction*. St. Petersburg: Kolo, 2019, pp. 11–14. (in Russian)
- [2] J.G. Frazer. *The Golden Bough*. Moscow: 1986, pp. 19. (in Russian)
- [3] S.V. Maksimov. *Unclean, Unknown and Cross Power*. Moscow: Book, 1989, pp. 113–117. (in Russian)
- [4] A.V. Ikonnikov. *Historicism in Architecture*. Moscow: Stroyizdat, 1997. (in Russian)
- [5] Le Corbusier (C.-É. Jeanneret). *Architecture of the Twentieth Century*. Moscow: Progress, 1977, pp. 13. (in Russian)
- [6] I.A. Bondarenko. On the Traditional Attitude Towards Architectural Innovation. In: A. Kazaryan, N. Konovalova, I. Rumbal (Eds.), *Proceedings of the 2nd International Conference on Architecture: Heritage, Traditions and Innovations (AHTI 2020), Advances in Social Science, Education and Humanities Research, Vol. 471*, pp. 18–23. Paris: Atlantis Press, 2020. <https://doi.org/10.2991/assehr.k.200923.004>
- [7] A.K. Bayburin. *Ritual in Traditional Culture: Structural and Semantic Analysis of East Slavic Rites*. St. Petersburg: Nauka, 1993, pp. 154. (in Russian)
- [8] Domostroy. *Compilation, introduction, translation and commentary by V.V. Kolesov*. Moscow: Sovetskaya Russia, 1990, pp. 68 & 80. (in Russian)
- [9] G.A. Ptichnikova. Pragmatization of the Architectural Profession Under the Conditions of the Modern Design Market. In: I.A. Dobritsyna (Ed.), *Questions of Theory of Architecture: Architecture in Dialogue With the Person*. Moscow: LENAND Publishing, 2013, pp. 290–304. (in Russian)

- [10] M.V. Nashchokina. Problems of Preservation of Small Towns in Central Russia. In: I.A. Bondarenko (Ed.), *Architecture and Culture of Russia in Historical Interaction*. St. Petersburg: Kolo, 2019, pp. 338–350. (in Russian)
- [11] I. Kukina. Urban Environment Renovation: A Shift in Professional Focus. In: A. Kazaryan, G. Ptichnikova, O. Baeva, N. Konovalova (Eds.), *Proceedings of the 3rd International Conference on Architecture: Heritage, Traditions and Innovations (AHTI 2021)*, *Advances in Social Science, Education and Humanities Research*, Vol. 600, pp. 429–434. Paris: Atlantis Press, 2021.
<https://doi.org/10.2991/assehr.k.211125.199>
- [12] I.A. Bondarenko. Conflict-Free Neighborhood. *Urban Construction*, 2013(5): 43–45. (in Russian)
- [13] A.S. Shchenkov, N.E. Antonova. Innovations in the Language of Contemporary Culture and the Problem of the Preservation of Cultural Heritage. In: A. Kazaryan, G. Ptichnikova, O. Baeva, N. Konovalova (Eds.), *Proceedings of the 3rd International Conference on Architecture: Heritage, Traditions and Innovations (AHTI 2021)*, *Advances in Social Science, Education and Humanities Research*, Vol. 600, pp. 255–261. Paris: Atlantis Press, 2021.
<https://doi.org/10.2991/assehr.k.211125.177>