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Paper:

SYNTHESIS OF NATURE AND ART IN LATVIAN CITIES



Abstract: Natural environment of the Baltic seashore became a dwelling place for the people who settled there. A new functional environment was established by changing water and greenery systems and by creating architectural structures. The first towns in Latvia were set up in the 13th and 14th centuries. Design and structural layout of building was affected by presence of the hydrological basin – the sea, rivers and lakes, as well as masses of plantations. Planning composition of settlements was formed according to the characteristics of the relief - lowlands and hills, and other natural elements.

On the 18th November, 1918 the independent Latvian Republic was proclaimed. Approach to urban development changed. Nature elements began to be included in the architectonic spatial structure of the cities. Pieces of art enriched the cultural environment. Synthesis of nature and art create harmonious environment and contribute to development of diverse planning and spatial compositions and their originality in Latvian cities. Sculptural works have enriched the coastal landscape of the Baltic Sea in Liepāja, the river and lake sceneries in Cēsis, Talsi and plantation structures in Baldone, Līgatne, giving artistic expressiveness and identity to the urban environment.

Topic: Architecture

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References:

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Keywords: City, composition, harmony, identity, nature elements, structure, synthesis

SYNTHESIS OF NATURE AND ART IN LATVIAN CITIES

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Summary

Natural environment of the Baltic seashore became a dwelling place for the people who settled there. A new functional environment was established by changing water and greenery systems and by creating architectural structures. The first towns in Latvia were set up in the 13th and 14th centuries. Design and structural layout of building was affected by presence of the hydrological basin – the sea, rivers and lakes, as well as masses of plantations. Planning composition of settlements was formed according to the characteristics of the relief - lowlands and hills, and other natural elements.

On the 18th November, 1918 the independent Latvian Republic was proclaimed. Approach to urban development changed. Nature elements began to be included in the architectonic spatial structure of the cities. Pieces of art enriched the cultural environment. Synthesis of nature and art create harmonious environment and contribute to development of diverse planning and spatial compositions and their originality in Latvian cities. Sculptural works have enriched the coastal landscape of the Baltic Sea in Liepāja, the river and lake sceneries in Cēsis, Talsi and plantation structures in Baldone, Līgatne, giving artistic expressiveness and identity to the urban environment.

The harmonious environment in Latvian cities, created by interaction of nature and art, can enrich our experience in creativity to find new and innovative solutions to urban development.

Keywords: city, structure, nature elements, synthesis, composition, identity, harmony

Introduction

Culture and art conforms the identity of territorially limited Latvian state and numerically small nation's self-assurance at epoch of globalization. Natural landscape with unique coloring and simple beauty is the national treasure of Latvia. Traditions of Latvian environment creation are founding in the rural and urban housing development, but nature, architecture and artistic design creates the landscape of contemporary urban environment.

Nature elements in housing and urban planning

Since olden times Baltic nations formed an organic intimacy with nature, what manifested in mental rituals and folklore, as well as in construction and transformation of the surrounding. At Latvian territory people of Baltic families formed settlements included by a wooden fence. Taking care for the safety, fortified housing began to establish at hill forts choosing natural mounds, moraine ridge tops or hills on confluence sites of rivers. An essential prerequisite for construction site selection was suitability of surrounding land for farming and vicinity, as well as hunting-rich forests in the proximity of settlement. Population growth and fortified settlements became too narrow. At lowlands to arterial roads and near water began to arrange enclosed settlements, which planning reflected individuality of relief. Perfect natural sense of site selection and organization of urban spatial structures, as well as attitude to the environment, efficient use of natural materials and landscape individualities settlements appropriated functional purposefulness and original beauty.

The ancient Curonians and Semigallians built one building for dwelling, but in case of need, they built besides residential building one after another without advance planning small houses for each function. Country estate planning developed and countryside intimacy expressed oneself. Originally just around the dwelling house, but later around the all building complex was built fence. The combination of country estates was irregular – several villages were located close together, but elsewhere houses were built in a row one after another. On the seashore of Baltic Sea from Palanga to Kolka and along Gulf of Riga to Salaca River close to neighboring unmatched groups of six, eight or ten houses formed hamlets inhabited by the Livonians – they historically were rooted in the Finnish traditions and differed from Lithuanian and German hamlets where streets were built. Enclosed complexes of houses or farmsteads formed greater or lesser hamlets and it became dominant type of residence place in Latvian territory.



Figure 1 Fortified residence in the natural environment – Turaida's castle near Sigulda [I-1]

In Latvian territory since the 13th century began to build stone fortresses (Figure 1). The first cities were founded in the 14th century. Rural residential buildings were gradually transformed and adapted to urban conditions – formed a little story building was connected with the natural environment. In cities of Western region of Latvia as Durbe, Ventspils, Kuldiga, Bauska, Jelgava, Aizpute, Liepaja and Piltene, as well as small villages Talsi, Grobina, Tukums residential houses with a tripartite plan started to built. They had a fireplace area in the central part and two lobbies: one in the front of the house, where was the main entrance, and another with an entrance to the courtyard and garden. Pass-through residential building layout helped to link the city's architectural space with the natural environment. Residential houses with a tripartite plan were placed on either sides of road or street with the side facade towards carriageway. Wooden structures and people cultivated greenery became a characteristic feature of the landscape of Latvian towns.

Greeneries in Latvian urban planning

At the first half of the 19th century in Latvian cities began to arrange of the first public gardens, but a few decades later, urbanization and railway traffic facilitated emergence of industrial sites. Natural areas in urban environment declined, and nature landscape was supplemented by human cultivated plantations. Cities focused on functional issues, urban environment improvement, and greenery system formation. Public parks, boulevards, and squares became an integral part of urban amenities.

In Tsarist Russia health resorts developed and the interests of the guest took into account. Summer cottages, hotels and luxurious houses and verandas were decorated with openwork, woodcarvings, balconies, metal forging grids. Treatment, recreation and entertainment were the main interests underlying the concept of a health resort. In Rīgas Jūrmala, Liepāja and other health resorts a significant role was assigned to parks and greeneries. In 1899, the Seaside Park was designed and on the seacoast of the Baltic Sea arranged on. The extensive territory of the public park was divided into several functional zones, such as the active recreation zone with tennis courts, playgrounds and quiet zones. In varied landscape the fountain and sundial were included. The health resort stimulates the development of Liepāja's planning and in forming of urban landscape greenery was used. In 1911, Rose Square became a symbol of Liepāja (Figure 2).



Figure 2 Nature elements in urban environment – Rose Square in Liepāja. 1911. [PK]

Urban aesthetics

At the turn of the 19th and the 20th century the first Latvian sculptors declared itself and development of Latvian professional sculpture began. The first creative efforts of Latvian professional sculpture were linked with easel-sculpture. Little by little a framework of genre was opened and language of forms was developed. The first professional Latvian sculptors mastered the artistic education, learning Russian and European sculpture heritage. In Paris,

Gustavs Šķilters (1874–1954) and Teodors Zaļkalns (1876–1972) attended a studio of prominent French sculptor François-Auguste-René Rodin (1840–1917) on Montparnasse Boulevard, where emerging sculptors gathered from different countries. Direct contact with the French masters of sculpture and their creative works left a great meaning on the first Latvian sculptors' creative self-expression and led to research into the nature, as well as improvement of the art of interpretation. In 1907, Zaļkalns went to Italy where he learned Italian Renaissance and contemporary art. Zaļkalns lived in Florence for two years and attended several other Northern Italian cities too. The artist's impressions and experience helped to master stone sculpture – granite as the material did verbosity and detail, but contributed to the certainty of composition and shape [1].

In start-up phase of mass culture at the beginning of the 20th century Art Nouveau and a new concept of spatial placement developed. Accordingly aesthetics of corresponding epoch and professional art requirements the folk art heritage began to purposefully use. Urban environment came to the attention of the artistic and synthesis of architecture and art began significant. Latvian monumental sculpture flourished, encouraging sculptors' interest in person [1].

On 18th November of 1918, the independent Latvian Republic was proclaimed and understanding of urban aesthetics changed. Much attention was focused on sculpture and architectural solutions for interfacing with the natural elements, such as sulfur springs (Figure 3), relief (Figure 4), waters (Figure 5), natural stands of trees and cultivated plantations. National culture revival in twenties and thirties of the 20th century granted Latvian professional sculpture democratic orientation. After the 1934th of 15 May coup former Prime Minister Kārlis Ulmanis (1877–1942) came to power and established an authoritarian regime and nationalism became the ideological component. In urban environment folk expressions monuments was included (Figure 6 and 7) to increase people's national consciousness and to achieve a common goals.



Figure 3. St Mara sculpture at the sulfur spring in Baldone's health resort. 1930ies. [PK]



Figure 4. Cēsis Castle Park stairs. 1935. Authors: artist Jānis Rozenbergs (1900–1966), sculptor R. Āboltiņš and Kārlis Jansons (1896–1969). (Photo by R. Sīmanis, around 1940) [PK]

Figure 5. Cēsis Castle Park pond landscape with stairs, which extends to the surface of water. 1935. [PK]



Figure 6. Monument to the Liberators of Jelgava. Unveiled on June 21st, 1932. Author: sculptor Kārlis Jansons. [PK]

Figure 7. Rēzekne Symbol – monument “United for Latvia” or “Latgalian Māra”. The first unveiled on September 8, 1939. Authors: Leons Tomašickis (1904–1996) and sculptor Kārlis Jansons. Restored by the sculptor Andrejs Jansons. [PK]

Semantic message of architecture and art

On August 5th of 1940, Latvia was incorporated in the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. In isolation on Western cultural ideology socialism

architecture was formed. Its motto was: “Socialist in content and form rational”. In 1957, the Communist Party of Soviet Union and the Soviet government adopted a resolution “On the housing development in the USSR” creating the basis for construction industrialization.

Primitive architectonic forms were included in urban environment and population resulted in negative emotions. In the seventies of the 20th century, international modernism grew into the late phase and in cities began to pay more attention to the protection of nature elements and historical architecture. In industrial conditions it was not an easy task, but in urban environment the nature landscape significance increased [2].



Figure 8. Monument to the dead fishermen and seafarers in Liepāja. 1976. Authors: sculptor Alberts Terpilovskis (1922–2002), architect Gunārs Asaris. [1-2]

Figure 9. Memorial in Priekule. 1974.–1984. Authors: Pārsla Zaļkalne, architects Artūrs Zoldners, Elmārs Salguss, dendrology Aivars Lasis. [PK]

Diverse spatial structure caused emotion in people. Elementary functional qualities guaranteed a comfort, are not only to initiate a dialogue with space. In the seventies of the 20th century, postmodern architecture was characteristic formal expressions of diversity gain and compositional technique complexity. In spatial environment sought to bring wider image system was created special symbols (Figure 8) and metaphors, as well as accentuated the semantic nature of spatial forms, to promote with definite idea and creating of spatial environment saturated with thinking [2].

Postmodern space does not made simple, but always hid himself some surprises organized through a variety of means of expression. Motto “ideas

justifying everything” cleared the way for complete compositions’ liberation and the most spacious interpretation of technical and artistic tools. Development process of new ritual traditions was promoted [2]. In Liepaja a wide path with luxurious greenery leads to architectural ensemble with concrete stairs on the shore of Baltic Sea.

Life shape elements for postmodern symbolism were used. In Liepaja at the closing of Kurmaja Prospectus the monument to the dead fishermen and seafarers on ten meters high concrete podium sheathed with dolomite plates was set up. Five meters high Mother-vernacular statue symbolizes mother, wife, daughter, bride, waiting to return to their dear comes in from the sea. In Priekule Memorial of Warrior’s Cemetery twelve meters high Mother-vernacular and child statue was positioned in the center of the ensemble (Figure 9). Postmodernism awarded the seclusion room. Surrounding plantations gave an intimacy to Priekule Memorial of Warrior’s Cemetery composition forming by vertical and horizontal elements.

In the eighties of the 20th century, in Jelgavkalns near Sigulda, where ancient Libyan camp was situated, the sacred landscape by symbolic sculptures (Figure 11, 12, 13) was formed. On June 7th of 1985, Folksong Hill with emotionally-based sculptures by sculptor Indulis Ojars Ranka was opened. Congruence of stone statues and nature embodies the beauty and wisdom, as well as loving attitude towards nature expressed in Latvian folk songs. In Turaida past encounters with the present. On July 1st of 1990, Songs Garden was opened. Sinuous trails linked Songs Garden with Folksong Hill to create a unified ensemble – Folksong Park (Figure 10), informed about accumulated heritage of intangible culture and value system based in traditional Latvian folk wisdom.



Figure 10. Latvian Folksong Park in Turaida, near Sigulda. 1985. Authors: Director of the Sigulda Regional Studies Museum Anna Jurkāne, sculptor Indulis Ojārs Ranka, architects Jānis Rozentāls, Ilgvars Batrags. [I-3]

Folksong Park near the Castle is a place for discovery of Latvian folk vitality secrets, as well as for exploring folk song meanings and wisdom to feel majestic beauty of nature and to draw energy. In 1996, Folksong Hill with twenty-six sculptures was included in the list of World's Sculpture Garden and Parks (Washington).



Figure 11, 12, 13. Folksong Park. Sculptures “Song’s Father”, “Thinker”, “Spīdola” [I-4]

Synthesis of nature and art in urban environment – ensign of Latvian culture

On May 4th of 1990, Latvia re-declared national sovereignty. In the renewed Latvian Republic attitude to historical and cultural values was changed. Started at the first half of 20th century spatial making traditions was continued.

In Latvian regional architecture dominate the intimate humanitarian dimension, and spatial relationships are very significant. Latvian landscape made up with an amazing sense of harmony sorted elements, such as the lines of gentle hills with dark contours of the horizon, birch groves, fir or pine forests, which include white zig-zag paths, meadows and fields with small house clusters with gardens. Landscaping or architectural context determine the scale of building compositions, but in modern urban environment requirements of the economy dictate forms of industrial buildings and the scale of super-large three-dimensional structures. Sense of proportion determines human attitude to regional expression in art and architecture [2].

Contemporary environmental forms are varied: open space interspersed with enclosed or semi-enclosed spaces, because the ability to perceive is different. In Latvian cities relief and location of planning elements influenced architectural and spatial structure. Open space created by water and greenery system promote health, communicative and recreational function, as well as affected the artistic expressiveness of the urban landscape. Over the centuries established centers of towns Kandava, Sabile, Kuldiga, Talsi now perfectly adapt in landscape (Figure 14). In the 1930s the inhabitants of Talsi decided to make a memorial site for freedom fighters of Latvia by unveiling the monument “Koklētājs” by Kārlis Zemdega. In the 19th century at one of the nine hills Ķēniņkalns (Kilg’s Hill) a park was established, but in autumn of 1996 a monument “Koklētājs” was mounted. Witnesses of the past gets a unique attraction in interaction with the surrounding landscape (Figure 15).



Figure 14. Coastal panorama of Talsu Lake. [I-5]

Figure 15. Monument “Koklētājs” – a dedication to fallen heroes of Latvian War of Independence. 1930ies. Authors: sculptor Kārlis Zemdega (1894–1963), monument minted sculptor Vilnis Titāns (1944–2006). 1996. [I-6]

Nature and building interaction encourages the search for artistically innovative solutions to create harmonious environment. Cultural environment enrich with art works (Figure 16).



Figure 16. Sculpture on Rīgas Jūrmala Beach – Majori. 1995. Sculptor Jānis Bārda. [I-7]

Synthesis of landscape and art promotes development of varied planning and original spatial compositions in Latvian cities. Silhouette and plastic construction of building is information the most intensive and emotional the most active components of spatial environment. Artificial spatial-shaped silhouette is read as a contrast on natural landscape or the sky background.

Plastic construction of the object is revealed most vividly in chiaroscuro, heterogeneity and dynamics of spatial structure [2]. Eastern Latvia's Center of Creative Services "Zeimuļs" (Figure 17) is situated near hill fort with Livonia weather ruins. The shape of this complex is created as sculpture with attuned to relief and it provides semantic message. This complex was nominated for the final of Latvian Architectural 2012th show the best job.



Figure 17. Eastern Latvia's Center of Creative Services "Zeimuļs" in Rezekne. Authors: SIA SAALS architects Rasa Kalniņa and Māris Krūmiņš. 2012. [PK]

Conclusions

1. Aesthetics of Latvian urban environment formed in a long period of time at presence of nature. Searching for harmony, people in self-generated living environment, according era aesthetic requirements, for accentuate of the most important places and nature elements artworks chosen.
2. National political system affected the choice of artistic means to express semantic message. In the presence of natural elements for expression of certain ideas and creating information-intensive space symbolic images and the subject artworks were used. Buildings acquired message to the appropriate composition, silhouette and plastic construction, aspiring to achieve synthesis of landscape and art.

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PK – Postcards from Silvia Ozola's collection

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