

ATHENS CHARTER FOR THE RESTORATION OF HISTORIC MONUMENTS
International Committee on Intellectual Cooperation
1932

AGENDA OF THE ATHENS CONFERENCE

- I. Statement of various legislative provisions concerning the protection and preservation of monuments of artistic and historical interest:
 - a) Fundamental principles; b) State powers and obligations in so far as concerns monuments belonging to the State, to public bodies or to individuals; c) Methods and procedures in the matter of classification.
- II. Restoration of Monuments - General Principles - Comparative study of principles.
- III. Damage resulting from age and atmospheric influences. Study of deterioration and dilapidation occurring in different parts of a fabric and the disintegration and decay of materials. - Typical examples. Examination of works undertaken for the consolidation, restoration, upkeep and protection of a building. Materials to be used for the repairing of visible and invisible parts of monuments. Is the use of new materials to be recommended? Technical processes for the protection of old monuments against destructive agents (microorganisms, vegetation, etc). Preservation of statuary and ornamental sculpture.
- IV. Surroundings of monuments. - Protection of sites. - Establishment of aesthetic and archaeological servitudes. Clearing of the immediate surroundings of monuments. The part played by vegetation as an aesthetic factor in the surroundings of a monument.
- V. The utilisation of monuments. - Uses which may be dangerous to their safety or incompatible with their artistic and historical character.
- VI. Special points on which it would be desirable that the International Museums Office initiate study and action.

At the Congress in Athens the following seven main resolutions were made and called "Carta del Restauro:"

1. International organizations for restoration on operational and advisory levels are to be established
2. Proposed restoration projects are to be subject to knowledgeable criticism to prevent mistakes, which will cause loss of character and historical values to structures.
3. Problems of preservation of historic sites are to be solved by legislation at national level for all countries.
4. Excavated sites, which are not subject to immediate restoration should be reburied for protection.
5. Modern techniques and materials may be used in restoration work.
6. Historical sites are to be given strict custodial protection.
7. Attention should be given to the protection of areas surrounding historic sites.

A. GENERAL CONCLUSIONS

I. DOCTRINES. GENERAL PROCEDURES

The Conference heard the statement of the general principles and doctrines relating to the protection of monuments.

Whatever may be the variety of concrete cases, each of which are open to a different solution, the Conference noted that there predominates in the different countries represented a general tendency to abandon restoration in toto and to avoid the attendant dangers by initiating a system of regular and permanent maintenance calculated to ensure the preservation of the buildings.

When, as the result of decay or destruction, restoration appears to be indispensable, it recommends that the historic and artistic work of the past should be respected, without excluding the style of any given period.

The Conference recommends that the occupation of buildings, which ensures the continuity of their life, should be maintained, but that there should be used for a purpose, which respects their historic and artistic character.

II. ADMINISTRATIVE AND LEGISLATIVE MEASURES REGARDING HISTORICAL MONUMENTS.

The Conference heard the statement of legislative measures devised to protect monuments of artistic, historic or scientific interest and belonging to the different countries.

It unanimously approved the general tendency, which, in this connection, recognises a certain right of the community in regard to private ownership.

It noted that the differences existing between these legislative measures were due to the difficulty of reconciling public law with the rights of individuals.

Consequently, while approving the general tendency of these measures, the Conference is of the opinion that they should be in keeping with local circumstances and with the trend of public opinion, so that the least possible opposition may be encountered, due allowance being made for the sacrifices which the owners of property may be called upon to make in the general interest.

It recommends that the public authorities in each country be empowered to take conservatory measures in cases of emergency.

It earnestly hopes that the International Museum Office will publish a repertory and a comparative table of the legislative measures in force in the different countries and that this information will be kept up to date.

III. AESTHETIC ENHANCEMENT OF ANCIENT MONUMENTS

The Conference recommends that, in the construction of buildings, the character and external aspect of the cities in which they are to be erected should be respected, especially in the neighborhood of ancient monuments, where the surroundings should be given special consideration. Even certain groupings and certain particularly picturesque perspective treatment should be preserved.

A study should also be made of the ornamental vegetation most suited to certain monuments or groups of monuments from the point of view of preserving their ancient character.

It specially recommends the suppression of all forms of publicity, of the erection of unsightly telegraph poles and the exclusion of all noisy factories and even of tall shafts in the neighborhood of artistic and historic monuments.

IV. RESTORATION OF MATERIALS

The experts heard various communications concerning the use of modern materials for the consolidation of ancient monuments.

They approved the judicious use of all the resources at the disposal of modern technique and more especially of reinforced concrete.

They specified that this work of consolidation should whenever possible be concealed in order that the aspect and character of the restored monument may be preserved.

They recommended their adoption more particularly in cases where their use makes it possible to avoid the dangers of dismantling and reinstating the portions to be preserved.

V. THE DETERIORATION OF ANCIENT MONUMENTS.

The Conference noted that, in the conditions of present day life, monuments throughout the world were being threatened by an ever-increasing degree of atmospheric agents.

Apart from the customary precautions and the methods successfully applied in the preservation of monumental statuary in current practice, it was impossible, in view of the complexity of cases and with the knowledge at present available, to formulate any general rules.

The Conference recommends:

1) That in each country the architects and curators of monuments should collaborate with specialists in the physical, chemical and natural sciences with a view to determining the methods to be adopted in specific cases;

2) That the International Museums Office should keep itself informed of the work being done in each country in this field and that mention should be made thereof in the publication of the Office.

With regards to the preservation of monumental sculpture, the Conference is of the opinion that the removal of works of art from the surroundings for which they were designed is, in principle, to be discouraged. It recommends by way of precaution, the preservation of original models whenever these still exist or, if this proves impossible, the taking of casts.

VI. THE TECHNIQUE OF CONSERVATION

The Conference is gratified to note that the principles and technical considerations set forth in the different detailed communications are inspired by the same idea, namely:

In the case of ruins, scrupulous conservation is necessary, and steps should be taken to reinstate any original fragments that may be recovered (anastylosis), whenever this is possible; the new material used for this purpose should in all cases be recognizable. When the preservation of ruins brought to light in the course of excavations is found to be impossible, the Conference recommends that they be buried, accurate records being of course taken before filling-in operations are undertaken.

It should be unnecessary to mention that the technical work undertaken in connection with the excavation and preservation of ancient monuments calls for close collaboration between the archaeologist and the architect.

With regards to other monuments, the experts unanimously agreed that, before any consolidation or partial restoration is undertaken, a thorough analysis should be made of the defects and the nature of the decay of these monuments. They recognised that each case needed to be treated individually.

VII. THE CONSERVATION OF MONUMENTS AND INTERNATIONAL COLLABORATION.

a) Technical and moral co-operation.

The Conference, convinced that the question of the conservation of the artistic and archaeological property of mankind is one that interests the community of the States, which are the wardens of civilization:

Hopes that the States, acting in the spirit of the Covenant of the League of Nations, will collaborate with each other on an ever-increasing scale and in a more concrete manner with a view to furthering the preservation of artistic and historic monuments;

Considers it highly desirable that qualified institutions and associations should, without in any manner whatsoever prejudicing international public law, be given an opportunity of manifesting their interest in the protection of works of art in which civilisation has been expressed to the highest degree and which would be seem to be threatened with destruction;

Expresses the wish that requests to attain this end, submitted to the Intellectual Co-operation Organisation of the League of Nations, be recommended to the earnest attention of the States.

It will be for the International Committee on Intellectual Co-operation, after an enquiry conducted by the International Museums Office and after having collected all relevant information, more particularly from the International Committee on Intellectual Co-operation concerned, to express an opinion on the expediency of the steps to be taken and on the procedure to be followed in each individual case.

The members of the Conference, after having visited in the course of their deliberations and during the study cruise which they were able to make on this occasion, a number of excavation sites and ancient Greek monuments, unanimously paid a tribute to the Greek Government, which for many years past, has been itself responsible for extensive works and, at the same time, has accepted the collaboration of archaeologists and experts from every country.

The members of the Conference there saw an example of activity, which can but contribute to the realisation of the aims of intellectual co-operation, the need for which manifested itself during their work.

b) The role of education in the respect of monuments.

The Conference, firmly convinced that the best guarantee in the matter of the preservation of monuments and works of art derives from the respect and attachment of the peoples themselves;

Considering that these feelings can very largely be promoted by appropriate action on the part of public authorities;

Recommends that educators should urge children and young people to abstain from disfiguring monuments of every description and that they should teach them to take a greater and more general interest in the protection of these concrete testimonies of all ages of civilisation.

c) Value of international documentation.

The Conference expresses the wish that:

- 1) Each country, or the institutions created or recognised competent for this purpose, publish an inventory of ancient monuments, with photographs and explanatory notes;
- 2) Each country constitute official records which shall contain all documents relating to its historic monuments;

- 3) Each country deposit copies of its publications on artistic or historic monuments with the International Museums Office;
- 4) The Office devote a part of its publications to articles on the general processes and methods employed in the preservation of historic monuments;
- 5) The Office study the best means of utilising the information so centralised.

This Resolution Adopted by the International Committee on Intellectual Cooperation on July 23rd, 1932:

Noting with satisfaction the positive results obtained in the domain of art by the Intellectual Co-operation Committee

Desirous of strengthening still further the ties, which, thanks to the International Museums Office, bind together the National Fine Arts Administrations and enable them to co-operate with each other;

Considering that the preservation of the artistic and archaeological heritage of mankind is a matter of interest to the community of States, as the guardians of civilisation;

Believing that the best guarantee for the conservation of monuments and works of art is to be found in the respect and attachment towards them felt by the peoples themselves, and that these feelings can be greatly stimulated by appropriate action on the part of the public authorities;

Requests the Assembly to address the following recommendations to the Member States:

That States acting in accordance with the League of Nations Covenant should establish closer and more concrete co-operation with each other for the purpose of ensuring the conservation of monuments and works of art;

That Member States should ask educationists to teach children and young people to respect monuments, whatever the civilisation or period to which they belong and that this educative action should also be extended to the general public with a view to associating the latter in the protection of the records of any civilisation.