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## Abstract

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In a world of rapid cultural transformation this research project takes a new look at architecture from an anthropological perspective. From the 1990s on there has been an increasing call for the integration of culture into development work and into planning and construction processes in developing countries. However, the mere declaration that it is absolutely necessary today to include the subject of culture in planning processes is rarely followed up by theoretical precision or methodological considerations. It is therefore the main goal of my own work to develop a methodological toolkit for the integration of culture into planning.

To this end, an exemplary field study was carried out in Ladakh, in the Indian Himalaya. The housing problems in Ladakh are representative for many regions in the Himalayas and similar problems can be found in many developing countries worldwide. A methodological approach for a so-called “anthropological pre-design study” (APD-Study) has been developed and introduced prior to a major building project (Solar Town) in Ladakh. A lot of useful information could be gathered in a relatively short amount of time and the results of the study are now with the planners helping them in their own decision making process in a number of ways. Drawing from this experience, general guidelines were elaborated - and are presented to the readers in a readily accessible form – in order to promote the introduction of similar studies in other world regions with comparable problems.

Dealing with an ever more interdependent world urges us to finally integrate developing countries into global considerations, stopping the long lasting construction of Western elites leaving important developing tasks out on the margins. This requires new thinking in broader terms.

Contemporary building professionals have to face a world without certainties to base their work on. They are left in a terrain that is unknown to them and the results of their designs and planning strategies are as unsound as their orientation in a culturally unknown landscape. Long established guidelines such as locality, place, climate and available building materials have to be reconsidered and placed into a wider context. I suggest that there is only one certainty left regarding the built environment nowadays: Houses are designed for the people who live in them, work in them, and are represented through

them. But who are these people who suddenly do not act in a particular place anymore, whose cultural heritage loosens and whose horizons are influenced by images from the other side of the world? How does an architect/planner deal with the demanding task to build for cultures s/he is not familiar with and new „transformed cultures“ that haven't even existed before?

Ladakh is one significant example representative for various regions, where recent developments have revolutionized the existing political, economic, social and spiritual structure of society – and therefore also the process of building. I argue that in developing regions planning strategies still put an overemphasis on the utilitarian dimension, namely, on economic and technological advances, whereas it is overdue to put fresh emphasis on the cultural, aesthetic and spiritual dimension to gain basic acceptance among the people. There will never be a customs control on the transfer of ideas and ideals. But more important than idealized superior visions is the strong need to trace the actual requirements and the needs of the people in the growing complexity of societies. Architects and planners need to go back to the people as the focal point of all activities. However, this is a dimension which is much harder to capture than technical certainties, and the simple "add-culture-and-stir"-approach has caused more trouble than good. The truth is that there is clearly a lack of theoretical precision and methodological consideration in the search for human demands on housing.

In this research work I illustrate that the field of anthropology, which has long defined the human being and culture as the cornerstones of its subject, is the discipline that can provide the architect and planner with the necessary methodological toolkit to survive in the complexity of this task. Highlighting this point through the example of Ladakh, I demonstrate that with the help of anthropology it is possible to develop a scientific way to trace the manifold wants and needs people may have regarding their housing situation. The ambitious task to approach both disciplines, anthropology and architecture, imposes constraints as well as obligations. First of all it has to find a vocabulary which is available to all, and above this the work should address academics and practitioners alike. A common conceptual framework of the two disciplines is clearly important in order to gain more satisfactory results regarding the building process in developing countries.

A new phenomenon to deal with is the enormous speed of the current transformation process which creates unknown problems in all spheres of life, housing being one of them. While formerly the question was: "What is the attitude towards the built environment in this or that culture?" It now has to be: "How is the attitude towards the built environment changing in this culture due to increasing transnational interaction?" Although theoretically a mutual process, the unilateral character of this interaction – or intervention - in many less-informed countries is best expressed by the use of the term "westernization", which signifies the mechanical imitation of a particular way of life, as a synonym for "modernization". The creation of new needs is a fundamental requirement for reformation, social change, intellectual shift and alike and thus it is a phenomenon which – to state it in a simplified version - promotes both materialism and individualism. Along with this comes a transformation of attitudes towards the house. Because of the tension between cultural homogenization and cultural heterogenization, buildings also have gained a new meaning as symbols of identification. However – there is a thin line between the mere copying of the Western approach and the potential for a creative transformation that could highly enrich the built landscape.

How should a planner and builder react to all these new expectations in architecture? Trying to trace the real wants and needs is not an easy task, since one will soon find out that there is considerable discrepancy in what people think, what they say and what the real issues are. It is not enough to find out what people want, but to understand, why they want it. During a two-month field research in Ladakh, I conducted an "anthropological pre-design study" (APD-study) prior to a major housing project called Solar Town. The purpose of my study, which I conducted in one of the already existing housing colonies around the capital Leh, was to gain a profound grasp of the people's views regarding their housing situation, actual as well as ideal, and - based on that - to suggest planning guidelines for the new project.

There is no global truth in how to approach the difficult task of dealing with the human being in its cultural, social, spiritual and ideological context. However, it is important to strongly enforce the attention paid to this matter in order to gain more adequate and sustainable planning results for building projects – for this seems certain: The amount of time invested is insignificant in comparison with the severe mistakes that can be prevented.