

Valuation Cycles Of Pre Industrial Townscape

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1 ABSTRACT

The townscape is the morphological expression of urban life in its local individuality and its historical complexity. It has a holistic structure, and the formative parts penetrate to different degrees. Human consciousness always evaluates the urban physical structures anew. The aesthetic and documentary component will change with the spirit of the time.

The shape of occidental towns was formed in pre-industrial building periods through

- a high degree of continuity of the ground plan patterns since the times of settlement
- an adaptation of the architectural styles of the pre-industrial eras in a specific local manner.

Whereas in pre-industrial times the physiognomy of occidental towns was characterized by high degrees of persistence, there were more degrees of freedom between radical transformation and adjoining regulations in the further development since the beginnings of the industrial era. These topics brought the fundamental question about the reflection of pre-industrial townscape due to the later building periods. In a heuristic manner the model of a cycle theory has been tested for the change of paradigm.

The fundamental fact of the evaluation is the identification of almost two synchronic cycles, which started with a period of disregard and later turned into a period of adaptation of the local architecture. The inner break of the two cycles in Central Europe can be dated about 1957, the inner changes around 1900, and around 1970 with slight changes in different regions. The two cycles show some similarities in their inner development. However, in the second cycle the proceedings for disregard were characterized by a more drastic vigour, and the instruments to maintain tradition were much more careful.

In analogy of both cycles, one could visualise that the present confession of the public towards the historic repertory of forms may lose its fascination, and a change to a third cycle will take place. There are opinions that a certain inflationary protection of monuments and a much less creative architecture of adaptation has arisen from the genius loci. In the present time, the human-interest pretence of history is even effective, nevertheless it is not only contrary to historic mentality, but may also be the germ that at any time could cause people to turn away from history again.

2 INTRODUCTION

The townscape is the morphological expression of urban life in its local individuality and its historical complexity. The configuration has a holistic structure and the formative parts penetrate to different degrees. Human consciousness always evaluates the urban physical structures anew. The townscape itself may be a significant viewpoint of such an evaluation. The aesthetic and documentary valuation will change with the spirit of the time, or to quote Faust in Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's drama:

"What you call the spirit of the time
is in reality the own spirit of men
in which the times are mirroring themselves".

The shape of occidental towns was mostly formed in pre-industrial building periods by means of:

- a high degree of persistence of the urban pattern got underway after the time of settlement
- the adaptation of the architectural styles of pre-industrial eras, in a specific local manner.

There were more degrees of freedom between radical transformation and homogenizing regulation at a later date. These given facts should be followed by the fundamental question about the reflection of pre-industrial townscape due to the later building times. In a heuristic manner, the hypothesis of a twofold cycle has been tested for a change of paradigm, with respect to the further influence on the traditional townscape.

The immediate past, the perspective of which is often not seen very clearly due to a lack of distance, was often fiercely criticized. In the analysis, the adaptation of the townscape tradition swung between "yes" and

“no” and therefore, a detached attitude is taken, particularly as a momentary point of view could prove to be a transitional one.

The findings are based on an analysis of the townscape of selected occidental urban cores in Northern and Central Europe. This paper will explicate the model of the town of Lübeck, former Head of the Hansa, the core of which is particularly suitable for such a consideration, for three reasons:

- the town centre has been changed only in such a way that the pre-industrial shape is highly persistent up to the present day, despite impacts of urbanization.
- precise order and functional conciseness in the townscape could suggest the possibility of a later interference in a normative comparison in the present building fabric.
- local literature and planning material could elucidate epochal intentions regarding the townscape.

3 THE CASE OF LÜBECK

The configuration of the townscape of in the core of Lübeck results, on the one hand, from a continuity of only few planning ideas during a time of intensive settlement in the Late Middle Ages and, on the other hand, from an increasing lassitude as a consequence of a lack of economic growth forces during the early modern times. The townscape of Lübeck on the hill between Trave and Wakenitz was fixed by a precise urban pattern, not schematic, but nearly regular:

- Types of streets

The only incomplete regular network consists of backbone streets, rib-streets, and transverse streets beset by fringe streets and it is additionally extended in the more peripheral areas by aisles (Gänge) into the blocks.

- Types of plots

The pre-industrial pattern of plots is formed out of elongated broader and narrower non- standard plots whose former backside plots are cut off in many cases, as small plots to the borders of the streets and as plots of the Gänge within the blocks.

- Types of houses

The pre-industrial stock of houses of civic building blocks exposed to these streets consists of big and small gabled houses as well as of eaves houses exposed to the streets and Gänge. The houses of the different building phases are differentiated by modified division into compartments and changing architecture of the facades within almost unchanged constructions.

- Street space

The continuous alignment out of mostly the same types of houses with façades of different building phases results in widened cross profiles and curved longitudinal profiles in connection with the relief in well-proportioned and fully changing arranged spaces of streets.

- Roof space

The dominant attribution of the gabled and eaves houses to the forms of the street produced due to the ascending relief, is a sliding overlapping scale of almost equally oriented roof ridges into a roof space that is almost only disrupted in its uniformity in the backbone streets and along the north-western fringed streets.

- Skyline

As the basis for the topographically distinctive distribution of the monumental structures, the roof space is part of the skyline that is heightened in its impression by the surrounding watercourses and former fortifications.



Fig. 1: Lübeck Inner Core (May 2012, Ref.: <http://www.zdf.de/ZDF/zdfportal/blob/4095768/1/data.jpg>)

3.1 The First Evaluation Cycle

3.1.1 Period Of Disregard

In Lübeck, the beginning of urbanization coincided with the abolition of the function of the town gates in 1864. After a long period of economic stagnation, the community began to grow at an increasing pace. The degree of change was especially dependent on the capital at hand. In the expanding agglomeration, the city centre initially developed along the main roads of the old town. A construction boom began in the business area as well as on the periphery in a few speculative objects, such as tenement houses which replaced traditional houses. Most of the large scale public institutions were built on the sites of former cloisters and curiae – whose old building substance was often integrated.

Before the turn of the 20th century, in the Bismarck era (Hochgründerzeit), disregard the pre-industrial structures with new forms and on a large scale was considered liberation. Under most generous standards of building codes of 1865 and 1881, the density of the inner town expanded vertically rather than horizontally. The height of the houses was raised to such an extent that the scale of the traditional townscape was broken at many places. The new houses with tall and bare fire protecting walls were in disorder to the relatively homogenous sequence of houses in the streets. The steep tile roofs were mostly intermingled with the (nearly) flat ones of non-local materials. The facades of lavish historicism were broken by the almost plain front walls of the traditional houses. However, this was seldom the case with the speculative objects of tenement houses near the periphery, where simple facades with less ornamentation arose. The new large public buildings reflect international, more eclectic style elements. However, a crossover of traditional forms with a regional touch was not unusual in the process of vital history adaptation.

3.1.2 Period Of Adaptation

The construction periods from 1900 to 1950 are a strong commitment to tradition and a critical reaction to the intrusions of the Bismarck era. At the beginning of the 20th century, an awareness of the importance to continue the irretrievable historical townscape of the long established urban cores arose. This was not directed exclusively at the structures of highest historical and artistic value as in the past, but paid attention also to less significant buildings which bear witness to the pre-industrial period. The principle was adopted that an outstanding structure and its immediate environs enhance each other and that the townscape would be formed by the totality of all individual structures of different orders. With the “discovery” of the ensemble of buildings, entire historical city cores were declared monuments.

In Lübeck, the new appreciation of long-established culture was based on the complementary instruments of preservation of monuments and sympathetic architecture (Anpassungsarchitektur).

- In 1915, the first preservation order (Denkmalschutzgesetz) was passed and shortly thereafter, a significant number of pre-industrial houses were affected by the statute. The strength of the law lay in the fundamental preservation of the buildings; its weakness lay in the tight financial situation of the communes.
- The efforts to promote traditional architecture were underscored in 1901 with a “competition of facades” (Fassadenwettbewerb) which was announced by an “Association of Friends of Art”. The outcome of 80 contributions was a locally specific metamorphosis of stylistic elements of historicism. However, a local traditional style (Heimatschutzstil) which was orientated on pre-industrial forms in a simple performance and only intended to emphasize the “traditional connections in character of the essential” soon became standard practice. In the 1930’s, buildings of historicism so were classified as “construction sins” and some facades were “purified” of their décor.

From about 1900, the appreciation of tradition coincided with urbanization influencing the historical ground pattern more incisively. Plots were aggregated to larger units and streets were widened. The particular functional challenges which had repercussions on the townscape, apart from the growing location pressure on the main business streets, resulted from the following objectives:

- In 1905, in order to cope with the flowing traffic, several alignment plans (Fluchtlinienpläne) to broaden the streets were drawn up. In the process of new building construction, the main traffic streets were set back in conformity with the projected alignment.
- In 1935, a flexible programme for the comprehensive renewal of run-down districts away from the main streets was initiated, which materialised quite pragmatically when dealing with the established building substance. Front houses were rationally converted to flats while the building density in the inner blocks was substantially reduced.

Much of the original townscape was given up as a result of these measures, despite all the confessions of heritage preservation.

Since the 1920’s, the potential preservation of valuable building substance was made possible by increased planning options. A counterbalance planning (Auffangplanung) was capable of influencing the location structure by stipulating the land use. In a protective manner, it was possible not only to divert the street traffic but also to relieve the city core structure. In this connection, the idea arose to relocate certain functions to semi-central locations outside the former town gates, but this could only be realised to a limited extent.

3.2 Second Evaluation Cycle

3.2.1 Period Of Disregard

In 1942, in Lübeck almost 20 % of the buildings in the core area, mostly in the main business streets, were destroyed by air-raids. The first decades after the war, the maxim was: city planning according to functional criteria. During the post-war reconstruction the following targets had priority:

- The historical core should become the main business centre again, although a semi-central location for many a function would have been sufficient that time.
- The historical core should be aligned to current flowing and stationary traffic, whereby in the long run, a system of peripheral roads should reduce the through traffic.

The widening of the streets, which occasionally occurred in the early 20th century by successive piecemeal replacement, was now tackled resolutely. Contrary to the former intention showing the frontage lines, the streets were now widened considerably. By re-groupment of plots and the coring of inner blocks, courtyards (Blockbinnenhöfe) were created, particularly for stationary vehicles. .

The consciousness of the city planners to restore the pre-industrial landscape still existed in the initial years following the war but could only put into action with considerable restrictions during the reconstruction of the inner core. The preservation was confined to the traditional isles (Traditionsinseln) and monumental buildings were reconstructed almost authentically.

The architecture of the new houses no longer represented the home style movement. The use of bricks for the facades and tiles for the (more or less) steep roofs still had a certain affinity with the building tradition. Most

of the gable-fronted houses were substituted by houses with the ridge parallel to the street. The new houses were sometimes wider. The traditional façade with separate inlets for the windows was frequently replaced by a flush façade with rows of windows. The sequence of the house facades often broke up the convention of traditional metric. The spatial pattern of the roofs, which were still traditionally steep, were changed to the extent that instead of many former gable houses the new buildings got ridges parallel to the streets.

The total break with tradition materialized at the end of the 1950's. With the dynamic economic development since the 1960's, the main business zone, which had experienced successive post-war reconstruction and local pressures, expanded into the neighbouring areas of the urban core. The types of construction followed multiple architectural styles with an international character using cubistic form and non-local material.

3.2.2 Period Of Adaptation

The attention to traditional townscape in Lübeck dawned again about 1975, at a time when the renewal of blighted areas of the old core became a current issue. Despite certain inner conflicts, a complex programme for the redevelopment concentrated on the following aims:

- The historical core shall be preserved completely in its cultural, historical and its townscape protecting elements.
- The historical core shall be promoted as a location for central functions for the population in the urban area and its hinterland.
- The historical core shall be increased in value as a location for potentially diverse models of flats which would be suitable for different population groups.

In this respect, the urban core as a monument was discovered for the second time and again, the reaction was to achieve a dualism of historical preservation and sympathetic architecture.

- The protection of historical buildings was extended. Many more objects were classified under the preservation order than in earlier times, even some that had been built during the industrial era, constructed before 1900.
- Sympathetic architecture was tried once again. Since 1981, after a period of vagueness, townscape regulations have been passed for public town space. Basically, it is the standardization of the types of buildings, the shape of the roofs and the structures of façades in their urban connection (Planungsgruppe mbH URBA 1977). The construction of the interior of the houses has seldom been laid down but every current building project is preceded by a total stock-taking.

During the realization of the programme, the consciousness for the authenticity of the townscape heritage has been sharpened. Defensive measures have been taken to influence the land use in order to facilitate the inner town preservation. Private traffic has been restricted considerably, in particular the through traffic in the core area. Substantial parking space has been established on areas of the waterfront at the fringe of the old core.

The revitalization of the core has resulted in a wave of public and private activities. The initial dispersion of objects brought about further initiatives in the neighbourhood and thus stimulated "snowball effects".

4 THE DUAL CYCLE: A COMPARISON

The fundamental fact of the evaluation is the identification of almost two synchronic cycles, which started at a time from a period of disregard, and turned into a period of adaptation of the local architecture. The inner break of the two cycles in Central Europe can be dated about 1957, the inner changes around 1900, and around 1975 with slight changes in different regions. When comparing several European cities, the analysis shows similar such periods that might only differ from each other by a short time lag. In times of economic prosperity and technical belief in progress, a distinct intermission materialized, while in times of depression, a growing uneasiness led to vital changes of mind.

The two cycles show some similarities in their inner course. However, in the second cycle, the proceedings for disregard were characterized by a more drastic vigour, and the instruments to maintain tradition were much more careful.

The two "periods of disregard" evolved differently, namely:

- The architecture in the time of historicism was lavish but it was rather meagre in the time of functionalism because the new construction techniques showed their rational effects.
- The multiplicity of new buildings broke up the structure of the traditional metric in both cycles. But still, the dimensional break was more radical through the second period.

The architecture of historicism, which was valued negatively in the first period of adaptation, was regarded in a positive way in the second period of adaptation. Nevertheless it is a kind of architecture that disregarded space and time in an ecclesiastical manner, similar to a current collage architecture, that has all kinds of historic motives available, but which are not derived from local tradition.

In both periods of adaptation, a dual strategy was applied to the cores, namely the heritage protection and the sympathetic architecture.

- The consciousness with a positive attitude towards the originality of the townscape and the instruments of preservation are pursued more consequentially in the later cycle.
- The understanding of planning has also changed fundamentally in the sense of adequate townscape preservation, when contrary to former principles, now the defensive maxim is “form follows function”.
- In the first period of adaptation, the interest in the townscape was only later linked with processes of urban redevelopment, however, in the second period of adaptation, urban redevelopment preceded and through its intervention in traditional structure, the question of preservation of heritage and sympathetic architecture was provoked.

5 ON THE WAY TO A THIRD CYCLE

In both cycles, the respective period of disregard was considerably shorter than the respective period of adaptation, which already manifests itself in the last cycle, too. In analogy of both cycles, one could visualise that the present public respect for historic repertory of forms might lose its fascination, and the preserving redevelopment would consequently wane, so that a change to a third cycle will eventually take place. There are opinions that a certain inflationary protection of monuments and a much less creative architecture of adaptation will arise from the genius loci. The arbitrary adaptation of any given pre-industrial design results in a pseudo-historic townscape in many places – even in places outside the historical districts. At the present time, the human-interest pretence of history is very effective. Nevertheless, it is not only contrary to historic mentality, but may also be the germ that at any time, as result of overreactions, will cause people to turn away from history again.

The cycle theory of a building conduct based on tradition manifests itself in comparable heuristic swings of the pendulum since the boom of the industrial age. The American city planner Albert Guttenberg postulates that, in principle, more attention should be paid to the cycle aspect of city development when he says:

“..planners ought to pay more attention than they do to the cycle aspect of their professions’ history..” (GUTTENBERG 1990, p.694)

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