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AN OUTLINE OF A PROGRAMME FOR THE CONSERVATION RESTORATION AND REVITALIZATION OF HISTORICAL ENSEMBLES¹

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The ideas which I want to present here are based on elements from two different subjects — the protection and conservation of historical monuments and urbanism. Both subjects have developed separately for a long time, each representing different, even opposite interests. It was only the social, economic and technological situation during the last two decades which has forced them to review their standpoints and thereby approaching each other. The protection of historical monuments has, in the main, taken care of the conservation and restoration of individual monuments, whereas urbanism, until deep into our century, has seen its main task as the demolition of old buildings or whole districts only to replace them by an artificial network of streets and open spaces, which were only concerned with functional considerations. This system has done considerable damage to the individual character of the towns. One took notice neither of the historical development that reflects the growth of a city in the course of centuries, (which is distinctly expressed in the layout of a city), nor did they pay regard to the outward appearance of the city, which is the result of this development and gives the city its unique character.

Not until the last decades, precisely in the very last decade did those two branches converge, and it was necessary for each to become familiar with the other's ideas.

The people concerned with the task of protecting and conserving historical monuments have been made to realize that the historical and the artistic individuality of a city may be of such great importance that the whole city, or at least certain parts must be regarded as monuments—it was within this context that the term 'historical ensemble' was developed and town planners have learned to consider the historical

¹ Text of a lecture delivered by Prof. Dr. Walter Frodl on Wednesday 5 November 1969 at the Faculty of Arts, Alexandria University.

centre of a city as the heart on which individual life depends. Medical science has taught them that blood pressure must not be too high, otherwise the heart, that is the centre, would explode,— on the other hand, it must not be too low as it would consequently stop beating, which means the centre would be deserted. Today, also international groups of town planners do not doubt that there is a cultural necessity to protect the historical centres of the cities and to integrate them into modern life.

Of all problems arising today in connection with the conservation of works of cultural value in all the world, the most acute one is the protection and conservation of the historical city centres. In the 'Charta of Venice' formulated by the second World Congress of 'Architectes et Techniciens of antiquity service des Mounments historiques' in Venice, in 1964, the first paragraph reads that not only individual Monuments but whole urban or also rural districts have to be protected which bear witness to a certain culture, a characteristic development, or a historical event. Furthermore, not the great works of art and architecture but also the modest works have to be taken into consideration because, as a complex unity, they have gained quite a considerable cultural importance in the course of time.

In the meantime, all the problems connected with these questions have become topical in all continents throughout the world. Some of the international organizations, especially the UNESCO, the European council, and the ICOMOS have placed them on the agenda of their congresses and their work programmes.

By those organizations the national institutions and authorities which exist today in nearly all countries of the world — some of them for about 150 years — are provided with a broader basis on which they can fight the destruction or the constant diminution of works of cultural value.

In this modest report it would take too long to explain the causes that today threaten the existence of historical ensembles more than ever before. I may, however, refer to the fact that the social, economic and technical developments have caused far reaching changes in the structure of the cities. The historical centres of the cities are no longer able to meet with the requirements of the present time, not to mention the future. They either burst under the pressure of social, economic and technical

needs, or they must decay and become deserted if the pressure is not regulated in time. The historical centres can no longer cope with the old functions, which they have performed for centuries and therefore they should be given new ones that they will be able to fulfil.

It stands to reason that the radical measures which are necessary for the future, cannot be taken and executed by the public monument conservation authorities. It is the planning and realization of very complex projects which only can be accomplished by the cooperation and coordination of all experts and authorities concerned. In the whole world we are in the first phase of this development, there are only very few countries (for example the Netherlands or France), in which the first difficulties seem to have been overcome.

What do we now understand by a historical urban centre or an ensemble of historical or artistic interest? The most important quality of such an ensemble is its homogeneity, but this cannot be justified only by the topographical unity of, for instance, the same type of houses, but it must also result from the interior of the dwellings, the structure of the street network and the open spaces, and, above all, from the uniform scale of the buildings. The homogeneity of the tissue, however, is not itself sufficient. There must further be a higher quality, which justifies the conservation. This quality consists less in the monument character of one or the other individual building in question, but in the architectural, archaeological, or aesthetic value of a whole group of buildings, which form the ensemble. Those cities which have, as a whole, the demanded homogeneity and, in addition, the aesthetic qualities, and which can be described as an ensemble, are very rare. The street in the historical centre of Cairo—drawn in 1870—has all qualities of homogeneity. Architectonic, historical and aesthetic values shape the ensemble which does not exist any more in this unity and to this extent today. (Fig. 1)

Salzburg in Austria and Dubrovnik in Yugoslavia are two towns among many others still existing which are distinguished by a large number of important monuments. The monuments are still standing in their natural environment; this means that the original proportion of the buildings in these ensembles has been preserved. (Fig. 2, 3)

Venice, the 'city on the water', is probably the only complete example of this kind. There are mostly only parts of cities or their historical centres which may be looked upon as urban ensembles worth protecting.

In many other towns only some streets or places have remained whose houses compose a homogeneous ensemble. However, just those small parts of the town often determine its individual character. As examples I want to show a street in Erzurum, Anatolia, a Gracht (canal) in Amsterdam and a place in the City of Stockholm. (Fig. 4, 5, 6)

There are, of course, ensembles apart from urban realms, rural settlements, archaeological ensembles, as there are also in Egypt, ecclesiastical ensembles which I shall not deal with today.

Only the problem of the rural ensembles may be hinted at by three examples. Fig. 7 shows a part of a small village in the centre of the Anatolian Highland which will be very familiar to you because it has a similar structure, the houses consist of the same material (mudbricks) and, as a whole, have the same appearance as the Egyptian villages on the banks of the Nile. Fig. 8 shows a row of houses of a village in the province Gilan on the Caspian Sea, in Iran. Mud and straw are the typical building materials. Fig. 9 shows the centre of a village in the Austrian Alps, an example of perfect homogeneity and unity of style.

It may appear strange to you that I have chosen such villages as examples worthy of preservation when a large number of similar villages still exist elsewhere. But we may be sure that industrial and agricultural development will cause their disappearance — perhaps still in our age. Therefore it is of great importance to preserve at least some of them as witnesses to the special form of social and cultural life. For the Austrian village we have worked out a plan (Fig. 10) to protect the old centre which contains the best and most typical houses. For example, according to the plan, it is not permissible to erect new buildings in the northern part of the village, in order to avoid the view of this side of the village being ruined.

After answering this question, which may also serve as an introduction, we have to draw up a work programme for those works which are necessary to make secure the ensembles still existing in a country, to restore and to conserve them and to integrate them into the modern complex of a city. In answering this I want to avail myself partly of the ideas expressed by François Sorlin, from the Ministère de la culture in Paris, at the colloquium of the ICOMOS in Spain, in 1967.

This plan comprises three main points which concern the whole work of urbanists.

1. The drawing up of an inventory of ensembles in the whole country.

2. The necessity of solving this problem by legislation, either by the extension of existing laws or by making new ones.

3. A statement of general technical principles which govern the restauration and revitalization of ensembles.

To this belong :

- a) The definition of the methods of restoration.
- b) The integration of the new architecture into historical ensembles.
- c) Satisfactory solutions for the traffic in the historical parts of a city.
- d) The coordination of the work of people who are concerned with conservation and restoration work with that of the town planners.
- e) The supply or even training of the necessary architects and craftsmen.

I should like to add further remarks to these various items :

- ad 1.) The inventory that must consist of a complete documentation of historical ensembles of every country is the basis and also gives a first survey of the work which has to be done.

The documentation has to consist of

- the exact plans of historical areas, that means street by street and house for house,
- the description,
- presentation of the most important historical data,
- the most important economic and social facts,
- and finally of the plans giving information about age and condition of the buildings, their use, plans showing the most important views and the relation to the city as a whole, projects for the restoration of the old houses and the filling of gaps. All data have to be verified by plans as well as photos.

It is an enormous task that has to be accomplished and it will take many years. Up to now, Spain is the only country with

a preliminary inventory of ensembles consisting of a list of places and their most important monuments. The data are symbolized by numbers and letters so that can also be used for computer work.

Fig. 11 shows the plan of the historical and very important town of Santiago de Compostela in Spain. The monuments and the various protected zones are marked on the plan.

For many towns in France the protection and preservation of historical ensembles is already secured by law. Fig. 12 shows the plan of the protected zone of Avignon in the south of France.

On a similar scale we are trying the same in Austria. The plan of the little town of Radkersburg (Fig. 13), still surrounded by the fortifications of the 16th century, shows clearly that those walls and many groups of houses — marked black on the plan — compose historical ensembles. Thus we may evidently regard even a whole town as a monument. Consequently alterations may be tolerated but only on a moderate scale.

In Austria the first volume of the Publication of Historical Ensembles of 176 towns will be published n.y. The second volume will contain the large cities, and the third about 60 smaller towns and some villages. This survey is of great importance because public planning, which has to arrange the future living space, has to think and plan on a large scale. It may therefore happen that historical details may be overlooked. We therefore have worked out a number of maps in connection with the programme of Austrian national planning.

On one map those cities and places are drawn, still possessing a group of historical buildings, having the character of an ensemble. (Fig. 14) Another map shows the archaeological excavation sites in Austria and regions with natural caves whose protection is of scientific interest. (Fig. 15) These works have to be followed by detailed plans, showing the ensemble in every individual place with reference to their environment, and those plans have to be completed by the investigation of every single house. Photogrammetry and

aerial photography are a valuable help in this work.

- ad 2.) Legislation concerning legislation, it has to be stressed that the historical urban centres are not to get the character of a museum only to be visited by tourists, they should rather be kept alive and incorporated into the organism of the modern city. This can be achieved only if the historical ensembles are included accordingly in economic plans, in the plans of city expansion, in the traffic plans. As already mentioned above, this consideration has also to be taken into account in the regional and the national planning. Without an adequate legal and financial basis this will hardly be possible. Consequently legislation and financing will have to exceed by far what has been stated in the average existing monument-protection-law up to now, and they will have to acquire a different and new basis.

The third group of questions is of greatest importance to the people who are concerned with conservation task. It comprises the technical problems. They are numerous and also rather complex, and they depend on very different precepts.

In this connection we can refer to a resolution passed in Prague by ICOMOS, four years ago, which says that the character and the beauty of a town do not depend only on the appearance of the streets and places in the centre of the city, but also on a view in the city from the outside. (Fig. 16)

The resulting consequences influence the scale of revitalization and restoration of the individual buildings of which an ensemble consists. According to the demands of the Charta of Venice the original state of a building should mainly not be altered by its restoration. This demand is easier to be fulfilled with a monumental building than with a dwelling place.

For instance, whereas the layout of a mosque, because of its very function remains very stable, certain alterations will have to be tolerated with a dwelling place to improve the living conditions and its utilization. To take such measures in the old parts of the towns of the Middle East is especially difficult,

because the modest structure of the houses and their age seem to make it easier to replace those buildings by new ones. For only in modern houses can that minimum of comfort be installed which the social situation demands, especially with regard to sanity I think, for those cities special methods will have to be worked out, for which European models and experiences may be used as guidelines, but they must find their own solutions. It is a fact that these quarters are abandoned because they cannot meet with the conception of the requirements of better living conditions. Those abandoned quarters decay slowly and are finally pulled down to provide sites for new buildings. An advance planning will be necessary to avoid the total loss of the historical face of the cities.

- b) It is naturally of great importance what those new buildings will look like. The new architecture can completely disfigure the historical picture. However, in its proportions, in the surface formation and by a clever selection of material, it can take up the melody by which the ensemble is dominated and form a new architectural harmony with the still existing historical buildings.

There is many a good example for this problem in Europe, and still more bad ones. (Fig. 17)

- c) Another chapter burdened with difficulties is that of the traffic. Already today the problem of modern traffic with its thousands of cars cannot be overcome even in a modern city with wider streets, circular roads and so-called express ways. One can imagine the far more difficult problem of finding a satisfactory solution for the narrow, winding streets of an old town.

The dangers brought about by modern traffic may be summed up shortly :

- Even today old streets are often replaced by new and wider ones in the course of which historical buildings are pulled down. The concussion of the ground caused by the traffic has a negative effect on the stability of old buildings that were erected under different conditions.
- And there is the so-called stationary traffic that hampers the flow of the traffic, causing that chaos with all its negative

consequences that influence constantly the life of the people in the cities and the cities themselves.

I am well aware of the fact that I have considered these problems from the view that results from my activity in a European city. After all, these problems are the same in your cities, however, with one difference that they, arise with a much stronger intensity and a greater severeness in the historical structure of a town in the Islamic world, and that the historical centres of a city with its densely built up areas on a town plan split into small sections, is much more sensitive to changes than in European countries, where the social, economic and technical development had started earlier.

- d) Concerning these problems the coordination of the work of the conservators and the town planners is even more decisive. From their cooperation only the results and the necessary consideration may rise which the monuments require as witnesses of a great history of the Islamic world.
- e) If the integration, especially the social and economic necessities and improvements into the existing historical structure of the cities will succeed, does also depend on the quality of work contributed by every single technician and craftsman. It is no secret that in Europe the number of those craftsmen capable of doing such work is becoming smaller and smaller.

For the training of architects who are especially needed for restoration work there are special possibilities provided at the Technical Universities and the Universities in Vienna, Warsaw, Milano, Delft in the Netherlands and some others. For eight years the University of Rome, together with the UNESCO, has arranged international courses for architects in which about 30 to 40 students from all parts of the world take part for the period of one year.

As far as I remember these courses were also attended by students from Egypt. Thus the problems of conservation of old city centres, or, as we have to put it more precisely the revitalization of old city centres are outlined with a few strokes. It is

natural that detailed different questions arise in different countries, especially when they are situated in different climates. These questions result from the character and the material of the buildings, from the customs and habits of the people, the social strata and from different other circumstances.

At all times, however, the success in restoring a monument (in our case the historical cities) will depend on the conscientiousness and skill of the restorer, and conservator, and, last but not least, on the accuracy and the high quality of the craftsmen employed.

And, lastly, there is one other thing which must not be lacking : that amount of artistic sensitiveness which is required wherever Man is engaged in matters of art.