

SPACE AND COURT

Swedish rural district court-houses 1734-1970; conceived, materialized and used

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Abstract

Although the court of justice is a fundamental institution of our society, the socio-spatial conditions and past of the Swedish district court have rarely been objects of academic research. The aim of this thesis is to examine the design of rural district court-houses from the period of 1734-1970, starting out from the often-assumed causal relation between function and form. Is it possible to understand the design of these buildings by relating to its function? Departing from Henri Lefèbvre's theory on the social production of space, this thesis deals with the different stages and participants in the building process and describes the court-houses as they were *conceived, built* and *used*. The time delimitation corresponds to a legal provision, which stipulated that inhabitants in all judicial districts were responsible for building and maintaining local court-houses. The thesis is in part based on a national survey of law court buildings, but also on four case studies, and alternates between an overview perspective and close-up studies.

In the mid-18th century, court-houses did not contain only the court-room and the two chambers that were laid down by the legal provision; they were larger and contained several different rooms. At this early point, the conception of such buildings implied more than a mere court-*session*-house, as the actual practice included other functions. The study further shows that around year 1800, their design was the result of an already limited number of established conventions of spatial configuration and form, identical to those classicist principles which characterized the residences of local officials. It was not founded on articulated needs; yet, the choice of forms was certainly not arbitrary, since court-houses thus became part of the *official* architecture. It is further evident that certain participants tried to spatially separate the various activities within the buildings, mainly by modifying the established structure without changing the symmetrical appearance. Nevertheless, as representative as they may have appeared, these buildings were thoroughly integrated into the everyday, agricultural landscape. At the turn of the next century, most layouts still related to the 18th century idea, the principle feature of which was constituted by the large court-room at the centre of the configuration. Although larger in general and with an urban character, the design was poorly adapted to the practices of the now permanent administration, which required large office premises. In parallel to earlier periods, the architecture rather resembled a private mansion, a suitable solution when the second floor of the building formed a spacious flat for the judge. A major change in style and configuration took place after the Second World War, when classicist principles were abandoned and the functions distinctly distributed within the structure and exposed in the exterior. Nevertheless, there was still no *court-house architecture* and, however radically implemented, the idea of separation was not novel. Indeed, the very wording of the legal provision can be considered a good example of such strivings, as can the attempts by 19th and early 20th century architects to modify conventional structures. The habits of court-house users only gradually concurred with the representations of court-house space. In practice, the buildings were more multi-functional and the social patterns and routines more durable than the conceptions behind new architectural designs had assumed.

KEYWORDS: court-house, socio-spatial conditions, function, form, spatial configuration, practice, representation

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RUMMET OCH RÄTTEN

Tingshus som föreställning, byggnad och rum i användning 1734-1970

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Akademisk avhandling för avläggande av filosofie doktorsexamen i kulturvård som med tillstånd av naturvetenskapliga fakultetsnämnden kommer att offentligen försvaras vid disputation onsdagen den 9 februari 2011 kl. 13.00, Institutionen för kulturvård, Hörsalen, Guldhedsgatan 5A, Göteborg

Opponent professor Fredric Bedoire, Kungl. Konsthögskolan

Handledare professor Ola Wetterberg

Ordförande vid disputationen professor Ola Wetterberg



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