

Architecture of the 20th century as a Cultural Heritage : Architectural Communication – Memorial Hall in Kolasin, Montenegro

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Abstract – The main objective of this paper is to develop a methodology (model) for the analysis of architectural edifices through the aspect of architectural communication. Architectural communication was defined considering three types of relations: with the context (social and physical), with the users (utilization of architecture) and with the author/architect (architecture as knowledge transmission). Memorial Hall in Kolasin, the north of Montenegro, built in the 1970's is chosen as case study.

Keywords – Architecture of the 20th century, architectural communication, context, intra and extra activity, users.

The overall history of culture is an evolution of the communication media [1] and, as a cultural phenomenon, architecture is a communication phenomenon itself [2]. The most significant progress in understanding architecture as a means of communication was made in the 20th century, first, with the onset of semiotics (F. de Saussure, Ch. S. Peirce) and structuralistic theories, theory of information and later by post-structuralism and post-modernism [3]. The first analogies between semiotics and architecture as well as the application of linguistic models appeared (Gamberini 1953, Koenig 1964) in the '50s and '60s of the 20th century. This enabled seeing the phenomenon of architecture as a readable text of culture. The elements of semiotic theories have found their application in architecture too. Saussure's semiotic dichotomy "signifier/signified" applied to architecture shows that edifice is at the same time the signified, as a result of concepts or ideas, and the signifier of a sign, namely, the form is a communication medium between the concept and the sign [4] (Fig. 1).

The work of Umberto Eco (*La struttura assente*, 1968) is particularly important for understanding architectural communication. Eco develops the theory of semiotics including methods from the theory of information and communication, cultural anthropology and Pierce's theory of signs [5]. He defines semiotics as a research program dealing with all cultural processes as communication processes in the role of a reader. He distinguishes primary architectural communication (denotation) referring to the ways of reading the function of a building and secondary architectural communication (connotation) related to all other levels of reading the building [5].

I. ARCHITECTURAL COMMUNICATION – A MODEL FOR AN ARCHITECTURAL ANALYSIS

The approach to architectural communication shown here begins with the definition of communication in modern communicology, where communication is primarily viewed as a relation. In the myriad of definitions by different authors (some

authors give as many as 126 definitions), we can single out 15 key concepts which constitute a kind of focal points for different conceptual approaches to the phenomenon of communication [6]. Understanding communication as an interaction i.e. as a relations (or co-relation) has been recognized as a basis for an approach to architectural communication, while the process (information theories) and meaning (semiotic theories) constitute its integral parts [6, 52–87].

Architectural communication is defined through three types of relations which a building establishes with its environment: building – context (social and physical), building – users (utilization of architecture) and building – author/architect (architecture as knowledge transmission) [7]. Denotative and connotative meanings, taken from the semiotics (Eco), constitute an integral part of relations defined in such a manner, but they are not the basic approach in understanding the phenomenon of architectural communication [7] (Fig. 2).

Memorial Hall in Kolasin, cultural heritage of the second half of 20th century, has been chosen as the case study suitable for architectural communication analysis, based on the previously defined model. The building, with the gross floor area of 2,500 m², located on the main town square was built from 1971 to 1975 according to the winning design of a Slovenian architect Marko Music, who won the first prize at the Yugoslav architecture-urbanism competition in 1970 (Fig. 3). The building was awarded a "Presern sklad" prize in Ljubljana in 1976 and a federal "4th July" prize in Belgrade [8]. The most interesting and the most intriguing building from the socialistic period in Montenegro built as a "memorial with function" includes two constitutive functional parts: memorial and administrative, which, even formally different (group and linear form), create a complete spatial system.

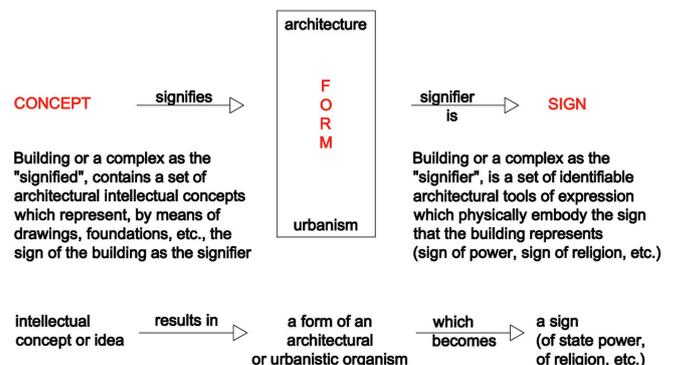


Fig. 1. Form within the signifier and signified. Form is a communication medium between the concept and the sign.

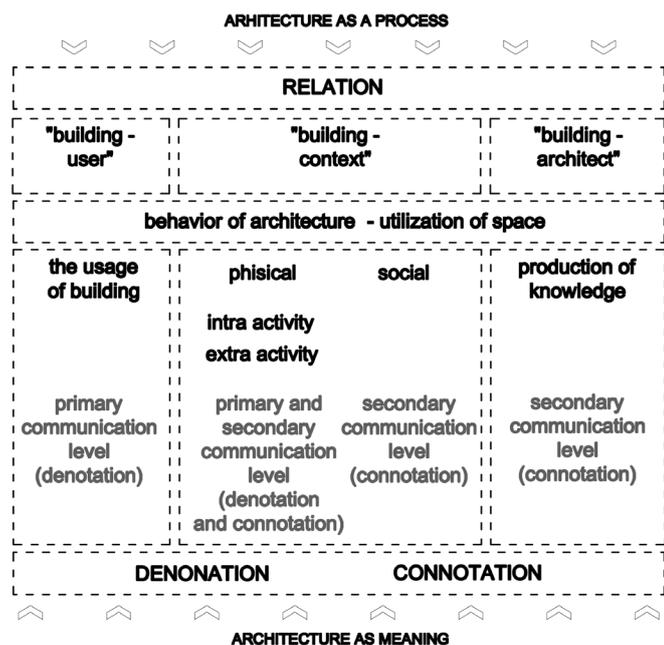


Fig. 2. Model of analytical process: architectural communication seen as “a relation between process and meaning (sign)”. One of the two communication levels: primary – denotation or secondary – connotation dominates in each of the three “relations”. [Diagram by author]

II. RELATION “BUILDING – CONTEXT”

Despite the difficulties in giving the right definition of the term “context”, we can say that a context is, in a broader sense of the word, an entity more significant than the simple unity of its parts. Architecture is, similar to every other cultural phenomenon, at the same time a product of context and its component, which constitutes a continuous dialog with the other components.

Context may be seen at two levels: *social* (soft) and *physical* (hard). The users (consumers) and the architect (author/creator) are also parts of the social (soft) context, but they are distinguished as separate categories due to the special communication relations between them and the building/architecture. An *author/architect* often creates a multileveled system of messages with the denotative and connotative meanings, while a *user* reads messages through the utilization process of a building.

A comprehension of the *building – social context* relation refers to the connections between architecture and ideology. This means that one phenomenon can never be entirely autonomous, thus the only way to define it is through the simultaneous interactions with other phenomena [9]. Architecture is a complex reaction to the particularities of the present time – “zeitgeist” (the spirit of the time) is a sub-creator of the architectural expression [10]. An architectural edifice takes also a certain “spatial position” by establishing relations with the physical context (natural and urban) in which it is placed. Hence, it is important to analyze the *building – physical context* relation.

“Building – social context”

Seen as a cultural product, architecture involves placing of the “built matter” (design) in the context beyond architecture that is “unbuilt matter” (non-design), when architecture as a “social text” ceases to be a dominant system for itself and starts being just one of many cultural systems [11].

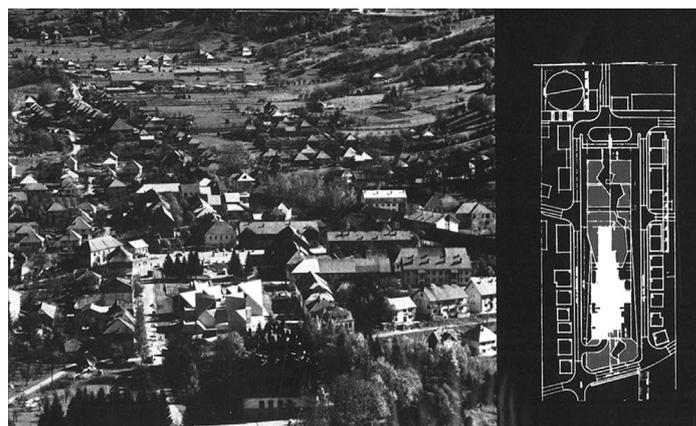


Fig. 3. Memorial Hall in the centre of Kolasin – the main town square – wider urban context, 70’s of the 20th century. [27]

Relation *building – social context* relies on the reading of *connotative meanings of architecture*. That implies the understanding of a *layered (complex) process* starting with the social circumstances at the time when the idea about building an edifice appeared, political decisions and urban plans, followed by design and building process, exploitation and further changes of an architectural edifice. Architecture becomes a reflection not only of the social reality, the modes of organization and the way life at the time, but also of the society’s past and future. The “non-design” becomes visible in “design”. The analysis includes the process of *semiotization* and *re-semiotization* of architecture and space, as a result of the changes in socio-political ideology.

The *building – social context* relation was analyzed considering a set of connotative meanings related to three temporal categories: *the past*, *present* time (the time of the erection process) and *future*, as well as through the change of meanings over time (*re-semiotization*).

The accumulation of the historical events in Kolasin, culminated at the time of the Second World War – *the past*, becomes a direct cause of the Memorial Hall erection and the part of its connotative meanings [12]. Kolasin has been known as a “historical town where the foundations of The People’s Republic of Montenegro were made” [13]. The time of the building erection – the 70’s (20th century), bears its socio-political connotations related to the culmination of socialism in the period after war Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia that becomes the integral part of the architecture – *the present time*. The culmination of socialist ideology becomes visible through architecture. Besides that, architecture becomes a narrative, educationally-didactic instrument with the intention of telling about the historical events and the socialist – revolutionary ideas to the future generations – *the future*. The beginning of the 21st century, that is more than 35 years after the building completion, brings new meanings to the Memorial Hall in Kolasin. Today, the building presents irrational architecture, unadjusted to the possibilities of a small town such as Kolasin. Due to the impossibility of suitable maintenance, such a complex building becomes devastated, a burden to the town and local government (Fig. 4).

A. “Building – Physical Context” – Intra and Extra Activity

Architectural communication can be seen as a spatial relation, interaction or *interpenetration* [14], which is as an “architectural

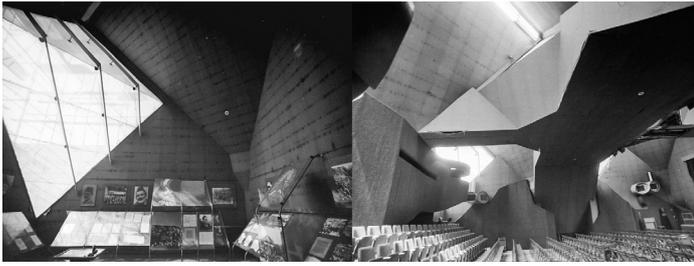


Fig. 7. “Building – user” relation – the second denotation level. Ground floor: 1 – entrance hall of the memorial part – “citizens’ vestibule”, 2 – main hall, 3 – memorial spaces, 4 – entrance hall of administration, 5 – offices, 6 – stage. Entrance hall – “civil vestibule” and multifunctional hall are flexible. [27]

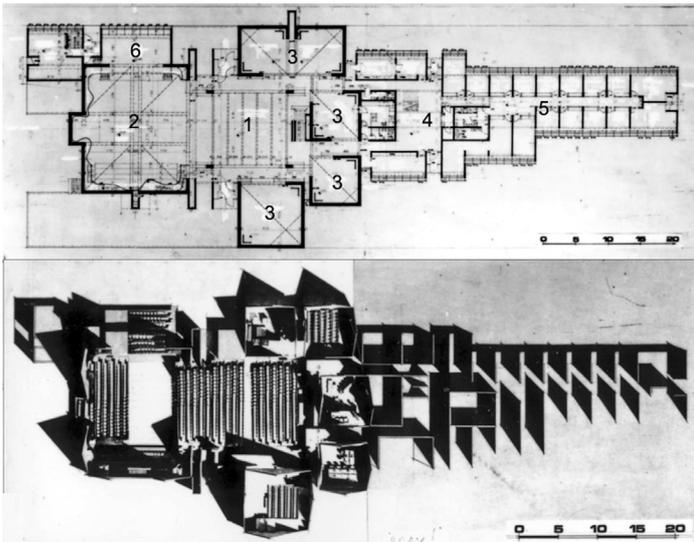


Fig. 8. Interior: memorial spaces – “event cells” (left) and the main hall (right). [27]

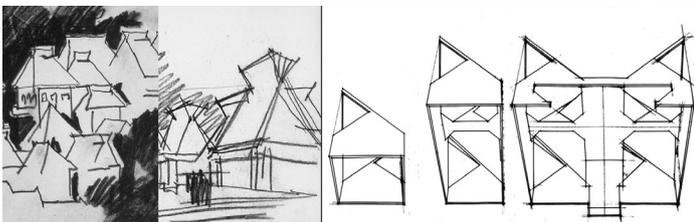


Fig. 9. Architecture is a field of knowledge production: transposition of the architectural codes – element of traditional architecture (the roof) is transformed into contemporary architectural expression by changing geometry, rotation and multiplication process – “event cells” create a “cluster”. [27]

The analysis of the first level of the “building-user” relation, or denotation of function based on a form, shows that the Memorial Hall belongs to the special (third) group of buildings, where “autonomous” form becomes a “sign” that not only disguises the function of the building, but puts it into the background. “The form-sign” gets arbitrarily symbolical meanings related to the ideas of war, struggle and revolution (fire, mountain peaks and so on).

The second denotation level of an architectural edifice implies dynamic denotation of the building’s functions understood throughout “narrative power of the moving through space” [22]. Here, three segments (areas) of utilitarian space differ:

- a) access and entrance/exit areas;
- b) spatial levels change areas (distribution areas);
- c) sitting/dwelling areas.

The analysis of the second level – *dynamic denotation*, considering three spatial segments – areas (access/entrance area, distribution area, dwelling area) shows that the spatial organization of the Memorial Hall is, in all segments, fluid and explanatory, “easily readable”, fluid, enabling simple, clearly directed movement and the users activities. The main entrances are clearly positioned, with passage ways leading directly through the building, despite not being emphasized by architectural elements. Entrance hall – “civil vestibule” and multifunctional hall are flexible – there is a possibility of expanding the hall to the vestibule by removing the panels that are now dividing these two rooms and the entrance hall can be used as exhibition space (Fig. 7).

Apart from these two denotation levels, denotative meanings can be seen as a part of connotative meanings (connotative meanings of denotation). The function of a building may imply broader connotative meanings that include some other, social or individual, ideological patterns.

Connotative meanings of denotation can be seen through the functionalist concept. The ideology of socialistic self-government, implying overall openness, equality and accessibility, may be seen in the spatial organization of the Memorial Hall. A flexible and polyvalent space, one of the manifestations of that ideology, is realized through the “connection and separation” concept in Memorial Part of the building, with moving panels between the multifunctional hall and the “citizens’ vestibule”. Socio-political concept of socialist self-government is based on openness, and “overall accessibility” is integrated into the spatial organization – open, flexible space in the building is dominant (Fig. 7 and 8).

IV. RELATION “BUILDING – AUTHOR/ARCHITECT”

Aristotle established the partition of the work that recognizes a hierarchy of *architecton*, the one that knows the causes of things, a theorist that gives orders to those that are theory ignorant, who conduct theory in practice. This is the foundation of *architectonics* as “the ability of systematic knowledge management” or “rational organization of all fields of knowledge”. Architecture is actually materialization of knowledge reduced to the status of representation, and the inner bond between architecture and philosophy that has always existed is the main “theoretical point of apprehension of architecture as knowledge” [23].

Some of the architectural concepts that change the limits of knowledge in architecture are syntactic approach in the work of Eisenmann (Eisenmann relates the term “semantic” to all aspects of a building that can be explained by cultural terminology, while the term “syntactic” refers to all universal aspects, including culture), semantic approach in the work of Le Corbusier and Graves (although differently applied) [24], Koolhaas’s dialog with the classical ideas of modern movement and his “cross-programming” (a certain relation between a program of a building and a place where it is located) [25], Hadid’s “curve-linearity” and Tschumi’s “concept versus context versus content”.

In the case study of Memorial Hall in Kolasin, the “building-author/architect” relation is very important. The architect Marko Music syntactically plays with the structural, geometrical and architectural elements of the regionalist architecture. He uses the typical pitched roof of the traditional northern house in

Montenegro and transposes it, through the stylization, changing geometry and rotation process, to the “event cells” afterwards connected in a “cluster” structure [26]. This structural approach in the form generating process makes the connection between traditional and contemporary architectural codes – creates a new knowledge and shows that architecture may be analyzed as a field of knowledge production (Fig. 9).

CONCLUSIONS

The fact that design process and architecture may be seen and analyzed from communicational point of view can contribute to creation of a high-quality space in better interaction with context. This shows the quality of architectural behavior and understanding architecture as a means of communication between people and nature. Furthermore, the model for the analysis of architectural edifices through the aspect of architectural communication showed here can be used for valorization of architecture as a cultural heritage.

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27. Courtesy of Studio Marko Music.



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