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FLOW ARCHITECTURE – FOLK ARCHITECTURE

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Publications:

- (2000) *A Káosz Peremén*, [On the Edge of Chaos, in Hungarian], Budapest: Budapesti Közgazdaságtudományi Egyetem

- (2015) *Missing Link Discovered*, Los Angeles-Budapest: ALEAS Simulations, Inc.

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Publications:

- (2015) "Mehr Licht": Fényművészet és fénytudomány keleten és nyugaton, magyarországi központtal / "Mehr Licht": Light-art and light-science in East and West, with a center in Hungary, [Bilingual], In: *International Light Symposium*, Budapest: Múcsarnok, Eger: Kepes Institute, [14-15]. (co-author D. Nagy)

- (2019) Symmetry and asymmetry in Japanese calligraphy (書道), *Symmetry: Art and Science*, 2019/1-4, [Special issue: Traditions and Innovations in Symmetry – Katachi, 11th Congress of SIS-Symmetry, Kanazawa, November 25-30, 2019], 118-121.

Abstract: *Csikszentmihályi's name is associated with the theory of flow in psychology, a mental state during a concentrated activity. His related books reached a wide audience. In 2018, the Hungarian poet and writer Géza Szőcs met him in Budapest, and during the discussion, they agreed to extend the psychological theory of flow to the questions of architecture. They were enthusiastic about the idea of a project "follow architecture". Unfortunately, both of them passed away before the start of the intensive collaboration. Zsadány Vécsey worked as a close associate of Csikszentmihályi since 2007. Szőcs, shortly before his death, organized a few meetings in Hungary where the idea of "flow architecture" was also mentioned. Dénes Nagy and Zsadány Vécsey*

¹ This paper is written by D. Nagy (chair of the conference). The presentation will be given by Zs. Vécsey and V. Inkler, other members of the informal *Flow Architecture Group*.

participated in such meetings, while Valéria Inkler had some discussions with Szőcs during the Kanazawa Congress and Exhibition in 2019. Using the opportunity of the conference on folk architecture, Dénes Nagy suggested uniting forces and going ahead with the idea of “flow architecture”, and also learning from the traditions of folk architecture, with the goal of making suggestions for how to make harmony between the built and the natural environments and for helping to make “happy homes”. It is also a tribute to Mihály Csikszentmihályi (1934-2021) and Géza Szőcs (1953-2020).

Mihály Csikszentmihályi's last name refers to a village in Transylvania, where his paternal grandmothers' lived, and he liked to refer to those roots (Csikszentmihályi, 1997, p. 13). At the age of 22, after the suppressed anti-Soviet revolution in 1956, he migrated from Hungary to the U.S.A. In the American spelling of his name, diacritical marks (accent signs) are not used. Csikszentmihályi graduated in psychology from the University of Chicago. He wrote his doctoral thesis about creativity in art in 1965, which immediately demonstrated his special interest in artistic problems, although his focus was not on architecture. Csikszentmihályi was interested in the mental state when an artist, for example, a painter, focuses on his work so much that a “flow” takes him, like a speedy river carries an object to a given direction, while the outside world “disappears”. In this period, the artist may “forget” even to eat and drink, or works without sleeping. Csikszentmihályi (1975) summarized his findings in a book, where he pointed out the importance of the flow state in work and play. He continued these studies and published many papers and books. He became also interested in how flow may contribute to joy and happiness. His work was an important contribution to an emerging new field, the positive psychology that deals with the well-being of people. In the meantime, he became a professor at Lake Forest College, then he moved to the University of Chicago, and later to the Claremont Graduate University in California. Csikszentmihályi (1990) also wrote a book for the general public, which was translated into many languages. This book had an unusual promotion in the U.S., which made it a “national bestseller” and the author's name became known in wide circles. Specifically, in 1993 Jimmy Johnson, the football coach of the Dallas Cowboys showed this book to the camera during the halftime interview of the Super Bowl and claimed that he used it in preparing his team, and then they won the title. (Maybe folk/vernacular architecture would also need a similar promotion, but it is not easy to link this topic with an event that is watched by millions of people). The theory of flow started to “flow” into many directions, including sports, tourism, business, and some questions of everyday life.

Since we face many problems related to the built environment, it is understandable that the Hungarian poet and writer Géza Szőcs in 2018, when he met Csikszentmihályi in Budapest, suggested dealing with the questions related to architecture, too, and nicknamed this idea *flow architecture*. Perhaps their Transylvanian roots and the fact that both of them escaped from communist regimes provided a special linkage. Szőcs was abused by the secret police in Romania and escaped to Swiss in 1986, but after the political changes there in 1990, he returned to Transylvania. Later on, he had various cultural and political positions in both Romania and Hungary, among others, he served

as the Secretary of State for Culture in Hungary in 2010-12. Similar to Csikszentmihalyi, Szöcs had a wide-ranging interest and organized a regular forum for Hungarian-born professors in the world. It is very sad, that they could not collaborate after their first meeting, since Szöcs passed away in 2020 during the COVID epidemic, while Csikszentmihalyi died in 2021 of cardiac arrest. We may remember them by helping the “flow” of ideas in connection with *flow architecture*, with the desire to help the joy and happiness of people in our buildings.

The idea of linking *flow architecture* and *folk architecture* is not just a play on words, but we may find some serious connections, and it was not far from the interest of Csikszentmihalyi. When he visited Hungary in 2011 he was eager to see the Open Air Ethnographic Museum in Szentendre, near Budapest. He was escorted by the General Director of the museum Miklós Cseri, a leading expert in folk architecture, and they had discussions at many buildings. Csikszentmihalyi had an interest in the characteristics of “happy homes”. In 1981, he co-authored a book dealing with this topic, after interviewing eighty families about their domestic environment in the greater Chicago area (Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton, 1981). They devoted a chapter to the home as a symbolic environment. It was pointed out that the word *home* is filled with emotional meanings, while many other European languages have no words with the same connotations, since the Italian *casa*, the French *maison*, and the Hungarian *ház* refer to the physical structure rather than to the emotional space. The Italian *focolare* literally “hearth” or “fireplace,” is the closest poetic metonym, but it is practically never used in speech; the Hungarian *otthon* meaning loosely “place of origin” is more commonly used in the same sense as the French *chez nous*, but neither one has the concreteness and the wide-ranging content of *home* (ibid., p. 121). Indeed, it is important to make distinction between the emotional and the physical space, but we challenge a little bit some of the examples: the Hungarian equivalent of *home* is not the word *ház* (house), but the secondly mentioned *otthon*, which also gained a lot of emotional aspects (see the popular phrases *az otthon melege*, “the warmth of home” and *otthon vagyok*, “I am at home”, as well as the widely used adjectives *otthoni* and *otthonos*). The authors also gave a brief survey on the early history of architecture from the shelters of nomads to the permanent houses. They added a note that in the Middle Ages for the peasants in Southern France the local expression *ostal*, the Latin *hospicium* and *domus* meant both, the “house” and the “family”. (Note that *ostal* is a vernacular word derived from *hospitāle*.) The authors also deal with the characteristics of “happy homes” focusing on social questions. Because of the crisis of environmental and material exploitation, as well as the growing consumption, they referred to an extreme example (ibid., p. 230) given by the anthropologist Marshall Sahlins’s book entitled *Stone Age Economics* (Chicago: Aldine, 1972): the quality of life in the most “primitive” cultures was not demonstrably inferior to that of ours. They criticized the habit of possession (“terminal materialism”) and suggested the possession of just such things that serve goals (“instrumental materialism”). Although it was not the authors’ goal to discuss the interior design of buildings but indirectly they gave many hints.

The idea of flow could also be useful in the basic design edition. Earlier we discussed an exciting example referring to William S. Huff's methods where the flow of deformed figures may also contribute to the flow state of the students who make the composition (Nagy, D.: In Memoriam: William S. Huff (1927–2021), From HfG Ulm to Louis Kahn's Design Office: From symmetry to parquet deformations with temporality and flow, In: Hoeydonck, W. van, et al., eds., *Space Tessellations: Experimenting with Parquet Deformations*, Basel: Birkhäuser, 2022, 7-12). Note that the cognitive scientist Douglas Hofstadter, the author of the book *Gödel, Escher, Bach*, also devoted a paper to Huff and his students' parquet deformations as "a subtle, intricate art form", which was later reprinted in his book entitled *Metamagical Themas: Questing for the Essence of Mind and Pattern* (New York: Basic Books, 1985, chap. 10).

Turning to folk architecture, most traditionally built houses provide harmony with the environment and even satisfy the modern requirements of sustainability. These houses and the extension of the houses according to the needs of the growing families were built by the local people who gathered for voluntary joint work. The Hungarian term for this is *kaláka*, a bit similar American expression is *bee*. They used local materials, thus the ecological footprint was minimal. During the work, they recited poems and sang songs. Finally, they celebrated the completion of the house with music and dance (see the expression *kaláka*-dance). Thus, folk poetry, folk music, folk dance, as well as folk architecture came together and helped the flow. They kept in the house almost exclusively objects that serve goals, practical or mental ones. These houses could help the flow and happiness of the people living there; it was great to return home after the difficult work. When we visit such a house, often we may see the optimal arrangement, touch the natural materials, smell the fresh air, and enjoy the acoustics of the cellar. We may feel a link to the spirit of the place (*genius loci*) and the flow in space and time. Incidentally, Csikszentmihályi's son Christopher, a professor of information science also became involved in rural development: he helped to establish local radio stations in Uganda, which run on sun, smartphones, and buckets, and provided flow to many people.

Using some ideas from folk architecture, we may provide better possibilities for the flow in our buildings and in our life. Indeed, folk architecture may help flow architecture.

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