

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

Held in: Conference hall of Herampey Consulting Engineers

Date: 02.05.2019

Title: Professional roundtable- Japanese Architecture from Iranian architects point of view.

Members of roundtable: Mrs. E. Androudi, Mr. E. Ahmadi, Mr. V. Qobadian, Mr. M. M. Mahmoudi, and Mr. M. Ma'soumi

Mr. Mahmoudi began the session saying that they would talk about Japanese architecture. The reason of such choice was the 90th anniversary of political and cultural relationships establishment between Iran and Japan, when various cultural and artistic ceremonies are held in both countries. Japanese and Iranian embassies had different programs and the Herampey Research Group has also dedicated a program the 14th March 2019, talking about art, architecture and urban planning in Japan and Iran, discussing the similitudes and differences.

Mr. Mahmoudi explained that the Japanese calendar begins with the new emperor ascent. He said that the precedent day Japanese calendar was changed and it was for the first time that it happened when the emperor was still alive. The reason was that the emperor abdicated living his position to his son, the new emperor that represents the 126th generation, celebrating different ceremonies in various places. He continued saying that architecture reflects the society and vice versa, so the Japanese architecture reflects Japanese society reality. He believes that in the world Japanese and German architectures have this characteristic, even though this aspect is stronger in Japan, continuing to maintain the essence of traditional architecture but refusing to repeat and copy it in modern era. After the foundation of architecture universities, the Japanese have introduced the achievements of new technologies in their architecture adding traditional elements, in order to stress the identity of the works, even though in high rise buildings, when you can feel the modern spirit and at the same time the presence of traditional elements.

Mr. Mahmoudi announced also that in October Mr. Qobadian has organized a conference, inviting a Japanese architect and the roundtable is also for introducing the meeting.

Talking about Japanese architecture Mr. Mahmoudi asked how it has been possible for Japanese to don't repeat the past heritage and at the same time design modern buildings and structure that present clearly their belonging to the Japanese culture and history. In his opinion the base of such result begins from the universities and the way they have educated generations of architects, like Mrs. Androudi, Mr. Ahmadi and Mr. Ma'soumi that have completed their studies in Japan. Talking about Japanese architects that win most of int'l prizes, he mentioned K. Tange that had also a project in Tehran, that wasn't realized. Mr. Mahmoudi was interested to know how after Tange there have been other architects like T. Ando, A. Isozaki, K. Kurokava and K. Seshima that continued their work on the same path and are very well known in the world and what was

the secret of their success in the universities when they were teaching and in the professional field as architect-designers.

Mrs. Androudi was the first speaker to answer to some of these questions. For Mrs. Androudi it's interesting to understand how different successive generations of architects have been able to bring the Japanese architecture on the top in a global scale. It's interesting that the Japanese architecture is functional, based on technology and industry, at the same time it reflects the Japanese culture. In her opinion, the phenomenon of Japanese architects that are able with their works to be present in int'l arena gaining numerous prizes is considerably interesting. She talked about the case of Japanese architect A. Isozaki that at the age of 86 has been able to present his works and gain prizes. This situation demonstrates that the Japanese architecture is alive and has the capacity to present the Japanese culture in a global scale.

Continuing to present the characteristics of the Japanese architecture, Mrs. Androudi asserted that in the Japanese architecture they have tried to avoid copying, and at the same realizing a process of knowledge that can be defined as Japanese based architecture. During the industrialization Japan experienced a period a western civilization penetration in its society, where a lot was inspired and copied from western models, causing cultural, social and political changes in the traditional Japanese society. In this situation when Japanese architectural production was influenced by western patterns , some Japanese architects criticized this process trying to find their inspiration from national roots and traditions, influencing foreign architects that were working in the Japanese field, creating the condition of a localized model of transformation that contained both Japanese and western elements.

Continuing the speech Mr. Mahmoudi referred to the Japanese architecture saying that in the past the composition of the structures was extremely simple, transparent and functional. This is a characteristic that is reflected also in the modern architecture that can be considered the successful continuation of the past in the present. Talking about the experience accumulated by Japanese architects in the western countries, he reported the case of K. Tange that studying and learning from Le Corbusier, in an initial period was influenced by western culture, but after this period, he returned to his national bases and traditions, working with his knowledge enriched in West.

Responding to this assertion Mr. Ma'soumi explained how Japanese architecture has successfully maintained its existence between western and eastern cultures and traditions. Talking about the Japanese architecture he said how, at the beginning of the 20th century, discovered the essence of Japanese architecture. They tried to study and understand what the Japanese architecture contained and at the same time study and know the architecture of the West, finding that there were many similitudes between the two currents and it was possible to be inspired by other cultures not necessarily destroying the local and traditional heritage and bases. When Le Corbusier proposes the domino solution in architecture, the Japanese discover that they have the same concept in their traditional architecture, based on the simplicity of the spaces and plans and

how functional they are. In this process some believed that they had to cut with the past and tradition and others were on the opposite position, saying that the solution was how to find the way to connect the tradition with the modern imperatives and needs.

Mr. Mahmoudi asked about the experience of Mr. Ahmadi that continued his studies in Japan when he had already accumulated the knowledge of Iranian architecture. He asked him if it was not difficult to study architecture in a country where copying wasn't the rule and the respect of the traditional values a must.

Mr. Ahmadi answered the question asserting that in Japan the principal act happens between tradition and modernity, when the problem is to find the balance. Mr. Ahmadi talked about the initial problem of understanding Japanese reality, but after learning the language and the culture of Japan many things became clear for him. He explained how Japanese shifted from a culture that derived from Chinese civilization to a culture that was basically inspired by local realities. Before talking about architectural peculiarities Mr. Ahmadi talked about the philosophy that Japanese have generally regarding the life and its different aspects. The most important thing for the Japanese is to respect the essence of life and be part of it. Talking about the architecture of T. Ando, he said that in reality the result of his architecture is the interpretation of ancient values adapting them to modern needs and possibilities. Another characteristic of Ando's architecture is the role that nature plays and how manmade structures create a unity with natural elements.

Mr. Mahmoudi talking about the visit of a famous Japanese architect, said that during the last years most of Japanese architects received their education in Japan, even though some of them followed courses in foreign countries. In his opinion the education in their own country, would have better results. On this regard he asked the opinion of Mr. Qobadian.

Mr. Qobadian Thanking Mr. Mahmoudi for the opportunity that he had to participate to that roundtable, explained that each year they organize conferences inviting architects from Turkey, India, Italy and this year in the occasion of the 90th anniversary of relationships establishment between Iran and Japan, they have decided to invite an expert from Japan. Talking about the reasons of the conferences that they have already organized, Mr. Qobadian explained that their goal was to know and understand the experiences of other countries, trying to transfer the successful results to Iran. Regarding Japan he asserted that Japan is the sole third world country that has been able to upgrade his status on fields like economy, industry, technology and also architecture, becoming a pole of attraction and inspiration not only for underdeveloped countries but also for countries that are considered developed and style making. Talking about the particular conditions of Japan, Mr. Qobadian explained that it's a country that geographically far from the West, it's the first country that has been able to defeat the Russians.

In his opinion Japan that culturally and socially is a different country, can be a pattern for other countries, at the same time even though in the countries of Persian Gulf there are many architecturally valuable buildings, but in this case that culture is imported thank to the economic

conditions of these small countries. Talking about the Iranian architecture Mr. Qobadian expressed the idea that once it was generator, but today it's in a condition that follows what is happening in the west, the universities are fed by foreign currents and in a second phase the novelties are introduced in the society. In this situation the Iranian architecture has become an importer and copier of foreign ideas and trends. The question that posed if Japan and its architecture could become an acceptable pattern, or the architecture of the Persian Gulf countries could play that role.

Reporting that he well knows the Japanese situation, Mr. Mahmoudi said that today's Japanese architecture, he said that there is a total comprehension between the designer, constructor and exploiter. All of them know the traditional values and the heritage that they can apply in the modern life and architecture. The secret of this successful transfer of past values is that Japanese designers use the heritage without copying them, and this is what in Persian Gulf countries we can't see, because they have money, construction necessities but without a consistent history in order to feed actual architectural production.

The next speaker was Mr. Ahmadi that began his speech talking about the ancient history of Japan. Making a comparison with other countries conditions, Mr. Ahmadi explained the political-geographical of Japan. As an island, Japanese had the possibility to close the borders when the country was threatened, trying to ensure country's general interests and during the last century open the country to foreign relationship to introduce others' achievement for local interests. The main question that Mr. Ahmadi posed was how Japanese have been able to make such order in their architectural process and how in Iran we could learn from such experience, trying to adjust the actual confused situation that today we are experiencing in Iran.

Mrs. Androudi talking about personal experience in Japan, she said that the key secret of the Japanese society is that they are strictly linked with their past and traditional values, creating the conditions to learn and protect their heritage and at the same time present it to foreign groups that somehow are interested with Japanese values in general. What happened in the architectural life of Japan is that in a long period of purification they stopped to be importer of Chinese or Korean values, trying to find and use simple but local bases and values in order to use them in their everyday life. In this process it doesn't matter the external imperfection of materials, what really matters is find internal values and bring them in other levels and structures.

Mr. Ma'soumi expressed the idea that what makes strong the Japanese actual architecture is the diversity that makes it rich. Regarding the architectural currents, in Japan there are different styles and currents, but there are focal points that put them in the same pot. For Japanese designers and architects the materials are on the top of the priorities, it's very important stress the importance of the functionality, it's very important to use traditional even though small elements

in order to ensure the relationship between past and present, between traditional values and modern necessities.

Trying to talk about the Iranian architecture Mr. Qobadian mentioned Iranian architect Seyhoon who designed also the mausoleum of Avicenna in Iran. Present this work in France, everybody understood and agreed that it was an example of Iranian inspired architecture. The difference with the Japanese condition is that they have int'l large relationships with many countries, meanwhile in Iran our capacities to develop contacts are a little bit limited. Mr. Qobadian expressed satisfaction regarding various presence and presentations of foreign architects that give the opportunity to Iranian architects to know other cultures and architectural currents benefitting from this process for the improvement of Iranian architecture.

Comparing the Japanese and Iranian characteristics, the participants agreed that in Japan the academic path they followed ensured better results for the Japanese, because the base of their activities was the collective work, the interest on the foreign conditions and values, used not for copying but for the improvement of Japanese society in general. Mr. Ahmadi asserted for example that meanwhile for the Japanese the main problem is to ensure the final result, in Iran many academic activists are interested to present themselves and bolt the importance of their personal achievements.

Talking about Japanese architectural strong points and characteristics Mr. Qobadian expressed that the idea that Japanese succeeded to upgrade their status from an under developed country to a country that today is considered one of the most developed countries in the world. Regarding the Iranian case he asked why such country that has a rich and ancient civilization must suffer such situation and problems. In his opinion the role that the academic sphere can play is decisive, because through science based education and instruction it will possible to correct the lacks that exist today and create the conditions for the improvement of Iranian architecture.

Concluding the roundtable Mr. Mahmoudi didn't agree with Mr. Qobadian that asserted the vicinity of Iranian and European cultures, saying that in his opinion Iran is acting more like an island than Japan.