

ZAVEDANJE PROSTORA V ARHITEKTURNI KRAJINI

THE NOTION OF PLACE IN ARCHITECTURAL LANDSCAPES

Ključne besede

prostor; identiteta; navezanost;
arhitekturna krajina

Key words

place; identity; attachment; architectural
landscape

Izvleček

V prispevku obravnavamo definicije in koncepte prostora, ki omogoča vzpostavitev raziskovalnega okvira in razumevanje termina arhitekturne krajine v luči okoljske psihologije. Pristop – prostora, izpostavlja navezanost na lokacijo in sorodne odvode: sovisnost prostora, prostorska identiteta in ukoreninjenost. Primerjava med prostorom – krajem in krajino – postavitvijo (udomačitev prostora) vodi k premisleku kaj je arhitekturna krajina in mar ni to prav kraj. Razprava o dejavnikih, ki določajo krajino, kraj in prostor, odpira mesto razmisleka o arhitekturni krajini in zaščiti le-te. Zaščito v tem primeru razumemo kot: zaščito njene psihološke dimenzije (kraj) dobrega počutja prebivalcev, ki so v to krajino vložili delo in bivajo z njo. Zaključki kratke razprave so strnjeni v premiso, da je psihološka dimenzija razumevanja krajine kot kraj nujna in ne le kot nefizični pojem krajine.

Abstract

This paper reviews the definitions and concepts of place to establish a conceptual framework for understanding architectural landscapes in light of environmental psychology. A place-based approach highlights the importance of place attachment and its implications: place dependence, place identity and rootedness. A comparison between space-place and landscape-setting proceeds, leading to a reflexion on how an architectural landscape is a place. A discussion on factors to take into account when assessing or preserving architectural landscapes is presented, in order to protect this psychological dimension of place for the well-being of inhabitants emotionally invested in them. As a conclusion, this paper advocates for the necessity of understanding the psychological dimension an architectural landscape as a place, and not only a physical tangible landscape.

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1. Introduction

Places and settings hold a strong influence in our common mental imagery of spaces and landscapes. The importance of these psychological and affective bond goes beyond the physical form they present and activities held in or around them. They have a psychological impact in individuals and groups of a certain region or area which creates a psychological connection and an emotional attachment. Cultural, social and historical aspects unique to the area are reflected in them and as settings become architectural landscapes, it is vital to address the influence this psychological dimension has in their conservation.

By understanding how spaces transform into places and to what extend architectural landscapes constitute a place, it is possible to assess the level of dependence and attachment to it, as well as the identity reflected in it from individuals and groups and originated from it. Physical tangible aspects of architectural landscapes have been long analysed, however a discussion on which factors should be taken into account when assessing architectural landscapes from an intangible dimension is also needed.

2. Definition of place

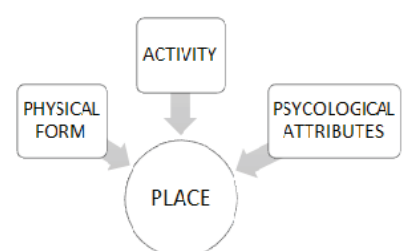
The terms 'space' and 'place' are often used as synonyms in the architectural discourse despite their own distinctive connotations, consequently bringing with it numerous interdisciplinary discussions. This has led to many researches to research and question their true nature as well as what implications derive from having either a space or a place in an urban or rural environment, not only from an architectural point of view but also from a sociological and psychological approach.

Space is an empirical physical entity that can be described objectively through abstract geometries such as distance, direction, size, or volume. It can be measured, weighed and assess. "It is detached from material form and cultural interpretation" [Gieryn, 2000; Hillier and Hanson, 1984]. Thus it can be objectively described always in an exact manner regardless of the observer, providing a constant perception of itself independent of cultural or social background. Applying Byrne [2001: 10] definition of a system, we can

also understand space a system from a mechanical perspective, and state that it can be reduced to the parts it is made of, and explain it in terms of the properties of the parts, tangible parts it contains.

However, individuals, groups or societies never remain impassive to their environment. From a sociological approach, humans have a strong tendency to turn spaces into places, impregnating the space with meaning and relevance, and getting invested in it. In the context of environmental psychology, 'place' is predominantly defined by a physical environment constructed based on its interrelationship with individual's internal psychological and social processes and attributes and activities done at the place [Smaldone, 2005]. Consequently a place presents a double nature, physical and psychological, intertwined with the activities developed in that space and making it impossible to separate from people invested emotionally in it. Places are not only described, but also felt, understood, remembered, interpreted, produced and passed on. A place may be understood also through its fabric. Fabric means all the physical material of a place [Burra Charter, 2013] and includes its components, contents, and objects, denoting a sense of interweaving elements. It provides a place with a unique depth of its physical form and, indirectly, a specific depth in meaning as places carry a psychological perception attached. It behaves like a thermo-dynamic system like Byrne [2001: 10] explains. It cannot be described by simple aggregation of properties of its discrete components. It has emergent properties not derived from components' properties.

Therefore, while a space is generic, objective and standard, a place is characterized by the uniqueness provided by its given meaning and interpretation derived from an emotional investment of the observer or inhabitant in it. A complex intertwining relation between tangible components of the space, and emergent characteristics from the interaction of elements in the space and the observer/inhabitant, is inherent to places. It can always be found, although it is fragile and not easy to assess or measure in many cases. The significance of individual's psychological connection with places must be addressed and safeguard if their qualitative value wants to be determined or assessed in an adequate way for further conservation.



Slika 1: Sestavine prostor kraj, povzeto po Smaldone, 2005. [Slika: Marta Bujanda].
Figure 1: Components of place according to Smaldone, 2005. [Drawing: Marta Bujanda].

3. Place attachment and its implications

Place attachment – a strong bond developed by individuals towards a place for its psychological meaning and/or socio-cultural imagery – is embedded in the feeling, emotion and behaviour of locals, reflecting on people responses towards the environment. Hidalgo and Hernández (2001) described the main characteristic of place attachment as “the desire to maintain closeness to the object of attachment which also describes the special feeling towards a particular place”. It is a psychological and affective factor that influences directly a place and its outcome in time, making it significant and well-identified to individuals. Besides, it provides with support for activities and behaviours specific to those individuals attached to that particular place, connecting and closing the circle of components comprising a place: physical form, activity and psychological attributes.

From a practical point of view, “the sense of belonging, degree of attraction, frequency of visits and level of familiarity are indicators of place attachment” [Ujang and Zakariya, 2015: 712], which makes this concept a relevant aspect in place making and preservation of place.

Linked to the attachment to a place is the concept of place dependence, which “indicates the importance of a place in providing features and conditions that support specific goals or desired activities” [Shumaker and Taylor, 1983; Ujang and Zakariya, 2015: 712]. Successfully achieving goals or developing activities in a place, will induce positive feelings in individuals, and will encourage maintaining a place attachment towards it. It is a two sided aspect that first creates excitement for reaching a goal or completing in a satisfactory manner a specific activity, and leads to an induced desire of continuing using that place for the same purpose. In time, the activity is specialized for that place and a psychological and physical dependence is created from the individual towards the physical form and psychological attributes offered by that place.

“Place dependence comes from a person’s consideration of two things:

(a) quality of the current place and (b) the quality of other substitute places that are comparable to the current place” [Smaldone, 2005; Ujang and Zakariya, 2015]. This aspect comprises utilitarian and functional aspects, connecting the quality of a physical space, with the activities developed under an affective and psychological link. On the other hand, a place is to be experimented and through this experimental process a sense of identity is formed. “Places play a vital role in developing and maintaining self-identity and group identity of people” [Davenport and Anderson, 20005; Ujang and Zakariya, 2015]. It can be understood as a collective identity held by individuals that share specific characteristics such as language, a common history or a particular culture, bounding them together around this components in a specific setting, in a place. “Identity can be defined as the sense that people make of themselves through their subjective feelings based on their everyday experiences and wider social relations” [Knox, 2004: 508]. Moreover, identity can also be seen as an individual phenomenon: a mechanism of social classification providing a person a sense of belonging to something bigger than him, a community to relate to, a place to relate to.

In both cases, four key aspects are identified when talking about identity: psychological, cultural, territorial and historical aspects. It is obvious the correlation between the sense of identity and place identity. Taking the territorial aspect as the physical form of a place, the psychological characteristics correspond to the attributes given to a place and place attachment. Thus, it is clear the activities held in a space conforming it as a place directly correspond to the cultural aspects as activities held today and historical aspects as activities and events held in the past.

In other words, place identity reflects the importance of a place as an archive of emotions and experiences lived in that space, which reminds the collective or individual mind its past and its need for a sense of belonging. Humans are, after all, social beings and crave for rootedness. Places naturally offer a sense of identity and belonging.

4. Architectural landscape as place

4.1 The notion of cultural landscape

Defined as “all the visible features of an area of land, often considered in terms of their aesthetic appeal” [Oxford Dictionary, 2014], the term landscape comprises a more complex meaning which includes scientific, anthropologic and historical references. Pitte states that “the landscape is the expression observable through the senses, of the earth’s surface, resulting from the combination between nature, technology and human culture. It is continuously changing, and it cannot be perceived otherwise but in its dynamics, the history being the fourth dimension” [Pitte, 1992]. Therefore the landscape is composed of a physical part – tangible, visible volumes and shapes with morphology and spatial structure – and also an invisible active part composed by the processes carried out in that space that alter it by usage or consumption.

In the same way space and place refer to different things, landscape and setting convey a different understanding of the environment. ‘Landscape’ presents a generic nature and does not need a specific element to exist, it simply is regardless of the typology, number, nature or quality of elements it contains. On the other hand, ‘setting’ is the immediate and extended environment of a place that is part of, or contributes to its cultural significance and distinctive character [ICOMOS, 2013: art. 1.12]. It includes interaction with the natural environment – land, water, sky, views – sensory aspects – smells, sounds – and historical and/or social relationships. In other words, a setting goes beyond the physical and visual aspects of a landscape, and contains an intangible value.

Places and settings may present themselves as unique to certain groups or societies and location due its direct relation with cultural and environmental factors. This creates cultural landscapes which reflect specific techniques of sustainable land-use, considering the characteristics and limits of the natural environment they are established in, and a specific emotional relation to nature” [UNESCO, 1996: paragraph 38].

The Coffee Cultural Landscape of Colombia, with a sustainable use of the land involving several generations exemplifies this concept. Coffee is a worldwide recognized symbol of the country and it has tangible and intangible manifestations in the territory, influencing not only the production process, but also the natural resources management, urban settlements, cultural patterns and economy. The landscape provides resources to develop a specific culture around it, and this cultural practices support the landscape, creating an identity and reciprocity that binds them together in a recognizable cultural landscape.

4.2 Architectural landscape and place

Specific structures or extraordinary constructions provide a special quality value to the landscape where they are set, becoming a dominant recognizable feature. These objects gather outstanding universal values and recognizable significance which make them crucial in providing key characteristics in the identity of a landscape or a setting.

These focal points can be from renowned authors as it happens in urban environments in the late 20th century. Sydney stepped into the international architectural scene in 1973 when Jorn Utzon's Opera House was inaugurated not only with economic consequences, but also socio-cultural. Also Bilbao was internationally recognized in 1997 thanks to Frank O. Gehry and his Guggenheim museum.

However these focal points can be instead anonymous – vernacular – architecture with distinctive characteristics in a whole region. While the previous ones remain in a strongly delimited area – often a metropolitan area or neighbourhood – these spread throughout a territory creating a general and harmonious landscape that share common features, are recognizable by individuals, and have a place attachment despite the particular differences each structure presents. As described by Fister, this phenomenon turns a specific architecture into general criteria and defines "an environmental identity and typological features

of all constructions in individual architectural landscapes" [Fister, P., 1993: 229].

Thus, while a cultural landscape embodies the evolution of a society and a settlement over time and under the influence of the physical constraints and opportunities its environment provides, an architectural landscape revolves around a common architectural criteria for all types of construction present in a landscape creating a common identity and sense of belonging.

An architectural landscape extends its effect to any object built in that territory due to specific geographical, socio-cultural, historical and economic factors. It constitutes an environment unit on its own unlike cultural landscapes, and can be linked into larger recognisable units as they share general particularities. Without this common architectural denominator, a setting would be dramatically different as it loses its imagery and emotional and social attachment.

For instance, kozolec – Slovene vernacular drying sheds – create an architectural landscape where cultural and historic aspects are recognisable by individuals.

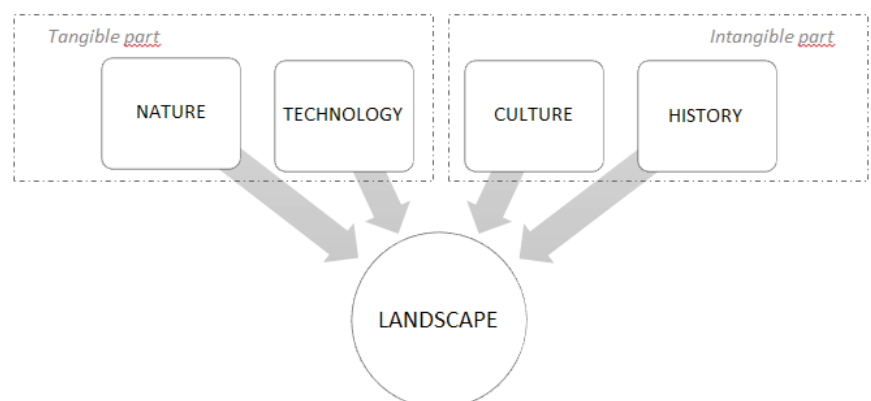
They present similar physical characteristics that make them recognisable despite their local differences. These constructions present pierced pillars where horizontal battens rest to dry fodder and a roof.

Larger typologies include a second level with wooden grids to filter ventilation and control sunlight. These common characteristics make them recognisable despite local differences, creating a single recognizable architectural landscape with inner particular smaller units, answering to each individual architectural structure feature. However, it is not only about the structure aspects but also about the relation with surrounding buildings and natural elements regarding size, position and stylistic adherence. Position and location with regard to physical environment and communications influences the perception of the architectural landscape created by residents and outsiders. Their arrangement, number, and size determine the level of importance transmitted. Coherence among the individual structures and in reference to architectural complexes they belong to is also crucial.

Slika 2: Sestavine krajine, povzeto po Pitte, 1992.

[Source: Marta Bujanda]

Figure 2: Components of the landscape according to Pitte, 1992 [Source: Marta Bujanda]



5. Preserving architectural landscape as a place

As exposed, the concepts of place, setting and identity are tightly interconnected among each other and constitute crucial aspects of architectural landscapes. These are places with a physical form where social events are held and socio-cultural aspects presented. Their meaning and psychological attributes provide them with individuals' emotional attachment. Place dependence exists among a group or society where they develop from a social, historical, cultural, and sentimental approach.

Architectural landscapes contain not only the history of a place, but also information which has determined the appearance of surrounding settlements and has been expressed through local specificity. A 'cultural brand' lies underneath it, making it possible to promote this architectural landscape and introduce such recognizable unique setting in a global scale. In the same way Dutch windmills and tulip fields are presented as a specific landscape with its own identity, other traditional constructions may be a tool to brand a territory without losing its uniqueness in a global society but reinforcing its identity.

An architectural landscape can lose its quality of place by loss, decay, or damage of one of these three aspects: physical form, activities originally developed in/around it and socio-cultural meaning given to the object. Neglecting one of these aspects may also irreversibly diminish the attachment of locals towards the place they embody.

Preservation of architectural landscapes often involves the process of remaking places in order to improve physical conditions, to increase sustainability in time and often to bring back an activity attached to or around the space. Steadman (2003) advocates the importance of the physical features and conditions in the construction of a place and place meanings based on its environmental attributes. Physical features influence the symbolic meanings of the landscape. Therefore, when preserving architectural landscapes, researching,

analysing and respecting their physical features is important not to break apart from the connection established with the setting and jeopardise the individual's or group's attachment to that place and its authenticity. The sense of belonging and rootedness must be taken into account not to alter the place identity and emotional investment of individuals.

Nowadays the process of urbanization has gone beyond the city, generating impersonality and lack of identity in many areas. Architectural landscapes are a source of identity for society and should be used to develop and protect the rootedness to that place from individuals and groups. They are a key element as they combine natural and anthropogenic aspects in balance with cultural and historic features, investing the territory with a unique identity.

6. Conclusion

Man does not adapt to his environment, but he adapts the environment to his needs leaving a visible trace of his path by changing the landscape he is surrounded by. Consequently, there is a link between evolution of human society and settlements over time that brings a specific recognizable character to it. The influence of the physical conditions and opportunities presented by the surrounding environment irreversibly affects the successive economic and cultural forces that shape a particular society. In the same way, a society modifies the landscape with its activities as it exploits the available local resources closing the circle of continuous feedback between human settlement and setting. Thus, landscape becomes something more than what we see as a result of these combined works of man and environment: a setting.

When a setting revolves around a common architectural criteria for all types of construction present in it, an architectural landscape is created, comprising a common sense of identity and sense of belonging. Individuals are invested emotionally in it, providing this type of landscape with psychological attributes that differentiate it from others and makes it unique. Place identity is present in architectural landscapes, as well as place dependence.

Architectural landscapes comprise historical, economic, social and cultural characteristics, apart from physical volumes and spatial structures. But they are also a complex systems that cannot be described by simple aggregation of properties of its components as it always has emergent properties. As a result, when preserving architectural landscapes it is vital to assess, comprehend and address properties derived from the interaction of all their elements, especially the place attachment and its implications.

The loss of physical character and meaning of a place affects people's perception and attachment to places. Emphasizing local character and using its identity and specific architectural elements to brand a territory is a way of protecting heritage without compromising the uniqueness of a place. It promotes its history and culture while developing strategies for spatial continuity of these architectural landscapes.

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