

Emanuel H r u s k a (Czechoslovakia)

THE REVITALISATION OF SMALL TOWNS IN CZECHOSLOVAKIA

In Czechoslovakia, nearly all the towns which have an historic centre may be classified as 'small towns' according to the guidelines given to the national committees by the Secretariat of ICOMOS for the preparation of reports to the Rothenburg Symposium - that is to say, towns with a population less than or equal to 50,000.

1. The geomorphological wealth, and the relatively dispersed nature of urbanisation in Czechoslovakia have conditioned the existence of these towns which have retained their historic centres.
2. In 1950 the Czechoslovakian government designated thirty-eight towns whose historical centres were declared 'reservations', twenty-eight of these towns are in CSR and ten in SSR; over three-quarters of these towns can be considered as 'small towns' according to the definition given above. This was indeed a progressive decision, taken with the view of assuring the preservation of large groups of buildings in towns, but it was not matched by the practical arrangements indispensable to its application.
3. It was only in 1958 that a new law about the safeguard of historic monuments gave the legal bases for the designation of 'reservations', composed of collections of ancient architecture or of historic urban centres. This law was innovatory, on a world standards, but still did not solve all the difficult questions, such as those of finance. But, in the context of the territorial planning introduced by a socialist government, operations with the safeguard of groups of historical buildings as their aim are efficiently backed up by regional plans and approved economic plans.
4. These last years, tendencies towards the conservation of historical buildings and the functional revitalisation of monuments have taken concrete form. Complex operations now take place which are no longer concerned onyl with the revival of a monument but of an entire town. These problems were tackled for the first time within the framework of an international symposium devoted to the conservation of historic towns (Prague and Levoca, Slovakia, June 1966). Underlined throughout this gathering was the necessity of bringing together the most favourable conditions in order to give modern functions to historic structures and to find - so as to ensure their revitalisation - investors who knew how to appreciate cultural, artistic and economic values, as well as all the advantages of the traditional milieu compared with the quality of living to be found in the estates on the edge of a town or in its outskirts.

5. We realise now that a historic centre is not an isolated urban element but one of the organic components - perhaps the most important - of the entire town or the whole built-up area. The problem of its safeguard, its conservation and its restoration is no longer one to be seen in terms of stylistic consistency and it is not a matter of initiating a purist restoration of the state of the town at a given historical period (medieval, 17th or 18th centuries, etc...). On the contrary, the entire group of buildings ought to be retained as evidence of the cultural continuity of development - an expression of the richness and harmony of the architecture of different periods - in close relationship with their natural surroundings, so varied in our country.
6. The Czechoslovak National Committee expressed itself to this effect at the time of two international symposiums:
 - 1971, Brno, protection of popular architecture,
 - 1973, Vilnius, (USSR), assembly on the protection of historic centres in the Socialist countries and the problems of their living functions, organised in collaboration with the Soviet committee of ICOMOS.

The Czechoslovak committee hopes that the idea of ensuring the conservation of groups of historic buildings will be extended further and that we will thence come to consider these problems from the point of view of the creation of the setting of the new socialist society: conservation should not only be restrictive but should become a dynamic creative action, integrating the cultural values of the past with the development of our future living environment.

After this introduction follows a number of slides which show the charm of our small historic towns and their mutual dependence on the countryside and the rich vegetation of our homeland ... despite one or two operations carried out with a lack of sensitivity to the harmony, the scale and the appearance of groups of historic buildings of particular architectural interest.

Today, it is the Minister for Culture of the Socialist Republic of Czechoslovakia who successfully directs the process of conversion and protection of our cultural assets. The Czechoslovak National Committee of ICOMOS makes every effort, on its part, to develop the study of the theoretical problems which arise in this field.

Our small towns, thanks to their ancient centres, are not only tourist attractions; their revitalisation serves to reinforce the national conscience of our people.

An updating of the law of 1958 is now in preparation. It will ensure the protection of groups of buildings in towns with historic quarters of cultural interest, regardless of the individual individual classifications of the buildings which constitute these groups - (in Czechoslovakia listed monuments are divided into three categories).

Here are two typical examples of the protection of 'reservation' towns:

- The town of Telč, in CSR, symbiosis of architecture and the environment,
- The town of Spisska Sobotka in SSR, the diversion of traffic from the centre has safeguarded its historic structure and favours the circulation of pedestrians.

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THE CONSERVATION OF SMALLER HISTORIC TOWNS IN AFRICA SOUTH OF THE SAHARA

WITH CASE STUDIES OF TWO GHANAIAI EXAMPLES, ELMINA AND WA

The cause of building conservation is still new in Africa south of the Sahara, and little account is taken of it in formulating national development policies. But the need for bold and progressive policies of building conservation is tremendous throughout Africa, because the pace and scale of development has increased so enormously during the last ten to twenty years, in every recently independent country, that the very fabric of society is threatened. The population explosion, the inexhaustible influx of people from the rural areas into the towns, and the insatiable demands of the modern economy for better communications, larger production units, and more extensive public services, are placing intolerable strains on the existing infrastructure of new nations. These strains are not applied equally everywhere, of course: the pressures are most intense in the great metropolitan conurbations - Lagos, Accra, Kinshasa, for example - but they are felt in the distant provinces. Anthropologists and social scientists fear for the health of society, even in the remotest areas, if the traditional structure of society collapses, as well it may, in the absence of any tradition of building conservation.

Throughout the greater part of Sub-Saharan Africa before the imposition of colonial rule, and especially in the great tropical forest belts, which were much more extensive a hundred years ago than they are now, the traditional economy of the state did not place any particular value on the conservation of buildings as such. The depredations of the climate, and of the animal world, together with the abundance of known building materials, made 'conservation' of buildings superfluous. Objects (regalia, cult objects, relics of the dead) and sites were commonly venerated, but buildings apparently not. They were functional and utilitarian and indicated a man's status, like clothing: and like clothing, when they had served their purpose, they could be as easily shed.