

INTERNATIONAL HISTORIC TOWNS COMMITTEE

COMITÉ INTERNATIONAL SUR LES VILLES HISTORIQUES

New Initiatives for Historic Towns

The conservation of historic towns represents one of the most difficult areas of policy that ICOMOS has to tackle. The towns comprise a complicated and interrelated set of economic and social activities housed within a historic fabric of national and frequently international importance. In these cases the development pressures are constrained by this historical physical framework.

Whilst the design of the new is critically important to the retention of the urban scene, the uncontrolled loss of historic and traditional fabric is a common occurrence.

There are three significant causes of loss which we need to consider:

1. Political Forces

Even at the end of the twentieth century, many historic towns are severely damaged by political forces. We have only to look across national borders into Romania, to see the effect of political rationalisation. Equally, the urban conflicts have left a legacy of violence and destruction in Beirut and Londonderry, for example. It is probably unrealistic for us in ICOMOS to seriously believe we can influence such events, yet in the case of Romania we are at least trying to do so through the mobilization of world opinion. Let us hope it is successful.

2. Social Pressure for Modernisation

There is a continuing and growing pressure for urban centres to have the basics of an organised infrastructure. The provision of clean piped water, efficient soil and sullage waste disposal, solid waste disposal and safe building structure, form the very basis of modern urban life. The provision of these amenities is normally a prerequisite in any urban aid programme, and quite rightly so.

The economic environment of gradual decay is reversed, frequently as a direct consequence of such works in historic towns. Indeed, this is often considered desirable and a new cycle of economic development is likely to result. Unless the need for conservation is clearly identified this frequently results in demolition of the older traditional and historic buildings. This is an area where ICOMOS could have a vital role to play.

3. Changing Economic Patterns

The stimulation of economic growth often relates to the introduction of a new activity and may be vital to successful conservation. Tourism, in particular, has frequently provided the capital growth for urban expansion. The investment of foreign capital or the organisation of joint ventures is obviously essential to many economies, yet time and again unregulated growth has destroyed much of the original attraction. It is not uncommon for the desire to modernise a way of life to result in the loss of a local identity.

In such cases the advice of an organization like ICOMOS is frequently needed.

4. Development Potential

The role that historic towns play in national economies and the preservation of national identities must be recognised. The ever growing international financial lending programmes that are now worldwide need to be made aware of the conservation priorities so that these may form one of the parameters of their budgets.

What Can ICOMOS Do?

As a result of the last General Assembly of ICOMOS, the Historic Towns Committee has put the rules in place. We have organised a strategy for promoting and, more important, the implementation of the principles of the new Charter.

It is not adequate simply to ask national committees to circulate the Charter. Our goal must be to highlight towns most at risk in order to encourage their proper conservation.

ICOMOS is fortunate in having a worldwide network of committed professionals. We need to establish how this network can be used so that this goal can be achieved and the necessary work funded and staffed. Our suggested programme for this is:

1. Become closely involved in the international funding programmes.
2. Look for potential sources of funding to promote the goal of our work. What we must do now is form a co-ordinated programme to ensure that the loss of traditional and historic urban fabric is brought under control.
3. A redefinition of the meaning of «historic».
4. The Historic Towns Committee must be instrumental in identifying and creating training opportunities.

5. In order to support training programs as well as professional activity there is a considerable need for the development of techniques, models and approaches that will permit the creative and innovative preservation of the built environment.

6. The Historic Towns Committee must work directly with the other ICOMOS Committees due to its importance to our central concerns.

7. We must begin to design sustainable and appropriate strategies for tourism in historic towns.

8. We must ensure a growing public awareness of the need to conserve the remaining historic urban environments through relevant communication techniques.

Conclusion:

It is essential that we work closely with other interested professional groups to maximise our efforts. We must also recognise the significant differences in practice and concerns that exist throughout the world.

We must make certain that adequate steps are taken to ensure the active participation of the community at large.

The General Assembly resolves to endorse the goals and strategies of the Historic Towns Committee.

The General Assembly authorises the Historic Towns Committee to seek the resources necessary to carry out this programme of work.

We need an agenda that is achievable, pragmatic and strategies in terms of where our efforts are concentrated.

ICOMOS International Committee on Historic Towns
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Summary

This Committee proposes new initiatives in favour of historic towns. The causes of the destruction of cities are political forces, the social pressures towards modernisation, the changing economic structures. It is important to emphasize the role played by historic towns in shaping national identity. Actions ought to be developed in the field of information, in the development of model techniques and of schemes allowing a creative as well as innovating form of preservation of the built environment, in co-operation with other ICOMOS Committees and with a reflexion upon appropriate strategies for the development of tourism in historic cities. The Committee asks the General Assembly's blessings to seek the necessary resources for the implementation of this programme.

Résumé

Le comité propose des initiatives nouvelles en faveur des villes historiques. Les causes de la destruction des villes sont les forces politiques, les pressions sociales visant la modernisation, le changement de structures économiques. Il importe de retenir le rôle que jouent les villes historiques pour l'identité nationale. Il faut prendre des activités dans le domaine de l'information, dans le développement de techniques modèles et d'esquisses permettant une préservation créative et innovatrice de l'environnement construit, dans la collaboration avec les autres comités de l'ICOMOS et en réfléchissant sur des stratégies appropriées au développement du tourisme dans les villes anciennes. Le comité demande à l'Assemblée générale l'autorisation de chercher les ressources nécessaires pour réaliser ce programme.