

# The Finnish Government's Architectural Policy

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## 1 The aim of architectural policy

The purpose of the government's architectural policy is to define its architectural frameworks and goals for subsequent implementation by the public authorities. Its architectural policy establishes guidelines for the protection of our architectural heritage, and for the maintenance and enhancement of the value of our existing building stock. It also provides opportunities for improving the existing high architectural standards of building as well as creating a suitable climate to enable our construction sector to compete effectively in a wider international setting.

The societal, cultural and economic values of architecture are great. It is an important part of our national culture. It provides the means by which to create a good living environment - which every citizen has the right to enjoy - as well as high quality architecture. It is the duty of every public body to realise this right.

Architectural policy aims to improve constructional quality, and it gives meaning to the principles of sustainable development in land use planning and building construction. In addition, it fosters transparency and interaction between interested parties. These are also central goals of the new land use and building legislation reforms currently being put into place.

### 1.1 What is architecture ?

The classical definition of architecture rests on three corner stones: utility, durability and beauty. These three foundations remain as valid today as they ever were, though modern approaches have added new dimensions to them.

Utility comprises functionality, practicality and efficient use of resources. Durability has evolved from merely the strength of structures to include ecological sustainability as well. However, greater emphasis needs to be put on the qualities of beauty and comfort in urban environments than occurs today.

Architecture is about time and place. Time connects buildings and their surroundings and creates a cultural heritage and history. Place gives meaning to the relationships between architecture and its immediate setting and the natural environment.

Architecture is created through, among other things, scale, forms, spatial relationships, structuring, choice of materials, detailing and careful execution. Architecture is important because the built environment forms the physical framework for human activity with architecture having a central role in deciding its quality. Moreover, architecture carries strong meanings, thus creating national and local identities.

Buildings always have long term effects and that is why architecture creates permanent values.

The cultural environments of towns and countryside are our wealth, and there are age layers in our towns which must be preserved. The cultural landscape which the buildings and the natural environment together form is an essential part of the value of the countryside.

## 1.2 A good environment is a basic right of every citizen

Greater environmental awareness and appreciation of the natural environment has changed the relationship between people and their surroundings and has increased the need for both sustainable life styles and sustainable physical environments.

Our constitution guarantees everyone fundamental rights to a healthy environment, and an opportunity to influence decision-making regarding the environment. However, it also imposes a responsibility for the environment and our cultural heritage. The government's architectural policy promotes the realisation of these rights.

Genuine opportunity for dialogue between decision-making and the people is an important element in the realisation of a citizen-centred society. Open decision-making systems and well informed and active citizens are needed for this. Popular participation in the processes, especially in matters relating to the immediate environment, has gained importance. In land-use planning and in building, the citizens' independent actions and participation complement the traditional culture of government.

Beyond that, responsibility for the cultural heritage requires that municipal decision-making in planning and building issues pays more attention to the preservation of the cultural and aesthetic values of the existing building stock and immediate environments.

## 1.3 The importance of architecture for national wealth

Two thirds of our fixed national wealth is in buildings and 15 % of the active work force is employed in the construction sector. Moreover, the construction sector makes up approximately 18 % of GDP. During the life time of a building, its maintenance and refurbishment demands funds many times the initial building investment. Good architecture makes a direct contribution to the national wealth.

The Finnish construction sector is now part of the European single market. By creating opportunities for the construction of high quality buildings, employment and our economic competitiveness are strengthened in all market areas. This competitiveness can be substantially improved by combining the established reputations of Finnish architecture and Finnish industry.

## 1.4 Importance of the architectural heritage

The core of national and local culture is the built environment, where buildings of different ages complement each other and are adapted to the natural surroundings. Thus is the cultural landscape born and thus develops a good built environment - remaining good also in the future. The essential element of the building culture is a long term technical and artistic activity which moulds the local natural conditions into parts of the cultural landscape. At its best, architecture is a combination of existing achievements and an on-going creative process.

## 2 Public building setting an example

### 2.1 The state as an owner of property and as a client

The state is both an important property owner and client. The majority of buildings of national value have either been built by the state or are owned by it. For decades the methods employed by the state building authorities have served as models for the other clients.

All public building must be of high quality. The environmental, building and refurbishment projects which the state carries out or financially supports are required to be sustainable and of high quality in their design and execution. These principles must embrace all state activities, for instance those of the Ministries of Finance, Labour, Trade and Industry, and Transport and Communications, because these activities have considerable indirect effects on the quality of the living environment and architecture.

The State Real Property Authority is the most important procurer and maintainer of state properties and it encourages good building procurement practice. It is vitally important to secure the continuity of this setting of high standards into the future. Furthermore, other procuring bodies of the state have the opportunity within their specific functions to act as exemplary procurers. Guidance by way of information and the standards laid down to ensure high quality will be extended to all activities affecting the environment: from the building of roads and waterways, through to technical services, to signposts and lettering, and also to designated green areas.

(Decision 1)

The Government expects the public and state-supported building and environmental development to set a high quality example for all building in Finland. The State Real Property Authority and other state offices and companies, as well as state-owned enterprises that manage properties must take into account the promotion of good architecture and the environment.

(Decision 2)

Considerations of quality and costs of public building must take the whole life cycle into account so that the value of our fixed national wealth remains high, and that its maintenance costs are affordable.

### 2.2 Public funding of building

State investment in its own property and those financed by it is considerable, and it is imperative that when these investments are made their effects on the quality of the citizens' living environment are also considered.

Building and construction investments are long-term. As such all building projects must be designed and realised carefully and professionally, in accordance with the principles of sustainable development. In order to obtain financial support from the state, it should be a requirement that quality targets are attained. Moreover, when the state supports projects where building is only a part of a larger entity, the building work must meet the standards that the state has set for its own projects.

(Decision 3)

When public funds are allocated for building and refurbishment investments, the Government requires that attention is paid to those aspects affecting the quality of architecture and the environment.

### 3 Guidance and control

#### 3.1 Building legislation and other forms of official guidance

As national legislator, the state has both a multifaceted and an extensive responsibility over building and the built environment. Its central tool is the building legislation, the function of which is to define the frameworks and create opportunities for a balanced development of habitats and building, and to encourage the establishment and maintenance of a good living environment.

The totally reformed building legislation will come in to force by the year 2000. The goal is to direct land use planning towards promoting sustainable development, reducing environmental damage and saving natural resources. At the level of practical guidance work, this means putting more emphasis on the quality of building, environmental questions, the life-cycle approach, and promoting refurbishment. The new Land Use and Building Act advances the goals of the architectural policy.

When it is not possible to achieve the desired end result for the protection of the architectural heritage via the Land Use and Building Act, procedures provided in the Building Preservation Act can be used. The Building Preservation Act gives people at the municipal level an opportunity to contribute in the conservation of the essential characteristics of their own living environment.

Many other pieces of legislation have indirect effects on the quality of the living environment. However, it is necessary in the course of the legislative processes to give more attention to the evaluation of their effects on the environment from the point of view of architectural quality.

The general direction of the legislation has been to strengthen the powers of municipalities and in turn to increase popular participation in decision-making. For instance, the reform of the building legislation abolishes the obligation of the municipalities to submit their land use plans to higher authority for approval. As the building legislation develops, regional and local responsibility will be further increased. These and the expectations associated with greater popular decision-making necessitate a strong network of specialist expertise together with adequate resources.

(Decision 4)

In the preparation of laws and regulations attention will be paid to the evaluation of the effects of these laws and regulations on the architectural quality of the living environment.

(Decision 5)

The opportunities for citizens to influence decisions concerning their own living environment will be strengthened.

### 3.2 The role of regional architects

The state-financed system of regional architects has increased architectural expertise, especially in remote and small municipalities. The committee which prepared the reform of the building legislation proposed that the system be extended from the present 30 municipalities to about 100 municipalities, and that it should be directed more clearly to serve the planning needs of small municipalities. From the point of view of architectural policy it is important that when developing the tasks of regional architects, their role as expert advisors in architecture and culture in the countryside will be maintained.

(Decision 6)

The Ministry of the Environment will explore ways to extend the existing regional architect involvement in small municipalities to cover the whole country and to link it to the tasks of the regional environment centres. Beyond that, it will propose that necessary resources be allocated to increase the number of regional architects.

## 4 Culture and education

### 4.1 Our architectural heritage

Our daily life can become richer and more inspiring as advantage is taken of the various potential benefits of the architectural heritage. Multiple layers of time help to create an identity of place and are thus important for building as well as for the preservation of the architectural heritage. Careful maintenance of the built environment is the basis of the constructional culture.

Moreover, the value of the architectural heritage for the broader cultural identity and national economy necessitates that it is taken into account in societal and economic solutions. The state aims in its action in different areas of government to enhance the preservation of the architectural heritage.

(Decision 7)

A national strategy for building conservation and for the maintenance of the architectural heritage will be formulated.

A comprehensive inventory of the cultural heritage together with related research programmes is urgently needed if the built environment is to be conserved. Sufficient information on the architectural heritage in the municipalities, be that heritage of local or national value, is an absolute requirement for conservation work. At this moment, this inventory has been carried out only in some areas of our country.

Training in how to use traditional building techniques and materials and how to design and execute refurbishment and restoration using these techniques and the necessary manual skills will be developed and increased at all levels of construction-related education.

(Decision 8)

Inventories of the architectural heritage will be made in all municipalities in the country.

(Decision 9)

The National Board of Antiquities will produce a report on the need to increase the expertise in regional museums, and will make a proposal for the number of experts in architectural history as well as their placement.

(Decision 10)

The Ministry of Education will study the feasibility of establishing as a joint project of the Museum of Finnish Architecture and the National Board of Antiquities a centre for traditional building techniques, which will exhibit and inform of building methods from different historical periods.

All municipal actions which will affect how the environment develops must share the common goal of high quality in the built and natural environment. The municipal programmes for the cultural environment will present the development goals and an action plan to enhance the comfort and functionality in the inhabitant's immediate surroundings and to conserve the cultural heritage. This will also strengthen local identity

#### 4.2 Architecture as a part of the arts and culture

In its report on cultural policy to Parliament in 1993 the government defined culture as the foundation of our national existence. Architecture is a central and highly visible form of culture.

Our national identity has often found its most durable expressions through architecture. We have expressed through buildings the vitality and uniqueness of our culture, and because buildings and built environments are expressions of our country and our culture, they form the basis of the image of Finland as a part of Europe and the World. Moreover, the internationally best known manifestations of our culture are often examples of architecture.

The interaction of art and production is an essential element of architecture. This interaction gives birth to the means for the development of architecture. In turn, the renewal of Finnish architecture necessitates provisions for experimental building and in this way provides genuine opportunities for innovation to develop.

The vital force of architecture depends very much on how the client appreciates culture and the designer's skills and motivation. The artistic work of architects and interdisciplinary artistic activity need appropriate economic resources.

That part of financial support for the arts which is channeled into architecture must be developed in a way that reflects the importance of architecture in cultural policy.

(Decision 11)

The Ministry of Education actively strengthens the position of architecture in Finnish arts and culture.

### 4.3 Basic education

By raising public awareness of architecture it is possible to improve popular participation in the decision-making regarding the environment and its debate. Understanding architecture is one aspect of civic skills.

The teaching of architecture in lower and upper secondary schools has been inadequate because of the lack of resources and teaching materials. However, the law regarding basic education in the arts provides a good framework from which to draw courses for the teaching of architecture at various levels of education. Moreover, the importance of the building culture should be further emphasised in teacher training curriculums.

The key to understanding architecture lies primarily in education in the arts, and also environmental studies encompassing matters of the built environment. The improvement of the citizens' competence to participate in the decision-making concerning matters of their own surroundings will be greatly enhanced when architecture becomes part of the curriculums of the environmental studies and biology, geography or history and political sciences.

(Decision 12)

The National Board of Education strengthens the position of architectural education when creating the bases for the curriculums. In addition, the needs of architectural education are taken into consideration in the execution of the programme for linking schools and and the wider cultural setting.

(Decision 13)

The Ministry of Education explores the opportunities to develop architectural education within the framework of the voluntary adult education to improve the opportunities of the citizens to act in the decision making concerning matters of their own living environment.

Beyond the considerations of basic education, it is important to find opportunities to raise the awareness of decision-makers of the value of the built environment and its evolving processes.

(Decision 14)

The decision makers, elected persons and functionaries of the municipalities will be offered training in architecture.

### 4.4 Professional education

The professional competence of architects embraces not only a solid foundation of design skills but also a thorough understanding of the principles of architecture, architectural conservation and construction techniques, coupled with an understanding of the environment and society and the mastering of the processes of building.

Architectural education cannot take place in isolation, it must be firmly in touch with its ambient society. Both research and the application of theory into practice must be central to the curriculum. In this way a fertile interaction can be created between the teaching of architecture and its practice. On top of that, research will be more purposefully directed, and top level professional skills will be secured.

(Decision 15)

Education in the construction sector will be developed so that all professionals who work in that sector will understand the meaning of the high quality of design and its execution. Additionally, the fundamentals of the history of building and architecture will be included in the professional education at all levels.

(Decision 16)

In architectural education an opportunity will be given to design and realise experimental buildings to demonstrate and complement teaching and research work.

#### 4.5 Architectural research

Investment in research into construction technologies helps to maintain a technological and international competitiveness. Such research has not, in most cases, embraced architecture.

A national strategy for architectural research and development together with experimental building programmes is needed: this will also improve the co-operation between architectural research units which today is not extensive. This strategy will consist of a proposal for the co-ordination of architectural research and development and a definition of national goals, focusing on current issues and trends as well as basic research.,

(Decision 17)

The Academy of Finland will explore opportunities to develop architectural research.

### 5 Architecture and the quality of building

#### 5.1 The quality of architectural design

Together with other aspects of design, architectural design aims to combine the requirements of the client with the conditions of the site. Such design will determine the functional, technical and aesthetic qualities of the final structure and has a bearing on its total cost. The skill and motivation of the builders and the quality of building materials, components and parts will decide the success of the project. The client, when defining the brief for the project, not only assumes responsibility for the quality of building user's operating environment, but also for the effects of his building project on the aesthetic quality of its surroundings.

A good final result is guaranteed through the development of professional skills, utilizing experience, securing continuing activity, close co-operation between all parties, and the long-term bearing of responsibilities.

Because of the substantial economic value of construction and the marked and enduring effects it has on the environment, consumer protection must be improved. This needs to be done by raising the quality of the construction in line with the principles of sustainable development - especially from the point of view of health, functionality and aesthetics - and by clarifying the responsibilities of the parties in the building process.

Total control of the building process from design to execution is an essential part in the realisation of the system of responsibility. The continuing activity of the parties involved in this process is a requirement for the bearing of responsibility beyond the completion of the project. The government considers it important that special attention is paid to these issues while the construction sector is being developed.

(Decision 18)

Development projects are started to support a quality based operating culture and to enhance the overall economy of the construction sector and building processes.

(Decision 19)

The Council of State calls those state offices and works which procure buildings to develop the procedures for selecting the architect - within EU legislation - so that the qualifications of the providers and the quality and overall economy of the project will be emphasised.

## 5.2 Quality assurance

Quality is assured from two directions. First, in the firms, by way of quality systems and secondly, through the professional skills of the individuals working with quality and official control. The qualifications of the parties involved in the project must always correspond with the requirements of the project from the company level to that of individuals.

Professional skills are measured in terms of education, experience and achievements. In many EU member states, the practice of architecture - bearing the responsibility for the project - is subject to licensing and requires registration either by the profession or a public authority. To demonstrate the architect's competence as defined in the architects' directive and in the supplementary recommendations, it takes the a minimum of five years of university level studies, which must include the requirements of the directive, plus two years of practical experience.

In Finland, the title of architect is held by those who have received the appropriate academic diploma, but in many European countries it is the title given to a person qualified to perform the functions of an architect. The Finnish situation is not sufficient to secure the professional mobility as guaranteed by the European single market or maintain the quality based operating culture. In addition to the diploma, a register should be established of architects holding the qualifications of the architects' directive. Such a register would ensure their professional competence.

(Decision 20)

The Ministry of the Environment will prepare together with the key organisations in the sector the establishment of an architects' register to confirm the professional competence in architecture together with the complementing functions of main designer, and in addition this register will facilitate the export of design expertise. The Ministry of the Environment must secure the interests of the society as regards the content and control of such a register, which would be regulated by the construction sector itself.

### 5.3 Architectural competitions

The means of selecting architects for all public building should be architectural design competition or tendering competition based on quality and on the total cost of the end result. In the latter means, the competition should be based primarily on the professional skills of the architect, including careful design work, skillful use of materials and construction techniques.

Architectural design competitions in Finland go back more than a hundred years, a tradition which is appreciated abroad. In our country, nearly all of the most important public buildings built during the last century are results of such competitions. Architectural design competition gives the client an opportunity to study a range of solutions to the design problem and to secure the quality of the final construction.

Architectural competitions encourage innovation in building and the evolution of architecture. A competition is also a form of further education and a way to offer opportunities for new architects. The large number of alternative solutions a competition produces makes easier the popular debate regarding the development options for the environment. The great success of Finnish architects in international competitions has shown that competitions to be an important disseminator of both Finnish know-how and Finnish culture.

(Decision 21)

The Council of State invites state organisations which procure buildings to increasingly exploit architectural design competitions to seek out exemplary solutions and as a method of selecting architects.

## 6 Raising awareness of architecture

### 6.1 Public awareness

Finnish architecture is internationally acknowledged as being of high quality. To uphold this reputation, involvement in international exhibitions and seminars must be increased, publications and other means of publicizing Finnish architecture should also be developed.

The Museum of Finnish Architecture is one of the oldest architectural museums in the world. Central to its activity are its exhibitions and publications, which reach wide audiences both domestically and internationally. The museum is planning to increase the number of travelling exhibitions, and exhibitions aimed at special audiences. This is at present possible, however, only through extra financing. A permanent exhibition of Finnish architecture requires an extension of the museum's exhibition space.

The professional press, the Museum of Finnish Architecture, and other media routinely take care of the information dissemination and documentation of architecture as. This task can be helped by strengthening the resources of the Museum of Finnish Architecture, by supporting publication projects and training of the journalists working in the field.

(Decision 22)

The Ministry of Education will secure the financial resources necessary for the continuous and successful work of the Museum of Finnish Architecture as an architectural information centre.

### 6.2 Encouraging and awarding

The Council of State encourages all participants in our society, from municipalities to private organisations and individuals, to work for the improvement of architecture and a better environment.

By encouraging the parties involved in the building process to move towards better architectural quality and in turn awarding both high quality projects and the designers responsible, architecture can be promoted.

(Decision 23)

The Ministry of Education will explore ways of developing the system of awarding environmental and architectural projects. Both high quality projects and the skills of the designers will be acknowledged.

The central goals of the government's architectural policy are:

- to create opportunities for the realisation of the constitutional rights of the citizen to have a good environment
- to facilitate the citizen's rights and his/her responsibilities for his/her own environment by promoting architectural education and public awareness
- to set high standards for public building and property management and in turn to set an example for the whole construction sector
- to encourage to use of procedures that will enhance architecture and high quality building
- to promote innovation through architectural education and research and development work
- to improve the care of our architectural heritage and the development of the built environment as a part of a broader approach to cultural history and architecture.

The commitment of the public authorities to the goals of the government's architectural policy is essential for the realisation of that policy. They must review their action strategies in relation to the goals and remove possible conflicts in existing programmes. To ensure this, the state government must arrange the necessary follow-up and guidance. The programmes and procedures must be developed and the interaction between various sectors improved in line with the guidelines of the architectural policy. To realise the goals of the policy requires that a detailed action plan be made.

(Decision 24)

The Ministry of Education and the Ministry of the Environment will jointly set up a committee to follow-up the government's architectural policy. It will draft a detailed action plan, monitor the realisation of the goals of the architectural policy and make proposals for the further action as necessary.

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