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The role of Iconic Architecture in creating an urban image

E. Abaimova*, Jiacheng Tan

Southern Federal University, Rostov-on-Don, Russia

*Corresponding author: abaimova.j@mail.ru

Abstract. Urban identity is the image of the city in people's minds. Preserving the uniqueness of the city in the process of urbanization is an important task of our time. The paper analyzes the problems of Chinese cities and modern approaches to the creation of public urban space. Options for creating a public city center are shown on specific examples of cities in Spain, China, and the United States. Architecture should be closely linked to local communities, to people's daily lives, to social events and collective activities to create a sense of belonging and identity. Strategies for architectural design of urban space to create a unique urban environment are proposed.

Keywords: *iconic architecture, urban identity, urban environment.*

1. Introduction

In this age of globalization, every city wants its own Eiffel Tower or Sydney Opera House or Guggenheim Museum and wants to express its urban identity. Urban identity is a very complex and difficult to clearly define concept. It is the unique personality and image of the city in people's mind, which is the root of people's sense of belonging and identity to the city. In a broad sense, it is about the natural environment, climate conditions, built environment, social status, history, and culture of the city. It is about the visible materiality and invisible spirituality of the city.

Many cities are trying to maintain their uniqueness in the process of globalization, which is the basis for building cultural identity and reflecting their own values. At the same time, it is also an important tool and resource for marketing the city in the competitive marketplace. The relationship between architecture and urban identity is very close, and Kim Dovey believes that the question is not whether architecture shapes identity and contains meaning, but how it is done and for whom it is done [1].

2. Situation in China

Although the concept of landmark building originated in developed Western countries, its most extreme performances are in developing countries such as China and the Middle East. Beijing and Dubai have become the most representative gathering places for landmark building. What they have in common are: emerging economies trying to catch up with the West; active participation in globalized competition; and a strong governmental push.

But at the same time, this phenomenon has its historical background and practical needs, and has played a certain degree of positive role in improving the urban living environment, seeking the revitalization of local culture, and promoting economic development:

1) As a developing country, China needs to rapidly improve its urban environment in the process of urbanization.

Therefore, it is a reasonable strategy to select key locations for the focused construction of municipal and cultural facilities.

2) Expensive, large-scale, and rapidly completed public buildings and urban landscapes have objectively provided citizens with more and higher-quality public space, despite the general shortcomings.

The architecture of existing urban public centers in China is often characterized by the following three features: loss of symbolic meaning, confusion of public order, and indulgence of expression.

In the face of all the status quo of contemporary Chinese landmark building, cities need contemporary iconic architecture that is composite, urban, true, and rational expression of cultural values, friendly and close to the public.

First, iconic architecture in urban public centers should not only rely on peculiar appearance but also form cohesive and attractive centers through strong urbanity: to become an important node of urban life, to become an important part of the city's public space system, to become a composite body of integrated buildings, landscapes, and infrastructures, and to become a cultural, commercial, and transportation complexes with a mixture of different functions.

Public space in Chinese cities faces different problems from those in Western cities. In Western cities, urban sprawl has led to the decline of old city centers, and neo-liberalism and consumerism have led to a decline in public life due to the public's over-concern with their personal lives. In China's urbanization, however, the needs of the individual are not fully protected and valued, the needs of daily life are not yet satisfied, civil society is still in the growth stage, and urban public centers are more of a reflection of the will of governmental power, which is too rough and rigid. Therefore, «friendliness» and closeness to daily life are very important qualities for iconic architecture in urban public centers in China. Only in this way can people be attracted to actively participate in public life and develop a real sense of belonging and identity.

Contemporary iconic architecture, as the public center of the city, should transcend the limitations of the building as a single unit and become an important complex on the urban scale. It needs to provide a cohesive place for the public and have a high degree of accessibility. In addition to fulfilling the building's own use function, it should also assume an important role in the urban spatial system, with an urban scale and utility beyond that of conventional architecture.

3. Contemporary architecture

For example, **Seattle Olympic Sculpture Park (USA)** is not just an art museum or a landscaped park, but more importantly it is a pedestrian link in the city's system of public spaces that connects the city to the waterfront across the freeway belt. It is a complex of architecture, landscape, and urban infrastructure. It is this urbanity that gives the project its monumental quality as an urban public center.

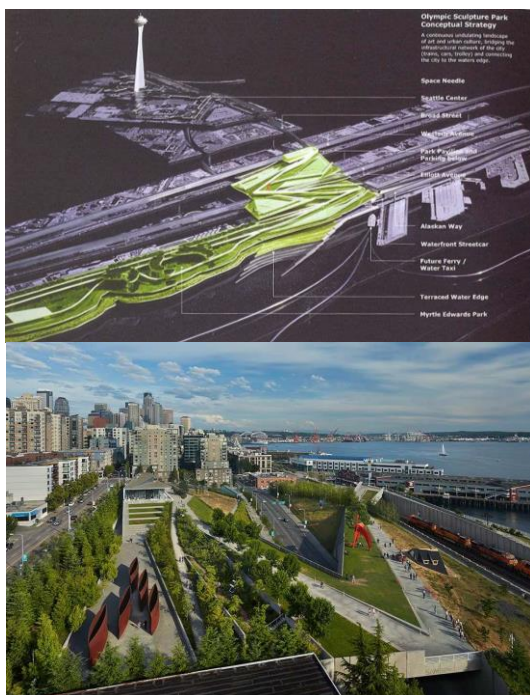


Figure 1. *The Olympic Sculpture Park, Seattle, USA, 2007*

The Seattle Olympic Sculpture Park is based on 3.4 hectares of derelict industrial land along the waterfront, which is divided into three parcels by railroad lines and highway arteries, with an elevation difference of more than 12 meters from the street to the waterfront. The government wanted the project to draw the public back to the waterfront as a venue for art displays, and to combat pollution from the industrial site and restore the waterfront ecology. The scheme skillfully integrates architecture, landscape, and infrastructure. It creates a continuous earths cape as a place to display art, forming an uninterrupted folded green platform. This continuous platform crosses the traffic arteries and gradually extends from the city blocks to the waterfront, thus creating a close and pleasant public space link between the urban core and the waterfront. At the same time, the changes in topography integrate the railroad lines and highway arterials into the overall environment and effectively screen them from the landscaped park.

The topographic platform of Seattle Olympic Sculpture Park that connects the city center to the waterfront transcends the simple notion of a park and museum, giving the site a strong sense of urbanity and centrality. Its unique charm attracts people to move and stay here, making it a true public center of the city [2].

Modern museums gravitate toward the «museum-spectacle» concept, which is characterized by rhythmic, fast the pace of constructing a visual-verbal series of information, to the maximum foot for perception. In addition to the interior space, the building itself can also be an unusual object in an urban environment, the so-called my «architecture-sculpture», becoming a place of attraction for tourists [3].

In his reflections on monumentality, William J.R. Curtis points to the profound relationship between form and idea, form and time, and form and content: «Authentic monuments possess a marvelous abstraction that condenses many meanings into simple and clear layers. Good architecture is like a poetic idea or a symbol with intuitive power: form and idea come together. It can embody a fictionalized interpretation of the world - the social and natural order - and its material presence will be a declaration of some underlying spirituality (connected to the deeper levels of the mind). The real monument reveals a profound combination of form and content. It enriches social life and public space, symbolizing the continuation of the spirit. It will serve as a storehouse of memory and a facilitator of new action. It is the miniature world of the city, combining the patterns of the past and the spirit of the present into a coherent and dynamic whole. Authentic civic monuments have a truly collective expression» [4].

An example is the **Shenzhen Nanshan Marriage Registration Center** designed by Urban Practice subverted. Compared to those huge, iconic city-level public buildings, it is only a tiny community-level public service organization. However, the gesture it presents through its unique architectural form and the openness and pro-people concepts it contains is a landmark demonstration of its significance. [5]

To create a strong sense of ceremony, the architects realized this intention through a deliberately elongated walking experience and a simple, elegant architectural form. The elliptical main building and the door-framed pavilion are located at the two ends of the base, with a mirrored pool between them, connected by two pontoon bridges, one entering and one exiting, one flat and one sloping. The architectural form is simple and pure, and the interior space is soothing and smooth, together creating a holy atmosphere for marriage registration. People who come to register their marriages will feel a strong sense of ceremony under the guidance of the strong architectural form.

More importantly, this site has also become a public center for community activities and a symbolic urban landmark. It is in Lai King Park, where water features, pavilions and ramps provide facilities and landscaping for residents' leisure activities. The elliptical shape of the building at the corner emphasizes the presence and charm of the place with a pure and powerful architectural form [5].

The openness, civility, and stimulation of community exchange embodied in this small building is a new model for governmental institutional architecture and an effective intervention strategy for existing urban spaces.



Figure 2. Nanshan Marriage Registration Center, Shenzhen, China, 2011

The Metropol Parasol project in Seville implanted a giant parasol in the Plaza de la Encarnación, in the heart of the old city, whose architectural form, spatial qualities and functionality give the place a unique identity, becoming the public center of the city, while activating citizens' spontaneous activities and events.

Plaza de la Encarnación has a long history of new buildings being built on the ruins of old ones. Until 1982 it was a city parking lot, and in 2011 the Metropol Parasol project was completed, transforming the area into an important public space and urban center. The Metropol Parasol is a complex that accommodates different activities: a museum of the site on the ground floor, a market, commerce, restaurants, and other functions on the first floor, and a public event plaza on the second-floor platform, with viewing platforms on floating parasol.



Figure 3. The Metropol Parasol, Seville, Spain, 2011

What really makes the Metropol Parasol project fascinating and cohesive is its unique form and place. The free form of the giant mushroom-shaped parasol contrasts sharply with the traditional, dense old city texture of the neighborhood levels. The huge parasols play the role of shading during the day and provide artificial lighting at night, supporting public activities at different times of the day in the city. At the same time, the parasols create a distinctive floating plaza in the air. The unique shape of the world's largest wooden structure, the parasol, can be imbued with a wealth of intentions: it can be interpreted as an ancient tree in Seville or a church vault, or as a mushroom, an awning, a floating cloud.

The Metropol Parasol creates attractive places, offering a rich and varied space to accommodate a wide range of activi-

ties: gatherings, shopping, recreation, sightseeing, and so on. It balances the needs of both the group and the individual: its large public spaces, open platforms and plazas, and grandeur make it a center and rallying point in the public's mind, providing a place for collective rituals and public events in the city. At the same time, its human scale, relaxed form, and richness of place make it intimate and closely related to everyday life [6].

For example, Snøhetta design for the **Norwegian National Opera and Ballet** in 2000-2008. The opera house is part of Oslo's revitalization strategy to redevelop the city's historically industrial waterfront into an active public space [7].

Expressing the urban identity goes beyond the specific functional and spatial requirements and becomes the biggest challenge of the project. Snøhetta Associates' project has a strong theme that closely integrates architecture with culture and place and is presented in a unique and innovative expression.

Above all, Snøhetta saw the form of his opera house as a monumental place housing a rich public program. The scheme places the complex function of the opera house in a simple, horizontal form through clever organization and composition. It is tightly integrated into the topography as a groundscape building, creating a rooftop public terrace where the public can roam freely. This public platform hovers up from the waterfront to the roof of the auditorium and offers different spatial experiences. Through the design, the platform floor develops a rich and subtle texture: the floor is not flat and uniform, and the stone benches are both functional and decorative. People can see the scene of the public hall of the Opera House through the glass façade as they walk along, generating dialog and communication. From the roof plaza, one can overlook the overall city bay. The huge three-dimensional plaza offers different views and activities in different seasons. Especially in the short but precious summer, it becomes a perfect place for people to enjoy the sunshine. The huge ramp becomes a theater for 8,000 people [7].

Secondly, the building forms a strong connection with the sea, emphasizing the identity of Oslo's coastal city. The Opera House is located on a former industrial site in the city's bay. The government intends to use the Opera House project as a key project for the transformation of the bay, gradually linking the area to the city center and making it the future cultural center of the city. The building is set up as an artificial island surrounded by water on three sides, with a gentle slope extending into the water as if it were an iceberg floating on the sea. After environmental treatment, the original industrial pollution was removed from this area, and it is gradually becoming a pleasant waterfront area.

Finally, the gently rising form of the building and the white building materials make a connection to the natural features of Norway. Rough, heavy white marble was chosen for the main body of the building and the floor of the platform. The stage is covered with aluminum panels with circular projections that create reflections and refractions.

4. Conclusions

Unlike traditional architecture, which is solemn, and inaccessible, contemporary unique architecture creates a collective place that is full of human scale and concern for individual emotions. It needs to consider the feelings of both groups and individuals.

In the architectural design strategy, this article discusses three aspects: 1) contemporary iconic architecture as the public center of the city, it should go beyond the limitations of architectural monoliths and become an important complex in the city; 2) contemporary iconic architecture has the task of expressing the identity of the city; 3) contemporary iconic architecture creates collective places that should be filled with human scale and attention to individual emotions.

William J.R. Curtis points out that the monument, the whole or an active part of it, should maintain a human scale. This is a deeper issue than dimension. Architecture must possess characteristics that emphasize life, spatial vitality, that relate to human nature, that move through space, tactilely and psychologically associated with texture, light, shadow, shifting viewpoints, patterned scale. The architecture's small nodes, steps, seats, platforms, soffits, and columns are embedded in empathic associations and human use. Monuments accommodate the spiritual life of the individual and the expression of a public role. A good monument is neither arbitrary nor neutral. Through its passion, it opens new areas of spiritual experience, emphasizing and exalting human actions, giving them a ritualized dimension [4].

There are different people, communities, different cultures and demands in the same city. For architecture to create a sense of belonging and identity, it must be closely related to local communities, to people's daily lives, to public events and collective activities, and reflect the needs, culture, and collective life of local people. Therefore, it needs to present an open and pluralistic attitude. It should serve local citizens, not tourists only.

In terms of architectural form, it emphasizes regionalism, the spirit of place, human scale, and constructed culture, rather than set dressing and showy gestures.

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Қалалық бейнені жасаудағы көрнекті архитектураның рөлі

Е. Абаймова *, Цзячэн Тань

Оңтүстік федералды университеті, Ростов-на-Дону, Ресей

*Корреспонденция үшін автор: abaimova.j@mail.ru

Андатпа. Қалалық сәйкестік-бұл адамдардың санасындағы қаланың бейнесі. Урбанизация процесінде қаланың бірегейлігін сақтау-қазіргі заманның маңызды міндеті. Жұмыста қытай қалаларының проблемаларына талдау және қоғамдық қалалық кеңістікті құрудың заманауи тәсілдері келтірілген. Испания, Қытай және АҚШ қалаларының нақты мысалдарында қоғамдық қала орталығын құру нұсқалары көрсетілген. Сәулет жергілікті қауымдастықтармен, адамдардың күнделікті өмірімен, қоғамдық іс-шаралармен және ұжымдық іс-әрекеттермен тығыз байланысты болуы керек, бұл тиесілілік пен сәйкестік сезімін тудырады. Бірегей қалалық ортаны құру үшін қалалық кеңістікті архитектуралық жобалау стратегиялары ұсынылған.

Негізгі сөздер: *культтік сәулет, қалалық сәйкестік, қалалық орта.*

Роль знаковой архитектуры в создании городского образа

Е. Абаймова *, Цзячэн Тань

Южный федеральный университет, Ростов-на-Дону, Россия

*Автор для корреспонденции: abaimova.j@mail.ru

Аннотация. Городская идентичность – это образ города в сознании людей. Сохранение уникальности города в процессе урбанизации – важная задача современности. В работе дан анализ проблем городов Китая и современные подходы к созданию общественного городского пространства. Показаны варианты создания общественного центра города на конкретных примерах городов Испании, Китая и США. Архитектура должна быть тесно связана с местными сообществами, с повседневной жизнью людей, с общественными мероприятиями и коллективной деятельностью,

чтобы создавать чувство принадлежности и идентичности. Предложены стратегии архитектурного проектирования городского пространства для создания уникальной городской среды.

Ключевые слова: культовая архитектура, городская идентичность, городская среда.

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