

Seminar on the topic of stratification, conducted by prof. dr. Zeynep Aygün at the Science Institute of Mimar Sinan Fine Arts University in Istanbul, Turkey during fall semester of 2017/18. Student: Poturak Semir / semirp@mail.com

## Challenging the immobility of the architecture: The power of building stratification

### *Abstract.*

Stratification is a symptom of one of the most appealing and most descriptive of the powers of architecture and building. Power to persistently exist through centuries, ability to absorb different building techniques, to allow for layering of different materials, ideas – these are advantages of the building over most of the other cultural mediums. The idea of stratification tells the story of respect for the values present in built spaces. It tells of the value of ordered space of architecture and it reveals the part of building's nature which can be expanded, which can organically grow and define the building as being an organism rather than a machine.

It may be considered that buildings which are subjects of stratification are strongest of evidences and most reliable of witnesses of the history of the world, of aging world, continuous changes of power, dependency on the urban environment- a collective, shared set of values which create necessity, desire to owe a specific location, to inhabit the same place, same space over and over again.

But in the case of being seen as an expansion, stratification of the building can be seen as a movement of the building – it is as an active mode of defense, an offensive

defense. This is the case with the building in Novi Pazar, which is now used as a Faculty of Islamic Studies. In this specific example of stratification, i would like to present how expansion of the existing building space reveals the power and eventually puts the architecture in offensive mode.

*General discussion.*

In the first part of the seminar I would like to present a couple of philosophical hypothesis dissected through the research of the stratification phenomena in buildings and architecture.

1. Any building undergoes a process of stratification after it has been put to use.
2. Any building can potentially undergo infinite numbers of stratifications.
3. Building stratifications happen in timely order or they can happen simultaneously.
4. A building undergoes stratification if its originally designed presence is being compressed or expanded.
5. Building preservation is a special case of stratification process of the building.

In this paper, the phenomenon of building stratification is examined as one of the potential powers of architecture. The power of architecture is a category of essential, grounding properties which fortify the existence of the architectural phenomena in general; a property which underlines categorically the very phenomenon of architecture and a property of architecture which is recognized as valuable beyond the field of architectural design..

Stratification is farthest seen in layers of Earth's core, where time presents millions of years of its work. In the context of architecture stratification also appears as a symptom of time. In the case of building stratification it is an accumulation and dispersion of energy and matter in long spans of time at fixed points in space. After being built, the building is left to operate by itself, to create problems and offer solutions,

mostly without the presence of former or any other architect. Stratification process actually represents the design conducted by the building itself.

Stratification, as a general concept, should be able to include both addition and removal of building parts. As stratification should belong to the order of time – it is a symptom, indicator, materialization of time. Both expansion and compression of the building are forms of movement. I wonder if we can identify the very life of the building with the stratification process – after being built, the building is left to work independently and to absorb information from various energies and matters for hundreds and thousands of years.

Together with powers, architecture has its tragedies, one being the “tragedy of immobility”. Stratification may be seen as an effect of building’s curse which comes from the fact that building has to be at rest in order to perform.<sup>1</sup> Additionally, the process of stratification can be also understood as an incomplete form of motion, a deviant form other than mechanical and quantum motion. Process of stratification is a possibility which arises from the fact that the building is durable and resistible enough to allow for additions and accumulation of more resources, for adaptations and improvements. The layers of times in a building tell of irregular movements, changes, superimpositions of time.

But why a building can actually undergo the process of stratification? What actually enables building to perform in such a way? Not all of the buildings live long enough or does not deserve the privilege to experience its own transformations. One of the undeniable reasons for this evident durability is the fact that architecture is being built from durable materials together with materials for durable cohesion. In the most of the cases, architecture is built to live more than a generation of humans – one part of architectural buildings being completely focused on the eternal category (monuments, tombs, mausoleums). On the other hand, many buildings from the past survived until today only because they possess undeniable, universal aesthetics or some other value which demand respect and nurture.

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<sup>1</sup> Even the tents used by the nomads have to be reassembled too in order to perform as a building – to fulfill its purpose.

### *Expansion as building stratification.*

A stratification process in a specific building indicates the ability for the growth, change, improvement during large quantities of time which is not a property of many cultural or technological mediums. A building which can undergo the process of stratification actually tells of high flexibility of its spaces to adapt to different needs and functions and to serve to different cultures and habits. At this point I find it very hard to imagine a medium beyond the building, in terms of durability, persistence in time, and ability to transfer large amounts of memories and information throughout the millennia. A building with its five, six layers, each presenting different point in time of history, tells most honestly about the events from the past. The building was at rest for thousands of years while time was bringing and taking away people, armies, cultures, ideas, goods.

In this seminar I want to look closer at the case study of building stratification where it appears in form of expansion. There is a common disbelief that architecture and space is immobile but the ability of the building to expand actually proves that there are different ways to look at the building in terms of rest and motion. Expansion of the building can be seen as a sort of moving, growing, building being alive and living, changing with time. Through expansion building behaves as an organism, it has an organism like behavior, similar to the one of cancer. Expansion of the building is tells the message of power, of abundance of resources, intelligence and technology. Of course, we shall not forget that stratification can go wrong, but for the purpose of this essay I will idealize building stratification process.

Stratification can happen within the building, and in this case it can work either as a change or a compression (removal of the building part). During the expansion the process works towards the outside – outside has been converted into more inside – the part of the outside has been appropriated and incorporated into the form of the existing building. Building can be expanded in all three dimensions – in all directions, both horizontally and vertically. The sacred right of property and ownership over the land

borders the building potential for expansion, although there are examples of building expanding much over the “borders of law”.

*Case study: Faculty of Islamic Studies , Novi Pazar, Serbia*

In the heart of the city of Novi Pazar there is a very interesting example of building which has undergone several expansions in relatively short period of time. This example also shows that stratification as a phenomenon can be used as a design and building method. On the place where previously an Ottoman mosque was present, during the communism period a new building was constructed. Because the land was forcedly taken away from Islamic Community, during the recently established restitution process, the land and the new building were taken back from the state back to Islamic Community. In October, 2006, during the first years after the takeover, the building had been defended from the police which were about to seize the building because of illegal construction works.<sup>2</sup>

In the following years, until today, the illegal construction work continued and the original building started expanding without any control or any document allowing for building expansion. The building survived several expansions in different years, with each of the expansion presenting a political progress.

This specific case indicates that beyond the simple materialization the act of building is a statement, a symptom of power, respect or some other manifestation. What is crucial is that ideal stratification is not conditioned with the availability of resources but with the order in which the new materials are placed in relation to existing building parts.

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<sup>2</sup> [goo.gl/sGdbrW](http://goo.gl/sGdbrW)



*Orthographic view of the Faculty for Islamic Studies*

What may be one of the most important questions regarding building stratification is if architectural design works identically when designing from *tabula rasa* and when designing the extension of the existing building. Should an architectural element be perceived in the same way when used for the new building and for building extension?

Leaving aesthetics and politics aside, the expansion of the faculty building is quite a successful one. It gained area of more than 2000 m<sup>2</sup> in 11 years. Each of the expansions was fast and efficient. The whole process started when one part of the building was transformed into “ethno restaurant”<sup>3</sup> in April 2010.<sup>4</sup> In May, next to the restaurant, a coffee shop was also opened. Since the very beginning the restaurants expanded in form of open terrace with chairs and tables. After the first summer, this terrace was closed and covered to become the parts of interior for the winter period, while for the next summer additional part was “conquered” with new terraces. Eventually the

<sup>3</sup> A local name for restaurants with authentic local food but also for ones which mimic oriental character. A bungalow type accommodation within the authentic, old fashion ranches is called “ethno village”.

<sup>4</sup> [goo.gl/SQB7mP](http://goo.gl/SQB7mP)

mechanism was understood as efficient and the building started expanding in all directions except the front which faces the street. In this process a huge part of “Isa Beg Isakovica” city square was transformed into different ambient of two restaurants, although there was never organized public reaction towards the usurpation of public property.



*One of the expansion processes of the building of Faculty for Islamic Studies*

This is only one specific case within more than 1,500,000 illegally built buildings in Serbia<sup>5</sup>. Removals, demolitions of illegally built buildings happen very rarely, only when really necessary. The building of Faculty for Islamic Studies successfully resisted and still resists the forces acting against its expansion. Probably it will expand even more.

On the other hand, in Belgrade area lives couple of hundreds of thousands of Muslims but there is only one mosque. In May 2017 a mosque which was under

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<sup>5</sup> [goo.gl/YVZgVg](http://goo.gl/YVZgVg)

construction in part of Belgrade called Zemun, was demolished by local authorities because it did not have all the required permissions from local government.<sup>6</sup>

Underlying point here is that several expansion of one building may be wiser than making a huge investment in one building at the very start. Using stratification process as a very method for architectural design, making the plan for the stratification can definitely have its own advantages.

#### List of figures

Google, image, *Orthographic view of the Faculty for Islamic Studies*, viewed 15 December 2017.

*One of the expansion processes of the building, photograph*, viewed 10 November 2017.

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<sup>6</sup> [goo.gl/WyVwBe](https://goo.gl/WyVwBe)