

## INTRODUCTORY REPORT

The theme chosen by the International Council of Monuments and Sites for this symposium is particularly timely.

Of all the problems raised at the present day by the protection of the cultural heritage of humanity, that of the conservation of historic centres is probably one of the most urgent. The development of industrial civilization, considerably accelerated since world war II, places in extreme danger the historic centres of cities and villages, as well as the surroundings of some of the most important public and historic buildings.

This development and the awareness of the dangers that it implies were clearly defined at the second World Congress of Architects and Technicians of Historic Monuments held at Venice, in 1964. The first article of the document that came out of that Congress, now called the "Charter of Venice", points out that "the notion of historic monument includes isolated architectural creations, as well as urban or rural sites that give evidence of a particular civilization, a significant development, or an historic event.

"It extends, not only to great creations, but also to modest works that have acquired, with time, a cultural signification."

This fundamental article is to be the inspiration of all future activity of the international organizations whose mission is the defence of this category of values.

UNESCO recently placed the problem on the agenda of one of its General Assemblies and is concerning itself with finding ways of fighting against damage to historic centres. For the past three years, the Council of Europe has been organizing a series of meetings on the same theme. Definite recommendations to the Governments of the member countries have already resulted from these sittings.

It now falls to ICOMOS to forge, through this colloquy, the necessary scientific instrument for the application of a world-wide policy in this matter.

## ORIENTATION OF THE PROCEEDINGS.

Through the questionnaire sent out to the National Committees in preparation for this colloquy, we have been provided with a number of valuable documents.

We should like to thank all of our colleagues for the serious way in which they have approached the problem, as well as for the quality and abundance of the information that they have furnished. In general, the answers are in agreement on the causes of neglect and lack of vitality from which historic centres suffer at the present day.

These causes reside essentially in the massive concentration in urban areas resulting from economic expansion, and in the exodus from rural areas which is the consequence of the mechanization of agriculture, (as well as, in some countries, the attraction exercised on the rural population by the high salaries available in the cities). The phenomenon is accelerated by a very strong demographic pressure that necessitates the construction of an ever increasing number of housing facilities.

This concentration in urban areas brings about a corresponding increase in automobile traffic. The heaviness of this traffic necessitates the widening of older routes which are poorly adapted for modern traffic. At the same time this gravely endangers the stability of old structures. On the other hand, in almost all countries, the scarcity and the consequent expense of land in the centres of the cities leads constructors to put up high-rise buildings that disrupt the harmony of the historic centre and lead to the loss of its proportions. Along with this, the state of disrepair of old buildings becomes worse as their inhabitants leave them en masse for modern housing. Thus, their normal maintenance cannot be assured.

In this way, historic centres tend to become foreign bodies within the hearts of cities. For lack of both the knowledge and ability to integrate them into the life of the city, efforts are made to eliminate them altogether. One sees an opposite kind of pressure being exercised on villages. This is because of the influx of city-dwellers, who, in creating second residences, often unintentionally change the character of the houses in order to install the comforts to which they are accustomed.

This situation is now well known, the task of our colloquy is to discover the methods and technical means that will bring a check to these developments. It would seem that our first task is to define what is meant by "historic centre". In my preliminary remarks to the colloquy, I tried to give the following definition: "One can call "historic centre" (or unit of historic or artistic interest), any group of buildings that, by its homogeneity and its historic, archaeological, artistic or picturesque interest presents the necessary characteristics justifying its preservation and reval-

uation".

If this definition is admitted, two factors must be present in order that the centre deserve all-inclusive protection.

### a. Homogeneity.

The historic centre must be clearly delimited by architectural or geographical characteristics, and it should constitute a coherent whole.

Where villages are concerned, their situation on higher ground, (they are usually called "peak villages"), results in a delimitation based on their geographical position. The place of the grouping in the landscape is defined by its defensive function, usually emphasized by a line of ramparts or a steep cliff. These centres, situated, for the most part, at a distance from main routes, have not, in general, undergone great structural modifications. Their homogeneity is often intact.

In cities, the historic centre is arranged around public or historic buildings, from which urban expansion has progressively taken place, (church, town hall, etc.). Very often, the ancient nucleus is itself delimited by a surrounding wall or boulevard, built on the remains of a wall. Sometimes, an important centre has several concentric walls, corresponding to successive developments.

In Paris, for example, five successive surrounding walls can be counted, beginning with the Gallo-Roman rampart to the "Fermiers Généraux" surrounding wall, built at the end of the 18th century. Thus, a homogeneous historic centre is constituted by the whole of the urban complex included within the most extensive wall, unless it has undergone, in peripheral areas, massive destruction or transformation, as was the case in the 19th century for that part of the city of Avignon between the 12th century wall and that of the 14th century.

It also happens quite frequently that wide thoroughfares have been put through the middle of historic centres. This happened, in general, during the last century in order to facilitate the movement of traffic. This is especially true of the "Haussman axis" in Paris which divided the city into a number of districts, isolated from each other, but each retaining its homogeneity.

For the same city, then, one can speak of not one but of several centres of historic interest, each deserving, by itself, special protection.

It goes without saying that the homogeneity of an historic centre should be viewed as the result, not only of the topographical grouping of houses, but also of the fact that, within a certain district,

the old streets, the proportion of the buildings and their original size have been retained. Experience shows that respect for the homogeneity of centres is in inverse proportion to the economic development that the region in which the old centre is situated has undergone. Thus, in France, more than two thirds of the historic centres enumerated at the present time, ranging at about fifteen hundred, are situated in the southern part of the country. This part is called the "French desert" by economists, because of the weakness of its economic and industrial expansion.

b. Historical, archaeological or artistic interest.

Obviously, it is not enough for historic centres to have remained the same in their fabric, streets, and size. They must also present an all-inclusive interest that justifies their conservation.

This interest consists less in the character of a monument that an edifice might present in isolation, than in the architectural, archaeological or aesthetic qualities of the grouping under consideration.

At the present day, cities constituting monumental centres in their entirety are rare. Without doubt, the only complete example of this kind in existence today is Venice, because of its special character of a "city on the water".

Almost always, even the most famous historic cities include, around the more stately buildings of historic interest, groupes of more modest buildings. Each of these buildings, taken in isolation, does not deserve to be called an historic building. However, taken together, they do present an unquestionable interest.

An excellent example of this is the English city of Bath. In that city one finds, grouped around squares and buildings of historic interest, rows of houses of similar construction that can only be preserved collectively.

It is very often possible that the character of these houses has been changed, especially by the installation of businesses on the ground floors. But if these modifications have not changed the structure of the buildings, the rhythm and arrangement of their facades can be restored by carefully managed repairs.

Thus, the district of Saint Jean in Lyon is recovering its original appearance by the elimination of wooden shop fronts and the reinstallation of windows in the archways of the ground floors.

These same criteria of architectural or archaeological interest hold good for the setting of old buildings (the square around churches, villages built around castles). These constitute with the building itself, an historic unit which must be protected in its entirety.

At this stage of our research, it is obviously impossible to go further in the definition of historic centres. These necessarily present widely varying characteristics in different regions and different countries.

For example, groups of houses with wooden timbering, many examples of which are found in Eastern European countries, and which have suffered a good deal from war and fire, do not constitute homogeneous groups at the present day, except in those cases where the facades were covered with protective coating during former centuries.

I should now like to take up the principal themes that, in my opinion, should engage the attention of our symposium. The discussion of these themes should result in some progress in the solution of the problems raised.

These themes are the following :

- I. The inventory of centres.
- II. The necessity of protective legislation.
- III. The principal technical problems, namely :
  - a. Methods of restoration,
  - b. The integration of new architectural styles into old cities,
  - c. Automobile traffic and parking,
  - d. The necessity of close relations between conservators, town-planners and economic planners,
  - e. The training of specialists.

On each of these points, I should like to put forward, for further discussion, the main items that have been gathered from the preparatory questionnaire.

I. The Inventory of centres.

The information brought to my attention leads one to think that, up to the present, very few countries have undertaken a systematic inventory of their historic centres.

In most cases, inventory-taking has only dealt with isolated buildings. However, some countries have tried out a policy of scientific enumeration in this matter.

The object is to obtain a complete knowledge of the historic centres that should be protected. To this end, certain national services have set up, for each centre, a complete set of documents, including historical, bibliographical, iconographical and graphic data.

The best documentation would seem to have to include the following :

- detailed statements, with photographs for the making of maps where required, of each of the constitutive elements of the centre, preferably taken street by street.

- drawings and cuts of the present state of the centre,
- the principal historical data, (history of the city, disasters and calamities, wars, sieges, great fires or floods, factors in the formation of the agglomeration),
- the principal economic events,
- the growth of the population,
- characteristics of the whole and its state of conservation, (make-up of the urban plan, transformations undergone, principal buildings and their role in the city, system of defence, outline of the city).

An exhaustive inventory such as this is evidently not realizable in every country. For this reason, certain organizations, such as the Council of Europe, have worked out "concise inventory index-cards". These permit, at least, the marking-out of the general location of existing centres.

However, it is evident that an undertaking of this order, indispensable as it is, can only be useful if it results in practical protective measures, facilitated by appropriate legislation.

## II. The necessity of legislation for protection and revivification.

In this field, the answers to the questionnaire reveal that very few countries possess, at the present time, legislation for the protection and restoration to use of historic centres.

Several countries have juridical means that permit the classification of centres, in the hope of avoiding modifications that would change their structure or appearance.

It appears evident that legislation, having strictly conservatory measures in view, can only have a limited scope.

In point of fact, it is impossible to assure the normal maintenance of the buildings that make up historic centres if the intervention of the State or local authorities manifests itself only under the form of a prohibition to demolish or modify.

If proprietors are left to their own resources for the work of maintenance, the ruin of the historic heritage is the inevitable result.

Moreover, it would be useless to undertake the maintenance of the walls and foundations of buildings if a new purpose is not found for them in the city.

Thus, we are led to the idea of an entirely new legislation. This would take into account the two-fold imperative constituted by the protection and restoration to use of historic centres.

Legislation of this kind, already introduced by several countries into their administrative systems, is being studied almost everywhere in the world.

It would seem to have to be inspired by the following principles :

- a. Historic centres should not be considered as "museum districts", created and maintained for tourists; they should be assigned a definite role in urban life and expansion.
- b. This objective cannot be attained without the financial and technical help of the state and public authorities.
- c. The revivification of centres should be integrated into urban development and economic plans at both the regional and national level.

## III. Technical problems.

These problems are numerous and delicate. Most of the answers to the questionnaire emphasize the following points :

- The technical difficulties in the restoration of historic centres.
- The necessity of harmonizing new architectural styles with the historic centres.
- Automobile traffic and parking.
- The lack of qualified specialists.

These problems were well brought out at the international Symposium on the renewal of "historic urban sites" held at Prague, under the aegis of ICOMOS, in June, 1966. The final declaration of the symposium contains the following two paragraphs :

"The solution of the problem of the protection of historic urban centres is only conceivable within the framework of a regional plan that aims at satisfying all the needs of the region, while respecting the coherence and the structure of old cities."

"The integration of new buildings and new arrangements into these cities should be the object of special attention".

This orientation seems worth our attention. It corresponds to the concern expressed by almost all the participating countries in their answers to the questionnaire.

In order to examine these answers, we shall take up, successively, each of the points enumerated above.

### A. Technical difficulties of restoration and revivification.

#### Restoration.

The most generally expressed opinion is that the restoration of historic centres necessitates the elaboration of a new doctrine.

When an important historic building or group of historic buildings, such as the Place des Vosges, is situated within the

framework of an historic centre, the work of restoration should naturally follow the admitted principles of the conservation of monuments.

But, as we have seen, most of the buildings that make up these centres are of modest importance and interest. Their value results more from their place in a group of buildings than from their individual qualities. Here, the first question arises; what buildings should be restored?

A detailed analytic study should help to select those buildings which should be conserved in whole or in part, and those which may or should be demolished.

This depends principally on the state of decay of each building, and on the possibility of its future use within the framework of a plan of restoration to use of the whole centre.

The principle generally admitted is this: an effort should be made to save the largest possible number of old buildings, in order to preserve the homogeneity and unity of the centre.

The second question is this: how should restoration be undertaken? Most of the opinions on this point are in agreement on the necessity of using modest methods, and, in so far as it is possible, those which are, relatively, the least costly.

Here, we find ourselves faced with a problem of doctrine.

The restoration of centres falls as much within the field of town-planning, as in that of the conservation of historic buildings.

What must be protected above all is the general appearance of a city or district of a city. This means its proportions, sizes, its old streets, the rhythm and opening of its facades, as well as the material and pitch of the roofs.

In order to arrive at this, is the use of the usual, onerous restorative processes indispensable?

The answer to this question will depend on the specific case dealt with. It is evident that rows of urban buildings of the 17th and 18th centuries and groups of mediaeval houses cannot be treated in the same way.

On the other hand, the problem of the urban environment in which the centre to be protected is found, is an equally determining factor.

The resolution of the Prague Symposium reminds us that "the beauty of an urban site includes the views on the city as well as those of its squares, districts, and streets".

Here, we come upon the question of integrating the historic centre into an all-inclusive plan.

In actual fact, it is certain that the protection of the views of the whole is often as important as the conservation of the historic centre properly so called.

It would be useless to undertake the protection of an old

group of buildings if, in the near vicinity or even at a distance, high-rise buildings are put up. These, by their very size would blot it out and thus create an irreparable rupture in the proportion.

At the present day, this question is raised in numerous cities, especially in Paris, where the problem of the architectural style that is to replace the "Halles" near the Marais district, has raised impassioned controversy.

Some of the projects proposed tend, in point of fact, to the construction of high buildings, whose juxtaposition with the Marais would render useless the efforts for the protection of that district.

## B. Revivification.

How should this restoration to use, which is absolutely necessary, be effected at the technical level?

The first question on this point is evidently that of the purpose to which restored buildings are to be destined.

Its solution depends on the urban disposition plan that should define the functions to be assigned to these buildings.

This fundamental preliminary question has already been the object of numerous exchanges of views at the international level. Even supposing it solved, restoration to use raises a series of technical problems the solution of which is very difficult.

In any case, it is necessary to modernize living quarters, and to install a minimum of comfort in old buildings. Without this the exodus of inhabitants will go on unrelentingly.

This supposes that the living quarters are supplied with light, heat, and decent living conditions.

In general, buildings of the classical period lend themselves easily enough to this kind of arrangement.

On the other hand, modernization will present a much greater difficulty in cities or districts where there exist a large number of houses dating from the 15th, 16th, or previous centuries.

The narrowness of the streets, the smallness of the windows and of the inner courtyards seem, a priori, to render these houses unfit for modern living.

The solution most generally proposed consists in yielding to the necessity of renewing the interiors of these houses. This solution favours the creation of new inner courtyards, ventilated and planted, onto which the living quarters would open.

The adjoining rooms could be arranged to open onto the main facades where their situation would present less inconvenience.

In order to arrive at this result it will be necessary to make certain sacrifices, by enlarging the inner courtyards by demolishing separating walls, and, where necessary, putting through passage-ways from building to building.

In any case, the fact should not be hidden that, in many

cases, this renewal is the necessary condition of the restoration to use of centres.

### C. The integration of new architectural styles into historic centres.

The necessity of this integration is evident. First of all, there exist numerous "gaps" in cities and old districts of cities.

Since the beginning of this century, it has often happened that local authorities have been forced to pull down whole groups of buildings that had become unhealthy and dangerous because of decay and prolonged neglect of maintenance.

In certain cases, the blocks pulled down have been replaced by modern buildings, the effect of which on the appearance of the historic centre is not always happy, when not outright damaging.

In other cases, also quite numerous, there exist at the present day untouched construction sites, very often abandoned, which will have to be "refurnished" some day.

Frequent also are the cases, of which we have already spoken, where existing buildings must be pulled down, either for reasons of public safety or because their restoration would be too much of a burden.

What principles should govern the integration of new architectural styles into historic ensembles?

It is generally admitted that these architectural styles should respect the size and proportions of the surrounding buildings in order to maintain an indispensable harmony.

But what kind of architectural style can be adopted? Everyone agrees in the condemnation of mere imitation, but there is an extreme variation of opinion on the remaining choice.

Must the rhythm and openings of old facades be respected? Should the pitch of roofs be like those of the surrounding buildings?

Should architectural creation that involves the use of modern materials such as glass and steel be tolerated in a complex of buildings of wood, brick or stone structure?

Such are the questions raised. Evidently, they cannot be answered except by a series of different solutions, in function of each specific case.

It seems, however, that our colloquy should be able to define a certain number of basic principles on this essential point that would guide the activities of national services.

### D. Automobile traffic and parking

One of the most frequent concerns expressed by the participating countries is that of the problem of automobile traffic and parking.

The preliminary consultation indicates that the most widely held opinion is that historic centres should be given privileged treatment on this point. That is, they should be protected against the invasion of vehicles.

On the one hand, it is admitted that the presence of a large number of automobiles on the squares and in the streets of old cities has the effect of seriously changing their atmosphere and appearance.

On the other hand, and perhaps this is even more important, the constant movement of automobiles is one of the principal factors in the damage effected to the historic urban heritage.

This incessant movement provokes tremors that shake the structures of old buildings. Furthermore, heavy vehicles crush the fragile pavement, and the release of harmful fumes raises the pollution of the air in the narrow winding streets of old cities to a level beyond the endurance of the human organism.

The remedy proposed is the prohibition, or at least a considerable restriction of automobile traffic in historic centres. This would be effected by the creation of by-passes and parking lots outside the cities.

Several interesting experiments have been carried out in this field. Some countries have prohibited traffic in the old parts of cities; others have constructed, or plan to construct tunnels that pass under these parts.

The fact cannot be concealed that these operations are very costly and often unpopular.

It would doubtless be useful for this colloquy to make and express recommendation in order to call the attention of the National Committees, and through them of governments to the necessity of finding, in each country, a suitable solution to this difficult problem.

### E. The lack of qualified specialists.

Most of the countries emphasize the difficulty that they experience in training and recruiting qualified specialists for the restoration of historic centres.

These difficulties reside in the necessity of setting-up bodies of skilled men and of technicians capable of mastering at one and the same time the problems of conserving old buildings, of architectural creation, of town-planning, and of economic and land planning.

If it appears possible to set up bodies of architects, archaeologist-conservators, and of town-planners, it is important that their activities be co-ordinated by one or several responsible

persons. These persons should be versatile enough to be able to think out all-inclusive solutions.

Some countries confide this responsibility to one person ; others to work groups made up of representatives of different disciplines.

Whatever solution is adopted, it appears that present developments require the creation of new technical bodies, endowed with a general formation, and capable of mastering the complex and related problems raised by the conservation of historic centres.

Without doubt, the International Centre in Rome would be well-inspired to take the initiative in this field.

The search for qualified workers also constitutes a serious problem.

The masons, carpenters, and roofers who still use old methods - whose number is constantly decreasing - are fully employed in contracts and services of conservation.

However, the extent of the needs created by the protection and restoration to use of historic centres has created the risk of a serious shortage of qualified workers. These should be trained as quickly as possible and suitably paid in function of their professional qualifications.

Such seem to be the most important problems brought up during the inquiry preceding our symposium.

Other questions, equally serious, also require reflection and an exchange of views. For example, both economic and political reasons dictate that the cost of restoration should not be higher than that of new construction.

There is, without doubt, matter here for a full discussion of considerable interest during the proceedings.

As I indicated at the beginning of this report, most governments seem to have become aware of the urgency presented by the protection of their historic centres.

They expect us to furnish the solutions that correspond to their preoccupations.

That is the essential task that we are invited to face. I am certain that the conclusions that we reach will be in proportion to the ambition that inspires us.

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