

Preservation History of Art Nouveau Heritage in Hungary, Czech Lands and France

Master Thesis

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Abstract

This master thesis discusses the preservation history of the most relevant architectural monuments of Art Nouveau from the perspective of different ideological and political systems of Hungary, the Czech Lands and France in the 20th century. The main objective of the thesis is to examine the influences of Art Nouveau in the society and vice versa through different heritage protection procedures and successful monument restorations, which took place in significant “Art Nouveau cities” of Europe: Budapest, Prague, Nancy and Strasbourg. The Art Nouveau style (1890—1914) was born as a reaction to the academic schools at the end of the nineteenth century and spread quickly by advertising a new architectural program, thanks to its special aesthetical, social and political contents. In order to satisfy the needs of the "modern" age and to create a better environment for the people, Art Nouveau broke with the previous dominant historical tendencies, not only in a mental way, but also in employing a new design and decorative elements. Thus the international practice-based, but locally unique and unprecedented works of the Art Nouveau were totally differing from the dominant eclectic townscapes, which is just one of the facts why they were criticized by both the contemporaries and the posterity. In Central Europe the new “style” had yet another aspect. It was often representing the national goals through creation of a so called “national style”, like in Hungary or the Czech Lands. One of the research questions of the thesis is the connection between the nation-building politics and the preservation history of Art Nouveau Heritage. In Alsace and Lorraine (two traumatized regions of France) Art Nouveau also played a very strong identical and political role. Especially, in Nancy (the second Art Nouveau centre after Paris) and in Strasbourg (the city annexed by the German Empire) the new modern style became on one hand the engine of strengthening the regional, on the other hand the imperial identity.

The reception of the style during the last century changed from approval to rejection and to admiration again. For a long time, the style had remained the main example of bad taste for modern and conservative critics alike. For almost half a century, no serious attempts have been made to re-evaluate it. Hence with rare exceptions – until the 1950s/1960s – the memories of Art Nouveau had no relevant social value in contrast to the building of historical styles. In the following period up to the 1980s the perception of Art Nouveau had changed and its architectural memories started to be protected as historic monuments all around Europe. Thanks to the re-evaluation of the style and the growing interest in the ‘patrimonialization’ processes, its preservation procedures were able to start, which significantly contributed to the re-consideration of Art Nouveau’s built heritage as collective historical and cultural values not only on national levels, but also on a worldwide scale. This study provides a better understanding of this social phenomenon by examining its hidden causes, which led us to successful heritage preservation.