

“Conservation of Architectural Heritage, CAH” 23-27 November 2015, Luxor

Architectural conservation in Brazilian architecture and urban design undergraduation courses: the teaching disarticulations between theory and project practice

Pedro Murilo Gonçalves de Freitas^a, Regina Andrade Tirello^{b*}

^aPhD Candidate, University of Campinas, Rua Saturnino de Brito 224, Campinas 13083-889, Brazil

^bAssistant Professor, University of Campinas, Rua Saturnino de Brito 224, Campinas 13083-889, Brazil

Abstract

In the last two decades, discussions and methods of architectural conservation design have become more and more available in Brazil. However, in spite of this aparent development, heritage preservation still faces a minor impact over the general curricula of Brazilian schools of architecture and urban design, provoking specific disarticulations of theory and practice in built heritage conservation education. This article aims to discuss these issues based on contemporary studies on higher education and recent recommedations proposed for architectural conservation education, addressing the need for awareness of preservation as a potential field for architectural creation.

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Peer-review under responsibility of IEREK, International experts for Research Enrichment and Knowledge Exchange

Keywords: Architectural Conservation; Architectural Design Teaching; Conservation Project; Architectural Teaching Disciplines; Brazilian Architectural Conservation Teaching; Retrospective Techniques

1. Introduction

In the last two decades, discussions and methods of architectural conservation design have become more and more available in Brazil. Over the years, the demands towards the heritage importance as a cultural basis for social development – stimulated by various national and international organizations – have popularized different types of

* Corresponding author. Tel.: +551935212448; fax: +551935212411.
E-mail address: rtirello@fec.unicamp.br

operational interventions in the existing architecture, making possible and more frequent the preservation of many cultural assets. A key role in this process was the growth of initiatives to implement conservation specialization courses since 1970's in Brazil, following UNESCO recommendations (Jokilehto, 2006) and related to architecture and urban design graduation courses in various public universities with the help of cultural heritage safeguard institutions (Mayumi, 2008) –, affirming a positive trend in favor of architectural restoration as a field that congregates theoretical knowledge and practical experiences of design and intervention on architectural heritage. Moreover, it is known that those initiatives enabled a new recognition of architectural and urban history as an important foundation of people's identity in Brazil, as over the world (Fonseca, 2005).

However, in spite of this apparent development, heritage preservation still faces a minor impact over the general curricula of Brazilian schools of architecture and urban design. As architectural design education in several public and private undergraduate courses still focus the new (and isolated) building as the single tool to stimulate creative capacities, it leaves often a disproportional time to enhance on future architects and urban designers a conservationist approach to exercise methods and operational techniques available today to prevent the decay of built architecture. Although several studies argue that the cause of this imbalance might be the persistence of a modernist tradition on Brazilian architectural education – since several of Brazilian public universities were created over that spirit in the 1940's –, the real cause of it may be the current interpretations of the field called “Retrospective Techniques” implemented in the 1990's on curricula to reinforce heritage education but still acknowledged as an only theoretical discipline. Combined, they're provoking nowadays serious disarticulations between theory and project practice of architectural conservation (Schlee, Medeiros & Ferreira, 2003).

This article aims to address these issues based on contemporary studies on higher education and recent recommendations proposed for architectural conservation education[†]. It analyses Brazilian case to raise awareness on the need of new educational criteria systematization that includes teaching strategies and curricula revisions about conservation on Brazilian architecture and urban design courses as a result of global and local points of view. To contribute on this conference for the international debate, this paper also seeks to formulate specific proposals that could be useful to similar cases in order to enhance a common educational agenda between universities, professionals and the general society on the cultural heritage field.

2. Education and architectural education

According to Carlos Rodrigues Brandão (1981), education is the process in which accumulated knowledge systems and values of a given society are transferred to new generations. To him, education is an identity tool, present in various cultures in different ways. Education, as so, is a fundamental instrument of socialization that triggers in the educated one the awareness of himself and the culture in which he is. Thus, education is based on passive and active events in which to educate and be educated are processes of acknowledgement of ourselves on a daily relationship with environment stimulæ.

In a more recent approach, Bernard Charlot (2006, p. 15) states that education is a science with poorly defined borders, consisting of “a triple process of humanization, socialization and entry into a culture.” As a practice, education also comprises actions towards the autonomization of individuals (Freire, 1996), but in an inseparable framework, as they are also integrated into a broader social set. In his interpretation, Charlot addresses that beyond the role of teachers and students, institutional structures have a leading role, at various levels, negotiating the possibilities of cultural integration in the same range of values. Therefore, education is a continuous process, endless in itself.

[†] This article was previously drafted as a work for the discipline “*Didática do Ensino Superior*” (Didactics of Higher Education), taught by Professor Ana Maria Reis de Góes Monteiro and Professor Emília Wanda Rutkowski at the University of Campinas Faculty of Civil Engineering, Architecture and Urban Design Graduation Program of Architecture, Technology and Urban Studies. The work was revised and improved for presentation on CAH 2015 Conference and is part of PhD Research Project “*Piero Sanpaulesi: História, Ensino e Projeto de Restauração Arquitetônica na Escola Florentina*” (Piero Sanpaulesi: History, Education and Architectural Project Restoration at the Florentine School), oriented by Professor Regina Andrade Tirello with funds granted by São Paulo Research Foundation – FAPESP (Process n. 2015/02022-7).

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