

## State of Art – Estonia

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Estonia

The cultural heritage we talk about today is fragile and constantly changing. The way of thinking in the society has changed, it changes through time and in connection with this also values and understandings about it. The protection of cultural values has started from the protection of unique buildings and art pieces and has reached as far as to the protection of town plannings, sceneries, handicraft skills, traditions etc. The realm of cultural values is extending continuously, there is always something new to protect, something that needs to be sustained. This “something” is, as a rule, something that we have borrowed from our ancestors and we wish, want and should give over to our children and grandchildren.

Cultural heritage is part of our identity through which we can create values based on our own traditions in globalised world in order to pass them over to future generations. If we ourselves do not keep up our identity, nobody does it. Therefore any kind of conservation policy and minimising of endangering risks of an object will be a cornerstone of general preservation of cultural heritage. This leads to minimum interference of the protection of cultural heritage.

In this workshop we talk about the endangering risks of cultural values, their assessment and cultural heritage as a source of potential threat. I'll try to do that in my discourse focusing mainly on the examples of my hometown.

On November 8, 2000 in Estonia there were 24726 cultural objects under national protection, among them 5115 architectural objects, 1137 historical objects and 6542 archaeological objects. Besides that there are also 10 areas of national heritage. These are the territories where separately non-protected buildings create an integral environment, where these buildings are part of the whole that has great value and where each building helps to create a valuable general impression. It would be the right place to mention that the old town of Viljandi has been declared as one of the protection areas of this type. The figures mentioned above altogether make up quite a big number considering the size of Estonia and there have been heated discussions about whether these objects have to be protected by the state. And if they still must be protected, why are there so many of them?

It would be easier to understand this if we look back to the history, where does Estonia come from and where it is today.

The safety of mankind is based on traditions. Revolutions and major changes in social relationships have always brought about the loss of security, negligence of traditions, wish to think and act in a new way, urge to carry into life ideas that have not been accepted before. The processes started during the “singing revolution” in 1988 led to the collapse of socialist totalitarian society, and created a need to build a new type of society. This kind of revolutionary change inevitably brings about together with new possibilities also confusion, temporary loss of head and legislative vacuum. The stabilisation of the situation takes years.

Together with the change in social order there are changes in understandings and principles. It is no wonder that people who had lived so far in a poor quality world with limited opportunities wanted to surround themselves - in the situation of suddenly opened alternatives - with smooth, straight-angled good-quality factory products seen on shiny pictures of foreign magazines and Finnish TV. Everything that was new was good. Old things and values, especially when exposed in the form of something less then exclusive lost its position to be valued. It is only during the recent years when handicraft and old values are little more popular again. We have gained back an understanding that the old does not have

to be straight, smooth and shiny. This is a sign that we have grown out of a status of a slave (only slaves destroy their surrounding riches).

Let us deal with the risks that endanger cultural heritage and which are familiar to me in one or other way. I have divided them in eight groups:

### **1. Risks linked with the way of thinking:**

- Retaining of “restrict-and-order” mentality from previous social system in the policy of the protection of national heritage and social thinking. In order to get something done there needs to be someone who asks to do it. There is also dominating the way of thinking that everything that is not prohibited by law is allowed. As a result of this we must protect nationally so many cultural objects because our cultural thinking does not take for granted the necessity to preserve them. Cultural heritage has not fully reached to our consciousness.
- Novelty and not conventionally used democratic way of thinking. Rights are well known to everybody whereas this is not the case with obligations.
- Presentation of replicas (newly built copies) of historical objects as originals
- Vandalism
  - Breaking
  - Arson
  - Graffiti

### **2. Risks caused by surrounding physical environment or its changes:**

- Risks caused by surrounding physical environment
  - Air pollution
    - The rainwater falling on the copper sheet roof of Niguliste Church in Tallinn reacts to copper which results in salting out and stratification on the walls.
  - Sinking of ground water. The Old Town of Tartu has been constructed on log rafts drowned in Emajõe wetland. In connection with the construction of technical supplies and drainage the level of ground water has sank and the log rafts that have been preserved well under water have started to get rotten due to access of air. The result is a decrease in the carrying capacity of foundations and sinking of buildings.
  - Soaking of soil. Toolse Order Castle was erected on the sandstone layer over the sloping clay layer. As groundwater rose the clay was soaked, became slippery and the sandstone layer started to slide. The result is that the ruins fall apart.
- Changes in carrying capacity and other physical qualities of materials
  - Damages by fungi
  - Damages by insects
  - Corrosion
  - Carbonisation
- Damages by storms

### 3. Risks due to usage:

- Risks due to maintenance or non-maintenance:

Unskilled maintenance or non-maintenance causes extensive repair and restoration works which inevitably causes the diminishing of authenticity of an object or its total destruction.

John Ruskin wrote in 1849 in his book “The Seven Lamps of Architecture” that if you permanently take good care of a building it does not need any restoration.

- The most common damages due to non-maintenance are:
  - Damages in wall constructions caused by lack of rain pipes
  - Roof leaks resulting from water channels not regularly cleaned from leaves or other dirt
  - Leakage in old broken-down communications resulting in fungi damage in constructions, soil soaking or washing off and sinking caused by it
  - Condensed water in non-insulated water pipes and damage resulting from it
  - Damage due to roof leaks caused by
    - unremoved moss or leaves on the roof causing an hindrance in water flow
    - amortisation of roof covering material and delay in its repair or replacement
    - direct negligence: roof doors are not in place
    - poor or careless installation of technical supplies
  - Inappropriate arrangement or non-arrangement of rainwater outflow resulting in rainwater flow into the cellar or splashing on the walls
  - Damage due to non-maintenance of trees and bushes, their growing exuberantly or too near to the constructions
  - Heaping up snow against the walls in winter which results in moisture damages when snow melts in spring
  - Closing up ventilation vents in the cellar or floor that cause violation of moisture regime resulting in moisture and fungi damages.
- Risks due to soil heaping or removal
  - In Viljandi Castle Ruins intensive decomposition of masonry open at one side due to moisture coming from the earth and spreading to walls causing cold damages
- Construction/addition of street coverings resulting in old houses being buried under which lead to moisture and fungi damages in wall constructions
- Damages due to overload of constructions
  - Usage of attics for storing old useless things which may cause wooden ceilings to sink under the burden
- Accidents
- Damages due to inadequate functional operation
  - Starting heating in previously unheated houses

#### 4. Risks due to will or wish:

- Wish to restore or recreate history

Memory is subjective and selective. Society remembers that it considers necessary to remember.

- Reconstruction of monuments - symbols of national identity, erected in memory of Estonian Liberation War in 1918-1920 and destroyed by Soviet Occupation Authorities - without considering the changed situation in town construction.

For example, there was a strong willingness to restore a Memorial in honour of Liberation War on the Victory Square in Viljandi despite the fact that instead of previously located park there is a parking lot surrounded by buildings.

#### 5. Risks due to financial means:

- Limited financial opportunities

- Inadequate skills and knowledge of cheap labour

Together with the removal of late plaster layers also valuable ceiling paintings or stucco ornaments are removed

- Usage of construction materials imitating traditional materials but destroying milieu value and architectural unity

- Facing plastic
- Iron sheet roof imitating tiled roof
- Cement stone instead of ceramic stone
- Usage of plastic windows instead of wooden ones

- Saving up money on the expense of research and design work

- Gap between wishes, wills and realistic possibilities.

Our middle-aged and elderly people know that they can never live like people in the western world, the youth believe to have that kind of life, but are sometimes impatient. What cannot be achieved legally, is taken by force. Hence the increase in crime.

- Falling out of usage. Due to social and economical changes buildings are not used any more, are neglected and decaying.

- Usage of modern unfamiliar building materials instead of traditional ones.

The usage of traditional construction materials and methods ensure harmony with man and his surrounding. It is our consciousness that considers traditional materials out of date. Repair works done with the same materials guarantee that material is ageing in the same way as surrounding and therefore there will be no conflict.

- Power of money

The situation where there is a lot of money and no common sense is considerably worse than the situation when there is little money. There have been times when relative poverty was the greatest factor of preserving cultural heritage. There would be no Gothic Old Town in Tallinn if it had not withdrawn into a status of a provincial town where money circulation was relatively limited.

## 6. Risks caused by poor knowledge, lack of information or skills

- Limited amount or lack of knowledge and skills
  - Keeping doors open into cold rooms (e.g. church doors) during first warm days in spring which cause condensing of water in cold construction parts and result in moisture and fungi damage.
  - Refusal to consider physical match of different materials
    - Joining copper pipes with iron ones. The result is electrolytic reaction that gradually destroys iron.
- Wrong decisions based on insufficient or nearly non-existent investigations
- Risks due to reckless or unplanned action
  - Opening of masonry without consecutive immediate conservation
- Usage of inappropriate solutions in an environment
  - Extensions and re-constructions not matching with time and architecture
    - Re-constructions due to change in requirements of life standard
      - Unsuitable roof windows in street areas
      - New windows and doors
    - Removal of chimneys from the facade view of historical buildings
  - Usage of building material inappropriate in relation to time and architecture
    - Covering roofs of old buildings with iron-sheet profile
    - Replacement of opening fillings of buildings with ones with inadequate proportion, division, colour or inappropriate material
      - Replacement of dark-framed Functionalist window rows with white plastic windows
- Rejection to consider general specific features of a region or location
  - Non-consideration of scale and proportions of existing historical environment in the construction of new buildings
  - Unskilful arrangement of changed fire service and evacuation requirements
  - Cultural heritage not adequately valued
    - While living side by side near cultural heritage we might not perceive that it is unique because it seems so familiar to us, it is part of everyday life. There needs to be an outsider to admire and value it.
- Misunderstandings resulting from usage of terminology

By using the same expressions in case of terminological confusion it may happen that we talk about different things. For example, during soviet time the terms “conservation” and “restoration” were synonyms.

## 7. Risks due to restoration, conservation and construction

- Risks due to usage of construction materials
  - Usage of materials not tested yet in temporal context. We do not know how the material acts in 10, 30 or 100 year’s time.
  - Poor quality of construction materials

- Choice of building materials induced by smart action or ignorance of advertising agents.
  - Usage of wrong type of colour
  - Usage of cement mortar
    - Together with weaker construction materials
    - In a situation where the construction needs to breathe
    - In a situation with a risk of salting out
  - Usage of inadequate construction techniques and technological processes
    - Unskilful usage of sand-spray or pressure wash resulting in violation of microstructure of outer surface, opening of pores for intensive access of moisture and dirt
    - Usage of building materials with inappropriate components
      - Usage of sand with unsuitable grain in lime mortar caused falling apart of the conserved wall in Viljandi Castle Ruins
  - Non-consideration of climatic peculiarities in the usage of construction materials, lime mortar and lime paint. It is possible to complete outside construction works with lime mortar only in late spring and summer. Due to cold and damp weather in autumn and winter there will be no carbonisation.
  - Damage due to lack of time
    - Placement of too thick layer of lime mortar at a time that does not allow drying and composition of calcium carbonate.
- Replacement of windows and other opening fillings with hermetic ones without changing ventilation systems.
- Usage of inappropriate construction that does not take into consideration all possible operation conditions.

## **8. Risks due to poor regulation of legislation or supervision:**

- Relative weakness in control system of observation of laws
  - Lack of personnel in the Board of National Heritage. There is only one inspector in every county in Estonia at the moment. It must also be pointed out here that besides legislative obligations – keeping register and organising supervision of cultural objects – the Board of National Heritage deals with a number of other tasks related to cultural heritage as there is nobody in charge of that.
  - Construction supervision in local authorities entitled by law to organise construction supervision is sometimes unable to carry out this task and has a will to control the processes.
  - Not common usage, due to inexperience or ignorance, of setting restrictions for detailed plans concerning the use of private property and rules in the use of real estate that are passed by National Planning and Building Law.
- Destruction of historical real estate units as Law on Land Reform foresees to set a separate lot for each privatised building. Especially drastic is the situation in the historical old town where everything has gone through a logic step-by-step development.

To sum up all aspects dealt with above I consider the most essential tasks of retaining cultural heritage in the following:

- To see and make visible the cultural values in the surrounding environment, to see them in every historical stage we have gone through
- To preserve cultural values in their natural existence/condition and environment protecting them from possible dangers and minimising risks
- To preserve cultural values for future generations in best possible authentic form
- To choose the best method and be responsible for achieving everything mentioned above, to teach seeing cultural heritage, understanding it, acknowledging its value and in a way that is acceptable for everybody starting from the owner and administrator and ending with general public.

In the world where everything perishes anyway, it is the better the more we can save for future generations. Let us do it together. Let us do it in the best possible way.