JSACE 1/32

The Combined Contextuality Method as a Means to Research the Relationship Between Architecture and Natural Elements of Place

Received 2023/01/11

Accepted after revision 2023/02/27

The Combined Contextuality Method as a Means to Research the Relationship Between Architecture and Natural Elements of Place

Kostas Biliūnas

Vilnius Gediminas Technical University, Faculty of Architecture, Pylimo st. 26, LT-01141 Vilnius, Lithuania

*Corresponding author: **kostas.biliunas@vilniustech.lt**

https://doi.org/10.5755/j01.sace.32.1.33180

Abstract

The article is focused on research into the aesthetic-psychological relationship between building and place as an important but usually neglected dimension of sustainable architecture. A tool for research of contemporary and historical architecture is introduced – a combined contextuality method, which enables the examination of the relationship between architecture and natural features of the place. This kind of research, which includes visual and sensory experience, is still rarely included in scientific analysis. The method is based on the principles of the philosophy of phenomenology, from which the concept of the two-layeredness of an architectural or natural object originates. Edmund Husserl's phenomenological method for uncovering the essence of phenomena is the basis of the various methods constituting the forming approach. In the theories of different authors of the tradition of architectural phenomenology, architecture emerges as a mediator between place and humans. Although such a concept has long been established in the scientific environment, and one of its pioneers was Christian Norberg-Schulz, phenomenological methods are usually applied separately in the analysis of place or architecture. In order to uncover the contextuality of architecture, an interdisciplinary approach, integrating both of these fields, is necessary. In this article a combination of methods for the analysis of place and building is offered, and in order to enable the study of the relationship between the building and the natural elements of the place, a combined contextuality method is formed. It is based on a symmetrical phenomenological analysis of natural elements and an architectural object. The approach combines setting the place character model and the methods of archetypes, natural symbols and walking, all used in current scientific research. Through the juxtaposition of the extracted *genius loci* of the place formed by natural elements and the architectural object reduced to its essence, the combined contextuality method enables one to determine and to analyse the contextuality of the building in relation to natural elements of the place.

Keywords: architectural research methods, contextuality, phenomenology, place, sustainable architecture.

Introduction

The visual expression of buildings usually remains on the margins of the definition of sustainability, while the concept of sustainable architecture emphasizes energetic, environmental and social aspects. A position contrary to such a provision has been presented by quite a few authors of architectural theory, highlighting the importance of the visual and somatic experience of architecture (Hemmati 2016: 85-86). Elizabeth K. Meyer, landscape architect and the winner of Vincent Scully's award, connects the function of architectural aesthetics with sustainability and care for the environment through a visual-spatial experience that awakens human emotional nature (Meyer 2008: 18). The architectural scholar Almantas Samalavičius highlights the superficiality of the declared aim of sustainability, which conceals the legacy of modernist ideology. Therefore, in order

ktu 1922

Journal of Sustainable Architecture and Civil Engineering
Vol. 1 / No. 32 / 2023
pp. 92-104
DOI 10.5755/j01.sace.32.1.33180

to achieve real changes in modern architecture, a fundamental revision of modernist provisions is needed (Samalavičius 2018: 2). Sustainable architecture, according to Glen Hill, cannot be simply "wrapped in a *delightful* aesthetic package", repeating the economical logic of modernism (Hill 2011: 40). After the crisis of modernism and in the face of the Anthropocene, the goal of new architecture should not be to oppose nature, but to return to dialogue with it (Pero 2011: 217-218). Architect and architectural theorist Paolo Portoghesi urges architects to learn from nature the esthetic harmony and points out, that in order to establish a "new alliance" with nature, it is necessary that the experience of nature will be a part of architectural thinking (Portoghesi 2012: 21, 2021: 14). The article aims to draw attention to one of the solutions to the problem of aesthetics of sustainable architecture – contextuality of architecture in the natural environment. In this article, the contextuality is understood as an expression of the aesthetic-psychological connection with nature, arising from the long-term experience of the history of architecture.

Architecture's connection with nature is enabled to be explored by phenomenological theories of place and architecture. Architectural scholars Christian Norberg-Schulz, Karsten Harries, David Seamon and many others who belong to the phenomenological tradition assert the distance of modern architecture from place, which can also be expressed as ignoring the spirit of place (*genius loci*). The background of the concept of place is based on natural elements – then architecture that reflects the spirit of the place should be contextual in relation to the dominant natural features of the place. In the practice of scientific analysis, various methods based on philosophy and theory of phenomenology are consistently applied separately: in the analysis of place (natural or urban landscapes, gardens, parks etc.) or architecture (interior, exterior or relation between the two) (e. g. Gandawijaya 2021). Whereas the concept of contextuality is in itself oriented towards a holistic approach, including both the characteristics of place and architecture. In order to uncover and analyse the contextuality, an interdisciplinary approach that would integrate both of these two fields is necessary. In the article, based on the phenomenological theories of place and architecture, and on the synthesis of different methods applied in practice, a combined contextuality method is offered, which is intended to uncover the meaningful connection between a building and elements of nature surrounding it. The method could be applied to the study of both contemporary and historical architecture in a natural and little urbanized environment, though also in urbanized territories where natural elements are clearly felt. In the article, the most important phenomenological philosophical statements that underpin the methodology and the theories of architecture and place arising from it are highlighted, the structure of the combined contextuality method is formed and the methods that make it up are unfolded. An example of the application of the method for the analysis of a historical building is introduced and, at the end, summarized conclusions are presented.

The Philosophy of Phenomenology as a Methodological Basis

The methods of architectural phenomenology originate from the philosophy of phenomenology, of which the fundamental theme is the experience of the world, objects, and phenomena (Mickūnas and Jonkus 2014: 33). The tradition of phenomenology was started by the philosopher Edmund Husserl, for whom the source of knowledge of reality is the world experienced directly – through the senses – and indirectly – through intuition. The two-layeredness of phenomena is fundamental to the entire phenomenological philosophy. Obviously, the layer of empirical reality is revealed through experience, and "behind it" is the layer of the essence of the phenomenon (Anzenbacher 1992: 54). Husserl formulated a method that enables one to move from the layer of empirical reality to the essence of the phenomenon. Thus, one moves from the primary experience of the world to the analysis of the essence, oriented not to the facts, but to the meanings that every perceived object or phenomenon has (Gutauskas 2021).

The tradition of phenomenology has proven to be a fruitful way to analyze such phenomena of the living world as architecture. Heidegger's phenomenology states that being does not exist separately, but only in the world (Heidegger 1992: 66). Various phenomena, and therefore architecture, become understandable and open to the researcher not in socioeconomic or other conditions, but only in the world, which we should understand not only as a physical or operational world, but as a realm full of meaning (Gutauskas 2021; Norberg-Schulz 1980: 6). For Heidegger, the theme of dwelling (*wohnen*) and rooting in the place is important, and architecture is an intermediate connecting humans with the earth (Heidegger 2010: 101). In Maurice Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology, the world is perceived through the living body, through its experience (Merleau-Ponty 2012: 84). The relationship of the human body with the world is expressed in a unique way, when the body itself is the departing point of the experience, and things and objects are found to the left or right, above or below, smaller or larger according to the body of the experiencer (Shirazi 2014: 33). The philosophy of Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty inspired the analysis of two different components that form the semantic layer of architecture. The question of meaning in architecture often arises from Heidegger's philosophy, and the origin of the analysis of the sensory and psychological experience of architecture, respectively, can be linked with the philosophy of Merleau-Ponty. These two approaches are close to the division between the architectural phenomenology "from without" and the one "from within" drawn by architectural scholar M. Reza Shirazi (Shirazi 2014).

Phenomenological Theories Emphasizing the Importance of the Place

Phenomenological philosophy has inspired Norwegian architectural scholar Christian Norberg-Schulz to develop a theory of place-specific architecture (Norberg-Schulz 1980). Reviving the Roman concept of *genius loci*, the author gave it the significance of a meaningful place and presented an analytical-interpretive approach to the study of natural elements based on it (Samalavičius 2012: 125). To express the profound meaning of the spirit of a place is the task of architecture. Among many architectural phenomenologists, Norberg-Schulz's theory stands out as unique because it combines two scopes: architecture and meaningfully perceived place, and reveals the dependence of a building on its surrounding environment. As a result, the author is sometimes criticized as presenting an overly "romantic" theory (Meyer 2013: 8). In a similar way as the philosophy of Heidegger is criticized, from which the importance of place comes into Norberg-Schulz's theory. Heidegger clearly states the purpose of architecture – to bring the "earth as an inhabited landscape" closer to man (Heidegger 1983: 93). The concept of architecture as a mediator between the natural world and man is the starting point of the combined contextuality method, highlighting the importance of architecture's connection with the natural world for human existence itself (Norberg-Schulz 1980: 5).

Other Heideggerian, Karsten Harries, an American architectural philosopher of German origin, emphasises the importance of the architecture-place connection, criticizing the idea of the complete building that shaped the ideology of modernism. "Pure" modernist architecture cannot establish the essential relationship to the place and, as a result, it is in danger of becoming uninhabitable (Harries 1980: 38; 1984). Such architecture that strives for completeness is arbitrary architecture – the creation of a free man, independent of nature or tradition. In opposition to the Kantian concept of aesthetics, Harries argues that architecture cannot be an autonomously aesthetic object, as this contradicts the contextuality of architecture (Harries 1983: 11; 1997: 24). At the center of Harries's theory is a non-arbitrary architecture based on the natural language of space. The architectural object is phenomenologically perceived as two-layered – it consists of an external representation and a represented part. Natural symbols concealed as the essence of architecture are related to natural human qualities, to the experience of weight, light, temperature, direction and others. These symbols express themselves through horizontality and verticality, lightness and darkness, openness and closedness (Harries 1997: 180–196; Seamon 2022: 10).

In a later reflection on his theory, Harries states that the connection between man and architecture does not mean being stuck in one place: a balance is needed between place that gives one a sense of home and space that gives one a state of freedom and independence (Harries 2017: 22; Shirazi 2014: 112). Philosopher Jeff Malpas, commenting on Harries's theory and one of its essential themes, the relationship between boundedness and openness, states that these two qualities are already present at the heart of a place and architecture takes over both of these qualities from the place as it emerges (Malpas 2017: 121). The function of architecture is to bring us back to the place through unfolding boundedness and openness (2017: 125).

Both Norberg-Schulz and Harries use different approaches to present architecture as a place-dependent phenomenon and highlight the importance of the concept of place itself. In the philosophy of modern times, interest in place was seen as regressive or superstitious – in the 20th century, the philosophy of phenomenology, as it were, uncovered the phenomenon of place, which had long been hidden in vague ignorance, and raised it as one of the essential realms of human existence (Casey 1993: xiv). Place emerges as an antithesis to the Euclidean concept of space – objective and infinite, as in a mathematical coordinate system. The world may be infinite, but through a place, a man experiences the world and is connected to it. The relationship between man and place, inseparable from the subjective human experience, became the basis of humanitarian geography (Samalavičius 2022: 144). One of these authors, the Canadian geographer Edward Relph, argues that geography has lost contact with the sources of meaning after abandoning itself to science (Relph 1976: 9). The model of the identity of place proposed by the author is related to the sense of place or the spirit of place – these concepts define the inner world or insideness of the place, which is separate from the outsideness, but fundamentally important to the place (Relph 1976: 48-62). The theories of Edward Relph, Jeff Malpas, David Seamon and other place researchers are united by a key concept: human experience is inseparable from place. The authors briefly discussed above are important for reflecting on overcoming the oblivion of place – which is also one of the causes forming a tool for the analysis of architectural contextuality.

The Combined Contextuality Method

The in depth analysis of various approaches and methodologies of architectural phenomenology, proceeded by acknowledged scholars, does not offer any direct tool to analyse the relationship between architecture and place (Lewicka 2011; Otero-Pailos 2012; Shirazi 2014; Seamon 2000, 2017, 2022). Except maybe only Norberg-Schulz, scholars present phenomenological methods for the analysis of buildings or places, although the relation between the two, and the importance of contextuality is convincingly declared in various theories, the most important of which are highlithed above. In this article, the theoretical assumptions and methodology of different authors are combined to form a practical key to determine the basis of a building's relationship with the place – the reflection of natural elements in architecture. The foundation of this architectural research approach and the methods that form it, are based on the essential provisions of the phenomenological analysis of architecture, based on Husserl's phenomenological method:

a Phenomenological *reduction* leads to the realm of pure experience, when one can see how phenomena (architecture) manifest themselves directly to his or her consciousness (Gutauskas 2021).

b Phenomenological *intuiting* is a kind of grasping of the whole, which occurs when one tries to look at the phenomenon in a free and unprejudiced way.

c Phenomenological intuiting takes the form of successive *disclosures* until the full picture of the phenomenon gradually emerges (Seamon 2000: 9–10).

The provisions forming the basis of the analysis are complemented by the key characteristics of the phenomenological study:

1. The researcher's direct contact with the phenomenon is important. It has to be followed by a thorough record of his or her experiences and perceptions, avoiding preliminary assumptions.
2. The researcher does not know how the phenomenon will unfold for him or her and should be ready to adapt to the situation.
3. The researcher's exploration of the constitution of the phenomena in consciousness.
4. Research methods should help to raise rich, multidimensional experience. Phenomenological research should develop creatively, combining various methods (Relph 1970: 194; Seamon 2000: 11–12).

The combined contextuality method consists of a symmetrical phenomenological analysis of the natural elements of the place and of the architectural object. The structure of the method is presented in the table:

Table 1
Structure of the Combined Contextuality Method

Phenomenological analysis of the place	Phenomenological analysis of architectural object
The experimental method of **walking** (by Henrik Schultz). Edwards Relph's scheme can be applied to, consisting of: seeing, thinking and describing.	The method of **archetypes**, its approach is based on a universal level of experience and is determined by psychological experience (by Thomas Thiis-Evensen).
The **place character model** describes the place, sets its character and helps to reveal the *genius loci* of the place (by Christian Norberg-Schulz and Nanet Schaap).	The method is supplemented with the provisions of the theory of **natural symbols** (by Karsten Harries).

The intermediate results of the research, obtained by applying the constituent methods, are compared to determine the relationship between the place character model, which expresses the spirit of the place, and the architectural language reduced to archetypes. The methods that constitute the combined contextuality method are detailed below.

The Phenomenological Analysis of the Place

The combined contextuality method starts with the analysis of natural elements of place. It has to be stated, that a phenomenological study of landscape is radically different from a positivist study (Thompson 2017: 48). It relies on the direct experience of the researcher. Edward Relph introduces responsive methods for landscape analysis that are radical in their subjectivity. The principle of Relph's method stands as a background for the analysis of place. In practice, responsive methods unfold as:

1. Seeing – careful observation of landscapes and their description or visual recording.
2. Thinking – meditative, based on self-knowledge.
3. Describing – using clear and understandable language (1989: 159–161).

One of the specific ways of experiencing the landscape, distinguished as an independent phenomenological method, is *walking*. Archaeologist and theoretician of the phenomenological tradition Christopher Tilley draws attention to the universality of the experience of walking, which has not altered since prehistoric times. Walking comprises the full bodily experience of space, distinguishing such features of the elements of place as distance, positioning, orientation, level of height or visual connection (Tilley 1994: 74). Walking can be treated as an experimental method, because it combines planned and unplanned elements, new ideas are generated during the process, experience is reflected on site. Landscape architect Henrik Schultz distinguishes three modes of walking that enable a quality experience of the landscape, namely: modes of discovery, flow and reflection (Schultz 2016: 63-64). The method allows the landscape to be perceived as a part of spa-

tial performances or *Raumgeschehen* (Schultz at al. 2017: 180). The most important advantages of the walking method are: generating implicit knowledge, identifying problems and reflection in action (2017: 182). The walking method consists of a general framework and a free exploration of characteristic places. It has been practically applied in the analysis of various landscapes (e. g. Amani-Beni et al. 2022; Fyfe 2020; Toso 2019). When adapting walking to the combined contextuality method, 3 phases are distinguished:

1. Starting from the building, the nature of the terrain, vegetation, surrounding structures and other elements are recorded. The area is experienced from all sides by walking around the building, with the greatest attention paid to the nature of the terrain near the building, based on visual and kinesthetic experience.
2. From the area around the building, the environment is observed and the landscape that opens up in different cardinal directions is recorded. Attention is focused on the features of the relief, the perspectives that open up, the visual connection with water bodies and the nature of the vegetation.
3. While maintaining the visual connection, the space around the investigated object is experienced by walking. Images of the building in the environment are recorded from different cardinal directions.

Based on the visual and kinesthetic walking experience, which is juxtaposed with the geographical description of the area, historical data or other clarifying information, a character model of the place is then established. It is based on the 4 categories of landscapes distinguished by Norberg-Schulz, reflecting the expression of two main natural factors – of the earth and the sky – in the place (Norberg-Schulz 1980: 42). The key elements constituting the structure of a factor of earth are:

a Topography or surface relief, which may be directional, wild (unhabitable) or inviting (habitable). 3 levels of scale are distinguished.

b "Secondary" landscape elements related to soil qualities: texture, color and vegetation. Often, elements a and b work together.

c Water, which can be calm or dynamic, structuring or indeterminate, dematerializing (1980: 32–37).

The characteristic properties of the factor of sky are:

d Light, color and qualities of clouds, depending on the geographical-climatic location of the area.

e The relationship between the sky and the earth, unfolding in the place. The element is characterized by the silhouette of the horizon (1980: 40).

After evaluating the expression of these elements in the landscape, 4 types of landscapes are determined:

1. Romantic: the balance of natural factors prevails, it is characterized by diversity and associated with Nordic landscapes.
2. Cosmic: characterized by monotony, dominated by the infinite extension of the ground. An extreme example: the desert.
3. Classical: neither monotony nor diversity dominates; mid-level, human-scale surface relief.
4. Complex: a combination of romantic, cosmic and classical types (1980: 42–47; Schaap 2011: 15).

The method has been applied in the analysis of various landscapes (e. g. Hamzenejad et al. 2020; Vitková and Lemak 2021). A systematization of the Norberg-Schulz's theory as a place character model, more adapted to the practical analysis of landscapes, is presented below in the form of a table. It is an adapter version of the one by landscape architect Nanet Schaap (2011: 16).

Table 2
Place Character Model

Fundamentals	Earth	Sky	Static and Dynamic (in parallel)
Elements	Ground Water Vegetation	Light Clouds Orientation	
Influential Elements	Texture, Colour and Time		

The *genius loci* is disclosed as an expression of the dominant features of the earth's surface, vegetation and water elements, revealed through visual and bodily experience during phenomenological analysis. Parallel to the analysis of natural elements, a building located in a natural environment of a place is analyzed phenomenologically.

The Phenomenological Analysis of the Architectural Object

In Norberg-Schulz's book[1] *Between Heaven and Earth* a system of three elements is laid out, consisting of the forest floor (*skogbotnen*), the sky (*himmelen*) and the visible horizon (*synsranda*). The architecture is juxtaposed with nature extracting these 3 common structural and visual-psychological elements of floor, ceiling (roof) and wall corresponding to the ones of ground, sky and trees or hills, which form an optic array (van Nes 2008: 116, 128). Based on this triad of elements, the Norwegian architect Thomas Thiis Evensen formed the method of archetypes. Its basis consists of floor, wall and roof, which the author calls the grammar of architecture – a set of archetypes common to historical and contemporary architectural structures (Thiis-Evensen 1987: 17). The method is characterized by universality, because at the center of the analysis the main theme of architecture is explored – the relationship between the outside and the inside. The central purpose of all three archetypes is the balancing of internal and external "forces" (1987: 19). The method is well rated because it helps to express subconscious, difficult to define architectural impressions and experiences in a clearly understandable way (Seamon 2017: 355). The archetype approach is based on a universal level of experience that is not associated with symbolic or cultural meanings, although such meanings may be an integrated part of them (Thiis Evensen 1987: 31).

The three archetypes – floor, wall and roof – are analyzed from the perspective of three qualitative concepts: motion, weight and substance. The analysis itself is developed according to two dimensions: themes (the question: what do archetypes do?) and motifs (the question: how do they do it?) (1987: 21, 19). The themes of the floor archetype are directionality, delimitation, and support. The archetype evokes the shared human experience with the floor in nature (1987: 36). The analysis of the wall archetype is characterized by complexity. The themes of this archetype are breadth, height, and depth. The archetype marks the visual characteristics of the wall's capacity to balance the forces that affect the inner and outer spaces (1987: 116). The archetype of the roof reveals the relationship of the interior of the building with the sky. David Seamon positively evaluates the method of archetypes according to the 4 guidelines of hermeneutic research proposed by the philosopher Bric R. Wachterhauser: comprehensiveness, semantic depth, inclusivity and architectonic structure (Seamon 2017: 352). The archetype method has been practically applied in the analysis of modern and contemporary as well as ancient architecture (e. g. Damayanti and Salura 2022; Irena and Fauzy 2018; Palyvou 2018; Seamon 2016; Дедов и Кокорина 2021).

Supplementing the method of archetypes, Karsten Harries's method of natural symbols is being practically applied in architectural research. Although it is not consistently developed, the scientific value of the author's theory is well recognized. It is significant that Harries's natural symbols comprise both components that form the semantic layer of architecture related to meaning and emotional experience, respectively referring to the philosophies of Heidegger and Merleau-Pon-

1 Original title *Mellom himmel og jord*, 1971. The book was published in Norwegian and has not been translated into foreign languages.

ty. Natural symbols are not linked to a specific cultural environment, as they arise from human physicality, returning the researcher's attention to human experiences in space. The main pairs of these symbols are: verticality and horizontality, light and darkness, moving and resting, openess and closure (Harries 1997: 125; Seamon 2017: 351). The method of natural symbols has been practically applied in the analysis of modern and contemporary as well as historical architecture (e. g. Assefa et al. 2007; Qureshi et al. 2021; Lin 2015; Olivier 2021).

The combined contextuality method is formed as a symmetrical structure, which consists of a phenomenological analysis of the characteristics of the place and the architectural object. The analysis aims to identify the *genius loci* characterizing the natural environment of a place and to approach the archetypal meanings of the building. The method is completed by the juxtaposition of these two poles, determining the common points of contact. It is expected that the combined contextuality method makes it possible to reveal the reflection of dominant natural elements in architecture, not as a copy of external features, but as a reflection of qualities reduced to their essences. Such reduced qualities of a place, expressed in the architecture of a building, can be horizontality – verticality, staticity – dynamism, rising up – descending, closedness – openness, lightness – darkness, roughness – smoothness and many others.

The Example of Applied Combined Contextuality Method

The summary of the analysis of the 18th century *S. Pietro* church in the town of Zagarolo in Italy is introduced as an example of the application of the method, yet emphasizing the universality of the method and its potentiality to be applied to both historical and contemporary architecture. The analysis begins with the study of landscape. During the walking experience, the natural elements of the place are analyzed at three levels – micro, medium and macro. It begins with the closest environment surrounding the church. The small *Piazza S. Pietro* opposite the main facade on the north side is horizontal, as is the street passing the church block from the east. The situation changes on the west-southwest side, where the steep descent of the slope starts right with a church wall. The terraced slope descends steeply for about 50 meters to a tree-lined valley. The church stands in the old town, on the flat terrace at the top of the hill. The character of the place opens up at the macro level – Zagarolo town is located on an elongated hill in the north-south direction, which is framed on both sides by accordingly elongated valleys. From the small *Piazza S. Pietro* in front of the facade, there is a distant perspective of the horizon in the west with the silhouette of the hills on the other side of the valley. On the eastern side, the view is blocked by the houses. As a result, the overview of the church itself from the old town is extremely limited. Walking in the old town, one can only see the dome of the church with a lantern rising above the block of buildings. The clearest view of the church is from the valley, from the hill on the other side of the valley or from the south side, when arriving in the town. When one enters the old town, one can not see the church – only the view of the dome emerges from time to time as one moves through the streets. The main facade of the church is visible only when one approaches it and turns into the small *Piazza S. Pietro* in front of the entrance.

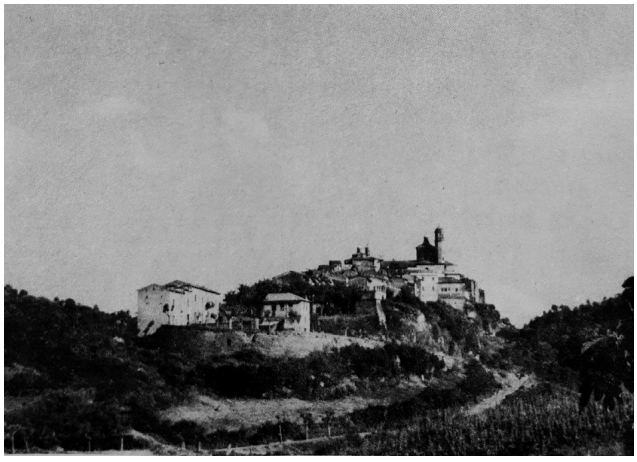

Fig. 1
Zagarolo hill from the north. Source: Loreti, E. *Guida di Zagarolo*. Roma: Tipolito Garofani, 1987

The surroundings of Zagarolo are characterized by the clear shapes of the hills that are best revealed at the macro level and the vertical

Fig. 2
Zagarolo's hill topographic view. Source: Google Maps

nature of the relief, which at the same time creates inviting conditions for habitation – at the top of the hill of steep slopes stretches a flat terrace where the old town is situated. The relationship between the sky and the earth is defined by the unevenly wavy horizon line, which is shaped by the silhouettes of the surrounding hills and mountains. There are no significant water bodies, there are practically no trees in the urbanized area of the town, so the most important natural element of the place forming it's *genius loci* can be named the surface relief. In summary, the place character model of the landscape of Zagarolo can be characterized as classical.

The second part of the method analyses the architecture of the building. The lateral walls of *S. Pietro* church are indistinguishable from the surrounding buildings, they are characterised by a smooth plastered surface with a modest cornice, and only the high windows of the transept chapels can distinguish them from residential buildings. Because of the residential house attached to the back wall of the presbytery, the church seems completely „melted" in the block building. The principal, if not to say the only, communication areas of the building are as follows:

a main facade,

b dome,

c interior space.

The parish church of *S. Pietro* was built in 1715-1722 according to the project of architects Nicolò Michetti and Ludovico Rusconi Sassi. The spatial structure of the building is akin to the model of the church of *San Giacomo in Augusta* in Rome. It is based on a central oval plan with six side chapels. The oval nave is completed by an oval dome with a tall lantern. The main facade uses the so-called *San Carlino* motive of concave-convex-concave facade surface. The designated models, on which the architecture of the church is based, do not yet say anything about the architectural whole of the building and its relationship with the environment. Although the description of such a kind often accomplishes architectural analysis, the models used are only elements of the vocabulary of the architectural language or style.

When analyzing according to the combined contextuality method, the main focus is on the exterior of the building. The analysis of archetypes helps to focus the study on three essential areas of the church. On the main facade, the floor archetype does not dominate, it is represented by a low unaccented base. It consists of two low steps, following the silhouette of the facade along its perimeter. The wall archetype, on the contrary, occupies a dominant position. The breadth theme of the facade is not very emphasized: the facade is divided into three even segments, and it is almost impossible to view its entire breadth in full – due to the small square, the facade is viewed in parts or at an angle. The height theme is of much more importance. The theme is expressed in a different way when compared with the original model of *San Carlino* (a church by Francesco Borromini in Rome). On the facade of the Zagarolo church, directly above the low base, rise the pilasters and semi-columns of the great order and there is not any horizontal division. Although the overall proportion of the facade is horizontal, it emphasizes verticality. Even more significant is the depth theme of the facade – the undulating concave-convex-concave motive of the wall also determines the undulating, changing projections of the entablature. They achieve dramatic

contrasts when viewed from a close distance, from which one is forced to observe the building because there is not enough room in a tiny square. The oval drum is the most prominent part of the dome, it is completed by a shallow vault and an emphatically tall lantern. Seen from a distance, from where the view of the dome is the best observed, the entire volume of the church appears compactly vertical.

Summarizing the combined contextuality method analysis, it can be stated that the most important areas of the building's expression (facade, interior, dome) do not have a very close interaction with each other, the church architecture is characterised by fragmentation. This could partly be due to the location of the church in a densely built-up environment and the fact that the building was designed by two different architects. However, after juxtaposing the analysis of the natural elements of the place and the architecture of the building, the natural symbols emerge, which allows to conclude that the architecture of the church is characterized by contextuality in relation to the *genius loci* of the place. The analysis reveals the following points of contact that determine this contextuality:

1. The verticality emphasized in the architecture of the church (in the general volume of the central plan of the church, the main facade, the cylinder of the dome and its lantern) corresponds to the most prominent feature of the natural framework of Zagarolo – the vertical nature of the relief, which is obviously (directly) expressed by the steep slope, right next to which the building of *S. Pietro* church is situated.
2. Although not particularly emphasized, the longitudinal axis of the oval planned church is oriented along an elongated ridge. In other words, the church obeys the direction dictated by the topography.
3. The motive of the undulating facade of the church in relation to the relief of the hill on which the town of Zagarolo is situated, reveals itself during the phenomenological analysis as interpreting the silhouette of the terrain of the area. The concave-convex-concave motive of the facade surface reproduces the most prominent character of the natural framework of the Zagarolo, which can be defined as a valley-hill-valley "motive". The correlation between the undulating facade and the dynamic relief consisting of valleys and hills is especially revealed due to the coincident longitudinal axes of the building and the hill. The undulating relief is overall characteristic of the surrounding area of Zagarolo, as can be seen in the undulating horizon line looking west from *Piazza S. Pietro* in front of the church facade.

Fig. 3
S. Pietro church from south. Author's photo

Fig. 4
S. Pietro church from north-east. Author's photo

Conclusions

The article, hopefully, highlighted the significance of the contextuality of architecture as a reflection of the natural elements of place and the need to integrate it into the concept of sustainable architecture. The importance of contextuality is related to aesthetic and emotional experience, while the phenomenological tradition emphasizes its necessity for human existence. The article presents the combined contextuality method as a tool to research the relationship between architecture and place, the importance of which comes from the theories of the authors of the phenomenological tradition. Summarizing conclusions are presented:

1. The combined contextuality method is introduced because of the lack of practical tools to analyse the relationship between architecture and natural elements of place. The importance of architecture's aesthetic-psychological connection with the natural environment is expressed in the theories of leading scholars of architectural phenomenology, though the analysis of such a connection remains predominantly on a theoretical level.
2. The principle of the offered combined contextuality method is the symmetrical combination of various practically applied phenomenological methods, which are *separately* used in the analysis of place or architecture. The innovation of the combined contextuality method is the holistic approach, which hopefully enables one to trace the aesthetic-psychological qualities of buildings that can only be experienced and analysed in the context of a place.
3. The method is characterised by its universality. It can be equally appliance to contemporary and historical architecture and places, as are the constituting methods. The analysis of the 18th century church in Zagarolo is presented as an example. This example demonstrates the contextual relation of the church building with the *genius loci* of the place, which is traced as the connecting points (common features) expressed as emphasised verticality, orientation along north-south direction and undulating nature of the surface.

In forming the combined contextuality method, the article aimed to return to the center of attention the fundamental concept of architecture as a mediator between nature and humans. A complex qualitative approach presented in the article could be meaningfully applied in the research field of various architectural analyses in order to determine the contextuality (or the lack of it) in historical or contemporary architecture. As a consequence, it is hoped it could broaden the understanding of sustainable architecture, as at the center of the method introduced is the human experience of architecture and nature.

References

Anzenbacher, A. (1992). Filosofijos įvadas. Vilnius: Katalikų pasaulis.

Assefa, E. M. and Seamon, D. (2007). Karsten Harries' natural symbols as a means for interpreting architecture: inside and outside in Frank Lloyd Wright's Fallingwater and Alvar Aalto's Villa Mairea. Wolkenkuckucksheim, 12(1), 1-7.

Amani-Beni, M., Khalilnezhad, M. R., & Mahdizadeh, S. (2022). Hierarchical access to the edible landscape: the Akbarieh Garden in Iran. Landscape Research, 47(3), 333-353. https://doi.org/10.1080/01426397.2021.2016667

Casey, E. S. (1993). Getting back into place: Toward a renewed understanding of the place-world. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Damayanti, R. S. and Salura, P. (2022). The spirit of place dynamics at GPIB Immanuel and the Pancaran Kasih in Depok. ARTEKS: Jurnal Teknik Arsitektur, 7(1), 109-118. https://doi.org/10.30822/arteks.v7i1.1257

Fyfe, J. (2020). Unsettled landscapes: the narrative and material capacities of landscape in the post-war Croatian hinterlands. Doctoral dissertation, University of Cambridge.

Gandawijaya, R. A. A. (2021). The contextual form of the campus center design in Bandung Institute of Technology area. ARTEKS: Jurnal Teknik Arsitektur, 6(1), 75-84.https://doi.org/10.30822/arteks.v6i1.611

Gutauskas, M. (2021). Fenomenologija. Lecture notes, Vilnius University Faculty of Philosophy, delivered 2-16 September 2021.

Hamzenejad, M., Nakhaee Sharif, A. and Azizi Qomi, H. (2020). Examining the Possibility of Interpreting and Categorizing Iranian-Islamic Cities Using Schul-

tz's Theory of Genius Loci: Defining the Genius Loci of the Space of Iranian-Islamic Cities and Searching for the Iranian Utopia. Culture of Islamic Architecture and Urbanism Journal, 5(1), 1-21. https://doi.org/10.29252/ciauj.5.1.1

Harries, K. (1980). The dream of the complete building. Perspecta, 17, 36-43. https://doi.org/10.2307/1567001

Harries, K. (1983). Thoughts on a non-arbitrary architecture. Perspecta, 20, 9-20. https://doi.org/10.2307/1567063

Harries, K. (1984). Space, place, and ethos: reflection on the ethical function of architecture. Artibus et Historiae, 5(9), 159-165. https://doi.org/10.2307/1483174

Harries, K. (1997). The ethical function of architecture. Cambridge (Mass.): The MIT Press.

Harries, K. (2017). Some thoughts and questions on revisiting the ethical function of architecture. International Journal of Architectural Theory, 22(16), 15-34.

Heidegger, M. (1983). Hebel - friend of the house. Transl. by B. V. Foltz and M. Heim. In D. E. Christensen (Ed.), Contemporary German philosophy, Vol. 3 (pp. 89-101). University Park and London: The Pennsylvania State University Press.

Heidegger, M. (1992). Rinktiniai raštai. Vilnius: Mintis.

Heidegger, M. (2010). Building, dwelling, thinking. Transl. by A. Hofstadter. In N. Leach (Ed.), Rethinking architecture. A reader in cultural theory (pp. 100-109). London: Routledge.

Hemmati, M. (2016). Aesthetics of sustainability: the relation of aesthetics and environmental sustainability. Manzar, the Scientific Journal of Landscape, 8(35), 82-89.

Hill, G. (2011). The aesthetics of architectural consumption. In S. Lee (Ed.), Aesthetics of Sustainable Architecture (pp. 26-40). Rotterdam: 010 Publishers.

Irena, L. A., and Fauzy, B. (2018). The monumentality of modern architecture as observed in Jakarta's Pola building. Riset Arsitektur (RISA), 2(01), 89-107. https://doi.org/10.26593/risa.v2i01.2933.89-107

Lewicka, M. (2011). Place Attachment: How Far We Come in the Last 40 Years? Journal of Environmental Psychology, 31(3): 207-230. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jenvp.2010.10.001

Lin, Y. (2015). Karsten Harries' natural symbols and Frank Lloyd Wright's natural houses. NA, 7(1).

Malpas, J. (2017). What is architecture for? International Journal of Architectural Theory, 22(36), 119-126.

Merleau-Ponty, M. (2012). Phenomenology of perception. Trans. by D. A. Landes. Abingdon: Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203720714

Meyer, E. K. (2008). Sustaining beauty. The performance of appearance: a manifesto in three parts. Journal of Landscape Architecture, 3(1), 6-23. https://doi.org/10.1080/18626033.2008.9723392

Meyer, G. (2013). Can phenomenological aesthetics enlighten the understanding of everyday architecture? EST 3010. https://www.academia.edu/27219314/Can_phenomenological_aesthetics_enlighten_the_understanding_of_everyday_architecture

Mickūnas, A. and Jonkus, D. (2014). Fenomenologinė filosofija ir jos šešėlis. Vilnius: Baltos lankos.

Norberg-Schulz, Ch. (1980). Genius loci. Towards a phenomenology of architecture. New York: Rizzoli.

Olivier, B. (2021). The Libeskind Jewish Museum in Berlin, the unpresentable and experience. Acta Academica, 53(1), 23-43.https://doi.org/10.18820/24150479/aa53i1.2

Otero-Pailos, J. (2012). Architectural Phenomenology and the Rise of the Postmodern. In: C. G. Crysler et al. (Eds.), The SAGE Handbook of Architectural Theory (pp. 136-151). London: Sage.https://doi.org/10.4135/9781446201756.n9

Palyvou, C. (2018). Daidalos at work: A phenomenological approach to the study of Minoan architecture. INSTAP Academic Press. https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv9zcgz9

Pero, E. (2011). Environmental issues as context. In S. Lee (Ed.), Aesthetics of Sustainable Architecture (pp. 213-226). Rotterdam: 010 Publishers.

Portoghesi, P. (2012). Proteggere e definire il paesaggio. A cura di F. Gottardo. Roma: Accademia Nazionale di San Luca.

Portoghesi, P. (2021). Poesia della curva. Il racconto di una ricerca durata più di sessanta anni che ha avuto come obiettivo, di rendere, ancora una volta, l'architettura un linguaggio capace di esprimere emozioni, speranze, scelte e rifiuti. Roma: Gangemi.

Qureshi, R. A., Akhtar, M., & Shah, S. J. (2021). Deep Beauty at the Archetypal Level: Analysis of the Barood Khana Haveli. J. Res. Soc. Pak, 58, 226-235.

Relph, E. (1970). An inquiry into the relations between phenomenology and geography. Canadian Geographer/Le Géographe canadien, 14(3), 193-201. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1541-0064.1970.tb01567.x

Relph, E. (1976). Place and placelessness. London: Pion.

Relph, E. (1989). Responsive methods, geographical imagination and the study of landscapes. In A. Kobayashi and S. MacKenzie (Eds.), Remaking human geography (pp. 149-163). Boston: Unwin Hyman.

Samalavičius, A. (2012). "Vietos dvasa" Christiano Norberg-Schulzo architektūros fenomenologijoje

["Spirit of place" in Christian Norberg-Schulz's phenomenology of architecture]. Logos, 71, 119-126.

Samalavičius, A. (2018). Beyond sustainability: reconsidering the healing qualities of the built environment. In IOP Conference Series: Earth and Environmental Science, Vol. 213, No. 1 (pp. 1-8). IOP Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1088/1755-1315/213/1/012001

Samalavičius, A. (2022). Vietos fenomenologija: nuo erdvės iki vietos koncepcijos architektūroje [A phenomenology of place: from space to the concept of place in architecture]. Logos, 110, 143-152. https://doi.org/10.24101/logos.2022.15

Schaap, N. (2011). Landscape based design: a research towards landscape identity. Master Thesis, TU Delft.

Schultz, H. (2016). Identifying particular places through experimental walking. SPOOL, 3(1), 57-66.

Schultz, H. and van Etteger, R. (2017). Walking. In A. van den Brink et al. (Eds.), Research in landscape architecture: Methods and methodology (pp. 179-193). Abingdon: Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315396903-11

Seamon, D. (2000). Phenomenology, place, environment, and architecture: a review of the literature. Phenomenology Online, 36, 1-29.

Seamon, D. (2016). A phenomenological and hermeneutic reading of Rem Koolhaas's Seattle Central Library: buildings as lifeworlds and architectural texts. In R. C. Dalton et al. (Eds.), Take one building: Interdisciplinary research perspectives of the Seattle Central Library (pp. 83-110). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315589237-16

Seamon, D. (2017). Hermeneutics and architecture: buildings-in-themselves and interpretive trustworthiness. In B. B. Janz (Ed.), Place, space and hermeneutics (pp. 347-360). Cham: Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-52214-2_25

Seamon, D. (2022). Architecture and phenomenology. In D. Lu (Ed.), The Routledge companion to contemporary architectural history. London: Routledge.

Shirazi, M. R. (2014). Towards an articulated phenomenological interpretation of architecture: phenomenal phenomenology. London, New York: Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315882383

Thiis-Evensen, T. (1987). Archetypes in architecture. Oslo: Norwegian University Press. https://doi.org/10.18261/9788215046419-2020

Thompson, I. H. (2017). The role of theory. In A. van den Brink et al. (Eds.), Research in landscape architecture: methods and methodology (pp. 37-53). Abingdon: Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315396903-3

Tilley, C. (1994). A phenomenology of landscape: places, paths, and monuments. Oxford: Berg.

Toso, F. C. (2019). Preliminary assessment practices for the definition of tools and goals of landscape quality in Mediterranean settlements: L'Alfàs del Pi as a case study. In Health, Wellbeing and Sustainability in the Mediterranean City (pp. 107-121). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429401572-10

van Nes, A. (2008). The heaven, the earth and the optic array: Norberg Schulz's place phenomenology and its degree of operationability. Footprint, 3, 113-134.

Vitková, Ľ. and Lemak, O. (2021). Interaction of Landscape and Settlement Structures in the Danube region. Architecture Papers of the Faculty of Architecture and Design STU, 26(1), 30-38.https://doi.org/10.2478/alfa-2021-0005

Дедов, В. А. и Кокорина, Е. В. (2021). Архетип «камень» как пример базиса коммуникативных качеств объемно-пластического образа здания [The "stone" archetype as an example of the basis of the communicative qualities of the volume-plastic image of the building]. Архитектон: известия вузов, 3, 1-9.

About the Author

KOSTAS BILIŪNAS

PhD student of humanities

Vilnius Gediminas Technical University, Faculty of Architecture, Department of Architectural Fundamentals, Theory and Art

Main research area

History of architecture, Baroque architecture, architectural phenomenology

Address

Pylimo st. 26, LT-01141 Vilnius, Lithuania
Tel.: +37061320222
E-mail: kostas.biliunas@vilniustech.lt