Evaluation and Preservation Methodology for Post-War Concrete Architecture: The Case of Lithuania

Authors: Aušra Černauskienė

Abstract: The heritage of modern architecture is closely related to the materiality and technology used to implement the buildings. Concrete is one of the most ubiquitous post-war building materials with enormous aesthetic and structural potential, that architects have creatively used for the everyday buildings, as well as exceptional architectural objects that have survived to this day. Furthermore, concrete’s material, structural, and architectural development over post-war years has produced a remarkably rich and diverse typology of buildings, for implementation of which handicraft skills and industrialized novelties were used. But in public opinion, concrete architecture has a negative association with shortages of Soviet era. And the aesthetic non-appreciation is not the only challenge, that concrete architecture meets. As the young heritage, it is not properly evaluated as it is a short time distance to rethink what they mean in historical perspective. Buildings also don’t meet the needs of contemporary society - are of poor energy class, poor insulated, has too little open-space and poor quality of the surrounding environment. However, concrete architecture is considered ambiguous, but has its character and specificity that needs to be carefully studied in terms of cultural heritage to avoid the risk of poor renovation or even demolition, which increasingly raises in recent decades in Lithuania. For example, several valuable pieces of post-war concrete architecture such as the Banga restaurant and the Summer Stage in Palanga, Lithuania, were demolished without understanding their aesthetic, social and technological values. Or many valuable concrete structures and raw surfaces were painted or plastered, based on the excuse of poor labor skills and shortage of materials during the construction in Soviet time. And it naturally raises a question of what to do with objects that are prominent as architectural or urban solutions, but the labour or material quality is poor (for example iconic Vilnius Culture and Sports Hall)? Another issue is mass housing areas in Lithuania, which were developed using precast panel houses mostly. Are they worth to be preserved or are they just grey concrete boxes similar everywhere? Taking all mentioned issues above, value assessment of concrete architecture is carried out using a theoretical matrix - in one direction, 3 value criteria are indicated: aesthetic, technological, and social; and in the other direction 3 different scales of the object are analysed: large (urban solutions), medium (building) and small (details, materiality). Valuable features of the concrete architecture of different typologies are sought in the interaction of these parameters. Such evaluation methodology helps to reveal the cultural significance of concrete architecture, from urban solutions to details; from aesthetic and technological innovations to a social dimension. In order to justify the evaluation methodology, it is tested on the prominent objects of the concrete architecture of different typologies in Lithuania.

Keywords: modern heritage, value, concrete, conservation

Conference Title: ICCRRP 2023: International Conference on Concrete Restoration, Repair and Protection
Conference Location: Istanbul, Türkiye
Conference Dates: August 17-18, 2023