

English Abstract

Searching for Styles of National Architecture in Habsburg Central Europe 1890–1920 Art Nouveau and Turn-of-the-Century Architecture as Nation-Building

This thesis examines aspirations of Central European nations to create architectural style, which would be particular to the given nation and would convey national spirit and character through architectural form. Inspired by social and cultural history, historians of architecture have recently begun to study conscious efforts of national elites to use architecture for nationalistic ends. Considerable attention has been paid to the interplay between national movements emerging in Europe before the World War I, and the concurrent developments in the field of architecture as signified by introduction of the Art Nouveau. However, most of these works focus on individual national building movement. Building on the existing set of studies developed in different national contexts, this thesis takes a step further and approaches the issue from the transnational perspective. Applying the comparative history methodology to the three cases studies – Hungarian, Czech and Polish, all non-German ethnic groups in the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy - enables close examination of the intertwined development of modern nations and architecture.

By the turn of the century, Hungarian, Czech and Polish intelligentsia endeavored to accentuate national characteristics through architecture. In Hungary, favorable institutional setting enabled swift and extensive application of the national version of Art Nouveau. Architects such as Ödön Lechner, Béla Lajta, and the so called Group of Young Architects managed to influence significantly faces of several cities. However, their Polish counterparts in Krakow, led by Stanisław Witkiewicz, initially did not succeed and the Polish national style appeared only after 1918, when Poland became an independent state. Similar was the situation in industrial Czechoslovakia. However, instead of Art Nouveau the avant-garde rondo-cubist style, with decorations referring to Slavic folk culture, acquired the status of national style after 1918. Unlike Hungarian and Polish architects, who were making regular rounds in the villages, Czechs did not turn for inspiration to the vernacular architecture.

To conclude, it seems that the formation of the national style depended on existing national support network, which were initially lacking in the Polish and the Czech case. The difference in aesthetics of individual national styles resulted from deviations in time of appearance and from differing levels of urbanization and industrialization.