

**Professional scientific sessions for art, architecture and urban planning Thursday evenings**

**Held in: Conference hall of Herampey Consulting Engineers**

**Date: 29.11.2018**

**Title: Experts' Roundtable, the architecture of past, today, tomorrow; Instruction & Research.**

**Roundtable members: Mr. M. M. Mahmoudi, Mr. H. Nasser Nassir, Mrs. A. Shahcheraqi, Mr. A. Qaffari and Mr. S. Ayvazian.**

Mr. M.M. Mahmoudi began the speech saying that during the first part they would discuss matters on instruction and research in architecture during the past years, especially before 1939, the year of foundation of fine arts faculty of University of Teheran and after it. He divided the speech sphere in the mentioned first period, arriving then to the '90s and to the last three decades. Mr. Mahmoudi said that before the beginning of academic activities, Iranian architecture had created monuments like Choqazanbil, the water mills of Shush, Takht-e Jamshid and Naqsh-e Jahan square. He posed the question if behind the architectural creations there were educational and research programs and activities, and if the general knowledge was transferred from a generation to the next, or there were just activities related to the construction?

Mr. Ayvazian was the first to answer, saying that as he knew, regarding the Safavid era, the knowledge was transferred traditionally, but of course the works couldn't be done in absence of research works. He continued, talking about a research work on Takht-e Jamshid, ordered by the ministry of Housing and Urban Development. The result of this research showed that during the construction of Takht-e Jamshid complex, a large scale research had been done by a group, before the initiation of the works, in order to coordinate the various activities in a such big construction site. As an expert on the caravanserais, he said that during his study-researches he had realized that even though the Qajar era caravanserais were the continuation of Safavid era types, but they improved in their qualities and characteristics, offering better solutions and services to the users of the complexes. In his researches Mr. Ayvazian has realized that studying 151 caravanserais just two of them have different plans compared with the majority and it shows that the final result is the conclusive process of study and research.

Talking about research and instruction Mr. Qaffari expressed the idea that these concepts have been subject to transformations, so they have different contents and meanings in different times. Mr. Qaffari believes that the success key of the Iranians in the past was the fact that their beliefs and acts proceeded in the same direction, a characteristic that had its roots in the Iranian-oriental philosophy. Regarding the historical bases, Mr. Qaffari asserted that most of them are the result of travellers' written sources that in most of the cases were not experts in the matter of architecture.

Because the travel accounts are an important source for part of the Iranian historical-architectural heritage, Mr. Ayvazian explained that most of them have been prepared by European and mostly

British, German and French travellers. In many cases their approach has not been friendly and impartial with the local people and its culture.

Continuing the speech Mr. Mahmoud asserted that at the end of 19<sup>th</sup> century there are still valuable architectural monuments, but the difference is that they are taking distance by the Iranian ancient architectural culture, copying mostly not the best samples of western society. This means that in this case too, the Europeans transmitted cultural products that didn't reflect the best of their society.

Mrs. Shahcherqhi agreed with the historical fact that the Europeans came and discovered the Iranian society through research and classification, meanwhile researchers and historians in Iran, in many cases used Arabic language to publish their studies and this fact created a cultural-scientific vacuum in Iran making it dependable by foreign sources. Talking about historical documentation, Mrs. Shacheraqhi referred to the photographic database ordered in 19<sup>th</sup> century by Qajar king Nasser-eddin, who ordered his photographers to register Iranian historical monuments. Many of these monuments don't exist anymore, so even though the registration manner was not scientific and professionally accurate, but they are an important source to study and research on an important part of the Iranian historical, artistic and architectural heritage. This is an open field for the researchers to study and illuminate part of the country and civilization heritage.

Mr. Mahmoudi believes that before the foundation of Faculty of fine arts (1939) there is a cultural confusion in Iran. It seems that what is going to be produced in the architectural field as the reflection of official positions, some kind of is wrong mixture is used to create buildings and monuments and the reason is a cultural-historical incapacity of Iranian ruling forces. Mr. Nasser Nassir agreed with this affirmation, saying that for a long time the Iranian cultural society ignored the study and research on the Iranian heritage, opening the way to a western cultural penetration in the country. It's true that during the last years Iranian theorists made important activities to study and research the Iranian architectural heritage, but the problem is not only the study of architectural heritage, the researchers must include a larger cultural sphere.

Talking about the year of foundation of the Faculty of fine arts, that in the beginning had foreign directors, or persons that have studied and are graduated in West, continue to believe in the introduction of French or Italian teaching schools, even though some of them have left precious works that enriched the Iranian architecture. Mr. Ayvazian asserted that in his opinion if the western educational model was introduced in a right the results could be much satisfying than are in reality. Mr. Qaffari added that the main problem in our academic educational system is the lack of order and discipline. Once the base of education in the universities was the order and discipline, meanwhile in our days in the name of less restrictions, the students enjoy some kind of freedom that has also a negative impact on their academic instruction.

Continuing the speech Mr. Mahmoudi talked the Iranian three main faculties of architecture, mentioning the characteristics of each one and how in a period of thirty years other new 20-25 faculties are added to the existing one, creating a confusion in the sphere of architectural

instruction. Mr. Qaffari talking about the problems that the society has regarding the architectural production said that in our days many buildings are built in absence of a strong architectural figure, so the lacks and problems that we see in the buildings is the result of the unqualified operators in building field. Another problem is the huge number of universities (about 850) that every year have graduated that are not professionally prepared and the market is not able to absorb such large number of graduates.

Returning to the foundation of the Faculty of fine arts in the University of Tehran, Mr. Nasser Nassir asserted that during the first period when the French director was A. Godar, the educational system of the faculty was the successful reproduction of French Beaux Arts, so in these conditions the graduated in architecture was a person that technically, artistically and culturally was ready to take its position in the Iranian architectural world, but when a new group of directors and playmakers, called the Italians, took the place of the precedent generation, many traditions and principles were lost, creating the conditions to release graduated persons, that were not ready and prepared to face successfully architectural and artistic matters. In his opinion this kind of retreat has social reasons, that are the reflections of what was happening in the Europe of 60-70s and also to what happened during and after the initial period of the Islamic Revolution, when because of the lack of architectural real projects, the students and the educational staff, had to face projects that were condemned to remain on the paper. This was the principal reason of the creation of a widening gap between the theoretical and practical architecture in Iran.

Talking about her personal experience Mrs. Shahcheraqhi said that because of her age, she could talk only about the past twenty years, when for people like her, that studied hard to get in the universities, the field and profession of architecture were very important, because it was the post war period and the country was facing the problems and challenges of reconstruction, and the architects had many occasions and opportunities to work in the field of architecture. The Islamic Azad University was established in this period and the educational staff was motivated to give its best for the instruction of the students. This is the era of the introduction of computer and big transformations that it caused in the world, forcing the students and professors to change traditional approaches in their fields. This is the time of big changes and transformations in global scale, even though in Iran the matter of communication has still to achieve global goals. Internet is still part of the future and the access to information and magazine sources is limited, pushing the students to follow the same route, even though there are exceptions that somebody called them superstars.

Talking about the educational staff Mrs. Shahcheraqhi asserted that in the mentioned period, in many universities there are still professors that are great professionals in the architectural field. In the period that big transformations occur, the academic field is also object to transformations, creating new directions of study in the field of architecture, because of the possibility that it creates for the university to gain money and position. The increase of the students creates new opportunities and new problems, because the world of knowledge and technology is changing in a fast process and the students don't really know which direction they should take and the

educational staff is not able to update the new challenges and manners. These lacks create problems for the students to accumulate experience and capability in order to play a positive role in their professional career. The problems remain the same, the professors are still unable to find the right way to get a connection and interpretation with the architectural heritage, ignoring the past and concentrating in modern achievements that seem temporary and incomplete.

Mr. Mahmoudi talked about another problem that exists in the faculties of architecture. He asserted that in the faculties there is a lack of middle generation of professors of 40-60 years old, meanwhile in other faculties the middle generation is ready to take the place of the old generation. Mrs. Shahcheraaqhi believes that the problem consists in the policy that the authorities follow for the recruitment of the academic staff, ignoring the characteristics and differences of each faculty. Mr. Ayvazian said that meanwhile in other countries of the world the expert professors teach in the initial levels, in order to prepare the base of the knowledge, in Iran the professors prefer to teach in the upper levels. In this regard Mr. Mahmoudi reminded that this principle is respected only in the Technical faculty, where the experienced professors have the duty to instruct the new entries in the university. Regarding the age of the academic staff, the participants expressed different opinions, but all of them agreed that the Iranian academic educational manner has problems that must be faced and overcome.

Talking about the educational lacks that exist in many fields, Mrs. Shahcheraqi asserted that an incomplete professional knowledge can be completed in different manners and periods, but the main problem regarding the students that study architecture is the incapacity to have an architect mentality, that once the students were able to get it from their professors.

The speakers explained the process of transformation and reorder of university educational system after the Islamic Revolution, the impact that it had on academic world with its positive and negative effects and consequences. In their opinion a political-religious approach on this regard, caused problems that today we assist to the results.

Mr. Nasser Nassir talked about the problem the educational world of architecture is facing. In his opinion the biggest problem is that meanwhile 30 years ago, only three universities were active in the field of architecture, today the number has risen to about 800, and it's obvious and natural that the academic society is not able to give the right professional and academic preparation.

Concluding the speech, Mr. Mahmoudi explained that regarding the education in architecture, in the Iranian schools nowhere there is a preliminary preparation for the students that aim to study architecture in a university level, so a new entry if has the chance to meet a professional, is fortunate to form a solid academic base that unfortunately many students don't have this chance.

The last word was that without a system that comprehends research and academic education, there is no chance to improve the quality of education in the Iranian universities.