

# EUROPEAN CITIES IN THE PROCESS OF CONSTRUCTING AND TRANSMITTING OF THE EUROPEAN CULTURAL HERITAGE. INTERNATIONAL CURRICULUM FOR UNDERGRADUATE AND MASTER STUDENTS.



## INTRO 8. CULTURAL LANDSCAPE / 9. TRANSFORMATION vs. CONSERVATION

Combining the city, memory and identity issues we open up a new perspective of perceiving a particular place as a cultural landscape. Even in the world's metropolises, we often use nicknames (e.g. Paris – the city of love) that seem to be based on cultural stereotypes, but often come from something important, intellectually interesting and motivating which defines the nature of the cultural landscape. The city can serve as a space where cultural changes and their institutionalisation as well as specific cultural phenomena can be observed. It is associated with creating an identity that reflects the state of revitalisation or sometimes of targeted political oblivion, or preserving some elements of the memory contents more than others.<sup>1</sup> The city's memory and identity can be manipulated and used in any way the current social-political leaders want.

*The city is a complex of time strings. It is a chain memory of generations of its inhabitants, a memory built in architecture, sculpture, painting, landscaping, and so on. At the same time, it presents a complex of images that existed and exist in ethnic, generational, social, opinion, local and other modifications.*<sup>2</sup> The city reflects how an urban space has been remarked by the past. The modern European city was predominantly pluralistic in the 19th century and before World War II. After the war (1945), this trend was maintained only in the western part of Europe. The Eastern bloc was characterised by a strictly unified space, from which the characteristic identity and identification with the environment disappeared. The new city, which has been built since 1989, is the next chapter of transforming the living space. It moves life from the city centre to the marginal parts, creating large satellite homes, accompanied by the revitalisation of housing estates and the construction of business areas

<sup>1</sup> Havelka in B. Soukupová, *Město-identita-paměť*, Bratislava 2007, p. 8.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 9.

where international business companies are based. Changing the character of the city is linked to its functionality, but also to the perception of the public space as such, or to the purpose of creating a city identity.

*The city is not only buildings with a variety of practical functions, but it is also something more. It is a historical form of the human world. It is a framework within which and in the light of which a person is planning life and meaningful fulfilment.*<sup>3</sup> If we mark the city as a cultural landscape, apart from other factors, it is necessary to see the wider cultural character of the site as well as its cultural potential. In addition to the above-mentioned facts, we look at the city as a separate cultural entity that reflects events, personalities and influences that shaped its identity. Such a *landscape can be the text to which generations write their repetitive ideas.*<sup>4</sup> The cultural landscape is a product of shared culture. The task for all who want to improve it is to reveal its story in richness and intricacy by overlooking conventional ideas.

Christian Norberg-Schulz, a Norwegian historian, eco philosopher and architectural theorist, is the founder of the concept of ‘cultural landscapes’ which has its own classification of cities, landscapes and architectures. Clarifying the notion of cultural landscapes, it is necessary to define the place which, in his opinion, is not an indication of an abstract location but hides a character or feeling in itself. The place can be perceived through respective identity. *It is therefore important. Our environment does not only have a spatial structure that facilitates orientation, but also it contains specific identification of objects. Personal identification assumes the identity of the place.*<sup>5</sup>

The place, whether natural or man-made, is in constant interconnection. *In general, the earth is the ‘scene’ on which our everyday life takes place. It can be transformed and controlled to a certain extent, which results in a friendly relationship. From the natural landscape, it becomes a cultural landscape, that is, an environment where one has found his meaningful place within the whole.*<sup>6</sup> If we perceive the place as a cultural landscape, bearing a link to the local culture which also manifests itself in public spaces, we will adopt an interesting image of synergy between cultural traditions, symbols and meanings that are rooted in the deeper layers of the community and the city.

In his work Norberg-Schulz (2010) devotes much attention to the concept of *genius loci*, thus referring to the spirit of the place. As it is understood today, it is more about a

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<sup>3</sup> Ch. Norberg-Schulz, *Genius loci*, Prague 2010, p. 8.

<sup>4</sup> S. Schama, *Krajina a pamět*, Prague 2007, p. 11.

<sup>5</sup> Ch. Norberg-Schulz, *Genius loci*, Prague 2010, p. 21.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 40.

feeling, a specific environment that acts authentically and at the same time undergoes changes due to the passage of time. And if we try to develop his ideas, the creation of any cultural landscape involves a characteristic *genius loci*, which is a formation of the cultural environment. A cultural landscape can be composed of more than one cultural landscape, the examples being big cities, such as Paris, London or New York, in which the visitor goes through different segments, cultural landscapes that jointly form one large compact landscape.

Everyone is influenced by the surrounding; the architecture of today is created in the spirit of unlimited freedom. *The problem of unlimited choice is that it is not so far from complete chaos.*<sup>7</sup> In the past, buildings were designed in specific architectural styles, but now architecture is exempt from any rules. The aesthetic function of architecture is often omitted, and the authors experiment with a combination of styles. Modern and original architecture reflects the visible and direct coexistence of cultural values of the past and of today. Any intervention in the public space should preserve a certain *genius loci*. An architectural work expresses cultural values in the space as material and sign representations. Each building is essentially a part of the memory of a place, city or location. *The city is not just a concentration of buildings and facilities with various practical functions, but it also means a lot more. It is a historical form of the human world.*<sup>8</sup> A set of architectural works co-creates a cultural landscape.

Today we witness controversial realisations whose evaluations are diametrically different. Any intervention in historical structures is a challenging conceptual activity that brings with it many risks. In particular, it is the problem of an inappropriate intervention, a misconception about space, the devastation of cultural values, the loss of space and the disturbance of the authenticity of the territory. So the questions of cultural landscape creation and transformation vs. conservation are very crucial to search solutions for.

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<sup>7</sup> A. de Botton, *Architektura štěstí*, Zlín 2006, p. 42.

<sup>8</sup> P. Halík, *Architektura a město*, Praha 1996, p. 73.

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