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## THE INTERIOR AS AN EXTERIOR. Precedents for the addition of a new hall in the old Gymnasium Neapolis, Crete.

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### ABSTRACT

Designing interiors as exteriors has always been a great challenge in architectural design. As a compositional principle this method highlights the capacity of the architect in combining scales and as a final result, it enriches the character of the buildings as *containers of life*.

The current proposal is concerned with two interventions for the construction of halls in the towns of Chaniá and Neapolis in Crete. The design approach should be that of the proposal of the external space qualities in these halls that should demonstrate a rich atmosphere made by the minimal architectural effort. The study of precedents has offered several ideas, in order to improve continuity and the severe control of our decisions.

In Chaniá the design of the internal walls combines row wood strips and photographs, trying to create the compact image of reed, moving by the wind. In Neapolis, the existing courtyard space is imagined as being covered by a large tent which curves downward, toward its centre and is pulled back by its four corners creating tension.

This method, where it can be applied, gives more welfare using less architecture. For the interventions in existing historical buildings it can offer the idea of the natural elements with which time involves buildings and creates the *patina*. The interiors designed as exteriors can offer a deeper architectural thought beyond buildings as a kind of a primitive euphoria, as life in the inbuilt.

**Keywords:** Interior design, Council Hall, Tent, Reed.



Fig.1: The frescoes from the "House of Livia", Museo Nazionale Archeologico Romano.

## Introduction

The inner purpose for architecture is to treat and configure the relation between the external and the internal spaces, the definition of the limits and the relations these passages creates when people move from outside inside, from one place to another. The immense of the natural countryside, then the continuous of the open air spaces in the urban settings, usually conducts into a covered, concluded interior, public or private.

For Piranesi the external spaces must be “*severe*” but the interiors must be “*gentle*”. For Loos the exteriors should have the character of the “*provocative*” but the interiors that of “*reassurance*”. Architecture has created its world explaining the autonomy and all the possible relations between these polarities. When the criteria of the external space, as size correlations, images, light and color are combined in the construction of an interior, architecture arrives to the description of the real world.

Examples as the Pantheon in Rome, Ayia Sofia in Istanbul and the Berlin Neue Nationalgalerie by Mies van der Rohe, try to include as a continuous, inside, working on and with the walls, the qualities of the open air urban landscape. In our first example, making rain and cold to come inside an interior which is composed by the repetition of facades, in the second, filtering light in, as in a covered public square and in the third, using the surroundings as permanent scenario in the interior, as walls. Designing interiors, architects have the opportunity to improve different materials and treatments and are able to incorporate in a fixed structure levels, themes borrowed from the visual arts. More or less murals have created the internal atmosphere in the greco-roman antiquity and then, between renaissance and neoclassicism. Gobelins and asian carpets are the fixed scene in the medieval domestic interiors.

For historic architecture, the composition of a space capable to incorporate the purpose of other arts has been considered as its highest goal, and in this kind of creations that of the total art. In our contemporary world we have changed the names of these basic intentions but the themes are unchanged. We don't paint murals and we don't cover by golden mosaics our walls. We focus on transparency because it is the solution for the introduction of a filtered image of the real life outside our buildings. Otherwise, we stamp leaves and row textures on plaster and glass, in reference to the natural and the time's dimension. Our “murals” are emanations of photography, and secondarily of the cinema. We desire architectural space as creation of a total art.

In Crete, Minoan architecture proposes interiors as outdoor areas with murals presenting scenes from country or marine landscapes. The painted walls in the house of Livia in Rome (Figure 1). and the “Camera degli Sposi” in Mantova by Andrea Mantegna, introduces moments of that inner happiness of life in the countryside, under the open sky, for private rooms in the city. The gothic cathedrals recompose all day's moments outside into a total natural light experience out of time, each time.

Contemporary architecture after the history's lesson of the eighties, confused by the promises of the digital era, introduced more and more nature in the design of the external public spaces in terms of landscape, thinking sustainability and environmental criteria as new substance and ethics in its workmanship. In the same moment, working with the elements of this lost naturalness in the internals donates to architecture the sense of lightness and porosity to its natural limits, the walls. Staying inside becomes easily a walk to spaces of the fantasy and immensity of the open air space. In these terms, an interior could become as the most expansive exterior. [4] This experience of the built could be combined with human inclination for freedom, delight and profane entertainment.



**Fig.2:** Erik Gunnar Asplund, cinema Skandia, Stockholm, Perspective design for the interior.



**Fig. 3:** Mies van der Rohe Neue Nationalgalerie, Berlin, view of the interior.



## 2. Modern precedents

The need for examples, structured on this subject in more recent times has given the instruments for further verification of the initial hypothesis. Asplund's cinema Skandia in Stockholm, (1924), has been designed on a nostalgic mediterranean reality: feast in a small italian square, by night. Low balconies and rows of chairs appears in a dark interior, where hanging lamps replace the stars. (Figure 2).

Alvar Aalto in his Concert Hall in Helsinki, (1962-71), follows the ceiling's movement on the lateral walls by a decorative pattern evocative of a dense reed bed or the wood around his villa Mairea. It is a typical example of many of Aalto's hallmarks and motifs. [7] Generally, in Aalto's interiors, large asymmetrical movements, lighting and the use of wood transfer the outside, into the finish landscape.

Mies van der Rohe, in his Neue Nationalgalerie in Berlin (1962-68) doesn't need to create an interior space. His captured images of the surrounding urban landscape, replace the walls of this gallery. Architecture becomes a flat roof, flying on the earth, somewhere in Berlin (Figure 3). This last solution had several applications and we can say that the modernist persistence for transparency and immateriality has been approved in several solutions, specially the last ten years. The most evocative of all could be appear the Onichi Civic center by Kazuyo Sejima and Ryue Nishizawa, (2009). Here interior and exterior penetrate completely one into the other giving a sense of life in the open air.

This short excursus shows that composing interiors with the elements of exteriors, creating a light atmosphere of pleasure, has always been a great challenge in modern architectural design. As a compositional principle this method highlights the capacity of the architect: First, in proposing ironically, as a literary transfer, a double sense in his rooms. Second, in combining scales of different working criteria from the city to the individual object and third, it gives the instruments for the incorporation of the so-called decoration in the final solution.

Examples like those presented above, as final results, enrich the character of the buildings as *containers of life*, in the same way that the public space functions, giving continuous opportunities for the collective expression. These thoughts composed the mosaic of the intentions in the two proposals in Crete.

## 3. Designing two halls in Crete

The Skoutelis & Zanon architectural studio in the 2006 had the opportunity to intervene in the abandoned Horticultural Market twelve kilometers southwest of the town of Chaniá, western Crete, with a project for the restoration of the whole complex into the Region's new administrative center. The given structures should be used totally, so new outdoor corridors, as transition areas have been proposed for the communication between the parts. The solution employed the introduction of a Council Hall in the ground floor, in an internal part of 180 m<sup>2</sup>, which cannot receive natural light.

The ideas for the interior of this hall has been originated from the very present groups of reed in the surrounding area, closed the lake Ayiá. The plan's shape of the hall led to a movement between the existing walls and the new sound absorption panels. These panels are two kind of structures: most of them are made by strips of iroko in different dimensions, leaving a void of 2 mm between them. The rest are webs by gypsum plaster, where photographs of the real reed and trees are involved on the walls. The new layer of Iroko wood panels reaches up to 2.20 meters while the rest of the room's height (totaling at 3.80 meters) is completed by a zone of semi transparent sheets of glass concealing the artificial lights. They fuction as substitutes of windows, bringing natural life inside. This stable lighting creates an atmosphere composed by green and blue color while the direct working lights are positioned on the ceiling. (Figure 5).

The second opportunity for the design of an internal hall has been given in 2010, by the Municipality of Neapolis, eastern Crete. In the historical gymnasium, converted into a cultural center, a hall should be added, for the unification of the rooms quoted in series. This late times monument consists of three ground floor wings forming a Π, which enclose a courtyard open to the east. The building is located south of the cathedral of the Assumption, in the most central point of the large urban area comprising the public buildings, east of the elongated central square. The two lateral wings, north and south, bridge the difference in level from the square towards the east, while the smaller central wing makes up the main elevation towards the town.

The existing building's total area is approximately 788 sq.m. and the courtyard 590 sq.meters. The building's architectural merit is limited to its robustness; its presence as part of the monument complex of the garden beside the church of the Assumption; and its uniformity to the other buildings of its time (the Courthouses, the Prison, latter mid-war residences) The value of the authenticity of materials which could have led to argue for the building's conservation is almost lost due to the restorative works (2000-02) which presented a freshly rendered and freshly painted building with new floors and roofs. The building's historic value is rather more significant. Here studied youths from the prefecture of Lasithi who came to be bright scholars and politicians, capable of elevating Neapolis to an important intellectual center for the island. The community's deeply rooted sense for the building's historical value led to its declaration as a preservable monument.

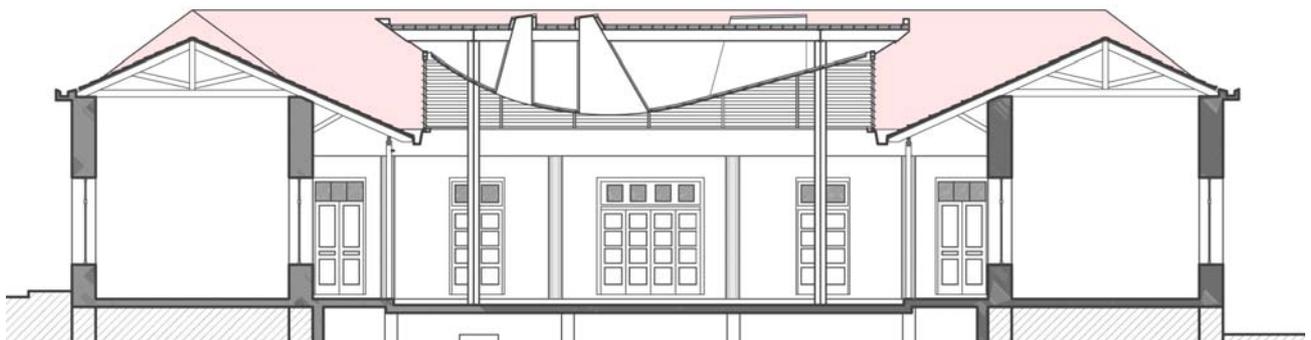
In 2009 Neapolis is integrated within the framework of the new Municipality of Mirabello, with Agios Nikolaos as its capital city. It could be stated that owing to the cultural activities and the overall dynamic which is developing; though especially due to the number of public buildings and the unique character of the central garden, Neapolis could serve as the region's cultural center; especially when considering the absence of such places in Agios Nikolaos and other regional settlements. This is a means by which Neapolis will reclaim its lost prestige.

In the meanwhile, the inhabitants appreciate their old Gymnasium as it has been the first formal educational institution in Crete in the modern times. Most of the people involved have expressed their hesitations and gave different conditions in order to agree with the project. Designing in these conditions seemed to give more restrictions to the architect's intentions, but by the end this new interior should appear as an outdoor area. The existing courtyard space has been imagined as being covered by a large tent which curves downward toward its centre and is pulled back by its four corners creating tension, much like when trying to fold a sheet of fabric. Staying inside should create the idea of an exterior space like in a bazaar or an Asian ceremonial tent.

Around this roof there runs a continuous band of wide blinds 1.73m tall sub-divided into strips of blinds 27cm wide; so that when the blinds are open, during most of the year, the courtyard space becomes semi open and the whole structural system serves as a shelter (Figure 6). Staying inside should create the idea of an exterior space like in a bazaar or an Asian ceremonial tent.

During the winter months the blinds shut and the courtyard space, supported by mechanical ventilation, may support any activity. The curved volume of the roof is pierced by five cone-like light wells, which let in and disperse the natural light; another means to render the space light and airy, recalling the openness of the school's courtyard.

The technological solution of the double roofing rewards the architectural invention, by the creation of two separate structures: one is the iron external structure elevated 7,50 meters high by eight iron beams composed pillars. The second is the so called "sheet", made by gypsum plaster panels, suspended between 4,80 to 6,90 m over the hall. A marquee divides it from the band of wide aluminum horizontal blinds giving the sense of an independent piece which takes part of the internal.



**Fig. 4:** Skoutelis& Zanon, The new Hall in the Gymnasium of Neapolis, section.



**Fig.5 - 6:** Skoutelis& Zanon, Internal views of the new Hall in the Gymnasium in Neapolis and the conference room in Chaniá.



### 3. Conclusions: towards a method

In this opportunity a theoretical approach can emerge as result of our attentiveness in the study of historical examples. We tried to give the instruments of a method which consists into:

**A.** Searching a pretext from the surroundings, in order to propose an ironic, double sense of an interior, as an open air space.

**B.** The combination of different architectural scales in the interior's design.

**C.** Working in this field conducts to the incorporation of the so-called decoration in the solutions of the several parts and the internal facades of the construction.

**D.** One could add one more compositional principle as a new contemporary approach in this theme: The interior rooms as continuous undulation of one only surface or material, as happens in the so called *diagrammatic* process. Also in this context the fusion between interior and exterior is guaranteed, as the traditional, modern or classical examples have highlighted previously.

The instruments for such a procedure vary from the mimetism of the dominate elements of the natural or the urban landscape outside, to the real presence of those through glass walls, inside. The interaction between the design's scales as another carrier of irony provokes the users mind in a kind of entertainment and an expectable astonishment. The redesign of the external elements as direct transfer and as metaphor for the needs of the internal function, in this process, contains automatically the production of decorative elements or surfaces as complete works of art.

This method, wherever it can be applied, gives more wellbeing to the users, building "less architecture" in a metaphoric sense, as it proceeds combining existing images and forms, leaving light to come inside, creating a kind of suggestion of continuity. For the interventions in existing historical buildings it could find even further applications. It offers the idea of the natural elements with which time involves buildings creating the so called "value of age", on architecture's materials [6].

If we try to redefine again our method, transferring these principles into restoration projects, they collaborate in this, by:

**A.** Proposing continuity between the natural elements and the aged architecture reconsidering John Ruskin's theories on buildings' life.

**B.** Suggesting higher scales of intervention in the interior's design could help into a major revitalization of the existing for the collective life.

**C.** Incorporating natural elements in the so-called decoration in the solutions, could replace the re composition of lost or partly destroyed historic elements.

Composing interiors as exteriors could emerge as that congenital method which contains the instruments for the stress of relation with the time dimension, enhancing the *atmosphere* values given by the presence of nature's action and the so called "patina" on the aged surfaces. The metaphor of fragments from the natural environment inside, emphasizes the presence of all the conditions of aging and the duality between the built and the unbuilt. One more time thoughts coming out this method, brings to the conclusion that the effort for the production of *less architecture* could add more substance into our creations.

The transmission in the future of the works of architecture, time by time becomes more pressing and the most of the times we are guided to apply contemporary values in the existing. That happens not only because of the commands of the international congresses and charters on monuments' restoration but also because of the less possibilities that are given for totally new constructions. Working on the existing is the near future, not only in countries with a huge stock of historic buildings but in all countries. In later or very old buildings these interiors could become the intermediates between the time of construction and the long time of the building's life, presenting values of our way of acting today. One of these is the landscaping process and then the design as a folding of continuous surfaces as experienced in the natural terrain.

We tried to analyze and to reconsider the nature of the external spaces as instrument for the interior design, because of the variety and the conditions they offer to real life and collective expression. Introducing the natural into the internal space could guide the users to unexplored results for their behavior. Interiors designed as exteriors can offer a deeper architectural thought beyond buildings as a kind of a primitive euphoria, as life in the inbuilt.

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