

COMPLEX RECONSTRUCTION AND MUSEALIZATION OF HISTORIC AREAS IN CITIES OF EUROPE: MAIN TENDENCIES AND NEW DEVELOPMENTS

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Abstract

The article can be divided into two parts. The first part gives a general description of architectural interventions and musealization projects of historic areas, developed and applied in practice in most European cities, which became the main urban reality of the past decades. In the second part of the article the theoretical aspects reviewed in a specific practical case: "Architectural intervention and musealization of the Archaeological Park of Castle Calafell" located in the province of Catalonia (Spain). This project is also interesting because of its innovative proposal of virtual heritage interpretation and application of new information technologies.

Keywords: interventions in historic areas, urban heritage, accessibility, heritage interpretation

Introduction

In recent decades in most European countries where the major urban changes have taken place, they have affected the whole historic city centers and large urban areas. The new system of design, firstly, was determined by the destruction and degradation threat of urban historical sites under the influence of growing urbanization of cities, and secondly, was related to the revaluation values about the architectural and monumental heritage. Under these conditions, the main focus in urban planning has been the reconstruction of historic areas, which include two main tendencies: architectural planning of the historic areas and the presentation of cultural monuments.

The status of historic buildings, the basic principles of conservation and the basic directions of development of city districts were fixed in the regulations adopted by the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS), among which The Washington *Charter* on the Conservation of *Historic Towns* and Areas (ICOMOS, 1987) stands out. This document emphasizes the need for protection of historic urban areas and their integration into urban development and dynamization. Also, it points out the importance of comprehensive preliminary research. The historic buildings and architectural ensembles in the present condition should be included in the development of security plans. At the same time, the new planning begins to take into account the construction of new infrastructures necessary for the city growth and their adaptation to the conditions of historic developments.

A new understanding of urban space

In recent decades, many new laws for the preservation and reconstruction of historic districts for the urban planning in many European countries have approved and put into practice. All cities, almost without exception, have their own memorial sites and cultural heritage, concentrated mainly in the historic districts. In this context, this trend has affected not only the largest metropolitan areas, but also small settlements, which also have their cultural and monumental heritage.

In the second half of the twentieth century, many historical districts of cities represented the extensive thrown territories. This condition complicates the task of their reconstruction. Simple preservation of buildings and architectural ensembles could lead to complete isolation and further degradation of the urban areas. Therefore the priority in the new planning was not only the restoration and reconstruction of buildings of significant cultural importance, but also the improvement of the quality of the environment in order to attract them to the local residents and to

restore the function of these residential districts. Thanks to that, the residents of the cities became conservators of their cultural heritage.

The historic districts also have become centers of commercial and social life of cities and at the same time have begun to create all necessary conditions to attract tourism. In modern cities, monumental and architectural heritage begin to be regarded as the main object of dynamization and attraction of economic resources. This feature determines the new urban planning, which becomes an integral part of policy development of historic districts and contains an important museum function - the preservation and presentation of the cultural heritage of cities.

In the architectural design, these characteristics cause the introduction of new terms and determine new standards for urban development. An important emphasis is being placed on design of multi-functional public spaces that should be shared, free, open and collective. At the same time, the key word to describe the singular specificity of the new urban environment is the term *accessibility*, which means the creation of public spaces, which can be used by any public. To design the accessible space means to take into consideration the characteristics and features of all people, including people with disabilities. *Accessibility* in this sense is synonymous of high quality urban environment.

In addition, the intervention project also includes a wide range of terms, among them the design decisions of large urban areas, as well as a detailed design of each urban element. The main blocks of urban design planning engage design of street paving, street furniture and architectural elements, as well as the creation of recreation and transit areas. One of the basic solutions for the improvement of the historic centers of the cities is the separation of pedestrian and vehicles traffics, aimed to improve the quality of the urban space. This method opens the possibility for more direct acquaintance of a visitor with the cultural monuments and their more careful preservation.

New perception of cities and urban heritage

With the development of new urban planning the perception of the city has also changed. The city has become more human, where the role of the citizen is important. This concept is directly connected with the previously mentioned concept of the quality improvement of public spaces, where the main priority in the architecture design are pedestrian zones, convenient and easily accessible, without interfering barriers, open spaces for recreation and cultural well-designed environment.

The introduction of a new term - *urban heritage* - has radically changed the appearance of cities, turning them into huge open-air museums. The museum's preservation of the urban environment and the transformation of the urban spaces into public gallery museums became a central feature of many modern cities in Europe.

Thanks to the museum approach, the urban environment acquires a new function - educational (Coma & Santacana, 2010). The same streets, monuments, which are objects of cultural value, tell us about its history, the main memorable and historical events, and also introduce the main characters of the city. Now the city streets, squares and other urban spaces take on the function in orientating visitors in a new educational environment of cities. In the architectural design it is presented by the installation of visual-information systems, provided by special information signs, panels and boards, which attract the attention of visitors. With this purpose, more often special signs with brief information about the sights and description of historical events have been placed on the main streets and squares of European cities. (Fig. 1).

These special information signs help tourists and visitors to orientate quickly in cities, mark the main monuments of great historical importance and also contain illustrative material, which explains in simple terms the monuments of the city.

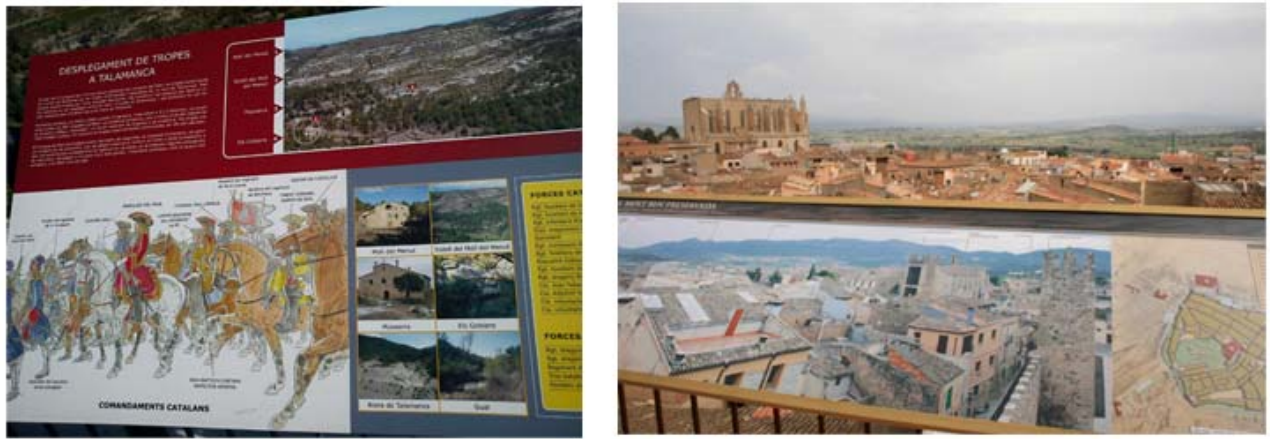


Fig. 1. Examples of signs with illustrative material

Interpretation - a key concept for the presentation of urban heritage

The fact that the objects of musealization and conservation have become entire buildings and large ensembles, determines the special feature of their presentation to the public. In this sense, in the new open - air museum spaces, the main tool to explain the cultural characteristics of the urban environment is the *interpretation*. The interpretation applied to *urban heritage* means the installation of the necessary connection between cultural monument and the observer (Cardona & Santacana, 2009). This term is widely used in museum practice and nowadays it is used for the presentation of cultural heritage, which is located in the cities.

Speaking about the *urban heritage*, it is important to understand that because of the various historical events and circumstances, many monuments and open –air monuments of a great cultural significance, since their construction have been rebuilt and survived until today in its different form. This feature complicates the perception of the monuments to many people. In this sense, the methods and techniques of *interpretation* help to explain in an easy way the structural changes which have taken place.

The project "The Architectural intervention and musealization of the Archaeological Park of Castle Calafell"

The principles of intervention projects in historic districts were applied in the complex reconstruction of medieval part of city and the lock Santa Cruz, located near Barcelona in a small municipal city Calafell, region Catalonia (Fig. 2). This project was investigated during its execution between January- April 2011 as a Research Master Thesis (Grevtsova, 2010).

The project, along its long history has gone through 3 main phases, commissioned by the City Council. The first one began in 1982 and lasted for 4 years, when an archeological excavation and the restoration of the castle of Calafell were executed. It was done by a group of archeologists, managed by Joan Santacana, whose experience was documented in a series of publications.

In 2000 the second phase took place, when a new development of the project began and the concept "Archeological Park" was defined including the medieval part of the city and the Santa Cruz Castle (Fig. 3).

Therefore it was decided to conserve all historic part of Calafell city and create a free access. At the same time, the residential function of the medieval quarter was secured. After that the first initiatives for musealization of the Castle and the elaboration of the didactic contents for its interpretation were put into practice. The museography project of the archeological park included the assembling of the didactic elements in the castle structure (Fig.4) and the definition of the pedestrian circulations in the urban medieval area.



Fig. 2. The location of the Archaeological Park at the Santa Cruz Castle, Calafell, Catalunya



Fig. 3. The views of the Archeological Park of Calafell, the medieval district and the Santa Cruz castle

The third phase began in 2010 and ended in 2012, it started to apply the concept of the Archeological Park as a single project of interpretation of the archeological heritage of Calafell and the innovation proposal for virtual reality was designed. For the project, it meant a new restructuring and rethinking of general concepts. Firstly it was affected the unification and coordination of two types of projects – museology and urbanism. That meant the beginning of the close collaboration of two professional groups: the research group of the University of Barcelona (DIDPATRI)¹ and the BCQ architectural studio².

The general description of the project proposal

The main idea of the project is to present The Castle and the medieval quarter of Calafell which formed a unique Archeological park, as a living structure, where daily life and activities of citizens should combined with the conservation of heritage structures.

¹ DIDPATRI (Didactic of Heritage, Comprehensive Museography and New Technologies heritage and Education) is a research group of the University of Barcelona, develop research and innovation activities, collaborate with emergent companies to test new technologies and methods in museums and heritage sites

² <http://www.bcq.es/index.php?l=3>



Fig. 4. Examples of the didactic elements, situated in the castle

The heritage park was designed as an open concept, where the visitor could walk like in any other neighborhood in the city. In the project 3 principal actions were proposed basically:

- Arrangement of circulation and of the architectural elements and materials of medieval archaeological complex.
- Improvement of the existing project with installations of new interactive signs with didactic contents.
- Design interactive resources of *nomadic museography*.

The project focuses on developing applications for smartphones for the openáir heritage interpretation. This system refers to the recent introduction of the concept called *Nomadic museography*. This term means the use of smartphones and other wireless mobile systems which allow a visitor more dynamic interaction and use of different didactic contents on a site.

The mini nomadic devices allow consulting the most diverse educational contents for providing understandable different heritage elements. The use of *nomadic artifacts* based on a virtual support, which allow a visitor more dynamic interaction and use of different didactic contents on a site. That kind of tours require the installation of a small application created specifically for these mobile systems (Fig. 5).

With the use of mobile devices, a visitor locates and identifies points of heritage interest directly in a cultural site. To access the information special information terminals were designed, which are situated in the whole Archeological Park. Then with installation of a mobile application the user can access additional information about the site. Thanks to intuitive display and interactive interface, a visitor can use additional tools and choose different interesting options to discover more information.



Fig. 5. The conceptual scheme of *nomadic museography system* applied in Archeological park, Calafell, Catalonia

Conclusion

The intervention projects in historic districts, applied in recent decades in most European cities, led to significant changes in urban design. The revaluation of the cultural heritage located in the historic areas, and the human treatment of the urban environment create new accessible urban spaces for all groups of public. New trends of urban planning completely changed the appearance of historic districts, giving each city a unique brand, thus fostering the interest to study the cultural heritage and growth of mass tourism.

The treatment of open-air monumental and historical monuments as *urban heritage* brings us to a new presentation of buildings and architectural ensembles, where the *interpretation* is the basic tool to explain cultural heritage.

The project "The Architectural intervention and musealization of the Archaeological Park of Castle Calafell" is an example of the use of two basic principles of intervention in historic districts: the architectural and museum. The innovative proposal of interpretation of the urban heritage with mobile devices may have a further widespread use in the future, because of its efficiency and easy use on a site.

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