Živa Deu

The Preservation of Wooden Architectural Elements in the Prevailing Identity Architecture

Key words: heritage, architecture, integral (integrated) protection, built identity structures, identity architectural design, prevailing architecture, sustainable development, integrated heritage protection

Abstract

A certain modest, yet distinctive artistic quality has been evident throughout the development of the predominant and identity architectural heritage, which with its pronounced function and structure, has shaped the particular character of the cultural landscapes of Slovenia. In comparison with "elevated" architecture, artistic design has always been modest, primarily due to the fact that all stylistic orientations were adopted in a simplified form, imbued with tradition and intertwined with the creative features of native artists, masters and self-taught artists; their skills were adapted to the general taste of the public who accepted them willingly. Preserved wooden architectural elements therefore demonstrate an especially successful adaptation of the artistic influences from a broader milieu to the cultural milieu of Slovenia. The art of designing wooden architectural elements, which reached its heyday in the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries and was marked by a variety of ornaments that are more or less distinguishable in individual provinces and also typologically definable, is therefore not only instructive, but also of cultural value that is to be preserved and enriched, last but not least out of respect for the international agreement on the integrated protection of architectural heritage.

Sustained environmental development

A number of factors lie behind the establishment of new international guidelines aimed at a different, nature friendly and sustainable development: the ecological and aesthetic devastation of the environment, an awareness of the limited and unique wealth of natural resources as well as of the importance of preserving environmental and architectural variety (typology for the development of human beings as individuals and as nations. The list of agreed goals, principles and undertakings as well as actions of sustainable land development, is presented in detail in a set of documents which focus specifically on sustainable settlement development (Habitat Agenda, Istanbul Declaration, Declaration of the World Council of Towns and Local Authorities). The established guidelines for settlement development display particular interest in architectural heritage (settlement development and architectural design) and the preservation of its distinctive quality (integrated protection of architectural heritage).
New international guidelines for sustainable land development including recommendations for settlement development and design were adopted by Slovenia in the form of various documents.

Živa Deu, Ph.D., University of Ljubljana, Faculty of Architecture

Integrated protection of architectural heritage

Studies and detailed analyses have demonstrated that the established criteria of the former building culture share a number of qualities with the criteria on which the new recommendations and guidelines for sustainable land development are based. Settlements and buildings that make up urban and architectural heritage (not only those that are of exceptional quality and stand under protection) have been created in harmony with their natural surroundings so as not to harm natural resources or degrade the natural environment, while the buildings themselves have proved to be healthy and energy efficient.
As well as environmental protection, it is clear that the fine design was an important consideration in creating our architectural heritage. Apart from following the generally accepted criteria of the beautiful in architectural design (i.e. the principle of fine composition), the creators of the prevailing architecture have consistently featured new ideas in town planning and architectural planning from the sphere of "elevated" architecture in their work.
Architects and art historians have established that structures were artistically enriched by native artists and masters (builders, sculptors, carvers, stucco masters and painters) through their creative work. New trends in architectural design were followed and became established as identity architecture, considered now as distinctive and typical of individual cultural landscapes. Although they are part of the prevailing architecture, the works represent a significant artistic tradition and are a vital element of our national cultural heritage.
The prevailing architectural heritage is included in the processes of sustainable settlement development on account of its permanent values, cultural significance and distinctive characteristics. Through its adaptation to natural conditions and numerous other conditions in the environment – from cultural influences to economic development –architecture contributes to the distinctive quality of individual cultural landscapes.
In order to make new guidelines for the integrated protection of building structures more interesting it should be pointed out that the inclusion of the prevailing architectural heritage within the development of cultural landscaping does not mean protecting the existing building culture of a certain milieu or indeed protecting significant cultural heritage as required by the relevant legislation. Above all, it means that architectural heritage must be treated with maximum consideration for the qualities it embodies and included in new urban planning and architectural design. Such an attitude to the identity heritage of the prevailing architecture and the particular qualities it possesses is termed integral or integrated protection of heritage in the field of settlement development and building.

Integrated protection of architectural heritage – Principles of sustainable settlement development

Recognition of the values, criteria and diversity of the architectural design of building shells and of diversity in the artistic design of individual elements of the prevailing architectural heritage is an ideal basis for the establishment of general guidelines (on national a level) for the high-quality sustainable settlement development of quality and for the establishment of detailed recommendations for its protection and continuation. A series of surveys – from general to specific – of the prevailing Slovene architectural heritage has been carried out according to the new requirements of integrated protection. The results presented in this paper form part of a general survey on the design and decoration of architectural elements.

Design and decoration of wooden architectural elements in the prevailing architectural heritage

The conclusions presented here on the design and decoration of wooden architectural elements are a summary of the results of a survey based on detailed analyses of material and written sources in Slovenia as well as the identity heritage of the prevailing architecture (created and developed uninterrupted until

the first half of the 20th century) in smaller settlements (villages, boroughs), namely those that are still considered to be distinctive features of the cultural landscape.
Applied art that made exclusive use of wood, common in the entire area of Central Europe, flourished in the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries, i.e. in the period when the criteria of beauty predominant in "elevated" architecture were transferred to the prevailing architecture.
However, well developed fretwork art – as exemplified by a multitude of works of varying quality – was not so widely included and was of lower quality than might be expected.
Firstly, numerous native master joiners and carvers concentrated their creative powers on the making of furnishings and wooden sculptures intended for decoration of the interior of numerous churches. The altars in Suha pri Škofji Loki, Bitnje pri Bohinjski Bistrici, Crngrob, Muljava pri Stični, Šalek pri Velenju, the Church of St. Barbara near Konjice, Podbrje pri Vipavi and many other churches are great masterpieces where "everything is covered with fretted ornaments and figures so that no dead spot meets the eye" (France Stele, Oris zgodovine umetnosti pri Slovencih [Outline of Art History of the Slovenes], Ljubljana, 1966, p. 65).
And secondly, according to the Renaissance and subsequently Baroque standards of "elevated" architecture, wooden ornaments were neglected in the design of a building shell. Creative powers were directed to the design and decoration of the interior: staircases, banisters, various panelling etc.
Timber was therefore seldom used in the prestigious prevailing architecture as an artistic accent in elements of the facade, except for door panels. New stone-built houses, the houses of wealthy farmers, innkeepers and merchants, were enriched with decorations made of stone, stucco and plaster, as well as painted decorations, which met the demands for luxury and sculptural appearance of the facades.
However, only a small number of prestigiously designed buildings were created in the period when the typical of today architecture was created in cultural landscapes. Modest stone-built houses or houses partly built and partly made of timber with timber outhouses prevailed, and in contrast to prestigious architecture, their Baroque appearance was created by means of simply designed and decorated wooden architectural elements. In houses of this variety, stone, stucco and plaster were replaced by wood in the design of individual architectural elements since timber was cheaper, more available and, last but not least, more traditional. Several native Slovene masters and self-taught masters excelled at designing it. Thus wood in its simplified and simple decorative role preserved its predominant role in the prevailing identity architecture.

Details of the prevailing design and decoration of architectural elements

Due to differences in indigenous materials and the level of economic and cultural development of the Slovene provinces, considerable inconsistencies in the number and quality of the design of wooden elements occurred that are still discernible today.
In coastal cultural landscapes, where stone materials were primarily used, architectural elements were rarely made of wood and even more rarely stylistically designed and decorated.
The situation was similar in those areas where wood was indigenously used in building, and which tended to be economically underdeveloped and slow to progress. It was rare that architectural elements were designed and decorated since their utility and function were considered much more important.
In contrast to that, most wooden architectural elements in the settlements of northern Slovenia were skillfully designed and decorated, although stone, stucco and painted decorations were the predominant materials in the design of the appearance of stone or part stone, part timber houses. Preserved door panels can still be admired as well as individual door-frames, banisters, balustrades, and conclusions of timber gables carved in the form of meanders, tears and crosses. Even wooden structural elements, finely designed and decorated, testify to excellent artistic quality and well developed carving and fretwork techniques and to the fact that they were created exclusively by master carvers. Such works bear witness to the wealth of those who commissioned them and to the favourable economic conditions they enjoyed. Some artefacts, especially door panels that are similar in detail, indicate the existence of a broad serial supply of workshops and carvers. The carvers from the Šubic family of painters – one of them with a workshop in Poljane, the other in Škofja Loka – carried out carving work all over the Gorenjsko region and elsewhere.
However, in most of Slovenia, especially in the central and eastern provinces where wood was an iden-

tity material, larger wooden architectural elements (wooden doors and window frames, door panels, banisters, etc.) were not made in carving workshops like in the Gorenjsko region. There were few workshops and they were busy with commissions for the more demanding works of elevated architecture. In comparison with the Gorenjsko region and the broader vicinity of the capital, Ljubljana, the level of economic development in these provinces was lower and only few wooden architectural elements were commissioned in carving workshops. These areas are therefore predominantly characterised by simple, less decorated wooden architectural elements by local craftsmen, of whom there were a large number. Their skills were passed from generation to generation since it is obvious that local people demonstrated a fair amount of skill and pleasure in carving. Most of the skillfully decorated architectural elements were made by the owners of houses skilled in crafts or by practised carvers and self-taught masters in smaller workshops.

Typology of designed and decorated architectural elements

The shells of stone identity houses built in accordance with established Baroque artistic criteria, were discernibly embellished by designed and decorated wooden elements: doors and windows, as well as panels and banisters on external staircases and galleries.

Form and decoration of window frames

Wooden window frames and window boxes were created as a result of the structure. The relief and sculptural decoration of the enumerated structural elements of window openings in Slovenia is exceptional. However, additional window frames decorated with fretwork, which accentuated the openings on the facade and were mentioned in records, were only discovered in a survey of material sources.

Form and decoration of door frames

The only original form of wooden door frame designed in timber is the arched form with a yoke-shaped lintel. Joiners and carvers imitated in timber the skillfully made and stylistically established (late) Baroque forms of stone-carved door frames. Thus the form and decoration of wooden door frames in individual areas were associated with stone door frames in other areas. The typical features of wooden door frames (i.e. imitations of those made of stone) are:
1) simple rectangular form, with level (prismatic) frames and a lintel;
2) rectangular form with level (prismatic) frames, a lintel and a ledge above the portal;
3) rectangular form with level (prismatic) frames and a lintel as well as a ledge and sockets above the portal;
4) flattened semi-circular arched form with keystone (moulding).
The door frames are only exceptionally accentuated with relief or sculptural decorative motifs.

Form and decoration of door panels

Door panels consisting of a frame and filling predominate in contemporary identity building and architecture of smaller settlements. Earlier forms of door panels discernible by horizontal, square, star-shaped boards or herring-bone motif are rare.
In contrast to the door and window frames where design is clearly subordinated to function, various richly decorated and skillfully carved door panels testify to the fact that the "artistic" work of joiners and carvers (including the self-taught ones) was creatively oriented .
Door panels consisting of thick frames and fillings can only be decorated with simple profiled frames of the fillings. Apart from that, door panels of high-quality design are visually accentuated by simply decorated fillings. Simple decorations include grain-shaped and ribbed surfaces. The finest door panels are undoubtedly those that are richly fretted and have fillings decorated with more demanding elements. These include geometrical motifs (rectangles, rhombi, stars, rosettes, quarterly rosette sections, voluted curves), Baroque motifs (tassels, various frames) and floral motifs (stylised flowers, plants in vases) as well as various figural carvings. In case of richly fretted doors, the closing batten between the panels often has

the form of a pilaster with a carved or fluted body, base and capital.
In contrast to the stylistic forms of door frames (the indirect influence of Italian masonry workshops), the selected decorative motifs of door panels demonstrate the strong influence of northern art which guided the Slovene master carvers who furnished high-quality architecture with wooden artefacts.

Form and decoration of panelled walls

Wooden panels for the timber sections of stone-built houses (gable conclusions and the upper, wooden parts of two-storey houses) were often decorated with openings for airing as well as with profiled perpendicular conclusions of vertical panelling. Apart from slots with toothed or curved outlines, the panels were usually decorated with motifs that were simply cut out between two boards. The range of motifs was varied, from simple geometrical motifs to Christian images and those taken from everyday life.

Form and decoration of galleries

While typical banister design and ornamentation throughout Slovenia provides ample scope for study, we should point out here that in the prevailing architectural style the identity banisters were flat in form and made of vertical boards or laths. Broad boards were nailed to the banisters in a continuous line so as to cover the timber framework and close the gallery visually. In contrast to boards, laths were attached to the framework with interspacing.
Skillfully designed and decorated architectural elements of wealthy houses were complemented with banisters that contributed significantly to the overall appearance of the building. The wooden surfaces of banisters were supplemented with decorations consisting of variously shaped openings through which the background walls were visible. The predominant decorative motifs created by shaping the edges of boards were simple geometrical motifs, floral motifs and those associated with religious life. However, the combination and refinement of motifs depended on the artistic abilities and skills of the master.

Sources of models and cultural influences for the design and decoration of wooden architectural elements

Experienced and self-taught carvers imitated the leading masters of contemporary artistic development in their designs. Wooden furnishings in churches and other sacred buildings often provided a source of models and new ideas. Numerous decorations on artefacts therefore imitated the small ornaments of wooden altars, pulpits and other church items. They were made by experienced masters in larger carving workshops. In the 18th century, small workshops around the capital adopted the artistic orientation of the famous Ljubljana Franciscan carving workshop. Their masters were trained in carving skills in southern Germany and most other trained carvers that worked independently in the Ljubljana area in that period were likewise taught the skills and artistic criteria employed in the leading carving workshops abroad, mostly in Vienna and Graz, Austria (H. M. Lohr, J. Gaber, M. Tomec, M. Ozbič, J. Žnider, A. Repič and others). The same was also true of the areas of Celje, Slovenske Konjice, Ptuj, Maribor, Gornja Radgona and Ljutomer.
The workshops in Štajersko (Styria) were closely linked with the mainstays of artistic development in Central Europe and Germany through the workshops in Graz and Vienna. The leading sculptors and carvers working primarily in wood and stone were the brothers Jožef and Jurij Straub, J. Holzinger, M. Pogačnik, J. Strutzl and others.
As well as the artistic standards adopted from the north, various moderate artistic influences from Hungary discernible primarily in the Prekmurje region, cannot be overlooked. Although art historians has established that the artistic current also flowed in the opposite direction – the work of masters from the Štajersko region (Styria) penetrated Hungary as well – the Hungarian influence is discernible in the design and carving of the prevailing architectural style.
Aside from the furnishings of sacred buildings, new artistic ideas were also displayed primarily in plaster decoration and outstanding stone artefacts. Timber door frames in secular and prevalent architecture in Slovenia, as well as the painted band-shaped borders of window openings (jambs) or those made of plaster, indicated economically weak contractors.

Since master joiners and wood carvers imitated the skillfully made and stylistically prevalent (late) Baroque shapes of architectural elements made of stone or designed in plaster, the shapes and decorations of wooden elements of prevailing architecture often matched stone, plaster or stucco architectural elements typical of the area.
The prevailing relief decorative motifs in the Ljubljana and Dolenjsko regions were thus stylised floral, geometrical or symbolic Christian motifs linked with the tradition of masonry as well as influences of Italian artistic styles. The prevailing motifs in the northern and eastern parts of Slovenia are discernible Baroque patterns, tassels and garlands that were adopted by carving workshops from the northern artistic styles in the Koroško and Štajersko regions (Carinthia and Styria) and were typical of the prevailing decorations in stucco and plaster. This is purely intended as a general description, as a more detailed survey would be required for a precise definition of their origins and local character.

Instead of conclusion

The architectural elements designed and decorated at present influence the artistic appearance of the facades to a certain extent, yet they are of poorer quality and less frequent than might be expected. The reason for this is that the condition of most wooden and stone-built houses has deteriorated (in the wider areas of larger cities and towns: in the vicinity of Ljubljana, Maribor, Celje and settlements along traffic routes: Jesenice, Ljubljana, Zagreb and Ljubljana, Maribor, Murska Sobota), while many outstanding wooden elements were destroyed by inappropriate building work carried out on indigenous stone-built houses.
The situation is expected to improve through the implementation of draft guidelines relating to the building and design of the prevailing architecture based on the material presented in this paper. The guidelines were drawn up according to the results of analysis and in accordance with the guidelines for the sustainable development of building structures based on integrated heritage protection.

- All work on the structure of the prevailing buildings and architecture of identity in a certain area is to be carried out with consideration for the established differences in artistic criteria, including variations of stylistic design and decoration of wooden architectural elements.
- All designed and decorated wooden architectural elements of outstanding as well as of poorer quality are to be protected to the utmost. The preservation of wooden artefacts is important since they are the product of native craft in their entirety and, according to numerous art historians (Stele, Zadnikar, Šumi), actually imbued with creativity typical of the nation. Special attention is to be paid to protection in cultural landscapes where the architectural identity is still clearly discernible (Peter Fisater et al., Arhitekturne regije in krajine, Ljubljana, 1993).
- Artistic continuity is desirable, as well as the modernisation of shapes typical of the regions and decorations of door and window frames, door panels, panelling and banisters of galleries. Many motifs are close to the contemporary stylistic standards. The decorative motifs established in wood originate from tradition, reflect daily life and habits and are therefore considered facade elements of contemporary architecture.
- The revival of former centres of carpentry, joinery and carving as well as crafts and workshops in Slovenia is to form part of the guidelines for protection and development.

Literature

Arhiv Korpus slovenske arhitekture (Corpus of Slovene Architecture Archive)
Anton Bač, Slovensko ljudsko izročilo, Ljubljana 1980.
Franjo Baš, Stavbe in gospodarstvo na slovenskem podeželju, Ljubljana 1984.
Michel Boucher, Joelle Furic, La maison rurale en Haute-marche, Paris 1984.
Ivan Cankar, Uvod v umevanje likovne umetnosti, Ljubljana 1994.
Emilijan Cevc, Kiparstvo na Slovenskem med gotiko in barokom, Ljubljana 1981.
Emilijan Cevc, Slovenska umetnost, Ljubljana 1966.
Živa Deu, Stavbarstvo slovenskega podeželja, Ljubljana 2001.
Nold Egenter, Architectural anthropology, Lausanna 1992.

Peter Fister, Umetnost stavbarstva na Slovenskem, Ljubljana 1986.
Peter Fister, Arhitekturne krajine in regije, Ljubljana 1993.
Peter Fister, Glosar arhitekturne tipologije, Ljubljana 1993.
Cyril M. Harris, Ilustrated Dictionary of Historic Architecture, New York 1977.
Jože Karlovšek, Slovenski ornament, ljudski in obrtniški izdelki, Ljubljana 1937.
Jože Karlovšek, Slovenski domovi, Ljubljana 1939.
Fedja Košir, Uvod v analizo arhitekturne teorije, Ljubljana 1987.
Boris Kuhar, Odmirajoči stari svet vasi, Ljubljana 1972.
Gorazd Makarovič, Slovenska ljudska umetnost, zgodovina likovne umetnosti na kmetijah, Ljubljana 1981.
Vojeslav Mole, V., Umetnost, Ljubljana 1941.
Marjan Mušič, M., Arhitektura in čas, Maribor 1963.
Ivan Sedej, Kmečka hiša na Slovenskem, Ljubljana 1979.
Ivan Sedej, Ljudska umetnost na Slovenskem, Ljubljana 1985.
Anton Sič, Kmečke hiše in njih oprava na Gorenjskem, Ljubljana 1924.