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Version: Published Version

Article:

Dogan, H.A. orcid.org/0000-0003-3413-0199 (2018) Süsleme gerçekten bir suç mudur: modern hareket'de süsleme kullanımı. Kocaeli Üniversitesi Mimarlık ve Yaşam Dergisi, 3 (1). pp. 113-127. ISSN 2564-6109

<https://doi.org/10.26835/my.351351>

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Is Ornament a Crime? Ornament Usage in The Modern Movement and Its Impact on Society's Perception: Case study of Kaunas

Huriye Armağan DOĞAN^{1*}

ABSTRACT

The relationship between ornament and architecture has had a symbiotic structure for centuries. However, the link between ornament and architecture was disrupted after the emergence of the Modern Movement (International Style) with its non-ornamented façades in the architectural sphere. Nevertheless, there are unique examples of the Modern Movement around the globe which contain ornamentation and traditional materials. One of the examples of this architectural style with ornamentation can be found in the city of Kaunas in Lithuania, which was added to UNESCO's tentative list in 2017. This article investigates the impact of ornamentation on architecture and, furthermore, how cultural memory and cultural elements affect the perception of the society by a case study of Kaunas.

Keywords: Ornament, Modern Movement. Memento Value, Kaunas

Süsleme Bir Suç mudur? Süsleme Kullanımının Modern Hareket ve Toplumsal Algı Üzerindeki Etkisi: Kaunas Örneği

ÖZ

Süsleme ve mimari arasındaki ilişki yüzyıllardan beri süregelen simbiyotik bir yapıya sahiptir. Fakat aralarındaki bağ, yirminci yüzyılın başında ortaya çıkan ve "Modern Hareket" olarak da adlandırılan Uluslararası Üslub'a ait süslemeden arınmış cephelerin mimarlık alanında görülmeye başlamasıyla büyük ölçüde kesintiye uğramıştır. Yine de, dünyada süsleme ve geleneksel malzemeler içeren Modern Hareket'e ait benzersiz örnekler mevcuttur. Bu örneklerden biri de 2017 yılında UNESCO'nun Kültürel Miras Aday Listesi'ne giren Litvanya'nın Kaunas şehridir. Bu makale süslemenin mimari üzerindeki etkisini ve kültürel bellek ile kültürel elementlerin toplumsal algıyı nasıl etkilediğini Kaunas örneğinde incelemektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Süsleme, Modern Hareket, Hatıra Değeri, Kaunas

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Gönderim Tarihi: 11.11.2017

Kabul Tarihi: 20.03.2018

1. INTRODUCTION

For over a century, especially after industrialisation, and after the establishment of the Modern Movement (which emphasises functionality), architectural historians have been discussing the usage of ornament on the façades of buildings. The moral resistance to ornamentation found its most vehement attempt in Austrian architect Adolf Loos, who in 1908 published an essay against decoration called "Ornament and Crime." The Oxford English dictionary defines crime as an action or omission which constitutes an offence. However, is ornament really a crime? Is usage of ornament disrespectful or does it represent an offence to the buildings or their function?

As Ulrich Conrads states, when Adolf Loos came back from the United States in 1896, he brought back a remark of Louis Sullivan: *"it could only benefit us if, for a time, we were to abandon ornament and concentrate entirely on the erection of buildings that were finely shaped and charming in their sobriety"* (Conrads, 1971, p. 19). In his essay, Loos used the argument that ornament was hampering nothing less than cultural evolution and human progress. He stated that ornament was a waste of manpower, health, materials, and capital, and furthermore, *"In a highly productive nation, the ornament is no longer a natural product of its culture, and therefore represents backwardness or even a degenerative tendency."* (Loos, 1908, p. 33). However, it is also possible to regard what Loos said from another point of view. Loos emphasises that ornament is no longer a natural product of culture, which can be understood to mean that the ornaments which were used in the early 20th century did not reflect the culture or establish a bridge between the past and present, and furthermore, they were overused.

However, the overreaction towards ornament in the Modern Movement has its roots in the Industrial Revolution and its impact on the emergence of eclectic approaches on architecture in the following century. By the effect of the Industrial Revolution, big crowds of people started to move from the countryside and established a new lifestyle, and furthermore, new industrial cities. As Leonardo Benevolo states, in these new cities, there was nothing beautiful and people needed to bring back the beauty and peace to the new establishments (Benevolo, 1971, p.3). Therefore, eclectic approaches started to appear in architectural history. As Elvan Erkmén states, in this new era, people did not establish genuine styles, but they preferred to copy the meaning of beauty and culture from the former civilisations (Erkmén, 1998, p.14). However, it is possible to assert that the core of architecture is an eclectic act. Furthermore, people started to create their shelters by analysing and imitating nature in the first place. Although, in this period, the approach of imitating the historical buildings and elements was not selective, moreover, not directly related to the culture where it is implemented, they were just copies of the past.

As a result, the architecture of the 20th century was born from a reaction towards ornaments, furthermore, towards traditional elements and materials. As Nikos Salingaros states, along with the many other changes that came with the industrialisation of the building process in the 20th century, traditional form languages around the world were lost (Salingaros, 2006, p.222). Developments in construction technology and engineering, and

in building materials such as steel, iron and plate glass, culminated in a style which is functional, and this changed the way people see design. Therefore, the form languages that were used in the previous approaches underwent a transformation. However, the aim of the Modern Movement was not establishing a style, but more about revitalising the influences in design itself, and as a result, developing a language which would not be an individual, and can be implemented universally. Therefore, it focused on defining transformations in building design, which involved changes in the traditional forms, materials and construction techniques of the past.

However, transformations in building design which involved changes in traditional forms led to another consequence in the contemporary perspective, which is its impact on the perception of society of the language of the Modern Movement. When the surfaces of the Modern Movement are scrutinised, the sensation they give is not individuality, but more of an expression of universality. In that regard, it might be possible to assert that the Modern Movement has achieved the aim it was focusing on. Conversely, it also establishes a feeling in society that the heritage of the Modern Movement does not have memento value which would help people to connect themselves with the construction.

Even though the public spaces and the solutions of the Modern Movement are successful, they do not have the effect of site-specificness or authenticity. Thus, it proposes an architecture which is possible to implant anywhere in the world; moreover, it affects the perception of beauty since it is not designed for the society which is experiencing the Modern Movement. As a result, the language the Modern Movement is using has no meaning for people which could help them with establishing a bonding and place attachment. Besides, the first impression people get from the Modern Movement does not signify the feeling that it is cultural heritage.

In addition to understanding what cultural heritage is in the perception of society, it is important to elaborate what are the indicators which affect people to qualify artefacts as cultural heritage. As Michel Rautenberg states, cultural heritage can either be heritage by designation, or heritage by appropriation (Rautenberg, 1998 p.282). However, in most cases the contribution of the perception of society is omitted. In that regard, the Modern Movement is an intriguing case in the architectural sphere, because while it has been evaluated as cultural heritage by the experts, the perception of non-experts differs.

In that regard, this paper investigates the role of the usage of ornament by applying it to the Kaunas dialect of the Modern Movement to understand how society evaluates cultural heritage. It begins by examining the definition and characteristics of ornament in architecture. This is followed by the explanation of the general background of the historical aspects of the formation of the Kaunas dialect of the Modern Movement and the peculiarity of its interpretation. The paper then discusses a survey which has been implemented to a focus group for understanding the impact of ornaments on the perception of society and analyses its results.

2. USAGE OF ORNAMENT

Encyclopedia Britannica Online defines ornament in architecture as: any element added to an otherwise merely structural form, usually for purposes of decoration or embellishment (Kuiper, 2007). However, in history, ornament has not just been used for decoration but also for expressing the culture and the traditions of a culture. Furthermore, ornaments also are the characteristics of an architecture which easily communicates with a wide range of people. As a result, the ornament is the contemplation of the way society communicates, with the accumulation of shared culture and memory. As Kevin Lynch states, *"Every citizen has had long associations with some part of his city, and his image is soaked in memories and meanings."* (Lynch, 1960, p.1). Therefore, people have the need to attach memories and meaning for perceiving the city. This also holds for the perception of a single building, and this can be achieved by the usage of ornaments. Memories have an important impact on the establishment of culture, and culture grows by knowledge, experience and the values of a community. Furthermore, it is also closely connected to the region and the environment. Therefore, societies tend to establish characteristics which are connected with the beliefs and the values in the areas they exist in.

The most specific example to provide of the expression of culture and regional elements might be Greek architecture and the ornaments which have been used on the facades of their buildings. The acanthus foliage that is commonly seen in Greek architecture is related to the flora of Mediterranean. Furthermore, the meander motif that can be seen on Greek and Roman architecture is based on the Maíandros River which is in the Aegean region of Turkey. Consequently, the patterns which have been used for ornament can vary depending on the region where it is located. Therefore, ornaments have the effect of identifying and determining the construction they are on. As social psychology specialist Vlad Petre Glăveanu explains in his research, ornament has different psychological functions, such as its meaning for individuals and societies (Glăveanu, 2014, p. 87). Therefore, ornaments which are related to the society or the environment they are in have the function of a cultural remark rather than just being a decorative element.

However, especially at the beginning of the last century, the usage of ornament decreased, and the topic of ornament took a prominent place in the discourse of the Modern Movement. One of the reasons why the Modern Movement was against the usage of ornament was related to the eclectic expression of it at the time, and it did not match the primary statement of "form follows function". Therefore, ornaments were damaging the form-and-function relationship. However, as James Trilling states in his book 'Ornament', the ornament is an art we add to art (Trilling, 2003, p.21). Hence, it is part of a façade which gives visual pleasure to the observers, as well as visual communication about the content of the surface. Contemporary usage of ornament in that regard might even be accepted in the discourse of the Modern Movement, since the patterns which are being used mostly do not destroy the overall composition, and they are usually repeated patterns which do not counteract the design.

Nevertheless, the usage of ornament still remains as a problematic and critical topic in the contemporary perspective even though it has a huge design potential. As Deniz Balık and Açalıya Allmer state, ornament has not emerged in contemporary architecture in the historical and traditional sense it used to have (Balık & Allmer, 2016, p.158). In the historical context, ornament was closely related to the style that the construction was representing. On the other hand, in contemporary architecture, ornament can be used as an impression for the observers, and furthermore as an expression of the architect. Moreover, a construction can be an ornament itself related to its function. When ornament is used as the representation of a function, the plasticity it gives to the building can develop more public attention and can create a form that society would remember. As architect Jacques Herzog states in the interview for *El Croquis*, “*We do not need to explain the necessity of ornament anymore, or apologize for a decorative detail in our works, since ornament becomes one with the form of our building*” (Chevrier & Herzog, 2006, p.22-42). Therefore, the usage of ornament in contemporary understanding is more about the form of the building, and furthermore it is a part of the design rather than an element which establishes beauty on the façades.

However, usage of ornament on façades has not just been used for establishing beauty in the past either. Ornament was the reflection of social and psychological contexts. Architectural ornament might not be a structural element which would affect the stability of the construction or conveyance of the system, although it is an element which gives meaning and identity to the building. Furthermore, it has the effect of adjusting the proportion. Although, James Gibbs asserted that beauty in architecture is only possible on a surface that is plain and not ornamented, because ornamentation affects the proportion which establishes the beauty (Kruft, 1994, p, 356). However, it is possible to use ornaments while at the same time keeping the beauty and proportion. As Nikos Salingaros explains, the perception of architectural scales and the sensation they give to people are affected by ornaments. Moreover, ornaments establish an emotional and visual coherence. He states that according to system theory in architecture, higher scales depend mainly on all the lower scales, and if we eliminate any architectural scale for which we can think of no apparent functional argument, then we deny the coherence of the structure as a whole (Salingaros, 2006, p. 78). Repetition and rhythm are essential for defining an attractive architectural façade and jumping from larger to smaller scales creates an adverse effect. Ornaments fill in that gap and establish the transition between the scales. Although, while achieving that connection, ornaments also need to be used in an organised way, because ornaments that are overused can cause chaos instead of richness. As a result, ornaments on a building have the effect of flourishing and adding individuality to buildings. Moreover, they make the building unique.

The usage of ornament could be seen as merely adding decorative elements on facades and not adding anything to the functionality of the building. However, it gives a meaning to the building by introducing personalisation and uniqueness, and furthermore, helps people to remember. As Paul Connerton states, forgetting is more than just an individual's inability to remember; it is the complicated process that first affects the anonymisation of local and geographical space in the eyes of individuals (Connerton, 2009, p. 40). Therefore, for not

forgetting, people also need signs which would remind them of their past, and ornaments and cultural symbols can achieve this goal. Moreover, the symbolic aspect of ornament can also be used to represent the function of a building. Charles Jencks argues that an iconic building has to carry plural meanings and mixed metaphors to continue its distinctive presence as a landmark. He asserts that attaching signs to a flat surface, as in the case of the decorated shed, merges multiple meanings with functional and aesthetic dimensions, and multi-layered ornamental façades can represent this instead (Jencks, 2011, p.15). Therefore, ornaments are not just decorative elements, but they also express meaning and function. Also, even though they are usually associated with the plasticity of buildings, they also establish a relationship between the structure and the urban fabric of the area.

As a result, when buildings do not display ornament or cultural elements, it can be stated that they do not incorporate with the geographical values of the environment, consequently, they lose the characteristics needed for being functional for the people who are living in that area. However, these effects of ornaments have not been acknowledged in the language of the Modern Movement, which is related to its aim of achieving a universal style which can be applied all over the world. As a consequence, the usage of ornament has been disregarded in the design of façades. However, in the course of the Modern Movement, different dialects occurred which used cultural impressions, while adopting the universal values. Some of these dialects managed to establish new languages in architecture involving adaptive design methods, which contain traditional materials and the usage of ornaments.

The city of Kaunas in Lithuania, which was added to UNESCO's Tentative List in 2017, is one of the best examples of establishing its own language by the usage of ornamentation on its surfaces. This characteristic of the dialect of Kaunas makes it exceptional as cultural heritage of the Modern Movement, not only for experts but also for society.

3. THE MODERN MOVEMENT AND ITS REFLECTION ON KAUNAS

The city of Kaunas turned into the temporary capital of Lithuania in the interwar period, between 1918 and 1940, due to the capital Vilnius being invaded and occupied several times. As a result, Lithuanian authorities temporarily transferred the government to Kaunas in this period. Transferring the capital to Kaunas had an impact on the city which initiated an immense amount of constructional developments. As it has been defined in UNESCO's tentative list description, Kaunas had been a modest Imperial Russian garrison town, and it suddenly acquired new importance with its new status as capital. Therefore, this provided an impulse to accelerate its integration into the political, social and cultural context of interwar Europe, through material and non-material forms, such as architecture, diplomacy, culture, and education. As Giedre Jankeviciute states, in this period, civil servants and professionals such as doctors, lawyers, artists and politicians started to reside in the city, which created the need for new headquarters of the institutions and housing for their employees (Jankeviciute, 2017, p.9). This resulted in construction of all the new government as well as the residential buildings in Kaunas. At the time, the

dominant architectural style in the world was the Modern Movement. Therefore, Kaunas used the expression of the Modern Movement; however, it used its own interpretation.

As Vaidas Petrulis states, even though Kaunas was the capital at the time, the temporary nature of the process has never been forgotten, and Kaunas established its own expression which was a combination of the Modern Movement and the national style (Petrulis, 2013, p.115). In that regard, the interpretation of Kaunas differs from the other Modern Movement expressions, since most buildings which have been constructed in the world by the influence of the Modern Movement cannot integrate with their environment and the existing cultural elements. However, Kaunas Modernism was incorporating rather than contradicting with traditional styles and features. It adapted to the urban fabric, and it did not establish a contrast with the landscape. (Figure 1)



Fig 1: Kaunas Central Post Office 1930-1932
(ref: Huriye Armağan DOĞAN, 2018)

As a result, it created a different style which is respectful of the environment while keeping the continuity of it. Except for the regionalist approaches in the Modern Movement where the architects are emphasising the use of local materials, in the example of Kaunas, it is possible to see the ornaments, which are the traces of the cultural memory of the society in a modernist structure. Moreover, there is the usage of patterns from the vernacular architecture and wood carving impressions made by utilisation of plaster. (Figure 2, Figure 3, Figure 4) Therefore, these components establish a different character and language in their interpretation



Fig 2: Detail of Central Post Office 1930-1932
(Figure 2: Huriye Armağan DOĞAN, 2017)



Fig 3: Shutter from N.Lithuania (Ref 3:
Huriye Armağan DOĞAN, 2017)



Fig 4: Pažanga Company 1933
(Ref 4: Huriye Armağan DOĞAN, 2017)

It can be stated that the expression in Kaunas originates from the fact that a remarkable number of buildings constructed in the interwar period have the impact of individuality and authenticity. When buildings with the expression of Modernism were erected in Berlin, most of them were in the form of social housing. Therefore, the sensitivity of the users was disregarded. As a result, the architectural style which had its emphasis on the users and functionality for the users failed to fulfil the real needs. Furthermore, it established a language which was an average interpretation that can accommodate various people. This was one of the essentialities at the time, related to the need for an immense number of dwellings because of the World War, and furthermore, to the problems caused by the extensive immigration to the city from the countryside. As a result, the architecture was economically feasible, however, it did not pay attention to the peculiarities of the location.

Kaunas also experienced the impact of the war and the building boost related to turning the small town into a capital. However, architects still managed to design in a way which managed to be site-specific. Moreover, the buildings which were constructed at the time were predominantly small-scale constructions rather than massive complexes, which could have provided the advantage of working directly with the architects. As Paulius Laurinaitis states, the new tendencies of modernism that spread through the most of the Western World after World War I soon found their way into the young Republic of Lithuania. Local architects that were returning home after their studies in Western European universities brought back the new architectural ideas and transformed them into distinctive local form, that was later named Kaunas School of Architecture (Laurinaitis, 2017). Therefore, even though most architects who produced artefacts in this period studied abroad, they did have local roots, which established their knowledge about and their sensitivity towards the

cultural memory of the society in their designs. As a result, it is easy to trace the impact of memory on the surfaces of Kaunas; furthermore, the buildings that were constructed reflect identity without rupturing the past, which is affecting the perception of the society in the contemporary perspective as well. For understanding the impact of ornamentation and cultural materials on the perception of people in the language of the Modern Movement a survey has been performed.

4. SURVEY

This survey aims to analyse the indicators of the perceptions and attitudes of people towards cultural heritage of the Modern Movement and to see if usage of ornament has an impact on it. The survey was designed to be implemented by interviews and a questionnaire to test participants' awareness of their surroundings and to investigate the factors which have had an impact on their discernment. It is qualitative research with the participation of 30 people.

4.1 Participation & Procedures

A total of 30 participants took part in the survey through one to one interviews either by interactive online communication tools or face to face. Participants were heterogeneous regarding age, which ranged between 20–50, and heterogeneous regarding the places they are from - Lithuania, Turkey, and a sample group from different parts of Europe. Participants in the survey were also selected from different education levels; additionally, only 10% of the participants were chosen from the field of architecture or fields related to cultural heritage. Twelve pairs of photographs have been demonstrated to the participants, and they have been asked to choose the ones which they would identify as cultural heritage in their own perception. The option of choosing a, b, both a and b, and neither a nor b was given to them.

Notations

In the survey, Variables are;

a – represents the people who have chosen the first photograph;

b – represents the people who have chosen the second photograph;

ab – represents the people who have chosen both photographs;

n – represents the people who have chosen neither photograph.

4.2 Methodology

The survey is a questionnaire prepared by using photographs of 12 pairs, in which each pair aims to examine the perception of people about cultural heritage and the specific indicators and components they contemplate in their decision. The survey follows the methodology of Galindo and Rodriguez on environmental aesthetics and psychological well-being, where they implemented the extensive use of photographs to test respondents' awareness of their environment (Galindo, 2000, p. 15). However, in this research, the awareness of heritage and elicitation of perceived notions to assess heritage have been investigated.

The pictorial material was selected from a collection of photographs of Germany, Turkey and Lithuania, taken by the author or from online resources. The order of appearance of the photographs was decided by different properties of the constructions, i.e. function, ornamentation, material. Whole images of the questionnaire can be found in Figure 5.

An example of the usage of merged images in more detail is demonstrated in Figure 6.



Fig 5: The comparisons which have been demonstrated



Fig 6: Example of the comparison sheet in the questionnaire which has been used for the analysis.
1) Turkey 2) Lithuania

4.3 Analysis

With the aim of achieving the research objectives of this study, two types of analysis were carried out: (1) First, an analysis of the perception of cultural heritage and if ornaments are affecting the perception of people; (2) Second, an analysis for observing the impact of knowledge, information and association on judgement.

- 1) Chart 1, presented below, shows the results obtained by analysing the percentages of a, b, ab, and n for each pair of photographs, which have been demonstrated for evaluating the perception of cultural heritage. Some interesting data can be observed in the chart. (Chart 1)

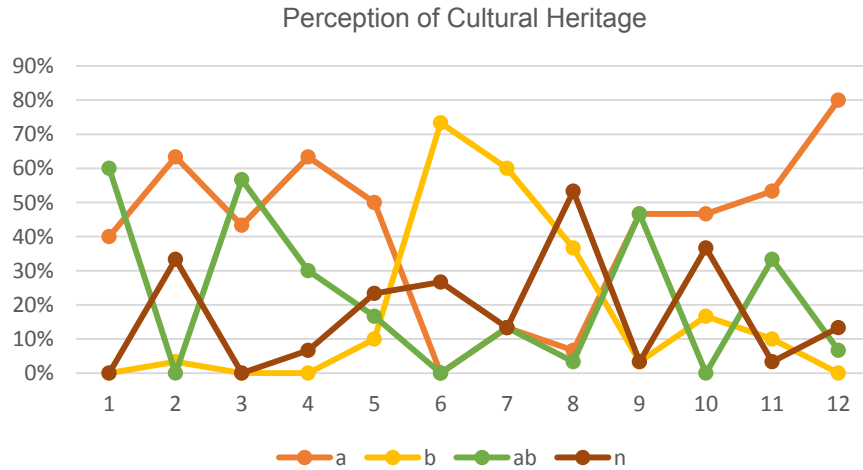


Chart 1: Perception of cultural heritage according to the answers of the participants

According to the chart, as can be examined in pairs 4 and 5, people tend to choose a (building which contains ornamentation on its façade), rather than b (building with a Modern Movement expression) when they are evaluating the structure as cultural heritage. Furthermore, as it can be examined in pairs 11 and 12, people are more likely to perceive traditional materials such as wood as cultural heritage rather than buildings which are built with more modern techniques. Additionally, patina on the surfaces has an impact while evaluating the heritage. If one of the photographs in pairs contained more patina on its façade, people had the propensity to select that photograph, rather than the other one.

2) Chart 2 shows the primary results obtained from the subset of participants who are from Lithuania. It is based on the analysis of the percentages of a, b, ab, and n for each pair of photographs, which have been demonstrated for evaluating the perception of cultural heritage like in Chart 1; however, in this chart, the participants are all from Lithuania. (Chart 2)

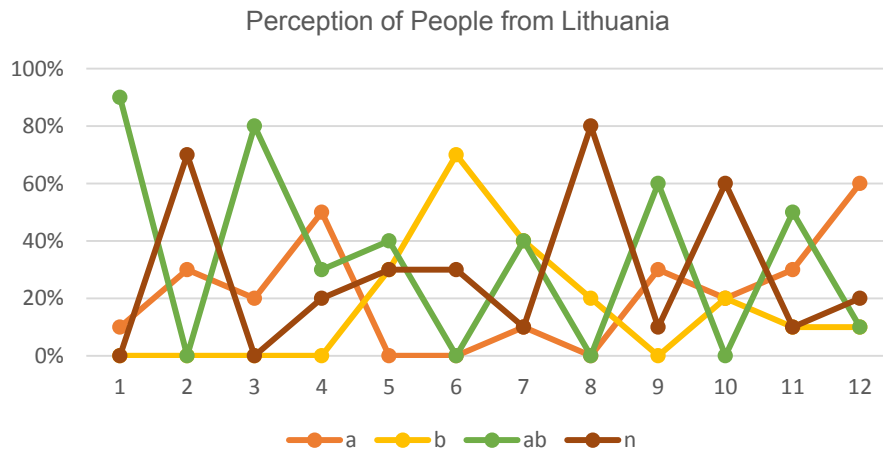


Chart 2: Perception of people from Lithuania on evaluating cultural heritage

According to the analysis, Lithuanian people are more aware of Modern Movement heritage by the impact of the education and the information given to them. Also, as most of the people stated, by the impact of the ornaments, they find it easier to associate themselves with the buildings. They can identify Modern Movement buildings in Kaunas and evaluate them as cultural heritage. Although they are more aware of the buildings which they have been informed about in their environment, they cannot quickly identify the other buildings with the same approach.

5. CONCLUSION

As the literature review of this paper suggests, people tend to feel a familiarity towards places and buildings where they have memories, or which carry symbols related to their own cultures. Furthermore, personalising and taking possession of the environment creates bonds with cultural identity and familiarity for people which makes it comfortable to live in. Therefore, it is advisable to use patterns and symbols that people can associate with while expressing themselves in an environment.

One of the ways to use patterns and pattern language in architecture for the expression of identity is by the usage of ornaments and traditional materials. Even though it might seem as if ornaments are only for decoration and for beautifying façades, they have other properties that they add to buildings, such as: identifying, locating, attention guiding, establishing the proportion and organising. Although ornamentation has all these different properties that it adds to architecture, there was a decrease in the usage of them and of traditional materials in the Modern Movement by the main discourse of the style. As a result, the Modern Movement produced a style which has a paucity of memento value.

Memento value in architecture is essential, and it is a necessity for people to establish the time and space correlation. Moreover, the correlation between the time and space creates a temporal continuity for human beings, which results in stabilising their sense of identity and sense of life. In that regard, this characteristic of the Modern Movement developed an attitude in the society which emanates the perception of the Modern Movement not being regarded as cultural heritage.

According to the survey results, people have the tendency to evaluate cultural heritage based on the patina, the usage of ornaments and the material of the façades. On pair 2, 63% of the participants chose the ornamented building over the heritage listed building of the Modern Movement, and on pair 5, 50% of the participants made the same choice. Also, in pair 7, 60% of participants evaluated the building with the ornaments as cultural heritage.

On the other hand, when the answers of the people from Lithuania are analysed on pair 5, 40%, and on pair 7, also 40% of participants evaluated the building with the ornaments as cultural heritage, even though they had the information that the other building is cultural heritage.

As a result, the usage of ornament, as well as other elements which reflect culture, creates an impact on the perception of people when they are evaluating cultural heritage. Kaunas managed to develop an architectural dialect in the Modern Movement era with characteristics of postmodern architecture such as the sensitivity towards the region and the environment it is implemented in. Furthermore, the society of Kaunas is well-informed and aware of their heritage by the knowledge available to them. However, the paucity in the use of ornamentation in the Modern Movement still has an influence on a broader scale and in the perception of people, which makes it hard for people to evaluate the structures of the Modern Movement as cultural heritage. Therefore, the ornament is not a crime, but it is an element on building surfaces which makes the structure more meaningful for society.

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