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## The ordinary – everyday – commonplace as a reference of cultural identity.

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### Abstract

Cultural identity forms a sphere of certainty, establishes a basis for communication and creates incentives for co-operation. However within the field of architecture it mostly represents a hindrance to creation. The paper seeks to clarify the ambiguous relationship between architecture and simplicity, ordinariness and banality and cultural identity – more specifically how the architecture could be inspired by the ordinary in order to preserve the cultural identity. New architecture, created in an existing, historical environment, should fit within its contextual surroundings – architecture like this could be considered as ordinary (in a positive sense). There are many examples which deliberately highlight this in European architecture. This architecture is of exceptional quality which typically results from a modern understanding of production, tectonic density and strength of composition. It also demonstrates strong empathy for its local conditions and often affirms a repressed social and cultural reality and identity. In the everyday world of architecture, we encounter two primary issues. The first is that of globalisation and the resulting loss of culture and identity. The second is the innate desire for extravagance. In addition, we have a tendency to forget that the commonplace acts, for many of us, as the identity holder. Although the architecture itself engages with banal, everyday and secondary things, it must be understood that we are unequivocally dealing with architecture and its inextricable link to cultural identity.

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### 1. Cultural identity in the context of Europe

A primary characteristic for any European area has historically been high cultural and high environmental diversity, which has been a significant factor in its development. However today there is an outstanding reduction

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of local cultural particularities. Cultural variety is at least as important as biological heterogeneity. The protection of cultural identity is imperative as it is a crucial component for the existence of any multicultural society. Cultural identity forms a sphere of certainty, establishes a basis for communication, and creates incentives for cooperation. However, within the field of architecture, it mostly represents a hindrance to creation. We understand it as the identification with the cultural heritage of our ancestors coupled with the ambition of preserving cultural continuity for all subsequent generations (Foltinova, 2010).

The realization of one's own identity is needed for space integration. Architecture as a cultural phenomenon carries many strong references. These references help to create cultural identity. Architecture is a determinant of man's orientation and identification in any one place. Together with urban planning and the landscape context, these form the factors influencing the creation of an environment and therefore are important for its quality. Today, however, the concept of a place is changing. It is evolving a new form based on the image of the city and *genius loci* – material and non-material culture.

New architecture, rising in a historical context, should be in harmony with its surroundings. There are many examples of this being achieved in European architecture. This gave rise to the interest in this topic given that there are many European architects in whose work exists a very successful utilization of the ordinary to reinforce the local cultural identity. American critic and theorist K. Michael Hays argues that since the mid eighties, it is possible to find a generation of young European architects whose work shows, from the American perspective, unexpected coherence and similarity. This architecture is of exceptional quality which typically results from a modern understanding of production, tectonic density and compositional strength. At the same time it also demonstrates strong empathy for its local conditions, a critical approach to the modern avant-garde, and often affirms a repressed social and cultural reality and identity (Hays, 1991). The common feature of the work of these architects is a strong desire for reality and identity of the place.

The current Swiss architectural scene based around offices such as Herzog and de Meuron, Diener and Diener, Zurkirchen and Marques, offers the best example most relevant to this topic. The following paper deals with a case study of the House for an Art Collector in Therwil by Swiss architects Jacques Herzog and Pierre de Meuron, who often develop their architectural ideas from unattractive, secondary, drama-less, often ordinary and everyday images or from elements of the environment. Such trivial things such as the physical context and other limitations imposed by building materials, the building site and building program are once again becoming an important impetus in architects work. An important moment of this work is the transformation of the image of everyday life, which depending on the nature of the environment in which it occurs, can lead to the creation or the reinforcement of a strong cultural identity. The issue of the phenomenon of cultural identity was brought to the fore (in the field of culture and architecture) around the 1980s which is when the house in Therwil was completed.

### *1.1. Method of research*

This postulate is represented by the project of a House for an Art Collector in Therwil, Switzerland, situated in a typical suburban area with a small lot structure. It is a homogenous structure, whose calm and unified look could be considered as relatively unexciting. The typical reaction to this tends to be to create new dominants (cultural, but mostly architectural) and to impose a new "image" in the structure. The house in Therwil, at first sight appears "common" as it does not have a tendency towards the dominant either by its largeness or extravagance of form. Its expectationality is partially due to its location (on the street corner), significance of function (house for an art collector) but is mostly due to its distinction from its context. The case is analyzed in thirteen points, which Swiss architect Carmen Humbel used to characterize new Swiss architecture. Among these

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