

# THE PARALLELS BETWEEN THE PRESERVATION OF ARCHITECTURAL HERITAGE AND NATIONAL IDENTITY

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"Architectures" are not only special monuments of great value or made by famous architects but it is the most influential material result of a creation of a specific space or form for a specific way of life:

1. The people's influence (through his way of life, through cultural, social and economical specifics) on the creation of architecture seems to be the only connection between man and a building, but in reality at the same time the influence of architecture on the possible changes or inertness of the human way of life (= his identity!) is of the same importance.
2. Thesis: THE CONTINUITY OF THE IDENTITY OF ARCHITECTURE (FIRST OF ALL THE EVERYDAY ONE, THE VERNACULAR ONE...) IS ONE OF THE 'CONDITIO SINE QUA NON' FOR A NATIONAL IDENTITY.

## The aims of the research:

As a Slovene, the member of one of the smallest nations in Europe, one of the eminent questions I have been always asked there was the problem of the identity of a "Slovene" architecture in the middle of Europe, in a confluence of Slav, German, Roman and Hugarian culture. The answer was very difficult because in the republic of Slovenia (Yugoslavia) there are other national minorities and a great part of Slovenes lives as a minority outside the political borders.

The main aims of the researches on the Faculty of architecture, University of Ljubljana and together with ethnologists (Faculty of Philosophy) and others were to see what is the real meaning of architectural heritage within the Slovene national identity, the everyday life and in the future - and first of all to define the real values of "architectural monuments" and "architectural heritage".

## Through the History:

The region where Slovenes live was more or less always politically and economically united within different political forms but at the same time always under great nonslavic influences. In the last hundred years there were great efforts in searching the proper Slovene identity and at the same time against them. From the 17<sup>th</sup> century on the architecture has always been a material indication of cultural (and national) identity.

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In the modern approach (20<sup>th</sup> century) there are most different approaches to the typical Slovene architecture:

1. An obsession to preserve many architectural monuments as greatest results of master-mind,
2. total neglect of the continuity of architectural identity (... to be more "European"...),
3. political misuse of the problem,
4. Scientific researches and proposals of special understanding the problem.

### **The theory:**

As we saw in almost all countries we can find similar problems: in the "melting pot" of North America, in the third World with its vanishing typics in national or regional architecture, but also in the proper center of Europe or in the most developed countries.

We realised that we started a very delicate problem:

- the difficulties in researches came out of political barriers or influences,
- there was always more local and not enough regional understanding,
- there was not enough scientific references (most of them have been influenced or have had special aims: to declare some architecture as strictly connected with national parameters or to declare its' strictly transnational characters),
- anthropology (ethnology) has done very little yet to open the real problem of identity and continuity of architecture as a materialised result of the influence of specific ways of life of some nation,
- there are some attempts of "urban anthropology" research the problem but always as a part of a team-work of urban planning.

### **The first specific problem; Southern Carinthia in Austria:**

The reason to chose the region is that it is the part where there lives Slovene minority outside the borders of the Republic of Slovenia and inspite its activity it is losing its identity.

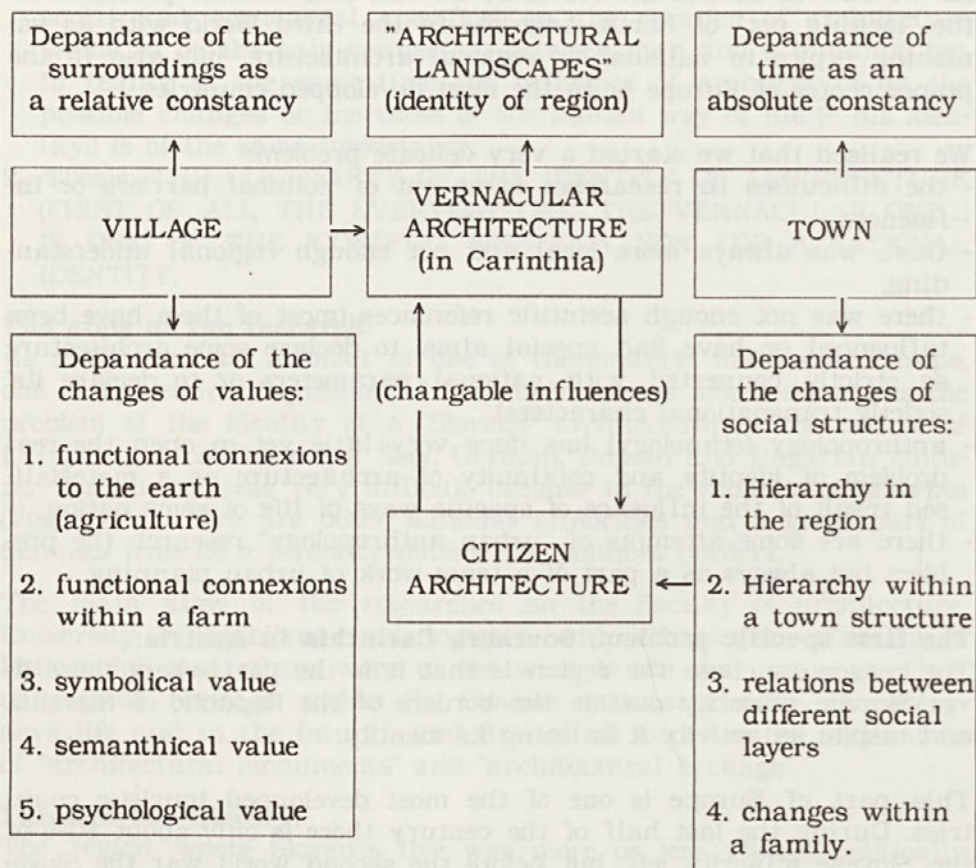
This part of Europe is one of the most developed touristic countries. During the last half of the century there is only about 10% of the Slovene minority left, but before the second world war the Slovene population was a majority.

About 1900 the political situation forced an architectural theory: there should be only two general kinds of (vernacular) architecture in the Southern Carinthia: the great and rich houses of the German origine and the poor and undeveloped ones of the Slovene origine ("Slowenisches längslaubenhaus"); as the result there was tendency to be ashamed of such architecture...



Recently, the importance of typical microregional diversity of architecture (that is specific for all the Slovene territory) is neglected and there are some bureaucratic attempts to uniform the "architectural landscape" with a new, invented type of "the vernacular house"...

We were invited to make special research that lasted for 5 years and a rich documentation was made (though unfortunately already too late...). A specific algorithm for the evaluation of the role of (vernacular) architecture was made to understand the influences within the development of the way of life, of the architecture and of the conscious of the identity:



### The results:

The vernacular architecture in South Carinthia before half a century was still an indispensable part of the identity of the region. Now it is practically lost—mostly in the parts where the minority lives; the people do not understand any more the connection between their national membership and the recognisable home country. The

exodus is great and almost completed and the Slovene minority is in extinction.

The proposed simplified and unitary false "vernacular architecture" can be used for the tourists only: there is only a special external appearance without specific hierarchy and understanding in it.

### **The second specific problem; the reconstruction of Breginj after the earthquake:**

Breginj was a typical western-Slovene village of a medieval/ baroque appearance and with a clearly legible identity of architecture.

Damages after the earthquake of 1976 were great but not irreparable: the villagers wanted to repair their homes and to preserve typical architecture made specially for their own way of life and for their identity.

To "help" the village, the Slovene government made a present: a new village was to be built, made of prefabricated houses - inspite the proposal of the experts to preserve the old village and architecture and to revitalise the settlement with even smaller finances as they were given to build a totally new architecture.

The result was terrible: the identity was lost completely, the great exodus of old inhabitants begun (today there is practically no farmers more!), the landscape was changed and the residents have lost their previous sense of local identity. The example of Breginj was a typical negative experiment and one of the proves for our researches.

### **Conclusions:**

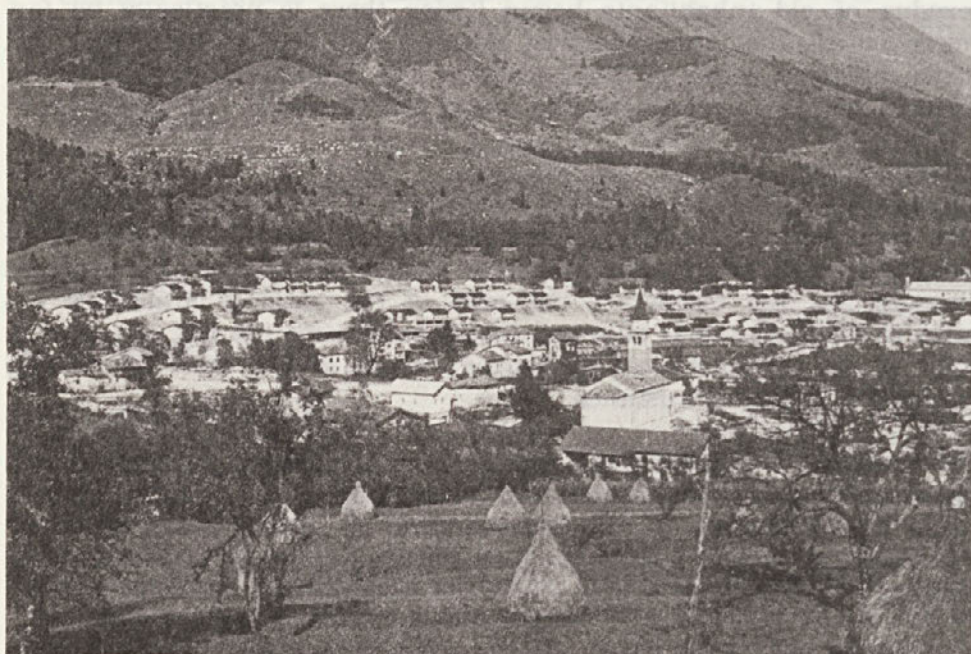
The lack of interdisciplinary researches of the influences between the continuity of identity of architecture on one side and the cultural (=national) identity on the other side is one of the most eminent reasons for the extinction not only of the national minorities but also of whole national cultures. In the same time the lost of the identity of an "architectural landscape" is one of the most irreparable ecological (cultural) mistakes.

We propose to UNESCO to organise interdisciplinary groups of experts to help to all the countries (undevelopped or developped) that have the problems of misunderstanding of active preservation of architectural identity as a part of national cultural and existential identity.



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*Novi Breginj, spodaj ostanek starega Breginja (foto Oskar; iz publikacije Potresni zbornik J. Dolenc et al., Tolmin, 1980)*