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## VIKTOR KOVAČIĆ'S VILLA VRBANIĆ – DAS ENGLISCHE HAUS

### VILA VRBANIĆ ARHITEKTA VIKTORA KOVAČIĆA – DAS ENGLISCHE HAUS

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The year that celebrates the 150<sup>th</sup> birth and 100<sup>th</sup> death anniversary of architect Viktor Kovačić, has seen the monograph *Vila Vrbanic arhitekta Viktora Kovacic – Das Englische Haus* authored by Nina Gazivoda, Ph.D. The monograph is an homage of sorts to the founder of modern Croatian architecture.

Culturo-scientific interpretation and study of Villa Vrbanic (1911-1912), Viktor Kovačić's valuable architectural marvel positioned at then Josipovac, today number 2 I.G. Kovačića Street in Zagreb, aids the cognisance of Kovačić's impactful *oeuvre* in the context of modern Croatian architecture as well as that of Europe, given its impact and interaction with the English architecture of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Research of Villa Vrbanic, consolidated in this monograph, is a result of continuous work conducted by Nina Gazivoda, and refers to the work and activity of Viktor Kovačić, in particular to the part of his *oeuvre* that encompasses a comprehensive approach to urban villa design.

The conducted research aims to point out to once exceptional architectural and design value of the Villa's exterior and interior, and applied design approaches of *Gesamtkunstwerk* and *landscape planning*, which led to the Villa gaining the status of a cultural heritage site. Additionally, such a status was extended to the built-in interior equipment of the Villa.

Furthermore, the aim was to use the revealed research findings towards setting up procedures required for the restoration of the Villa, as well as to nurture affirmation and preservation of urban villas positioned in Rokov perivoj gardens and summer houses at Josipovac, both discussed in detail in another book by the same author, *The Villa Franges on Rokov perivoj in Zagreb – The origins of its construction and recognising its importance*, published in Zagreb in 2008.

Though the impact of the English residential architecture on Viktor Kovačić's work had previously been stipulated by V. Lunaček and A. Laslo, this monograph has established for the very first time and elaborated on the relationship of Kovačić to the English architec-

ture of the ultimate quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> and beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

It is not a mere accident that Kovačić, as published in his notable article *Moderna arhitektura* in journal *Život* in 1900, got his inspiration from the modern architecture movement in England, namely from its founder J. Ruskin, pledging to the truthfulness of artistic (architectural) expression and devoting himself to strong movement of modern spirit.

This way, the author reveals an immediate impact of the English residential architecture on Villa Vrbanic and other work of Kovačić's, as much as its direct impact, observed through the work of Viennese architects J. Hoffmann, K. Moser and A. Loos. In that context, another influential figure relevant to Kovačić's work is the Berlin architect H. Muthesius and his colossal work *Das englische Haus*, subject to detailed analysis in the monograph.

Led by the principle that the first and foremost role of a house is to enable comfortable living and that to do so, it needs to be architecturally designed, Villa Vrbanic ensures high quality of living, with functionality and content features at the level of an upper middle class English household, as seen from the work of the aforementioned English architects. Next to Muthesius' elaboration, the author delves into some of the most significant theoretical pieces, *oeuvres* and individual masterpieces of the Secession movement in general and those significant for Croatian architecture of that period, and various happenings in the world of English architecture of that era.

From the cultural heritage point of view, Villa Vrbanic is a part of the Historical Urban Area of Zagreb heritage site, which, amongst others, includes areas that the historical urban center is immersed in and which frame the city's urban tissue, its accentuated urban block structure and the bearers of its identity features, all formed until the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century.

From the viewpoint of a contemporary approach to preservation of inherited cultural and natural values of the historical whole, not only is the cognisance of the value of the design approach witnessed not just in the exterior and interior design of Villa Vrbanic (*Gesamtkunstwerk*) exceptionally significant,

but so is the Villa's surroundings in the heart of Tuskanac forest, and the established landscape element (made possible by the appropriate size of the allotment and its landscape design), integrated in the comprehensive architectural approach, rendering it an inseparable component of its overall value (*landscape planning*).

Once a wooded area under the hills of Medvednica reaching almost into the core of the city center, Josipovac is Zagreb's very first example of an executed, planned transformation into a cottage-neighborhood of family garden villas. The construction set off in the late 1880s, covering the initial area of twenty allotments. It is important to highlight that the cottage neighborhood construction in Josipovac was a mere continuation of the late 18<sup>th</sup> century tradition of sporadic and dispersed, usually anonymously executed construction of summer houses as part of seigniories, and occurring only a decade or so following the appearance of the Viennese model of the cottage-neighborhood, Cottagen-Viertel, in neighborhoods Währing and Döbling, inspired by the English cottage-style houses. In fact, cherishing traditional models of construction, Zagreb of that time was not falling behind in the application of contemporary European tendencies of *landscape planning*, applied in the construction of summer houses under the hills of Zagreb's Medvednica.

Though originally scientifically purposed, this monograph sees art history, architecture and urban planning disciplines and their respective key events intertwined and contextualized in the given socio-historic circumstances, snapshotted around the life of the Vrbanic family, oftentimes even expanding on other arts and cultural activities of that era. It is for those reasons that the monograph is of interest to a much wider audience than perhaps initially imagined. In this context, the audience is provided with examples of English film and literature pieces to get a deeper grasp of where Kovačić drew inspiration from in the production of his own *oeuvre*. Particularities of the Secession era in Europe are also depicted through various visual and literary media, which Ž. Corak describes as *duality and doubt principles, reality pluralisms*.