

## JKWIS Block 3 Essay

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### **How accurately does architecture reflect prevailing ideology? Do all successful ideologies require architectural support?**

*“The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways: the point, however, is to change it.”*

— *Karl Marx, The German Ideology*

The reason we have chosen this particular quote to start our essay is because through the course of our analysis we hope to show you how different architectural forms, at different times, have fulfilled the point Marx is trying to make here; that ideological theory alone is not enough to make a difference in the world. Architecture has worked to strengthen abstract notions, such as communism or fascism, by giving them physical manifestation in society and hence helping establish their overarching presence in day to day life.

To further expound on this idea, let's go back to 20<sup>th</sup> century Europe and see how, if at all, architecture helped aid the fascist ideology present in the region at the time. Fascism as a political ideology is characterized by ultra-nationalism, authoritarianism and the primacy of the state. For Hitler one of the main objectives of his rule was to unify the people of Germany under his supreme rule. One way of rallying the people for support was through his infamous. To achieve this he needed a space that could not only accommodate a large number of people but had the pomp and grandeur associated with it that could make the countrymen proud of their nation, especially after the tumultuous war years. Places like the Deutsches Stadion in the Nazi party rally grounds. These large and spacious stadium grounds provided just the solution; allowing thousands of people to have what Hitler call the “mass experience.” Here they would gather and express feelings of fervent patriotism whilst also allowing the Reich to indoctrinate the large masses with their beliefs at the same time. The Luitpold Hall, built 1906, in these grounds was decked with 76 loudspeakers, 42 spotlights, the largest pipe organ in Germany and could seat 16,000 people. The building itself was in neo classical style with limestone used for the façade and three majestic entrance portals. Buildings like these were also significant because of historical importance. The Luitpold Hall was the place where in 1935 the Nuremberg Laws were passed which denied the German Jews and other minorities their citizenship. Events like these were used by Hitler to point fingers of blame for the war towards certain groups and this building would act as a constant reminder of that for the people in Germany at the time.

As for the question about whether architecture reflects prevailing ideology accurately we need to turn to the prominent religious sites in the world today and see how true they remain to prevailing religious ideologies. One of the main principal Islamic architectural types is the

mosque. A mosque is a place of worship for Muslims to come together to say their prayers, discuss religion and politics, gather religious information or even settle disputes. The key features of any mosque are the dome, the minaret (tower) and the vast open courtyard. Let's take the Sultan Ahmed Mosque (the Blue Mosque) in Turkey for our case study in this essay. This masjid was built in the early 17<sup>th</sup> century during the rule of Ahmed I. It incorporates traditional Islamic architectural styles with Byzantine elements making it the last remaining mosque of the classic period of Ottoman architecture designed by Sedefkâr Mehmed Ağa. Islam as a religion advocates the values of simplicity and modesty in lifestyle. The holiest and most sacred site in the Islamic religion, the Kabba situated in Mecca, is an unassuming cuboid shaped building made of granite marble and limestone and draped in the Kiswa, or black silk cloth. It derives its importance not from architectural grandeur but religious and historic significance. Contrasting to this the Blue Mosque is a grand affair with one main dome, six minarets, and eight secondary domes. The inside constitutes of around 200 intricately designed stained glass windows, floor casements covered in the opus sectile technique of art, an ornate prayer niche made of sculptured marble, with a stalactite niche and lamps that at one time were covered in gold and gems. Here is where a paradox arises. On the one hand we can say that this mosque quite aptly covers the functions of a mosque. It is large enough in size to host upto 10,000 individual who would come here for the purpose of prayer or meditation, with it's various domes and other Islamic structures we can say its keeping in line with Islamic architectural tradition, it has ablution facilities as well as an information center catering to the needs of the worshippers who come here. Yet, in a word, it is extravagant. Whilst aesthetically beautiful it has all the aspects of pomp and majesty attached to it that Islam as an ideology rejects. It was built with the purpose of being grand and serves more as a tourist attraction than a religious site. In this regard we can say that the spiritual association often attributed to a mosque, the sense of humility and peace you link to it, is lost in this particular case hence creating a discrepancy between form and ideology.

It is difficult to argue the case of architecture reflecting ideology as ideologies are fluid and ever changing, holding different meanings and interpretations for different people. Yet through our essay we have tried to build a case showing how architecture works conjointly with ideology to achieve certain aims for people in power. Conversely, we also discussed the susceptibility of architecture to stray from the very ideology that birthed it, falling prey to the material motives of people in the process. In this we hope we have managed to enrich the ongoing debate about ideology and architecture.

Word Count: 930 words