



ICOMOS international Comité
on Historic Towns CIVVIH

2011-02-21

Concerning proposal for “ICOMOS Charter on Historic, Cities, Towns and Urban Areas”

ICOMOS SWEDEN has reviewed the revised Valetta Principles document. We find that it has been largely improved. For example we appreciate very much that the pressure on the fast growing big cities because of globalization and the enormous loss of historic values because of that has been taken into account. Still we find that some aspects have to be given more consideration

The title of the document

Why not just “ICOMOS Charter on Historic, Cities, Towns and Urban Areas”. Easy to understand, easy to remember.

Preamble

We find the text very clear and relevant. Still we would like to recommend one addition to make it still more clear, We would like to add to the end of paragraph 4 “Towns and cities tend to become more like each other and lose their genuine identity”

Conservation or safeguarding

We agree with Nils Ahlberg and others that we have to very carefully consider what word to use for the protection of the cultural and historic values of our cities, towns and urban areas. We have to consult our native English-speaking colleagues.

Taking into account:

- a city, a town or a urban area is by definition a changing structure. Towns and villages that are not allowed to be changed are exceptions
- the structure as a whole very seldom can be protected, it is only its values
- we have to use a word that gives positive associations to people in general, decision-makers etc. The word conservation gives negative associations. I believe that it says “save every detail” to most people
- to me it is impossible to conserve something intangible as identity To conserve a skyline or pattern is may be possible, but to conserve a town? For Swedish ears as an example, safeguarding seems to be more appropriate.

Why not talk about “*to save the cultural and historic values*” of.....

Topography fundamental for the historic value

We still miss a strong statement about the role of the *topography* in the proposed text. Why not enclose paragraphs like the following to the text: “*Fundamental for the historic value of most cities, towns and urban areas is that the topography is fully understandable.* It must be possible to understand what the topography has meant for the localisation to the place and to its development and identity.

That means that it must be possible to see and experience the connection between the topography, the urban development and the function of the town and how all of it has worked together in its development. If the conjunction between these aspects is lost the historic value is seriously diminished. On the other hand if the two create a synthesis and the one refers to the existence of the other the historic value will become stronger.

Changes in urban development should be planned in such a way that the relation between topography and the built structure will be kept or rather strengthened”.

New skills, tools and attitudes to manage change.

We find it very good that these needs are mentioned in the preamble. But *still what we mean with these skills, tools and attitudes have to be clearly expressed in the text and related to the “new challenge for heritage sector to manage change.* We have to write something like:

“The organizations charged with the safeguarding and enhancement of heritage need to develop their skills, their tools, their attitudes and in many cases their role in the planning process. It is a matter of continuity and a slower approach as mentioned in the document. But above all it is absolutely necessary to find new ways to define the limits for possible change. To succeed with that we have to raise the ability in general in the heritage sector to:

- define the essential values in a way that people can understand
- describe consequences for life and wellbeing of different alternatives
- take a more active and leading role in the planning process
- influence political decisions for example about use of parts of a town to make it possible to save old buildings or reach the mixed structure of cheap/expensive, flats/industrial work etc we strive for

Heritage as driving force in climate-change

Heritage as driving force towards a sustainable society could become a reality.

Why not express that as a strategy and say in clear words that heritage can become model for sustainable planning in:

- its attitudes of saving what is valuable from different aspects
- its use of sound and renewable material etc:

Adapt the document to living places more consequentially

There are some illogical traces from the old document, that handled only very old towns that were more like museums in a way

Look at for example:

Page 5 paragraph 4: It would be better to start with “Many historic towns and....

Page 8 c contemporary architecture, It is better to begin the sentence with “New buildings or adaptations to existing ones, the

For ICOMOS SWEDEN

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