MOSJØEN: DESTRUCTIVE PLANNING DEFEATED

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THE EUROPEAN ARCHITECTURAL heritage year 1975 was the official confirmation of a tendency which had been growing from strength to strength for a long time, in Norway as in other countries: an increasing interest in “anonymous” architecture and with it, the desire to preserve as much of complete environments as possible. A contributing element was the fact that many of the older inner-city areas had become abandoned or obliterated during the postwar boom. Moreover, there was a strong radical movement in Scandinavia in the late sixties where both social reform and a growing awareness of ecological problems were central themes, and this helped to provide the architectural conservationists with new allies. From having once been regarded as a fashionable hobby for the cultured, the protection of the architectural heritage was adopted by political activists as one of the “causes”. Redevelopment schemes in threatened inner-urban areas became symbols of the arrogance and disdain with which full-time politicians greeted the democratic requests by ordinary people for a share in decision-making. Moreover, the thoughtless demolition of old buildings came to be regarded as an extravagant waste of resources at a time when there was a housing shortage.

These more general reasons for preserving old buildings had added a new dimension to the work of the conservationists, and the authorities were obliged to review the laws, to reconsider planning procedure and to discuss new financial limits to meet the increasing demands of this new alliance of environmentalists. The upgrading of conservation work which was now being justified at top level by a variety of experts and specialists, failed however to gain the support of politicians at local level, in spite of the growing volume both of general information and of official reports. At the

E N NORVÈGE comme ailleurs, l’année du Patrimoine architectural Européen, en 1975, a confirmé une tendance croissante de l’intérêt porté à « l’architecture anonyme » et à la sauvegarde de l’environnement. Le fait que d’anciennes zones intra-urbaines aient été abandonnées ou détruites pendant la vague de prospérité de l’après-guerre a renforcé ces dispositions. En outre, il y a eu, en Scandinavie, à la fin des années 1960, un puissant mouvement progressiste qui a mis au centre de ses préoccupations à la fois la réforme sociale et une prise de conscience grandissante des problèmes écologiques. Ceci contribua à donner de nouveaux alliés aux partisans de la conservation du patrimoine architectural. Après avoir été d’abord considérée comme un passe-temps à la mode pour intellectuels d’avant-garde, la protection du patrimoine architectural fut adoptée par les professionnels de la politique comme une des grandes « causes » à défendre. Les programmes de rénovation des zones intra-urbaines menacées devinrent les symboles de l’arrogance et du mépris avec lesquels les politiciens à plein temps accueillaient l’exigence légitime exprimée par la population de participer aux décisions. En outre, la démolition mal avisée de vieux immeubles finit par être considérée comme un gaspillage extravagant des ressources à une époque où il y avait pénurie de logements.

Ces raisons plus générales en faveur de la sauvegarde des bâtiments anciens ont ajouté une nouvelle dimension au travail des partisans de la conservation, et les autorités ont été obligées de réviser les lois, de revoir la procédure d’urbanisation et de discuter les nouveaux plafonds budgétaires pour satisfaire les revendications croissantes de cette nouvelle alliance des « environnementalistes ».

La reconnaissance officielle du travail de con-
Vue sur la rivière Vefsna, Mosjoen, Nordland.

de rêveurs irresponsables, étrangers aux problèmes pratiques auxquels les politiciens locaux ont à faire face, et ces derniers pouvaient même jusqu’à un certain point gagner le soutien populaire en refusant de prêter trop d’attention à des notions si raffinées.

LE PROJET « SJOGATA »
La petite ville de Mosjoen, située à l’extrémité du Fjord de Vefsna au nord de la Norvège, n’a pas échappé à la vague caractéristique des années 1960. Son centre-ville avait subi des transformations. Après avoir été un lieu où coexistaient les professions les plus variées, il était devenu exclusivement réservé aux magasins et aux bureaux, et l’augmentation, apparemment imprévisible, du transport privé débouchait sur une demande supplémentaire de place pour le parc automobile. Pour diverses raisons, les opérations de démolition et de reconstruction avaient épuisé le quartier de Sjogata, une rue qui longe la rivière Vefsna et qui constitue le cœur historique de Mosjoen. Ce quartier vétuste de la ville, qui avait donc jusqu’alors échappé à la rénovation, devint véritablement le point de mire à la fin de la décennie, lorsque les urbanistes commencèrent à examiner les moyens de résoudre le problème du parking. Les bâtiments étaient délabrés et, comme ils n’étaient pas particulièrement anciens, même selon les normes norvégiennes, l’idée qu’ils pourraient valoir le peine d’être conservés ne fut pas sérieusement envisagée. Les représentants de l’autorité municipale avaient grand et entre les deux guerres: les années marquantes de leur jeunesse avaient été celles de la grande dépression et le quartier de Sjogata était un rappel du passé de la pauvreté et de la médiocité provinciale qu’il valait mieux oublier.

A cette époque cependant, les partisans de la conservation montraient un intérêt croissant pour l’architecture inédite, intérêt qui n’a pas manqué d’influencer le point de vue local. En 1968, à l’initiative des dirigeants du bureau d’urbanisation de la ville, un comité fut chargé de faire une enquête sur les possibilités de sauvegarde de Sjogata et sur l’éventualité d’une exploitation. Le résultat fut un projet de rénovation qui prévoyait de conserver un tiers des bâtiments. Pourtant, lorsque le projet fut rendu public au printemps,
ment scheme in which a third of the buildings were to remain standing. Nevertheless, when the plan was made public in the spring of 1970 it was greeted with a storm of protests. There were many who objected to the extent of the proposed demolition and these formed an organisation for the preservation of Sjøgata, known as "Sjøgata Vel", where the local conservationists joined forces, regardless of their different backgrounds.

Opposing notions of what was actually involved, in other words all the myths concerning the preservation of buildings, collided head on. The concept of preserving being an expensive luxury or a hindrance to progress, combined with the ingrained social-democratic tradition of public control and maintenance, foiled the arguments of the conservationists. It was taken for granted that the local municipal authorities would be responsible for the redevelopment—and at the taxpayers' expense. On the other side stood the conservatives with their somewhat optimistic ideas about the actual costs involved and the size of voluntary contributions, in the form of either labour or money. In order to raise the tone of the discussion from the level of entreaty and supplication, while at the same time mobilising experts and specialists, the Sjøgata Preservation Society sought the support of the School of Architecture at the Norwegian Institute of Technology (Norges Tekniske Høgskole), University of Trondheim. In 1975–76 students from the School's Department for Architectural History carried out a survey of the area, which included recording the state of the buildings, as well as suggestions for the rehabilitation of some of them. Their report, coinciding with the declaration of Architectural Heritage Year, was put to full use in demanding the attention of the central authorities, at the same time justifying the work of conservation to local politicians and to the local public.

As a result, local conservationists came into contact with those working centrally and in particular the Norwegian Council for Culture. It was natural for this body, as an institution involved in putting cultural policy into practice, to follow up the pilot schemes initiated during Architectural Heritage Year with more broadly-based schemes which would provide the opportunity of gaining experience over a longer period of time. After considering to what extent it would be possible to mobilise majority support for the scheme locally, which would not only help to guarantee its success, but hopefully have a positive spin-off effect as well, it was decided to support the Sjøgata Project. In 1976 the Council made a sizeable grant, thus providing the financial basis for further conservation work, but it was on condition that the area was given the necessary area-planning permission and that the Department of Architectural History in Trondheim would accept the Council's invitation to draw up a plan for the area based on the material which they had collected through the work of their students. During this work it had become clear that more information was required about the buildings and it was also desirable to follow up the planning legislation with an investigation into how it would work in practice. A research project was organised with financial support from the Norwegian Research Council for Science and the Humanities, which made it possible to engage specialist assistance in planning and surveying, due to the project's direct involvement in the planning process. In the same time the opportunity of gaining a more comprehensive knowledge of the buildings.

The threat of redevelopment by the town-planners was now being replaced by a situation which promised security for investment, but the change in mental attitudes which this new situation required to take root, nor was a real improvement in the work of restoration. Even though political and financial barriers had to some extent been removed, it was clear that the organisational and practical arrangements could not cope with a large-scale rehabilitation scheme. To administer the grant an executive group or steering committee was appointed, consisting of representatives from the local municipality, the Sjøgata Preservation Society and the Historic Monuments Office. One of their first duties was to draw up guidelines for granting aid and to decide how best to use the grant, other than just covering the extra costs incurred in the restoration of the historical details.

At first it was necessary to consider the problems associated with work on the actual buildings. The steering committee arranged and also partly covered the costs of specialist help with the planning work and with filling out all the necessary application forms, and they also looked for carpenters and joiners with the right attitude possible locally to mobilise the support of the plus grand nombre au programme, ce qui ne servirait pas seulement à garantir son succès, mais qui aurait en outre, du moins l’espérait-on, un effet de relance supplémentaire, on décida de soutenir le projet « Sjøgata ». En 1976, le Conseil à la Culture attribua une subvention importante, assurant ainsi la base financière des travaux ultérieurs de conservation, mais à la condition que les autorisations nécessaires à l'urbanisation soient accordées et que le Département d'histoire de l'Architecture de Trondheim accepte de dresser un plan de la zone concernée, en tenant compte des données rassemblées par le travail des étudiants. Au cours de ces travaux, il était apparu qu'on avait besoin d'un complément d'information sur les immeubles ; il était souhaitable d'assortir la législation en matière d'urbanisation d'une enquête sur le déroulement pratique des opérations. Un programme d'études fut mis en route avec le soutien financier du Conseil norvégien de la Recherche Scientifique, rendant possible l'engagement d'un spécialiste dans le cadre de l'étude des plans, ce qui aboutissait directement à des travaux de restauration et permettait aussi d'acquérir une connaissance plus approfondie des bâtiments.

La menace de redéploiement par les urbanistes était maintenant remplacée par une situation qui assurait un niveau de sécurité pour les investissements. Mais le changement d'attitude mental qui cette nouvelle situation nécessitait pour s'implanter, n'était pas une amélioration réelle dans le travail de restauration. Même si des barrières politiques et financières étaient levées jusqu'à un certain point, il était évident que sur le plan de l'organisation et des pratiques, on ne pouvait pas faire face à un programme de réhabilitation sur une grande échelle. Pour administration la subvention, on nomma un groupe exécutif et comité directeur, formé de représentants de la municipalité locale, de la Société de défense de Sjøgata et la Direction des Monuments Historiques. Une de leurs premières tâches fut de définir les conditions à remplir pour l'octroi d'une subvention et des possibilités de son utilisation à d'autres fins que les dépassements de budget consacrés à la restauration de détails historiques.

Il était tout d'abord indispensable de se préoccuper des problèmes relatifs aux travaux sur les immeubles eux-mêmes. Le comité a pris en
and background for restoration work. After the war, there had been a rapid development not only in new building materials, but also in marketing, which had made it difficult to obtain many of the materials and products essential for the correct restoration and repair of old buildings. Some products had in fact totally disappeared from the market. As the grant was not tied to any specific projects, it was possible to use it so that local firms were in a position to undertake specialised work involving the treatment of building materials and the production of particular parts. It could also be used for bulk buying and for rescuing unused materials when the opportunity arose, and also for acquiring special tools and equipment which could then be lent out.

The practical problems involved in the preservation of old buildings can be quite challenging in themselves, but in any rehabilitation scheme there will also be social aspects demanding attention. It was realised that not everyone had the same capacity to derive the benefit of the various grants and loans which were at their disposal. By visiting all the residents in order to inform them of what assistance was available, it was discovered that some people were just not capable of making use of the system.

The steering committee has tried various strategies to ensure that the weaker group were not forced out of the area, but it must also be admitted that the influx which has taken place of those with better resources should not automatically be regarded as negative. By taking the initiative and demonstrating the possibilities, they have also had a positive effect on those who were more hesitant. One of their contributions has been to establish standards for the restoration of old buildings, and this has consequently made it more difficult for building contractors who have not really understood the situation to deviate from these standards. By trying to maintain a balanced population in the area, however, problems have arisen which might have been avoided with only conservation enthusiasts living in Sjøgata.

In Norway there is strong feeling that everyone should not only own their house, they should preferably also have built it themselves. If for various reasons this is not possible and they are obliged to set up home in a "second-hand" property, it is essential that they make their mark by removing all possible traces of the previous owners. It is not easy for the more academic principles of conservation to be heeded, such as taking account of the documentary evidence for the building’s age and history. Now that the steering committee has succeeded in getting timber merchants and building suppliers to produce exact copies of certain details, many house-owners will take the opportunity of obtaining a “correct” exterior to their houses, while at the same time renewing as much of it as possible.

Now that the idea of conservation has become acceptable here, new stereotypes have begun to allude. En rendant visite à tous les habitants pour les informer des aides disponibles, on décrit que certains étaient absolument incapables d’en tirer parti.

Le comité directeur tenta de s’assurer par diverses manœuvres que les gens les plus démunis ne soient pas exclus du quartier, mais il fallait aussi admettre que l’influence manifestée par ceux qui disposaient de ressources plus abondantes ne serait pas négligeable. En prenant l’initiative et en faisant la démonstration de leurs possibilités, ils avaient aussi une influence positive sur ceux qui étaient les plus hésitants. Ils contribuaient, entre autres choses, à fixer des critères pour la restauration des immeubles anciens, ce qui rendit plus difficile aux entrepreneurs, qui ne comprenaient pas vraiment la situation, de transgresser ces critères. En s’efforçant de maintenir dans le quartier une population mixte on a vu surgir des problèmes qui auraient pu être évités s’il n’y avait eu, vivant à Sjøgata, que des passionnés enthousiastes de la conservation.

En Norvège, on a le ferme sentiment que chacun devrait non seulement posséder sa maison, mais, de préférence, l’avoir bâtie de ses propres mains. Si, pour diverses raisons, cela n’est pas possible et s’il faut installer ses pénates dans une propriété de «seconde main», il est indispensable d’y imprimer sa propre marque en faisant disparaître toute trace des précédents propriétaires. Il n’est pas facile de faire accepter le principe d’équivalence et de faire comprendre qu’il faut tenir...
Mossen in the 1970s.

Mossen dans les années 1970.

While they also harbour a declared aversion to bureaucratic limitations and patronising control, for example from the historical buildings people. The role of the steering committee here has been to enter into discussions with developers and the authorities in order to co-ordinate the various wishes and demands, so that also the views of the historical building authorities are given proper priority.

When the preservation scheme was first proposed in 1977, local politicians were afraid that the area might develop into a conservation ghetto, and they insisted that it should be a "living urban area, not a museum". A central aim of the steering committee has been to make Sjøgata an active part of the town, by encouraging the establishment of premises in the area for social and cultural activities. Despite these good intentions there is a feeling that the district is regarded by many as an enclave with "problems" which the rest of the town must be spared — a special zone reserved for "conservation ideas", on the same lines as other specially designated areas.

As an extension of the Sjøgata scheme, the Norwegian Council for Culture has taken the initiative in setting up an interdisciplinary research project, with the support of NAVF, concerned with the local specificities of urban development from the point of view of cultural sociology and architectural and administrative theory. This new project will also consider the protection of the heritage outside special conservation areas.

By making use of Vefsn museum it has been possible administratively to combine local resources and national institutions. Preservation is one of the official areas of responsibility of the museum and the current functions as secretary for the steering committee. Financially, this is covered through the government's funding scheme to semi-private museums which came into effect in 1975, making full-time appointment possible. The museum has also set up a carpenter's workshop in Sjøgata specialising in in situ restoration work, where not only the museum's own work can be carried out, but also jobs associated with the repair and restoration of old houses elsewhere in Mossjen and the surrounding region. Parts which can be re-used are also repaired here.

The Sjøgata Project has shown that the rehabilita-
BRYGGEN: UN PROBLÈME D’ARCHITECTURE INTÉGRÉE

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In any homogeneous group of buildings, it will be necessary at some time or another to replace one of them with a new building. It may be for a variety of reasons: an existing building may have been gutted by fire, it may have become dilapidated beyond repair, or the owners may simply require more room.

The shape and size which the replacement takes will usually be determined by the location and will be dependent on a number of factors, such as the wishes of the site developer, the architect’s competence and assessment of the task, the rules and regulations dictated by the local community. The physical situation of the site will also determine to a large extent what solutions which will be feasible.

Since there are many ideological and philosophical conceptions concerning infill architecture, the solution which is ultimately chosen will often be controversial and subject to debate. Almost without fail phrases like “an expression of our time” and “the demands of the present day” will crop up in the ensuing discussions. It is indeed a moot point whether people are capable of paying proper attention to “the spirit of the age” when it concerns their own time. It is easy to defend the argument that “the spirit of the age” can only be recognised from another point in time: that it is the outcome, in other words, of the cultural struggle which has taken place within a period, where, for example, the product which has resulted from opposing conceptions about the form of a new building can be compared with other contemporary achievements.

Even though the new development at Bryggen in Bergen is so close in time to the present that we cannot claim any historical distance from it, it provides an excellent example of infill architecture which was the result of exhaustive discussions. During the preceding controversy a great variety of possibilities were put forward. This can