Yet with so many competing needs, it is likely that few projects of this kind in Africa could be given a respectable priority rating. Current development needs are overwhelming and knowledge for the sake of knowledge is probably a luxury that cannot be afforded. For this reason, the Botswana project which I hope to start later in the year - given the availability of funds - will survey the changing pattern of rural housing and seek to identify regional variation, current preferences, forms of adaptation and so, and in doing so provide information which can be utilised not least in the planning and implementation of site and service schemes in the genuinely urban centres of the country. Beyond this, however, the project should begin to describe those buildings or groups of buildings, kgotla arrangement, graveyards, wells and the like which are of cultural and/or historic importance but which are currently excluded from the responsibilities of the National Monuments Officer. At minimum, these buildings and sites need to be given some degree of protection which might best be ensured by local, rather than central, government authorities. Personally I am in no doubt about the urgency of this needs. Buildings of very real interest have already been lost and these simply cannot be replaced. Botswana may not be as rich in its building forms as many other countries in Africa but what it has is its own and should be cherished accordingly. Tradition can be developed and built upon, it does not have to be cocooned and protected.

Vilhelm H e l a n d e r (Finland)

THE WOODEN TOWNS OF SCANDINAVIA

The towns of Scandinavia have had a common feature: until the last decades the towns have been dominated by timberbuilt houses. Right up to the 20th century, brick or stone buildings and multi-storey apartment houses have been a rarity at least in smaller towns. Only Denmark and the Swedish scania form an exception with their more continantal brick and half-timbered houses.

To be able to understand the recent development and the problems of preservation in the wooden towns, it is necessary to point out some of their common features. The towns are relatively few and modest in size. The timber-built towns were contres in a farming community, often they partly relied on shipping and fisheries. They were situated in the middle of sparcely populated farming and forest areas.

The tradition of city culture is very thin in Sweden. Norway and especially in Finland, which had for instance only six medieval towns (or rather villages). At the beginning of the 19th century still less than 10 percent of the total population in these countries lived in towns. The building stock is rather new, mostly dating from the 19th and 20th century. Buildings even

from the 18th century are rather uncommon. Wood is an impermanent material, and repeated fires have destroyed the building stock. Especially in Sweden and Finland, radical regulations of the town structure often followed the conflagrations. The town structure of timber houses is easy to remove. And yet, the wooden towns are an essential scene of everyday life in Scandinavia, and an indispensable part of the cultural heritage of the northern countries.

The most eypical Norwegian timber town has an irregular town plan: the medieval tradition was in general not broken even when the towns were replanned. A rather high density and cramped sites are characteristic to the town structure. The narrwo lanes are flanked by boarded houses painted in light oil colours.

The typical Finnish 19th century town is the definite opposite to the norwegian timber town. The sites are big, the houses have normally one, seldom two storeys, and the density of the built-up area is thus low. Like in Sweden, the towns in Finland are usually laid out like a chess-board plan, refined through continuous regulations. The horizontal volumes of the houses follow the ideals of the local empire style or its later varations. The low distributed town structure with its planted trees and gardens had, increasingly up to the 19th century, been affected by aspects of fire security. After a series of fires, national catastrophes, the structure of the Finnish wooden town was, partly under Russian influence developed to meet the demands of fire prevention. Trees were planted as fire breaks, wide open belts would prevent fire from spreading. At the same time aesthetic values were created which today can give a basis for a good living environment.

The Swedish towns, almost without exception following the rectangular town planning ideals - remote influences of the planning principles of the renaissance - give the most varied picture. Big merchant houses, several of them dating from the 18th or even 17th century, were situated close to the town centers, and the smaller houses of the people of lesser means in the outskirts of the old town. Thus the scale of social differencies is clearly expressed. Like in the neighbouring countries, the courtyards of these mercantile towns of an agrarian society were bordered with economy buildings, workshops, warehouses, stables and cow sheds. The reuse or substitution of these secondary buildings today constitutes only one of the problems to be met in the changing towns.

Industrialism came late to the Scandinavian countries, last to Finland where modern industry started in a modest scale only towards the end of the 19th century. Stone buildings had always been the ideal of both the governments and the builders, but the resources had usually been too limited for erecting stone houses. With industrialism multi-storey apartment houses grew up in the bigger cities. But parallel to this the wooden house tradition was

continued. In the outskirts of bigger towns dwellings or tenement houses constructed in wood were erected for workers. Especially in Sweden and even in Finland there was a mass production of timber houses. Now the courtyard of a private family group was changed into a collective outdoor space inside the blocks. The wooden house tradition was continued far up to the 20th century.

So much more drastic became the break with the tradition in the last two decades. New economic forces have brought up a broad production of new buildings, but they have also fallen on the vulnerable wooden town structure.

The urbanisation of course causes a pressure on many of the old town areas. In Sweden especially the town centres have been remodelled completely. The development is characterised by the concentration of the department stores of a few retail trade chains into the old town centres. The land is exploited to a much higher degree than previously, and so the increased land value has made it profitable for the landowners to pull down the old structure.
The central business area is served by a peripheral, often four-lane ring road, with wervice accesses and generous parking facilities, which have pushed away a good portion of the old structures. An effective co-operation between city authorities, planners and private capital has resulted in a rapid change in most of the Swedish towns.

But what happens immediately outside the central cores of the towns? The areas, containing dwellings and working places, are characterised by decline and decay, while they are left to wait for further redevelopment. Demolished sites, and fragments of the old wooden town, disturbed by the traffic pressure form the prevailing picture of the former coherent areas.

There has been a determinde belief in demolition and redevelopment, expressed in the post-war housing programmes. With the exception of a few towns, it has, however, not been possible to get rid of all the houses in the old town areas. After the first boom, the builders and contractors hesitate, and redevelopment is often postponed. A dilemma has occurred: what will happen to the rest of the old town?

In Finland the total redevelopment started later, but it has been perhaps still more violent. There has not been a similar concentration of department stores as in Sweden, but instead the housing policy has strongly supported the building of new blocks of multi-storey apartment houses, even into the old town areas. Generous building rights have been guaranteed to the contractors, and the low density of the existing wooden house areas has created an easy market for property speculators. The redevelopment has been enforced by town planning. Many Finnish town areas have got plans that directly demand a complete restructuring of the town areas. Not a single house, except a couple of gems, is allowed to be standing, if the plans are to be realised.

Functionalist planning ideals, originated in the metropolis of Europe, demanding light, air and greenery, have been transplanted on the wooden town structure, which surely has air and greenery from the beginning. There has, however, been a clift between plans and reality, between forecasts and the real resources available. In some cases the redevelopment has been successful, but often only fragments of the new plans have been realised, standing in a definite contrast to the remaining old town structure. The old areas fall into decay, while waiting for the hew plans to be realised. The continuous maintenance of buildings is neglected, as the houses are predestinated to be pulled down.

In Sweden and Finland there has also been a prevailing negative attitude towards the timber houses. This attitude is now enforced by the decay of the wooden house areas, where continuous maintenance is prevented. Wooden houses are really sensitive, and the lack of repairs soon causes irremediable defects to the technical state of the buildings. The possibility of creating better living conditions through improvement and modernisation of the old houses has, until recently, only seldom been taken into consideration in the official policies.

While both the official housing and town planning policies and the common attitude in Sweden and Finland have presupposed an almost total liquidation of the timber town areas, the development has been somewhat different in Norway. In bigger towns and old workers' house areas the tendencies have been similar to Sweden and Finland. But while these countries have laid a strong emphasis on the production of large apartment blocks - almost 80 % of the yearly production of flats - the small house production is dominating in Norway. Two thirds of all new habitation consists of small houses. Thus there is no problematic contrast between new housing and the existing small-house areas. A careful maintenance and improvement of old houses is typical for many Norwegian small towns. The rather high density of existing areas diminishes the speculation with increasing land values. Thus Norway can offer examples of a 'spontaneous' preservation of many wooden towns.

It is evident, that at least in Sweden and Finland the attempts to preserve old town areas have not proved to be very successful. Either a couple of selected buildings stand in a definite contrast to a totally transformed environment, or some bigger areas of cultural preservation tend to become exceptions and isolated reservations. Also when there is a will to preserve areas, the prevailing legislation and housing policy, directed to support new construction, cause difficulties to the old environments. The solution of the problem of preserving areas of cultural interest in these countries cannot be only to increase the number of selected monuments. What is needed, is a changed attitude towards all existing structures, a more sensible way of maintaining the existing areas and houses.

A strong opposition against the prevailing forms of redevelopment has emerged after the end of the 1960's. The misuse of existing building resources, when new building forces to pull down usable houses or when houses are left to decay, and the splitting up of coherent environments, are some of the reasons to the opposition. The redevelopment, left dependent on the laws of the market economy, has not always been successful in fulfilling its aim to realize a better standard of living for the inhabitants. Many inhabitants have been forced to move out from their old areas into even worse living conditions, and social bounds, developed during decades, have been split up. There has been many spontaneous movements in the Scandinavian countries among the inhabitants of wooden house areas, demanding a rehabilitation of the existing houses and environments.

A continuous maintenance and improvement of large existing wooden house areas, combined with careful new construction, does not only imply a more realistic use of economical resources. It is also a condition for any wider success in the attempts to preserve the heritage of town culture in Scandinavia.

This has also been pointed out in a large research project on the Scandinavian wooden towns, sponsored by the national committees of ICOMOS and various institutions and schools of architecture in the Scandinavian countries. In 29 reports the recent problems have been analysed and a wide range of propositions for solving the planning problems of the wooden towns are presented.

The studies have emphasised the qualities of a good living environment that the wooden towns can offer: the diversity of the environment, the close contact to the ground, the protected courtyards with their greenery. The defects, however, have to be defeated. Experiments have also proved, that a well planned improvement and modernisation, introducing modern conveniences, is usually clearly cheaper than new construction.

Even in official planning a new direction is to be noticed - although it is partly due to changed economical conjunctures. New loans for improvement have for instance enforced the rehabilitation of the Swedish timber house areas still preserved. In Norway there seems to be a strong interest in improving existing areas. Finland gives the most dull future prospects. Except for some few areas, mainly old areas with irregular town plans, the destruction and decay of the wooden town goes further.

A new planning, which gives equal conditions for rehabilitation dompared to new construction, is needed in Finland. But also in Finland a shift of opinions is visible, although almost too late. In some of the earlier doomed areas, improvement and repair work is carried out today.

A new form of planning is needed, not plans that only answer to new growing demands, but plans that show how to use the existing town structures. Much is destroyed, but there is still work to be done in the field of the preservation of the timber towns. The recent studies on the wooden towns of Scandinavia include 66 Swedish, 54 Norwegian and 26 Finnish towns or town areas, in which the traditional wooden house structure is still dominating. A main task is to guarantee good living conditions for the inhabitants.