

## VERNACULAR ARCHITECTURE AND ITS ADAPTATION TO THE NEEDS OF MODERN LIFE: THE SITUATION IN FINLAND

The buildings of Finland are mainly of wood. Throughout the country's history only the richest class and the wealthiest communes and parishes have been able to build in stone. Both the historic towns and villages and the scattered dwellings in the countryside are entirely built of wood, the only exceptions being the cowhouses.

Wood rots and burns easily, and for this reason most of the buildings are relatively young. In the 1970's only 16% of the houses occupied were more than fifty years old. In densely built-up areas, and especially in cities, administrative action against fire, and building regulations connected with the prevention of fire, as well as supervisory measures, have influenced both form and structure.

A special characteristic of our rural landscape is its scattered dwellings; the exceptions are certain historic market-towns, fishing villages in close contact with harbours, mill villages, and so on. In the fertile southern and western parts of the country the existent historic villages began to spread out after 1749 as a result of the system of partitioning village land; it was believed that agriculture would be more effectively developed by independent farmers whose houses lay amid continuous stretches of their own fields. Although it is obvious today that in densely-built villages the country population had better access to social and cultural facilities, this partitioning — or in other words, this tearing-down of the village structure — is still continuing. The State grants low-interest loans for the putting up of new buildings on the lands made available on condition that the old buildings in the village are torn down. Rural populations, who for generations have believed partitioning to be a progressive measure, will not easily change their minds on the subject: and yet a crisis has now been reached as a result of the over-production which has been the outcome of the process of concentration and the free market system. The appalling fact is that arable land and rural homes are being abandoned, young people are moving to the towns in search of better living conditions, and old people are moving to centres where communal services ex-

ist; meanwhile pressure on some of the historic centres is growing and their traditional structure is being threatened by new constructions.

Industrialization in our country was pushed ahead after 1809, when secession from Sweden put an end to 700 years of economic dependence and colonial subservience. The relative autonomy enjoyed during the Russian period (1809—1917) encouraged the growth of a national economy based rather narrowly on our timber resources; speculative purchasing of forest land and the problems the landless farm-workers or sharecroppers found themselves facing caused the country population to migrate to the towns. At the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th our industrial cities were growing rapidly, while at the same time the housing problems of the workers were becoming more acute. Housing development has since then been a substantial element in the structure of our environment and our economy.

Jobs and those who run after them are tending — as regularly happens in a capitalist economy — to become concentrated in the bigger centres. 60% of the total population now lives in the five southernmost provinces, which cover only 20% of the total area of our country. Other areas are being abandoned, the raw materials they contain being transported to the industrial centres. Elimination of the housing shortage is not considered a priority; the reason, which is not far to seek, lies in the building enterprises' search for profits.

The above is a picture of the general situation in our country within which the problem of the future of existent built-up areas must be solved. It must always be kept in mind that the preservation and use of old buildings is a part of planning. But under the unplanned and uncoordinated system obtaining within a free economy preservation would appear to be in conflict with production, which must be based on consumption.

I shall now give some examples of how vernacular or popular architecture and some relatively spontaneous housing ventures are having to face the pressure of the structural changes in our society.



1. Forssa Kalliomäki

#### LAPP OR "SETTLED NOMAD" VILLAGES

Such villages usually consist of a few separate private farms. The homes, cowhouses, saunas and barns are scattered over an unwooded stretch; the reason for this lies in both the natural conditions and the fear of fire. Reindeer are raised collectively, but each family possesses some farming land. The houses are built by the owners themselves; in fact, these villages are typical instances of "settled nomadism". The population, known collectively as "Lapp", is actually composed of two ethnic groups, the Kolttas and the Saames, both minorities, and both deprived of school education in their native language or any official rights as regards its use. The Lapp culture is based on collective fishing, hunting and reindeer-rearing. The Finnish ruling classes have pushed these minorities back into the northernmost parts of Finland, bringing them at the same time to the verge of ruin. The new legislation covering ownership is going to destroy the economic, social and physical structure of Lapp society; a few villages could be preserved as open-air museums or places for tourists to visit. The essential problem here is not the adaptation of vernacular or popular

architecture to suit modern needs; the fundamental requirement is to ensure a healthy, and not an arbitrary, natural means of livelihood for the population.

#### ISLAND OR FISHING VILLAGES

About 10% of the total area of Finland is covered by water. Parts of the south and west are completely surrounded by sea. The Finnish archipelago is often compared with the Greek one, and it is only natural that fishing, on a cooperative village basis, should be a traditional means of earning a livelihood in the Finnish islands.

Villages are usually densely built and close to the harbour for shelter. Houses were stoutly constructed to resist the fierce sea winds, in an age when the sea offered an excellent means of making a living. Fishing, piloting and boat-building are activities for skilled and hard-working people. There is also some farming.

Future prospects for these villages look bad. State subsidies for the fishing industry are insufficient and the profession is consequently undervalued. Young people are moving to the towns, and even the old people often move to the mainland for the



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winter, so that the villages are really inhabited in the summer only. But use during the summer only is not sufficient to ensure their preservation, and they are in danger of decay.

It would not be impossible to provide these island villages with the aid of modern technical progress: even the transport problems arising during the period when the ice is breaking could be solved by the use of air transport. But in our monopoly capitalist economy fishing is not a challenging economic proposition.

As rare special cases within our fishing-village culture we may mention the two Kalla Islands. These are about 30 kilometres off shore in the Gulf of Bothnia, and have been autonomously administered since the 17th century. The cottages belong to the mainland peasant fishermen and provide the base from which they operate during the Baltic herring season. The church was built in 1780 and belongs likewise to these fishermen. Their administration is responsible for law and order on the islands; it has its own court of justice and is the body which grants building permits. If a fisherman has not used his cottage for two years, his fellow-fishermen may tear it down for use as firewood. The

system of administration is in itself an institution presenting an interest on the cultural level, and the buildings with their natural surroundings combine to form a landscape which is unique. But fishing has ceased to be profitable, and tourism, organized by a monopoly concern, is pushing its way in and is going to destroy the sociological and physical structure of the place. The fishermen consider all outside proposals for planning and subsidies a threat to their independence; but it is absolutely essential to plan tourist activity on the Kallas, as otherwise it will rapidly destroy them and destroy their unique natural and cultural features.

#### VILLAGES ON THE PLAINS, OR AGRICULTURAL VILLAGES

On the fertile East Bothnian plain there are still some handsome riverside villages with their traditional buildings. Here the homes are built round a square courtyard, while the fields lie in long strips the other side of the road. Such regularity in design is due to the flatness of the landscape, while the stately appearance of the buildings derives from the breadth and fertility of the fields. Architecture in East Bothnia used to be harmonious,



3. Ilmajoki.

with classic proportions, and indeed slightly pompous.

Technical progress in agriculture has brought about a decline in the number of farm-workers required, and a number of crises due to overproduction have led to specialization: we thus find abandonment of mixed crops and of the raising of cattle, sheep and horses as in my childhood. The result is that the domestic buildings are now empty or only partly inhabited. Maintenance of such buildings is an unduly heavy burden for the peasants; a small one-family home with modern conveniences and a shed for the agricultural machinery is sufficient for a farm where there is no stockbreeding. The stately villages of the plains of East Bothnia are going to vanish, and nothing but a few open-air museums will be left to testify to the skill of their builders.

In view of the policy of agricultural concentration adopted since the war it is impossible for the peasants, who are now living barely above subsistence level, to preserve the structure of the traditional landscape. An East Bothnian village is today nothing but a series of domestic buildings dependent for all utilities on a larger community elsewhere.

#### THE RURAL COMMUNITY AS AN ECONOMIC CENTRE

The typical rural economic centre is made up of the church, the vicarage, the store, the pharmacy, the police-station, the school, etc., and of a group of houses inhabited by the landless population. Some centres have been fortunate enough to acquire some industry in the course of the present process of structural change. Competition in the finding of jobs is severe, and the municipalities are granting incentives of various kinds to contractors; the planning which must necessarily precede building development in those centres which are growing is done on the terms proposed by these private firms. We all know what this means. Since new buildings are a part of economic growth and development, an old building is a symbol of stagnation or decline; newness is a status symbol. To repair an old building which is in good condition and install modern conveniences is cheaper than to put up a new one; but repairs require greater care and imagination, whereas new buildings are more profitable. The small-scale communities, which are growing relatively slowly, could in actual fact develop on the pattern set by their traditional structure. A partial success has been achieved.



4. Raamankari village in Himanka

ved in Hauho, where special building and cultural provisions were approved at the regional planning stage. When it came to detailed planning an accurate inventory was made and a classification was introduced. For certain special areas new building permits need to be approved by the Central Board of National Antiquities and Historical Monuments; this means that the planners must contact our Board at the appropriate stage and that consequently new architecture is properly fitted into the traditional environment. It is also a stimulant to owners to repair their old houses rather than build new ones.

Another interesting case in which the structure of a village is being preserved is Raamankari. The traditional commune of Himanka, where development is slow, wanted to build a town hall by special permit in the old village of Raamankari, for which no valid plan existed. The local historical society found the proposed building out of harmony with the surroundings. The campaign it launched was lost; but it led to the establishment of a new village plan under which every worthwhile building forming part of the village landscape is now to be preserved. The size of the built-up area is to

remain the same as at present, though there will be a limited increase in its density. The change has been made possible only through the maturing of public opinion in the village. The important factor at the outset was the fight put up against the local authorities.

#### WORKERS' HOUSING ESTATES

A study needs to be made of the situation in crowded areas which are poles of migration from the countryside but lack housing facilities. At the dawn of the industrial age crowded working-class shanty towns grew up on the outskirts of the existent towns; public services were completely lacking and building was not controlled. But too soon the housing of workers became a good business proposition. In the biggest towns whole districts of workers' tenements were planned on the Berlin model. But at the same time the workers themselves organized cooperative housing schemes.

Some of these estates built on a cooperative basis offer a living environment which is attractive, socially interesting and a relatively short distance from jobs and central services. These diminutive communities are now threatened with demolition



5. Vallila.

as a result of recent municipal reforms, but there is a mass movement against the pulling-down of traditional residential areas.

One of the most famous workers' suburbs is Pipsala in Tampere. It was built 70 years ago on the steep slopes of the Pyyrikki ridge, which in those days were far out of town. It is an important symbol of working-class action. Ten years ago a competition was announced for the best new plan for the area, and the winning plan, which seeks to preserve the picturesque outward appearance of the place, is now ready for approval. But it can be implemented only if all building is done in accordance with an overall scheme; it will be impossible for owners to build within their small individual plots and at the same time obey the regulations governing the preservation of the aesthetic qualities of the whole. There is no alternative plan providing for the repair of the existing buildings and the putting-in of a water-supply and sewage system. The population of the area is poor, and most of the present inhabitants will be leaving the district, making room for upper middle-class people who will occupy white concrete brick individual houses or standardized residences with swimming-pools. Des-

pite the initially passive and patient attitude of the inhabitants of Pipsala, opposition to the renovation scheme is growing.

Another traditional working-class residential area is Vallila in Helsinki. It was originally intended that the municipality should plan and build the houses on publicly-owned land and lease them out a moderate rent to those requiring to be housed; but in fact they were built by the workers themselves on a cooperative basis. The area is now close to the centre and communications are excellent. It is no wonder that there began to be talk of "renovation". However, under pressure from public opinion leases were extended, and now buildings are being repaired, and it is going to be possible to preserve the district. Thanks to the cooperative system of ownership the original population is sure of being able to remain in the area once the repairs are completed.

The district known as "Wooden Käpylä" in Helsinki has become famous. The land is owned by the city council, and the housing estate was planned and built under a progressive housing programme in the 1920's. The buildings are two-storeyed, with 4 to 8 flats in each, and each flat may be entered

directly from a courtyard. The flats are small, consisting of one or two rooms and a kitchen, without modern conveniences; they are built of prefabricated units in an architectural style which uses almost traditional forms. The estate is a good example of a "social" housing programme and used readily to be shown to official visitors, besides being regularly included in architectural exhibitions. Opinion generally was in favour of preserving the area by repairing the houses, and after a bitter fight, which frequently took place on a political level, it was decided to do this. Modern conveniences are now to be installed, but the rents are subsequently going to rise almost to the level of those for new flats.

The economic crisis of the West is gradually making life in our country more expensive. Despite the promises made for political reasons, society does not subsidize the poor. The worst off are the old people, who are the last to leave the countryside and some of whom contributed in the best years of their lives to the cooperative building schemes.

The problem of integrating popular or vernacular architecture into present-day society is not a fundamental one in our country. Personally I feel it is non-fundamental because the ultimate results of mere technocratic integration would appear to be unfair to the original population. The technical work of building and preserving cannot be separated from the social measures capable of ensuring the security of the inhabitants. Under the laws which characterize our system mere technical expert knowledge is always harnessed to the inequalities in the social order.

People today are growing conscious of their rights as regards the environment in which they live. I am sure that organized action can enable the dwellings people have bought for themselves to remain their homes. When this happens the building heritage will be counted as a part of our resources, and the problem of the integration of ancient architecture, whether popular or urban, will be solved on a new basis.

Maija KAIRAMO, Finland

## RESUME

*Les bâtiments anciens de Finlande sont surtout en bois. Seuls les gens riches avaient pu bâtir des maisons de pierre. A l'exception de ces demeures et de leurs dépendances, les villes et les villages historiques ainsi que les maisons isolées sont en bois.*

*L'industrialisation de la Finlande a entraîné l'émigration de la main d'oeuvre vers les villes et l'abandon des petites agglomérations et des maisons isolées dans la campagne.*

*La sauvegarde et l'utilisation de ce patrimoine architectural doivent être intégrées dans l'aménagement du territoire. Mais, dans une économie nonplanifiée, la sauvegarde des bâtiments anciens se trouve parfois en conflit avec des intérêts financiers.*

*Voici quelques exemples des incidences de la structure de notre économie actuelle sur la conservation de l'architecture vernaculaire.*

*Villages de lapons nomades. Ils consistent en quelques ensembles dispersés de maisons de bois. Il est possible d'en conserver quelques uns comme musée ou comme agglomération touristique.*

*Village de pêcheurs. Leurs activités sont la pêche et la construction navale. Les bâtiments sont construits sur le port, avec une grande densité. Quoique l'on note une opposition entre les désirs des visiteurs et des*

*touristes et ceux des habitants, ces villages deviennent des centres touristiques.*

*Villages des plaines. Riches villages agricoles, situés à l'est du Golfe de Bothnie. L'évolution de l'agriculture et l'émigration de la main d'oeuvre vers les villes ont entraîné l'abandon de ces villages. Quelques maisons transformées en musées en rappelleront l'existence. Le centre des villages comprend un ensemble de bâtiments, répondant aux fonctions administratives et économiques: l'église, le magasin, la pharmacie, l'école, le commissariat de police et quelques maisons. Pour sauvegarder le caractère de ces centres anciens, le permis d'y construire des constructions nouvelles ne sera accordé qu'après consultation du Service Central des Monuments Historiques.*

*Agglomérations ouvrières — conséquence du développement industriel et économique des villes, il s'agit surtout de banlieues ouvrières. De nouveaux plans d'urbanisme seront élaborés pour leur rénovation.*

1. Forsa Kalliomäki.
2. Løhtaja.
3. Ilmajoki.
4. Village de Raumankari à Himanka.
5. Vallila.