

I · N · T · B · A · U

International Network for Traditional Building, Architecture & Urbanism
PATRON: HIS ROYAL HIGHNESS THE PRINCE OF WALES

The INTBAU Venice Declaration On the Conservation of Monuments and Sites in the 21st Century

The Athens Charter of 1931 made an important contribution toward the development of an extensive international movement for the safeguarding of our common heritage for future generations. The Venice Charter of 1964, noting problems which have continually become more complex and varied, re-examined the Athens Charter, made a thorough study of the principles involved, and enlarged its scope in a new document.

Almost half a century later, we have witnessed new problems and new complexities. Foremost among them is the challenge to maintain coherent and sustainable urban environments, within which historic monuments are often seamless elements, and living repositories of important and useful knowledge. It has also been noted that the Venice Charter did not sufficiently address challenges beyond Europe and the United States, and overlooked the vital role that traditional building crafts continue to play. Lastly, a number of logical contradictions have become evident within the Charter itself, or within its over-rigid interpretation.

Accordingly, a group of international leaders in conservation, architecture, urbanism and environmental planning, met in Venice in November, 2006, and agreed that the time has come to clarify the Venice Charter and its interpretation, addressing in particular the following issues:

- **The PREAMBLE** notes our common responsibility to safeguard ancient monuments for future generations and to “hand them on in the full richness of their authenticity”. It is now understood, however, that any act of conservation or restoration is inevitably an act of alteration based upon historically partial knowledge. Hence the goal of authenticity must not be interpreted to require an absolute state of preservation of pre-categorized moments in time. Rather it must reflect the complex pattern of change and recurrence across the ages, including the present. It is to be established as much in interpretive materials as it is in the techniques of accurate conservation.

- **ARTICLE 1** wisely includes urban and rural settings in the definition of an historic monument. We note that this may also include an historically unique settlement pattern or organisational structure within the landscape, which may embody important knowledge for future settlements.

- **ARTICLE 2** calls for recourse to all the sciences and techniques which can contribute to the study and safeguarding of the architectural heritage. We emphasize the importance of scientific investigation, particularly for useful but overlooked knowledge embodied in historic monuments, which may prove to be relevant in unforeseeable ways to our challenges today and in the future. The participation of the public in scientific, educational and political exchanges on these topics is vital.

- **ARTICLE 4** calls for the permanent maintenance of monuments. We note that maintenance using new elements in a compatible character is not “false historicism” provided the new elements can be readily distinguished by experts, or with the aid of interpretive materials.

- **ARTICLE 5** prohibits changes to the lay-out of a building, even when making use of it for some socially useful purpose. But such changes must be allowed where the alternative is a threat to the building’s survival, where the changes are not inharmonious as called for in Article 6, and where careful documentation of the changes is maintained. As much as possible, such changes should also incorporate the building’s original spatial quality and structure.

- **ARTICLE 9** calls for new work which “must be distinct from the original composition and must bear a contemporary stamp.” But this goal must be dynamically balanced with other needs, including the need for coherent and enduring human environments. Thus, new work may be distinct from the original composition while still harmonizing with that composition. A contemporary stamp may be provided in a number of ways,

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including interpretive information or identifying marks or characteristics. It is not necessary to create a striking juxtaposition, which may violate the mandate to preserve the traditional setting or the relations of mass and color (Article 6, Article 13).

- **ARTICLE 11** states that “the valid contributions of all periods to the building of a monument must be respected, since unity of style is not the aim of a restoration.” But styles cannot be strictly assigned to a unique origin in a specific time or context, as they may be found to recur in repeated revivals within different periods and contexts. Therefore a variation of styles can be tolerated and accepted for any period, including the present. At the same time, a unity of composition can be maintained, and does not require a unity of style.

- **ARTICLE 12** states that “replacements of missing parts must integrate harmoniously with the whole, but at the same time must be distinguishable from the original so that restoration does not falsify the artistic or historic evidence.” However, this need not be interpreted to forbid replacements in a compatible style. It requires only an honest distinction of the new work, which may be made identifiable with the aid of interpretive information.

- **ARTICLE 13** prohibits additions that detract from the interesting parts of a building, its traditional setting, the balance of its composition and its relation with its surroundings. Together with other articles, this must be interpreted to mean that contemporary additions that politely take their place within the harmonious composition (including revival styles, if deemed appropriate, as well as innovative new styles) are allowable. Additions that are deliberately discontinuous, discordant, or self-consciously dominant, must not be allowed to damage the balance of the composition or the relation with its surroundings.

SIGNED by the authors, this 8th day of January 2007:

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