

Conference on Historic Cities and Urban Regeneration:

Draft Recommendations

Bahrain, 25 March 2015

I. Introduction

The participants to the conference on “Historic Cities and Urban Regeneration”, held in Bahrain from 23rd to 25th March 2015, express their deep gratitude to H.E. Sheikha Mai Al Khalifa, President of the ARC/WH, for planning, organizing and hosting such an important gathering on a topic of utmost priority in a world where urban heritage conservation is becoming one of the pillars for the future planning of resilient and sustainable cities. They express their great concern about the damages and destruction taking place in a number of Arab countries and condemn in the strongest possible terms the killing of innocent people and the obliteration of their cultural heritage, both tangible and intangible. They urge the international community to take all possible measures to halt the current destruction of the cultural heritage, and the establishment of a charter agreed-upon by all concerned institutions to prevent the future destructions and loss of the irreplaceable heritage of the region.

At the end of the Conference, the experts issued the following recommendations.

II. General Recommendations

1. To take into careful account reference texts from UNESCO and ICOMOS in order to further the conservation of historic cities, urban landscapes and their territorial contexts.
 - I. Athens Charter 1931
 - II. Venice Charter 1964
 - III. Amsterdam Declaration 1975
 - IV. Nairobi Recommendation 1976
 - V. Washington Charter 1987
 - VI. Nara Document 1994
 - VII. UNESCO Recommendation 2011
2. To adopt legislative measures at national level that take into account both the heritage values and socioeconomic contexts of the cities concerned in order to promote forms of sustainable urban development.
3. To give special attention to the identification of cultural values in relation to the long term sustainability and regeneration of historical ensembles.
4. To organize a brainstorming session of Arab countries in coordination with ALECSO to define a specific approach and philosophy of conservation for the cultural heritage of the region.
5. To undertake a linguistic study for the proper understanding of the technical terminology concerning conservation, restoration, rehabilitation and reconstruction applicable to the Arab region, as well as draft a user-friendly handbook in Arabic to guide urban regeneration and the preparation of management plans applicable to historic urban areas.

III. Historical Conservation and Urban Regeneration: Technical Recommendations

It is further recommended:

1. To conduct a comprehensive socioeconomic survey that takes into account social, economic and physical issues in order to enable the successful implementation of urban regeneration initiatives in the framework of an agreed-upon management plan;

2. To plan and implement pilot projects to enable the identification of the socioeconomic conditions and technical requirements for the successful implementation of a general policy of conservation and urban regeneration in the region;
3. To address the restoration and/or renovation of heritage buildings in the framework of an holistic approach to urban regeneration;
4. To adopt and implement an integrated strategy that takes into account top-down and bottom-up approaches in the development of any urban conservation project;
5. To bring to the attention of governments and concerned institutions the need to establish a planning framework consistent with the protection of the urban heritage and take into account the request for better services and protection of existing assets by community organizations; as well as the urgency sensitizing the local level of administration to take responsibility for the day-to-day management of construction in heritage-sensitive areas;
6. To promote effective housing policies, such as fair and consistent planning instruments, financial support, security of tenure and technical advisory services to relieve pressure on the existing residential fabric and prevent the uncontrolled demolition and transformation of the historic fabric;
7. To involve stakeholders and communities in planning, shaping and implementing urban regeneration projects in order to guarantee their sustainability;
8. To ensure the continued presence of residents and beneficiaries of rehabilitation projects in the urban areas concerned in order to minimize the effects of gentrification;
9. To ensure capacity building in the field of conservation at all levels of education, including vocational training in traditional construction and university courses in urban planning applied to historic contexts.

III. Future Actions

Finally, it is recommended:

1. To organize a conference on the question of religious endowment properties (Awqaf) and their role in the conservation of the Islamic heritage;
2. To reinforce capacity-building of specialists in the Arab region with the support of the international advisory bodies through the organization of national workshops with participation from ministries, economic actors, NGOs and stakeholders concerned;
3. To prepare a charter devoted to preventing the destruction of cultural heritage in the region through the participation and contribution of all national and international institutions concerned, as well as ratifying the relevant international instruments, namely the 1954 Convention and its 2nd protocol (*Convention on the Safeguard of Heritage in Case of Armed Conflicts*), the 1970 Convention (*Convention on the Illicit Trafficking in Cultural Properties*) and the 1995 UNIDROIT Convention;
4. To plan the design of new buildings and urban infill projects in historic contexts in ways that take into account and respect both the values of the site and the needs of the communities concerned, and that the regeneration of vacant historic buildings be used to fulfill the needs of the residents.