

Tlaxcala Declaration on the Revitalization of Small Settlements (1982)

The participants attending the third Inter-American Symposium on the Conservation of the Building Heritage devoted to the subject of "The Revitalization of Small Settlements", organized by the Mexican National Committee of ICOMOS and held in Trinidad, Tlaxcala, from 25 to 28 October 1982, wish to express their gratitude to the representatives of Mexico and the organizing committee for the very kind way they have been received and express their satisfaction at the high standard of the proceedings and at the results achieved.

They wish most particularly to thank the government of the state of Tlaxcala for its hospitality and are happy to observe the efforts it is making to preserve the architectural and urban heritage entrusted to its keeping by history, which is of extreme interest to all the peoples of America.

The delegates, after examining the situation now prevailing in America from the point of view of the dangers which threaten the architectural and environmental inheritance of the small settlements, decide to adopt the following conclusions:

1a. They reassert that the small settlements are repositories of ways of living which bear witness to our cultures, retain the scale appropriate to them and at the same time personify the community relations which give inhabitants an identity.

2a. They reaffirm that the conservation and rehabilitation of small settlements is a moral obligation and a responsibility for the government of each state and for the local authorities and that their communities have a right to share in the making of decisions on the conservation of their town or village and to take part directly in the work of carrying them out.

3a. As established by the *Charter of Chapultepec*, and as reflected in the concern expressed at the Morelia Symposium and at other meetings of American practical conservationists, the environmental and architectural heritage of small settlements is a non-renewable resource and their conservation calls for carefully developed procedures which will ensure that they run no risk of being impaired or distorted for reasons of political expediency.

4a. They agree that initiatives for the purpose of securing the well-being of the communities living in small settlements must have their basis in strict respect for the traditions of the places concerned and their specific ways of life. They also agree that the situation of economic crisis at present affecting the continent must not restrict efforts to preserve the identity of the small settlements; on the contrary, if such difficult circumstances are to be overcome, reliance must be placed in the cultural achievements of the past and in the material forms of expression of our collective memory.

5a. They further observe that the introduction of patterns of consumption and behaviour foreign to our traditions, which make their way in via the multiple communications media, assist the destruction of the cultural heritage by encouraging contempt for our own values, especially in the small settlements; they therefore urge governments, institutes of higher education and public or private bodies interested in the Preservation of the heritage to use the media at their disposal for the countering of the effects of this process.

6a. They reassert the importance of regional planning as a means of combating the process of desertion of the small settlements and progressive overpopulation of medium-sized and large towns - a phenomenon which strikes at the very existence of the said settlements. And they point out that any action designed to preserve the urban setting and the architectural qualities of a place must essentially be a fight for the improvement of its population's socio-economic conditions and of the quality of life in its urban centres. They therefore appeal to governments and to competent bodies to provide a suitably integrated infrastructure together with the practical equipment for the arresting of the depopulation of small settlements.

7a. They consider that if the traditional environment of the rural settlements and small towns is to be preserved, and if there is to be continuity of expression in contemporary vernacular architecture, traditional materials and techniques must remain available, and they propose that, where these cannot be found, substitutes be used which do not involve any marked impairment of the visual effects and which meet the requirements both of the local physical and geographical conditions and of the way of life of the population.

Recommendations:

Those attending the Symposium reassert the principles which inspire the work of the International Council on Monuments and Sites, as laid down in miscellaneous international texts, including the recommendations made at the meetings held previously in America, at Quito, Chapultepec and Morelia, concerning the conservation of small settlements, and adopt in their turn the following recommendations for circulation by the ICOMOS Committees in America and by any other specialists and for submission to the authorities, the professional associations, the institutes competent in the field concerned and the universities, schools of architecture and other bodies.

It is recommended:

1. That any initiative with a view to the conservation and revitalization of small settlements must be designed as a part of a programme embracing the historical, anthropological, social and economic aspects of the area and the possibilities for its revitalization, failing which it would be fated to be superficial and ineffectual.
2. That encouragement be given to interdisciplinary participation as an essential prerequisite of any effort in favour of the conservation, restoration and revitalization of small settlements.

3. That the public services administrations concerned with such things as communication, health, education, electrification, etc., should be duly conscious of the fact that their activities undertaken with the best of intentions can on the contrary cause harm to small communities if they are ignorant of, or fail to appreciate, the values of the cultural heritage and the benefits deriving from the conservation of that heritage for the community as a whole.

4. That if better results are to be achieved both in national policies and in specific legislation and in technical progress, the sharing of experience in a variety of areas is essential. Information, whether of an international nature or specifically relating to the American world, is most important. Emphasis is laid once again on the utility of publications designed for the purpose, and it is proposed that American working groups be set up on the various individual subjects involved.

5. That the use of regional materials and the preservation of the local traditional building techniques are essential to satisfactory conservation of small settlements and do not conflict with the general principle that any new work should bear the mark of our age. It is urgent that an effort be made to recognize and enhance the prestige and value inherent in the use of such materials and techniques where they exist, and to keep them alive with increasing forcefulness in the minds of the communities concerned. It is recommended that encouragement be given to proficiency in the skilled building trades in the form of awards and prizes.

6. That the governments of the Latin American countries consider as in the public interest the granting of funds for the acquisition, maintenance, conservation and restoration of dwellings in small settlements and the lesser towns, as a practical means of keeping alive the building heritage and the housing possibilities it affords. For this purpose there must be amendment of the norms governing the allocation of funds to enable buildings for which vernacular techniques and materials have been used to be eligible for mortgage loans.

7. That schools of architecture should institute and maintain M. A. degrees in restoration and doctorates of restoration and assign due importance in their basic training syllabuses to appreciation of the architectural and town-planning heritage, conservation and restoration problems, and knowledge both of vernacular architecture and of traditional building techniques, to enable their graduates to fit usefully in their professional capacity into the communities requiring their services.

8. That the recognized colleges and societies of architects should set up commissions for the preservation of architectural heritage capable of promoting improved awareness of the responsibility devolving on them for the maintenance of the small settlements, of compiling and circulating information on this problem and of recommending programmes and operations to this end.

9. That the representatives of the countries in the region make every effort to have their governments, if they have not yet done so, approve the Protocol to the UNESCO World Heritage Convention (16 November 1972), so as to be eligible for the support and technical assistance of the international bodies.

The undersigned certify the authenticity of the present text, to be known as the "Declaration of Tlaxcala", which contains the conclusions and recommendations approved at la Trinidad, on 28 October 1982, by the plenary session of the third Inter-American Symposium on the Conservation of the Building Heritage.