

# Resolutions of the International Symposium on the Conservation of Smaller Historic Towns (1975)

## At the 4th ICOMOS General Assembly

1. The general principles set forth in the *Bruges Resolutions* (1975) can be applied more or less universally to the conservation of smaller historic towns; the implementation of these resolutions must however take into account the specific social, economic and political problems of the different regions of the world.

Smaller historic towns can be classified into different types which are characterized by problems in common and by specific features which vary, among other things according to their size, cultural context and economic function. Measures adopted to revitalize and rehabilitate such towns must respect the rights, customs and aspirations of their inhabitants and must be responsive to communal aims and objectives. Consequently, as regards both strategy and tactics, each case must be judged on its own merits.

2. Often, in industrialised countries, the smaller historic town was formerly an important centre which was bypassed by the wave of 19th century industrialisation and urban growth. As a rule, such towns' economic role is as the centre of an agricultural area which gives them characteristics which distinguish them from larger cities:

- the smaller town has not yet expanded beyond its historic core (which is still visually dominant) and has sometimes kept its walls,
- the town's historic core still marks the centre of social life and business and contains a large proportion of residences,
- the surrounding landscape is still very largely unspoilt and is an integral part of the image of the town,
- in many cases there is still a balanced and diversified community structure in terms of population and employment: very few smaller historic towns are economic monostructures depending on mass-production processes.

3. Such smaller towns are subject to specific dangers of various sorts:

- they may suffer from a lack of economic activity leading to the emigration of their populations to larger centres and the resultant abandonment and decay.
- even when the population is numerically stable, there may still be a tendency, due to traffic and other inconveniences, for the inhabitants, to move to modern quarters on the fringes of the town, leading to dereliction of the historic town centre.
- on the other hand, too much economic activity may cause disruption of the old structure and the insertion of new elements which upset the harmony of the urban environment.
- measures to adapt the town to modern activities and uses may have similar effects. For example, tourism, which can be a legitimate means to economic revitalization, can also have a negative impact on the appearance and structure of the town.
- the increasing unit size of the social infrastructure such as schools and hospitals tends to destroy the scale of the town and to reduce the level of its services.

4. In the countries of the developing world, the rapid expansion of population and the accelerating influx of people to the towns threaten to destroy the existing settlement structure. The national and cultural identity of these countries will be irremediably impoverished if the surviving links with their past are allowed to atrophy. None of these links is of greater

importance than the indigenous architectural environment which has evolved over centuries in response to local physical and climatic conditions, in terms of settlement structure, house form, building technique and the use of local materials.

Governments should be made aware of the need both to intensify their efforts to maintain the positive qualities of the indigenous urban and rural environment and to provide planning authorities with the responsibility and the authority for protecting their historic towns against the pressures of excessive expansion and industrialisation.

5. To counteract the dangers threatening smaller historic towns, strategies and measures on various levels are necessary:

- (i) Regional policy must take into account the specific needs of smaller historic towns and must ensure their conservation by assigning them a role in keeping with their special structure: above all, the economic function of smaller towns should be selected so as to imply neither disruption nor dereliction of the historic substance and structure;
- (ii) In order to accomplish this, there must be coordination at the planning stage of all public authority policies which affect the town including, for example, industrial location, transportation network and other regional facilities.
- (iii) On the local level, too, planning must recognize the need to retain and to enhance the specific values of the town, and should aim:
  - a) to observe the existing scale of the town in all new developments, to respect its character, its dominant buildings and its relation to the landscape,
  - b) to retain the specific visual qualities of urban spaces, streets and squares not only in isolated "tradition islands" but throughout the town's fabric, so as to provide, at the very least, a continuous network linking the main points of interest,
  - c) to avoid the destruction of historic elements which, at first sight, might seem to be of minor importance but whose cumulative loss would be irretrievable,
  - d) to search for appropriate new uses for empty buildings which would otherwise be threatened with decay.
- (iv) Methods for surveying, assessing and protecting the character of smaller historic towns must be developed, as a premise to their conservation. Technical, legal and financial problems should be taken fully into account. The exchange of experiences is an important aid. The UNESCO-ICOMOS Documentation Centre might undertake the collection of relevant information to put at the disposal of all.
- (v) It is, finally, essential to stimulate a sense of pride in their historic environment and a sense of responsibility for its maintenance among the inhabitants of smaller towns and among their political representatives, as a basic condition for the long-term success of conservation Policy.

6. In many places, the preservation of smaller towns has largely been the result of local initiative and such worthwhile activities must be encouraged and supported. The problems of urban conservation are, however, growing too complex for private action and purely local initiative. The future must see stronger and more comprehensive national and regional legislation to encourage the conservation of smaller historic towns, and to protect them from the threat of property speculation.

Rothenburg ob der Tauber, 29-30th May 1975.