

TOWN-PLANNING AND THE PROTECTION AND REVIVAL OF HISTORIC ENSEMBLES.

The recognition of the importance of protecting valuable historic centres has been relatively recent. In the 19th century when the modern movement for preservation began, interest was confined almost entirely to isolated historic buildings. The resolution that can be called the "Charter for the Protection of Historic Buildings", passed in Athens in 1931 at the Congress of the Museum Office of the International Institute of Intellectual Collaboration, did not concern itself with the problem of historic centres. It is necessary to emphasize the merit of the town-planners and architects grouped in the CIAM, who, two years later, in their "Charter of Athens" approached the problem. They maintained that not only isolated historic buildings of artistic value, but also urban wholes should be protected : art. 65 of the Charter.

We can clearly see at the present time the harm that modification in its primitive surroundings can cause an architectural monument. We also know that well-preserved historic centres deserve as careful protection as isolated buildings of a higher architectural rank. Following this evolution of ideas, certain European countries have recognized the fact that certain urban districts or even whole cities should be classified as historic monuments. Finally, at the present day, we connect the protection of centres of historical architecture with the protection of the surrounding landscape, of which they are constitutive elements along with the greenery, lakes or hills.

The extension of the scope of the problem is of capital importance for the protection of historic centres. At the present day there is no longer any question of protecting certain particularly rare and valuable buildings, but of preserving centres of historic architecture that, in many cities, are an important part of existing constructions. It is also a question of seeing to it that the buildings put up in the neighbourhood of historic centres do not interfere with the harmony of these centres.

Unfortunately, the increasing interest in historic centres often goes hand in hand with an increasing pressure that tends to replace old buildings with new ones better adapted to modern needs. Under the effect of accelerated town-planning, of technical progress, and of the rise in the standard of living facilities, old buildings are disappearing or are being deformed by new construction. The situation is especially difficult when historic groups of buildings form the centres of cities in full expansion.

The clash between two opposed tendencies, the one aiming at increasing the number of protected buildings, and the other, on the contrary, that would like to see them replaced by new construction, has recently raised the problem of the attitude to be taken toward historic centres. During the years immediately following the war, a number of national and international congresses gave it an important place. However, in spite of cries of alarm and many anxiety-filled resolutions, the process of the destruction of the precious historic substance continues. Uncontrolled development has caused irreparable loss in many European cities.

The protection of artistically valuable historic centres against degradation is one of the most urgent duties involved in the development of cities ; if the tendency to destroy the historic heritage is not stopped, there will soon be nothing left to preserve.

However, the problem is difficult and complicated. We shall first try to define the role of the town-planner and the means at his disposal in the fight for the protection of historic centres. Following this, we will approach, in a few words, the problems of architectural composition. We shall end our reflexions with a few remarks on the social, administrative, and juridical aspects of the question.

1. The town-planner's ends and his means.

The city is a living organism that develops and adapts itself to ever-renewed needs and to the means of their satisfaction. The problem of historic centres should not slow down the renewal of cities. It is a question of directing the development of cities without renouncing the values that historic sites have both for us and for future generations.

In order to define centres that deserve protection, it is first of all necessary to determine their value. These values are of different kinds.

Let us begin with aesthetic values. Groups of historic

buildings charm us because of the quality of their architecture, the play of space and mass, of light and shade, of form and colour, as well as by the homogeneity of material and construction techniques. The liveliness of aesthetic impressions is due to the historic character of these groups, the means of expression being quite different from modern architectural language. Only the direct vision of the original work permits the appreciation of the architectural whole. A good reproduction can sometimes render the aesthetic impressions produced by the colour. It is much more difficult to replace by a photograph the view of an architectural monument, especially if it has a complex mass or interesting interiors. Neither a photograph nor a film can replace a walk through the streets of a city. Our impressions depend on the place in which it is found as well as on the light that illuminates it. Furthermore, the image produced in a photograph depends on the objective in view.

The traces of the past also have the value of being a source of knowledge concerning past periods of history. The buildings and different details of the arrangement of cities, although they lack artistic importance may, however, deserve protection in so far as they contribute to material culture. The interest of these witnesses increases in direct relation to the rarity of these traces. Groups of buildings that are particularly characteristic of a region deserve all the more attention.

The emotion that one feels in old districts does not come only from the aesthetic impressions nor from the historical associations evoked by these groups of buildings. The inhabitant of the large, noisy, and ugly contemporary city finds in these districts a captivating milieu that results from its quiet and harmony where the individual character and human dimension are respected. The image of old historic cities has influenced numerous new ideas in the field of town-planning and similar effects have often been attempted with modern means of expression.

These remarks only concern the arguments justifying the protection of certain buildings because of their value as historic monuments. One might add that their attraction for tourists plays an important role in a number of modern cities. The weight of different criteria of appreciation is not the same and it is impossible to establish a uniform principle of application. In cities that possess few historic monuments, the protection of buildings that would not attract such attention in other surroundings is indicated. In applying these kind of criteria, each city can establish a hierarchy of importance of historic groups, corresponding to the classification of particular buildings.

- tain hours, and the exclusion of cumbersome vehicles,
- the location of parking lots outside of protected areas or the construction of underground parking places,
- the laying-out, if necessary, of underground routes for public transport such as tramcars, or even for every kind of vehicle,
- restraining the large number of lorries carrying fuel by installing central heating fed by sources of heat situated outside of the historic centres.

Increasing resistance to the invasion of cities by automobiles and the increasing tendency to favour pedestrians, especially in the centres of cities, are auspicious for the preservation of historic centres.

Finally, the technique of the modernization of historic buildings, strictly linked to the questions already examined, constitutes a town-planning problem of great importance. Its purpose is both the improvement of the functional value of buildings and the disengaging of hidden beauties in the historic surroundings. The technical condition of buildings often requires different work, especially the installation of sanitary arrangements. When the construction is too compact, it might be necessary to eliminate architecturally valueless parts that deprive neighbouring buildings of light and air. The space that is thus set free should, if possible, be given over to the planting of lawns and trees. In case of need, neighbouring houses can be joined together in order to increase the possibilities of use. Thus it is indispensable to examine the best use of the buildings in order to decide on their functions and to foresee whether they can be used as lodging. The fitting out with utilities might necessitate an addition in conformity with the functions foreseen; for this purpose adjacent land might be put to use. Finally, the renewal of an historic centre requires the elimination of disfiguring elements that have been added during periods posterior to the original construction.

The protection and revivification of historic centres and their integration into the urban organism constitutes a difficult and delicate problem. Sometimes a compromise is necessary: it might be necessary to renounce a maximum of practical advantages in order to protect the artistic value of the surroundings, but, on the other hand, it might be indispensable to introduce several modifications in the state of these centres in order to adapt them to modern needs. Like a doctor who decides to amputate an organ to save the life of a sick person, the town-planner might also judge that a part of an historic centre should be destroyed. However, it should not be forgotten that some organs are irreplaceable and that

exaggerated amputation can lead to a deplorable infirmity or even to the death of the sick person.

Fortunately, the methods applied by town-planners have reached a high point of perfection during recent years. Reconstruction work carried out by archaeologists and conservators during the 19th century often caused irreparable damage to the monuments concerned. The same holds for town-planning work undertaken for the revivification of historic centres in a state of decline, work that has often deformed and disfigured the face of the city. In order to revivify old cities, routes have been put through, streets have been widened and straightened, archways have been pulled down, and buildings have been put up that brutally destroy the former harmony. Modern town-planning aims at rehabilitating historic centres by far more prudent methods. These methods remarkably facilitate the complex problems connected with this undertaking.

2. Architectural problems.

Historic sites cannot be forbidden to new construction. However, it should be introduced on free plots of land or on the sites of buildings that have no architectural value or are simply ugly and are marked out for demolition. The problem of the relations between old and new also appears at the junctionpoint between historic areas and modern areas. What conditions should new architecture fulfill? How can the harm caused to the face of the city by the construction of buildings on a different scale, in absolutely different forms, with the use of materials unknown in previous periods, be avoided?

Evidently, the imitation of historical forms such as was done during the 19th century and even recently, must be avoided. Buildings that are to be put up in the near future should be modern; any other solution would be unfortunate both for new construction and for the old buildings. This opinion has often been expressed. But the interpretation of the "modern" has often been an object of discussion. According to some opinions, architects who work in old districts, while using modern materials and techniques and expressing themselves in the language of contemporary architecture, should adapt their work to the surroundings in respect to the scale of the buildings, the treatment of mass, etc. Other opinions, on the contrary, call for the use of procedures that would form a marked contrast with the surroundings and that would thus emphasize the difference between the periods in which the buildings have been put up. Finally, some call for an absolute freedom of creation and the uncompromising application of an architecture in conformity with contemporary criteria without regard for the place in which the building is to be put up.

This last point of view, appearances notwithstanding, does not correspond with the genuinely modern spirit in architecture. The adaptation of architectural solutions to the existing surroundings has been maintained by representatives of different tendencies. The taking into consideration of the existing surroundings constitutes one of the basic principles of architecture that is called "organic"; it is sufficient to remember the works and writings of Frank Lloyd Wright. Le Corbusier also tried to open "the eyes of those who see not", not only to the beauty of forms created by industrial civilization but also to the surroundings of the buildings. It must be required that each new piece of construction take into consideration the surroundings, all the more so when an historic centre of high value is in question.

This kind of centre has its own individual character, its own poetry, a harmony that is often subtle and delicate. New buildings should not interfere with this picture. The principle "primum non nocere" respected in medicine, should be observed in regard to historic centres. It is difficult to establish detailed prescriptions to be followed in different cases. One would perhaps be justified in requiring that, in a general way, the scale of the volume of buildings, the detail of their facades, the colour and the material should be adapted to the surroundings; it is important to avoid aggressive effects, especially in the vicinity of the great works of historic architecture. However, sometimes the emphasis on the contrast between old and new would be indicated. There exist good examples of buildings in raw concrete situated in historic centres. Le Corbusier planned to use this material for his hospital in Venice. But the body of the building was low and divided up in order to adapt it to the surroundings, and the intimate liaison of the architecture with the lagoon had a very Venetian character.

The problems of architectural composition in historic cities cannot be reduced to the relations between old and new in groups of old buildings. Only rarely can the preservation of such groups in the strict sense be spoken of. Other problems apart, the project of protecting and revivifying an old district raises artistic problems. The decisions to be made in regard to the elimination of buildings that are foreign to the surroundings, or the returning to their original state of certain others, the modifications to be made to the network of streets and their paving, and finally, the modification of other elements in the urban scene, all these require on the part of the architect directing the work, not only historical knowledge but also great artistic sensibility. All these problems, that of new construction included, should be faced at the same time; they constitute one great problem: that of the nature of the urban milieu.

Solicitude for historic centres should not be identified with a tendency to neglect, under the influence of the charms of the past, modern needs. On the contrary, it is the expression of the needs of the 20th century man and it manifests the contemporary attitude toward historic centres, an attitude fundamentally different from the past.

At the end of the 19th century, little attention was paid to protecting the urban scene in its entirety. Confident of their knowledge of these historic forms, the architects of that period believed themselves capable of creating works of artistic value and style that would not be less perfect than the authentic old buildings. Thus they did not attach much importance to the preservation of groups made up of buildings of slight artistic interest, witnesses of a backward civilisation. At that time old districts were much more numerous than at the present day. The 20th century man has discovered the beauty of historic areas, he has acquired a taste for touring, and, tired of the insensibility and monotony of many new areas, he appreciates all the more the atmosphere of these old areas. This sensibility to their charm is no longer, as formerly, perceptible only to certain individuals, but at the present day is a mass phenomenon. Everything seems to indicate that in the future, when a higher standard of living will allow for a better satisfaction of the spiritual needs of the urban population, historic centres will be even more highly appreciated. That is, if by then, they have not been completely devastated and destroyed.

3. Social, administrative, and juridical problems.

The protection and revivification of historic centres requires the solution of various problems besides those of an architectural and technical nature.

It involves questions of a social nature. Historic districts, since they are less well fitted-out, are often populated by poorer social groups who cannot pay a high rent. After modernization this housing can become inaccessible to the former tenants if rents are not maintained at a level in proportion to their means. The arrangement of the interior of small blocks of houses often requires the demolition of a certain number of lodgings and the transfer of the tenants to other districts. In these blocks of houses that are to be improved there are often workshops of craftsmen that also should be replaced by substitute quarters. Thus the process of renewing historic centres can provoke serious disturbances in the social milieu. Before undertaking these arrangements it is necessary to foresee the lot of the former inhabitants as well as the future de-

mographic structure of the centre It should not be inhabited by only one social group.

The revivification of historic centres, if carried out in time, while permitting their best possible adaptation to the needs of a modern city, constitutes the most effective means of preserving them from destruction. In so far as the living standard of the population raises and the requirements relative to the standard of housing and its surrounding increase, former tenants will leave historic areas that are in poor condition and that contrast disadvantageously with the housing in new areas. When revivification is undertaken too late, defacement of the site or undesirable modification can take place whose effects would be difficult to repair.

However, this kind of revivification is often very costly. It is not limited to providing historic buildings with satisfactory architectonic and sanitary conditions ; it involves the construction of substitute quarters, the completing of public services, the reconstruction of networks of streets, etc. Thus it is necessary to plan for public subsidies to cover the costs of the works included in the project and the maintenance of the buildings, and to take care of the eventual increase of rents and of other expenses of this kind.

The protection and revivification of historic centres should be supported by solid juridical foundations. It is not enough that historic monuments be protected against defacement, it is also necessary that competent bodies be authorized to undertake and finance work. The law should authorize the expropriation of land when it is indispensable for the carrying-out of the plan. However, this is not all. The renewal of historic centres constitutes only one part of a vast enterprise of the planned development of cities, and it should not be faced outside of this problem. As has already been said, the campaign in favour of the protection of historic centres can only attain full success when these centres are made to fulfill functions in conformity with their nature. In order to attain this end it is necessary to dispose of the necessary juridical and administrative foundations so that the development of whole cities and not only the development of their historic areas can be directed. When a city is developing under the impulse of impetuous and uncontrolled economic forces, it will not be possible to protect the delicate and fragile texture of historic centres.

Finally, the protection of old urban centres that requires great material efforts and long and exacting labour, cannot have good results without the sentimental commitment and complete support of the population. Thanks to an attitude of this kind we have succeeded in saving historic centres of remarkable value from

dangers that threatened them, in undertaking work with a view to bringing out their beauty, and finally, in reconstructing numerous centres destroyed by the war.

However, a heavy accusation can be thrown in the face of industrial civilization. The best-preserved treasures of the past are generally found in cities situated away from the great currents of industrialization and the gold-fever that accompanies it. Many of the most valuable historic centres often owe their survival, not to the enthusiasm of the population, but to the poverty that has installed itself in them. And finally, if some historic centres shine in all their beauty at the present day, it was necessary that they be destroyed during the war and carefully reconstructed. A large number of historic centres of incontestable value still wait in vain for the care that they deserve.

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