

DENMARK – HERITAGE @ RISK!

In Denmark, historic or archaeological heritage places are protected within the provisions of the Nature Protection Act, this applies to about 100,000 listed sites. All structures and cultural items on the seabed are automatically protected under the terms of this Act. Historic buildings are protected under the Building Protection Act. There are 3,500 sites listed as protected, comprising in all about 10,000 buildings.

Denmark has not however ratified the current international conventions concerning the protection of cultural heritage!!

Threats to our historic heritage

Natural

Climatic conditions with air pollution have a destructive effect on the fabric of historic buildings, in particular on sculptures and details of sandstone buildings.

Coastal erosion is threatening prehistoric structures and cultural layers. Two medieval churches, one in Western Jutland and the other on Zealand, are in the process of collapsing into the sea.

Underwater settlements from the Stone Age and shipwrecks on the seabed are under threat because of erosion.

Cultural

Archaeological heritage is threatened by agricultural processes and construction works. A recent investigation showed that almost half of all registered burial mounds have disappeared in the course of the last 70 years!

Within agriculture there is a particular problem posed by tree planting for forests. Deep ploughing in that context can remove all traces of a prehistoric settlement or burial place in the course of a single day. And this happens frequently. Ordinary cultivation, which is tending to involve steadily deeper ploughing, also

results in destruction of the archaeological evidence, at a slower pace but just as inevitably.

Construction works – natural gas pipes, motorway-construction, major bridge-building, harbour-building (particularly the many new marinas), extensions to town and new industrial buildings – constitute a threat to archaeological heritage. The situation is not improved by the fact that the financial resources available to undertake archaeological investigations in relation to such construction works are all too limited.

While physical developments have repercussions on the cultural landscape – as in fact they have always had, but now in many cases in a particularly unfortunate direction – economic and labour-market trends are also having an effect on historic heritage. Many small islands are becoming depopulated of their communities, and local schools, shops, and services are being closed down, resulting in disused buildings which are liable to deteriorate, as well as causing erosion of their intangible cultural heritage.

The stock of historic buildings in Denmark is at general risk of a gradual deterioration, as a result of a lack of maintenance. The costs involved in maintenance increase rapidly in a society with a heavy tax burden, and all types of building work are subject to 25% VAT, which is almost prohibitive. The deterioration is most evident in the case of Danish castles and manor houses, but it is also very visible in privately-owned houses. State buildings, including protected castles, etc, have never been in a worse state of repair.

Privately-owned historic and valuable buildings, in spite of a major information campaign, are to some extent at risk from the use of the wrong materials. In this respect, the legislation covering the work environment sometimes creates a dilemma, in that many of the traditional materials can no longer be used, eg oil paint, lead primer, etc.

ICOMOS Denmark

► The Sphinx: the restoration of this endangered monument, badly damaged by erosion and salts but also by unsuccessful earlier restorations is causing extreme difficulties.

► The Sphinx: parts of the new stone facing have already fallen off (photo 1989).