

XIII.

ULUSLARARASI SİNAN SEMPOZYUMU INTERNATIONAL SINAN SYMPOSIUM

27 - 28 Nisan 2023 / April 27th - 28th 2023



MİMARLIK VE SORUMLULUK ARCHITECTURE AND RESPONSIBILITY

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"MİMARLIK ve SORUMLULUK"

ARCHITECTURE AND RESPONSIBILITY

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USER-PERCEPTION of LIVING HERITAGE in CONTEMPORARY CITY: SOCIAL, CONTEXTUAL and HISTORICAL RESPONSIBILITY

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ABSTRACT

Research within this paper examines the concept of visual responsibility of the contemporary city towards cultural heritage. The legacy of the 20th century, seen as living heritage, is specifically highlighted as problematic concerning the frequent failure to recognize architecture from this period as a member of cultural heritage. These built structures require complex conservation methodologies in order to adapt to contemporary building standards in pursuance of inclusion in the daily life of the city. Subject importance is recognized through the intensive interdisciplinary discussion about different methodologies of XX century heritage conservation, which results in new global initiatives, documents and movements. Contemporary initiatives predominantly focus on the restoration of technical and technological aspects of the objects, while less attention falls on the life of heritage in the everyday context, as well as the observer's contact with these spaces. Considering that the recognizability of the heritage from this period has already been marked as problematic in scientific circles, this paper examines the potential for the instrumentalization of perception of the built structure in user's everyday contact with its surroundings. If the users perceive the environment as architecturally, environmentally or historically significant, they identify with the analyzed space, which represents the first step in its potential preservation and conservation. The hypothesis within this paper is that the perception of heritage in the immediate environment, defined through the intensity and quality of the user's perception, has a significant role in understanding the way heritage lives in the modern city. In this way, special importance is given to the sociological, contextual and architectural determinants of space. Research result is the definition of methodology for the visual valorization of heritage in city context, as well as the impact of potential future interventions on its perceptual quality, defined in this paper as visual responsibility. The methodology will be set through a case study of New Belgrade, seen as a representative of modernist architecture of the 20th century that still lives in the contemporary context of the Serbia's capital.

Keywords: Cultural heritage, Spatial cognition, Identity, Visual interpretation, Emerging heritage.

1. INTRODUCTION

The globalization process poses a threat to preservation of the unique character of urban landscapes, therefore the urban city development in the modern-day is based on the ideas of (a) sustainability and (b) conservation of the overall place impression that makes a certain area unique and recognizable (Sandalack, 2022); these ideas reflect the value system and thinking of contemporary society. In this paper we will focus on the latter. It is extremely important to understand an urban place, how it lives and functions, before making any suggestions for its transformation. If the goal of development is to preserve place uniqueness, new development policies must be open to innovative techniques of analysis and valorization of space, so that future interventions are in accordance with contemporary tendencies, while at the same time preserving important heritage values.

A particular problem arises when analyzing heritage of the twentieth century, which in many conservation initiatives, policies and guidelines does not have a clear direction for conservation. The aim of this work is to create a method for the urban space analysis based on the visual experience of the observer, in order to clearly determine current position of recent-date heritage in the contemporary context from the perspective of space users. Research result is a model for examining the perceptual quality of the environment, which places special responsibility on the values and intangible characteristics embedded in heritage objects, defined as a model of visual responsibility.

This paper will define and research the concept of visual responsibility through the evaluation of (a) social, (b) contextual and (c) historical spatial cues. Research goal is to create a method for analyzing the visual perception of the observer and employ it in defining the connection and identification users form with the immediate environment. The premise of the work is that a proper quality assesment of urban landscape from the users standpoint can be done through the identification and valorization of visual (inter)relationships, formed between the objects in the targeted area of research. The research is divided into three segments; in the first part the basis for research is laid through the presentation of a significant development axis in the modern era: the preservation of the uniqueness and recognition of urban places. In this part, emerging heritage stands out as a particularly sensitive segment of the urban landscape. The second chapter defines the relationship between the user and space as important for the overall comprehension of place uniqueness, highlighting that understanding the values that people instill in the urban space are the most important for its preservation. In this way, the concept of visual responsibility is established, which is additionally explored in the third segment of the paper through a case study.

2. LIVING HERITAGE: DEFINITION AND CHALLENGES

Over the past 200 years, modern heritage conservation movement developed under the assumption that values rested mostly, if not entirely on its material form; in contrast to traditional practice, the values of the emerging heritage paradigm most often rest on intangible vessels, for which the existing conservation methods are of little assistance (Araoz, 2011: 59). Contemporary practices of preserving the uniqueness of territories within the framework of international organizations and institutions tend to establish a pattern of preservation that is applicable in different local contexts. There is a danger that the universal applicability of development policies and practices to different territories may lead to a reduction of local recognition and identity. Ashworth points out that the exchange of environmental conservation and revitalization techniques promotes the creation of *world heritage* (Ashworth, 1997). Recognized limitations require additional research and numerous case studies in order to validate different conservation methodologies as objective, but also inclusive of different contextual variables.

The term “living heritage” refers to all intangible characteristics of heritage objects that influence their understanding and interpretation, such as embedded cultural, visual, social, psychological, historical and contextual values. This phenomenon describes all the transformable, mobile and elusive characteristics of heritage. The sensitive aspect of protecting recent heritage is recognized through the work of numerous international organisations dedicated to research of new methodologies and improvement of preservation practice, such as Docomomo, ICOMOS and APT.

Recognizing that the 20th century heritage is massively unprotected prompted the formation of new movements and initiatives, such as the Getty Conservation Institute (GCI), which launched the Conserving Modern Architecture Initiative in 2012 that aims to advance practise in the area of conservation through compressive research and implementation program including materials-based research that investigates innovative techniques to arrest decay in buildings, while sustaining them into the future (Gultekin, 2019). Their work is continued today and resulting in multiple policies and publications concerning the ever-developing methodological improvement, such as “The Twentieth-Century Historic Thematic Framework: A Tool for Assessing Heritage Places” published in 2021.

Debate about conservation challenges continues with recognizing the risk of predominately focusing on technological aspects of objects preservation, while neglecting the intangible values embeded in heritage. The value of cultural heritage does not derive from the profits and businesses it encourages, but rather from the values inherent in the wealth of heritage, which requires the establishment of a methodology of alternative valorization of the contemporary context. The contemporary city interprets heritage not only as a static legacy of the past, but also as a generator of new social, environmental and contextual changes. Heritage values are beginning to be assessed as much as its tangible features; the challenge is to recognize development strategies that are applicable in different contexts and enable adequate articulation of recognized values.

From the previous analysis, it was recognized that the trend in heritage research of the 20th century is development of a methodology for preserving intangible aspects of buildings and researching their impact on the observer. Recognition of these topics by a wider scientific audience defines the justification of the research within this paper for the formation of a new research model. Model’s purpose is the valorization of visual aspect of heritage objects spatial cognition, defined as visual responsibility.

3. PRESERVING THE EPHEMERAL

When observing built structure, the observer forms a mental record of the composition which, depending on various factors, can manifest a clear mental map of the scene. Mental maps allow us to to subsequently remember the space and (re)imagine it. Many characteristics of the context, such as hierarchy, colors, textures or volumes deem the setting recognizable and different from other sites. In the process of cognitive perception of the built structure, we actually perceive the interrelationships between different physical elements, which help us create a mental image of the place. These relationships can be divided into two groups: (a) interrelationships that we remember based on the contrast in relation to the rest of the composition, and (b) interrelationships that we group according to perceived similarities. As part of his research, architect Kevin Lynch pointed out that the mental images formed by the observer are the result of a two-way process: when we look for intangible signs in the built structure, such as buildings, streets and landscapes, we simultaneously know that these signs carry values instilled by people who occupy and actively use that space (Lynch, 1960). Context elements contain information about the users who inhabit them, their activities, social relations and life. As this information changes, the appearance of the built structure transforms in parallel, whereby we can conclude that these values have an ephemeral character.

When we discuss values that heritage carries in the modern urban context, it is important to consider the relationship between users and space. People who live in a certain environment form strong perceptual connections to the context that carries a certain meaning for them. Objects that have high historical, social or ambient values create in the observer a sense of responsibility towards the preservation of these intangible characteristics of the urban space. The sense of responsibility towards the values instilled in these objects comes from the desire to maintain stability through the preservation of developmental and historical continuity. Prevailing sense of history embodied in a building or place gives roots to this sense of stability and security; as the rate of change in society increases, so does the value we place on the old (Sanoff, 2016: 44).

3.1. Concept of *Visual responsibility*: model definition

In the introductory section of the paper, we established the claim that the development trends of the modern city tend to preserve its authenticity. Place uniqueness rests on the conservation of the intangible artifacts – messages and values of history, society and culture, which shape the built space. It is our responsibility to preserve these values and adequately emphasize them, with the intention to convey a clear message to the observer. The way we observe an object in the environment also determines how we will interpret it. The concept of visual responsibility unifies spatial parameters that give the observer a sense of belonging and recognition, that is, they adequately emphasize the values embedded in the heritage object. In order to define the relevant parameters, we will start with the analysis of the townscape concept.

The concept of townscape – urban scene analysis was chosen for this paper because it includes in its research apparatus the built and immaterial structure that is woven into the landscape of the city. Townscape acknowledges and valorizes the impacts of economic, climatic, social and other urban flows that shape a distinct urban locale. The concept definition was given by the British architect Gordon Cullen: "One building is architecture, but two buildings is townscape. For as soon as two buildings are juxtaposed, the art of townscape is released." (Cullen, 1971). The concept of Townscape is still active and researched today through constant updates and improved analysis of (inter)relationships in the urban space (Sandalack, 2022). In order to illustrate the specific experiential meaning, the key characteristics of the urban space that build the townscape are defined (Figure 1). The illustrated table presents sensory spatial cues that the observer perceives and remembers while passing through a certain spatial zone. These marks are physical in nature, but they carry information about other, invisible spatial determinants that convey specific historical, ambient, functional or social context values. Through a sensory walk along the indicated path, the user observes these spatial elements and singles out visual benchmarks - an object or grouping that is considered valuable and unique. One of the problems of viewing space in this way is the sensitivity to different contexts, that is, potential for applicability of the model in diametrically opposite environments. With the aim of further objectifying the research, and at the same time not losing its value order, reinterpretation of the townscape notation system will focus on recognizing the interrelationships between physical elements. By focusing on the relationships of physical elements, the problem of physical element diversity is further reduced; their immaterial conditions come to the fore. This claim will be examined through a case study.

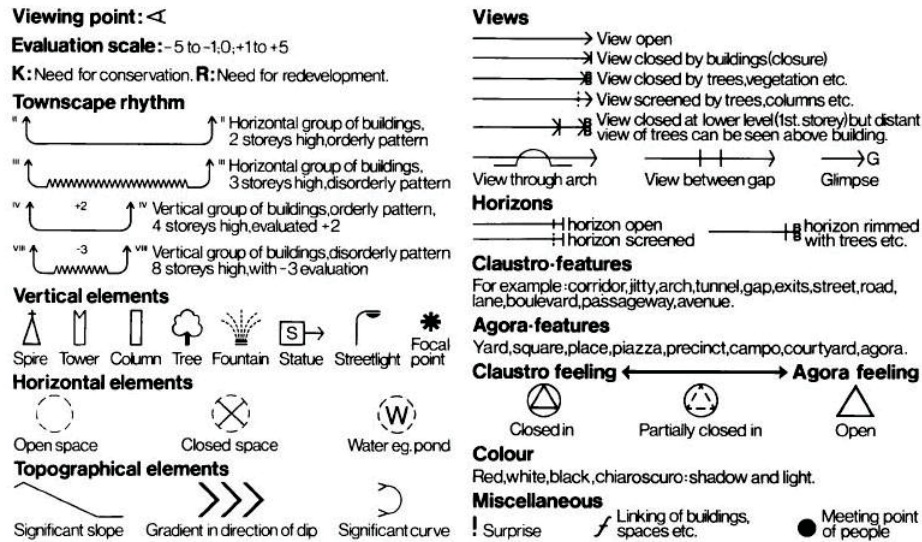


Figure 1. Townscape notation system (Sanoff, H. *Visual research methods in design*, 2016)

It can be concluded through the reinterpretation of the townscape notation system that the parameters defining visual responsibility are manifested through the following relationships in the urban space: (1) rhythm of object silhouettes, (2) hierarchy of physical volumes, (3) change of topography - dynamics of the landscape, (4) elevation plans - contact with the wider environment, and (5) contrasting physical elements (color, material, facade openings, etc.). These are the variables that will be used in the case study to further inspect the validity of the model, set through a theoretical overview.

4. CASE STUDY

Recognizing heritage from recent history as important and worthy of conservation is not only problematic from the perspective of the average observer, but also from the viewpoint of a wider scientific audience. Experts advocate for the formulation of innovative methods and preservation policies for a comprehensive recognition of emerging heritage. In this category, the rich legacy of the 20th century is particularly noteworthy. A large number of initiatives deal with the conversion and technical preservation of these buildings with the aim of bringing them closer to modern standards of construction. Insufficient research recognizes the preservation of intangible values embedded in heritage objects as a primary theme, despite the fact that these values are extremely important for protecting the identity and distinctiveness of a place from a historical, social and environmental perspective.

A special challenge in the emerging heritage analysis are buildings of the residential typology. In the perception of the observer, the housing category often represents the everyday urban landscape, which is not recognized as particularly valuable from the perspective of conservation - these values are mostly associated with objects of exceptional importance i.e. public typologies. The case study within this paper will analyze the protected

zone of residential typology in the capital of Serbia - New Belgrade. The residential blocks of New Belgrade were built in the second half of the twentieth century and have been designated by the „Institute for the Protection of Monuments of Belgrade“ as a zone of exceptional historical and/or architectural value. New Belgrade rests on modernist principles and illustrates the new social and architectural order through modern standards of construction, housing and infrastructure. The protected (central) zone includes residential blocks 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 28, 29 and 30 (URL 1). Within the framework of the case study we will analyze block 28. It has been selected for its liminal location, in addition to bordering with various typologies and buildings from different periods, from educational to modern business and commercial facilities.

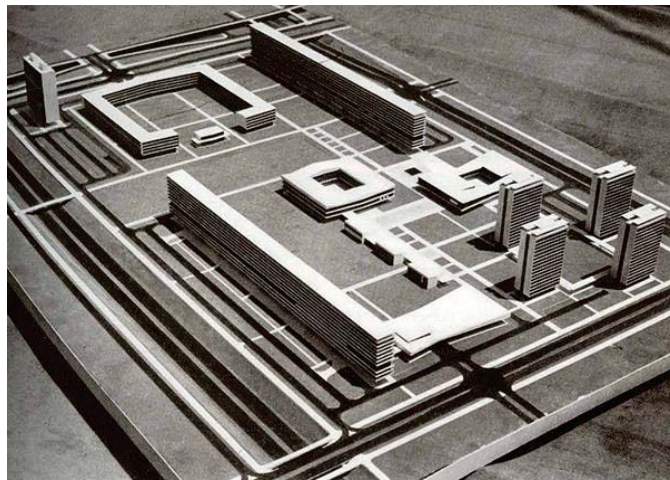


Image 1. Model of block 28 (Docomomo, URL 2)

The case study is conducted through the previously set five criteria for the valorization of visual responsibility: (1) rhythm of object silhouettes, (2) hierarchy of physical volumes, (3) change of topography - dynamics of the landscape, (4) elevation plans - contact with the wider environment, and (5) contrasting physical elements. The first criterion, the rhythm of the silhouette, illustrates the diametrically different dynamics of the urban front on the two sides of the street. Block 28 is characterized by a dynamic silhouette with an alternation of linear, uniform forms and high landmarks – residential towers. Opposite it is a front of office buildings, which build a dominantly homogenous line without exceptional notions. This distribution of elements creates two different impressions for users, where block 28 stands out as heterogeneous and contrasting, and the block of office buildings as a uniform, grouped stimulus. The hierarchy of volumes also supports this claim - the volumes that build a unique urban silhouette participate in the creation of contrast in favor of block 28, which with its continuous structure full of different visual attractors arouses the attention of the observer. The third criterion of analysis - the dynamics of topography, does not appear to be overly relevant in the selected case study. Since New Belgrade has a mostly uniform, leveled terrain morphology, not a single spatial attribute causes a greater intensity of perception in the observer. The analysis of the fourth spatial relationship - the elevation can actually be interpreted quite similarly (at the stimulus level) within the two zones of interest. Block 28, although it is rich in contrasts and forms a dynamic hierarchy of volumes, is

defined by a clear visual border - a barrier that is formed through the continuity of the street front. A similar situation occurs in the business zone across the street, within which a solid visual barrier is defined with very little perceptual porosity, making the plans solid and perceptually impervious. The contrasted physical elements represent another relationship that makes the perceptual experience more dynamic and intense in favor of block 28 - the characteristic facade openings located on the longitudinal residential building introduce a new rhythm into the perception of the facade, which in the contrasted stimulus introduces a new grouping through the dynamics of the openings that additionally make this area recognizable and striking (Figure 2).

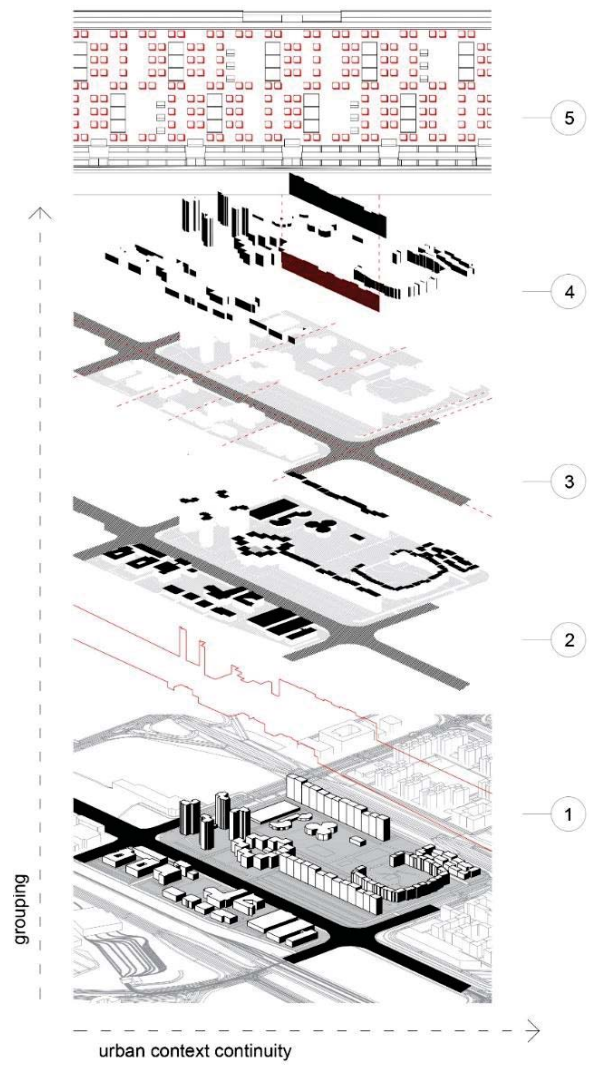


Figure 2. Axonometric preview of analysis: visual responsibility model in block 28
(Vanja Spasenović, 2023)

5. DISCUSSION: The sixth condition – Visual continuity of immediate context

After the conducted research, it can be concluded that visual responsibility represents a duty to preserve intangible values embedded in heritage existing in contemporary urban environment, manifested through defined characteristics and relationships that we perceive in the analyzed place. The described values are merits of social and historical significance embedded in various contextual determinants. The newly formed model is based on the concept of townscape, due to its comprehensive treatment of various (im)material aspects of the urban context. The model of visual responsibility is a tool for analyzing the immediate context from the aspect of visual perception, which is conditioned by the physical environment.

The case study of New Belgrade confirms that the model of visual responsibility, defined through a scientific review of relevant theoretical foundations, is applicable in the physical context. All parameters lead to the common conclusion that the protected zone of block 28 stands out as perceptually significant in relation to the immediate context, which defines its wider recognition. Considering visual perception as the main parameter, although the two zones are from different time periods, typology and overall appearance, they create a continuous experience for the observer and enable a good balance of attention intensity in favor of block 28. In a hypothetical case that the opposite zone is visually more dominant, it may create an excessive contrasts with high intensity of perception and have a negative effect on the observer – perceptual fatigue, which makes it impossible to perceive the zone of interest as a pure stimulus. The way in which the immediate context of heritage objects develops greatly influences its understanding and wider recognition.

The new knowledge we acquire through the case study is the importance of the (visual) quality of the immediate context, which can be included as the sixth criterion of the analysis of spatial relationships in the model of visual responsibility. The contribution of this research in architectural theory and practice is the formation of a new tool for environmental analysis. This tool is meant to be used in architectural and urban planning process as a tool for valorization and critical review of the urban context from the aspect of visual perception - user experience.

Future research trajectory will focus on establishing a model of visual responsibility as an objective and widely applicable instrument for context analysis, with particular reference to emerging heritage. New case studies in different contexts can further confirm and affirm the relevance of the now six criteria of visual responsibility analysis. The challenge of future research, especially from the aspect of objectivity in the application of the defined method, is to understand how different groups of observers, depending on culture, gender and age, see heritage and instill unique values in these objects. Different stakeholders can assign diametrically opposite values and characteristics to the same urban area, which in some situations are even conflicting (Araoz, 2011). This diversification of values conditions future research, which must refer not only to the interrelationships that are formed in real space, but also to the relations that are conditioned through the observer. The rapid development of modern cities is based on the ideas of sustainability and preservation of uniqueness, which can be considered threatened under the influence of globalism and the formation of global culture. The model of visual responsibility deals precisely with the issue of preserving recognition and uniqueness through the analysis of the physical context, which makes the presented research relevant and current.

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T.C.
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