

INTERACTION OF MAN AND HIS ENVIRONMENT

Human-centred design in the United States

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The aim of this paper is to introduce the importance and various methods of human-centred design (mainly universal design) in relation to environmental psychology and neuroscience, and to call attention to the legislative, research and educational conditions in the United States. The paper is based on a six-month research at the Institute for Human Centred Design (IHCD) in Boston under the Fulbright Program.

The human-centred design focuses on creating an environment that takes into account the diversity of people, their various physical, psychological, cognitive, cultural, religious and other differences, which are quite significant in the multicultural United States. The objective of this methodology is to achieve an inclusive environment in which a broad spectrum of people will have equal opportunity to use the physical environment, products, services and information, without any discrimination, and also to be active members of the society.

In the United States, the trend of combining the human-centred design with environmental psychology and neuroscience in architecture has flourished. These sciences provide scientific insights into the functioning of people in their environment and draw attention to the psychological and social aspects of the environment and the study of the impact of the environment on human health and well-being.

Environmental psychology studies the symbiotic relationship between man and his environment, and primarily examines human perceptual and emotional responses to environmental attributes, while proposing ways to modify the environment to enhance positive responses and reduce negative effects on people.

Neuroscience in architecture helps to scientifically explain the relationship between man and his environment, especially the processes of perception, memory, decision making, emotional reactions and interactions within the environment.

One of the human-centred design methods is Universal Design, which has its roots in the United States. Universal design does not provide “one size fits all” solutions but promotes the need for flexibility and adaptability of the environment to reflect individual needs of a wide range of people with diverse abilities and limitations. Universal design also has to respond to the contextual complexity of the environment, such as cultural, social and economic conditions.

The increasing awareness of the impact of the built environment on human health and well-being helps to emphasize the importance of universal design for the whole population.

FORMS OF EXPRESSION IN BANK BUILDINGS

Architecture of bank buildings at the beginning of the 20th century in the territory of the present-day Slovakia

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The turn of the 19th and the 20th century was a turbulent time in

terms of political and social situation, as well as cultural development. There was no single style in architecture, but a great array of them ranging from historicism, through vernacularism to art nouveau. Architecture was supposed to be ornamental and with inner meaning, and, in addition, easy to build in the shortest time and at the lowest cost possible. Demands regarding quick and efficient building production without losing the content-related qualities affected every aspect of building production. This led to the discovery of new building materials and techniques. Ornamentation, considered to be a primary bearer of meaning in architecture, was affected by the changes in the composition of stucco mass. By replacing the marble powder with plaster, the cost of stucco decorative elements was reduced significantly, which led to its broader use. The paper offers an overview of communication forms used in bank buildings built between 1900 and 1918 in the territory of current Slovakia, ranging from the buildings of the central state bank to small local institutions with regard to the authors, political and economic situation, capital funds and social and cultural background.

At the turn of the century, bank buildings as a building type were derived from an urban apartment house with shops on the ground floor. To distinguish them from the standard pattern, it was necessary to convey their particular function to the public. This was possible either by giving the building a place of significance within the urban structure, emphasizing it by architectural means or by an inscription with

the institution's name. However, the most significant way of communicating the aforesaid was via the decoration. Since bank buildings should be perceived primarily as representative concepts of architecture, their decoration needed to clearly convey the values, origin and main activities of the institutions. The first step in achieving this was the choice of an appropriate style. The institutions that wanted to emphasize their long history and tradition usually chose historicizing elements. The ones that wanted to be perceived as modern preferred primarily art nouveau. In other cases, calling attention to the national background of the institution was the most important message. For this purpose, usually national variations of art nouveau or vernacular inspiration were employed. Another way of referring to a national background of the institution was the choice of the architect. There were also specific decoration elements that were used to communicate the meanings in architecture of bank buildings, such as Mercury – the god of banking and commerce; Chronos – god of time; beehives and bees – symbols of frugality, particularly used in connection with savings banks; lions evoked power, majesty and royalty; laurels – success; flower and fruit garlands – prosperity and fruits of labour; plump children – abundance and carelessness. In other cases, architects decided to refer to particular activities that the banks supported by employing allegorical figures such as Commerce, Industry, Agriculture, Labour or Diligence. Architects used this sign language based on subjective evocative symbolism

to distinguish the bank buildings from less significant structures and to promote them as powerful and reliable enterprises.

THE PHENOMENON OF THE FRENCH GARDEN

The origin, development and contemporary reflections on examples from France

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The relevance of French gardens nowadays can be appreciated primarily because of the existence of unique castle parks, as well as private-owned, historical sites, that have been well preserved and maintained, which, to a varying degree, present the composition principles of symmetrical style. A lot of these estates are in private hands and serve as family seats. Many of the owners consciously maintain their inherited property, including the gardens, with a little touching-up, while preserving the defined style, and open them to the public, which helps to preserve the cultural and historical continuity of these gems in the current period. This paper does not aim to provide an exhaustive excursion of the French formal garden, but, through the analysis of selected examples of different sized gardens, to reflect on the current state of the gardens, in the maintenance of which their owners play a crucial role. According to the Florence Charter, the term “historic garden” is equally applicable to small gardens and to large parks. The paper covers not only the most important works but also two historic gardens less known in Slovakia and a historic castle site, which, through its

new functional use, gained new importance. Nowadays, an individual, strategic and sensitive approach is applied to any modifications of these areas, using imagination, while also respecting the history and the contemporary demands and conditions. The French garden has influenced the design of gardens in Slovakia, too. The paper offers a short description of the current state of the French gardens in Slovakia, or what is left of them today. The French garden traditions and concepts can be observed in the current design as well as in the formal compositions of primarily urban garden landscapes.

ARCHITECTURE IN SCENOGRAPHY

The impact of architectural symbolism and form on scenographic concepts

Peter Mazalán

Theater art is a complex and dynamic form of conveying news and information about the time we have lived, live and will live in. It is a vibrant and reflective documentary of events. Scenography and theatrical architecture, as components of theatrical work, significantly shape the visual part of the concept and they are also the components that determine the possible ways of presenting the director's interpretation and put the work into a certain aesthetic context. The paper examines the theater of scenography of real-life architecture. A theater that is placed face to face with the true “social imitation” of the historical period, especially the architectural concepts of the former Eastern Bloc, transforming

the timeless value-related issues of the drama. In this paper, we analyze a stage design incorporating real-life architecture, its image or fragment that creates a fiction. The power of this function differs from spatial theatrical abstractions; it is another possible way of creating scenography. Such application of narrative moralities in well-known typologies becomes a more specific mirror of consciousness, compared to scenic art abstractions. The specific architectural and hyper-realistic scenography of social and political imitation acquires new characteristics and meanings in the next layer.