

b. "DANGERS WHICH THREATEN THE
HISTORIC ENSEMBLES IN EASTERN
EUROPE "

In his concise, thorough, and competent report Mr. Sorlin has given an outline of the dangers that threaten historic centres of cities, towns, and villages. Fundamentally, all of these dangers manifest themselves in Central Europe as well in the socialist countries of Eastern Europe. However, in these countries the tendencies and forms of these dangers have a special form. In this brief exposition I prefer to abstain from making generalizations concerning all the countries of this region; I shall speak above all of Poland, although the basic problems are related or similar in all countries. In speaking of my country I shall not take into account those historic centres devastated and reconstructed after the war, but those that have remained extant as they were and present problems of revivification and adaptation to modern social needs.

The rapid expansion of industrialization and town-development that is its result, manifests itself with particular force in socialist countries. It is enough to remember that in Poland the proportion of the urban population before the war was 25 % and at the present moment is 50 %. A large mass of the rural population, counted in the millions, has thronged to the cities and continues to do so. Of this mass, a part has moved toward the modern cities, but the majority is concentrating itself in old cities with their old centres, cities which are in a process of development at the present time.

Evidently, the massing together of the urban population is intensifying ; this is also the case of the centres of historic cities. In the large cities, residential areas are planned "en bloc " and constructed according to industrial methods. I mention this because this method of building is hardly used in existing historic centres for economic reasons. Here, difficulties present them-

selves, seeing that in order to repair, revivify, and improve historic centres it is necessary to construct supplementary housing in order to evacuate the inhabitants from over-populated land.

Cities of less importance and villages are threatened by the tendency to put up modern construction and to carry out indispensable work for improving the land. The danger is all the more serious because the economic requirements of modern construction do not allow buildings of less than five floors, thus forming a contrast with the buildings of old towns and cities. Furthermore, the homogeneity of old cities and villages is threatened by the tendency to introduce modern buildings for social services, such as large stores, restaurants, post-offices, within these centres. Our old cities offer examples of this kind of intrusion dating from the 19th and early 20th century (Wroclaw, Gdansk, Torun, Cracow).

However, at the present time these tendencies are counter-balanced by the need to create new modern centres with functions and a scale that go beyond those that can be fulfilled and assured by old centres. In town-planning at the present day it is indispensable to provide for such centres and their gradual carrying-out. Difficulties having to do with the solution of problems regarding space vary according to the situation of the historic centre in the developing urban organism. These difficulties become even greater when a city develops in a concentric way and when the historic center continues to be its geometrical centre : in this case it undergoes the pressure of municipal functions and of urban structures ; such is the case of Wroclaw, for example.

The thoroughfares formed in the course of history, converge towards the center and constitute another difficulty. A peripheral thoroughfare to lighten traffic, as well as the setting-up of a new modern centre, are indispensable measures permitting the preservation of the nature and urban structure of the avenues of the historic centre. The problem is less difficult when the situation of the historic centre is remote, e. g. on the high bank of a river or in special topographical conditions. As for the dangers constituted by traffic within the historic center, this problem is solved by measures restricting such traffic : one-way traffic, or, for historic centres of small area, complete prohibition, except for a limited service traffic.

At the present day, it is becoming more usual to relieve the principal square of an historic center of its function of parking lot, and to set up parking lots outside the center. This has even been done in an historic center having a large area—that of Cracow.

In villages having thoroughfares with heavy traffic, peripheral arteries were constructed after the war, a work that is still going on. Their purpose is to assure an effective and certain movement of traffic, at the same time preserving the old urban structure and the system of old streets.

If all the problems of historic cities are faced, it is the large villages rather than the big cities that present the greatest difficulties. These difficulties result less from traffic problems than from the fact that all the functions of a modern city are concentrated in their historic centres.

Outside of the villages but in their near vicinity we situate the schools that cannot be placed within the crowded historic centre, in view of the space that is indispensable for them. Hospitals and technical communal services are also situated outside the villages. However, administrative organs, businesses, provisionment services are necessarily situated in the town, thus leading to conflicts between the needs of modern life and historic and cultural values. In larger cities it is easier to choose an appropriate programme of functions for the historic centre and for individual old buildings ; it is possible to select and choose. Another danger comes from the side of the conservator ; that is, the tendency to give every building the role of a museum. Mr. Sorlin has also drawn attention to this point in opposing the creation of "museum-districts". A centre or an historic district should be a living centre, a part of the modern city with an active and clearly defined role.

One problem, especially difficult, is that of the preservation of old villages, both of the whole and of individual parts farm housing and buildings. Agriculture has undergone and is still subject to fundamental changes influencing its organization and forms of operation. At the same time, new needs cannot be satisfied by the present condition of buildings. This process is going forward rapidly ; in some socialist countries the function of villages has undergone fundamental changes with the introduction of collective forms of agriculture. Even in Poland, in spite of the preponderance of individual forms of agricultural property, the march of change is also rapid. Picturesque villages with thatched or shingled roofs and low wooden houses, so characteristic of the Polish country-side, are becoming more and more rare. The peasants are constructing new, larger, brick buildings with roofs covered with fire-proof materials. Buildings in new forms and for new purpose are appearing : stores, dispensaries, administrative offices, schools, etc. Old wind mills, water mills, fullers mills are being replaced

by modern establishments.

The preservation of the historic centre of a village, even if possible, is among the very rare exceptions. What remains for us to do is to collect choice examples of old wooden rural buildings and to protect them by placing them in ethnographic museums called "Skansens". Museums of this kind have been set up in Poland and in other countries. The most important, with the most complete collection is the Museum of Building of People's Culture in Bucharest.

The elaboration and carrying-out of principles and methods of preservation and revivification of historic centres of cities, towns, and villages are based on co-operation and the exchange of experiences in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe. Numerous national and international conferences and many publications have been consecrated to this problem. It seems to us that the tendencies and programmes are right ; but their carrying-out requires effort and a widely conceived international co-operation. Constant and vigilant observation of the changes underway is indispensable for discovering imminent dangers threatening historic centres. In order to do this, it is important, above all to link problems of historic urban centres with those of town-planning.

Jan ZACHWATOWICZ