

Superstitions and customs in construction - a contribution to the discussion on the disappearance of this tradition

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Abstract

Construction is one of the most important, but also the most extensive areas of the economy. That is why we encounter superstitions and customs related to this discipline of the economy quite often: we believe and repeat them, not even knowing what their origin is and what according to old beliefs resulted in their lack of application. This situation applies in practice to all buildings, including residential buildings implemented at different times of time, including today.

The aim of the article is to indicate the genesis of selected exaggerations, describe the customs that arose on their basis and present the alleged effects of not cultivating them.

Due to the criterion of time in relation to the period of construction of the building, the article discusses superstitions and customs specific to the following stages of the investment: preparatory works and design, direct implementation and operation and operation.

Keywords: building customs, construction superstitions, tradition

1 Admission

In construction, preservations and activities have survived to this day, which can be considered as elements of non-material heritage and of vitality lasting from pre-Christian times, referred to in some literature items as pagan times. Within both construction professions, i.e. architects and civil engineers, the awareness of the manifestations of this heritage is still alive, and some participants in investment processes cultivate and popularize them within their competences and professional activities. The most common manifestation is the superstitions and customs cultivated in almost every construction site.

2 The problem of superstitions and customs in construction

Centuries-old superstitions, customs and the consequent tradition are difficult to fight [2, 5, 6]. Some prefer to respect them just in case. This situation also applies to the broadly understood construction industry. Very often we succumb to certain superstitions and put into practice the customs related to the construction of a house. Superstitions introduced into everyday life and the customs resulting from their application come from various periods of time: antiquity, pagan times, early Christianity, the Middle Ages, the Renaissance, as well as arose in the modern period.

The aim of the article is to indicate the genesis of selected exaggerations, describe the customs that arose on their basis, present the alleged effects of not cultivating the beliefs cited and indicate contemporary examples of cultivating superstitions and customs in construction.

3 Division of superstitions and customs in construction

Based on the principle of succession of time, one can formulate the thesis, that on the basis of commonly known superstitions customs are formed which enter into common use [10]. This situation is perfectly visible on the example of broadly understood construction. In construction, the lack of compliance with commonly known customs, the lack

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of application of which means that the hosts of the house, most often identified as the owners of a newly constructed building, must take into account the possibility of negative situations (random events) which hypothetically could be avoided if the usual solutions, which are often the result of centuries-old tradition, were applied.

In construction, most construction customs are indicated to investors or even enforced to be carried out by construction workers [3, 4, 7–9, 11]. Construction customs are not honored by investors, then it is customary to say that workers cast a curse. And according to the prevailing belief, the curse of the construction worker is very severe and painful.

Moving on to further considerations, two concepts should be defined [1]:

- superstition
- custom

Superstition, also popularly known as superstition, is an unfounded, stubbornly nourished and insensitive to argumentation belief in the existence of a cause-and-effect relationship between events. It may stem from stereotypes rooted in tradition and culture. It is devoid of rational basis and impossible to verify. Most often it is a remnant of the old belief system, considered obsolete forms of magic, manifestations of ignorance and backwardness.

Custom, on the other hand, means a way of behaving established in the collective (society). On a collective scale, it is the equivalent of an individual habit, and its existence is based on tradition and has the character of an unconscious imitation of what other members do. Custom differs from fashion by much greater permanence, while from custom, by the fact that its non-observance does not have any negative consequences for a member of the group.

Thus, it can be argued that customs arose and continue to arise as a consequence of superstition. This inference can also be applied perfectly to the field of construction.

Due to the criterion of the time of construction of the building, because it is this form of construction object that will be limited, further considerations can be divided into the following stages:

- preparatory work and design,
- direct execution,
- Operation

In the further part of the article, the technical term of a building object, which is a building, will be used as identical to the popular term house used in the common language.

Thus, the following customs related to the construction of the house and the consequent customs can be divided into the following thematic groups:

- superstitions related to the choice of the place of construction of the house,
- superstitions related to the construction of the building,
- superstitions related to the commencement of residence in the building.

4 Examples of superstitions and customs in construction

4.1 Superstitions related to the choice of the place of construction of the house

4.1.1 Prohibition of building a house in the place of a cat bed

One of the oldest superstitions is the belief that you should not locate the house in a place where cats are lounging. The consequence of superstition is the habit of seeing, as far as possible organizationally, a place for the construction of a house in the spring, when wild cats are looking for a place to set up beds or viewing the area where it is planned to build a house in the morning, when the cats are still asleep. Failure to act in accordance with the described superstition could result in the fact that in a house that was created in the place where cats lie down, all life events will happen very slowly, and some of the most important ones from the point of view of family life may not happen at all, because there is an analogy to the behavior of a cat that sleeps a significant part of its life.

Nowadays, this superstition is not very popular, among others due to the fact that the choice of the place of building a house, especially in the era of a market economy, is most often determined by economic and economic considerations and, of course, technical conditions.

4.1.2 Location of the house in the place indicated by the sheep

A superstition dating back to ancient times is the belief that the house should be erected in a place where sheep herded to the construction site behave calmly. The place where animals behave most calmly should be intended for the location of a bedroom or a children's room. Actions contrary to superstition could result in the fact that the newly built house will not be a refuge of peace for its residents, and the family life of the inhabitants of the house will be very turbulent.

Nowadays, this superstition is not very popular, in practice it has disappeared. Currently, one of the most popular rules for choosing the functional and functional layout of the house is to follow the principles of feng – shui or other tips, including those bordering on magic and religious guidelines, in particular those from non-Christian denominations.

4.1.3 Prohibition of building a house in the place of earlier burial

According to this superstition, it is forbidden to build a house in places of previous bloodshed, misfortunes and burials. This superstition also applies to the fires and battlefields in which people died. The custom of avoiding as a place of construction of a house the areas where people died is associated with the respect for the dead originating from ancient times. Violation of the burial place for the purpose of building a house could cause that the hosts would not experience happiness in the house, and it would even be a place of tragic random events.

Nowadays, this superstition is still respected, in a way it has been sanctioned by relevant detailed regulations – this applies to places that are exclusive areas from investment opportunities due to historical conditions, e.g. they are a place of worship or are under religious or archaeological protection.

4.1.4 Determining the zone of happiness around the building

In the distant past, dating back to pagan times, it was believed that the magical barrier against misfortunes such as war, disease, conflagration and misery was to be a strip of land around the place where the construction of a house was planned, which was surrounded (harrowed) at midnight by women harnessed to the plow. In addition, in the place where the threshold of the entrance door to the house was planned, a sacrifice was made in the form of a black hen or rooster, later eggs or their shells were buried instead of animal sacrifices. There are also known cases of burying pieces of iron, axe or horseshoe. Salt or holy herb was also buried. The lack of action in accordance with the described superstition was to be the reason for the lack of happiness experienced by the hosts of the house being built.

Nowadays, this superstition has completely disappeared in practice, and the customs associated with both the plowing of the land around the final place of construction of the house, as well as the subsequent burial of plants, animals or other material goods are not practiced.

4.2 Superstitions related to the execution of the building

4.2.1 Construction start date

One of the oldest superstitions is the belief that construction should not begin on any other day of the week than Monday. The superstition associated with the belief that all relevant construction activities, including the start of construction of the house, should begin on the first day of the week, i.e. on Monday. The designation of Monday as the first day of the week is at odds with the notion of the first day of the week in the Catholic faith, which is considered Sunday. In the times of early Christianity, however, in areas where the Catholic faith was practiced, a different approach was also used, starting construction on Wednesday or Saturday, considered to be the days of the Virgin Mary. This was to ensure its favor for the house under construction, both during implementation and subsequent operation. In the Middle Ages, the moment of commencement of construction, as extremely important, both for the host and for the builders, was determined by the astrologer. The correct date of commencement of the construction of the house guaranteed safety and its proper execution, so that it was not fraught with defects and served the owners for many years. According to beliefs and superstitions of the time, the first day of construction had to fall on the time of the full moon. On this day, there was also a family celebration with a sumptuous meal, i.e. the so-called hostages. Regardless of the period to which the discussed superstition refers, the lack of its observance

could cause that during the construction of the house of its builders, and during the period of use of its inhabitants, they will encounter misfortunes.

Nowadays, in the era of the market economy, this superstition is not practiced, in particular by investors from the development industry. However, private investors who start building single-family houses very often still follow this custom and practice in the vast majority of cases to start building a house usually on Monday.

4.2.2 Laying the coalstone

The needle stone is less often called a coalstone, but very often it is mistakenly called a cornerstone. It means the stone in the corner of the outer walls, on which the knot (corner) is based. Nowadays, this is most often referred to as the first stone or brick built on the foundations to start the construction of a house. In the past, it was placed on the stone by forging, the name of the builder, today information about the date of construction, investor, etc. is also included.

The laying of coalstone stone is usually associated with the ceremony of signing the foundation act. This custom has always had the character of a ceremony, but there is no information that the resignation from laying the cornerstone resulted in negative consequences for both the fate of the building itself and its hosts.

Nowadays, private investors during the construction of single-family houses do not practice the custom of laying hungarian stone, but it is a ceremony that is very often organized on large construction sites, both residential, as well as industrial and linear construction, and as it was mentioned earlier, it is often combined with the ceremony of laying the erection act describing (characterizing) the implemented investment.

4.2.3 Laying the foundation act

The erection act is a symbolic document that begins the construction in a solemn way, in particular the construction of a house. It lists the initiators, founders (investors) as well as the builders of a given project. Nowadays, the foundation act is solemnly signed and embedded in the foundation of the commenced construction, and this ceremony is most often combined with the laying of a cash stone. And the erection after signing is placed in a metal tube. Along with it, tradition requires placing in the locker several other items, which are most often: the issue of the local newspaper from the day of the ceremony, a few circulating coins or banknotes, photos of the participants of the construction, a photo of the area from the period preceding the start of the investment. The choice of objects depends on the nature of the investment, as well as the invention of people preparing the ceremony as a souvenir for posterity.

There are no messages that not laying the foundation act resulted in problems at the stage of construction, as well as the use of the house.

Nowadays, just like the ceremony of laying a node stone, the laying of the erection act usually takes place on large construction sites, as part of single-family housing construction this custom is not practiced.

4.2.4 Respect for foundations

In the distant past, referring to pagan times, it was believed that small money (coins) or eggshells should be thrown into the newly realized foundations. The first of them is to ensure the well-being of the household, the second – to protect the foundations of the building from moisture, and the children living in it from disease. This custom is an impoverished (limited) form of the old pagan rite according to which a shoe heel and even fallen domestic animals were thrown into the foundations.

Nowadays, the superstition associated with showing respect for the foundations of the n a stage of their implementation in practice has completely disappeared and is not practiced.

4.2.5 Marking of wooden beams

In the past period, especially in the countryside where construction based on wooden technology was developing, it was commonly practiced that the first wooden beams laid on the foundations of a newly erected building are marked with crosses and other conventional signs bringing happiness to the inhabitants of the house. The size and number of marks used for marking was an individual matter, and the signs used as symbols of happiness were most often the idea of the builder (carpenter) erecting the house.

Nowadays, marking wooden elements is a disappearing custom. Occasionally, this activity is performed by carpenters when erecting recreational houses with a wooden structure. Occasionally, you can meet with this custom during



Figure 1. Examples of a panicle (wreath) prepared after the completion of the raw state: a) economic building (2012) – number of storeys of the building: 1, height of the topping out (wreath): 0.2 m, b) residential and commercial building (2015) – number of storeys of the facility: 15, topping out height (wreath): 3.5 m, c) a residential building (2016) – number of storeys of the building: 1.5, topping out height (wreath): 0.8 m, d) container building (2017) – number of storeys of the facility: 1, topping out height (wreath): 0.4 m (photo: Maciej Niedostatkiewicz)

work carried out by carpenters as part of the reconstruction of wooden objects, e.g. during the reconstruction or reconstruction of a wooden roof truss in a sacred building.

4.2.6 Glajchowe

Glajcha in the jargon of bricklayers is the last layer of bricks under the ceiling. According to custom, this layer is decorated with a bunch of flowers or twigs, and then the completion of the construction of the storey is celebrated. Basically, the number of celebrations is closely related to the number of storeys, but it is customary to celebrate only the glajcha festival after the end of masonry of the walls at the level of the ground floor, in particular, the so-called glajchowe after making the walls of the storey recessed in the ground (basement storey) is not practiced.

Nowadays, on large construction sites related to the implementation of residential buildings, this custom is not practiced. Occasionally, this tradition continues on the construction of single-family houses.

4.2.7 Panicle (wreath)

The topping out, also referred to interchangeably as a wreath, is made of green twigs, usually coniferous, decorated with colored ribbons and mounted on a wooden roof truss. The topping out is a symbol of the creation of something new understood as the completion of the first stage of building a house, according to modern technical standards it corresponds to the so-called raw open state. In the past period, the topping out was considered as a sacrifice for the so-called good spirits taking care of the construction, who were then to take care of the house, and whose seat according to pagan beliefs was a tree. By making a wreath from its branches, and then hanging it on the top of the building, the positive power of the supernatural being previously inhabiting the tree is to pass from the topping out to the wooden skeleton of the roof (Fig. 1). The topping out is also a symbol of the host's gratitude to the builders who worked on the first stage of building the house. There is a common belief that if the host does not organize a ceremony related to the hanging of the topping out, he will not experience happiness in the house in which he will live.

In the past, the topping out was preceded by a ceremony called paid, from the word puff, understood not as an element of a wooden roof truss, but as laying the last beam on top of the log, i.e. a wall made of wooden round logs.

Depending on local traditions, sometimes during the ceremony of hanging topping outs along with a wreath over the building appear, made of wood saw, ax or other tools that symbolize the work of the carpenter.

Nowadays, the topping out suspension is very often combined with the ceremony of driving the last nail into the structures of the wooden roof truss.

While the guidelines as to the moment of hanging the topping out are clear and unambiguous, it is not entirely clear what should be done with it when it needs to be dismantled due to the need to carry out further construction works. Usually, the topping out is hung under the roof slope and so it hangs until the start of finishing works.

Nowadays, the following ways of developing the topping out after its dismantling from a wooden roof truss are known:

- throwing away as garbage,
- sacrifice on the altar of the Mother of God in the church,
- thorough destruction by burning and scattering ash in the area around the house under construction.

There is a widespread belief that throwing out the topping out can bring misfortune to the house under construction, in particular to its hosts. Therefore, the most popular form of topping out development is its burning. In the old days, the ashes from the topping out were scattered on the field owned by people building the house, which was to ensure fertility and prosperity for the hosts.

Nowadays, the suspension of the topping out after the completion of the so-called raw open state is the most popular custom referring to building traditions. It is practiced both during the implementation of small residential buildings, collective residence buildings and public utility buildings, very often the topping out also takes place after the completion of the stage or the whole implementation of linear investments, in particular roads or railway lines.

4.2.8 Installation of the roof tap

The roof tap in the basic solution was to symbolize the rooster, who, according to superstition, was to take care of the house, ensuring its happiness and safety. Being mounted on the ridge of the roof, i.e. at the highest point of the roof slope, it was to be similar to a rooster who, sitting on the highest perch, takes care of the hens in the hen house. In the old days in the countryside only wealthy owners had roof taps because originally they were made of steel and

were very expensive. Ceramic roof taps, which are an element of roof caterpillars, became widespread only at the end of the nineteenth century, and the reason for their appearance was the economic substrate – they were cheaper than steel, forged by blacksmiths, and thus more accessible. Over time, the shapes of roof taps changed and they began to be only a decorative element of the roof slope, and their installation was devoid of the ground associated with the construction tradition. There is no information about superstitions whether the lack of installation of a roof tap results in negative consequences.

Nowadays, roof taps are installed in practice only on roof slopes of single-family buildings only for aesthetic purposes.

4.2.9 Implementation of the fence

The fence around the completed or nearing construction, in particular the construction of a house, can be done in practice throughout the year - but it comes from pagan times superstition says not to do it in the autumn. The implementation of the fence in the autumn will cause both the house and its inhabitants to grow old quickly. There is an analogy to the season of autumn, which is even reflected in the statement of autumn of life.

Nowadays, the superstition related to the date of construction of the fence is not practiced, and the time of commencement of the fence results only from technical organizational and financial conditions.

4.3 Superstitions related to the commencement of residence in the building

4.3.1 Date of moving to a new home

Moving to a new home should not take place in the months of November and December. These are the shortest months in a calendar year during which the day decreases. According to superstition, moving in November and December threatens that the time at home will pass too quickly, as are the days in the autumn - winter period.

Nowadays, the superstition related to the date of moving to a new home is not respected, and its date in practice results only from technical, organizational and financial conditions.

4.3.2 Dedication of the house

Every house has a good spirit that needs to be cared for. The so-called good spirit is the guardian of the house itself, as well as of its inhabitants. The Catholic Church has sanctioned this popular superstition, which is now practiced as the custom of the consecration of a building by a priest.

Nowadays, the custom of sacrificing a house is an individual matter and each host makes his own decisions whether to sacrifice the house. In practice, most single-family houses are consecrated by a priest, although this is very often done not immediately after living but in the period of, for example, a year from the end of construction, when the building is already furnished.

4.3.3 The first piece of furniture in a new home

The first piece of furniture brought into a new house should be a table. This custom was to ensure that the house would never run out of food. The table should be brought into the kitchen, which is the room where meals are prepared. Usually, it is the room in which the inhabitants of the house most often stay.

Nowadays, the superstition associated with bringing the first piece of furniture into a new house is not respected.

4.3.4 First night in a new home

The first night in a new house should not be spent by hosts understood as the owners of the newly built building. A stranger, not connected with the hosts' families, should spend the night in the house in order to pave the way for the so-called good dreams of the hosts, because as everyone knows, dreams are prophetic and good dreams will ensure stability and prosperity for the hosts.

Nowadays, the superstition associated with not spending the first night in a new building is not respected. On the contrary, many owners celebrate the first night in a new building, rejoicing that the construction of the house has come to an end.

4.3.5 Broom in front of the house

A broom should always be displayed in front of the new house. According to a superstition dating back to pagan times, all witches, commonly identified with the forces of evil, will then learn that one of them already lives in the newly built house and will avoid this house. Superstition does not specify how long the broom should be displayed in front of the building, i.e. when the so-called new house becomes the old house.

4.3.6 Housewarming

After hanging the topping out, i.e. the so-called tiles, finishing works begin, the completion of which is most often associated with the start of preparations for the move. In the past, the ceremony after moving into a new house was called settlements or obsiedlins, today the most common term is the so-called housewarming. This ceremony should be the first one that is organized in a newly built building. At the same time, there is no information about superstitions or the lack of organization of the so-called housewarming results in negative consequences, e.g. the operational problem of the building or health problems of the hosts.

5 Conclusions

Despite the further rapid development of civilization, traditions should be respected, including those related to building customs. Tradition is an intangible asset, it is completely incalculable, but it determines the quality of life in a very important way.

Superstitions and the subsequent building habits should be approached sensibly, it cannot be brought to a situation that irrational premises will determine the quality of life limiting the possibility of conscious decision-making.

Nowadays, the most popular are superstitions and customs related to the construction of the building and related to the beginning of living in it. The most popular, belonging to the first group is the custom of hanging a topping out (wreath) after the end of the so-called raw state of an open building. It is also common to celebrate after living in a building commonly referred to as a housewarming party, belonging to the second group of superstitions and customs used in construction.

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