

Theme

3. THE 60TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE VENICE CHARTER

(ii) reflect on the impacts of the Venice Charter on conservation practice around the world.

Author

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Title

Ensuring the succession of urban development in the context of the Venice Charter

Summary

Introduction.

The principles of the Venice Charter have been and still are essential in the preservation and development of the cultural heritage of historic cities, however, their application requires research and interpretation, considering the peculiarities of local culture and conditions. The principles of this charter are to be assessed in historic cities together with concepts such as succession, traditional construction, context and contrast, craftsmanship to ensure the preservation of historical integrity and at the same time opportunities for modern successional development.

The principles of the Venice Charter have been successively clarified in other ICOMOS and cultural heritage documents, such as the Davos Declaration (2018), The Faro Convention (2005), The Charter of Riga (2000) with guidelines and recommendations on how cities can develop while preserving their historical and cultural identity. In the historical centres, especially in villages and small towns, where the impact of industrialization has been less, the preservation of craft skills is of particular importance, which is emphasized by the UNESCO Convention on the Preservation of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (2003), indicating that these skills are considered vital for the preservation of cultural identity, knowledge and the transmission of skills from generation to generation and the maintenance of cultural diversity. The Convention defines intangible cultural heritage as the practices, expressions, knowledge, skills and related tools, objects, artefacts, and cultural spaces that communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals recognize as part of their cultural heritage.

Special preservation values of cities.

Cities have been shaped by different natural, cultural, and political influences, and have evolved in very different ways over time. Towns and villages - World Heritage Sites - each have their own outstanding universal value, determined by the unique factors and paths of their development.

The value of a city lies in its layout and building as a masterpiece, e.g. Brasilia, Brazil; the value of a city lies in its architectural style or in the handwriting of its author, e.g. City of Vicenza and the Palladian Villas of the Veneto, Italy; and the value of a city lies in the preservation of historical evidence that has developed over time, e.g. Visby, Sweden.

Urban continuity and historic preservation

The development of cities is mostly continuous, and it is essential to view the provisions of the Venice Charter on the modern feeling of the continuation of the city's fabric and objects with the city's previous development. Continuation of traditional planning and construction, not the creation of copies or replicas, if the overall context of the preservation of the city is not understood, but only an individual object is evaluated. The context of the Venice Charter, adopted 60 years ago, is particularly sensitive in this regard, as it is sometimes misunderstood or tends to be understood differently when not considered in the context of local culture and circumstances.

Ensuring the continuity of Kuldīga Old Town in Latvia

A case study is the newly inscribed World Heritage Site of Kuldīga Old Town in Latvia. Its OUV is based on – “it is an exceptionally well-preserved example of a traditional urban settlement, which developed from a small medieval hamlet into an important administrative centre of the Duchy of Courland and Semigallia between the 16th and 18th centuries.. The architectural influences and craftsmanship traditions introduced during the period of the Duchy endured well into the 19th century.”¹ The Venice Charter highlights the importance of local culture and context in conservation processes. The conservation of the Old Town of Kuldīga, including its aura as part of its authenticity, goes beyond the physical preservation of buildings and the urban environment; it also includes the cultural and social practices that define the unique character of Kuldīga. In this old town, building and urban development were traditionally continued from the time of the Duchy in the 15th century, continuing through the difficult industrial boom of the 19th century, continuing in the difficult conditions of the Soviet period when other building materials and standard designs were used in small towns, and continuing craft traditions even into the 20th century. The craft traditions of the late 20th century, when Latvia regained its independence and new materials became available - plastics, UPVC windows, metal products, etc. The unique value of the Old Town of Kuldīga would not have been created without the harmonious continuity of the building in its layout, function, size, facade composition, materials, details, and craftsmanship. If the post-war development of the town were to implement the Venice Charter in the misunderstood manner of, for example, this principle phrase that “.. new developments ..must bear a contemporary stamp..” Kuldīga's preservation approach is deeply rooted in the local context, which includes not only the preservation of physical structures, but also the concern that the town's cultural expressions, are preserved and integrated into the urban environment, including in new developments.

Conclusion.

The Venice Charter should thus be read in conjunction with the Intangible Heritage Convention and the other ICOMOS doctrinal texts, which define the importance of the continuation of local cultural expressions. The continuation of traditional architecture in the historic centres of towns

¹ Old Town of Kuldīga – world's heritage site, <https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/1658/>

that are UNESCO World Heritage Sites is a delicate balance between the preservation of historical authenticity, including cultural expressions, and the demands of modern development, and decisions on their development must be based on an understanding and respect for the historical context, as well as an understanding the cultural values of the local community.