

ARIADNE - Workshop on Cultural Heritage

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First of all I have to say that I was a little surprised to see my name amongst the general reporters of this workshop. Although I am interested in the subject, it never occurred to me to think about myself as being an expert on the field of cultural heritage. Nevertheless, I have decided to make use of the opportunity to gain new knowledge myself and perhaps, after some thinking, I will turn out to be able to write something about the subject.

To enable the reader to understand this paper, I believe I should introduce myself a little:

I am Dutch and have studied „spacial planning“ at the University of Amsterdam. To make things clear, „spacial planning“ has no close relation to cultural heritage. During a practical training in Moravská Třebová (CZ) I met my present wife so after graduating (1995) I looked for work in the Czech Republic. By now, I have been working on several projects, mainly as an employee of Taken Landschapsplanning bv (a Dutch consultancy on landscape architecture, member of the NL-Group) on two larger projects in the surroundings of Telč (CZ). Only during my work in this fascinating region and because of us now living in a superb but very neglected manor house I got interested in cultural heritage. It may be clear that my paper cannot deal with the conservation of cultural heritage as practised in the Netherlands. Instead, it offers a view on the situation in the Czech Republic as seen by a Dutch town planner.

First some statements:

In only very few cases, when dealing with utmost rare and special monuments (mostly national symbols), the public opinion will allow specialists to spend on the maintenance of buildings which have no functional use. In all other cases the preservation of monuments, or especially of larger monumental areas where people work and live, is not just a technical matter. It will be necessary for experts, politicians, owners, inhabitants and other users to find compromises for the use of the buildings. The more people agree with the use, the more will they be ready to maintain the building themselves and the less money from the state budget will be needed for grants and subsidies.

This reminds of the famous rustic stool with three legs, which is often used to illustrate such situations. Experts, politicians and the private sector need each other for the preservation of monumental areas just as the three legs of this stool need each other to carry the seat. For this reason the mentioned actors, being aware of this fact, should be careful not to lose contact.

The statement also implicates that the existence of monuments is very closely related to social and economical developments. If the authorities succeed in preserving the social structure and the functional use of an area for a long period, the users of the buildings will tend to maintain their property themselves. Therefore one should be aware of the way such entities came into existence. Indeed, only very few monuments are constructed just to be monumental, they are designed to fulfill a function, or more often, to fulfill a complete set of functions. Town centres or even individual buildings contain shops, living areas, representative elements, administration rooms etc. In the course of time these areas or buildings became monumental because of stability of use, i.e. the lack of development...

It is possible to present two more statements, both closely linked to the foregoing alinea. Firstly, the unforeseen effects of rather small measures, functional changes perhaps not even in the monumental area itself but in its neighbourhood, can very easily disturb the equilibrium of all functions in a monumental area and therewith eventually cause its

destruction. Therefore, when dealing with areas of high cultural heritage value, spacial plans (such as masterplans, zoning plans etc.) should pay much attention to make clear which unintended effects the proposed measures might have on the functioning of valuable areas in their surroundings. Certainly when dealing with the preservation of a whole area, a monumental town centre or something thelike one deals with a very complex structure with a lot of human aspects and with very many actors.

Secondly, on the other hand, certain modernisations will turn out to be inevitable for the functional use of such areas or buildings to keep up with time. Modernisations to strengthen the present function are not as dangerous as a change of this function itself. However, owners and users inevitably incline to modernise as much as possible to decrease the costs of future maintenance, especially when they dispose of enough money or when they can obtain grants for their expenses.

Perhaps the foregoing statements seem to be rather trivial. Nevertheless I observe that in the Czech republic all actors participating in the preservation of cultural heritage very often struggle with these problems.

A lot of monumental buildings are in a very bad state of maintenance. Especially outstanding buildings scattered out over less visible locations (in smaller villages) all over the country, such as mills, manors, small castles, churches, rectories, larger farmhouses etc. The present state of most of these buildings was caused by social changes during the last years of the fourties and the fifties of the nineteenth century. Nowadays, these buildings have no owners and no use. If not very soon someone invents a way to incorporate them in the modern way of life, they will be lost because it is clear that renovating such buildings without being able to give them a useful function is senseless. This problem does not at all depend on the skill of experts and craftsmen and does not concern only the institutions taking care of monuments. It seems to be too complicated to be solved.

On the other hand there are town and city centres, untill recently having a clear function, now being threatened by the rapid developments since the revolution. Increasing traffic problems and the need to find quickly possibilities for unpatient investors lead to the development of bypasses, industrial zones and shopping centres at locations harming the original, historic centre. Nevertheless, the owners of the buildings in the centre are known and there exists consensus about the fact that something should be undertaken for the protection of these areas. Thus, a lot of state money is spend on monuments in city centres, which nobody would seriously propose to destroy and which in a normal situation would be maintained and used by their owners anyway. The grants often lead to unnecessary, unlogical renovations.

A few examples:

Telč, a small town (6000 inh.) being the local centre of a remote highland region: The badly located supermarket, constructed in 1999, tends to suck life away from the historic town centre. The land use plan of 1998 solves lots of actual problems but can in no way be considered strategic because it does only on a very small scale anticipate future problems. Moreover, for financial reasons (present calculations) it projected a future bypass (not to be constructed during the next 15 years) through the most sensitive area of the town (from historical and environmental point of view) and not serving the two industrial zones in the south.

Moravská Třebová, another small town (12000 inh.) in a rather remote region: Also here the bypass (construction works finished about 1995), not serving industrial zones, cutting of a housing quarter from the town centre, forming a barrier at the bottom of the valley of the local stream, is located poorly.

All over the country architects often act undignified, obeying their clients even against their own conviction. On the other hand many owners of monumental buildings, rather than consulting the authorities before ordering drawings at an architects', make up their mind exactly and later on are furious that in spite of their expenses the planned renovation cannot be permitted.

There also is a large number of monumental buildings being neglected purposely to such an extent, that soon they will collapse. In this way the owners want to get rid of the building just because they plan to use the location for some other purpose.

Nevertheless, the most curious observation is the fact that frequently grants are misused to damage the historical values instead of to preserve them. The monastery of Nová Říše was, with the help of a grant, renovated in such a way that the 150 years old roof-tiles (of which at least 60% was in perfect state) were replaced by completely new ones, that wooden window-frames with baroque details and with the original panes were replaced by plastic ones and that the original baroque winding staircase was replaced as well. Another, though less disastrous example could be the building of the Špitál in Telč.

When looking for the causes of all these problems, one comes along the following deliberations:

The bypasses obviously were designed by civil engineers, not consulting an interdisciplinary team. Also the zoning plans, land use plans and masterplans witnessed little co-operation between different disciplines. Further seem both planning specialists and politicians, two groups one should expect professionally engaged in dealing with the future, to be surprisingly often puzzled by actual developments and they continuously need to solve problems – such as finding a plot for a factory, shop or a housing area and other things being definitely prosperous for their municipality - on a very short term. This, together with the very complicated situation on the Czech real estate market, causes a lot of sites for new developments to be completely dislocated.

Building authorities do not use all their possibilities. There *do* exist laws saying that people should maintain their property (not only monuments) in good order and make proper use of it. Owners neglecting their property *should* receive a letter of the local authorities and in the end these authorities, being allowed to do so, *should* order repairs themselves and recover the costs by decision of the court. Furthermore, there *does* exist a regulation saying that getting permissions means answering conditions as stated by the civil servants, e.g. colours, materials but also structure of the plaster or percentage of re-used roof tiles. But civil servants in the Czech Republic almost never make use of these paragraphs, perhaps because of a lack of technical skill or because they are afraid to bother somebody by defending the interests of the majority. Of course one of the conditions for the use of these paragraphs is, that the interests of this majority should be clearly formulated. The only way to answer this condition is a good dialogue between all actors (local administration, political forces, experts as well as inhabitants, owners and other people making use of the area) resulting in some agreement concerning the image of the area and the way to preserve it. The better the dialogues, the better the agreement and the better the building authorities and the organisations taking care monuments can specify under which conditions they might allow or even subsidise certain activities.

A lot of these features and problems can also be recognised in other countries, e.g. the Netherlands. Nevertheless they surely outreach in number and result in the Czech Republic. It would be interesting to compare the situation with other former socialist countries, because a lot of the causes seem to be connected with the way of communication practised during the decades before 1989:

Already then the level of technical skill used to be high but different disciplines were, and at universities nowadays still are, strictly separated. Planning and controlling mechanisms

were organised on a top-down basis and for reasons of efficiency only involved a few disciplines. Even nowadays planning and consulting agencies usually have a staff consisting of specialists only on technical matters as traffic, environment, demography etc. Social aspects made and make no integrated part of the planning process.

In short, monuments and especially monumental areas are considered static objects needing technical curing. But in fact they are not. Instead, they are entities functioning in a complex spacial and social structure.

Another field of causes lies in the problematic communication not amongst specialists and politicians themselves, but between them and the other participants. People (owners and users) do not yet trust the authorities and are not able to communicate with experts. They should understand that it is possible to discuss in a cultivated way even when they do not grasp all technical details. Experts are not used to spend time on communication with ordinary people and are not able or willing to explain their arguments in non-professional language. Very naively it is expected that regulations, as formulated and decided on by experts and politicians, will during their implementation without alterations be accepted by the other actors. In short, no attention is paid to participation of the local inhabitants.

In this respect one more remark should be made about the Netherlands. There municipalities, although quite large still the lowest layer of the authorities standing closest to the inhabitants, have a very strong position in the state organisation. Even small towns are able to formulate their own policy on cultural heritage, in communication with the inhabitants. What can be reached when local authorities succeed in following a clear policy to conserve the historical values of their towns, can be showed by the examples of Thorn and Heusden.

To illustrate that also in the Czech Republic local inhabitants do have some feeling for cultural and historic values and that they are capable of dealing with complex issues in a quite sophisticated way, the following two examples should be mentioned:

The lake of Černič is situated between three small villages (65, 40 and 30 inhabitants), for already 50 years being one municipality. It was declared a nature reserve during the thirties. During the forties the owner, the count of Telč, was expropriated and the lake became state-owned. Because at present the size of the lake has decreased from its original 24 ha to only 8 ha, the depth from more than 2 m to about 70 cm, the dam is dangerously damaged and there is no way to exploit a nature reserve nobody is interested in investing money in the maintenance. Only the State Organisation for Nature and Landscape Protection, being responsible for the lake, wanted to create some new lagoons and islands to restore the natural qualities of the reserve, which had gone lost during the last decades.

During the negotiations, initially completely ignoring the local population, not the experts from this professional state institution but these local inhabitants pointed out all connections: that it is nonsense to improve natural qualities when at the other end of the lake the dam will soon collapse; that the rare flora and fauna did not disappear only because of the decreased depth and a few lagunes will not solve the problem because for that it would be necessary to put a stop to erosion or, as happened before the lake was declared reserve, the local peasants should be allowed to empty it every two or three years during winter to dredge it; that another factor causing the disappearance of the species was the increasing pollution from the factory a few kilometres upstream and from the town of Telč; that it was unlogical for this institution to pay attention only to the natural aspects of the lake, which had with its original surface of 24 ha also a high visual value in the landscape and besides that for more than five centuries fulfilled many other functions (water reservoir for the mill, growing fish, recreation for the local population etc.).

The second example concerns the trees along a minor road in another small village. Here, the

local inhabitants initiated the restoration of an almost disappearing avenue. These roads with fruit trees are typical for the region. Many of them date back to the early decades of the

19th century and have been maintained because of their function. Only during the last fifty years of socialistic regime they got rapidly lost. After they got a grant for purchasing the small new trees (they had to explain that in this region, although fruit trees are not one of the priorities of nature protecting institutes, for historical and functional reasons their choice for fruit trees was well-founded) they placed the them themselves. And these inhabitants new exactly which trees to put where and for what reasons (different kind of fruit, micro-climate, highth etc.).

In both cases the understanding the people had for the specific features of their closest surroundings was surprisingly. This understanding, the memory of the local population, certainly depends for a great deal on the social structure of these very small communities. In my opinion especially these features should be considered to make an important part of the cultural heritage of the Czech countryside, which does not consist of just the visual aspects of the landscape.

As a concluding remark I would like to say that in the Czech Republic improvements in the preservation of cultural heritage could be reached mainly through more frequent contacts between all actors, through participation of lower authorities which work at a more integrated level and perhaps through the delegation of responsibility.