

Kitsch as a Phenomenon in Architecture of Contemporary Hotels

Elzbieta Trocka-Leszczynska, Joanna Jablonska*

Faculty of Architecture of Wroclaw University of Science and Technology (FA WrUST)

Prusa St. 53/55, 50-317 Wroclaw, Poland:

elzbieta.trocka-leszczynska@pwr.edu.pl, joanna.jablonska@pwr.edu.pl

Abstract

Commercialization and favouring tastes of clients, is a strong feature of contemporary hotels' architectural design. Due to an increasing commercialization in hospitality services, networks and individual businesses, race each other to attract as many guests as possible. Thus, hotels are constantly renewed and their offer is updated. Even, in a relatively small edifices, there is a tendency to add multifunctional zones, i.e.: cafes, Day SPA, gyms, casinos, conference rooms, event venues and so on. Such areas, together with halls and corridors, are receiving very vivid and attention captivating design, which should please and surprise varied public.

Thus, the unlimited number of forms and inspirations, like: palaces and castles, tropical jungles, movies, pirate ships or ancient baths, are in many cases placed together in one building. They form an environment that should bring happiness and sense of endless fun to the guests. However, at many occasions, it does not strengthen positive impressions, but frightens users with cheap and random forms. Moreover, manufactured from poor materials and simplified to prosthesis of initial inspiration, they become architectural caricatures. In this process kitsch appears as odd phenomenon, strongly present in hotels' solutions. This article was devoted to presentation of studies on this issue, carried on both literature and selected cases. The conclusions aim at showing possible solutions in order to avoid this negative phenomenon in the future hotel implementations.

1. Introduction

Each travel business or touristic for single individuals connects with gathering new experiences and immersion in alien town, cities, architecture and urban structure. Hotels are important element of this journey and as such, are designed in a method to provide interesting and unforgettable moments within overall visitation. Their architecture and interior solutions – so called physical factors, together with functions – referred as organizational elements, are crucial to proper guest reception in particular establishment [2], [6].

This article is focused on the first group of mentioned physical factors, which can be designed in three different ways. First method, assumes recreation of home character in the hotel and bases on simulation of spatial functionality in traditional household: dining and sitting rooms, libraries, parlours and bedroom areas. Second, can usually be found in budget accommodation objects, and offers typical hotel plan with traditionally set zones: entrance, reception, restaurant, lobby and guest rooms. And at last, third, which is focused on providing visitors unusual impressions, illusion of immersion in novel worlds and full escape-from-reality experience. [9] In this form rarely there can be extracted typical zones divisions, and public areas have more of a shared space character, without traditional building compartments.

The main issue of this article will be focused on third collection of elaborated solutions, thus they are closely connected to the problem of kitsch in contemporary hotels. Here, this phenomenon is usually an outcome of exaggerated pursuit for uncommonness in architecture. However, there will also be noted examples of standard hotels' design methods from first and second group. There, on the other hand, tasteless solutions appear by mass repetition of selected architectural styles or trends, copied and multiplied with the use of cheap materials and technology of low quality.

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2. Aim and method

2.1. Aim

First aim of this article, is to turn attention of scientists and professionals, who are working within the hospitality branch design, towards the problem of kitsch in contemporary hotels' architecture. This issue becomes really severe, by polluting our public spaces with aggressive: forms, colours, textures, advertisements, lights and noise. They are constantly becoming more and more dangerous to physical and psychological health of human beings.

Secondly, authors interest was to show causes and effects of aforementioned phenomenon occurrence, in order to formulate guidelines for gradual elimination of these adversative impacts from the hotels' built environment. And by such, to humanize this space methodically creating user friendly and safe places, without loss of their commercial and competitive character.

2.2. Method

Research consisted of two crucial parts. First, there were case studies during which it was stated, that kitsch is repetitive phenomenon in contemporary hotels. In comparison to other buildings of public use, like: offices, administration, banks, theatres, concert halls, cinemas or even shopping centres etc., the occurrence of tasteless solutions in a hospitality business could be stated as more frequent. For this part of studies over 100 of buildings in Europe and USA were considered. Into account there were taken: external forms, facades and interior architectural solutions, with focus on materials, colours and textures. With the use of conclusion form this part of study, main elements of kitsch in hotels could be distinguished and described.

Thus, second part of research was carried out and it consisted of broad literature review, aiming on the

essence of the kitsch phenomenon and possible reasons for the popularity of tacky solutions in the hotel industry. In this part there were used: critical analysis, comparative studies and synthesis – latter for conclusion formulation. Deliberately for article purpose, primary there were presented definitions and conditions of phenomenon occurrence, and then short review of case studies was mentioned. Elaboration, is closed by the authors' conclusions, which hopefully will contribute to improvement of contemporary hotels' architectural and interior design. This research were limited to European and American contemporary projects, due to similar cultural and tradition background [8].

3. Discussion

3.1. Definitions

Notion kitsch was firstly used in 60. or 70. of XIX century, in Munich, to describe sloppy work, objects of low value and unfair trade. Originally word was written as (germ.) *Kitschen* and *Verkitschen*. Literature sources show also that in Germany and England there were terms like (germ.) *die Skizze* and (en.) *sketch*, meaning unfinished underline for painting, so something that should not be presented to the wide public [1], [7].

For the purpose of this study, authors define architectural kitsch in contemporary hotels as non-functional and random design solutions, neglecting context of the building; its' cultural, aesthetical and regional or local value. Moreover, it is added that form and substance of the edifice is chaotic, varied without clear purpose, has aggressive features of an alien or odd: shapes, composition, colours or textures; that negatively dominate build or natural surroundings. Alike is treated noise or artificial forceful light influence of exteriors or interiors to the human and animals, that are in or near the building (Figure 1).



Figure 1. Kitsch in architecture of hotels: number of styles, forms and advertisements, in Las Vegas (USA)



Figure 2. Global modern style, hotels, on left: Intercontinental in Bucharest (Romania), on right: Victoria in Warsaw (Poland) – uniformity of solutions in culturally different counties

3.2. Historic background

Kitsch in our today's hotels has several historic causes, which are connected to political, economic and social events arising in European and American countries during XX century. This requires instantaneous broadening of context of these considerations. World wars, political changes, economic breakdowns occurring during this time period, affected in destruction and traumas inflicted to many nations, ethnic groups and communities, on a massive scale. Moreover, as an outcome of job search, many people living in the village areas, started to seek employment in the towns and cities, which at that time may seem as only places providing any income. This phenomenon has produced a sense of lack of safety and stability for many individuals, that is continued even until today in most societies.

Throughout that interval also many building substances, especially in central and eastern Europe, were destroyed, not to mention total demolition of infrastructure. All these events were strengthened by different political systems, like communism – i.e. in central and eastern Europe, which propagated further negligence of many aspects of humane life. Misunderstood ideas of modernism as an international style, with concrete and in many cases prefabricated buildings, shortly manifested itself as a cheap remedy for so many aforementioned problems. Repetitive grey boxes, styles and deprived of any composition or decoration nor caring values of initial modern ideas, started to take over the panorama of so many cities.

Thus, people intimidated and forced to live in unfavourable conditions, pursued to find at least some impression of joy and happiness in their new settlements. The answer for this search was often cheap and low quality products, furnishing and decorations, fabricated on a large scale in random colours, used for

covering the actual economic conditions. Such an approach was supported by policies, which were aiming at creating an impression, that things will be looking much better in a nearest future. For example Koolhaas [5] states, that in USA kitsch was an answer for a certain way of realisation of the "American dream" vision. While Jencks [4] recalls London on the breakthrough of 60. and 70. of XX century, where hotel design was dominated by historic styles, especially in network buildings, where interior finishing was prefabricated. To be accurate, this type of styles is still popular nowadays, however it is not the only cause for contemporary kitschy solutions (Figure 2).

3.3. Nowadays causes of kitsch

As it was aforementioned American and European society was forced to undergo valiant and rapid changes in XX century. The end of this period and beginning of current century, has fruited with dramatically dynamic transformations in: science, economy, industry and IT technologies. Nowadays people are flooded with inventions, concepts and options, which they are not able to understand, adjust to them or use. At least not all of them at once. As a social outcome of extenuation in cultural, family, spiritual life of societies and as a certain contradiction of growing impoverishment of large groups of city and village residents, consumption is growing rapidly. Thus, commercialization is progressing in these urban structures, and as an outcome also in the hotel industry. In order to maintain the profitability of businesses, hotel owners favour the taste of the mass client.

This is one of few causes of kitsch in hotel design. Here, it cannot be forgotten, that sense of aesthetics of a general client does not necessarily have to be of a highest value. Neither reaches or poverty saves individuals from

choosing: bright colours, noisy patterns or peculiar forms, for their homes, shops or hotel businesses. At the same time design industry comes up with new, shocking solutions, which aim at shaking the architectural or interior market, in the same way that fashion of car enterprises are pushed forward in their development. Just to give an example, futuristic projects of famous Karim Rashid, which are based on characteristic features of plastic, like: elastic form and bright colour options. In hotel industry this designer marked his presence by an outgoing project of Semiramis Hotel in Athens, distinguished with organic lines and neon colours of finishing. Also works of Jean Nouvel could be recalled here, with an extraordinary designed Hudson building, erected under Morgans Hotel Group in 2000 year [3].

Such enterprises, are an answer for certain need of narrow group of clients, work well in their context and are produced from reach highest quality materials in up-to-day technologies. Just like fashion trends they excite imagination of hotel owners and designers all over the world. Furthermore, they are associated with elite, richness and luxury, therefore deserve to be copied, by others seeking this values. Unfortunately the uniqueness of such proposals is not necessary understood by mass client. Thus, Rashid's or Nouvel's ideas are recreated in poor attempts of industrial production or low-quality-fabrication. Such fakes will never offer to mass client anything better than odd forms and blatant colours infolded in inexpensive plastic.

Exactly the same process of expansion of unique ideas to mass imagination, concerns all historical styles, like: ancient Greece and Rome, classical period, baroque decoration and all neo and eclectic solutions. It should be stressed, that old resources and manufacturing technologies no longer can be obtained. Especially, if into account are taken limitations of contemporary construction site in time and economy. So, usually nowadays there are created cheap copies and inefficient imitations of historic forms and details.

The next causes of kitsch in contemporary hotel design is mass production. This process is the answer to growing demand for both material goods and need for expansion of building substance in nowadays cities and villages. Unfortunately, what is widely observed is use of not economical or sustainable, but discounted building materials on today's construction sites. What is more they are introduced without sufficient technological of craftsmanship knowledge of underqualified employees. It is especially frightening, when typical and standard solutions are used in cites or regions with unique regional or local building tradition, decoration or ornaments. This process is connected also to disappearance of high quality craftsmanship, which could be a remedy for aforementioned problem.

To sum up kitsch is an effect of following factors:

- Consumption
- Mass production
- Disappearance of high quality craftsmanship
- Commercialization
- Lack of aesthetic and architectural education
- Lack of knowledge on styles of époques in architecture
- Lack of understanding of new trends and their purposes in architecture and design even among professionals

Due to already brought up strong competition in hospitality business branch of market, it is especially exposed to all aforementioned factors. Some examples of such failed attempts will be presented in the case studies part.

4. Case study

Regional architecture mismatch example can be presented on a case study of a hotel in Karpacz. This is a town in southern part of Poland in Karkonosze mountain region, with unique vernacular architecture objects, of a small scale spread all around hilled area. Here, a network building was raised, of a large scale and forms alien to the context. Also decoration detail, thou may seem regional, are in general not characteristic for this (lat.) *genius loci* (Figure 3). At the same time it needs to be added that interiors of this edifice do not follow neither exterior architecture nor any regional solutions and have been designed in the very decorative, palace style forms (Figure 8).

The other case of alike solutions can be found in the economic and budget networks, which have the same styles outlook, regardless the context. It is worth recalling examples of many European cites, like: Bordeaux (France) and Cracov (Poland), where huge hotels have been implemented adjusted to the significant historic context (Figure 4).

Hotels, belonging to different operators, represent simplified contemporary architecture, with naive geometric composition in form and elevations. Itself are neither bad nor kitschy, but as it must be notice, were erected in cites of an amazing cultural and architectural background. This itself could be an indicator for interesting spatial and functional solutions. Moreover, this edifices are just in the neighbourhood of old substance, but neither resemble it in proportions, nor material. In a way they are continuation of cites degradation process, which started by aforesaid modern blocks (Figure 2 and 4).



Figure 3. Large scale and number of odd forms in hotel in Karpacz (Poland)



Figure 4. Global solutions for economic network hotels, on left: two buildings in Bordeaux (France), on right: building in Cracow (Poland) – styles elevations without recall to the surrounding historic context



Figure 5. Las Vegas – “American Dream” implementation in the architecture of hotels



Figure 6. Las Vegas – “American Dream” implementation in the details of interiors of hotels and their related spaces

Completely different context has a city erected on a desert, which is creating reference for itself. In Las Vegas, a clear form of architectural kitsch is implemented, due to fulfil the “America Dream” idea. This pursuit for happiness is purposely arranged as endless and limitless party. Here, use of expensive materials and sophisticated technical solutions, are aiming at creating the strongest as possible impact at the user, made of colours, lights and sound. All framed by architecture, which designs are sourced in each possible epoch or directly recreate existing famous buildings. In this huge city-sized theatrical decoration everything is pretending something else, in order to bring as much fun to its guest as possible. It is one of many examples in hotels, where kitsch was consciously used to body a specific concept of hotel structures (Figure 5).

This intention is deliberately continued in the interiors, where solutions of different styles are stacked together with decoration objects, textiles, mirrors, mosaics and neon lights. All in the unexpected and at many occasions incompatible forms and contrasts. The background blinks and glows, which is supplemented with music or noises from cafes and casinos (Figure 6).

In a similar way illusion of cheerfulness, colourfulness, enjoyment and variety is implemented in European solutions, no matter what city is in question. Unfortunately, kitsch use in this spaces is much more random and accidently designed, creating chaotic space perception. Mixture of diversified flooring, wall decorations, palace-like curtains and columns with historic and contemporary furniture in unfit styles, contrasted with nowadays electronic utilities, is hard to understand and organize in mind of a hotel guest. It must be stressed that this seemingly expansive solutions are usually complemented with the cheapest light fixtures and air-conditioning outlets. At some occasions,

especially if peculiar sculptures and furniture forms were used, such interior arrangement may also be perceived as grotesque and repulsive to some hotel guests. This seems like an effect, that each hotel business owner would rather omit (Figure 7, 8).

During the debate on case studies, the question may arise, whether kitsch should be perceived as negative phenomenon in hotels’ architecture. Hence, clear popularity of certain solution, should advice designers to use them in their work. Author answer to this question was reflected in the fourth part of this considerations.

5. Conclusions

5.1. Effects

Taking into account presented case studies, it can be stated that in the hotel business architectural kitsch decreases feeling of spatial organization, arrangement and order. This may cause in guest a feeling of being lost, disorientation and chaos, which should not be raised in human being, whose already is staying in the foreign city or country. Number of colours and aggressive textures, decrease comfort, aesthetics, but also sense of cleanness in a hotel facility. All this parameters are important elements of overall hospitality service quality evaluation, which is introduced in each organization on daily bases.

At the same time kitschy solutions may be troubling for guest with any type of psychological or physical disability. In this field threats are also strobing, bright and colourful lights, loud music or noise, which at some occasions are purposely introduced into hotels’ interiors and exteriors. Similarly large glossy surfaces, mirrors or any other reflective materials will affect space users, if they will be placed in a way to create instance light ray



Figure 7. Entrance lobbies of two European hotels, on left: in Delft (Netherlands), on right: in near Poznan (Poland) – a composition of diversified forms, objects, furniture and technical equipment in varied styles



Figure 8. Palace style interiors in hotel in Karpacz (Poland), which do not follow exterior architecture

bounces and random glares. It also must be stated, that kitsch not only unfavourably disturbs cities, villages and natural landscape, but also promotes poor architectural, visual and aesthetic education of young adults and children.

5.2. Solutions

Proposal for long term counteraction towards kitsch in contemporary hotels architecture in the areas of Europe and USA, are focused on solutions, which are possible for all scientists, professionals, hotel owners and users, who are interested in humanization of our hospitality environment. They are as it follows:

- Wide and accessible culture propagation in societies despite the social background of communities
- Propagation of information and knowledge on both: styles of époques in architecture, as well as new trends and their purposes in architecture and design
- Stronger introduction of aesthetic and architectural information and education both among professionals and unprofessional of hospitality business
- Search for high quality design and re-creation of good craftsmanship by hotel businesses owners, especially in places where regional and vernacular architecture is existing
- Supporting sustainable hotel design, which is based on economical (but not cheap) local materials and building traditions

- Perception of commercial values by hotel networks in the individualisation of their particular buildings in different cities

Last remark is based on successful and well introduced current activities of particular hotel network groups.

By acknowledging the existing problem of kitsch in contemporary hotels architecture, there can be a lot of small and large scale activities taken, to bring cities and villages closer to their guests and residents. In this way building fabric will be more aesthetical and friendly to the public, while hospitality business may benefit from increasing interest of clients.

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