URBAN AESTHETICS: EMERGENCE AND DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract

At the beginning of the 3rd millennium, when urban settlements become more and more crowded due to the work and life conditions they offer, urban aesthetics is becoming increasingly imperative. This is all the more important as population growth, in some cities has influenced directly the city's architecture, determining a growth of residential constructions, which, seldom, did not appeal to the "laws of beauty".

The purpose of this paper is to highlight the necessity of urban aesthetics and the role urban architecture should play in developing the city, in an attempt to accomplish a perfect combination between usefulness and pleasantry.

Keywords: urban geography, urban aesthetics, environment.

1. Introduction

Regarding strictly the development of human society within our living space, which implies the Greek-Latin and Judaic-Christian tradition, we may set some significant facts related to the way in which urban aesthetics emerged and developed.

A major role in urban aesthetics development of the two cultures (Greco-Latin and Christian-Jewish) was played/performed by the theories about beauty that met three distinct notions: beauty with its wide meaning – ethical and aesthetic concomitantly; the beauty with its aesthetic exclusive/strictly signification/meaning that rise and incite/bring about aesthetic emotions against color, sound and thinking; the beauty in its aesthetic meaning, but limited only to the visual area. (Morar, 2003).

Thus, the emergence of the urban civilisation in Mesopotamia and later on, in Judea, ancient Greece and Rome, has taken place by combining its material elements with a true philosophical and ethical-aesthetical vision on the world from that particular period.

Obviously, urban life is characterised by certain facilities, but concomitantly, it is completed by the idea of order, measure, balance, harmony and not least, power. In order to establish an equilibrium between what urbanism means in general, and aesthetics, especially, it is necessary to acknowlwdge the important role that that the shape acts (Hartman, 1974), because the shape/the aspect/the arhitecture of

the buildings/structures/constructions in the urban area is the first that draws everybody's attention. On the other hand, the aesthetics of the city influences in a very powerful way the soul and character of a city. (Cernescu, 2001)

Thus, implicitly, the idea of an aesthetic dimension is often brought to discussion, within urban civilisation.(Vianu, 1998). In some way, in the city, the aesthetic component is completed necessarily by the utility one, the life safety, power ones, and not least by the sacred dimension; actually, we must not forget that the city has been and remains the place for honouring the gods or the sole God, by the three Abraham-religions: Judaic, Christian Islam.

Once with the victory and spread of Christianity and especially, once with the assimilation of Christianity by the conventionally named barbaric populations, a rurality of the Mediterranean space occurs concomitantly with a degradation of the life space of fortress-cities. As testaments to this lie the interpretations brought by the main representatives of the Analles school (Jaques Le Goff, Georges Duby, Jean Delumeau), who have shown that in the Middle Eve, the quality of life in the cities was extremely precarious, as minimum salubrity conditions were lacking. In this context, we may give a single revealing example: the black pestilence which haunted Europe starting with 1348 killed nearly 40% of population, as the most affected were cities inhabitants.

In the so-called "primitive capital accumulation" period, two contradicting processes were outlined: on one hand, the quality of life increase for those in higher classes, and on the other, the depreciation of life conditions and pauperisation of lower classes. To this added the degradation of environment conditions for the simple reason that the environment was not taken into consideration as anything else except exploitation means.

Once with the real industrial revolution, initially emerged in England, and then France and developed European countries, which included after 1870 the USA, contradicting processes have taken place, and the environment has been to a great extent ravished. Concomitantly, however, during the industrial revolution material conditions are created for a hygienic-aesthetic transformation, first of all in the urban landscape. For example, from *Les Miserables* by Victor Hugo, we can conclude that in 1830 when the revolution the famous writer describes takes place, Paris was already endowed with collecting drains in the city's undergrounds, which means that water was already used as important means to ensure public health as well as for increasing the degree of life safety. From this moment, the former diseases of the Middle Eve, such as pestilence and cholera are practically, eradicated.

Most urban structures which emerge in the moment inaugurated by baron Haussman, who rebuilds Paris starting from utility-aesthetic, moral, and not least, political criteria, highlight the fact that the city has specific functions and it represents the paradigm of industrial and post-industrial civilisation.

In 1924, Le Courbusier launches the 4 million "Modular I" Paris project, and starting with 1929, when Bauhaus is set up, led by Van Duisberg, more pregnant is outlined the idea that the city is an artificial system which must take into account the surrounding nature, denied through some elements, and enforced through others.

Regarding the situation of the Romanian space, after the Union took place, clear urban issues are revealed and even, with certain ecological tendencies, the moment more projects emerge in the central and northern area of the capital. For example, all discussions regarding the Arch of Triumph are made in terms similar to Haussman's aesthetic model for Paris.

The aesthetic and urban studies of Gheorghe Duca or Mihail Sfintescu are, to some extent, synchronous to those elaborated in the European space. The interpretations and applications on this European structural horizon are different from those in the American horizon, mainly from the ones which defined the construction of the great New York metropolis.

The real aesthetic problems after the Second World War aim not only components related to symmetry, proportions, axes, urban perfections, but also the combining of the technological elements with the sanitary, public space infrastructure ones, in which people could act: markets, parks, clubs, boulevards, etc.

We may say that from this point of view, the 20th century was a space of tensions not only of political nature, between free democracies and Nazi and Stalinist dictatorships, but also a competition between aesthetic-urban models. Thus, for example, fascism, Nazism and Stalinism have opted for monumental, as an aesthetic-urban category, while democratic regimes have not neglected the grand and monumental in urban architecture, but awarded it a second place, after the functional and utility roles.

If we were to synthesise this evolution then we will conclude that beyond the approach differences which relate to political regimes, there are certain constraints which relate to the way in which urban space can be efficiently rationalised.

One may say that once with the new global projects and the ascent of a new ethics, a new planetary ethos, emerges the pressing need to consider the aesthetic component within the very wide variable that has been called for centuries the quality of human life.

We may note at this point of the speech that Romania has many similar elements regarding accelerated urban development with the other former constituents of "real socialism". We may exemplify, first of all, the bedroom cities and the lack of mandatory infrastructure elements for a totally civilised life.

To this we may add the lack of a long-term strategic urban plan for the entire Romanian territory, following a model that proved to be viable in the European and American West. More precisely, although certain development plans existed, the law has always allowed, through its own words, numerous exceptions, so that:

• unfortunately, there is no obvious style unity for Romanian cities; in the best case, the temptation of eclecticism[1] is dominant, and in the worst, the lack of balance between constructions, both from the perimeter of large cities as well as in the former rural areas which recently entered the urban circuit;

• in this context, we may outline that apart from an eclectic and sometimes aberrant style, an excessive temptation of kitsch has installed; thus, the more pregnant and disappointing image may be described as: cities without permanent water facilities, but with over-dimensioned buildings which look like palaces and medieval fortresses;

• What is outlined to be the National Strategy for Durable Development in Romania has a temporal stake, until 2030 (with two intermediary phases, 2013 and 2020) and, if completed, among others, will effect into a growth of aesthetics of life in the urban communities of the Romanian future. Sustainable development <<should be centred on people>>, expressing the concept of „human sustainable development". (Malița, 1998). Referring strictly to the urban area we shall emphasize the fact that sustainable development should take into account two major co-ordinates: on one hand to be looked at as a policy of environment protection, applied to urban territory, and on the other hand to represent an approach and a harmonious combination among ecology components, economic aspects and social equity (Ghiga, 2004).

2. Interactions between urban aesthetics and the environment

Environment – human ambiance resulted from the continuous and permanent interrelation between elements of the geographical medium (Cucu and Soare, 2001).

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[1] Architectural eclecticism represents a combination of some elements deriving from different styles and means of expression. Eclectismul arhitectural reprezintă îmbinarea unor elemente provenind din stiluri sau modalități de exprimare diferite.

There is a tight connection between the characteristics which fundament the types of environment, mainly the urban one, and the actual physiognomy of the city. The urban logic is based on the intensity of the productive phenomena tightly correlated to the biodiversity of the types of space. The urban site preserves the authentic elements, specific to the city's origin, elements which constitute, in time, cultural, traditional values (Mehedinți, 1999). The urban site offers expression to the rational balance between the city's fundamental behaviours. Subject to pressures of certain nuances (economic, social and especially political), the urban site changes at times ending in the alteration of initial archetypes. (Vlad, 2008).

It is the case of certain development phases of the Romanian city, mainly in the evolution period from the second half of the 20th century and no less in the last decade of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st. in both cases, the quality of the Romanian urban environment is profoundly influenced by new, modern and post-modern urban orientations.

Through the modern architectural vision, there has been an attempt to eliminate in the second half of the 20th century, architectural "monotony" and to assert grand mania and corbousian style generating urban aesthetic discomfort. After1989, in the second development phase, there has been a rapid shift towards architectural "chaos" generating practices, altering traditions and autochthonous urban specific, in essence towards the degradation of city-environment relations. On the other hand, the environment is influenced also by the negative effects of neighbouring relations with the great cities contributing to the degradation of the environment through noise, high dust levels, etc. (Ioan Ianoş şi Wilfried Heller, 2006).

These evolutions result in ignoring fundamental issues of modern urbanism, of quality attributes of urban comfort, of preserving a superior level, of health.

3. Conclusions

The main conclusion that may be drawn from this is that Romanian urban development in the last years has been made disregarding the elementary laws of aesthetics and without maintaining a minimum balance between the natural and artificial environments. Most often, buildings, and especially residential ones are build on the vertical axis, denote monotony, as they appear to be built according to a pattern, without any elements individualising them. The monotony installed before 1989 has been replaced with architectural chaos and a continuous and more accelerated degradation of autochthonous traditions regarding urbanism.

In order to counter the negative effects of constructions in the last years, special attention must be given to future urban planning, so that cities, regardless of their size, stop developing chaotically, and have

not only functional attributes but also, aesthetic ones, and to harmoniously combine the built surfaces and the ones destined to recreation and green spaces.

This fact would be possible only if architects and specialists from other fields of activity (sociologists, psychologists, anthropologists etc.) will cooperate in order to realize a profitable utilization of space and a well-balanced combination between built up surfaces (no matter the type and destiantion of the construction) and those for relaxation.

The beauty of cities is all the more important as it acts positively on population moral, while the importance of urban aesthetics derives from the benefiting effects this has on culture and population artistic education.

Excepting the moral effects of urban aesthetics, we believe that it has positive effects also from a material point of view, and to support this statement we rely on the fact that beautiful architectural cities endowed with representative monuments attract a large number of visitors and tourists and even important manifestations from national and international points of view.

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