

COMPLEX PRESERVATION AND PRESENT-DAY USE OF HISTORICAL ARCHITECTURAL ENSEMBLES IN ESTONIA

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The Estonian SSR is one of the westernmost republics in the Soviet Union, situated on the east coast of the Baltic Sea. Due to its location in the heart of the North, all European architectural trends from the 13th-century Romanesque up to the 20th-century postmodernism have left their traces on the Estonian architecture. On the other hand, the Estonian peasant architecture is extremely individual. This is vividly expressed by the log-walled thatch-roofed building, a unique combination of a dwelling and a threshing barn, designed both for living and working up bread corn.

The characteristic abundance of woods in the Estonian area has had a great effect upon our national architecture and has made timber the main building material.

Stone structures bound with lime mortar appeared in Estonia as late as in the Middle Ages, in the 13th century, and that is why our oldest structures date back to that time.

One of the main aims in the protection and preservation of architectural monuments is to perpetuate the development of the national architecture by preserving its most authentic samples, beginning with the oldest survived buildings with different uses and ending up with the contemporary ones.

The aims of the protection of architectural monuments have undergone a considerable change—instead of single buildings now building complexes, complete architectural ensembles are to be preserved.

As historical architectural ensembles in Estonia the following objects are listed:

(1) Ethnographic farmsteads where the outward appearance of buildings is characterized by log walls and by high reed or thatch roofs which keep the buildings warm in winter and cool in summer. Besides the dwelling there is a cowshed, a granary, barns for food, cloth and clothing in the Estonian farmstead yard and at a small distance a smithy and a bath-house. Through ages the bath-house has been one of the chief structures in the farmyard—there body was washed and treated in hot steam, birth was given to a child and the later part of one's life was spent.

In different regions of Estonia old farm buildings are listed and preserved in their original location. Still, on the outskirts of the Estonian capital Tallinn a museum of peasant architecture—the Estonian State Open-Air Museum—has been founded. There typical specimens of peasant architecture from all ethnographic regions of the republic are exhibited.

The oldest farm buildings date from the 18th century and their complex restoring and preserving is mostly based on their exhibitional functions.

(2) Major historical centres of agricultural production—manors

The buildings of the manors date mainly from the baroque, classicism and historicism periods, presenting a grand architectural scene in the rural setting.

The manor ensembles comprising twenty to thirty and more buildings are nowadays practically all in use as agricultural centres, schoolhouses, cultural centres, etc.

Historical manor complexes are found all over the republic and 250 of them are listed.

The architecture of manor buildings and their surroundings designed in style—parks, walks, bodies of water—are an interesting sight besides practical use of the buildings.

(3) Villages as ethnographic and historical architectural ensembles

As architectural ensembles five villages are listed, each under a different protection regime.

Four of the villages are permanently inhabited, one fishing village functions as a museum.

Among them the village of Koguva, situated on the Island of Muhu and founded in 1532 by the peasant elder Hansken, has the oldest buildings.

Another singular village is Käsmu on the north coast of Estonia, in the Lahemaa National Park. Its buildings are not so old as those of Koguva but they retain well the local colouring of the coastal village. Käsmu has been well known as a training centre of seafarers and as the so-called ship captains' village since the previous century.

Building activities in the ethnographic villages with permanent population are also subjected to special control, the aim of which is to preserve and restore the architectural property.

(4) Cores of provincial towns

As big architectural ensembles our district centres have deserved special attention.

By decree of the government of the republic in 10 provincial towns a protection zone was established. Its size amounts to 2.5-4.5 per cent of the total area of the towns.

Most of the towns were granted city rights in the 13th century, one of them in 1784, this being the oldest town in Estonia built after a design.

The local natural conditions had a considerable effect on the establishment of the historical provincial centres—three of them were affected by a river, two by a lake and two by the sea. A 13th-century fortified stronghold serves as the main reason for the rise of eight of the towns.

In their planning, structure of buildings and architecture the provincial towns differ considerably, and one of the aims of their regeneration is to preserve their specific individuality. This means that the buildings significant from the point of view of the history of architecture should be restored and various other buildings which surround them and create the local colouring should be selectively preserved and renovated.

(5) The historical core of the republic's capital Tallinn

The Arab geographer Idrisi marked Tallinn as a big fort on his world map as early as 1154.

The protection zone of the Old Town was established in 1966 and it comprises the whole Old Town, the fortifications surrounding it—including the medieval town wall with defence towers—and more recent earthworks with bastions and a moat. The total area of the protection zone covers 125 ha.

The prevailing architectural style in the old part of Tallinn is the Gothic and the originally preserved structure of the town, most of its medieval buildings and fortifications are of great value.

As the republic's administrative and cultural centre the Old Town of Tallinn still retains its historical content. Various buildings and structures in its historical architectural ensembles reflect the development of the national culture of living and the history of science and technology.

Complex preservation and restoration of historical architectural ensembles is an extremely complicated task depending on a number of factors. Without doubt, this is one of the most complicated tasks that faces the restorers in their work. And even in case of permanent and ceaseless work the results worthy of mentioning will be seen only after decades. This particularly concerns the historical towns where the implementation of aims is the most complicated.

The following methodological sequence of work has been established in the field of preservation and restoration of architectural monuments:

(1) Thorough study of the object through archival and field investigation and ascertainment of the existing situation (photography, photogrammetry, surveying) which is the basis for further work.

(2) Joint working out of the object's restoration and functional use concepts and their analysis in the scientific council.

(3) Drafting of the object's preliminary design and its revision by the object's possessor and by the Estonian Inspectorate for Protection of Architectural Monuments.

(4) Drafting of the object's working design; in course of this work the requirements for sanitary engineering and fireproofness are specified.

Most of the research and design work of historical architectural ensembles is carried out by a special institute of cultural monuments, which unites the best experts in this field in the republic. The tasks set up in the projects are implemented by a special organization—the Estonian Restoration Board—which has subsidiary offices in every Estonian historical town.

The protection zone of a historical town or of a smaller area which is covered with buildings constitutes but a small part of a big whole. This necessitates the solution of various other special problems accompanying the restoration, such as traffic, transportation and utility lines (heating, water supply, sewerage, electricity and telephone communication).

All these technical matters are solved by the republic's chief design organization—the State Design Institute "Eesti Projekt" by regarding in the detail plan of a historical town quarter or an architectural ensemble the special requirements and aims set for the protection of architectural monuments.

These special requirements in the concept of the complex preservation of historical architecture apply to all the buildings of the ensemble and to everything in its immediate vicinity.

Various ancillary buildings which belong to the main structure and also the greenery, bodies of water, roads, streets

and even the surrounding landscape give a new and wider content to the protection of architectural monuments.

The man today and in the future, the nation for whom we preserve the property of the past is going to need ever more and still firmer confirmation for cultivation of affection for his home which unites and is always calling him back. The national culture of every nation is inseparable from the world culture.

And this is the moral aspect of the preservation of historical architecture, an aim extremely difficult but still possible to achieve.

The preservation of architectural monuments, especially their preservation as big ensembles, is closely connected with their present-day use. Buildings are designed for use and through their further use we preserve the most valuable part of the architecture. The more than a century-old restoring practice in Estonia has proved that preservation and restoration of monuments begins with finding a new proper use for the buildings which have become useless. At the same time, the aims to preserve and restore the monuments' architectural and historical value must always be primary.

This is even more true of the regeneration of architectural ensembles. There a new and lasting life has to be given to a bigger built-up area. Complex protection of the area includes preservation and restoration of the ensemble's historical structure, of its streets' and plots' borders and of various other erections.

An historical architectural ensemble should be treated in its development and with the architectural changes due to it.

An historical architectural ensemble which comprises dozens sometimes even hundreds of buildings different in size purpose and materials, mostly can't exist solely as a sight. This is luxury that can be afforded in present-day practical life only by way of exception when dealing with extraordinary architectural property.

And so, in order to extensively preserve historical buildings nothing remains to be done but to find possibilities for their future use, to look for ways for adapting present-day life to the old architectural form.

Each historical architectural ensemble chosen for preservation comprises buildings of different import and architectural and historical value. This in its turn necessitates carrying out construction activities of different kind, maximum restoring and putting up new buildings included.

In the principles of regeneration of ancient towns and restoration of buildings the above statements have been taken into account. The principles themselves are as follows:

- find for the Old Town a function which is necessary for the whole town and raise the living and working conditions in the Old Town to contemporary level
- preserve the original structure of the Old Town and its architectural property
- give special attention to complex restoration of architectural ensembles and to exposure of cultural property
- adapt and subordinate the new architecture to the priority of the historical one

• As follows from this, complex regeneration of the Old Town

does not mean demolition of the existing architecture and substitution a new one for it, but preservation of the former and historically valuable architecture and its adaptation to new present-day needs.

Pursuing these aims in Tallinn's old part the work has been carried on almost for two decades, in other Estonian historical towns almost for one decade. For the work Tallinn was awarded the so-called European gold medal and Kingissepa was awarded the State Prize of the Estonian SSR for its Old Town.

The complex regeneration of Estonian historical towns is following the course approved by practice. The main stress is laid on the improvement of conditions in the town and on the increase in the townsfolk's welfare. The tasks arising from tourism and recreation for tourists are taken into account, but those are not primary.

The aim of our work is not to create a town-museum, but to turn historical town quarters into a needed and nice living and working place for the dwellers.

Various positive examples can be given on such activities in Tallinn:

- the ancient castle on Toompea has been for ages and is still the site of the republic's government
- the Town Hall belongs now, too, to the municipality and is the site for festive receptions and for awarding the most merited citizens
- in the defence towers of the town wall museums and cafés have been opened; the town wall itself is an historical sight
- the bastions and the moat surrounding the Old Town have been turned into a pleasant green area for the whole town
- in the historical buildings of the Old Town various leading institutions of the republic have their offices, even such establishments as the Puppet Theatre, the Youth Theatre, the Old Town Studio, the Niguliste Concert-hall, the archaeology centre, the children's art centre, etc.

Similar examples can be given on other Estonian historical towns where ancient buildings successfully serve present-day needs. In Kingissepa, for instance, in the last decade more than two dozen establishments or offices removed into historical buildings which were adapted for them. Let's count some of them: the wedding house, the children's music school, the library, the bookshop, the club for game hunters, the house of heavy athletics, the café in the windmill, the souvenir shop, the hair-dresser's parlour, the old curiosity shop, etc.

Each of the establishments has a different space programme and technology. In spite of this, the historical buildings retain their architectural value when adapted to the new needs and harmonize with their new function. Besides the architecture of every single building, the historical local colouring of the Old Town, its individuality and peculiarity are preserved.

So the age-old ancient architecture is being revived nowadays and acquires a new meaning and the prominent landmarks in our national culture will remain.

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The Estonian SSR is one of the westernmost republics in the Soviet Union, situated on the east coast of the Baltic Sea. Due to its location in the heart of the North, all European architectural trends since the 13th century have left traces in Estonia.

As historical architectural ensembles ethnographic farmsteads, manor centres, villages, cores of provincial towns and the centre of Tallinn, the capital of the republic are listed in Estonia. Within the borders of the ensembles protection zones subjected to a special regime have been enacted, there complex preservation and restoration of historical architecture is foreseen.

The methodological sequence of work in this field is as follows:

- (1) Thorough study of the object through archival and field investigation
- (2) Working out of the concept for the object's reconstruction and functional use.
- (3) Drafting of the object's preliminary design and its revision by the authorities
- (4) Drafting of the object's working design

The basic work in the field of investigation and design of historical architecture is performed by the State Institute of Cultural Monuments and designs are put into practice by a special restoration organization—the Estonian Restoration Board.

The man today and in the future, the people for whom we preserve the values of the past need ever more convincing assurance in order to cultivate affection for the native country, which unites them and calls back home. Here arises also the ethical aspect for preservation of historical architecture.

Preservation of historical architecture as an ensemble is closely linked to monuments' proper present-day use. Buildings are designed for practical use and by their continued use we preserve the most valuable part of our architecture.

An architectural ensemble should be treated in its development and with the architectural changes due to it.

Taking into account the above statements, let us present the main principles on regeneration of ancient towns and on reconstruction of buildings:

- find for the Old Town a function which is necessary for the whole town
- preserve the original structure of the Old Town and its architectural property
- give special attention to complex restoration of architectural ensembles and to exposure of cultural property
- adapt and subordinate the new architecture to the priority of the historical one

In more than ten years of practical work the regeneration of Estonian historical towns has taken a definite direction. Main stress is laid on increasing the welfare of the townspeople.

Through these extensive activities the age-old ancient architecture is being revived nowadays, it acquires a new meaning and the prominent landmarks in our natural culture will remain.