

Baukultur derived from built form – listed buildings inspire new ideas

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Since the 1970s, there has been a growing understanding of the undesirable consequences of one-sided technical solutions in the building sector. The break with building history in the modern era, fascination with serial production, and seemingly limitless economic growth led to the industrialisation of the building sector, the aesthetic and cultural consequences of which are visible everywhere. How might we manage today to rethink the way we build so that it is resource-saving and sustainable?

In Switzerland, at the political level, the decline of *Baukultur* has been acknowledged and attempts have been made to counteract it through programmatic pleas. One example of this is *Schweizer Ortsbilder erhalten* (report on Swiss townscape preservation),¹ to which the federal government responded with a *Strategie Baukultur*² and the *Davos Declaration*.³ In order to support the notion of *high-quality Baukultur* coined in the *Davos Declaration*, eight further terms have now been described as the last step in a differentiated quality system.⁴ Unfortunately, in an effort to be scientific and comprehensive, these terms are very all-embracing and abstract. In the field of building practices, I think that aesthetic and cultural reference points are initially required, which may be used for a transition towards a high-quality *Baukultur*. This is where the testimony of surviving historical buildings, such as those from rural culture, among others, comes into play. As I would like to show below, we can only gain access to it by slowing down and through heightened perception. If

many people with an alert mind appreciate listed buildings, they might provide an impetus for radical change in design and construction practices.

A different way of thinking emanates from country buildings. Entering into this thinking can only be achieved through a changed attitude; by slowing down one's footsteps; and by allowing for, and probing, many possible meanings. In my case, an ideal tool to achieve the latter are paper and pencil. Through drawing, perception becomes focused and speculative thoughts mingle amongst the lines. If we try to understand what people believed and considered important while they were building their houses, and what they saw during construction, then we can capture the inner and outer shapes of things. The projecting roof and the bench in front of the house embody a social gesture, an inner form of togetherness (see Fig 1). And the external or concrete shape of the processed material not only testifies to local traditions but, above all, allows the care taken in the work and a feeling for beauty to become tangible. Anyone who reduces building to its mere function as protection from nature overlooks these meanings.

Precise observation is part of the farming profession: whether it is the weather or plants – farmers have learned much through observation. Insights that proved to be true again and again turned into customs and country lore. In many old farmhouses, hardly anything is more clearly expressed than weather watching. All these wide projecting roofs form an intermediate climatic area and

observation post. But to start with, they protect the wooden structure from moisture and are always large enough so that a vehicle can take shelter should it suddenly start to rain.

At a time of increasingly heavy rainfall, there is creative potential and poetic expressiveness in the channeling and slowing down of rainwater: green roofs could, for example, become water filters or gutters could become irrigation systems. Pitched roofs have proved to be the right shape in many contexts: they enable the material used to be preserved for a long time and share the snow load. Even gutters were made of wood. The harder heartwood was used for the deeper, more heavily-used part of the gutter. These wooden gutters were hung on forked branches that were attached to roof beams with wooden pegs. Thus, construction relied on materials at hand, whose knowledgeable use outweighed their weaknesses (see Fig. 2).

Just as the transition to the weather outside was a soft and gradual one, the warmth of the fire inside was also wrapped in layers. A bedroom could be as small as a bed and be shaped as an alcove; or a small staircase next to the tile stove might take advantage of rising heat to take the warmth of the sitting room into the bedroom above (see Fig. 3). In this way, a comfortable and vital living space could be created with limited resources. All of this is still possible today, but is overlaid by supposedly standardised 'living requirements': rooms with a wide view and a regulated indoor climate. Energy-saving labels contri-

bute to the fact that only technical solutions for thermal insulation are considered, without even exploring the potential of spatial heat flows. Rooms with a large thermal mass are an economically and aesthetically interesting alternative in an era where heat produced by computer work can be calculated. A winter house can be smaller than a summer house; the overall energy balance brings locally available materials such as clay, wood and straw back to the centre stage.

Peasant life was austere in comparison to our life today. Because you might only build once in a lifetime, your most important goal was to get the most out of available material. All materials were used in such a way as to be reversible and repairable. The word 'sustainability' was only used for renewable forests, because every construction material was used down to the last scrap and then used again –

there was no waste in today's sense. Rural architecture derives its charisma from careful handling of materials. The love with which it was created can still be felt today. Key to such quality is the time imparted us to build a house. A society striving for *high-quality Baukultur* could, alongside parental leave, allow itself *construction leave*: a few months during which residents would devote themselves entirely to building their house. Thanks to interaction with specialists, better and more durable spaces – that would not be viewed as commodities so much – could be created.

The form ideas embodied in listed buildings contain constructive, spatial and bioclimatic elements that we could put to new uses. Today, as the many inhabited listed buildings show, beauty achieved through in-depth involvement protects simple buildings even after changes in use and over

long periods of time. As sustainability reveals itself in the long lifespan of houses, we may see listed buildings as something that lights up minds. They show us that economics do not have to imply anything such as personal enrichment but, instead, may mean making the most out of limited local resources. Such an approach does not entail rejecting new opportunities brought about by digital fabrication and today's materials, but calls for a critical concentration of what is possible in design. At all times, *Baukultur* has been a mirror both of craftsmanship and of our social and intellectual attitudes.

- 1 Schweizerischer Bundesrat, *Schweizer Ortsbilder erhalten*. Bericht des Bundesrates in Erfüllung des Postulates 16.4028 Fluri vom 15. Dezember 2016, Bern 2018.
- 2 BAK, *Strategie Baukultur 2020*.
- 3 *Davos Declaration 2018*.
- 4 *Davos Baukultur Quality System 2021*.

Abstract

Une culture du bâti issue des formes constructives – les monuments en tant que base de réflexion

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La rupture avec l'histoire du bâti au sein de la conscience publique et l'industrialisation du bâtiment ont provoqué au cours des dernières décennies une perte massive, que ce soit au niveau de la substance bâtie historique ou des compétences artisanales. Un changement de mentalité s'esquisse, mais se limite fréquemment, comme dans le domaine climatique, à des appels bien intentionnés. C'est néanmoins l'observation des bâtiments historiques et une pensée créative qui permettent de transmettre la connaissance de la culture du bâti.

Lorsque nous prenons le temps d'analyser les formes constructives des bâtiments historiques, nous découvrons de nouvelles significations, à divers niveaux. Dans un premier temps, cela concerne le mode de construction et les matériaux. Dans la plupart des cas, le matériau constituait une compo-

sante précieuse et faisait l'objet d'une mise en œuvre soignée, avec pour objectif une durabilité élevée. Les toits en large débord n'avaient pas uniquement pour objectif la sauvegarde du matériau, mais servaient également de protection en cas de pluie. Nous arrivons ainsi à l'aspect social des formes constructives. L'avant-toit, le banc devant la maison et les nichoirs des hirondelles composaient un ensemble typique, qui pourrait nous enseigner bien des choses sur la relation des nouvelles constructions avec la route. De la même manière que les agriculteurs observaient le temps devant leur maison, ils associaient leurs constructions à la nature et au paysage environnant. Le temps qu'ils y consacraient se lit aujourd'hui encore dans leurs bâtiments. Une société qui ambitionne une « culture du bâti de qualité » doit à nouveau accorder du temps à l'acte de bâtir ; une « durée

du chantier » comparable à celle d'une « gestation » pourrait permettre de lancer un débat politique sérieux entre spécialistes. Comme sur le plan bio climatique, il est possible de tirer un enseignement de la modestie des maisons historiques. Lorsque, en lieu et place d'une isolation parfaite, le volume à chauffer était réduit et que la chaleur de la salle de séjour était ensuite déviée par une trappe dans les chambres à l'étage, il est parfaitement envisageable que cela serve de modèle pour une construction édifiée au XXI^e siècle.

Plus nous serons capables d'identifier les diverses significations des espaces et des modes de construction historiques, de les adapter sans vaine destruction de la substance bâtie ancienne, et plus nous nous rapprocherons de l'intégration d'une culture du bâti sociale, matérielle et spirituelle.