

A HUNDRED YEARS OF SWEDISH ARCHITECTURAL RE-

Depending on how we define it, we can say that architectural research in Sweden began about 100 years ago when architects started becoming involved professionally in swift and far-reaching change in society. Trying to describe new ways of living, they noticed that they lacked the knowledge required to solve the new problems such as town planning and dwelling design. During the first four decades of the last century, many practising architects were involved in debates and investigations of these issues.

In 1942 the Swedish government set up a committee, which, ten years later, was changed into a more permanent Board of Building Research. This was funded by a tax paid by building companies, but not by architects. One consequence of this was, I believe, that practising architects became less involved in research and ceased to take responsibility for their own knowledge development. They handed this responsibility over to the government.

From the beginning of the sixties and into the

mid-eighties research funding increased. The architecture schools became responsible for developing and carrying out architectural research, a lot of new professorships were founded at the schools and some young architects went over into research as a full time career.

The professors given this new responsibility were mostly practitioners with very little experience of research. A consequence was that when they started their new task they imitated what they considered to be normal research. Their aim was to find or develop a theoretical base in architecture rather than to discover what kind of knowledge architects needed. Methods became more important than the subjects of their investigations. You could say that knowledge development in the field of architecture and planning was “academicised” to an unreasonable extent.

Unfortunately, research in the schools was not only separated from the practising architects but also from the students in the schools. Of course this was not the intention. Research is supposed to be closely connec-

ted to teaching, but that was not the tradition in architecture education and perhaps it does not suit it.

The most important consequence of this development was, however, that researching architects, an increasingly large group, and designing architects began to work apart from each other and, even worse, without respect for each other. The practitioners claimed that the reports from the schools were of no use for them, and in fact these reports were seldom intended to solve problems in the designing architects' daily work.

In the mid-eighties the special tax was cancelled and building research was financed directly from the national budget. Resources were gradually reduced and, for example, the building companies, now free from the special tax, started private foundations for research within their field of interest, SBUF. In an attempt to improve the situation somewhat and to identify the problems, our five architecture organisations founded a similar organisation in 1986, the Architects Foundation of Research, Arkus. The foundation's aim was to develop practical knowledge and to build a link between practitioners and researchers. Basic financial support was provided on a voluntary basis from some architect offices. The Board of Building Research also supported the idea and contributed financially.

Today, 15 years later, Swedish research policy places even more emphasis on academic research and has

given up responsibility for knowledge development in professions governed by the market. There is no longer a special board of building research and such questions are now buried within a great Council of Environmental Science, which means that more practically motivated studies can expect little support from the state in the future. This is a situation which ought to lead to reflection about a new strategy for knowledge development.

Unfortunately, expectations for fruitful initiatives are not high. The distance between the practitioners and the researchers is still wide, and attitudes are petrified. Architecture research is very disparate and lacks a distinct focus. Many practitioners, even (those once ?) famous, deny that knowledge development of the profession is their business. We do not discuss our two main questions: "What is good architecture?" and "How do we produce good architecture?"

However, there are also grounds for optimism: Young practitioners are showing a new interest in reading, investigating and research. The program of the new united organisation "Sveriges Arkitekter" points out the need for knowledge development. Researchers are taking a new interest in the special kind of knowledge that architects develop, use and need. We can also hope that the discussions at this symposium will suggest research aims around which all architects can gather.

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