

„Wherever I go, I see. . .“

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Abstract

The post with the title “Wherever I go, I see...” is an educational project that is a part of my dissertation work and which is called ‘Historical sites of Olomouc from the point of view of a historian of architecture and an artistic painter’. In the dissertation, I am comparing how a historian and an artistic painter look at a site, what is the difference in their attitudes and what documentation techniques are used by each of them. Collected materials are the main source of information for the project “Wherever I go, I see...”. The main goal is not to only show selected sites but also by using comprehensive overview and visual materials present how we perceive our every-day-life surroundings. Furthermore, the goal is to encourage the public to think about what they can notice in particular while they routinely move around the city, especially in regards to the selected sites - how we can read them, what we can read in them and how we can document them. The aim of my dissertation is not to only point out how the two dissimilar fields can cooperate with each other but also encourage the public to sometimes stop, while commuting or walking on known paths, look around and see what they are actually looking at and inspire them to document the site or place by themselves rather than

taking pictures, which will most likely become just a part of their backup hard drive.

Keywords

Architecture, documentation, drawing, painting, terminology

A part of my Master's thesis on „Olomouc's historical sights from the point of view of a building historian and a painter“ is a project named „Wherever I go, I see...“. The project in a simple and playful form enables access to information in the thesis to the general public. The thesis itself focuses on how a structural historian and a painter; perceive certain objects, documents them, and what derives from them. The thesis is supervised by Mgr. Jakub Pátek, Ph.D.

First step was selection of particular structures from Olomouc and their documentation, which resulted in list of visually documented structures from Olomouc. Being a painter, I selected the structures based on esthetic perception that I would have wanted to capture in a single unique moment. Only then I would considered the structure aspects as a structural historian searching for historic values. Forgotten, tarnished, and often in disrepair villas and buildings were center of my attention. This also impacted the project „Wherever I go, I see...“ where the general public is confronted with the buildings poor conditions. And hopefully in some cases this would inspire them to undertake steps to buildings restoration.

A questionnaire with enclosed photos of a villa from Olomouc was the next step. The questionnaire did not have time limit and was presented to structural historians, artistic painters, and students of cultural history. One enquiry was to describe what interests them about the villa; for example building historical evolvement, inhabitants' history, purpose of the villa, words of art, building construction etc. The structural historians were most interested in building historical

evolution, building construction, used materials, techniques etc. Second group of most common answers relates to building purpose, and vocabulary extension with respect to words of art. Answers related to inhabitants' history, and building relation to its surroundings were in the third place. Students of cultural history studies were most interested in inhabitants' history and building historical evolution. In the second place was building purpose and the third place was terminology for architectural features. The students of painting were mostly interested in inhabitants' history, then how time impacts the architecture, and last was the building purpose. The next question focused on which type of documentation the queried would choose; offered choices were written form (professional or emotionally biased), and drawn or painted form (technical drawings, freehand drawing or painting). Majority of people choose opposite of their study or profession. 64% of the structural historians chose drawing instead of professional written description. Only 15% of painting students chose drawing, the rest of them would choose emotionally biased written description. Similar results were among students of cultural history, where 15% would choose drawing in most cases a floor projection, and the rest would choose professional verbal description with some added emotional aspects.

Following the questionnaire was a discussion about the project, with intention to receive feedback and additional recommendations how to improve the project. Overall responses could be divided into two groups, first with positive attitude acknowledging the educatory value and with interesting recommendations, second group argued that modern technology offers us possibility to capture the moment much more easily than by drawing it or verbally describing it. The photography was referenced as the easiest mean for capturing the visual perception of a moment or an object. I don't refuse this argument, but neither can I support it in respect of the project „Wherever I go, I see. . .“ that focuses on our daily life awareness and understating of what we are seeing. Some people also argued that they are not gifted and they would not be able to learn how to draw. My response was that basic drawing skills can be learned by anyone

who is willing to invest some time and effort. However, their response was still negative even though they did not try it. In this sense we were both on completely different page.

Painted pictures, and transparent slides depicting architectural features with the professional vocabulary are the means how the general public can be familiarized with the two mentioned documentation approaches. And this familiarization process is the main goal of the project. Due to a fact that the project was part of the national festival Dey of architecture (www.denarchitektury.cz) the number of selected structures was reduced. Five structures were selected all in vicinity of tr. Svornosti in Olomouc. During the festival, these five structures were part of a commented tour. The structures were painted on jute canvas using oil painting. Afterwards transparent PVC foils corresponding to the paintings were created. A supplementary document with vocabulary was also included.

Furthermore the project intentionally forces the individual to not only learn about the possible documentary methods, but to also apply the acquired skills during their own journeys. To replace the photography that often becomes only part of data cloud, which is then forgotten. Unlike the photography our own drawing, painting, or written description can help us remember the moment in past. As such we often tend to relive the moment, or evaluate our own progress over the time. The project helps people to appreciate the two selected documentary media and theirs application on our monotonous daily life.

The Den architektury was held on 30th of September. The project presentation to the general public started at 10am with brief introduction to the project „Wherever I go, I see...“and the thesis. 25 people attended the presentation, two third women and one third men. Division to age categories clearly showed dominance of category 19 – 30 years of age. Same attendance had two following categories when combined together. The categories were 31 – 45 and 60 and more. Last category was age ranging from 46 to 59 years.

After the introduction the audience was acquainted with the topic and instructions for im-

mediate activities were given. Next, the fundamental and supplementary materials were distributed. The transparent foils with printing were the main material. The foils depicted elaborated structures with architectural terminology. Supplementary materials provided audience with a map of structures, and a vocabulary. First the audience had the opportunity to experience work with the foils. Here they could perceive not only the artistic side of painting, but also become exposed to terminology specific for architectural features. Once they understood the link between the paintings and the foils we started the commented tour itself. During the tour a drawing contest was held. Each participant was asked to draw a structure or architectural feature they liked. The drawings were at the end assessed and we choose a winner. To my surprise the participants were very pro-active. The commented tour itself was rather in a form of a discussion about the terminology for architectural features. The tour was stopped at each selected structure, here participants had opportunity to study architectural details such as, surfaces, lines, volumes etc... During the stops it was very interesting to see how the foils were used. Participants were very active with them. And the foils had proven their value as educatory tool. The tour ended with a typical modern piece of architecture. This was in complete contrast to the rest of the tour where Neo-Renaissance, Neo-Baroque and Art Nouveau. This building also did not have a foil with terminology. And participants were asked to apply what they have learned during the tour. And even here they were very pro-active. They presented their ideas and were willing to discuss them.

The project presentation during the Day of architecture was a success. The audience participated in discussion about the current state of structures, they showed interest in related terminology. They were also interested in creating of their own drawing record. The next step in this project for me is to prepare a workshop for kids and students from elementary and high schools. The intention is to inspire them to learn about architecture.

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