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SAGRADA FAMILIA vs OPERA HOUSE

The tourist movement. The icon of the city

It is surprising how each year, thousands of Catalans, cameras under the arm, visit Sydney to see the Opera House designed by Jorn Utzon at the same time that thousands of Australians go to Barcelona to see the Sagrada Familia. Many of these visitors will curiously cross their pathways in airports with similar goals but in different locations.

A part from the spatial experience of being in one of these masterpieces, what is it that these buildings can tell us about their cities they inhabit?

This article attends the understanding of both cities through the analysis of these two outstanding buildings.

ARCHITECTURE AND THE CITY

Spain is a country where the approach to architecture is a world precedent, Catalunya a region where one of the most powerful urban statements, Eixample Cerdà was rigorously developed and carried away to the greatest cities of the world. The professional training of the architect goes hand in hand with the urbanism as an inherent relation which if it does not exist it may have been set up in a wrongly isolated way. Therefore there is an assumed relation between the building and the environment, as a play between the mass and the void, or the void and the piece that it gives sense to the whole.

And it happens, when there is contemplation and analysis of the capital of the Wales State in Australia, the identification of this relationship between architecture and the city is often marginally casual. But, despite the absence of coherent relation to the urban realm, the spectator always takes a look back to what he came for, to what many spectators come from the other side of the world: to see the Sydney Opera House .

THE LANDMARK OF THE SYDNEYSIDERS

The Danish architect designed the masterpiece situated where the emptiness of the harbor granted its place. This masterpiece comes into not only a formal relation with its environment but also into a physical relation through "promenades" leading to views and landscape encounters.

The Opera House, as a landscape landmark, highlights the location of the maritime promenade exactly where the densest cityscape, the Central Business District enters in relation to the sea.

With its many incoming and outgoing movements of salt water, sometimes fresh water, Sydney is embracing a sea of embarkations. This space is understood as a space of ephemeral relations, a semi-urban space of waves and water squares generated around the Opera House. This building is situated to the limit of water and pavement, it provokes and attracts a whole mass movement, most of which are tourists, but also locals. It acts as a catalyst and it generates an economic, social and dynamic activation in the immediate place where it is situated.

The Opera House as an architectonic object locating the coastal city in the international panorama, whereas the Sagrada Familia does so with its Comtal city. Sagrada Familia attracts religious believers and intrigued tourists to see the geometric shapes Gaudí projected for the still unfinished religious entity.

THE PRIDE OF THE COMTAL CITY

As different to the Australian building, the Sagrada Familia Project, when it started to get built, was situated in the middle of what it was a rural medium. It has been an evolving building through its more than 130 years of history, together with the evolution of its environment, more urban every time. The originally planned relation with the Ensanche was to situate the

cathedral in the middle of a cross laid out by five empty isles of the Ensanche, even though the city has been developing and growing until it took up this emblematic building. The unfinished piece liberates emptiness within the intense and dense fabric of Barcelona while its combined towers add a landscape character to the building as a whole creating a landmark to the city.

A GEOMETRIC PLAY IN COMMON

Apart from its strategic position in the city, there is a visual component helping these two icons to become worldwide referents. Both buildings have a very strong formal linkage in common, the geometric play based on complex structures from nature helping to aid resolve the elucidation of the architect. While the coastal piece of work uses the geometric language as a strategy to relate to its maritime-landscape environment, the modernist building uses the shape as a tool to express its content, the religious content, embracing the natural light with its catenary structure. One masterpiece is located in the hiatus creating landscape, the other created emptiness in the density of Barcelona.

These two landmarks are an exemplification of how each city has been built in its own urban morphology. One with the intense landscape relation, prioritizing its contact with nature and forgetting, for a moment, of its urban core; the other clearly defining the relationship of spaces of public domain affecting the society it inhabits.

BEYOND THE MASTERPIECE

There is certainly something highly admirable about the two buildings with such a powerful value to attract people from very diverse cultures. Despite both projects being initiated from the hand of an architect, there is a moment when the masterpiece is alive, trespassing the geniality of the creator and requiring the collaboration of a whole community, very often from people around the globe, to jointly work together and making it happen.

It is therefore, the moment when the masterpiece does not belong to the architect anymore and goes beyond the limits of the local and individual realm to become part of the collective imaginary of man. It defines the new limits of humanity to make something beyond the individual and the contemporary society, it defines the new limits to MAKE CITY.

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