

TRADITION AS INTERPRETED IN ECOLOGICAL WAY OF BUILDING¹

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In the last two decades, adherence to tradition, to architectural antecedents recovered its importance. Tradition in general, however, does not exist as such, namely culture, architectural culture has several layers. Stylistic and formal marks of tradition, construction rules, or even mentality can be drawn from. Even, most periods have their 'great' and 'small' traditions, that is, high and low culture, classic and vernacular architecture. Thereby, selection of any sample or prototype out of the choice, accepting continuity with them, means at the same time to accept, to take their inherent values.

The idea of architectural ecology emerged — partly as impact of ecological crisis of natural environment on architecture — in the mental environment of the near past sensitive to traditions, to past, and to historical relations. The best known element in the ecological approach to architecture is the protection of Nature by applying nature-friendly materials and alternative technique, respect of the principle of energy and resource savings. But the same importance is due to a mentality anxious to quality rather than to quantity, imposing creation of human scale. Here, size reduction is understood not only concretely, spatially, but also socially: the adaptation to the locality, Nature, and minor social communities is integral element of ecological approach.

Original meaning of the word 'ecology' is: science of natural balance; or, in a wider meaning: science of the relation between an organism and its surrounding. Thus, for an ecological approach in architecture, the model is Nature, first of all, her self-sustaining, self-controlling action. Applying Nature as model — having at most historicity but no history or tradition — promises understanding and realization of building independent of tra-

¹Delivered at the Technical University of Budapest, Institute of History and Theory of Architecture, on the 13th of December, 1990, on the occasion of the commemorative celebration and conference entitled 'Tradition and Intuition'.

dition and time. Mechanical transfer to building operations fundamental organizations (networks, his archies, etc.) and of basic operations (fluctuation, symbiosis, etc.) practically leads to oversimplifications and forced analogues.

By chance, for the ecological way of building, it is rather characteristic to think not only in a natural system but in a wider, more complete one — in integer environment. This environment integrates natural, social, economical, cultural, and built environment, and as an integer part, of course, also tradition. Though, studies of an ecological approach, to theory of architecture are devoid of conscious references to historical prototypes, obviously, since ecology looks after patterns of thinking or approach rather than historical ones.

In final account, periods and sources of architectural history taken by the ecological architecture to be affine, coagulate into a uniform system: a common element of all of them appears to be the harmony between nature and man, — created or at least, felt to be created. Primitive and natural people did live and are living as part of Nature, at the level of nearly complete unity between man arising from Nature, and Nature his emitter, their architecture or better, way of building is an inexhaustible source for those looking after ecological features of architecture. Tending to this age, references to ecological construction trace the line of folk architecture, to urban vernacular, and to metropolitan popular architecture.

Although there is a striking attraction toward anonymous architecture, in some works, also elements of 'the great tradition' — Greek or mediaeval Romanesque architecture — emerge as positive patterns. Among principles, ideas of architecture, affinity to Ruskin's — Morris' social-romantic, and to Wright's organic ideas — 'Real function of architecture is to interpret life' — may be demonstrated anyhow, if not absolutely by quotations and names, but by purport. Direct intellectual background of an ecological approach to the theory of architecture is of course alternative philosophy lending its ideology to political movements of ecology; thereby the conclusion of the example of Greek architecture or of Morrisian ideas; — the idea of harmony between Nature and man is affine to the idea of harmony between the individual and the society — becomes unambiguous.

A survey of traditions of ecological way of building points to a popular-mediaeval-romantic succession, missing — however — the stress laid on national character generally belonging to this tradition, and the accent laid on the individual, the intuitive creative freedom, the individual work of art. In fact against the concept of social, an ecological approach stresses what is individual, but its rather local-communal than singular character. The term 'local' has a peculiar importance exactly because of its double relation — natural and historical. While community means basically common ac-

tion, something produced in common, kept and forwarded in common. This leads to the most general, encyclopaedical meaning of 'tradition': 'habit, taste, concept or spiritual heritage (consciously kept) in the community'.

This definition involves an element of tradition fundamental to the interpretation of tradition in ecological way of building: surviving character of tradition, its continuous presence. Local, environmental-conscious materials chosen for energy saving — timber, reed, adobe — involve to be ephemeral; while alternative technique of built-in further ability results in ever integrable structures, in an unaccomplished form. In some cases, buildings apparently arisen conform to strict rationality become symbols of themselves, transgressing reason and function; creating the image of continuity, they become or may become works of art.

In knowledge of, and understanding ecological approach and mentality, it is, however, obvious that ecological construction does not strive to create individual works of art. It is rather intended to realize another concept of creation: where creation aims at a communication between past and present; where tradition — always present — gains an ever new meaning in its omnipresence.