

SWEDEN - SUÈDE

The Venice Charter: its importance and implementation in Sweden

The essays on restoration published by the architect and art historian Sigurd Curman (1879-1966) after years of study abroad, e.g. in Venice in 1904, were a seminal influence on Swedish cultural heritage management. The essay entitled «Restaureringsprinciper» (1906), which is virtually a manifesto, betrays powerful influence from Camillo Boito. In addition to valuable experience of conservation and restoration, Curman brought home the new Italian methods of uncovering and conserving frescoes and mosaics and, if, necessary, transferring them to canvas.

Curman made use of his studies of Italian conservation techniques in Strängnäs Cathedral in 1909 in a project which, of great importance to Swedish cultural heritage management, can be said to have established a school. Curman's dictum, «The supreme objective of the management of our cultural heritage must be, while maintaining scientific principles, to try to merge into a superior entity the preservation of historic art with the best artistic aspirations of the new age», became during his tenure as Director General of the Central Board for National Antiquities, between 1923 and 1946, a guiding principle for the Board's handling of conservation and restoration issues. It remains so today.

Ever since the beginning of the 20th century, then, Sweden can be said to have had a tradition of conservation and restoration firmly rooted in the Italian approach. This is what makes the Venice Charter of 1964 a natural sequel. For the purposes of conservation policy in Sweden, the Charter became, more than anything else, a confirmation of principles observed for decades past.

The definition in Article 1 of the Charter: «The concept of an historic monument embraces not only the single architectural work but also the urban or rural setting in which is found the evidence of a particular civilisation, a significant development or an historic event», was vitally significant to Swedish conditions. This wider view of the management of the architectural heritage as including not only large, artistically significant works but also more modest works from the past which with the passing of time had acquired cultural

importance, has led in Sweden to the adoption of an objective based in principle on the general conservation of older buildings and their surroundings.

During the 1960s in connection with the management of the Swedish cultural heritage, research was conducted into traditional building materials and their interaction with modern materials. As a basic principle it was asserted that all materials must be amenable to maintenance. The importance was also underlined of not carrying out repairs with a material stronger than the original one. This is particularly important where, for example, rendering is concerned. These recommendations accorded fully with the Venice Charter, but they were realized in the light of current problems of heritage conservation.

At the «Urban Renewal — Conservation» conference in November 1968 at the Chalmers Institute of Technology, where the delegates included Professor Carlo Ceschi of Rome University, the Venice Charter was distributed in Swedish translation. This conference, attended by some thousand delegates, proved to be of the utmost importance to Gothenburg itself, because it led city officials and politicians to reconsider, from a preservation viewpoint, several of the area development plans pending at the time. Ceschi also lectured in a Stockholm shuddering under a culminating wave of demolitions. There as well, his message of preservation and restoration of the historic city centre contributed to the change of opinion that led to the reconsideration of urban renewal of the 1970s.

Conservation issues acquired a broader focus in the 1970s and the Central Board of National Antiquities spent the greater part of the decade drawing up guidelines for building conservation in general. These guidelines revealed the influence both of the 1964 Venice Charter and the 1975 Amsterdam document. This development in favour of preservation and maintenance, emanating essentially from a reaction against the post-war method of urban renewal by demolition and new construction, also included research and development work on urban renewal, conversion and restoration. The work was carried out at the schools of architecture, mainly from the end of the 1960s, at the Chalmers Institute of Technology, the College of Fine Arts and the Royal Institute of Technology in Stockholm. Working approaches and projects differed, but the basic attitude was the same, rooted as it was in a reaction against the destruction which the

current renewal had entailed. The overriding idea was that it should be possible to conserve features of interest and at the same time remedy deficiencies.

The importance of the Venice Charter in the education and research of recent decades in Swedish building conservation is instanced by schemes for the careful conversion of dwelling houses. Briefly, the concept of careful conversion and alteration, established at the beginning of the 1980s, implied:

Preserving the character of buildings, both by preserving things still in working order and by selecting and positioning supplementary interiors in harmony with the old ones;

Using the natural opportunities which a building provides for functional efficiency and a good standard of comfort;

Making necessary functional alterations in such a way as to preserve the original period character;

Facilitating maintenance and continuing activity;

Letting the residents choose between the alternative uses which older housing generally offers.

This manifesto bears unmistakable resemblance to several articles of the Venice Charter, even if there are differences in wording. The Charter speaks of the conservation and restoration of historic monuments, whereas careful conversion refers to ordinary housing. Conversion as a concept indicates certain architectural principles for care and renewal, rooted in Articles 9-13 of the Charter. The care concept, however, puts much stronger emphasis on the usefulness of the building.

Special data have been collected concerning the importance of the Venice Charter in training for management of the architectural and cultural heritage. As a rule, information is supplied about the Charter which, for the most part, is also included in course literature. The Chalmers Institute of Technology and Gothenburg University have pride of place in this respect because, in 1966, they introduced extramural courses in alteration and restoration which were attended by architects, art historians and engineers. The courses included study visits to Rome, where useful contacts were established with Italian expertise.

The Chalmers Institute of Technology and its affiliated Centre for the Built Environment in the West of Sweden continuously offer conversion and restoration courses for architects and graduate engineers, as

well as labour market courses for structural engineers and supervisory personnel. During these courses, the Venice Charter, which is required reading, is dealt with in lectures and seminars. The important basic principles of the Charter also permeate many of the practice tasks and projects undertaken on the courses, such as taking into account all the periods of building history when planning changes, integrating replacements for lost parts of buildings with the overall structure while still making them distinguishable, using both earlier and more recent techniques for alterations and restoration, and including maintenance in one's planning. The basic approach and principles of the Venice Charter are successfully implemented in instruction on the planning of alterations and restoration, which is the nature of development work.

The Institute of Conservation of Gothenburg University observes that the Charter has become an established international canon of conservation and that it is virtually required reading for advanced study programmes in most countries. This makes it of the utmost importance that knowledge of the Charter's existence and applicability be conveyed in all studies at post-secondary level, and also in a constructive and critical perspective.

All students at the Institute of Conservation are informed of the Venice Charter already during their basic courses, and also of other important documents and basic texts relating to the theory and concepts of conservation. In their own scientific studies, project work and thesis preparation, the students are expected to relate the measures they propose to current practice and international documents which, for example, means assessing conservation measures with reference to the Charter.

Labour Market Board employment training activities in Stockholm between 1973 and 1986 included alteration and restoration courses for unemployed architects and structural engineers. On these interdisciplinary courses, attended by large numbers of immigrants from ten or more countries, the Venice Charter was a valuable common source of inspiration.