

## Chapter 2

# Architectural Concept: Location Versus Tradition of a Design Philosophy

**Abstract** In globalized world, the geographical location of the buildings is losing its impact on architecture, as places are losing their identity. What instead begins to play an important role is an origin of the design concept behind architecture. It is largely determined by the creative individuality of a designer, which, in turn, is never a completely independent—self-induced feature. What should be pointed out here is the crucial role of architectural education. In the globalized architecture, academic tradition is behind the actions of the creator: design philosophy, understanding and interpreting the design process, sensitivity, ethics.

Defining the territorial framework in the research is commonly justified by the belief that the location of the building is the primary factor influencing the characteristics of its architecture. This issue is closely connected with the theme of the spatial context—understood as the direct environment of the building and the cultural context of its creation. Contemporary architecture is subject to currents of the global flow of information, becoming part of Castells’ “space of flows” (Castells 2007a, b). Its formal features are decreasingly dependant on tradition, spatial and geographic context, and they are increasingly imprinted with global media patterns and design trends. In the description of architecture, which is global in its nature, numerous examples of which are cited by the author of this work, in addition to the geographical coverage of the developed content, one should also pay attention to:

1. mobility of architects,
2. internationalization of the creative environment,
3. internationalization of the architectural education.

Adaptation of architecture to the surrounding conditions over the centuries has had various causes and consequences. Traditionally, they included availability of technology, materials, climatic conditions, cultural context. Modernity has brought mastering of technologies allowing to build similar forms in various conditions, unification and globalization of the market of materials, making the builders independent from resources of the specific location. Since the nineteenth century the discourse on architecture and spatial context has been expanded by the doctrines

of conservation issues, which implied a conscious adjustment, contextualization of newly designed objects. Not all theorists and practitioners continue this approach. At the same time, in the centre of this discussion is the creator—the architect and his personal relationship with the place. The question is what the project is better defined by—the tradition of architectural thought, philosophy from which the creator is derived or the place—*locus*—is the most appropriate.

Determination of the geographical boundaries in the research on architecture is considered to be a fundamental issue. It is often understood as equivalent with giving information about the identity of the place, tradition, culture of creation and implementation of urban or architectural design. This approach is indeed true when dealing with issues of historical architecture. The place defined the availability of materials, materials defined the building technology, which in turn affected the applied architectural detail. Historical architecture was obviously subject to a stylistic evolution and international influences—the locations were, however, so much separated from each other that the influence progressed relatively slowly. Over the years the patterns that came from afar were changing, mixing with the native stylistic solutions. And these objects, inscribed in the landscape and fabric of the city, were studied by the first students of the architecture courses and schools in the past centuries. Drawing on existing models formed the basis of research methodology associated with the beginnings of the architectural education. The study was based on the analysis of objects in an authentic context during European journeys underlying the architectural education. Sketches of construction forms and details made by the then students survived, *inter alia*, in sketchbooks and documentation preserved till now. A perfect example is a prominent Scottish architect from the Art Nouveau era, Charles Rennie Macintosh (Robertson 2002). A careful study of observation of context and coupling of architecture with the surrounding space in the case of his works arouse admiration—they explain the criterion of a place and cultural context as a basis for discussion about the quality of historical architecture.

Today, however, the increasing number of realizations elude to be classified by location. Historically, the creator of the work was usually associated by his or her origin with the community which decided to erect an architectural object. In the case of architects—visitors from foreign countries, the country of conducting investment was at least a temporary place of residence of the creator—so he was no stranger to the social environment. Culture, language, traditional places influenced the authors, encouraging them to borrowing and creative use of local motifs. The need for the use of local building materials, the use of the services of local craftsmen in the construction process—led to the mixing of technologies for erecting of buildings. Spatial concepts and decorative motifs could be imported—for example, a wonderful renaissance of Cracow—despite the Italian roots—it had also native features. Nineteenth-century architects working in Cracow, who finished schools in Vienna and Munich, also imported styles processing them, however, in their own way—and under the influence of the local culture. For these reasons, defining a territorial framework for objects of great historical architecture provided information on a wide cultural context of the work.

Today, the range of activities of creators has been significantly extended. Restrictions for beginning works on the project no longer lie in the geographical distances, they were substantially limited by the widespread use of information and communication technologies (ICT), and the availability and generalization of air transport. Locations of new design projects are of secondary importance, also due to the tradition of contracting local architects<sup>1</sup> to carry out some design work and supervision. The flow of duties and commands does not need a hierarchical order—it is more like a collaboration of entities involved in a common process of realization. This solution is more natural since architectural offices have always had the problem of coordination of many industries—the institution of local architects is another link.

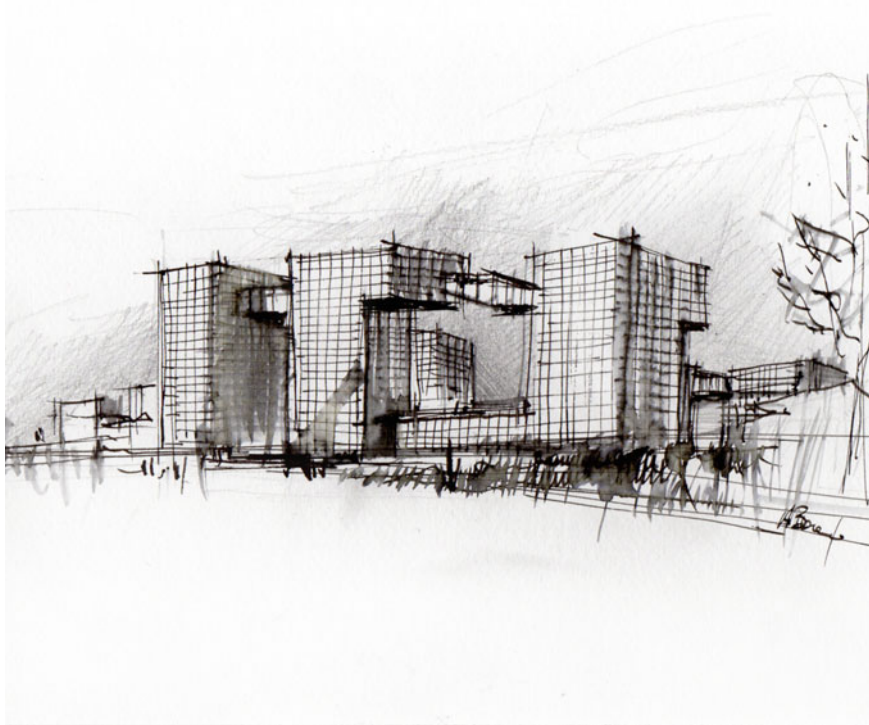
The possibility of quick displacement limits the impact of culture of the location on the Creator, and, unfortunately, it also reduces his or her knowledge of that place. An architect evaluates the characteristics of the surrounding area from the point of view of the visitor—tourist. Interpretations of the local architecture, which are often the element around which the marketing framework of a new investment is built, may prove to be shallow and borrowings—superficial. This is the case, in the opinion of the author, of the international airport in Beijing, designed by Norman Foster. The motif of the red columns visible in pictures, dominant in the external composition of the solid and in its interior along with a symmetrical system are present, among others, in the architecture of the Forbidden City. Formal quotes, the use of symbolism of colours, are very direct and obvious. They are based on a simple processing of the formal characteristics of the most popular monuments in China.

Similar situations occur frequently and result from expectations of *consumers* of architecture. The latter are interested in the simultaneous stressing the identity and culture of the place and in belonging to an elite global network of business, economic connections, whose style is synonymous with modernity and progress. These objectives are not always moving in one direction. They embody the contrast occurring between what is global and local. An investor with public capital is usually eager to highlight the references to the past and tradition because it is required by the culture and the local community, big business is looking for references to global design and universal themes. Nonetheless, both the authorities of bigger and smaller towns think that having a building bearing the name of a well-known creator of world architecture opens the door to an exclusive club of big cities—it is an indicator of belonging to the “great world”—which stands in opposition to the sense of familiarity and identity of the place (Figs. 2.1 and 2.2).

An important element in determining the nature of the global market architecture is a multiculturalism of creative environments. As in other areas, the custom of employing a multi-national project team serves to prepare for operations in foreign markets. The basic requirement is knowledge of the specificity associated with conducting business in other countries and cultures. Employment of people speaking the language of the place for the project realization, people with knowledge of the legal regulations, cultural specificity is increasingly becoming a necessity—like

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<sup>1</sup>*Local architects*—Architectural office located in the project realization site.



**Fig. 2.1** Buildings designed by the architectural office Steven Holl Architects: linked Hybrid apartment (Beijing, China, 2009), Simmons Hall, Massachusetts Institute of Technology (Cambridge, USA, 1999–2002). In these projects strikes the similarity of spatial solutions, formal solutions and architectural details. *Photo A. Bonenberg*

employment of specialists to perform specific tasks. Impact of the creative environment on the result of the design work is significant. In the international team of designers occurs the exchange of experiences, both professional and philosophical ones. Both elements affect the applied spatial solutions. Shaping of meeting places, interaction space, working space, residence depends principally on traditions, culture and beliefs. In the project teams we deal with merging and imposition of frequently very different ideas. The privacy issue or family model are variously perceived in diverse places—and these factors influence the development of residential space. The business culture is also different—hence the different schemes of working space. The author experienced these differences working in the office Renzo Piano in Genoa, in an international creative environment (Figs. 2.3 and 2.4). Apart from having to choose concepts that were satisfactory to a designer, there was the dispute of the geographical diversity of implementation and issues relating to local climate and local legislation. The objective of establishment of international project teams in was:



**Fig. 2.2** Simmons Hall, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Cambridge, USA. *Photo A. Bonenberg*

1. obtaining the adequate statement of skills: professional, language competence.
2. assignment of roles in which the specific qualifications are useful,
3. ensuring and facilitating the possibility of proper communication in the team—including the linguistic dimension; employees should be able to speak a common language and should be encouraged to a permanent use of it on the group forum. Lack of such solution reduces the efficiency of the group.

A large-scale professional mobility of architects is confirmed by statistical data contained in the atlas of architecture by Phaidon.<sup>2</sup> Data on global relationships between architects and implementations indicate a particularly high proportion of architectural offices located in Europe in shaping the face of a world architecture. Out of 653 cited authors, 323 operate on the Old Continent, at the same time, out of

<sup>2</sup>“The Phaidon Atlas of twenty first Century World Architecture” page 10. The statistics in this publication can be considered reliable because of the comprehensive scope of the subject elaboration. Accurate, because the book is the quintessence of world architecture.

**Table 2.1** Expansiveness of architectural offices

Europe 323 design offices	• 154 intercontinental projects
Asia (a large dominance of Japan) 113 design offices	• 33 intercontinental projects
North America 97 design offices	• 37 intercontinental projects
Oceania 43 design offices	• 4 intercontinental projects
South America 52 design offices	• 3 intercontinental projects
Africa 25 design offices	• 3 intercontinental projects

Source “The Phaidon Atlas of Twenty First Century World Architecture”, page 10

233 researched intercontinental projects, as many as 154 were implemented by the European offices (Table 2.1).

Table 2.1 shows that Europe is unrivalled in terms of influence through export of design concepts, the subsequent places are occupied by Japan and North America.



**Fig. 2.3** The architectural office Renzo Piano Building Workshop: facade, teamwork space on the lowest terrace of the office. The glass facade and sliding wood panels used for exhibition of prints and drawings which enables discussion of the project in a broad group of people. *Photo A. Bonenberg*





**Fig. 2.4** Renzo Piano Building Workshop, model workshop. The construction of mock-ups is an essential design tool of Renzo Piano. *Photo A. Bonenberg*

In the situation when the location of the project has been losing its importance, what begins to play a more important role is an origin of the design concept. It is largely determined by the creative individuality of a designer. This, in turn, is never a completely independent—self-induced feature. What should be pointed out here is the crucial role of architectural education. In the global architecture, tradition has the greater importance than a geographic location, since tradition is behind the actions of the creator: understanding the design process, sensitivity, ethics, sensitivity to context. What has a significant impact on the quality of the international architecture in the era of the dominance of Western culture are precisely universities—schools of architecture. In the study conducted among the students of the Faculty of Architecture of the Technical University of Poznan 98%<sup>3</sup> of respondents indicated a strong influence of the “master”—teacher on the effects of their own, individual creativity. According to the author tracing and examination of the “creative thought”

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<sup>3</sup>A statistical survey was conducted on a sample of 430 students in two age groups—in the second year and fourth year of study during the summer semester 2011.

gives us a better idea of the circumstances and philosophy behind the creation of a work of architecture than the use of a geographical key. University centres, through the selection of staff, international cast of professors, elaboration of the adequate, up-to-date and modern *curriculum* of the taught subjects and implementation of the educational process, bear part of the responsibility for the quality of the designed space and globalization of the stylistic trends (Bonenberg 2013). Their basic duty is to shape a responsible attitude in relation to:

1. past: heritage of the spatial context,
2. present: concept, philosophy, available technologies, adequacy of material solutions,
3. future: adoption of issues of variability in architecture.

An important feature of European and American architectural education centres are mutual contacts and cooperation. It can be said that the process of architecture globalization begins at the stage of education of a student. A student who participates in the universal international exchange programs—for example (Erasmus<sup>4</sup>). A student taught by professors cooperating with other centres—conducting joint scientific works and research. These trends affect the unification of a scholastic culture—a globalization which is later visible in the architectural realizations. Approximation of teaching methods, level of qualifications is a positive phenomenon. It greatly supports and facilitates the international flow of ideas and skills.

A degree of internationalization of education centres is one of the important criteria for assessing the quality of teaching.<sup>5</sup> Centres offering a high level of education receive international students. Their presence and further professional path widens the impact of the academic centre on the further practical and theoretical development of disciplines—it provides a broad impact on an international scale and raises the prestige of the University. The language issue is also one of the reasons why the culture (including architectural culture) of Anglo-Saxon countries is very influential.

One of the oldest and most famous schools of architecture is the Architectural Association in London. Graduates of this school with an unusual program and a flexible approach to knowledge include, among others, Rem Koolhaas, Zaha Hadid, Peter Cook, Peter Wilson and Julia Bolea-Wilson. Analyzing achievements of those few outstanding personalities of a contemporary architecture we can realize a wide intellectual range of the academic community—teachers and students.<sup>6</sup> The author had the opportunity to participate in the evaluation of teaching methods of

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<sup>4</sup>In the international student exchange of Erasmus Programme (European Community Action Scheme for the Mobility of University Students) has been taking part generations of students since 1994 (Socrates programme), there have been conducted ongoing activities aimed at integration and cooperation within the European Community.

<sup>5</sup>The criterion used as one of the six in the University Academic Ranking of 2011, source: “Rzeczpospolita” (the Polish newspaper).

<sup>6</sup>Both Rem Koolhaas and Zaha Hadid, after obtaining diplomas, were academic teachers at the Architectural Association School of Architecture in London.





**Fig. 2.5** Globalization in the architectural education: towards new designing forms and technologies. The inner courtyard of the London Architectural Association School of Architecture with a parametrically designed cloud installation spread out over the terrace

Architectural Association, where a very individual approach to students is applied. Systematics and distribution of courses are characterized by arrangement in blocks compared with the most European centres.<sup>7</sup> The unusual curriculum promotes the formation of avant-garde projects—with use of advanced computational methods being the primary design tool (Figs. 2.5 and 2.6).

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<sup>7</sup>A coherent system for dividing courses was developed in Europe on the basis of ECTS points, Architectural Association, School of Architecture in London does not belong to that system.



**Fig. 2.6** The annual exhibition (*summer show*) of the recognized London School of Architecture Bartlett. Photo A. Bonenberg

The statistical data relating to the architectural education in Europe show the disparities in the amount of students of architecture being formed and the number of practicing creators. It seems that this condition causes an asymmetry in the availability of architectural services and encourages to a professional migration. These disparities are significant in Europe. At the moment, the state with the highest number of students of architecture in Europe is Italy. A characteristic feature of the Italian architectural education is the emphasis on design theory and its *ex cathedra* relationship to the history.<sup>8</sup> It seems, however, that the north-European approach

<sup>8</sup>Diagnosis based on the long-term cooperation with the Dipartimento di author Progettazione dell'Architettura, Politecnico di Milano.

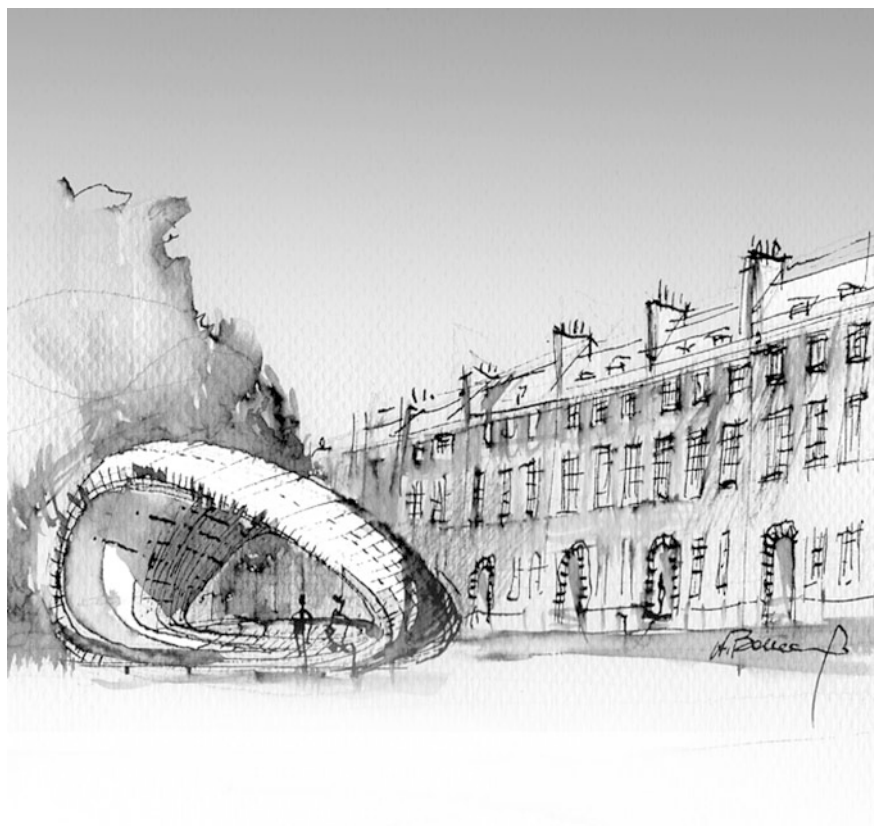
**Table 2.2** Disparities in the amount of students of architecture being formed and the number of practicing architects in Europe

ITALY	97,200 students of architecture	194 practicing architects/100,000 inhabitants
SPAIN	21,200 students of architecture	93.9 practicing architects/100,000 inhabitants
PORTUGAL	9300 students of architecture	120 practicing architects/100,000 inhabitants
(...)	(...)	(...)
POLAND	6,700 students of architecture	35.3 practicing architects/100,000 inhabitants
(...)	(...)	(...)
LICHTENSTEIN	120 students of architecture	261.6 practicing architects/100,000 inhabitants
ESTONIA	105 students of architecture	54.1 practicing architects/100,000 inhabitants
ICELAND	36 students of architecture	112.5 practicing architects/100,000 inhabitants

Source “The Phaidon Atlas of twenty first Century World Architecture” page 227

brings better results in the architectural education, and it can be described as *hands on experience*, or a practical verification of an obtained knowledge (Table 2.2).

The role of universities is important in the information society. Hirst (1995) in the article “Education and the Production of New Ideas” draws attention to the phenomenon of loss by universities of a monopoly on the transmission of information. There have been created many competing branches of economic activity devoted to this task: training courses, specialized consulting, education in the form of multimedia communication. Schools, which have traditionally played the role of information transmission—are facing the necessity of a partial redefinition of their role in the information society. Their opportunity is the fact that mass media do not create knowledge—they only recycle it and provide information. Universities, including architectural ones, should take the role of a producer of knowledge. Critical thinking, objectivity of research, innovation—herein lie the possibilities of academic centres. What has turned out important is the development of theoretical research, prototyping—creating knowledge and verifying the results. At the same time, their role as a transmitter of encyclopaedic information and images is decreasing. Images of the global architecture we can see in many sources: with the eyes of thousands of users of architectural blogs, resources of Picasa Albums (great pictures), finally, from a bird’s eye view in Google Earth. Such information can be the basis of the space analysis, but the knowledge drawn from them is superficial. A student basing only on that knowledge has a tendency to create aesthetic clichés, duplicate formal and material solutions. The architectural education should be focused on creating innovative, insightful solutions. Designs, in some of its part, should look to the future, teaching to young architects options of adaptation, response to the real needs of users.



**Fig. 2.7** DRL 10 Pavilion, Bedford Square, Architectural Association School of Architecture, London. An example of a digitally generated small architecture: a spectacular shape and experimental building material. One cannot receive it only as an exercise—a form of the object is very conducive to social behaviours, meetings during lunch breaks. The pavilion is a landmark in the cityscape. Drawing A. Bonenberg

So, if it is not the matter of connection with the place that can provide information about the philosophy, culture of creation, identity and tradition behind the work belonging to the “global architecture”—what, therefore, can?

Under the conditions of the above-mentioned high mobility of students, creators of architecture and activity of architectural offices, we know much more about the architectural work observing the tradition of a creative philosophy than analyzing its geographical placement, its location. A contemporary architecture has become less dependent on the place of origin both in terms of available technologies as well as materials and concepts. Globalization in architecture is a consequence not only of interpenetrating global stylistic trends, but also of mobility and multiculturalness of the environment of creators. The environment whose roots date back to the European and North American traditions of architectural education (Fig. 2.7).

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