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Design and Dining – Traditional Heritage and Contemporary Habits

Despite the fact that we often perceive it as a ‘modern’ discipline, design is closely linked to traditional heritage. Eventhough it is mostly related to the technological development which has marked the last two hundred years, design has stemmed from much older concepts of shaping our material reality, a constitutive part of traditional heritage. But that is not all. Traditional heritage in all its complexities can present an eternal source of theoretical and practical inspiration for future projects. The culture of food and dining is just one of many fields in which there are objective conditions for the high quality developmental politics based on traditional values.

Key words: design, tradition, culture of food

Design – definition and basic concepts

There are many definitions of design and it is difficult to single out only one which would, in a few words, clearly and unambiguously describe this concept. Design is a relatively young discipline which, due to the fast technological development of our society, has not yet reached its final form. Design as we know it today is based on the tradition of art trades and crafts from the first half of the 20th century. At the beginning, the most commonly

used term was 'industrial design'¹ and it referred to the design of objects produced by industry which, because of the serial production, simply stepped out of the definition of applied arts (or art trades), a manufacture production which paid special attention to the aesthetics of the objects. The production potential in industrial production no longer relied on the craftsman but on the machine, which significantly changed the approach to the creation of new products. The attitude towards the aesthetics was also changed, the new dominant attitude was that the beauty should stem from the internal logic of an object and because of that the tradition of the additional decoration of the produced objects or objects prepared for production, i.e. 'applied arts'² was slowly abandoned. The new discipline, therefore, was faced with the task to improve not only the aesthetic, but also functional, ergonomic and commercial qualities of new products and in the same time, to use the production materials and technology in the optimal way (Vukić 2003:54).

In other words, the basic task of design was to enrich and improve in every way possible the material qualities of life through the creation of material reality. Later the same term was used for graphic design which, because of its commercial and functional qualities, stepped out of the framework of fine arts. In the last thirty years the term has entered the field of virtual reality (for example web design).

Whether we are talking about industrial, graphic, web or some other of its sub-disciplines, design is always closely linked to economy. Besides being in the service of consumers and trying to satisfy their needs for good quality products, in the same time design has to satisfy the needs of producers in terms of their competitiveness and survival on the market.

Material reality (and probably the same can be said of virtual reality), however, from ancient times contained also certain characteristics which we could describe as spiritual. The ways in which certain objects can symbolize a community can be illustrated by numerous examples in which objects were raised to the level of worship, legend or a cult; royal crowns and insignia, swords (King Arthur), rings, rare postal stamps, cars, etc. Objects give us power, strength, feeling of security, self confidence, social status: they invoke in us nostalgia, hatred, joy, sexual excitement; objects are often much more than just 'objects'. Designer is the person who implements in objects these 'add-

¹ Pevsner claimed that the term 'design' originated in the English language and was introduced to German language at the beginning of the 20th century (Pevsner 2005:170), and according to Fruht the term 'industrial design' was introduced for the first time by the English painter Joseph Simmel just after the World War I' (Fruht 1976:18). The term entered Croatian language as late as the 1950es, when the theory of design in industrial production was formed in terminological sense..... as 'designing' (meaning process) used with the adjective 'industrial' or used as the collocation 'designing industrial products', while the person carrying out this process was called (we could not speak about a profession at that time because of the non-existence of a specific educational institution), an 'industrial artist' (...). Terminologically in some cases we could identify 'shaping' and "designing", but only with the purpose to explain the term in more details, or we used the term 'design/designer', but only when we wanted to distinguish it from other related terms or to point to the design of industrial products in the countries with market economy. (Vukic 2003:29).

² Fruht defined applied arts as the ... subdiscipline of fine arts which used and transferred/applied the artistic elements and artistic expression to the items of everyday usage (Fruht 1976:17).

ed values'. By buying designed objects the consumer therefore in a way improves his/her life in a spiritual sense as well and because of that he/she is ready to spend more money and this satisfies the producer's basic need.

If we here leave out the discussion about the ethics of design, we can define design as an interdisciplinary field which balances between the needs of consumers and the needs of producers. Through designed creations the producer creates an image of himself/herself as a successful provider of material reality for an individual or a group and they, by using these same products, define themselves according to certain sociological and cultural patterns. The need for displaying belonging to a certain group is as old as the civilization itself. Noblet pointed to the existence of 2 to 1,5 million years old African cultures which coexisted in the same region and, even though their economy was very similar, highly differed in the decorative styles of their material products. Similar contemporary examples made Noblet conclude that '...the style of an object is probably equally important as its function' (Noblet 1999:22). We could actually say that the focal point of design is the creation of identity, of producers and consumers alike.

Dietary habits

Design enters the field of dieting culture through tableware, the interior and through graphic applications which deal with the topic of food and diet. In a research conducted for my graduate thesis (Paškvan 2006) I tried to explore the context in which the elements of material culture were (and are) created in the field of food and dining. I limited my research to the objects which most directly and to the greatest extent linked design and dining, and these were items for preparing and serving food and for dining – in other words, kitchenware. Through the research of historical-sociological circumstances which determined the dietary rituals and through the research of historical development of kitchenware I tried to establish certain irregularities in the development of the culture of food and dining. This insight into a wider context provided me with a better understanding of the recent developments in the field of dining culture and helped me in defining the potential market for the industry of kitchenware which I saw as a basic precondition for starting a project of designing these items. In order to define the contemporary dining habits of my target group more precisely, I thought it necessary to study in more details some of the characteristic elements of the phenomenon. I started with the cookbooks, both national and commercial, then went through the literature which dealt with food and dining in the context of economical, political and religious circumstances in a region or a state and finished with the field research of the kitchenware market. By gaining some knowledge on the current state of affairs (which actually refers to the period of the last few years, but does not exclude the possibility that some major changes have occurred in the period of a few months to which the outlined indicators could not have reacted), and by studying the history of the development of my target market, I could predict

its future development with more precision. By comparing data I gained through analyzing the situation in the world and in Croatia, I tried to determine the possibilities for the development of new products in Croatia.

Basically, we can distinguish between two types of cultures of food and dining: the culture of the baked and the culture of the cooked. The first one was characteristic of nomadic cultures and the second one of sedentary cultures. History teaches us that cultural achievements which we consider the basis of the civilized world stem from the sedentary cultures of Mesopotamia, India, China, Egypt and Ancient Greece and Rome. However, contrary to the scientific analysis, in the dietary habits of the economically advanced cultures the dominant culture is the culture of the baked and not the culture of the cooked. The reasons should be sought in the era of industrialization which happened not so long ago. Speeding up of social processes resulted in speeding up of economy which, in turn, resulted in a faster rhythm of life. Lives of people who travel everyday for tens and even hundreds of kilometers to their jobs, who spend in their offices almost whole days and where they take care of their diet, their biological needs, their relaxation and sex, who migrate during their lifetimes several times to different cities or states, are much closer to the lives of nomadic warriors of Dzingis Khan than to the lives of warriors of Ramsez II. As a consequence, the dominant type of diet of those nomads of the 21st century is the fast food, of the roasted type, consumed outside of the family circle. The most contemporary phases of globalization, based on IT revolution, have additionally speeded up the social processes and brought civilization to the point never reached before – the whole Earth is united in a big empire – empire of capital. The market, therefore, has lost its regional characteristics and for the first time in history we can speak about real global markets. The world has become uniformed. As a reaction, an individual feels a desire for the autochthonous; he/she aims at the definition of his/her own identity under the frameworks of smaller groups and specific regions and towards the re-establishment of diversity as the basis for future development. In the field of diet, this growing trend is observable in the re-establishment of regional cuisines, inside the already existing frameworks of national cuisines. Parallel to the trend of political, there is also a trend of gastronomic regionalization which is observed in emphasizing the specificities of respective cuisines as a consequence of various historical, geographical and sociological microsituations. As an example we could take the neighboring Italy which conquered world markets by emphasizing its regional specificities (Toscana and Chianti and Alto Adige and Grappe), while pizzas and pasta were pushed aside.

Data I gathered while analyzing the situation in the world, I compared with the situation in Croatia and tried to determine the potentials for the development of new products in this field. We could say that Croatia is in a transitional phase, not only from political but also from gastronomic standpoint. The invading capitalism has, on one side, in the culture of the roasted exchanged 'čevapi' for hamburgers while, on the other side, in many houses the 'granny's cooking' is still the dominant cult, even though this is maybe more a consequence of economic underdevelopment than a conscious choice. Due to this economic underdevelopment and (un)fortunate historical

circumstances numerous fragments of our cultural heritage have been preserved and in the context of the new changes in the sphere of global cultural development, our cultural heritage could provide us with certain advantages as compared with other economically more developed Western countries. In relation to the topic of this article, these historical circumstances have provided us with the legacy of variety of customs, habits and enjoyments, which in the gastro world are expressed as the variety of tastes, smells and colors, and this results in a variety of shapes, materials and techniques of production of items for preparation, serving and consummation of food. This richness of our cultural heritage is a great capital for the future of Croatian design when it comes to food and dining.

Heritage in the future and the ‘Scandinavian case’

It is important to differentiate a few important characteristics of heritage which could be crucial for planning the future on the basis of inherited values. First, we have to distinguish between material and intangible heritage. Material heritage refers to the objects and items which in the field of food and dining include wooden, ceramic or metal tableware, kitchenware for cooking and eating and a number of other items linked to culture of dining. These items are kept in museums and depots of related institutions and these holdings are invaluable for the research of the culture of food and dining in our regions in different historical periods. Intangible heritage refers to knowledge and skills needed for the production of the enumerated items. It is preserved in the minds and hands of craftsmen and will live as long as the people who use it. Taking into consideration the long period of systematic neglect, the situation with our traditional crafts is today far from satisfactory. Potters, notaries, traditional carpenters and others are almost as extinct as the Mediterranean Sea Lion; last generations of traditional craftsmen are slowly disappearing. However, we should have in mind that the similar processes in the majority of the so-called developed countries have occurred much earlier and that the situation in those countries is much worse than here, which makes our obligation to preserve the elements of our intangible heritage much more serious from the economic aspect as well.³ Here it is important to emphasize that material heritage is of non-changeable, while intangible heritage is of changeable character and therefore, when discussing the measurements for the preservation of the latter, we should revise the old paradigm on the inseparability of items and skills which produced them. Namely, a certain skill has been changing constantly over time and has been adapting to the new lifestyles by incorporating new technical and technological findings. If we take, for example, a traditional object from the same region, but produced in different periods, we can observe

³ An important example is the hand pottery wheel, a more primitive predecessor of the foot wheel, which is today preserved only in Spain, Portugal and Dinaric regions of Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia (Barlek 1982:5).

some significant differences in the decorations, the form and even in the function⁴ of this object, eventhough the skill which produced it and the place of production were the same. Therefore the key element in the strategy of preservation of our intangible cultural heritage is to introduce the people who still posses the skills to the current trends. Traditional craftsmen will not survive if we place them in the museum together with the museum items nor will they survive if they stay oriented only towards the production of the souvenirs. Their skill and knowledge can be used for the creation of new material reality which corresponds with the current lifestyle.

The critics of this concept claim that commercialization of culture leads to its vulgarization. True enough, if we perceive culture as a form of spiritual asset of a certain community, then its commercialization can seem as a blasphemy. However, we have to ask the question: is it possible to separate culture from economy in a given community? The history tells us the story of highly developed cultures of Celts, Mayas, Incas, North American Indians and others, which were, after encountering the economically more advanced societies, almost eradicated from the face of the Earth. Examples of numerous other cultures which, either due to internal reasons, or due to the clash with economically stronger societies, at one point lost their economic power or autonomy, confirmed the idea that economic death was always followed by cultural death and hence that cultural life of a community depended on its economic life. And the other way around. Many global economic powers are expanding and strengthening their markets primarily by spreading their own cultural influence. What we call today 'McDonaldization' is not only an economic, but maybe, primarily, a cultural expansion of influences of a series of economic-political subjects which could culturally be defined as 'the American cultural circle'. The influence of American lifestyle through films, music, internet, beauty magazines, etc. was crucial for the transformation of Croatian, Bosnian or Kazakhstan markets into new 'American' market. The key role in the 'conquers' of this type have the mechanisms of the so-called 'cultural production', i.e. 'culture industry'⁵, where we could also include design. I think that the culture which is not prepared to use its commercial potential for strengthening the economic subjects which inhabit the same cultural space has little chance to survive the clash with the American or some other global economic-cultural symbiosis. Furthermore, economic subjects whose products are not culturally determined can hardly have a serious influence on the global market. I therefore think that the development of cultural industries should be one of the guidelines of national and regional developmental politics in Croatia. Mechanisms of culture industry should not,

⁴ When he speaks about the earthenware of the Panonic area, Barlek mentions the pots with narrow base which were used for cooking in 'the old fashioned stoves (pots were placed in them using iron rods), while the pots with wide base appeared only after the introduction of common stoves.' (Barlek 1982:4).

⁵ 'The creation of the term 'culture industry' is linked to the chapter of a book titled *Dialectics of Enlightenment* (1977/1944). In this book Adorno and Horkheimer use the term 'culture industry' to refer to the phenomenon (which they consider negative) of standardization of all forms of production, including culture. (...) Culture industries include a variety of fields and Hesmonhalgh claims that the most important are the industry of commercials and marketing, radio and television industry, film industry, internet, music industry, publishing (classic or e-publishing) and video industry and computer games'. (Primorac 2004:237).

of course, be used only as a means for accumulation of capital, but also as a strong weapon for the preservation of cultural identity of larger and smaller social groups and sub-groups and, in the long run, of the individual himself/herself.

Our cultural heritage could hence be used as a platform of knowledge and experience for launching of new products. Designers could (and should) have the key role in the process of adaptation of folk knowledge to the new forms of production. We can learn from numerous examples from Scandinavian countries that such concepts can yield excellent long term results, both in economic and cultural sphere. Scandinavian countries have not only significantly increased their already thick budgets from their production industry, but they have also, through their world famous design, managed to create a positive image of themselves as the countries which have, through planned quality investments in their own human, cultural and natural resources, created a society of peace and prosperity. Scandinavian design, which is highly based on Scandinavian cultural material and intangible heritage perfectly embeds all the characteristics of the countries which are, just like Croatia, relatively small in size, but which have, through intelligent usage of their own resources, managed to ensure high living standards and prosperity for their citizens. The Nordic logic is that the national design strategy should be determined by their way of life which is in turn determined by realistic life conditions and not by TV commercials or popular TV shows. In doing that they often peak into the vaults of their heritage in order to learn from their ancestors how to fight from cold, ice, lack of sunlight or, furthermore, how to use the seasonal excess of daylight, winds, sea and other natural resources which have been influencing their lifestyle for centuries. The designers of their industrially produced furniture have inherited from the old carpenters the fine sense for materials and details, while the ‘secret’ of the success of Scandinavian contemporary architecture was maybe best revealed by the Danish architect Claus Bonderup: ‘Modernist took our architectural history away. Now some of us are trying to get it back. I don’t think we abandoned modern. I think we are making it richer.’ (Gaynor 1987:104). By using their products to solve the real problems originating from the logic of culture of their everyday life, the Scandinavians have developed a simple, but unique style, which owes its uniqueness exactly to the fact that it has been harmonized with the character of its creators and primary users. Scandinavian production industry might not be the largest in the world, but it is in accordance with its own needs and it is trying to use its own potentials optimally. Villy Sørensen described it wittily: ‘Getting more of something is good – but getting something good is better.’ (Gaynor 1987:11).

The examples of Scandinavian countries can show us that the preservation of cultural and economic independence of small nations in the globalized world is possible. Specificities which stem from the logic of life in relatively small communities, and the Republic of Croatia is such a community in the global context, can represent a certain advantage in the struggle for economic and cultural independence. In the context of the above discussed trends on the global market and taking into account the fact that our cultural heritage is relatively well preserved as compared to the neighboring markets, I think that Croatia has a good chance to create, by its own resources and

through clever politics, a production strategy for the production of items related to food and dining (and other fields as well) which can significantly boost the Croatian economy in the future.

Zupajol – suggestion of a different approach

By analyzing the aspects of Croatian cultural heritage in the field of food and dining, I have come to the findings which could form a good basis for the creation of new products related to food and dining. Zupajol is a concept which is trying to revitalize the tradition of lunch as a central social event in the daily rituals of small communities. Family and circle of friends are social groups of great importance for the preservation of identity of an individual in the globalized world. A joint lunch is in this sense an unavoidable part of everyday life. Zupajol is trying to re-establish an almost forgotten tradition of eating soups which, because of their warmth and the way of serving, have always presented an important part of the ritual of a family lunch. By using new materials, Zupajol is adapting its functionality to the smaller kitchens which are now dominant in most of the households; it is envisaged as a set of kitchenware which covers the whole process from cooking to serving and consummation of food and opens up possibilities for preparation of all kinds of soups. It is important to mention that this product is only one of many possible suggestions which could come out of this or similar research. Through larger investments in the development of concepts which use our cultural heritage for the creation of new product lines we could come up with many more new suggestions and a lot of them would probably have the potential for being developed into solutions which could be materialized and competitive on the international market.

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