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Manifesto for a new urbanity

European Urban Charter II

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Manifesto for a new urbanity

European Urban Charter II

Adopted by the Congress on the occasion of its 15th Plenary Session
in Strasbourg on 29 May 2008

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Summary

Introduction	9
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Manifesto for a new urbanity European Urban Charter II (2008)

Preamble	13
The European urban <i>acquis</i> and the prospect of a new urbanity	17
Town and city dwellers as urban citizens	19
Sustainable towns and cities.....	23
Cohesive towns and cities.....	27
Knowledge-based towns and cities	31
Conclusion	33

The European Urban Charter (1992)

The European Declaration of Urban Rights	37
The European Urban Charter	41
Background to the Charter	41
Purpose, philosophy and structure of the Charter	42
The town in Europe	44
Principles of the European Urban Charter	51

Introduction

The first European Urban Charter, adopted by the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe in 1992, was a ground-breaking step for Europe and marked a key stage in the necessary recognition of the urban phenomenon in the development of our societies.

Since then, our societies, economies and cultures have undergone far-reaching changes. In a context of rapid change and of massive urban development, towns and cities now face challenges on an unprecedented scale.

The European Urban Charter II – Manifesto for a new urbanity, adopted in May 2008, complements and updates the original Congress contribution and proposes a new approach to urban living, urging European countries to build sustainable towns and cities.

The Manifesto aims to establish a body of common principles and concepts enabling towns and cities and their inhabitants to meet the current challenges facing urban societies. It is an invitation to local authorities, in all their diversity and on the basis of shared European values, to implement the principles of ethical governance, sustainable development and greater solidarity in their public policies.

This Manifesto conveys an ambitious and demanding message to all those involved in urban development

**Manifesto for a new urbanity
European Urban Charter II
(2008)**

Preamble

In 1992 the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe (the Congress) adopted the first European Urban Charter. This was a ground-breaking step for Europe. Since then, fifteen years have elapsed and our societies, cultures and economies have changed considerably.

The great European divide between the east and west of the continent, which had such an enduring impact on the post-war period, has now closed up again. Many countries have moved forward in the pursuit of ambitious co-operation within the European Union or the Council of Europe.

In this crucial period, it was the towns and cities of Europe that were the most exposed to globalisation. First and foremost, they rapidly became the focus of Europe's efforts to adjust to the new technological, ecological, economic and social conditions that this entailed. Willingly or not, they entered the global age and had to cope with its main challenges.

They became aware of the new role they were required to play and saw themselves as "collective players", as centres of initiative and creativity. They became the setting in which new lifestyles and social networks emerged, along with a new social flexibility, often characterised by family instability, unstable employment and residential mobility.

At the same time, they were faced with far-reaching social and economic changes: the erosion of the working class, the de-industrialisation of entire regions, increasing social inequality, crises in working-class neighbourhoods, growing immigration, ageing of the population, urban sprawl and widespread car use. They also had to tackle the challenges arising from the threats to our environment.

In this period of rapid change, a number of key texts on urban issues were adopted. Some were drafted by the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe.¹ Others were the work of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe,² the European Union,³ the United Nations,⁴ civil society and associations of local and regional authorities.⁵

These reference texts have reflected an increasing acknowledgement of the major changes of the last fifteen years. Taken together, they follow in a direct line from the Congress's Urban Charter and have mostly been approved by European governments. A glance at them reveals an acute awareness of the scale of the changes taking place and a collective resolve to address them. Stemming from very different organisations and written in different styles, these texts reaffirm urban rights, emphasising the indispensable role of the urban citizen at the heart of urban policies.

1. European Convention on the Participation of Foreigners in Public Life at Local Level (1992, ETS No. 144)

Revised European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life (2003)

Revised European Urban Charter (rapporteur, Carlos Alberto Pinto, adopted by the Congress in May 2004 and revised in 2005)

Congress Recommendation 188 (2006) on good governance in European metropolitan areas.

2. Committee of Ministers Recommendation Rec(2001)19 on the participation of citizens in local public life

Valencia Declaration on "Good local and regional governance – The European Challenge" (Conference of European Ministers responsible for Local and Regional Government, 2007).

3. Leipzig Charter on Sustainable European Cities (May 2007)

Territorial Agenda of the European Union (May 2007).

4. Resolution S-25/2 – Declaration on Cities and Other Human Settlements in the New Millennium (2001), United Nations

Resolution 21/3 on guidelines on decentralisation and strengthening of local authorities (2007), UN-Habitat.

5. Charter of European Cities and Towns towards Sustainability (the Aalborg Charter, May 1994) and the Aalborg Commitments (2004).

However, given the diversity of these international reference texts on urban development, the Congress felt that it was necessary to reframe some of the principles of the European Urban Charter. While the original European Urban Charter retains its status as a benchmark, we felt that it was necessary to develop and update it. That is the purpose of this Manifesto, which reflects a new form of urbanity that has emerged at the dawn of the new century.

The European urban *acquis* and the prospect of a new urbanity

In adopting this European Urban Charter II, after the first one in 1992, the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe aims to establish a body of common principles and concepts enabling towns and cities to meet the current challenges of urban societies and to outline, for the main players in urban development and Europe's urban citizens, the prospect of a new form of urban living, in other words a new way of living together and a new approach to city life.

In keeping with this spirit, we, European local elected representatives and Congress members, reaffirm the importance of the European urban *acquis*. We believe that this *acquis*, stemming both from the experiences of urban governments and from the ideas, reports and statements of the main players in urban development, constitutes a bedrock of principles on which our manifesto can be based. In particular, we consider the following principles to have been established:

European towns and cities belong to their citizens; they are an economic, social and cultural asset which must be passed on to future generations.

Given the scale of the global challenges facing us, European towns and cities are the ideal setting for a historic compromise between the economy, society and the environment.

European towns and cities are responsible for building a model of urban government which takes account of the new demands of democracy, particularly where participation is concerned. They are an asset in the much needed democratic revitalisation of our societies.

European towns and cities are conducive to creative diversity and represent powerful forces for innovation. They are perfect places for personal development and access to learning and knowledge. They have the potential to integrate and mutually enrich the multiple identities and cultures which exist within them.

European towns and cities are now driving forces for prosperity and key players in the globalisation process. They are the ideal setting for the knowledge-based economy which is the future of economic growth in Europe.

We, European local elected representatives and Congress members, believe that these principles and the analysis underpinning them form the basis for future change and for the policies which we will be required to implement.

The towns and cities that we want to place at the heart of our priorities are made first and foremost for the people who live there, who must also be citizens.

The towns and cities which we want are also sustainable towns and cities, respecting the local and global environment.

They are cohesive towns and cities, committed to fostering the greatest possible solidarity within and between themselves.

Lastly, they are towns and cities of knowledge and culture which need their past and present, built from diversity, in order to project themselves into the future.

Town and city dwellers as urban citizens

We, European local elected representatives, share the belief that the inhabitants of our towns and cities cannot experience fully their town or city without also being responsible, active and informed citizens.

We reaffirm in this regard the validity of the values and principles contained in our European Charter of Local Self-Government drawn up in 1985, and in particular the belief that the right of citizens to participate in public affairs can be fully exercised at the local level.

Indeed, we think that it is at this level that this right is exercised most directly, most effectively and most successfully.

We also reaffirm the principles of ethical public life as defined in the European Code of Conduct for local and regional elected representatives.

Lastly, we think that the crisis of political representation facing many of our countries, which can be seen especially in high abstention rates at elections, a continuing extremist vote and a growing disaffection with politics, can and must be fought primarily at the local level.

We, European local elected representatives, believe that urban democracy, having for a long time been a school of national democracy for many politicians, can revive the public spirit of our citizens and their appetite for democracy.

As far back as 1985, the European Charter of Local Self-Government envisaged the possibility of having recourse to participatory democracy practices alongside the traditional mechanisms of representative democracy.

We therefore encourage, as the Charter of Local Self-Government invites us to do, the use of citizens' assemblies, local referendums and all forms of direct citizen participation.

To promote the exercise of modern local democracy we recommend, for example, the setting up of elected councils at the different levels of urban decision making, which, however, does not preclude the provision of information to residents and opportunities for public discussion and co-operation in urban planning.

In the same spirit of involvement of all the components of the urban population, the right to vote and to stand in elections for urban local assemblies must be granted to migrants, who contribute in many different ways to the life of the community.

To maximise the effectiveness of these different arrangements, we urge our towns and cities to make full use of new information technologies in order to improve public consultation on urban projects. We believe that interactivity and speed of information can enhance the process of democratic participation and improve dialogue between elected representatives and citizens.

Our towns and cities must work to establish extensive local e-democracy. Far from being technical gadgets, information and communication technologies (ICTs) offer new opportunities for democratic mobilisation which it would be tragic not to make use of in these times of disaffection with politics.

With regard to local powers and responsibilities, we believe that appropriate devolution is a key to the proper democratic functioning of our towns and cities. In this connection, we reiterate our attachment to the principle of subsidiarity, which regulates the proper relationship of powers between the European, national and local levels.

But the principle of subsidiarity cannot stop halfway between central government and the local level. It must also guide the distribution

of responsibilities between the different levels of local government and within local areas.

In keeping with this spirit, we believe that the general principle governing the allocation of public management responsibilities in our towns and cities must be based on a constant concern for closeness to urban citizens. This principle should apply, for example, both to large conurbations and to infra-municipal areas (neighbourhoods, wards, districts), which should be able to have their own elected assemblies, budget and local powers and responsibilities.

Furthermore, the devolution of local and regional powers and responsibilities should be accompanied at all relevant levels by the resources, particularly financial resources, needed for the full exercise of those responsibilities. Here again, we recommend referring to the European Charter of Local Self-Government, which demands that towns and cities be able to control their expenditure.

We believe that the complexity of exercising these powers and responsibilities in the management of large urban areas calls today for a clearly identified, democratically elected urban government driven by a constant concern for good urban governance.

This governance should be subject to effective supervision mechanisms and regular evaluation. It should be open to political and public debate in local elections in order to mobilise citizens and lead a majority of urban citizens to support the collective urban political project. In this context, the elected urban executive, the mayor or equivalent, should act as a driving force for local activity and should be committed to mobilising citizens and the networks that shape the urban fabric around a collective political project that can be understood by the majority of people.

The quality of this urban governance also lies in its ability to organise itself within an appropriate area, ensuring a match between the size of local institutions and the urban areas which they are responsible for developing and administering.

We believe, moreover, that some issues cannot fall exclusively within the scope of local management (urban sprawl, transport and information infrastructures, right to housing, environmental protection, etc.) and that it should be possible for local policy issues to be regulated at regional, national and European level on the basis of a balanced and respectful partnership.

In this connection, the need for spatial equity requires that towns and cities be able to contribute to measures for redistributing resources. Such measures should make it possible to reduce unavoidable spatial inequalities.

We, European local elected representatives, aware of the profound changes affecting our countries in the general redistribution of powers between European, central and regional governments and local authorities, believe that the weakening of state supervision and the resulting emancipation of towns and cities should not be to the detriment of much needed solidarity between local areas. The increasing independence of towns and cities should not lead to ruthless, unregulated competition between local areas.

We are convinced that the state must be the guarantor of this solidarity, which should be set in a context of balanced regional, national and European spatial planning.

Sustainable towns and cities

We, European local elected representatives, support the action taken by our citizens, and more generally by all the players in urban development, to turn our towns and cities into sustainable urban spaces.

We share our citizens' growing concern at the increasingly clear evidence of the global environmental crisis facing us. This crisis now affects the whole biosphere and is reflected in declining biodiversity, soil degradation, increasingly scarce water resources, air and river pollution, an increase in other forms of pollution and environmental degradation, and many other aspects which affect our quality of life. The crisis is unquestionably man-made and one tangible result is the increasing number of natural disasters and exceptional climatic events which have alerted opinion in our countries and greatly increased citizen involvement in addressing environmental issues.

We believe that this global environmental crisis takes on a particular form in urban areas and calls for specific analysis and treatment in the context of urban ecology.

In addition to the strict protection of the local environment, which they must provide for their territory and their citizens in a context of heightened risk, we believe that our towns and cities have a major role to play in protecting, restoring and managing the global environment.

In terms of the level of economic activity, the increasing size of urban populations in Europe and the ability to generate relevant behavioural models, our towns and cities are in the front line of the fight for a more liveable planet. It is for us to support them in this responsibility which is crucial for the future of our societies.

In keeping with this spirit, we undertake to develop urban ecology in order to turn resolutely towards a more sustainable kind of urban

development. We undertake to reduce the environmental footprint of our towns and cities, to preserve their natural resources, to maintain and enhance their biodiversity, to provide access for all to public assets and their networks, and to make energy efficiency central to our policies.

To achieve this, we know that we must organise our development around different types of urban form and a different model of mobility.

With regard to the urban form, we believe that the current dilution of urban areas is a cause for concern. Urban sprawl, which is usually accompanied by a functional specialisation of areas between shopping, residential, leisure, industrial and craft areas, drastically reduces the environmental capital of our towns and cities. This sector-based urban model increases energy waste and damage to the environment. It is a policy which has no future.

We must conceive of our towns and cities in terms of dense, compact urban forms requiring as few resources as possible for their maintenance and allowing their inhabitants to have access to the various urban functions and services in the immediate vicinity, as well as to leisure areas and preserved natural areas. We seek towns and cities that are sparing of resources, land, travel and energy. Our towns and cities must be coherent and compact if urban areas are to be made easier, more accessible and livelier for all their inhabitants, whatever their social status, age or state of health.

We want towns and cities that are able to check their growth through improved management of land use.

Mobility is the other central variable of the proper functioning of towns and cities and of environmentally sound urban development. Travel and mobility are becoming increasingly important in our society of intense communication. They are becoming a key to good urban practice and a decisive factor in the quality of urban life.

To take up the challenges of controlled and sustainable mobility, we believe that we must develop credible alternatives to the car. The adverse effects of the priority given to the car are now well known. Air and noise pollution, road safety issues, fragmentation of space by invasive infrastructure, the blighting of our urban landscapes – all these encourage us to turn resolutely towards a development that is oriented more towards the citizen and shows greater concern for the human dimension of our towns and cities. We must free ourselves from over-dependence on the car all the more quickly because, in addition to the environmental problems that it causes, it prevents a large number of people without access to individual motor transport from fully enjoying the towns and cities that they live in.

It is for us, European local elected representatives, to promote sustainable mobility policies which favour “soft” means of travel such as walking and cycling as well as all forms of public transport.

In this connection, we must opt for a public transport policy which is not restricted to public transport alone, but which provides for a new social sharing of the roads and public space in which all means of travel will find a place, but with cars and motorcycles taking a smaller place, due account being taken of their social usefulness.

It is in this spirit that we must pursue concurrently our aims of sustainability, conviviality and improved mobility flows in our towns and cities, which depend in particular on the possibilities offered by increased use of intermodal transport.

Our analysis has led us to the realisation that the sustainability dimension of our urban development (compact towns and cities, voluntary and controlled mobility, respect for the environment) is not just another step in the improvement of our quality of life, but the indispensable precondition for proper spatial development. Only a commitment to sustainability can give real coherence to our urban development projects and offer tangible prospects of success.

Cohesive towns and cities

Our towns and cities must be understood in their wider geographical context. They develop within a regional, national and European space. They are integrated politically and economically into those spaces and crystallise their socio-economic contradictions, and in particular the profound social inequalities affecting our societies.

We, European local elected representatives, believe that sustainable urban development, which must reconcile the economic activity of towns and cities with the protection of our environment, is inconceivable without a demand for social equality. We want to make the social dimension a central aspect of our sustainable development policies. That is the meaning of the historic compromise that we want to achieve at the local level between the environmental, economic and social dimensions. It is essential to pursue new urban policies incorporating these three requirements.

The towns and cities that we want are places where everyone enjoys a good quality of life and access to services, particularly in the education, health, cultural and housing sectors. They are also places where there is a genuine social mix, reflecting our goal of building a cohesive, inclusive and diversified society with ambitious quality of life standards in Europe.

The question of housing is of particular importance. The population movements which have led to continual growth of our towns and cities in recent years have triggered a housing crisis in many of our countries and urban areas, which has been exacerbated by the rising land and property prices. Despite this situation, we remain attached to the principle of a right to housing. We must pay particular attention to the availability of a varied housing provision with the aim of maintaining an indispensable social mix in our neighbourhoods. We

must be able to offer the inhabitants in all sections of our towns and cities the possibility of housing that is tailored to their needs and income.

This aim calls for strong political will on our part and a policy of active solidarity founded on a democratic ethic. It involves promoting solidarity between generations, with low-income groups and the disabled, and with all those facing financial and social difficulties. The ultimate goal is to combat social exclusion and thus offer everyone the opportunity to enjoy the vast potential offered by towns and cities.

In this connection, we are aware of the work that remains to be done to realise this aim of cohesive towns and cities. We observe disturbing trends towards increasing poverty. Serious social and spatial disparities continue to affect large sections of our populations. In addition to the wide social rifts between different urban neighbourhoods, there are ecological disparities which mean that the most vulnerable among us are concentrated in the areas of greatest environmental degradation, resulting in a dramatic combination of inequalities. We are particularly alarmed by spatial disparity processes that are leading to gentrification of certain urban areas, by the uncontrollable rise in land prices in our urban centres and its parallel phenomena of ghetto formation in peri-urban areas and by the appearance in certain places of "gated communities" that encourage a spatial segregation which is breaking up our towns and cities.

We solemnly reaffirm that the central aim of urban policies is social and spatial cohesion. Our towns and cities are places where people live and work, multigenerational, multicultural and multireligious places where people from all social backgrounds mingle on a daily basis. For urban society to develop fairly, mutual assistance between citizens, dialogue between groups, including inter-religious dialogue, and voluntary activity need to be promoted. We will continue our fight against financial and employment insecurity, exclusion and all forms of discrimination on grounds of social status, age, culture, religion, gender and disability.

Our towns and cities must also be rid of all forms of stigmatisation of particular groups, which are seriously detrimental to the sense of belonging to an urban community and which, more often than not, are the root of the urban violence, antisocial behaviour and insecurity that is painfully felt by our urban citizens, particularly the most vulnerable among them (the elderly, children, people living alone, immigrants, the poor).

Lastly, we consider that the solidarity which is needed within the city limits should also guide our relations with urban surrounding areas, other neighbouring towns and cities and the rest of the population, in accordance with criteria and redistribution mechanisms decided at national level.

In keeping with this spirit, mutual assistance between towns and cities is intensifying at international level, particularly where the countries of the South are concerned. This solidarity which is spreading as globalisation grows may be seen as a form of "city diplomacy". We strongly encourage these other forms of solidarity with the cities of disadvantaged countries, which help to build a more balanced and more cohesive world.

Our concept of solidarity begins in the neighbourhoods of our towns and cities, but it cannot stop at their gates.

Knowledge-based towns and cities

Our towns and cities are the crossroads of civilisations. They are the ideal setting for knowledge and culture to find expression; they are contact and meeting places. We, European local elected representatives, view our towns and cities as places of exchange, cosmopolitan places where differences are free to interact and find expression in a spirit of mutual respect.

We are not looking for towns and cities where cultural differences merge into a single global, globalised and homogenised model. Our towns and cities are culturally and architecturally different and diverse, and must remain so. We are alert to the risks of standardisation of buildings and services and the aberrations of a globalised urban development model which only obeys the rules of a global market, leaving its uniform imprint everywhere.

We also support the culture of our local areas and their identities. We wish to promote and disseminate our local cultures and our local history as a key asset in an increasingly globalised world. We undertake to continue our efforts to support artistic creation and ambitious policies of cultural amenities for our towns and cities.

Our towns and cities have always been home to forces for change and innovation. They are an opportunity for progress and adjustment to change. We believe that our towns and cities are the focal points of the knowledge-based economy, which is already driving the development of our communities and will do so even more in future.

We think that, at the beginning of this new millennium, our towns and cities more than ever have a historic role to play in the establishment of this knowledge-based economy in Europe. The de-industrialisation of entire regions, the rise of the new information and communication technologies, the advent of biotechnology and,

more generally, the development of intangible economic activities, mark the new forms of our development, and we know that local areas can play a major role in this regard. We therefore want to give priority to knowledge and innovation, to access to education, to research, and more generally to cultural and artistic activities, which provide the fertile ground on which this new economy will grow.

With this in mind, we undertake to develop our communications and telecommunications infrastructure, increase Internet access, to create “intelligent” spaces and bring e-governance into general use. We want to make our towns and cities the setting for omnipresent co-operation networks that can facilitate the transfer of knowledge between education and research systems and the production system. We want to build digital towns and cities that are an asset to our development.

We are aware that our goal of making our towns and cities a cradle of knowledge, culture and the arts would lack credibility if we showed no concern for their architectural beauty.

In this connection, we are aware that our urban landscapes have often developed in the last fifty years without any real concern for high architectural quality. We have neglected many of our peri-urban landscapes and we have abandoned the outskirts of our towns and cities to soulless and uncreative commercial urban planning. Henceforth we want to take into greater consideration the architectural dimension in our spatial development and foster the development of a lively architectural culture among decision makers and urban citizens.

We want to be proud of our towns and cities and their culture, but also of their architecture.

Conclusion

We, European local elected representatives, know that the present development of our towns and cities is not without danger and that they face unprecedented environmental, democratic, cultural, social and economic challenges.

In this Manifesto we are driven by a sense of confidence in our towns and cities. We firmly believe that they are a unique asset for our societies. As driving forces for local and regional development and as political players, individually and in networks, towns and cities have to address the changes in our societies. They can contribute to the prosperity of their communities and to their sustainability. But the perspective cannot be exclusively local. In the pursuit of this goal of prosperity and sustainability, they must continue to show solidarity with other local areas.

We know that our towns and cities have a long history and must be viewed from a long-term perspective of our cultures. We think that these roots in the past and in our collective memories are also an asset that helps us to project ourselves into the future on the basis of a strong identity. We are not proposing a single model of urban development. Our towns and cities have their own personalities. They are all different and their diversity is an opportunity for Europe.

Concerning diversity of, and diversity within, towns and cities, we think that the ability to integrate cultural diversity can be developed through a conflict-free vision of our identities. We are proud of our identities, but we view them unreservedly as an element of openness to others.

We are convinced that encouraging towns and cities to strive for more democracy, greater sustainability, ever greater solidarity within

and between local areas, better governance and better performance is crucial for the proper development of our societies.

It is this optimistic, ambitious and demanding message that we wish to convey to our urban citizens and to all those involved in urban development. We propose this Charter as an invitation to build a new urban project for the towns and cities of Europe based on a sharing of values and an exchange of experience, so that towns and cities can retain their individuality while collectively embodying a European urban blueprint that is a seamless combination of humanist values, individual freedom, economic prosperity, social solidarity, care for the planet and living culture.

European Urban Charter (1992)

European Declaration of Urban Rights¹

Considering that the exercise of the following rights should be based upon solidarity and responsible citizenship implying an equal acceptance of duties, citizens of European towns have a right to:

1. Security: to a secure and safe town, free, as far as possible, from crime, delinquency and aggression;
2. An unpolluted and healthy environment: to an environment free from air, noise, water and ground pollution and protective of nature and natural resources;
3. Employment: to adequate employment possibilities; to a share in economic development and the achievement thereby of personal financial autonomy;
4. Housing: to an adequate supply and choice of affordable, salubrious housing, guaranteeing privacy and tranquillity;
5. Mobility: to unhampered mobility and freedom to travel; to a harmonious balance between all street users – public transport, the private car, the pedestrian and cyclists;
6. Health: to an environment and a range of facilities conducive to physical and psychological health;
7. Sport and leisure: to access for all persons, irrespective of age, ability or income, to a wide range of sport and leisure facilities;

1. This Declaration arises from the European Urban Charter, adopted by the Council of Europe's Standing Conference of Local and Regional Authorities of Europe (CLRAE) on 18 March 1992, a Session held during the annual Plenary Session of the CLRAE (17-19 March 1992, Strasbourg).

8. Culture: to access to and participation in a wide range of cultural and creative activities and pursuits;
9. Multicultural integration: where communities of different cultural ethnic and religious backgrounds coexist peaceably;
10. Good quality architecture and physical surroundings: to an agreeable, stimulating physical form achieved through contemporary architecture of high quality and retention and sensitive restoration of the historic built heritage;
11. Harmonisation of functions: where living, working, travelling and the pursuit of social activities are as closely interrelated as possible;
12. Participation: in pluralistic democratic structures and in urban management characterised by co-operation between all the various partners, the principle of subsidiarity, information and freedom from over-regulation;
13. Economic development: where the local authority, in a determined and enlightened manner, assumes responsibility for creating, directly or indirectly, economic growth;
14. Sustained development: where local authorities attempt to achieve reconciliation of economic development and environmental protection;
15. Services and goods: to a wide range of accessible services and goods, of adequate quality, provided by the local authority, the private sector or by partnerships between both;
16. Natural wealth and resources: to the management and husbanding of local resources and assets by a local authority in a rational, careful, efficient and equitable manner for the benefit of all citizens;
17. Personal fulfilment: to urban conditions conducive to the achievement of personal well-being and individual social, cultural, moral and spiritual development;

18. Inter-municipal collaboration: in which citizens are free and encouraged to participate directly in the international relations of their community;
19. Financial mechanisms and structures: enabling local authorities to find the financial resources necessary for the exercise of the rights as defined in this Declaration;
20. Equality: where local authorities ensure that the above rights apply to all citizens, irrespective of sex, age, origin, belief, social, economic or political position, physical or psychological handicap.

European Urban Charter

Background to the Charter

The European Urban Charter is built upon the work of the Council of Europe on urban policies – work inspired by the European Campaign for Urban Renaissance, organised by the Council of Europe from 1980 to 1982.

This Campaign, a Europe-wide focus by public authorities and the public, on some key approaches to the improvement of life in our cities, concentrated on four main general areas:

- improvement of the physical urban environment;
- rehabilitation of existing housing stock;
- the creation of social and cultural opportunities in towns;
- community development and public participation.

In line with the human rights vocation of the work of the Council of Europe, the Campaign was dominated by qualitative rather than quantitative aspects of urban development; the slogan of the Campaign was “A better life in towns” (“des villes pour vivre”; “Städte zum Leben”).

The Campaign subsequently led to a programme within the Council of Europe on urban policies, developed from 1982 to 1986 by an intergovernmental Committee (ie made up of representatives of national ministries responsible for urban questions).

In 1986 this programme was transferred to the Council of Europe’s Standing Conference of Local and Regional Authorities of Europe (CLRAE), following the logic of existing practice in many member countries whereby decisions affecting urban communities are made principally by local civic leaders and following the logic of decentralisation policies in other member countries, which gave increased responsibility for urban matters to the local tier of government.

From 1986 to the present day, a sustained programme has been developed, characterised by the organisation of a considerable number of “ad hoc” conferences and symposia; the preparation of reports and Resolutions, based on those reports, addressed to municipalities in Europe, on different aspects of urban development (e.g. health in towns; regeneration of industrial towns; policies for dealing with urban insecurity, crime prevention and drug abuse; architectural development and historic towns; self-help and community development in towns, etc). Details appear as an appendix to the Charter.

These events, developed in order to promote an exchange of experience and information between politicians, professionals and the public, together with other work of the Standing Conference on local democracy, decentralisation and participation (e.g. the European Charter on Local Self-Government), have provided the necessary background material for the Charter.

Purpose, philosophy and structure of the Charter

Drawing together into a single composite text a series of principles on good urban management at local level, the PURPOSE of the Charter is to:

- provide a practical tool and urban management handbook for local authorities;
- provide the principal elements for a possible future Convention on Urban Rights;
- provide the basis for an international award scheme for towns who subscribe to the principles of the Charter;
- constitute a “visiting card” for the Council of Europe on matters relating to the built environment and act, at the same time as a synthesis of the conclusions of the Council of Europe’s work and particularly that of the CLRAE on urban questions.

In terms of its philosophy, the Charter has a number of distinct, clear, underlying threads.

It has a firm local authority dimension, concentrating upon the specific responsibilities of this level of government for urban development.

It concentrates very much on qualitative aspects of urban development and quality of life considerations, in line with the overall vocation of the Council of Europe for the protection of fundamental freedoms and human rights. In this sense, the urban work of the Council of Europe and its Standing Conference of Local and Regional Authorities of Europe is distinguishable from that of other international governmental organisations which have a valid urban component within their programmes.

It identifies a number of universal guiding principles, readily applicable from country to country in Europe where the problems of cities are very much the same in nature, if not in scale. This universality is particularly important, in that the Council of Europe is an expanding organisation, with progressively additional member countries following democratic reform in Central and Eastern Europe. The cities in such countries might well find much of value in the series of principles included in the Charter, arising from the experience of cities in countries where democracy has a more unbroken tradition.

A strong element throughout the Charter is the notion of collaboration and solidarity:

- between local authorities in individual member countries, in order to secure an improved quality of life in urban areas, recognising also the additional benefits, responsibilities and opportunities arising as a result of the involvement of Central and Eastern European countries;
- between national and local governments in securing and strengthening, through political and financial commitment, the devolution of decision-making away from the centre towards towns and their communities;
- between local governments and their communities, to examine and gain a closer understanding of the different needs of an

- urban area and involve local people in the decision-making process; and,
- significantly, between cities throughout Europe and beyond, transcending national boundaries.

The Charter is guided by the belief that citizens have basic urban rights: the right to protection from aggression; from pollution; from a difficult and disturbing urban environment; the right to exercise democratic control of their local community; the right to decent housing, health, cultural opportunity and mobility.

Furthermore, the Charter insists that such rights are applicable to all urban dwellers without discrimination in respect of age, origin, race, belief, socio-economic or political position, physical or psychological handicap.

It is thus one of the responsibilities of local and regional authorities to protect such rights through the development of appropriate strategies.

In terms of its structure, the Charter takes the form of a series of short, clear principles, relating to different aspects of urban development, accompanied by substantial explanatory paragraphs.

The town in Europe

The development and notion of a city

The town or municipality has always been the ideal place in which to gather, somewhere where community and social life is possible, without which, in the words of Thomas Hobbes, life is “nasty, poor, solitary, brutish and short”.

Towns and cities attract people who wish to live there, work there, go there as tourists or for cultural reasons. It has traditionally been the area for concentration of substantial resources and networks of influence.

The etymology of the word “città”, “cité” and “ciudad” (stemming from the Latin “civitas”) encompasses two fundamental concepts – a material, archaeological, topographical and town-planning notion, the city as the venue for human congregation and, in the words of the Treccani Italian Encyclopedia, a “historic and legal phenomenon that has come to provide the characteristic, fundamental nucleus of life in society.”

The Greek word “Polis” also suggests the two concepts of both the medieval city in the territorial sense, as a collection of buildings and spaces, and the city in the legal sense, as a community of people politically organised for the achievement of common aims.

The same concepts lie behind the French “cité”, Spanish “ciudad”, etc.

Currently, the town or city is increasingly identified with the “municipality” (commune, municipio, Gemeinde, comune), as an “autonomous area body comprising a community of residents with certain interests”, an inhabited centre “with organised building development, public services and its own administration”.

Cities, however, are complex entities. They differ considerably in terms of urban development and size. Their identity, although rooted in history, is constantly changing. Over time, most towns and cities have evolved in the light of new requirements, ideals, lifestyles, standards of living and a new quality of life.

In some cases, cities have changed for the better, where their administrators, politicians or members of the public have been enlightened or where they have collaborated; or for the worse where this has not been the case.

New problems have arisen, through the development of urbanisation and urban sprawl. Beginning in the 19th century, associated with the Industrial Revolution, streams of people migrated into cities, drawn by jobs and wealth, theoretically leaving poverty behind.

The process is still continuing in many European countries. In others, especially in recent years, decentralisation or reverse migration from the city towards suburbs has taken place – not only at weekends, but also more permanently by the search for a healthier, less polluted environment, a different job or more amenable surroundings.

Fortunately, there are many examples of cities which function well and which provide their inhabitants with a satisfactory quality and way of life; where a balance is struck between economic development and retention of a high quality environment; where high levels of participation, neighbourhood and community development, a sense of belonging and pride exist.

Many cities, however, are not so well off and reflect in a magnified way a wide range of societal difficulties and painful adjustments: inner city decay, engendering a descending spiral of deprivation for their populations; deterioration of historic centres; excessive traffic densities; noise, air and soil pollution; shortage of good quality, affordable housing; social and health problems; generations and ethnic groups no longer respecting each other's differentials; high unemployment, particularly among younger people; unfamiliar and alien surroundings; neighbourhoods which have become unsafe and insecure through high levels of crime and delinquency, mostly drug-related.

Some cities no longer meet the most elementary requirements of livability.

The city and its surroundings

The boundaries of the city are never the limits of urban society. The city needs its surrounding region for functions which are often considerable consumers of land, e.g. airports; for a variety of settlements for urban dwellers and for open air recreation.

Conversely, the region needs the city for its services (cultural, medical, retailing) and for jobs.

Too egotistical management of the city and the suburbs separately is causing:

- imbalances, e.g. costly urban services, theoretically available to all within the conurbation are mainly paid by the city – often poorer than the outlying suburban areas;
- low costs of development in suburban areas prevent the city from developing its own potential;
- the city consumes environmental resources of the surrounding region (energy and water) and returning waste and pollution.

A balanced development of the city with its surrounding region is required – reflected through regional planning, active collaboration between cities and local authorities within the surrounding region and joint decision-making. The result is the harnessing of respective potential for mutual benefit, avoidance of unnecessary mobility and more rational use of environmental resources.

Local democracy

It has not always been the case that members of the public have had sufficient opportunity to put forward their requirements through existing institutions and become involved as of right in the democratic process of urban development.

This shortcoming is particularly serious in that the way towns function conditions the effectiveness in defending democracy and rights. If they function well, they are a guarantee of human rights; if they function badly, these rights are threatened.

The basis of urban development must be direct citizen participation, within a local authority which itself enjoys as much autonomy and fiscal independence as possible.

The raison d'être of urban policy

The transformation of an unsatisfactory urban condition to one which becomes as satisfactory as possible for as large a number of people

as possible is achieved through an amalgam of determined local political will and urban planning proposed by teams of skilled professionals.

This twin political and professional approach is what constitutes urban policy.

A wide range of factors affect urban life and need to be taken into account in a comprehensive manner – the economy, technology, socio-cultural factors, legislative framework. Any action taken in towns thus requires considerable analysis, study, knowledge and responsibility.

Urban policy “is concerned with an examination of the relationship between resources, products and movements, aimed at resulting in objectives and services, promoting the development of the municipality, associations and individuals within it, within an overall perspective of sustainable development”. (René Parenteau)

Urban policy affects the community as a whole and individuals in many aspects of their private lives. It is a major public act of intervention and direction and should therefore be the fruit of constant, regularly renewed co-operation between elected representatives and the public. It is part of the democratic institutional heritage of towns and cities.

The city of the future

Choices need to be made now if the city of the future is to be livable, agreeable, beautiful and healthy. Existing unsatisfactory conditions should act as an incentive to reviewing the current underlying conception of cities and towns.

This review must be built around the coordination of all people and professional categories concerned: city dwellers, administrators, politicians, officials, professionals, those who work in it – a coordination in contrast to many of the tenets of the Athens Charter.

An ideal city is one which succeeds in reconciling the various sectors and activities that take place (traffic, living working and leisure requirements); which safeguards civic rights; which ensures the best possible living conditions; which reflects and is responsive to the lifestyles and attitudes of its inhabitants; where full account is taken of all those who use it, who work or trade there, who visit it, who seek entertainment, culture, information, knowledge, who study there.

A city must also strike a balance between modern development and retention of the historic heritage; integrate the new without destroying the old; support the principle of sustainable development. A town without its past is like a man without memory. People leave traces of their lives and their work and their personal history in cities, in the form of neighbourhoods, buildings, trees, churches, libraries. They constitute the collective legacy of the past, enabling people to feel a sense of continuity in their contemporary lives and prepare for the future.

Cities must function and be managed, in the belief that urban problems cannot be limited to purely financial mechanisms or questions, nor by traditional means of functional town planning. Municipalities must seek to use methods drawn from other the experience of national governments and/or the private sector.

Co-operation between towns

Reflecting the reality that towns have a fundamental role in regional, national, European and world-wide development, it is essential for them to be involved in networks of co-operation and exchange on the regional, national and international levels, through twinning, contracts, membership of international associations and non-governmental organisations.

Rights within towns

The respect, promotion and extension of human rights, for all individuals in towns - irrespective of age, origin, race, age, belief, social,

economic or political position, physical or psychological handicap
– is essential.

This includes, amongst other rights, those to:

- provision of suitable, well-located and well-lit housing and dwellings of sufficient size, with adequate amenities, reasonably priced and reflecting anti-pollution requirements;
- preventive health measures; to the provision of greenery, space, sunlight, silence, vegetation, beauty;
- the interlinking of the various functions of city life;
- cultural opportunity, sport and leisure facilities, social development, to free circulation, incorporating a harmonious balance between all street users (public transport, private cars, the pedestrian and cyclists);
- provision for community facilities; measures against poverty; particular help for the disadvantaged;
- security; work; well-being; training and education possibilities; culture and history.

Principles of the European Urban Charter¹

Transport and mobility

Principles

1. It is essential that the volume of travel, particularly by private car, be reduced
2. Mobility must be organised in a way which is conducive to maintaining a livable town and permitting coexistence of different forms of travel
3. The street must be recovered as a social arena
4. A sustained educational and training effort is required

Environment and nature in towns

Principles

1. Public authorities have a responsibility to husband and manage energy resources in a coherent and rational manner
2. Local authorities should adopt policies to prevent pollution
3. Local authorities have a responsibility to protect nature and green spaces
4. Nature conservation is a factor in developing community involvement and pride

The physical form of cities

Principles

1. City centres must be safeguarded as important symbols of European cultural and historic heritage

1. Summary of the principles contained in the individual chapters.

2. The provision and management of open space in the city are integral parts of urban development
3. Architectural creation and development play a crucial role in the quality of the urban townscape
4. All persons are entitled to a healthy, safe, settled, pleasant and stimulating living environment
5. The vitality of a town depends upon balanced urban residential patterns and the maintenance of the residential character of the city centre

The urban architectural heritage

Principles

1. Urban conservation requires a carefully constructed legal framework
2. Conservation of the urban heritage requires policies for information partnerships
3. Adequate and often original finance mechanisms and partnerships are necessary
4. The maintenance and sometimes revival of specialised crafts and techniques are essential
5. Urban heritage must be integrated into contemporary life via its incorporation as an essential element in overall planning
6. Economic development can often be stimulated by the heritage

Housing

Principles

1. The urban dweller is entitled to privacy in the home
2. Every person and family is entitled to secure and salubrious housing

3. Local authorities should ensure diversity, choice and mobility in housing
4. The right of persons and families in the most disadvantaged categories cannot be safeguarded by market forces alone
5. Local authorities should ensure that opportunities to purchase housing are available and that security of tenure is achieved
6. The redevelopment of older housing must not be undertaken at the expense of the existing social fabric

Urban security and crime prevention

Principles

1. A coherent security and crime prevention policy must be based on prevention, law enforcement and mutual support
2. A local urban security policy must be based on up-to-date comprehensive statistics and information
3. Crime prevention involves all members of the community
4. An effective urban security policy depends upon close co-operation between the police and the local community
5. A local anti-drug policy must defined and applied
6. Programmes for preventing relapse and developing alternatives to incarceration are essential
7. Support for victims is a key component of any local security policy
8. Crime prevention must be recognised as a priority and thus command increased financial resources

Disadvantaged and disabled persons in towns

Principles

1. Towns must be designed in such a way that all citizens have access to all places

2. Policies for the disadvantaged and disabled persons should aim to integrate and not over-protect
3. Co-operation with and between specialised associations, representing disadvantaged or minority groups, is essential
4. It is important to ensure that houses and workplaces are suitably adapted to the requirements of the disadvantaged and disabled
5. Travel and communication and public transport must be accessible for all people

Sport and leisure in urban areas

Principles

1. All urban dwellers have a right to take part in sporting and recreational facilities
2. Sports facilities should be safe and well designed
3. All urban dwellers have a right to be able to develop their expertise in sport up to their individual potential

Culture in towns

Principles

1. All urban dwellers have a right to culture
2. The cultural development of towns contributes to their economic and social development
3. Cultural exchange is a powerful bond between peoples of different nationalities, different regions and nations
4. Cultural development and genuine cultural democracy involves extensive collaboration between local authorities and community groups, the voluntary sector and the private sectors
5. Cultural pluralism presupposes experiment and encouragement of innovation

6. The balanced promotion of cultural tourism by local authorities can have a beneficial effect on their community

Multicultural integration in towns

Principles

1. Non-discrimination is a fundamental aspect of urban policies
2. Local authorities should ensure effective participation by immigrants in local, political life
3. Cultural and educational policies in towns should be non-discriminatory
4. The provision of equal access to employment must be a concern of public authorities
5. Multicultural integration implies full integration of immigrant communities into the social and physical urban environment

Health in towns

Principles

1. The urban environment must be conducive to good health for all citizens
2. A reliable and durable supply of goods, meeting the fundamental needs of people, is a major factor in ensuring good health
3. Local authorities must encourage community-based health initiatives and participation
4. Urban health, a matter of international importance, involves the co-ordination of municipal action with international programmes

Citizen participation, urban management and urban planning

Principles

1. Citizen participation, in local political life must be safeguarded through the right to elect local elected representatives freely and democratically
2. Citizen participation in local political life must also be effective at all levels of the local, political and administrative structure
3. Citizens are entitled to be consulted over all major projects affecting the future of the community
4. Urban management and planning must be based upon maximum information on the characteristics and special features of the town special features, potential, activities, development capacities and resources
5. Local political decisions should be based on urban and regional planning conducted by teams of professionals
6. Political choices, the final stage in the decision-making process, should be vital and comprehensible
7. Local authorities should ensure the participation of young people in local life

Economic development in cities

Principles

1. Local authorities should ensure the economic development of their local communities
2. Economic and social development are inextricably linked
3. A town is economically and socially part of its surrounding region or hinterland

4. Economic growth and development depends upon an infrastructure adequate to produce, sustain and increase that growth
5. Collaboration between the private and public sectors is an important component in urban economic growth and development

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The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities is an institutional body of the Council of Europe. It represents local and regional authorities strengthening local democracy in the 47 member States of the Council of Europe.

Made up of two Chambers, the Chamber of Local Authorities and the Chamber of Regions, it is the institutional voice of over 200,000 European municipalities and regions.

Local and Regional -L&R is a new series from the Congress addressing the challenges facing local democracy and urban governance at pan-European, regional and local levels.



The first European Urban Charter, adopted by the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe in 1992, was a ground-breaking step for Europe and marked a key stage in the necessary recognition of the urban phenomenon in the development of our societies.

Since then, our societies, economies and cultures have undergone far-reaching changes. In a context of rapid change and of massive urban development, towns and cities now face challenges on an unprecedented scale.

The European Urban Charter II – Manifesto for a new urbanity, adopted in May 2008, complements and updates the original Congress contribution and offers a new approach to urban living, urging European countries to build sustainable towns and cities.

The Manifesto aims to establish a body of common principles and concepts enabling towns and cities and their inhabitants to meet the current challenges facing urban societies. It is an invitation to local authorities, in all their diversity and on the basis of shared European values, to implement the principles of ethical governance, sustainable development and greater solidarity in their public policies.

This Manifesto conveys an ambitious and demanding message to all those involved in urban development.

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