

Riga Charter on authenticity and historical reconstruction in relationship to cultural heritage

ICCROM/Latvian National Commission for UNESCO/State Inspection for Heritage Protection of Latvia

[in cooperation with: World Heritage Committee and Cultural Capital Foundation of Latvia]

Riga, Latvia, 23-24 October 2000

We, the delegations of Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Belarus and Ukraine, together with colleagues from ICCROM, Canada, the United States of America and the United Kingdom, assembled here in Riga, Latvia, from 23rd to 24th October, 2000, for the Regional Conference on Authenticity and Historical Reconstruction in Relationship to Cultural Heritage, initiated by ICCROM, at the invitation of the Latvian National Commission for UNESCO and the State Inspection for Heritage Protection of Latvia, in cooperation with the World Heritage Committee, and the Cultural Capital Foundation of Latvia,

recognising that the body of international opinion as stated in the Venice Charter (1964) and other ICOMOS doctrinal texts including the Burra Charter (1979), the Florence Charter (1981), the Declaration of Dresden (1982), the Lausanne Charter (1990) and the Nara Document (1994), as well as, the UNESCO Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage (1972) and the UNESCO Nairobi Recommendation (1976) establish a presumption against reconstruction' of the cultural heritage (2),

excepting circumstances where reconstruction is necessary for the survival of the place; where a 'place' is incomplete through damage or alteration; where it recovers the cultural significance of a 'place'; or in response to tragic loss through disasters whether of natural or human origin, and

providing always that reconstruction can be carried out without conjecture or compromising existing in situ remains, and that any reconstruction is legible, reversible, and the least necessary for the conservation and presentation of the site,

noting that particularly in countries which have recently regained their independence, issues of reconstruction and authenticity have become of particular concern, because of the large number of proposals now being planned and realised,

agree that

1. the value of cultural heritage is as evidence, tangible or intangible, of past human activity, and that intervention of any kind, even for safeguarding, inevitably affects that evidential quality, and so should be kept to the minimum necessary,

2. the maintenance and repair of cultural heritage should be the primary focus of current conservation work, recognising that each historical period has its own particular style³ which does not replicate previous used formal vocabulary and means of expression,

3. the purpose of conservation⁴ (and/or reconstruction) is to maintain and reveal the significance of the cultural heritage,

4. authenticity is a measure of the degree to which the attributes of cultural heritage (including form and design, materials and substance, use and function, traditions and techniques, location and setting, and spirit and feeling, and other factors) credibly and accurately bear witness to their significance,

believe that

5. replication of cultural heritage is in general a misrepresentation of evidence of the past, and that each architectural work should reflect the time of its own creation, in the belief that sympathetic new buildings can maintain the environmental context,

but that

6. in exceptional circumstances, reconstruction of cultural heritage, lost through disaster, whether of natural or human origin, may be acceptable,

when the monument concerned has outstanding artistic, symbolic or environmental (whether urban or rural) significance for regional history and cultures;

provided that

- appropriate survey and historical documentation is available (including iconographic, archival or material evidence);
- the reconstruction does not falsify the overall urban or landscape context; and
- existing significant historic fabric will not be damaged; and

providing always that the need for reconstruction has been established through full and open consultations among national and local authorities and the community concerned

and urge

7. all concerned governments and administrations to integrate this document and those which give it context into national and local policies and practices, and all concerned academic institutions to include it in their training programmes.

The Riga Charter was composed by the Scientific Committee organised for that purpose during the Riga meeting. The Committee was chaired by Janis Lejnieks (Latvia), and included Christopher Young, U.K., (who acted as Rapporteur), Gediminas Ruthauskas, Jonas Glemza, (Lithuania), Hain Toss (Estonia), Janis Krastins (Latvia), Vasily Chernik (Belarus), Evnika Liniova (Ukraine), Herb Stovel (ICCROM). The work of the Committee was based on written drafts submitted by Janis Krastins, Herb Stovel and Juris Dambis.

1 Reconstruction: evocation, interpretation restoration or replication of a previous form

2 Cultural heritage: monuments, groups of buildings and sites and landscapes of cultural value as defined in Article 1 of the UNESCO World Heritage Convention

3 Style can be precisely identified by its morphological, aesthetic, economic and social aspects

4 Conservation: all efforts designed to understand cultural heritage, know its history and meaning, ensure its material safeguard, and as required, its presentation, restoration and enhancement