

ICOMOS: A quarter of a century of Venice Charter

Summary

Prepared by US/ICOMOS

Understanding the relevance of the Venice Charter to our current historic preservation policies and practice requires a basic understanding of our preservation system. In the United States, preservation takes place within a federal-state-local governmental system, led and supported by the federal government, and in which national inventory, registration and implementation programs may exist side-by-side with state and local programs. Preservation must meet the profit expectations of private owners of historic buildings and of investors operating in private capital markets. It must acknowledge political realities which tend to place higher priorities on other programs. National preservation incentives are based largely on financial inducements provided through federal income tax subsidies. State and local preservation programs tend to be dominated by approaches which rely heavily on the uncompensated regulation of private property.

The United States did not support adoption of the Venice Charter in 1964 for a variety of reasons, but the principles of the Charter, with minor exceptions specifically appropriate to our situation, are firmly embedded in our preservation practice through federal policies contained in *The Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Historic Preservation*. These incorporate and reflect the basic principles of the Charter and prescribe acceptable preservation practices for acquisition, protection, stabilization, preservation, rehabilitation, restoration and reconstruction work. They have governed 20,000 projects representing more than \$13 billion worth of preservation work since 1971.

US/ICOMOS does not believe the Venice Charter needs to be rewritten. A modern version of the Charter suitable for the United States would have to acknowledge the nation's contemporary social, economic and political bases for preservation, while continuing to support the more traditional rationales and practices with respect to physical intervention regarding historic properties. A doctrinal statement, perhaps based on the Secretary's Standards, describing and reconciling the current realities of our preservation philosophy and technique, would be adequate for its purposes.