ADAPTIVE REUSE AS A STRATEGY TOWARDS CONSERVATION OF CULTURAL HERITAGE: A SURVEY OF 19TH AND 20TH CENTURY THEORIES

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INTRODUCTION

Altering existing buildings for new functions is not a new phenomenon; in the past buildings that were structurally secure have been adapted to fit changed needs or new functions without questions or theoretical reflections. For example during the Renaissance period, monuments from ancient times were transformed for new uses. During the French Revolution, religious buildings were transformed for industrial functions or military uses after they had been confiscated and sold [1-3]. These interventions, however, were done in a pragmatic way and in many cases without heritage preservation as an intention [4]. Instead, the driving force behind these examples of 'reuse' was functional and financial, in essence [5].

Today, however, working with existing buildings, repairing and restoring them for continued use has become a creative and fascinating challenge within the architectural discipline [5, 6]. The process of wholeheartedly altering a building is often called 'adaptive reuse' [7]. In contemporary conservation theory and practise, adaptive reuse is considered to be an important strategy towards conservation of cultural heritage [8, 9].

But an extensive review of scholarly literature on adaptive reuse from the 1970s onwards learned us that its body of theory is largely based on case study research and not, as one would expect, on architectural theory and/or conservation history [10]. Several 19th and 20th century theorists on conservation and architecture have discussed adaptive reuse, but their ideas have hardly ever been discussed by contemporary theorists working on this topic [an exception is 11]. Therefore, this contribution aims to present a critical analysis of these theories in the light of adaptive reuse of heritage sites.

VIOLLET-LE-DUC: REUSE AND HERITAGE PRESERVATION

The theoretical discussion on adaptive reuse as a way to preserve historic monuments started in the 19th century. At that moment the practice of restoration was situated between two opposing orthodoxies: the restoration-movement, led by Eugène Emmanuel Viollet-le-Duc (1814-1879), and the

anti-restoration movement, led by John Ruskin (1819-1900) and his pupil William Morris (1834 - 1896).

As an architect and chief inspector of monuments in France, Eugène Emmanuel Viollet-le-Duc (1814-1879) had been involved in many restoration works of mostly Gothic buildings, among which the Notre Dame in Paris, the castle of Pierrefonds and the citadel of Carcassonne [12]. His interventions were often far-reaching, as he added for instance completely new parts to the building '*in the style of the original*' [13]. His work, however, has been criticized by his contemporaries and descendants. John Ruskin (1819-1900) for example describes this kind of stylistic restoration as '*a destruction accompanied with false description of the thing destroyed*' [14: 184].

Nevertheless, both Viollet-le-Duc's work and writings are particularly relevant to contemporary conservation when it comes to methodological issues and reuse of historic buildings. Concerning reuse of historic buildings, he states:

> *… the best of all ways of preserving a building is to find a use for it, and then to satisfy so well the needs dictated by that use that there will never be any further need to make any further changes in the building. … In such circumstances, the best thing to do is to try to put oneself in the place of the original architect and try to imagine what he would do if he returned to earth and was handed the same kind of programs as have been given to us. Now, this sort of proceeding requires that the restorer be in possession of all the same resources as the original master – and that he proceeds as the original master did* [15: 222-223]. (1)

Viollet-le-Duc's ideas contrasted strongly with those of the anti-restoration movement who fought against the destruction of the historical authenticity of the buildings in favour of their protection, conservation and maintenance. Ruskin considered restoration '*the most total destruction which a building can suffer*' [14: 184]. According to him:

> *It is impossible, as impossible as to raise the dead, to restore anything that has ever been great or beautiful in architecture… Do not let us talk then of restoration. The thing is a Lie from beginning to end...Take proper care of your monuments, and you will not need to restore them* [14: 184-186].

RIEGL AND THE INTRODUCTION OF THE USE-VALUE

The conflict between these opposing theories on conservation, and the adherent opinions on adaptive reuse, have been discussed by Alois Riegl (1858-1905) in his essay "*Der Moderne Denkmalkultus: Sein Wesen und seine Entstehung*" [17]. He ascribes this conflict in theories to the different values which their proper adherences attributed to monuments. Riegl distinguished different types of values which he generally grouped as commemorative values – including age-value, historical value and intentional commemorative value - as opposed to present-day values - including use-value and art-value (newness-value, relative art-value). (2)

Although different values can be found in one single monument, these values do often conflict with each other. He states: "*The contradiction between newness-value and age-value is at the centre of the controversy which rages over the treatment of monuments*" [18: 44]. (3)

On the one hand, the supporters of the restoration movement, inspired by Viollet-Le-Duc, rested essentially on the amalgamation of newness-value (unity of style) and historic value (originality of style), aiming to remove all traces of natural decay and restore every fragment to create a historic entity. On the other hand, supporters of the conservation movement, led by Ruskin and Morris, appreciated monuments exclusively for their age-value. For them, the incompleteness of an artefact

should be preserved as traces of natural decay that testify to the fact that a monument was not created recently but at some point in the past.

Although Riegl is rather critical about the creative restorations executed in the 19th century, by including the use-value in his assessment of monuments, he recognizes reuse of historic buildings as an intrinsic part of modern conservation.

> *Where a monument has ceased to have use-value, the consideration of age-value has begun to prevail in its preservation. The situation is more complicated where the use-value comes into play; most would prefer to regard a building in use as something sturdy rather than as something ages and decayed* [18: 44]. (4)

He points to the innumerable monuments that are still in use or that have received a new use in the course of history and says:

> *an old building still in use must be maintained in such a condition that it can accommodate people without endangering life or health… [as such] practical considerations allow age-value only in a few exceptional cases* [18: 39]. (5)

Although Riegl's thinking has been considered of fundamental importance for the Austrian conservation policy, initially his international influence was rather limited as his writings were conceived in a very abstract and condensed form and were not easy to translate [12]. "*Der Moderne Denkmalkultus: Sein Wesen und seine Entstehung*" only was translated to English in its entirety in 1982 [18]; since then, Riegl's theory has often been cited in relation to value assessment [e.g. 19, 20, 21] and conservation theory [e.g. 12, 22] but has not received much attention in relation to adaptive reuse so far.

BOITO AND THE FORMAL ARCHITECTURAL RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN OLD AND NEW

A few years before Riegl published his essay on monuments, Camillo Boito (1836-1914) presented his paper "*Questioni pratiche di belle arti, restauri,,concorsi, legislazione, professione, insegnamento*" in which he gives practical guidelines for the restoration of historic buildings [23]. He too, compared Viollet-le-Duc and Ruskin and is critical of both. In Viollet-le-Duc's approach, he fears a loss of the material authenticity of the building, while in Ruskin's thinking he dismisses the concept of advocating decay in favour of restoration [12]. Instead, Boito finds that the restoration method should depend on the individual circumstances of the monument. He distinguishes three methodologies which he calls 'archaeological restoration' (for antique monuments), 'picturesque restoration' (for medieval monuments) and 'architectural restoration' (for Renaissance and other monuments). Moreover, he presents eight principles to restore a building. He states, for example, that a monument should be consolidated rather than repaired, and repaired rather than restored. In case restorations or additions are necessary, he also describes how modern interventions may be done in such a way so that they can be recognized as such to avoid misunderstandings about the historic and artistic value of the building [24].

Although Boito does not mention reuse of buildings in particular in his writings, his ideas are extremely relevant in relation to adaptive reuse as he describes several possible approaches how to deal with alterations and additions to historic buildings. As such, his principles can be recognized in many projects of adaptive reuse from the beginning of the 20th century onwards up to date.

THE AFTERMATH OF THE FIRST WOLD WAR: MODERN CONSERVATION VERSUS MODERN ARCHITECTURE

Contrary to Riegl, the influence of Boito's thinking on the Italian and international conservation practice was very strong. For example, his ideas have been the basis for the Athens Charter in 1931, the first international document to promote modern conservation policy [12]. This charter was the result of a meeting of the International Museum Office, which had been established after the First World War to discuss the problems related to heritage conservation. In general, the charter denounces stylistic restorations in favour of regular and permanent maintenance. About adaptive reuse it says: "*the Conference recommends that the occupation of buildings, which ensures the continuity of their life, should be maintained but that they should be used for a purpose which respects their historic or artistic character*" [25, article 1].

Conversely, the destructions of the war also created an opportunity for modernist architects to apply their ideas not only on the individual building but also on the urban scale. As such, city planning has been the subject of the fourth CIAM congress that was organised in 1933, also in Athens. Participants present at the congress analysed the problems of 33 cities and proposed a set of 'statements' for the creation of the ideal modern city. Their analyses and conclusions were based on the division of the ideal modern city in four main functions: dwellings, recreation, work and transportation [26]. Concerning historic parts of the city, the CIAM states:

> *Historic objects (separate monuments or sectors of the city) must be retained:*
> *- When its existence is not bought at the price of bad living conditions for the population that is compelled to live in it.*
> *- When the opportunity is afforded to remove its restricting influence on development by the diversion of traffic round it or the shifting of the focal point.*
> *An aesthetic adaptation of new parts of the city to the historic area has a catastrophic effect on the development of a city and is in no way to be desired.*
> *By the demolition of slum dwellings surrounding the historic monuments, green areas can be created, which improve the hygienic conditions in those areas* [27].

As such, a clear split emerged between conservation on the one hand, and architecture at the other hand.

ADAPTIVE REUSE AS A FASCINATING ARCHITECTURAL PROJECT

Within the conservation discipline, the post-war era was not only a moment to discuss the principles and techniques of modern conservation, but also to discuss the meaning and scope of 'cultural heritage'. Until the 19th century, the notion of heritage was limited to antique and medieval buildings but due to the destructions of the two world wars, awareness grew about the value of buildings of other periods and typologies including vernacular architecture, industrial buildings and even complete historic cities [22]. As the conservation practice had to deal with these 'new types of heritage', interest for adaptive reuse as a methodology towards conservation grew. In 1964, The Venice Charter points to the importance of adaptive reuse within the conservation practice saying saying that "*the conservation of monuments is always facilitated by making use of them for some socially useful purpose*" [28, article 5].

Within the architectural discipline, a growing interest emerged in conservation of old buildings as a reaction to their increased demolishment in favour of new construction [29]. Where during the first half of the 20th century architects aspired to create new buildings which completely broke with traditional building, during the second half of the 20th century architects started to consider working with historic buildings as an interesting challenge and made it an important aspect of their work. Carlo Scarpa, Raphaël Moneo, Herzog & de Meuron are examples of such architects. Hence, from the 1970s onwards, adaptive reuse has been a key subject for many conferences on architecture and conservation, resulting in a considerable body of scholarly literature [for an overview see 10].

CONCLUSION

Until the 19th century, architecture and conservation were converging disciplines. During the Renaissance for example, architects were involved in the construction of new buildings as well as in the adaptation of ancient structures. Although preservation mainly was done because of utilitarian considerations, for many buildings the very fact of their continued use was the reason for their preservation [4]. In the 19th century, Viollet-le-Duc and Morris both played a major role in the development of the first theories on conservation as well as in the field of contemporary architecture (which at that moment basically consisted out of buildings in neo-gothic style). During the first half of the 20th century however, an opposition arose between architecture and conservation. While modern conservation dealt with issues of 'scientific restoration' (cf. Boito) and 'value-assessment' (cf. Riegl) aiming to conserve the remaining historic fabric of the post-war-period, modern architecture showed a strong believe in the future and new technics that would improve the quality of life. It considered existing architecture as not able to satisfy current needs and demands. From the 1960s onwards, architecture and conservation moved closer to one another again. Architects showed interest in working with historic buildings while conservators saw reuse of historic buildings as an important aspect of their preservation. Currently, adaptive reuse is emancipating to become a proper discipline within the broader field of architectural conservation. A (re)reading of the architectural and conservation theories which we discussed in this paper within the context of adaptive reuse may contribute to the intellectual foundation of this discipline and may provide a valuable input to the wider discussion on adaptive reuse theory and practise in the future.

NOTES

(1) … le meilleur moyen pour conserver une édifice, c'est de lui trouver une destination, et de satisfaire si bien à tous les besoins que commande cette destination, qu'il n'y ait pas lieu d'y faire des changements. … Dans les circonstances pareilles, le mieux est de se mettre à la place de l'architecte primitive et de supposer ce qu'il ferait, si, revenant au monde, on lui posait les programmes qui nous sont poses à nous-mêmes. Mais on comprend qu'alors il faut posséder toutes les ressources que possédaient ces maîtres anciens, qu'il faut procéder comme ils procédaient eux-mêmes [16 : 31].

(2) *Erinnerungswerte:* commemorative values
Alterswert: age-value
Historische Wert: historical value
Gewollte Erinnerunswert: intentional commemorative value
Gegenwartswerte: present-day values
Gebrauchswert: use-value
Kunstwert: art-value
Neuheitswert: newness-value
relative Kunstwert: relative art-value [17]

(3) Der Gegensatz zwischen Neuheitswert und Alterswert steht hierbei durchaus im Mittelpunkt der Kontroverse, die gegenwärtig teilweise in den schärfsten Formen um die Denkmalbehandlung geführt wird [17: 179-180].

(4) Wo es sich um Denkmale handelt, die keinen Gebrauchswert mehr besitzen, ist es auch dem Alterswerte bereits überwiegend gelungen, seine Prinzipien der Denkmalbehandlung durchzusetzen. Anders steht es aber dort, wo zugleich die Anforderungen des Gebrauchswertes mitspielen: denn alles im Gebrauch Stehende will auch heute noch in den Augen des groβen Mehrzahl jung und kräftig, im Werdezustande erscheinen und die Spuren des Alters, der Auflösung, des Versagens der Kräfte verleugnen [17: 180].

(5) Ein altes Gebäude, das heute noch in praktischer Verwendung steht, in solchem Zustande erhalten bleiben, daβ es Menschen ohne Gefährdung der Sicherheit ihres Lebens oder ihrer Gesundheit beherbergen kann … Die praktische Realisierung dieser Forderung ist aber doch nur in verhältnismäβig wenigen Ausnahmefällen möglich; denn es erheben sich dagegen ganz und gar unüberwindliche Schwierigkeiten [17: 174-175].

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