

OPEN AIR MUSEUMS AS WAYS OF PRESERVING AND TRANSMITTING THE SPIRIT OF PLACE

OLGA SEVAN

Russian Institute for Culture Research

Bersenevskaya nab. 20

119072 Moscow

Russia

E-mail: osevan@mtu-net.ru

Abstract. In this article the author, being the main architect of such project as one of the biggest Russian Open Air Museums near Archangelsk “Malye Korely” (1974-1986), explores the situation around this project, history of its creation, modern approaches to this kind of complexes, ways of deciding the contemporary problems. During creating the spatial image of historical environment of region and transmitting of spirit of place in the museum, the author had proposed his own method of work, which helps to presented spirit of place in the new territory.

Theme of the Assembly: “The Spirit of Place: Between the Intangible and the Tangible”, formulated by its organizers, deals not only with the monuments, historical places, but with the spiritual heritage. The questions, proposed for consideration, include as well the philosophical, anthropological and cultural research aspects of problem of preservation and development our society. Such wide approach should cause respect and approval, but it has also an obvious difficulty and leads in a certain extent to ideal constructions, that occasionally has no attitude to realization of these proposals and even means impossibility of realization.

Idea and need of community of keeping itself and its originality as condition of its existence should be comprehended and transmitted to next generations. In this socio-cultural process museum is the medium between people and culture, and its aim is transmission of values, knowledges, experience. In primitive societies the spiritual

precondition of museum was creation by a man of specific cultural space representing available ancestral experience through feelings, emotions, i.e. practical and spiritual experience.

Ancient Greeks had opened the art of memory (mnemonics) which later entered the European tradition. In Plato's Academy ("the house of muses" - deity of arts, education, enlightenment) philosophy adjoined to reminiscences about great ancestors that was an important part of teaching. Knowledge of one's sources was rescue from oblivion, which is death. (Lomako O.M. 2001)

Well-known Russian philosopher Nikolay Fedorov (1828-1903) had wrote about museum as about organic unity of memory and mind that proves to be true by linguistic and psychological researches. These researches convince us that muse, museum and man are of equally old. Muse and museum were born simultaneously with man's consciousness. The philosopher believed that museum was expression of concord and internal fullness where all three properties of human soul were incorporated in memory: mind, feeling and will. The museum is resemblance to the Universe, i.e. the project that unifies all preceding generations (fathers) and subsequent ones (sons). It unites sciences (knowledge), morality (feelings and souls) and arts (beauty) for general affair (Fedorov N., 1982).

The ideas of German philosopher M. Heidegger are consonant to the Russian philosopher's ones. He wrote that memory was collection of such things that should be comprehended first of all, collection of all that existed and addressed to us. To perceive our past means to understand ourselves: not what we have to take from the past, but what we owe to the past and how we have to return our moral debt to it. "Historical social memory is criterion of perfection and guarantor of immortality" (Lomako O.M. 2001).

Making start from Nikolay Fedorov's ideas concerning museum-building in the end of 19th – beginning of 20th century that was specific movement of that time when the whole cultural community of the world had turned to museums, we shall address to modern analysis of open air museums in particular. As a matter of fact, all historical cities or historical villages in their natural conditions and landscapes are such kind of museums. And all the above-mentioned that were said by philosopher are relevant to these objects. But as the theme

declared by me concerned the open air museums, in particular those which were created by the specialists or local communities in the open air, we shall try to consider the possibility of transmission of spirit of place by the examples of such kind of complexes.

Such museums, both in Europe and in Russia, divide into three types: the scansens, i.e. transportable type ("Scansen" in Sweden, "Malye Korely" in Russia, etc.); at the places of preservation of installations there is the "in situ" type (for example, village Holloko in Hungary); and the mixed type. In the last case the monuments are transported from the other places (island Kizhi, Russia). There are more than 2000 open air museums in the Europe and at about 50 in Russia.

As it is known, the initial aim of forming of open air museums was formulated quite narrowly: monuments had been transported with the purpose of their rescue. They had been placed in the new territory of museum in neighborhood with the other objects, and it was not taken into account that they belonged to the certain historical and cultural zone, occasionally the whole ensemble of installations was not taken into account. The dynamics of transformation and development of museums can be observed in many countries. The museums of Sweden, Finland, Germany, etc. became the most representative. Many of them had appeared in the end 19th - first half of 20th century. And as for Russian open air museums, they had appeared already after Second World War, and boom of museum-building happened in 1970-1980. But museum practices began to develop in our country as far back as in 18th century.

Among Russian open air museums the Archangelsk wooden architecture and folk art museum "Malye Korely" is at one of the central places. In 1975 the General Plan of museum (architects B. Gnedovskyi, O. Sevan) had been approved and later carried out. (Sevan. 1995). It was one of the first projects of our country of that period in the framework of which the landscape environmental method had become the dominating principle of creation of museum exposition. (*Figure 1*)



Figure 1. The main view of the open air museum “Malye Korely”
(Photo O. Sevan, 2007)

To reconstruct the spatial system of artificially recreated settlements (sectors of museum) the historical settlements and monuments in the nature were explored in detail during the big number of expeditions to the different territories of Archangelsk area. Planning and landscape characteristics of villages from which the monuments were taken out, typology of investigation and their location were being studied. Historical and cultural zoning of the region were being discovered.

The author had proposed his own method of work with the environment and with other specialists could realize it in museum. It consisted not only for study monuments etc., but drawing landscapes, settlements and monuments in the process of which “getting used to environment” took place. Later this feeling of environment and its features are being transferred to the project of specific museum sector and to build it later. In our opinion this is a very process which includes the feature and the technique of representation of spirit of place in the new territory of artificially created villages, i.e. sectors, monuments and even landscapes of place, from which these installations were transported. The sense of such author's

demonstration consists in consecutive process: “sensual entering the environment” - studying of the environment - fixing - designing – carrying out - the control - presentation and, at last, donation and alienation.

The initial stage of described method is set during drawing, i.e. “entering the environment” by means of architectural figure, drawing in the nature either settlements and landscapes or installations and their details. It should be use in the town as well. The all nature and outward things also became the participants of such process of “entering”. Drawing and offered way of comprehension of place and its spirit by means of figure sharply differs from multilevel photo or cinema fixing as well as computer graphic, including fixing of non-material objects as there is no such important elements of perception as time and memory. I.e. method of “entering” (“sympathy”) becomes the important element of comprehension and understanding of the object and its memorization (memory).

Such expression as “what we do not know, that does not exist” can be changed to “what we shall not feel deeply, that we shall not remember”. Therefore, when we speak about landscapes, we can emphasize their important elements such as color and spatial characteristics that were in the focus of attention of artists either in Russia (B. Kustodiev, V. Polenov, I .Bilibin and so on) or in other countries and that were the subjects of a lot of written works. But the important elements of landscape are sensual characteristics of man connected with the nature, its condition and season, change of temperatures, rain or snow and so on.

Besides, a sound components of the world turn out to be important. Thus, it is obvious, that in the countryside or in any city (industrial, tourist, seaside and so on) such characteristics will be different. Rustling of foliage, birds’ singing, far or deafening music, noise of sea, local dialect of people or

conversation of foreigners, as well as many other things explain to a man in what place and landscape he is located.

A smell also characterizes the certain landscape, either countryside with its specific attributes, i.e. open spaces of fields and meadows, smells of grasses, woods, animals, or city area. In the city streets man feels others components, such as smell of gasoline, perfume, dust, etc.

In the city man finds different places where it is possible to have a rest and breathe quietly in a park. Well-known writers had been brightly describing not only natural or urban visual landscapes (I. Turgenev, L. Tolstoj, etc.); some of them had succeeded in transmitting of their taste and flavor (Marcel Proust). There are also smells of interiors of temples and palaces, manors or dachas. Boris Pasternak had transmitted in verses and prose the spirit of his favorite place, summer house-museum at Peredelkino. And all people who happened to be there know how it corresponds with Pasternak's prose; and during reading of his verses you may feel the spirit of this place.

All these elements are the important components of spirit of landscape, and they influence on our perception. They can be transmitted through art performance, in figure or in painting, then transferred to paper as a project and carried out in space. And we hope that the author of the current article and her colleagues succeeded in carrying out this sort of project in Archangelsk wooden architecture and folk art museum "Malye Korely", that was realization of proposed method of work (*Figure 2, 3, 4, 5*)



Figure2. Drawing of the village in the Mezen River, Russian North, 1981
(Arch. O. Sevan)

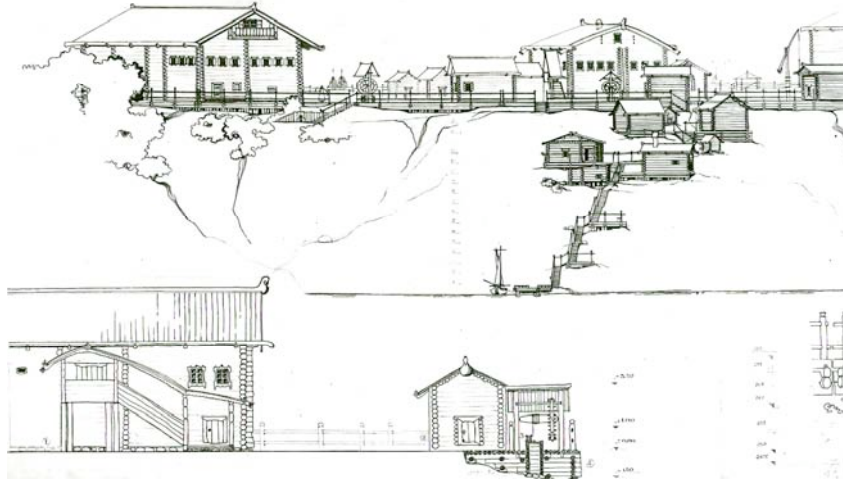


Figure 3. Part of the Project of Mezen sector in the museum «Malye Korely», 1983. (Arch. O. Sevan, N. Brovchenko).



Figure 4. Project of Mezen sector was realized in the museum «Malye Korely». (Photo O. Sevan, 2006)

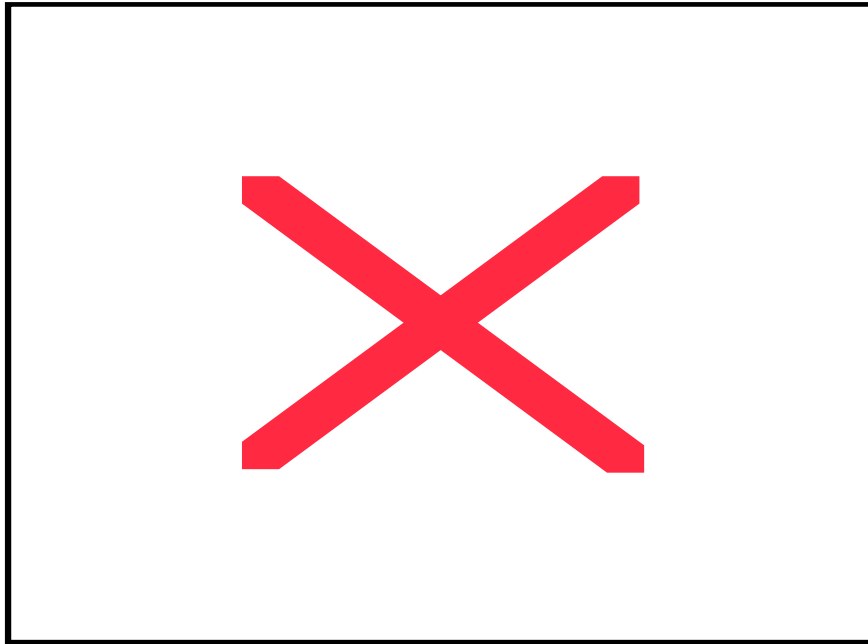


Figure 5. Project of Mezen sector was realized in the museum «Malye Korely». (Photo O. Sevan, 2007)

Getting into the spatial structure of a place (whether a monument or a landscape) and its details, “to the silence of its conversation with you” (and only in silence it is possible to feel deep the spirit of place, its feature, its sound ...), you go through relation of times, cosmic space of the world. There are the very things Nikolay Fedorov wrote about. Although many of his statements seemed to be too ideal, F.Dostoevsky, V.Solovev, L.Tolstoj and others at the same time had supported his ideas and his project of “regulation of the nature”. These ideas correspond with the works of founders of astronomy K.Tsiolkovsky, V.Vernadsky and A.Chizhevsky.

On the basis of not only studying the historical and cultural territories and monuments, regional features of places, the organizers and employees of the museum strived for transferring and representing the way of life of population and spirit of place, from which these

monuments, basically of wooden architecture, were moved. All these complexes represent interpretation of the real environment as they were restored from regions and settlements which consisted not only of installations of cult and habitable architecture, but also of traditions and customs of their inhabitants. Family trees of various social groups of population which were depicted in interiors of buildings, in manors and in artificially created settlements (sectors) were studied. Therefore in open air museums where such kind of elements of culture were taken in account the material essence of different places as well as spiritual one were represented (*Figure 6*)



Figure 6. The new image of the old traditional heritage presents in the museum exhibition.

There were reconstruction and actualization of a part of life activity of population, and widening of conception of cultural heritage of different territories presented in the same place, i.e. in open air museum. Nowadays they became the platforms for teaching the population of various technologies in the sphere of culture and methods of preservation of spirit of place, from which the monuments were taken out. Local people, coming from these far territories and

being participants of holidays or fairs speak their own dialect, demonstrate their own cuisine, clothes, and folk music etc. By means of behavior of their small community they bring and present a part of spirit of their region, their land; and visitors feel that. Taking into account that this action takes place in the territory of artificially created regional villages, it can be said that general context of spirit of place is undoubtedly present.

However it is frequently required to give explanations for the tourists as, how we spoke, “what we do not know, that does not exist”. And moreover, it is possible at reasonable quantity of visitors to give these explanations that promotes perception and silence of “entering the environment” and feeling of place. But it contradicts the modern marketing programs of museums which are generally focused upon attraction of increasing number of visitors and making a profit. Many open air museums become park museums that entail different structure of behavior and demonstration of objects (23rd conference Association of the European Open Air Museums, 2007)

But in open air museums, especially in those which are created at the places (“in situ”), under skilful use of both immovable and movable monuments and under professional management it is possible to achieve feeling of spirit historical place, new socio-cultural situations and new objects of demonstration.

The paper presented on the Assembly of ICOMOS in Canada and supported by Russian Humanitarian Found in framework of the Project _ 08-04-15070 (3), 2008.

REFERENCES

- Lomako, O.M. 2001. The Image of Museum as a Realization of the Idea of Integrity in the History of Culture: A Philosophical-Anthropological // Analysis The Philosophical Age. Almanac 18. Part 2. Ed. by T. Artemieva, M. Mikeschin. St. Petersburg: St. Petersburg Center for History of Ideas, 2001. pp. 102-07. Internet. Available from <http://www.ideashistory.org.ru/pdfs/00title.pdf>
- Fedorov, Nikolay. 1982. *The philosophy of the common cause. Museum, it is sense and meaning*. Moscow: Misl, Vol. 2, pp. 575-603
- Sevan, Olga. 1995. Act Scansenologica. *The methods of designing and arranging open air museums in the Russian North*. Edited by Jerzy Czaikowski. Vol. 7. Sanok, Poland. pp. 65-90.