

# Urban Rehabilitation

by Ingrid Appelbom Karsten

» Conservation of Buildings and Urban Areas «  
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THE PRESERVATION OF A MONUMENT – not only an artistic monument – but *a monument of history as an urban area*, is a principle which has been gaining ground in Europe, but has not always been that self-evident. In the former Eastern European countries and especially in Poland it has a rather long tradition and Poland is also a country which more than other European countries has experienced times when the physical surroundings and the *monument of culture*, that is the monument of history as an urban area, really meant something.

As in France, it was also the case in the former Eastern European countries where the state always played an important part as a builder, in Poland the state after World War II and during the communist period put a lot of money in to reconstruct and restore the old historical city centres which suffered damage during the war; not only Warsaw, but also Gdansk, Wroclaw and later also other towns which were of interest for the state to take care of.

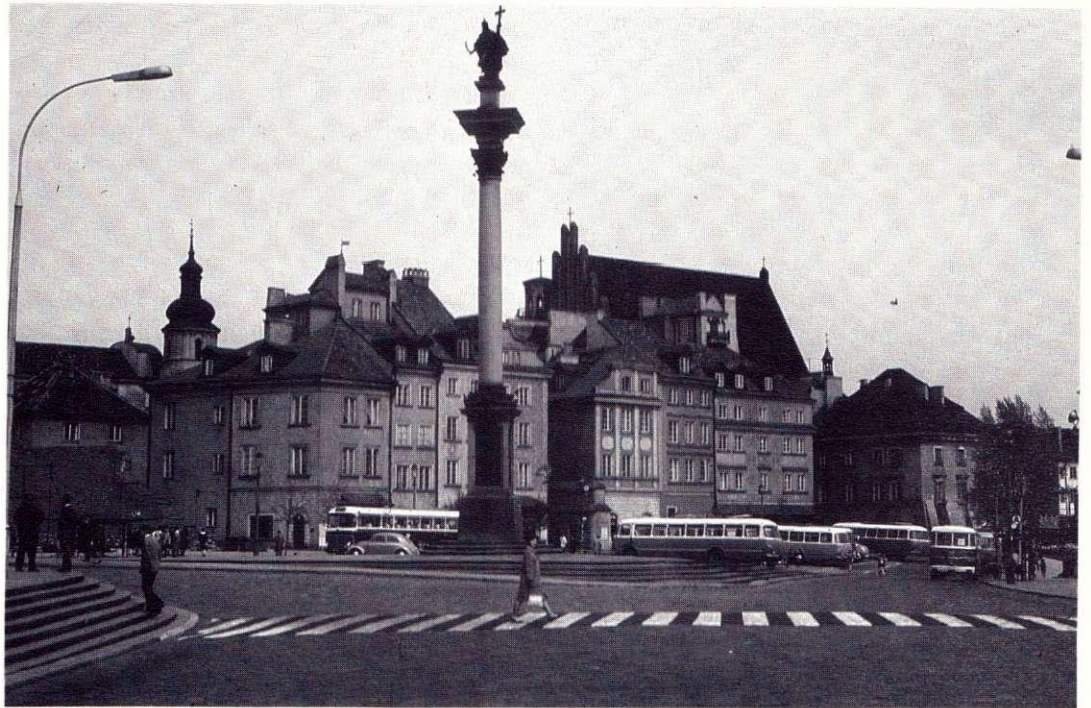
Also in other countries the state chose the most valuable town structure for so-called declared town historic reserves. Special instructions were given which excluded them from the rest of the town development. The state in the former Eastern European countries also played an important role concerning theories and methods, and worked out building projects. Methodology of planning for historic preservation in the field of inventory approach, such as classification of buildings according to architectural and historic importance, methodology of cityscape valuation and other types of extensive studies, was worked out to strengthen *the*

*monument of culture*, while very little prestige was placed on so-called ordinary housing estates. These urban estates were not declared as monuments of culture.

Cultural aspects of life were given high priority, while the real economic factors and criteria were missing, as architect and planner *Miroslav Baše* from Prague told us. He usually worked in the State enterprise called SURPMO or the State Institute for Restoration of Historic Towns and Monuments in the former Czechoslovakia, where he dealt with the regeneration of Prague Historic Reserve which still occupies 880 acres and is declared to be one of the largest historic ensembles of that kind in Europe.

*Today* with a totally new political and economical system in the former Eastern European countries there are new sets of conflicts and new sets of questions and thereby new sets of changes of approach. New political and economical conditions in Europe as a whole will also have an affect on the existing towns and villages; when the national state will loose its hold and regions will become more of the norm, some of them will play a more active role and the market forces as well.

The communist system was centralized; it made many people passive, *planner and architect Agnes Nagy* from Budapest, said, and as everything belonged to everybody, the result was that *nobody was responsible for the process of renewal*. There was no tradition for people to take part in the more democratic practice and planning process, either. Also the land-use plan, based on functional and morphological analysis, is too passive and has a very limited impact on urban dynamic change today. "Local authorities are not equipped with the instruments which allow them to carry out revitalization



Landmarks of a special historic value are focussed upon in Poland as well as in other countries in the East of Europe. Stare Miasto in i Warsaw with the Sigismund Column has a strong symbolic expression.

Photo: Ingrid Appelbom Karsten

policy in a market-driven environment”, professor *Zbigniew Zuziak from Poland, former town-architect of Krakow* told us. Today there are questions related to fundamental issues, as well, like the ownership of the property rights.

A rather interesting example of this more democratic planning system was made by the Danish *architect Per Gotfredsen* who started to define the town of Helsingør in Denmark where he comes from. Helsingør does not consist of historical buildings only, he said, but is a living organism and a place where things are going on where people of Helsingør work together with the municipality to prepare plans and in that way improve the town.

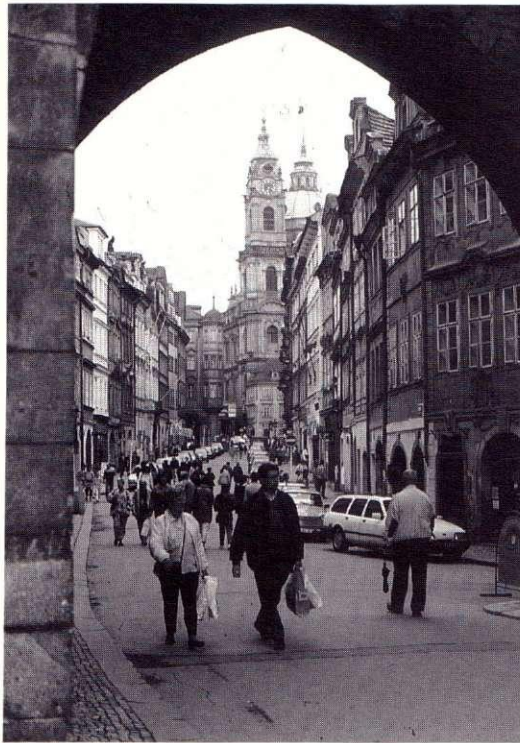
A new financial system in the former Eastern European countries must be worked out as the former source has dried up. Public-private-partnership is non-existent, they say. The economic factors have a high priority and count for much more today than cultural aspects do. The threat of free economy and new market forces are close. “Money speaks”. Can they endanger

the historic sites and monuments, when not controlled by proper regulations?

Contributions made by the private sector are increasing, but the speed of its development under the unfinished legislation does not help, as Mr Baše said. The state enterprise, SURPMO has made no concession to the changes which have taken place, and Baše like many others, now runs a private firm. He is dealing with the contemporary problems in both small and large protected Czech and Slovak towns, in such areas as new urban plans, regulations and the new approach to the architecture from our days. What is lacking is money.

Agnes Nagy, like Zuziak and Baše also focussed on the new independent society, independent from state controls, that is how to control the social mechanisms and how to control the pure market forces.

Zuziak was also very concerned with what he defined as *the identity of culture space*, which is a mixture of different notions, such as physical space, social space, economic space and



View from Prague with its street system from the Middle Ages. Will the tourism change the character of the old town? Photo: Ingrid Appelbom Karsten

last, but not least, meanings and messages. It is important to bring these aspects into the revitalization plans of down-town and city centres. Therefore policy issue is extremely important, Zuziak says, because it touches on the questions of instruments. "Without instruments we can't have any solutions".

The former legislation system, instruments and so on which were valid in the former so-called *central planned economy-countries*, are at the moment not sufficient. SURPMO and PKZ (the former well-known Polish building enterprise for historical building) are now undergoing changes because their organisation did not react to the new conditions. But what is worse is that the rapid changes are sweeping away the established relations, instruments and doctrines. Therefore it is extremely important for them to look towards so-called Western democracies for the new set of instru-

ments to be used during the transitional period.

But as Baše said, "to what extent are these methods completely worn out or, to what extent could they play their role within a new situation?"

### Budapest

Architect A. Nagy talked about Budapest and the new plans for rehabilitation in the city. She supposed that the country-borders would play a different role tomorrow than before by the changes of European politics. Budapest has been situated since time immemorial at the cross roads from North to South and West to East. Because of this transport-geographical situation perhaps Budapest will be a regional center and have a greater importance in commerce and businesslike functions than before. Then the economic importance and the functions of some areas will change and the international traffic and road-net as well. The business life needs more additional functions and accommodation possibilities, more cultural structure, technical services, as well. All these will have a strong influence on the structure of the city itself and also on the Budapest agglomeration outside the city. There is a pressing need for new built-in areas, as well. All these also increase the need for a cleaner environment.

But many municipalities have not recognized yet that they have to work together and create a common development policy to solve the problems. So, if Budapest starts to find solutions to the problems inside and around, it can be based on *cooperation* only and in the field of the *environmental problems and a whole-thinking methodology* for the town structure, she said.

Architect Nagy concluded by saying that for the rehabilitation of Budapest some important questions are to be answered by the city fathers. The first and most important, perhaps is in which direction the municipality wants to go in town-policy in the future. Either as a passive – or active part by creating new infrastructure, evaluating the land, etc. Another question deals

with the regulations which should not be based on the land-use functions only, but on the environmental and architectural character and values, also outside the historical town. She also mentioned the tax-system which should give advantages, or disadvantages, for the suitable or unsuitable functions in different parts of the town. What these examples show then are that when dealing with urban elements like historic city blocks and areas, there is a need for a whole-thinking. It is not enough to work in a micro but in a macro perspective.

### Krakow

Zuziak presented a historic district of Krakow, an old Jewish quarter called Kazimierz, named after the Polish king Kazimierz the Great, which was founded in 1335 as a separate part of the city and put on the UNESCO priority list lately to ensure the preservation of cultural values. A few years ago a detailed land-use plan was approved by the City Council, but the present situation of Kazimierz District, with a population of 2 000 inhabitants, contrasts with its historical significance. Today deterioration is still higher than conservation and the city centre shows pressure from market forces with a commercial strip. Zuziak, who was not very optimistic, made a proposal for an international collaborative project with new ideas for the practice of urban conservation to be tested here. To be successful urban regeneration should include at least components, such as what he would like to characterize as "urban dynamics" which affect urban change and *the question here is, of course, which kind of instruments are needed?*

What he mentioned was first of all to establish institutional community development



In Helsingør the municipality has conferred with the inhabitants to prepare plans for the rehabilitation. Photo: Ingrid Appelbom Karsten

trusts or corporations for bringing together private and public sectors for financial cooperation, tools designed to secure economic feasibility of the project, and legal issues.

### Gothenburg

In the Northern countries the situation for the past fifty years has been quite different. Due to postwar faith in technology and through ignorance in the 1960's-70's, many historical town cores were destroyed. Entire blocks built during the 19th century were levelled to make room for new housing. *Gothenburg* with its many working class areas and many wooden houses, e. g. the houses typical for Gothenburg called "landshövdingehus", was one of the cities with great changes, referring to *architect Solveig Schulz*, who also made a presentation about these ideas during the conference. During the 60's the city of Gothenburg planned reconstruction in larger units and several reasons for this were presented. Renewal should be more rapid, planning conditions better, more mechanised construction methods and the building economy more favourable. It was thus made relatively clear that the intention was primarily one total of renewal. Criticism was being raised against Gothenburgs reconstruction policy, gradually, first because

of the demolitions, later on because of rough renovations. Here new and untried building materials increased the destructive process. Due to the many changes of the city, the interest for the historical dimension in physical surroundings and the cultural heritage has been increasing. So has the interest for traditional building materials and handicrafts, as well. The change in opinion was not unique to Gothenburg, but was a part of the spirit of the times, but there was more distinct opposition here than in other places because of the rigid reconstruction programme at that time. It has been debated and polarised toward an ideal of new construction on one hand, an ideal of preservation on the other. This has applied to the opposition between demolition or preservation, or between taking little or great consideration to the existing buildings during renovation, again referring to Schulz. I think in Sweden especially there has been developed, through debates, a new approach that has come to be called *careful renovation*. This can be said to be an attempt to preserve existing values and satisfy new demands concerning standards and design. "In my view", Schulz said, "a suitable way of judging the potentials for a careful renovation in concrete cases lies in using and interpreting regulations and seeking technical and economic solutions with carefulness as a guiding light – to discover where the obstacles lay and how one could overcome them."



An older part of Gothenburg with wooden houses from the 18th and 19th centuries.  
Photo: Centre for the Built Environment



Typical façades in Gothenburg from the century turn, with the first floor built in brick and the upper two in wood (so called *landshövdingehus*). These houses lie in Haga, which is now a conservation area.  
Photo: Solveig Schulz

Architect *Sonja Vidén*, Stockholm, who has been doing research on renewal of the residential housing estates for many years, said that an important starting-point is, that all buildings and environments, also most ordinary residential houses and districts dominated by residential housing from the 50's, 60's and 70's, have some architectural values, worth respect and preservation.

An interesting point of view is of course the fact that the former Eastern European countries have been putting more interest into the specially valuable and significant urban and architectural landmarks, and not so much into the ordinary housing and physical surroundings.

### What is urban rehabilitation then?

We can find different stages or approaches in the history of conservation of building and ur-

ban areas. Some of these are mentioned below:

After World War 2 and specially in the 60's *renewal* programs for many towns and cities all over Europe were made, as the example from Gothenbourg showed us. At that time people were not very much involved in the planning process.

At the same time the term reconstruction also came into practice which focussed on urban areas such as monuments of great ideological importance. Very much used in Poland and also in many of the former Eastern European countries, which in practice followed the tradition called the "*Polish school of conservation*". They put more interest into the specially historic urban area and not into the whole urban physical framework.

Then the *Venice Charter* at the Venice Congress in 1964 defined a common doctrinal and ethical attitude toward cultural heritage making clear to respect both cultural differences and heritage from different times. Another type of approach was made later on, which can perhaps be called *redevelopment*.

In the 80's we find the terms like *integrated conservation or revitalisation* where not only the physical structure became important, but also the social structure.

*Careful renovation*, as we have heard from Gothenburg lies in using and interpreting the existing values with carefulness while and at the same time satisfying new demands.

*Professor Tore Brantenberg*, Trondheim, head of the theme group of urban rehabilitation, summed up:

Urban regeneration includes at least the following components:

- spatial  
history, architecture, infrastructure
- social  
social structure – social dimensions
- financial aspect:  
market economy or a state-centralised system
- organisational aspect
- legal aspect – who should be responsible.

Urban rehabilitation has several levels and scales:

- the country-size rehabilitation;
- the town-size rehabilitation;
- the town-part;
- the architectural rehabilitation building scale.

What is important then is to be aware of the fact that it is of the utmost importance to work both in macro and in micro scales. Urban rehabilitation must be based on a whole-thinking methodology.

Urban rehabilitation then is both rehabilitation of people and society. It includes new buildings, and not only care for the old ones, it includes the environment as an entirety and not only a part of it. Urban rehabilitation must be based on the organic continuation of the historical development of the town and village up to now, spatial and social.