

The Built Cultural Milieu in Finland

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1. INTRODUCTION

The cultural environment in Finland consists of the built-up cultural environment, the cultural landscape and prehistoric remains. The remarkable buildings, constructions and their environments belong to the built cultural milieu by their history, architecture and the image of the densely populated area. There are about three million buildings in Finland with over five million inhabitants.

Wood has dominated the Finnish building during centuries. The hegemony of timber as building material lasted both in the countryside and in the cities up to the 40s. The dominance of wood has been the problem of the preservation of the building heritage. Rot, fires and the easiness to change or the demolition of timber houses for new use have destroyed much of our valuable building heritage.

The building stock in Finland is young compared with other European countries. It is estimated that there are less than 150 000 buildings left built before 1921, which is about 5 % of the present quantity. A good 10 % of the building stock were completed in 1921-1950. Measured by the gross floor area the share of the old building base is even smaller than that.

There is little left of the building heritage established before the middle of the 19th century. They are mainly separate objects: churches, castles and manors. There are still wooden and stone city blocks, notable cultural buildings, administration buildings, schools and health establishments, village areas in the countryside and separate farm-houses from middle of the 19th century and from the beginning of the 20th century.

2. Cities

The wooden cities have been historically the most unique Finnish city culture. In the oldest parts of some cities, like in Porvoo and in Rauma, you can still see the irregular structure of the city which dates back to the Middle Age. Most of our cities were however, built after the principles of the grid plan were adopted in the 17th century.

As a consequence of city fires the considerations of fire safety, which had an influence city planning of Finnish cities from the 19th century, was emphasized. Characteristic of the wooden cities are the timber houses of one or two storeys, based on timber blocking and which have mostly board siding, and line the street in straight lines.

There are more than ten preserved wooden cities in Finland. In addition there are areas which are as large as some city blocks. The small cities at the coast of the Gulf of Finland and the Gulf of Bothnia have been best preserved. The slow growth of cities has enhanced the preservation. Cities, which grew very quickly and in which the pressure to change has destroyed the old structure of the city, have the least areas of old wooden buildings.



*Picture 1: Old Rauma was inscribed
on UNESCO World Heritage list in 1991*

3. Modern urban structure

In Finland, large-scale industrialisation only began in the latter half of the 19th century. Up till the 1860s, townspeople accounted for merely 5 – 6 % of the total population. The share of urban population, however, began to grow fast in the late 19th century. Rural depopulation and urbanisation continued to gain momentum in the 1950s, and by the 1980s, 60 % of all Finns were living in towns. The most recent major wave of migration into population centres began in the late 20th century and still continues.

Urban growth has broken down the centuries-long predominance of wooden buildings. Urban centres mostly consist of administrative and business buildings made of stone, surrounded by zones of stone apartment buildings and wooden family houses. Since the 1960s, there has been a shift from the use of wood as a building material to the use of prefabricated elements and reinforced concrete.

Renovation of urban centres in the Finnish wooden towns has resulted in an inconsistent urban pattern and fragmentation of the historical urban structure. The increase of traffic has also become a problem. The historical values of the built milieu have not been appreciated in traffic planning or the process of outlining streets and parking space for present-day traffic.

Finland is known for its high-standard modern architecture. This “modern architectural heritage” has begun to attract growing attention both in Finland and elsewhere. From the mid-1930s onwards, Finnish architects have been generally applying the modernistic principles of architectural design and town planning, and these principles still continue to be applied today. It is now time to evaluate the significance of areas built during and after the 1940s and 1950s and to assess their need for renovation. The large number of buildings in need of renovation will pose notable demands for maintenance.

4. Rural areas

Rural cultural landscapes constitute a notable portion of the Finnish cultural and architectural heritage. Apart from farmyards and villages, there are also many landmark buildings, such as churches, vicarages, schools and community halls as well as mills, dairies, sawmills and iron mills.

Up till the mid-19th century, farmyards were located in compact villages, some of which still remain along the rivers in the western coastal plains. The current rural landscape consists of solitary farms. Finnish countryside with its administrative and business centres and outlying villages is sparsely built.



Picture 2: Rural area in Hailuoto

5. LEGISLATION AND TOWN PLANNING

A new law on land use and building came into force in Finland at the beginning of 2000. This law, together with the international regulations, will guarantee the maintenance of Finland's architectural heritage.

According to the **Constitution** (1999):

- *All Finns are responsible for conserving nature and biodiversity, the environment and the cultural heritage. The public authorities should aim to guarantee each citizen a right to a healthy environment and a possibility to contribute to decision-making concerning their living milieu. (20 §)*

According to the **law on land use and building** (1999):

- *This law aims to provide for regional development and building that help to establish good living milieus and promote ecologically, economically, socially and culturally sustainable development. (1 §)*
- *The aim in regional development is, by means of interactive planning and adequate outcome assessment, to promote ... the beauty of built milieus and the fostering of cultural values ... (5 §)*
- *The supervision of building aims to promote ... building based on solutions that result in sustainable life-spans, are economically, socially and ecologically functional, and serve to create and maintain cultural values... (12 §)*
- *Built milieus and natural environments should be preserved and the special values implicit in them should be retained. ... Community planning should not significantly detract from the quality of any living milieu in a way contradictory to the ultimate purpose of the plan. (54 §)*

The **state-wide goals of regional development** have been defined in the law on land use and building (22 §) as follows:

- *Regional development aims to maintain national cultural milieus and architectural heritage as well as their regional diversity.*
- *Regional development should guarantee the preservation of nationally significant values of the cultural and natural heritage.*

Regional development should also be compatible with the international agreements and obligations concerning cultural and natural heritage and the relevant governmental resolutions. Moreover, the state-wide inventories by the public authorities should be used as the basis of regional planning.

Provincial planning should identify areas and buildings of such scenic and cultural value as to be recognisable in the national context. In such valuable areas, regional planning should be compatible with the historical development.

Inventory, as used here, refers to the thoroughly prepared state-wide inventories carried out by the public authorities. Inventories are carried out on nationally valuable scenic areas, milieus valuable in terms of the cultural history and prehistorical conservation entities.

Conservation of buildings in areas with an existing or prospective plan is mostly accomplished based on the *law on land use and building* (1999). The development of modern, preserving town planning began in the wooden towns in the early 1970s. According to a rough estimate, about 25,000 buildings have been preserved by means of town planning. Nevertheless, there are still a large number of outdated plans aiming at redevelopment.

Buildings outside planning zones are protected by virtue of the *law on the protection of buildings* (1985). Based on this law, approximately 200 buildings or groups of buildings, most of them privately owned, have been protected.

Immovable prehistorical monuments are protected by the *law on prehistorical relics*. State-owned buildings are protected based on a *statute*. Evangelic-Lutheran ecclesiastic buildings are protected by virtue of the *ecclesiastic law*, which provides protection for all churches built prior to 1917. There are 500 such churches. Even churches built later than 1917 can be protected by a resolution of the National Ecclesiastic Board.



Picture 3: Verla was included on the UNESCO
World Heritage list in 1996

International agreements and recommendations, such as the UNESCO and European Council agreements concerning architectural heritage and several EU programmes, also include obligations and premises for preserving our architectural heritage. Finland is participating in these international co-operative programmes as well as the ICOMOS project on building traditions.

The international and national obligations concerning sustainable development as well as the Finnish Council of State's *architectural policy programme* and *sustainable building programme* also involve references to the preservation of architectural heritage.

Master planning is not equally compatible with the principles of architectural conservation as local planning. Conservation of buildings may be problematic in areas without a detailed plan. It is true, however, that many of the current master and regional plans include notations and regulations concerning the preservation of the built cultural milieu.

6. CONSERVATION OF ARCHITECTURAL HERITAGE

Provincial and local museums collect, store, analyse and disseminate information about the local architectural heritage and the ways to preserve it. These institutions do not, however, have enough resources for guidance and counselling concerning the built cultural milieu, as only half of the provincial museums have an architectural specialist or a corresponding expert among their staff.

In Finland, the first nationally significant inventory of built cultural milieus was published in 1980. In 1983, it was supplemented co-operatively by the Ministry of the Environment and the National Board of Antiquities and Historical Monuments, and the list is now being revised again. Further inventories and reports have been compiled by municipalities and regional councils. These inventories are inadequate, however, and the evaluation criteria are inconsistent.

Municipalities have begun to make risk surveys to forecast and prevent natural catastrophes, fires and other hazards. They are even required to do this by the new law on rescue services.

Civic action contributes significantly to the general appreciation and knowledge of architectural heritage. There are several Finnish organisations that participate in international discussion on these matters and develop ways to maintain cultural heritage. The numerous regional, local, village and suburban associations make up a significant network of promoters of the regional heritage of buildings.

At their best, such organisations can play a key role in local awareness raising, public information and counselling, and they may also propose initiatives to protect buildings. Most of these organisations naturally have meagre financial resources, which is an obvious disadvantage in view of their ability to participate in, for example, the land use planning process.

The maintenance of architectural heritage is shifting its focus from single buildings or sites to large-scale systematic action. The most important regional goal is to make inventories and analyses of landscape structure and environmental features. This means that building-specific evaluation will receive less attention.

Both the EU and our national legislation underline the importance of provincial and municipal decision-making. This means that provincial and municipal decision-makers will be increasingly responsible for the maintenance of our architectural heritage. State-level administration will mostly have the following tasks: to make conservation legislatively and economically feasible, to identify buildings and sites of national significance, to make sector-specific inventories and to develop methods and systems for promoting the maintenance of our architectural heritage.



Picture 4: Making of shingle roof

7. STATE SUBSIDIES

The state began to subsidise the renovation of valuable buildings in the 1980s, but the level of financial support has been modest. The most important direct subsidies for architectural conservation have been the subsidies issued by the *environmental administration* and the *National Board of Antiquities and Historical Monuments*. Subsidies

are only granted for a fraction of the applications. The main weaknesses are the inadequacy of financial support, the principle of granting subsidies in response to applications, and the large number of funding sources. Moreover, the system of subsidies clearly favours single renovation projects instead of continuous maintenance.

In the late 1990s, the environmental administration issued a total of about 5 million FIM (841,000 euro) as subsidies annually. The approximately 1700 applications submitted annually were requesting 50 million FIM (8,410,00 euro). Only 350 applicants were annually granted subsidies.

During the same period, the National Board of Antiquities and Historical Monuments issued about 3 million FIM (505,000 euro) a year for the restoration of buildings of cultural and historical value. About 400 applications for 30 million FIM (5,050,000 euro) were simultaneously filed. Subsidies have been issued to only 150 applicants each year. The average sum total of these subsidies has ranged within 15,000 – 25,000 FIM (2,500 – 4,200 euro).

The subsidies issued by the *Ministry of Education* for the maintenance of community halls also help to promote architectural conservation. These subsidies have recently amounted to about 7 million FIM (1,180,000 euro) annually. Architectural conservation also benefits from other state subsidies, such as the subsidies issued by the *Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry* for farms, the renovation subsidies by the *state housing funds* and some subsidies from EU programmes. In the year 2000, for example, *employment and economic development centres* issued 7 million FIM (1,180,000 euro) for the maintenance of cultural milieus and 2.6 million FIM (437,000 euro) for archeological projects.

Taxation has not been used as a way to promote renovation in Finland. Internationally speaking, the subsidies issued for architectural conservation in Finland have been notably modest. The law on land use and building underlines the owners' liability and obligation to take care of their buildings and the surrounding milieu.

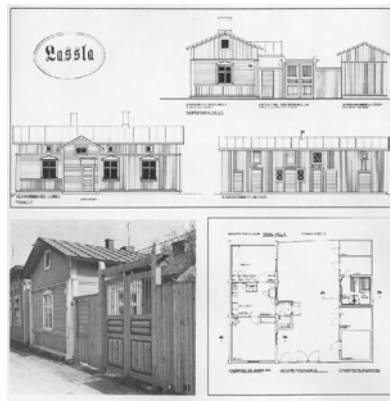
8. EDUCATION AND RESEARCH

Education about cultural milieus has been part of the Finnish curriculum of primary education for years. The practical attainment of this goal, however, has been notably variable and dependent on both the school and the teacher. In 1998 – 2000, museums and school carried out a co-operative project titled "Suomen Tammi" (Finnish oak), which aimed to encourage school-aged children to appreciate and cherish their cultural milieu. A three-year continuation project is under way now.

Instruction and training in the renovation and assessment of architectural heritage are given in vocational schools and colleges, but the programmes are fragmentary and limited. In the 1990s, employment courses were arranged to train builders in the use of traditional renovation methods.

Most of the research on architectural heritage has been cultural or historical. There are very few studies on the impacts of environmental change, socio-economic factors or economic regulation on architectural heritage. Applied research on conservation and maintenance is similarly scarce. The main focus of funding available for research on the built milieu and community structure has been on technical and ecological issues.

In 1999, the laboratory for the history of architecture in the University of Oulu launched a research project on the processes of change in historical towns, which is funded by the Academy of Finland. There are several subprojects, including three doctoral projects on the architectural history of the City of Oulu in 1822 – 1882 and 1882 – 1939 and a study on the possibilities of building wooden urban milieus in the future.



Picture 5: Drawings for old houses in Rauma

9. THREATS FOR ARCHITECTURAL HERITAGE

The preservation of historically valuable buildings depends on societal development. The development of business life has been notably divided during the past few years. Migration, population growth and economic activity mostly accumulate in a few growth centres, while rural areas suffer from regression and depopulation. The structural change in agriculture will result in fewer and large units and industrial-scale processing facilities.

Although societal values are largely governed by economic factors, decision-makers have failed to see the economic potential of our architectural heritage. As a consequence, historical buildings are not appreciated or adequately subsidised. The traditional Finnish residential ownership is both a resource and a threat.

One of the problems is that the economic and the vocational resources of remote municipalities are being depleted. More and more buildings fall out of use. Growth centres, on the other hand, face the conflict between their desire to conserve and the need to demolish and redevelop as well as to aim at an increasingly compact community structure. Architectural heritage is still not seen as a regional competitive advantage.

In urban areas of enhanced cultural and historical value, the rise of status may result in excessive renovation of residential buildings. Wealthy persons buy traditionally built houses in centrally located and prestigious areas. Since these buildings do not meet their owners' standards, they are modified and extended in ways that drastically affect the milieu.

From the viewpoint of rural landscape structure and cultural milieu, both intensive agricultural production and dropping out of production are significant factors. The changes that have taken place over the past few years are manifested as overgrowth and afforestation of cultivated fields and as dilapidated buildings.

Over the past few years, the renovation and maintenance of special-purpose buildings, such as hospitals and schools, has been increasingly based on competitive bidding by private companies. As a consequence, the tradition of maintenance and the sector-specific competencies have suffered. Some state-owned buildings have even been purchased by private owners, which has resulted in problems of conservation. State-owned buildings have statutory protection, which has not been recorded in registers.

There are also pressures on industrial milieus. Many of them are of cultural and historical value and contribute significantly to the local urban milieu, though they are no longer suited for production. It is difficult to find new occupants for the vacated buildings or to raise the funds needed for their renovation.

10. NEW OPERATING MODELS

New administrative operating models in Finland are represented by the regional and municipal **cultural milieu programmes**. They aim to describe cultural milieus and action programmes launched to maintain them.

About 40 municipalities or intermunicipal boards have drawn up cultural milieu programmes, which contain information about the local valuable buildings and areas as well as the history of the cultural landscape and built milieu. The programmes also provide information about the possibilities to cherish and develop environmental values.

At its best, a local cultural milieu programme is a functional tool of interaction between citizens and decision-makers. Village- or area-specific cultural milieu programmes also serve to promote awareness of the cultural heritage, town planning and commitment to regional development.

Another model that has been applied to the maintenance of architectural heritage has been the **contractual procedure**, whereby the owner of a building undertakes to maintain his or her historically valuable buildings in return for financial support. This model was experimentally applied to the maintenance of railway facilities in 1998.

The **renovation centres** established in different parts of the country provide counselling in the renovation of old building, the need for which has been constantly increasing. These centres provide information about orthodox building methods, competent designers and builders as well as recycled building materials and components.

11. ARCHITECTURAL HERITAGE STRATEGY

The architectural heritage strategy prepared by the Ministry of the Environment was published on 15 Feb. 2001. It is a national action programme to protect our architectural heritage. It contains information about the available knowledge and skills, the ways to facilitate and accomplish conservation as well as the responsible participants.

One of the aims of the architectural heritage strategy is to safeguard the economic preconditions for high-standard conservation and to create conditions where the financial and cultural added value gained by the owner of historically and cultural valuable buildings exceeds the costs of maintenance.

A further goal is to conserve our architectural heritage not only for its cultural value but also as a way to consolidate the national and local identity and uniqueness and as a regional competitive advantage. The main guidelines for the maintenance of architectural heritage have been compiled into 16 strategy statements. Their consequences are compatible with ecologically, economically, socially and culturally sustainable development.

The following ways to attain economic and social goals and to promote international co-operation have been proposed:

- *To improve the information service concerning architectural heritage, to support local renovation and counselling centres and to establish a state-level centre for building technologies and renovation.* Good maintenance of valuable buildings will prolong their usable life and keep their use economical.
- *To support municipal, provincial and national inventories of cultural milieus.* To update the existing inventories and to enter them into a computerised database, a project subsidy of 2 – 3 million FIM (340,000 – 505,000 euro) will be needed from the state. The inventories will support education, civic action, local conservation and business life through, for instance, tourism. We will also need adequate information of both the environment and our architectural heritage to be used as a basis of town planning.
- *To improve the preconditions for research on architectural heritage.* The funding and research organisations should co-operate to draw up guidelines for the implementation

and funding of projects on architectural heritage. Special attention should be given to the analysis of the societal and economic consequences of architectural conservation.

- *To enhance international co-operation on the maintenance and preservation of architectural heritage.* Co-operation with UNESCO, the Nordic countries and the Baltic states should be promoted. Architectural conservation is also one of the key goals of the EU structural funds.
- *To promote adherence to the international agreements concerning architectural conservation.* Finland has signed international agreements with the EU, UN, UNESCO and the Council of Europe.
- *To enhance the possibilities to maintain our architectural heritage by crucially improving funding and financial support.* The annual subsidies by the Ministry of the Environment and the National Board of Antiquities and Historical Monuments should be raised from 8 million FIM (1,345,000 euro) to 50 million FIM (8,409,400 euro). More support should be issued to small municipalities and communities. Subsidies should also be targeted to inventories and cultural milieu programmes. The possibilities of using taxation as a way of support should also be evaluated.
- *To promote practicable use of our architectural heritage, competent maintenance and professional renovation.* The willingness of owners, designers and builders to maintain architectural heritage and the opportunities for vocational training should be promoted.
- *To cherish and maintain architectural monuments and public administrative buildings.* Public buildings involve a number of meanings and values related to cultural history and national identity. The maintenance of historical public buildings would also serve as an example for private citizens.
- *To support municipal competencies and resources in the maintenance of our architectural heritage and the provision of counselling services.* The significance of architectural heritage as a local resource and attraction should be highlighted. There should be enough financial support to enable the appointment of regional architects. More expert help should be provided for provincial museums, which will require an additional annual subsidy of 2.5 million FIM (420,500 euro).
- *To support civic organisations and other organised action to propagate information of architectural heritage and to maintain and preserve it.* The economic resources of civic organisations to participate in, for instance, EU projects should be promoted.

If this architectural heritage strategy is implemented, it will have a favourable impact on the national economy. Architectural conservation can be improved by making a single authority responsible for granting the subsidies and by clearly increasing the financial resources. The renovation of historically valuable buildings will directly improve the employment rate. Architectural conservation on the whole will have a direct impact on cultural tourism and related services.



Picture 6: City Art Gallery in Oulu

12. Summary

Architectural heritage is an essential part of the built milieu. It ties up a lot of work, materials, energy and capital. Some of the historically and culturally valuable buildings have been acknowledged and cared for adequately, while many others are endangered due to inadequate knowledge and appreciation or lacking maintenance. Valuable buildings are being constantly vacated and falling out of use.

Adequate maintenance of our architectural heritage means that the buildings are kept in use, repaired and maintained and, when necessary, renovated appropriately. As a consequence of good care, the usable life of buildings is prolonged and local areas are considered attractive milieus to live and work in. The history behind our architectural heritage, the temporal stratification of the built milieu and the national symbolic buildings help people to understand societal change and to command the ongoing process of change.