

DECLARATION OF ALMERIA – THE EUROPEAN ASSOCIATION OF HISTORICAL CITY CENTRES

ORIGIN

After the proposal was passed by the city of Almeria for the regeneration of its historical city centre, in June 2008, in the framework of the Urban Initiative Programme 2007-2013, the Almeria City Council has proposed that the fulfilment of its urban project should be taken not only as an enterprise with a clear vocation for regeneration in terms of society, the environment, the economy and the city, but rather that in addition to this the aim should be that its development will provide a boost that is sustained locally following the end of the project, as well as an opportunity for twinning on a European and international level, open not only to local and regional governments, but also to all organisations which, whether on an international or on a local level, develop actions which promote the comprehensive regeneration of historical city centres, both within Europe and beyond.

This initiative for the integration of organisations concerned in the regeneration of historical city centres aspires to continue the course of action outlined in the text of the Leipzig Charter, in the European Forum for Architectural Policies on Building Culture on the 27th April 2007, and in the "Network of Vital Cities" European Charter.

It is aimed that attention in terms of the regeneration of historical city centres and objectives which emerge from future cooperation should be focused on the strategic courses of action outlined in Leipzig: integrated urban development policies and underprivileged areas in the overall context of the city. All of this should be within the framework of Historical Centres and of cities which have an historical heritage linked to social and urban regeneration problems.

Therefore, the main line of action to be developed within this initiative is that of achieving common conclusions and strategies for the creation, consolidation and regeneration of high-quality public spaces in the context of historical city centres, as indicated in the Leipzig Charter, to create attractive and human public spaces, and to achieve high standards with respect to living environments, in other words a "Baukultur" (planning and building culture).

The quality of public spaces, of man-made urban landscapes, and of urban architecture and development, play a fundamental role in the living conditions of the urban population. In addition, as a "soft" location factor, public spaces are important in attracting businesses from the knowledge industry, a qualified and creative workforce, and for tourism. As such, the interaction between our historical architecture and urban planning and its associated policies and actions must be strengthened, so that attractive and human public spaces can be created and preserved, and high standards in relation to living environments within historical city centres can be achieved.

In terms of "Baukultur", we must understand the broader sense of the concept, as the sum of all cultural, historical, economic, technological, social and ecological elements which contribute to quality in the planning process, to the construction of new urban areas and, of course, to the conservation of historical city centres as living, valuable and vital areas of cities.

This is particularly important in the conservation of our architectural heritage. Historical buildings, public spaces and their urban and architectural worth must not only be preserved, but ought also to be used in a sustainable way by all agents of the social and economic life of a city.

The task of ensuring that historical city centres have infrastructure and urban spaces which are well designed and which are in social and economic harmony with the rest of the city must be carried out jointly by the state and by local authorities, but also by citizens themselves, local and national associations and international organisations, as well as with vital support from the business world.

MAIN THEME OF THE EUROPEAN ASSOCIATION OF HISTORICAL CITY CENTRES

Cities possess important capital when it comes to channelling the social and economic development of an area, as it is in cities that the greatest number of jobs, businesses and higher education institutions are found, and their action is vital for achieving social cohesion. They are centres of change, which is based on innovation, the entrepreneurial spirit and economic growth.

Paradoxically, in some cases it is the historical centres of cities which are set apart from this development, or relegated to participate only partly in it. Sometimes this is because they are areas which are completely deteriorated, or it could be because they have been transformed into little more than theme parks, used only for tourism. Contradictorily, this poses a threat to itself as a result of the loss of authenticity which such a process entails, as it is authenticity which provides value and attraction for cultural tourism, as an experience of getting to know and enjoying a place. These are two clear examples of how historical areas which constitute part of our patrimony can be affected by the poorly planned urban development of a city.

The purpose of the present initiative for creating a European Association of Historical City Centres is to fight against such non-sustainable urban development of historical areas.

The development of historical city centres as living areas which are integrated into the life of a city is sustainable when it goes hand in hand with measures aimed at reducing poverty, social exclusion and environmental problems. The issue of the sustainable nature of growth takes on a particular importance in city districts which are more exposed to social exclusion, the deterioration of the environment and disorganised urban growth.

Multifunctionality is one of the features which endows the historical city centres of Mediterranean and European cities with their own individual identity. The maintenance of this is, consequently, a challenge for their endurance as living social realities. However, it is not proving easy to implement integrated restoration policies which, over and above their architectural dimensions, thoroughly tackle social and functional issues. To avoid turning them into mere urban decorations or huge open museums, our historical centres, without eschewing protection, must achieve a functional reuse of their rich and diverse cultural heritage.

In terms of the survival of multifunctionality, having a residential function plays a decisive role as it guarantees social heterogeneity. Uninhabited residential properties have a very negative effect, but the gentrification of an area can also have a harmful effect as it impoverishes urban life and social relations.

The main theme is an integrated approach for sustainable urban development in terms of historical city centres.

Urban development is a long and complex process. It is important that cities place this development in a long-term perspective in order to get the most from the many different factors for success.

The success of the URBAN community initiative is due, to a large extent, to its integrated approach. The objectives of the URBAN project are social and economic cohesion, the removal of obstacles to employability and investment and the reinforcement of environmental goals. This approach has been based on the mobilisation of many partners with various different capacities.

According to the “*Communication from the Commission to the Council and European Parliament, Cohesion Policy and cities: the urban contribution to growth and jobs in the regions, COM(2006) 385 final and SEC(2006) 928*”, cities should have a coherent long-term plan for each of the different factors of sustainable growth and employment. Actions carried out in one domain should be compatible with those undertaken in other areas. For example, economic measures must also be sustainable in social and environmental terms. It is also important that monitoring and evaluation systems are created in order to check results on the ground. Finally, this communication also indicates that it is vital to get key partners involved (the private sector, the local population and NGOs, as well as local, regional and national governments) in participating in the planning, implementation and evaluation of urban development.

In the framework of the aforementioned Communication COM(2006) 385 final and SEC(2006) 928, we have established the principle lines of action of the future European Association of Historical City Centres.

Furthermore, this Association aims to have a more open and integrationist character than other initiatives, not restricting itself solely to local and regional administrative bodies and not being limited to any particular regulatory framework or institutional programme, but rather, by the multifaceted nature of its components and in the freedom of association, seeking a European and international reflection of what ought to be achieved through the sustainable development of cities and of their historical centres, that is, the involvement of all key agents for participating in the planning, implementation and evaluation of the sustainable urban development of historical city centres.

OBJECTIVES AND LINES OF ACTION

Objective

The goal is to provide an adequate balance between the conservation of our architectural heritage and intangible cultural elements (arts and crafts, traditional music) and an adequate sustainable development of historical city centres, with the aim of making them part of the development enjoyed by all of the cities collectively. The aim is also to resolve the conflicts which may emerge from an urban rejuvenation which is simultaneously social (social inclusion), cultural and economic, with an adequate conservation of our heritage, seen as a further source of future opportunities.

Means of Action

Achieving common conclusions and strategies for the creation, consolidation and regeneration of high-quality public spaces in the context of historical city centres, through the mobilisation of all

key agents for participating in the planning, implementation and evaluation of the sustainable urban development of these historical centres.

Courses of Action

The association will aim to tackle urban development (economic and social) and the respect due to aspects of heritage in all lines of action established, by developing, comparing and exchanging policies, actions and techniques, from various perspectives, which are as follows:

- 1- Conservation of architectural heritage and promotion of habitability.
- 2- Conservation of intangible cultural heritage (arts and crafts, music).
- 3- Accessibility and mobility of historical centres.
- 4- Access to services infrastructure.
- 5- Quality of the environment and spaces for public use.
- 6- Policies for supporting SMEs and micro enterprises.
- 7- Innovation and the knowledge economy driving growth.
- 8- Improvement in employability through increased levels of education and training.
- 9- Promotion of social integration and equality of opportunities.
- 10- Improved public safety.

ACTIVITIES AND SUBSEQUENT DEVELOPMENT

This work of comparison and exchange of policies, actions and techniques, from the different points of view anticipated (courses of action), for achieving common conclusions and strategies which are strong and valid, could be developed through the following actions:

- 1- Organising a regular programme of conferences, seminars and workshops.
- 2- Celebrating cultural events.
- 3- Research and cooperation projects between partners.
- 4- Participating in European projects.
- 5- Establishing businesses between partners.
- 6- Establishing and supporting working groups among partners.
- 7- Systematic and regular distribution of information.
- 8- Maintaining contact with the media to ensure frequent and adequate coverage of issues of relevance to the association.
- 9- Promoting personnel exchanges and corporate visits.
- 10- Establishing and maintaining databases and communication networks (newsletters) relating to member organisations.
- 11- Publishing an annual report for the association.
- 12- Creating joint platforms, reservation centres and purchasing centres.

INVITATION TO BECOME PART OF THE NETWORK AND THE EUROPEAN ASSOCIATION OF HISTORICAL CITY CENTRES

As a first step in the establishment of the European Association of Historical City Centres, the following invitation has been issued, signed by the Mayor of Almeria, for the imminent creation of a European Network of Historical City Centres.

Once this network has been set up, its priority objective will be to become an Association, the European Association of Historical City Centres, whereby it will have full powers to operate and to develop all activities required for the fulfilment of its objectives.

Almeria, 29th October 2009.

Mr. Luis Rogelio Rodríguez-Comendador Pérez, Mayor of Almeria