

The far reaches of **Norway**, stretching from the polar circle to the northern cape at the 71st parallel, and to the Svalbard Islands even further north, is a vast landscape of islands, fjords and mountains. The vernacular architecture of the region's fishing industry reveals a long and advanced building tradition along the coast. But the north, like many remote areas around the world, has also provided a laboratory for modern architecture since the Second World War.

Northern lights

NORWAY — TEXT: JOAKIM SKAJAA, ILLUSTRATION: SYLVAIN TEGROEG

Exploring a city, region, or theme

This has especially been the case in the post-war period, but also in more recent decades when the relative distance from the mainstream of the country's southern parts has provided a clean slate for different, more concentrated discussions. Right now, the landscape is shifting and the northern areas are taking a more central position with their proximity to large-scale climatic and economic developments in the Arctic.

The cities and villages of northern Norway were heavily impacted by the war, both in its early days, when the key port city of Narvik was contested, and towards the war's end. Many cities were completely destroyed, making planning for a complete reconstruction necessary. This effort, called the 'Planning of Burned Places', is the reason many of these small cities and villages on the northern edge of Europe are not organically grown settlements but classically planned, with ordered streets on clear grids oriented towards the distant mountain ranges.

This period of rebuilding, spanning from the war's immediate aftermath to the late 1960s, also provided a generation of architects the possibility to build a large number of churches, town halls, schools, swimming complexes, cultural centres and other public buildings. Some, like Jan Inge Hovig, assembled a substantial oeuvre in just a few years. In the early 1950s, pre-war national modernism, where an international style mixes with hints of local folklore, is apparent, while in the '60s a more simple international style took its place. Magnus Poulsson represents the pre-war generation, while Jan Inge Hovig is a representative of the post-war generation. The latter finished his architectural education in 1946 and went on to hold the position of city architect in Narvik, heading the rebuilding there from 1947 to 1950.

Through the 1980s and early '90s, a series of interesting projects were realized that questioned the existing architectural production, trying to develop

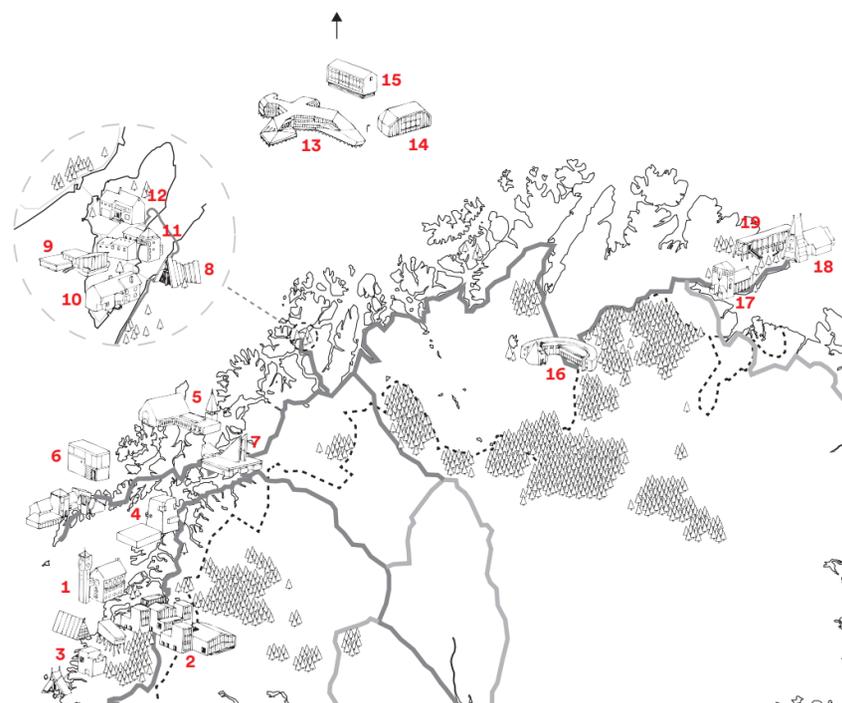
different modes of practice. Knowledge of local conditions, both physical and social, were used as a starting point. Collaboration and participatory processes were important to both co-housing projects and urban planning processes. Knut Eirik Dal and Nils Mjåland of Blå Strek are significant as predecessors for later offices like 70° Nord and Dahl & Uhre, and Tromsø is this era's undeniable centre.

In a kind of late post-modern period, a more formal approach to architecture has been developed. Associations with indigenous culture and natural phenomena (icebergs, ice sheets and the Northern Lights) are taken as starting points for architectural forms. More recently, the northern part of Norway has experienced a major shift, from remote outpost to the centre of rapid transformation. This change is fuelled by the discovery and exploration of energy resources on the seabed, as well as the withdrawal of the ice sheets and resulting geopolitical implications. It is a time also characterized by an increasingly international architectural production. Architects from abroad are given important projects, and local architects are more rapidly influenced by global practice, hyperlocal movements and DIY spirit.

For international travellers, **Bodø** is a good place to arrive, with the possibility of reaching the Lofoten archipelago, Harstad and Tromsø from there. Distances are vast, but travel options are varied. There are many local flights, and the Hurtigruten cruise line brings travellers by sea from Bergen in the south to Kirkenes in the north-east.

Bodø is the main city of Nordland, the southern-most of northern Norway's three counties. The city was rebuilt after the war with an urban plan that combines classical ideas with a strong relationship to the surrounding nature. The **town hall (1)** by Gudolf Blakstad and Herman Munthe-Kaas was completed in 1962. The centrally located building has clear pre-modern references, with a bell tower and main hall on the *piano nobile*. In 2012, Danish firm Atelier Lorentzen & Langkilde won the competition for a new addition to the building, which is a good

'The region has experienced a major shift, from remote outpost to the centre of rapid transformation.'



1 **BODØ TOWN HALL (1962)**
Architect: Gudolf Blakstad and Herman Munthe-Kaas
Address: Gjørdåsveien 2, Bodø



2 **BODØ CULTURAL QUARTER (2014)**
Architect: DRDH Architects
Address: Kwartal 100-105, Bodø
Info: www.drdharchitects.co.uk



3 **SALT ART AND ARCHITECTURE FESTIVAL (2014)**
Architect: Sami Rintala with international students
Address: Sandhornøya, Gildeskål
Info: www.salted.no



4 **KNUT HAMSUN CENTRE (2009)**
Architect: Steven Holl Architects
Address: 8294 Hamarøy
Info: www.stevenholl.com



5 **HARSTAD CHURCH (1958)**
Architects: Jan Inge Hovig
Address: Åsveien 2, Harstad



6 **GRUNNFJØR BICYCLE SHELTER (2004)**
Architect: 70° Nord
Address: Austvågey, Lofoten
Info: www.70n.no



7 **GRATANGEN CHURCH (1971)**
Architect: Oskar Norderval
Address: Årstein, Gratangen



8 **TROMSDALEN CHURCH (1965)**
Architect: Jan Inge Hovig
Address: Hans Nilsens veg 41, Tromsø



9 **ALFHEIM SWIMMING HALL (1965)**
Architect: Jan Inge Hovig
Address: Alfheimveien 23, Tromsø



10 **GRØNNEGATA 21-23 (1986)**
Architects: Blå Strek arkitekter
Address: Grønnegata 21-23, Tromsø
Info: www.bluearchitecture.com



11 **VILLA HOLMBOE (1988)**
Architect: Blå Strek arkitekter
Address: Conrad Holmboes vei 13, Tromsø
Info: www.bluearchitecture.com



12 **BO I NORD RESIDENTIAL AREA (1988-1990)**
Architect: Various architects
Address: Olsgårdvegen 17, Tromsø



13 **SVALBARD SCIENCE CENTRE (2005)**
Architect: Jarmund Vignæs Architects
Address: Hilmar Rekstens vei, Longyearbyen
Info: www.jva.no



14 **POLARBO RESIDENCE (1994)**
Architect: Steinsvik Arkitektkontor
Address: Lia, Vei 234
Info: www.steinsvikarkitektkontor.blogspot.nl



15 **SVALBARD HOUSING (2009)**
Architect: Brendeland & Kristoffersen
Address: Vei 230, Longyearbyen
Info: www.bkark.no



16 **THE SÁMI PARLIAMENT OF NORWAY (2000)**
Architect: Stein Halvorsen
Address: Aivojvargeidnu 50, Karasjok
Info: www.sh-arkitekter.no



17 **VADSØ CHURCH (1954-1958)**
Architect: Magnus Poulsson
Address: Amtmannsgt 1B, Vadsø



18 **VARDØ CHURCH (1958)**
Architect: Eivind Moestue
Address: Søndre Langgate 2, Vardø



19 **STEILNESSET MEMORIAL (2011)**
Architect: Peter Zumthor, Louise Bourgeois
Address: Andreas Lies gate 9950, Vardø
Info: www.nasjonale turistveger.no/en/varanger/steilneset

(Northern lights)

starting point for a tour of the city that should also include the **new cultural quarter (2)**. Due to open in late 2014, it is based on a 2009 competition win by British practice DRDH. The three buildings in the quarter reference the city's existing buildings, like the much older town hall, and develops a new relationship to the landscape. It includes a theatre, concert hall, new library, cafés and exhibition spaces.

A 45-minute trip by high-speed passenger boat takes you to Sandhornøya and the **SALT art and architecture festival (3)**. Now in its first year, the festival is situated on a large white beach surrounded by mountains and looking out on the northern archipelago. The project consists of a group of buildings (including a grand hall, sauna and living quarters) created by Sami Rintala and international groups of students. The event will remain at its current location until September 2015, when it heads off on a nomadic journey through the Arctic territories.*

The **Knut Hamsun Centre (4)** in Hamarøy is a two-hour drive up the coast from Bodø. Based on a 1994 competition win by Steven Holl, the centre, a black tower with characteristically coloured balconies and grass roof, makes poetic links between Hamsun's character, writing and nature.

Harstad, a small city 130 kilometres further up the coast, could be a starting point for a tour of the beautiful Lofoten archipelago. The town is home to the **Harstad Church (5)** by Jan Inge Hovig. An early example of his work, it is clearly influenced by the work of earlier Norwegian modernists, with its slate roofs and natural stone walls.

The national tourist road in Lofoten starts in Raftsundet, a couple hours south of Harstad, and continues for 200 kilometres until it reaches Å (Moskenes), a small town at the southernmost tip of the archipelago. The tourist road includes a series of small buildings conceived by architects like Snøhetta, Jarmund/Vigsnæs, Manthey Kula, and 70° Nord (see www.nasjonalaturistveger.no for routes and projects). The latter made a **small tower** at Grunnfjør (6) that provides both a protected place to take in the beautiful views and a bicycle shed.

Driving north, stop in Tromsø Gratangen, where Oskar Norderval's **Gratangen Church (7)** is well worth a visit. Built in untreated concrete and glass, it makes a strong impression in the landscape. The flat roof is contrasted by two triangular concrete slabs standing at 90 degrees. While clearly 'brutalist', their reference to ships' sails on the fjord below is an early example of the associative formalism of later decades.

Tromsø is the largest city in northern Norway and the second-largest city north of the polar circle. It is easy to reach, with an airport only ten minutes' drive from the city centre. Most of the city is built on an island, and Jan Inge Hovig's church, nicknamed the **Arctic Cathedral (8)**, stands at the point where the bridge from the city reaches the mainland. The church is one of the most well-known buildings in Norway. Instantly recognizable, it immediately became the city's icon upon completion in 1965. Hovig is also the architect behind the **Alfheim municipal swimming pool (9)**. The main pool is surrounded by a large glass wall giving unobstructed views towards the impressive mountains surrounding the city, the roof seemingly floating above.

Since the 1980s, Tromsø has been home to a strong community of architects producing a series of innovative housing projects. Blå Strek ('Blue Line') Architects was run by Knut Eirik Dahl, Gunnar Hageberg and Nils Mjaaland. Their housing project, **Grønnegata 21-23 (10)**, contains family housing, offices and a small gallery. The architecture is an eclectic mix of elements found in the area's traditional wooden houses and more classical architectural elements. **Villa Holmboe (11)** is another housing project where the idea of community is strong. It has two wings of apartments and a small tower with communal spaces. Residents took part in both plan-

ning and the actual building of their new home.

From 1988 to 1990, the building exhibition **Bo i nord ('Living in the North')** was organized in Tromsø (12), and included projects by Blå Strek, Div.A, Steinsvik Arkitekter, Bjerck & Bjørge and others. The exhibition, just outside the city centre, is organized around an Arctic park and includes several interesting housing projects that take both the location and the need for more social housing developments as their starting point. Blå Strek's Punktet is a series of three houses connected by an outdoor pergola, while Octopus by Løvstakken and Sundlisæter is a complex with almost one fifth of floor space set aside as common areas.

Svalbard, while mostly visited for its untouched nature and the Aurora Borealis, also has a few architectural gems. Longyearbyen, a small city of about 2000 inhabitants, is the centre of these remote islands. The city was established as a mining town, but as mining activity dwindled, its focus has become more centred on research. The **Svalbard Science Centre (13)** by Jarmund Vigsnæs Architects is a university education and research institution that also incorporates the Svalbard Museum. The building envelope is based on studies of climate, wind and snow, remotely echoing the earlier **Polarbo residence (14)** by Steinsvik Arkitektkontor. Polarbo's overall shape is intended as a plough cutting through the region's harsh winds. All the apartments open onto a shared corridor, where a communal living room and crafts room are situated. A more recent project is Brendeland & Kristoffersen's small, **three-unit housing project (15)** for the Store Norske mining company. The structure's extremely restrained detailing, reminiscent of surrounding houses, lends a great deal to its character.

Bordering both Russia and Finland, **Finnmark** is the most northern of Norway's counties, and largest by area. Karasjokk, in the eastern parts of the plains that form the majority of this region, is the administrative centre of the Sámi population. The **Sámi Parliament of Norway (16)** by Stein Halvorsen is based on a 1996 competition win. The architecture is strongly influenced by indigenous construction, especially the *lavvu* (Sámi temporary dwelling), establishing the 'Sámi style' in northern architecture.

Vadsø, a three-hour drive along the eastern border and situated on the northern shore of the Varanger Fjord, is home to the fantastically eclectic **Vadsø Church (17)** by Magnus Poulsson. It is built in the same place as an older church, but the direction of the building is changed from the usual east-west orientation to north-south, in alignment with the new city grid. This concrete church's most remarkable features are its two imposing towers topped with a large gable.

The final stop in Finnmark is the small island city of Vardø, on the most north-eastern tip of the country. In this small town can be found Eivind Moestue's **Vardø Church (18)**. Built in 1958, it has a long, narrow interior with concrete pillars. The high, thin triangle that forms the bell tower lends the structure a distinct identity. On the western coast of the island, a ten-minute walk from the city centre, is the **Steilneset Memorial (19)**. A collaboration between Peter Zumthor and artist Louise Bourgeois, it commemorates the 17th-century trial and execution of 91 people for witchcraft. It comprises two structures: a long building of wood and textile where each victim is memorialized through a small window, and a compact glass building containing Bourgeois' contribution, her last work before she died in 2010.

The Arctic University of Norway in Tromsø hosts a comprehensive online guide to architecture in northern Norway (www.ub.uit.no/baser/arkinord). Writing this guide would have been difficult without it as a source for project details and images.

* Unfortunately the first autumn storm caused severe damage to some of the installations and the exhibition is currently closed for rebuilding. Check the website for updates (www.salted.no).

IN THE NEXT ISSUE:

EUROVISION: HUNGARY

In recent years, Hungary has witnessed significant economic, political and social changes. The economic crisis slowed the construction industry, forcing many architects to venture into design and technology. The government's centralizing tendencies and budget cuts resulted in a gap in social services, inviting a focus on community cohesion and public space. In the meantime, Budapest has become one of Europe's party capitals, with interior design driving the commercialization of entire neighbourhoods. *Eurovision Hungary* outlines these trends, exploring the complexity of practicing architecture in the contemporary Hungarian landscape.



↑ Spring Wind House by Architecture Ucomfortable Workshop

READY

September saw the opening of the Tadeusz Kantor's Art Documentation Centre (alias 'Cricoteka'), which is an expansion of the Museum of Tadeusz Kantor. Located along the Vistula embankment in Kraków, this public building takes in a former power station spanned by a striking, bridge-like structure. In 2007, A10 correspondents Roman Rutkowski and Lukasz Wojciechowski wrote about the first outlines of the project, which foreshadowed a busy and lively future. Coming up, we return to see if it lives up to its promises.



↑ Cricoteka by Wizja and nsMoonstudio

OFFICE

The Dutch office cepezed has tripled in size since the 1990s, and now counts about 50 employees. Recently, the firm moved into a self-designed office space located in a century-old monument in Delft. The conversion comprises three halls once built to house the laboratory of the Department of Mechanical and Naval Architecture of the Delft College of Technology (now TU Delft). Cepezed transformed the brick structures into a single, multi-company building, wherein the largest hall accommodates their own staff.



↑ Cepezed's office in a heritage-listed building, 2014

...and much more. A10 #61 issue will be published 1 January 2015.