Architecture as an Indicator of Territorial Conflicts, Globalisation and Unification

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The paper discusses architecture as a marker of two selected types of conflicts. The first type described are conflicts rooted in a dispute over a territory. Territorial conflicts result in the transpositions of architectural styles, their merges and evolutions. Based on colonial architecture, the author gives examples of the aggressors’ architectural practices, which are treating the local design in various manners: elimination, acceptance or conscious use. Subsequently to colonialism, the paper discusses decolonisation and globalisation, which lead to the unification of architecture all over the world. This, as the article shows, is related to the transformations of global economy. The paper discusses examples of architectural styles and tendencies, which are triggered by economic factors, including the architecture of international corporations, and modular container building. Finally, the paper comments on architecture portraying economic discrepancies, reflecting extreme luxury and poverty. The author comments on the clash between elitist skyscrapers and slums in large metropolises. The article discusses social phenomena that stem from this clash and, most importantly, portrays architecture as an agent and a victim of territorial and economic conflicts.

Keywords: architecture, territorial conflicts, economic conflicts, globalisation, colonial architecture, decolonisation, hybrid architecture

Introduction

Domination over a territory gives power over the natural resources and the inhabiting society, including power over people’s creative potential. Territorial conflicts aimed at the possession of a land or a zone of influence have existed since the beginning of humanity. These conflicts frequently resulted in the aggressors’ attempts to change a native identity and transform it, mainly in order to get most permanent possible control over the society. Domination was often shown by means of symbolic architecture, which was also used as a tool of influence over the perception of reality by a local population.

Territorial conflicts: Colonisation

Colonialism clearly illustrates the idea of a foreign domination, as well as the relationship between architecture and human identity. In the age of discoveries, colonialism was the product of economically developed countries’ policy towards the developing ones. The influence of the aggressors on the conquered lands was not only political and economic. Indigenous, architecture-related identity was often broken and replaced with the elements of the invaders’ architectural identity, including symbols, style and spatial hierarchy. The impact mentioned was frequently a long-term one. Changes in a traditional architectural style, imposed by the aggressor, would often last longer than the aggressor’s actual power or presence on a territory, as architecture is characterised by its longevity, in comparison to many human-produced artefacts. An invader’s frequent practice, aimed at demonstrating their superiority and introducing new spatial hierarchy, was to build architectural dominants and landmarks. These practices led to the creation of a new hierarchy, frequently neglecting an existing culture and authorities.

It was popular to introduce the coloniser’s indigenous architecture into the conquered land, not only to dominate, but also in order to cut the native people’s roots[1]. These processes triggered the transformation of architectural styles, which is clearly seen in the dissemination of the Palladian style. The style, created in the 16th century by Palladio, in Italy, was in the 18th century brought to England and subsequently popularised in the world, as a result of English colonialism. Nevertheless, an architectural style

Fig. 1. Map illustrating gradual end of colonialism after World War II. The territories which regained independence are marked wit different colours depending on independence date. Author: Nobelium, 2010
could not always be repeated in its original form – for instance, the European villa had to undergo certain transformations due to the climate differences between Europe and the colonised lands, where heat imposed e.g. the introduction of shadings[1].

In some cases, the colonisers’ architecture was adjusted to the existing, local one [2]. For instance, the Cristo Rey Catholic Church in Santa Fe is not only rich in foreign elements, stemming from Christian and European architectural conventions, but also built of local building materials [1]. On the other hand, architecture was built to mark the newly conquered territory – an example of which may be the Cathedral in Lima, whose construction was initiated by the conquistador Francisco Pizarro. The conquistador personally laid the first construction stone in 1535. The cathedral was later rebuilt, following the style of the Seville Cathedral in Spain, and, next, renovated and modernised several times, usually based on the European models.

Meanwhile, the case of the Brits in India shows that sometimes an independent style, of neither the colonising nor the colonised, was introduced. The case of the British colonisers is indeed quite interesting, as they followed different styles – the Gothic, Imperial, Hindu, Buddhist, Victorian ones, as well as the British Renaissance. In 1857 Bombay was renovated in order to give it an imperial touch. The Victoria Terminus, built in 1878-87, is an example of a unique merge of Victorian and Hindu styles[3]. On the other hand, the so-called India Gate, built in New Delhi, is a clear, architectural symbol of British dominance in India. The monument, erected in honour of the World War I Hindu victims, refers in its form to the Western tradition, and in fact may be interpreted as the British triumph over India [4].

Forts and castles along the Africa’s Atlantic coast, from Senegal to Benin, constitute another example of architecture rooted in colonialism. They reflect the merge of European and African architecture from the 14th to the 19th century. Most of the colonial buildings erected in Africa during the colonial times were of spectacularly different scale and typology from the local architecture; they triggered both fascination and intimidation in the local population. The house of Provincial Commissioner in Nairobi, Kenya, which was the largest in town and heavily secured by fences [5], constitutes an example of such construction. The building, completed in Nairobi in 1913, was the city’s “zero point” – all the distances were measured from there. The building also housed a court, dealing with the natives who entered the city without any pass.

Decolonisation triggered the gradual change of art and architecture. They no longer played the roles of symbols of imperial power and dominance, and, at the same time, they did not correspond to the new social order and emerging local identities. The end of colonialism commenced a new era of return to the traditional culture, which was often un-

Fig. 2. The renaissance Cathedral of Lima, XVI c., photo by Martin Garcia, 2008

Fig. 3. Tomb of Mohamad Ali Jinnah, (Mazar-e-Quaid), arch. Yahya Merchant, Karachi, 1960s, photo by Shahid 1024, 2007
easy or even impossible, due to the local identity already distorted by the colonisers, as well as conflicts stemming from the changed social, economic and political structures, as well as geographical boundaries. Meanwhile, post-colonial architecture, in some cases, earned the features of architecture that is referred to as hybrid. It combined the key elements of the colonisers’ cultures mixed with local symbolism, which can be illustrated by the Mazar-e-Quaid mausoleum in Karachi (Fig. 3).

The uniform aspiring to be unique

In the era of global trade and communication, the domination over a territory is becoming gradually less physical – it can be often described as economic or information-like, and as such can be spread more effectively, reaching the global limits. Globalisation unifies architecture, makes particular buildings share common features, irrespective of their location on Earth. Design shows a tendency towards stylistic unification, that refers to a global, technology- and market-driven identity related to a uniform lifestyle or culture. This process is connected with industrialisation and technologisation. This wide dissemination leads to the creation of an international network, a “global village”. Therefore, there is no “centre”, no axiological base, from which the new, global society may derive its values. Global architecture is frequently composed of forms having no symbolic value, being just “autistic buildings with no reference to any context and no communicative function”[6].

These new characteristics of buildings and urban spaces, described above, were introduced in the 20th century, when modernism was developed in opposition to historicism. The resulting international architecture was often a “uniform mass of identical, boring boxes made of steel, glass and concrete – abstract forms, disconnected and foreign”[7]. Urban landscapes shaped by modernists and late modernists are markers of capitalism and the social alienation related to it[8]. They reflect human early fascination by mechanisation. Developing better building technologies and enhancing production gave rise to new, global trends on architecture, closely related to the globalisation of market. The creation of the international market of production and consumption was in fact the effect of globalisation. The creation of the international market of production and consumption was in fact the effect of globalisation.

Unification of architecture was also triggered by the capitalist market, emphasizing the importance of speed. As Rewers put it, such an approach led to the creation of “light images, rather that material objects”[6]. Importantly, these virtual, “light images” do correspond with a certain place, but are transitory; they do not leave any permanent traces of their existence. Similarly, buildings created according to global trends often do not exert any long-lasting influence on their observer or user, communicating nothing original.

This tendency towards unification is visible in the behaviour of international corporations that aim at keeping a coherent, geographically-independent company image. This results in the development of a global architectural style, well-illustrated by chain restaurants, cafes, brand shops or hotels which are identical irrespective of their location. This phenomenon is related not only to the companies’ image creation, but also to fulfilling the consumers’ needs, and adapting to business models that are frequently based on franchising and supply chain unification.

Unification can be also associated with the economy-driven business corporate architecture, which is a result of internationally uniform rules, governing corporate organisations. These rules, translated into spatial relationships, include, for instance, the requirements and measures for public areas and office spaces. An example of a building in which these rules were embedded is the FIFA Headquar-

Fig. 4. An impressionistic view on uniform architecture, Signalhuset, Copenhagen, arch. Nobel arkitekter a/s, 2004-06, photo by Jens Lindhe, 2006

Fig. 5. Repetitive elements in: Signalhuset, Copenhagen, arch. Nobel arkitekter a/s, 2004-06, photo by Jens Lindhe, 2006
Corporations, built in 2006 in Zurich, according to the design by the Schwarz & Schwarz architectural office.

Corporate architecture origins can be probably derived from early corporations – which existed as early as in ancient Rome. In its more pronounced form, the corporate style emerged in architecture along with the international style, which appeared in 1920s and 1930s; in fact, the international style was redeveloped in late 1950s into “corporate style”, which later spread from the North America internationally. The style was particularly fit for corporate purposes, as it embodied the traits of modern corporate philosophy: organisation, efficiency, hierarchy and the globality of form. However, the uniformity of the so-called corporate high rise buildings, characterised by a square or rectangular plan, simple cubic form and horizontal window alignment, was a threat to the originality of a brand identity. Therefore, a counter-trend appeared around 1980s, when architecture became a marker of a company’s visual identity. Nevertheless, the same drive to originality makes the corporate buildings excessively expressive, and not corresponding with the surrounding architectural forms. Corporate architecture is also frequently designed without the proper cultural background and local specificity check.

The phenomenon of unified architecture, that could exist in any world metropolis, may be well illustrated by means of container buildings – made of identical, repetitive elements. In fact, the “container architecture” trend is present in cities worldwide. A multi-family housing estate named “City Center Lofts”, designed by Adam Kalkin, in Salt Lake City, is an illustration of this trend. On the other hand, the designer used colours to make the building diverse despite its scale and the repetitiveness of container modules.

Architectural unification is only a part of a more general, multidimensional process triggered by globalisation. Yet, even this small part has its consequences in human emotions, mental state and identity. Antonio Miotto even calls unification a form of social pressure, a method aimed at generating social groups of homogeneous emotions and mentalities [10].

The included and the excluded

Similarly to unification, consumerism leads to the conflict between personal and market experience, between self-development and consumerism. This internal conflict, generated by the contemporary market system, results from the policy of creating “the feeling of constant insatiability, stemming from irreducible frustration due to one’s unfulfilled needs” [11]. The same policy dictates boosting human traits such as pride and arrogance, narcissism, hedonism and the longing for luxury. Architecture contributes to the development of these traits, making the clash between the rich and the poor even more visible.

Luxurious architecture is a symbol of this clash, an example of which may be the designed, but yet-to-be-built, “Crystal Island” by Sir Norman Foster. The “Crystal Island” was supposed to be the largest building on Earth, a city within a city, with its surface exceeding four times the one of Pentagon [12] – namely, equal to 2.5 million square meters. As Sir Norman Foster put it, “Crystal Island is one of the world’s most ambitious building projects and it represents a milestone in the 40-year history of the practice. It is the largest single building in the world, creating a year-round destination for Moscow and a sustainable, dynamic new urban quarter” [13]. The potential residents of 900 luxury apartments and 3000 hotel rooms will not have to leave the building to attend cultural, commercial, sport or educational entertainments – they will be protected from the outer world by solar-responsive façade panels, with their comfort ensured by natural ventilation and temperature controlling systems.

A similarly exclusive architecture is the one of the Dynamic Tower, a rotating building, planned to be the most prestigious building of the city, designed for the prime location of Dubai. If the construction finally takes place, the turning tower will be the second rotating building in the world, after Suite Vollard in Brazil. Rotating floors will allow the inhabitants of apartments and 1.200-square-meters villas (with car parks inside the apartments) to cherish various window views at different moments of the day [14], as the floors are going to rotate by 360°. The building’s architect commented on his design by saying that “today’s life is dynamic, so the space we are living in should be dynamic as well, adjustable to our needs that change continuously”[15]. According to the designer, the inside offices, hotel and apartments, especially the ones located at the top of the building, constitute the very gist of luxurious architecture, and even the very possibility of enjoying both east and west from one room is a luxury on its own [16]. This luxury, in turn, will be inserted into the urban tissue composed of other elitist buildings – the towers of Dubai, with their internal wells and supermarkets. To limit the risk of potential conflicts, these facilities are

Fig.6. Artist’s impression of the Dynamic Tower, 2004, David Fisher, visualisation: Dynamic Architecture company
accessible from the underground, so that the flow of their users, which is composed of underpaid working force, does not merge with the flow of the rich.

The clash of the elitist rich and service workers is even higher in the case of the state of Haiti, where even a simple dwelling is already a luxury. In that setting, the planned 4,000-room, 5-star resort in Cotes-de-Fer will be an icon of a luxurious resort located in a poor country (and repeated worldwide).

Luxury is frequently accompanied by exclusion. This exclusion can be seen in cities, countries and on a global scale, where some areas are outshone by the developed regions, and the distance between the rich and the poor increases. This discrepancy results in frustration, that can be felt not only by the excluded part of the society, but also the prosperous one which is under the impression of being threatened by the poorer groups. According to Castells[16], the excluded community starts to isolate itself from the rest, as they believe to be of lower class. They give up on their ambitions, develop their own rules of living and a distinct lifestyle, abandoning the rules of the surrounding world. As Castells claims, the global, information society generates exclusion-based conflicts. Cities become divided, with their modern, knowledge-saturated parts neighbouring the enclaves of the excluded [17].

Exclusion is well reflected in the apartheid history of District Six in South Africa or in the presence of slums in the Nigerian Lagos, a historical capital of Nigeria and its biggest city, with the population of about 21 million inhabitants (which also makes it the biggest African city[18]. The number of inhabitants is also the reason for which the capital is being moved to Abuja, predicted to be inhabited by a million of people still in the first half of the 21st century. Lagos keeps housing certain administrative institutions, and remains the most important commercial centre of the country. Consequently, it is subject to the fastest urbanisation processes: already in the 1970s, its annual population growth was equal to 14%. The city was constructed rapidly due to the waves of immigration (the immigrants were attracted by the city’s development), but it became famous for its urban problems and overpopulation. The development could not keep up with the demand. Built on insufficiently dried marshlands, Lagos currently falls victim of floods during the rain season. A higher water level makes sewage pollute the streets, especially in the low, poor city districts. Similarly to other Nigerian cities, Lagos lacks a system of waste management, while its biggest problem stays related to the traffic. The arteries’ flow capacity is too small to meet the demand, and the city road and bridge grid is not sufficiently developed, which results in enormous traffic jams. Slums are the city’s grave problem; in fact, they constitute one of the biggest issues stemming from the lack of sustainable development in urban areas.

This problem is an economic one, potentially leading to conflicts and bringing epidemiological risk, which was lately observed in the case of the Ebola epidemic in West Africa. This epidemic has erupted in urban areas, characterised by very high urbanisation rate and density (Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone were subject to a population density growth by 223, 178 and 275% respectively, in the years: 1960-2012, as well as the growth of urban population by 248, 130 and 163%)[19]. As this tragic example shows, the process mentioned can trigger the outbreak of epidemics, as infrastructural and public health needs are not covered fast enough. Weak road systems, transportation and telecommunication services cause delays in the transportation of patients, as well as create barriers in effective public information communication. The countries hit by the Ebola outbreak are characterised by one of the highest worldwide migration rates, which is caused by the inhabiting population constantly searching for better socio-economic conditions. This fact, along with traditional ritual funerals, as well as low literacy rates, has led to the detrimental effects of the Ebola epidemic.

Currently the contrast between the “excluded” and the “included” in communities is still substantial. This inequality can give rise to the protests of the poor and lead to global conflicts, particularly in the poorest areas, characterised by a high population growth. There remains the hope that both policies and individual actions will aim at levelling the playing field. Public places do not develop based on market standards only. Societies have established and still do apply the rules and practices of spatial organisation and planning that, if used consciously and correctly, may contribute to better and conflict-free, social, economic, political, cultural and private spaces.

**Conclusions**

Architecture is a tool in human hands. It may be used consciously to bring societies together, and to mark a local identity. On the other hand, it may also be treated as a means of territorial and political dominance, resulting from geographical conflicts. Power gained over a land would al-

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**Fig. 7 – Slums in Lagos, Nigeria, photo by Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung, 2010**
ways require a certain marking of that territory. Architecture served this purpose well for thousands of years. It also reinforced the feeling, or even the actual degree of domination over a local population – either as a symbol of oppression and segregation, or as a means of shifting local identity. Territorial domination often leads to the re-definition of an architectural style, to the introduction of dominants, to rephrasing spatial hierarchy. These processes can be observed in colonialism: it usually imposed new spatial solutions whose role was to symbolise new domination. In some cases, where local identity was treated with more sensitivity, the conflict between the dominated and the dominating resulted in hybrid architecture. Decolonisation led in some cases to the re-discovery of the original forms of architecture, which were built, transformed and re-named to empower the local society.

Currently a somewhat similar trend can be observed: the initial diversity of architectural forms went through the unification phase, only to reach the re-diversification. This new trend cannot flourish entirely though, due to global production economics and mechanisation, as well as communication and mobility. These processes, related to globalisation and market economy, have been leading to substantial changes within architecture: mainly to unification, but also to commercialisation. This is particularly vital, as these phenomena were intensified by the individuals willing to use architecture as a means of gaining power and influence over a land and human mind, attracting potential customers and creating a company’s own market image. Architecture can act as the language of propaganda, or a tool used for social manipulation. Uniformity, which is one of the foundations of propaganda, can be a dangerous phenomenon, as it leads to removing traditional centres of meaning within a built space, and replacing them with new, artificially introduced ones. Unification is a result of technological and industrial transformation, and economy-based development, which leads to the creation of similar architectural forms worldwide. These processes are further intensified by consumerism, promoting luxurious lifestyle combined with luxurious architecture, which may contribute to the occurrence of social and economic discrepancies and clashes, both within particular cities and worldwide.

Architecture may as well be treated as a reflection of the current economic situation, processes and phenomena, both the positive and negative ones. Buildings mirror and create human interaction, social inequalities and global disasters, it is therefore particularly important to understand these complex interrelations. Architecture is a standing testimony of geographical and economic situation, and as such, it also reflects all the world’s economic and territorial conflicts.

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