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THE PRESENT-DAY VALUE OF EUROPE'S HERITAGE OF HISTORIC MONUMENTS AND SITES

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At the time when the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe, prompted by the Conference of Ministers of Culture, held in Brussels in November 1969, is setting up an intergovernmental committee with the aim of bringing about a common European policy for the preservation of member countries' heritage of historic monuments and sites, two fundamental questions have to be faced by those responsible for the conception and implementation of that policy:

- what is the value of that heritage to the people of today?
- what resources do we have available and what resources need to be created in order to preserve it?

The purpose of this paper is to suggest a few topics on which the members of the Intergovernmental Committee may wish to reflect. Before embarking on joint action, it is important to agree on the aims to be pursued, on the value of the desired objective and on the broad lines of the method it is proposed to employ.

I. THE PRESENT-DAY VALUE TO MAN OF HIS HERITAGE OF MONUMENTS AND SITES

The constant and increasingly rapid disruption of our traditional surroundings, indeed the utter destruction with which they are threatened, have made people more aware than ever before of their irreplaceable value. In this respect, it is highly instructive to confront two contradictory aspects of our age: on the one hand, the tremendous need for both spiritual and material renewal which is efficiently served by the lightning advance of science and technology; on the other, the growing and necessary awareness of the past which, in a thousand years of interaction between man on the one side and his surroundings and everyday objects on the other, has given the environment a scale, a variety and a perfection rarely attained by contemporary creations.

1. Disruption of the traditional setting for individual and community life

The questioning of our conventional reasons for living and the birth before our very eyes of a mushrooming new civilisation which sometimes shakes at their very foundations

values previously taken for granted, was bound to affect the physical setting of our lives, that "environment" which, more than any other of man's creations, is the mirror of his way of living and thinking.

The inevitable and almost necessary disorder which accompanies the fundamental revolution which mankind, conscious for the first time of its unity and co-responsibility for all its members, is accomplishing in this century, finds expression not least in a disordered environment. The absence of equilibrium in man's individual and social life is reflected in an unbalanced environment. The violence of individual and social conflicts, the lack of proportion in power relationships, the hankering after immediate enjoyment and the constant quest for consumer goods without regard for the balance of nature or the natural environment are reflected in the casualness, the senseless disorder with which land and space are used and in the pursuit of contradictory objectives, which town and country planning has not thus far been able to overcome. It is in this context of upheaval that thought must be given to the value of the legacy of the past and it is in this context that we must decide on its future.

2. A new awareness of the values of the past

What, for the people of today, is the significance of an old town, a village which has retained its traditional rural atmosphere, a period house? This question can only be answered on two conditions.

The past as an essential part of an advanced civilisation

The first of these conditions is not to think in terms of antagonism between past and present. To ponder on the significance of the past for the man of today is not to deny the importance and irreversibility of the present. It is not to seek escape from the problems of the present but rather a fundamental act of our civilisation to analyse and grasp the significance and value of past ages and their legacy. Only a civilised man is fully aware of the value for himself of the passage of time. This awareness leads him to attach to the past a special significance which is not necessarily the same as it had at the time, but is a kind of recreation of the past in terms of present values, which gives survivals of the past a real meaning in the present.

Diversity: a fundamental human need

The second condition is recognition of the growing diversity of human needs in proportion to rising cultural standards, especially in the environmental and housing spheres. Nothing is as apt as culture to develop the various aspects of the individual's personality, by making him fully aware of the meaning of his own existence and providing him with the means of self-fulfilment. And yet, paradoxically, at a time when the individual's rights are acknowledged as never before, the present-day development of life and society exerts increasingly restrictive pressure on him. In terms of housing conditions and environment, this pressure takes the form of mass housing and uniform, tentacular urban development. Obviously, both these offend against human values and man's search for an environment commensurate with his innermost needs, with his means and his sensibility is profoundly conditioned by them.

The traditional town, particularly the early 19th century town, with its infinite variety in layout and housing conditions was the very opposite of the planner's monotonous new towns and housing estates, whose human shortcomings are only too well-known. There is no comparison between the brutal inhumanity of Sarcelles and the graceful charm of Bruges.

The constant link between the development of the town and the development of society has been broken. The traditional urban pattern has collapsed under the strain of new or altered functions and the new town has yet to offer any attractive solution to the people who have to live in it. Of course it is true that not everyone is equally sensitive vis-à-vis his environment. What is found brutal and aggressive in the extreme by some is hardly noticed by others; it is to the former that we must give our attention, since for them the setting in which they live is crucial to their equilibrium and personal development.

3. Three attitudes towards the legacy of the past

Provided these two conditions are observed, the question: What is the present-day value of the traditional environment? can be answered with requisite subtlety. Our attitude towards the legacy of the past and our heritage of monuments and sites will follow from that answer.

In the reactions of our contemporaries, three major tendencies may be discerned :

The search for a "refuge"

For some, the architecture and town planning of past ages is a refuge. They are affronted by many aspects of contemporary civilisation, environmental factors often being in the forefront. For them new towns and modern buildings are acceptable or tolerable as work places but not for living in. For them the planners' and architects' responses to the new and enormous needs resulting from man's measureless multiplication and increasingly frantic concentration culminates in complete failure to create a setting capable of fulfilling man's innermost needs.

The attempt to combine the old and the new in a balanced and harmonious whole

For others, past and present are mutually complementary or at least should complement each other, not merely in the sense of existing side by side but in an integrated combination of the two. They see old and new urban complexes, period and modern buildings not as clashing with each other but as basically complementary to each other. In their view, a quality environment in countries with a rich architectural heritage implies organising functions, volumes and spaces in such a way as to combine the old and the new in a balanced and harmonious whole. Surviving traces of bygone ages are not just relics but functional elements in a live environment, just as new buildings are. Their value is thus not only cultural, but utilitarian and social as well.

This attitude undoubtedly represents one of the fullest and most original forms of our civilisation, more receptive than any other to the legacy of the past.

Conservation of "relics"

For the third group, only modern town planning and architecture are capable of satisfying the enormous and often new needs of contemporary man. If the past is of any interest

at all, it is as a historical relic, lifeless but preserved. It is as a "monument", a memorial to the dead past. To be sure, the violent reactions against traditional environments so typical of some of the founding fathers of contemporary town planning and architecture did not last long. There is no more talk of replacing Paris by 4 towers (Le Corbusier's "Citroën" project). Moreover, the obvious failure in human terms of some of the revolutionary designs they inspired has tempered some violently negative attitudes toward the legacy of the past.

4. Providing everyone with an environment conducive to full development of his personality

The fundamental conclusion that emerges from this brief analysis is that the environment must be varied at both overall and individual level. Any civilised society worthy of the name has a duty to its members to provide them with a setting in which their lives can come to full flower, for this is a fundamental condition for happiness.

The age of theorising on a grand scale is past and any action in the environmental field, and more especially in the areas of architecture and town planning, must be based on thorough investigation of man's individual and collective physical and mental needs, on psychological analysis of the individual and society, on realisation of his conscious and subconscious needs in relation to the setting in which he lives.

A brief survey of contemporary attitudes to survivals of the past is sufficient to show that a great many people frequently feel the need for the physical presence of the past. It is necessary to their equilibrium, their mental security, the development of their personalities. Whatever the underlying reasons for these needs and whatever judgements may be passed on them, a civilised society worthy of the name has a duty to satisfy them if it has the means to do so.

II. TOWARDS A NEW PRESERVATION POLICY

1. Conservation as an aspect of comprehensive action to preserve the environment

Preservation policy must concentrate not only on preserving aesthetic and cultural values, but especially the essential social value which a building's presence represents in the rich and varied environment which man needs.

Conservation, rehabilitation and adaptation of ancient buildings and districts to the requirements of present-day living and their incorporation as useful elements in the community's functional patterns is a fundamental aspect of active maintenance of the environment.

Indeed, it is the only way of varying supply to meet varying needs - the expression of the differences which fortunately exist between people. Seen from this angle, the problem assumes the same political and social importance as is usually accorded to housing, that is to say an importance of the first order in terms of modern nations' governmental programmes.

2. The failure of "traditional" protection

For many decades, all the European States have possessed the legal and administrative means to protect their monumental heritage. Yet few of them manage to provide effective conservation. At first glance there would appear to be two reasons for this failure:

The notion of the heritage requiring preservation has widened

The first reason is that the very notion of our monumental heritage has evolved. Whereas until recently it covered only "monuments", i.e. large, often prestigious buildings, widening of the concept to include urban and rural "minor architecture" and the environment, not only as the only setting ensuring major monuments of rehabilitation, but above all

for the benefit of people who need an environment in which the past is really present, has increased the difficulties of preservation out of all proportion to those of traditional protection. The latter was primarily concerned with piecemeal operations, the new approach covers whole areas or even villages or towns - sometimes even groups of towns.

Misguided re-development

The second reason for the failure is the increasing concentration of human activities and of people in densely-populated towns and the need, usually starting from an old town, to ensure the functioning of an urban society whose size is much greater and whose needs are more varied than those out of which the original town grew.

Incomplete appreciation of these needs and ignorance of their development often lead to a succession of sometimes incoherent development projects which eventually prove disastrous in terms of both conservation and creation of a quality environment. The scale of the technical and financial resources available, together with concern for efficiency and economic operation have resulted in piecemeal projects being replaced by huge "redevelopment" schemes, in the course of which the wheat is usually destroyed along with the tares. So many of Europe's beautiful cities have been scarred or overwhelmed in this way that there is no point in quoting examples.

3. The new approach: preservation as an integral part of management of the environment

This sombre portrait of the present situation demonstrates a fact which was too often overlooked until recently: preservation of the past must be a part of a general approach to re-development, i.e. to town and even town-and-country planning.

The interdependence of all urban and regional functions, the need to establish priorities in physical planning are of crucial importance to preservation of the past, since survivals of the past are everywhere around us.

As long as preservation was concerned with cathedrals, palaces and castles, the limited measures provided for in most countries' legislation were sufficient and the problem was mainly one of safeguarding so-called cultural values. The impact of those measures on the development of town and country planning policy has been virtually nil. It is quite a different matter when the future of whole districts or even towns is at stake or when large regions have to be preserved. The very scale of such operations makes them a fundamental part of any urban or regional planning scheme.

Because of the turn events have taken, therefore, and because of the evolution of ideas, if the legacy of the past is to be preserved in old towns and villages, the problems of preservation must be dealt with in the context of general and specific management of the environment.

III. CONCLUSION

This is the philosophy that has informed the Council of Europe's activities to date and which provides the foundation for the programme of intergovernmental activities to be drawn up and carried out by its Committee on Monuments and Sites.

The Committee's aim is to promote a European policy of:

- integrating measures to preserve and rehabilitate monuments and sites with physical planning schemes in order to develop their cultural, economic and social function. This aim will call for work in three spheres: legal, administrative and technical;
- educating and informing public opinion: the Committee is to plan a campaign, in which 1975 will be a "European Year" aimed at awakening the public to the importance of historic buildings and sites in man's existence.