

European Charter of the Architectural Heritage

Adopted by the Council of Europe, October 1975

INTRODUCTION

Thanks to the Council of Europe's initiative in declaring 1975 European Architectural Year, considerable efforts were made in every European country to make the public more aware of the irreplaceable cultural, social and economic values represented by historic monuments, groups of old buildings and interesting sites in both town and country.

It was important to co-ordinate all these efforts at the European level, to work out a joint approach to the subject and, above all, to forge a common language to state the general principles on which concerted action by the authorities responsible and the general public must be based.

It was with this intention that the Council of Europe drafted the Charter which appears below.

It is, of course, not sufficient simply to formulate principles; they must also be applied.

In future, the Council of Europe will devote its efforts to a thorough study of ways and means of applying the principles in each different country, the steady improvement of existing laws and regulations and the development of vocational training in this field.

The European Charter of the Architectural Heritage has been adopted by the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe and was solemnly proclaimed at the Congress on the European Architectural Heritage held in Amsterdam from 21 to 25 October 1975.

The Committee of Ministers,

Considering that the aim of the Council of Europe is to achieve a greater unity between its members for the purpose of safeguarding and realizing the ideals and principles which are their common heritage;

Considering that the member states of the Council of Europe which have adhered to the [European Cultural Convention](#) of 19 December 1954 committed themselves, under Article 1 of that convention, to take appropriate measures to safeguard and to encourage the development of their national contributions to the common cultural heritage of Europe;

Recognizing that the architectural heritage, an irreplaceable expression of the wealth and diversity of European culture, is shared by all people and that all the European States must show real solidarity in preserving that heritage;

Considering that the future of the architectural heritage depends largely upon its integration into the context of people's lives and upon the weight given to it in regional and town planning and development schemes;

Having regard to the Recommendation of the European Conference of Ministers responsible for the preservation and rehabilitation of the cultural heritage of monuments and sites held in Brussels in 1969, and to Recommendation 589 (1970) of the Consultative Assembly of the Council of Europe calling for a charter relating to the architectural heritage;

Asserts its determination to promote a common European policy and concerted action to protect the architectural heritage based on the principles of integrated conservation;

Recommends that the governments of member states should take the necessary legislative, administrative, financial and educational steps to implement a policy of integrated conservation for the architectural heritage, and to arouse public interest in such a policy, taking into account the results of the European Architectural Heritage Year campaign organized in 1975 under the auspices of the Council of Europe;

Adopts and proclaims the principles of the following charter, drawn up by the Council of Europe Committee on Monuments and Sites:

1. The European architectural heritage consists not only of our most important monuments: it also includes the groups of lesser buildings in our old towns and characteristic villages in their natural or manmade settings.

For many years, only major monuments were protected and restored and then without reference to their surroundings. More recently it was realized that, if the surroundings are impaired, even those monuments can lose much of their character.

Today it is recognized that entire groups of buildings, even if they do not include any example of outstanding merit, may have an atmosphere that gives them the quality of works of art, welding different periods and styles into a harmonious whole. Such groups should also be preserved.

The architectural heritage is an expression of history and helps us to understand the relevance of the past to contemporary life.

2. The past as embodied in the architectural heritage provides the sort of environment indispensable to a balanced and complete life.

In the face of a rapidly changing civilization, in which brilliant successes are accompanied by grave perils, people today have an instinctive feeling for the value of this heritage.

This heritage should be passed on to future generations in its authentic state and in all its variety as an essential part of the memory of the human race. Otherwise, part of man's awareness of his own continuity will be destroyed.

3. The architectural heritage is a capital of irreplaceable spiritual, cultural, social and economic value.

Each generation places a different interpretation on the past and derives new inspiration from it. This capital has been built up over the centuries; the destruction of any part of it leaves us poorer since nothing new that we create, however fine, will make good the loss.

Our society now has to husband its resources. Far from being a luxury this heritage is an economic asset which can be used to save community resources.

4. The structure of historic centres and sites is conducive to a harmonious social balance.

By offering the right conditions for the development of a wide range of activities our old towns and villages favoured social integration. They can once again lend themselves to a beneficial spread of activities and to a more satisfactory social mix.

5. The architectural heritage has an important part to play in education.

The architectural heritage provides a wealth of material for explaining and comparing forms and styles and their applications. Today when visual appreciation and first-hand experience play a decisive role in education, it is essential to keep alive the evidence of different periods and their achievements.

The survival of this evidence will be assured only if the need to protect it is understood by the greatest number, particularly by the younger generation who will be its future guardians.

6. This heritage is in danger.

It is threatened by ignorance, obsolescence, deterioration of every kind and neglect. Urban planning can be destructive when authorities yield too readily to economic pressures and to the demands of motor traffic. Misapplied contemporary technology and ill-considered restoration may be disastrous to old structures. Above all, land and property speculation feeds upon all errors and omissions and

brings to nought the most carefully laid plans.

7. Integrated conservation averts these dangers.

Integrated conservation is achieved by the application of sensitive restoration techniques and the correct choice of appropriate functions. In the course of history the hearts of towns and sometimes villages have been left to deteriorate and have turned into areas of substandard housing. Their deterioration must be undertaken in a spirit of social justice and should not cause the departure of the poorer inhabitants. Because of this, conservation must be one of the first considerations in all urban and regional planning.

It should be noted that integrated conservation does not rule out the introduction of modern architecture into areas containing old buildings provided that the existing context, proportions, forms, sizes and scale are fully respected and traditional materials are used.

8. Integrated conservation depends on legal, administrative, financial and technical support.

Legal

Integrated conservation should make full use of all existing laws and regulations that can contribute to the protection and preservation of the architectural heritage. Where such laws and regulations are insufficient for the purpose they should be supplemented by appropriate legal instruments at national, regional and local levels.

Administrative

In order to carry out a policy of integrated conservation, properly staffed administrative services should be established.

Financial

Where necessary the maintenance and restoration of the architectural heritage and individual parts thereof should be encouraged by suitable forms of financial aid and incentives, including tax measures.

It is essential that the financial resources made available by public authorities for the restoration of historic centres should be at least equal to those allocated for new construction.

Technical

There are today too few architects, technicians of all kinds, specialized firms and skilled craftsmen to respond to all the needs of restoration.

It is necessary to develop training facilities and increase prospects of employment for the relevant managerial, technical and manual skills. The building industry should be urged to adapt itself to these needs. Traditional crafts should be fostered rather than allowed to die out.

9. Integrated conservation cannot succeed without the cooperation of all.

Although the architectural heritage belongs to everyone, each of its parts is nevertheless at the mercy of any individual.

The public should be properly informed because citizens are entitled to participate in decisions affecting their environment.

Each generation has only a life interest in this heritage and is responsible for passing it on to future generations.

10. The european architectural heritage is the common property of our continent.

Conservation problems are not peculiar to any one country. They are common to the whole of Europe and should be dealt with in a coordinated manner. It lies with the Council of Europe to ensure that member states pursue coherent policies in a spirit of solidarity.