

A R C H I T E C T U R E & W O O D

Every year, in the Spring, the Nordic Association for Architectural Research holds its statutory annual meeting, open to all of its members and hosted by one Nordic school of architecture. Usually the annual meeting is accompanied with a research seminar or symposium. This year it was the turn of the University of Oulu, Department of Architecture, to organize the annual meeting and symposium. The meeting and symposium took place in Oulu and Hailuoto, Finland, 28th – 30th of April, 2000.

The theme for the symposium first suggested by us organizers was Architecture and Wood. We emphasized that the theme should not be understood in a narrow sense, but as a topic that could be approached from a variety of perspectives, ranging from wooden building technologies to design possibilities of wood, and further to the traditions and ecological aspects of wooden architecture, and to the phenomenology and identity of milieus built of wood.

At the Oulu School of Architecture we have a number of active post-graduate researchers whose work fitted within this broad frame. Four of them – namely Kati Jokelainen, Markku Karjalainen, Anu Soikkeli and Risto Suikkari, together with Dr. Jari Heikkilä and the authors of this introduction, formed the organizing team of the symposium. The theme Architecture and Wood was thus well suited for the interests of our own researchers.

The board of the association, however, decided to broaden the theme further to include architectural research on materials in general, not just wood. The Danish members of the board preferred the title Architecture and Materials, since in Denmark wood as a building material does not have as central a role as it has in Finland, Norway and Sweden. As it turned out, we had one presentation on concrete in the symposium by a researcher from the Aarhus School of Architecture (the only presentation not on wood) – but also three (!) presentations associated with wood from the same school.

Besides the theme, there was another matter concerning the symposium on which we had a strong view. Our aim was to develop the symposium into an educational event where the participating researchers would be offered a chance to have their papers evaluated by their more experienced peers. The idea was that the scientific committee of the symposium – Dr. Jari Heikkilä, professor Kimmo Lapintie, professor Jerker Lundequist, associate profes-

sor Dag Nilsen, professor Kaj Nyman, professor Eero Paloheimo and professor Anna-Maija Ylimaula – would review in advance the papers and present their critique after the presentation of each paper in the symposium. With Jerker Lundequist, editor-in-chief of this journal, we agreed to link this review procedure with the journal, so that papers chosen by the scientific committee would be developed into articles that together would form a special issue of the Nordic Journal of Architectural Research. Six papers out of twelve ended up as articles of this issue¹. After the symposium, the authors of these articles were offered the possibility to improve their papers in cooperation with their referees (two for each paper).

As all of the articles selected for this issue have to do with wood, in one way or another, it is proper to revive the symposium's original title – Architecture and Wood – as the title for the present issue.

Wood is the Nordic building material. The oldest wooden buildings still existing in the Nordic countries are the Norwegian stave churches. Jørgen H. Jensenius is doing research on the planning and design processes preceding the construction of those churches. His article introduces the problematic of sources for the study of mediaeval wooden construction.

Old wooden towns in Finland are Risto Suikkari's focus of interest. But unlike Jensenius, his approach is pragmatic: the idea that aspects which characterize historical towns might serve as clues to the planning of modern towns built of wood, which they do.

Many architects aim at a more sustainable architecture. Lightweight timber-based housing forms have a lower total environmental impact than heavyweight concrete-based ones, especially with extra insulation, as shown in the article by Rob Marsh, Michael Luring and Ebbe Holleris Petersen. This, perhaps, is one of the reasons why there is an expanding market for wooden buildings in Denmark, as reported in the article by Pia Storvang. But continuous success is possible only when coupled with a new approach to industrialized building which retains some of the features of old handicraft.

The essay by Elisabeth Tostrup tells about how the Norwegian female architect Wenche Selmer, using wood as her material, managed to create an architecture of thoughtfulness – buildings that seem to take care of their inhabitants. The report by Anu Soikkeli about research on the service life of external wood claddings shows that wood is just that kind of building material; it takes care of us for decade after decade – but only if we know how to treat it well.

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1. In the book Proceedings of the Nordic Research Symposium Architecture and Materials, to be published by the University of Oulu, Department of Architecture, will the papers not selected for this issue also be included.