

Introduction note

The draft Charter on the use of ancient places of performance originated in the work of experts who met in the framework of the "European Network of Ancient Places of Performance" (theatres, amphitheatres and circuses), which has been fostered since 1993 at the initiative of the Council of Europe. Its purpose was to promote cooperation, centred on tangible examples, among professionals active in one area or another in the life and enhancement of a heritage widely established in many countries of Europe and around the Mediterranean. Archaeologists, architects, art historians, scenographers, performance organisers, representatives of local authorities, tourism experts, economists and specialists in local development exchanged their points of view in the course of a number of thematic encounters, giving expression to an intersectoral approach towards objectives for a better conservation and use of the cultural heritage.

The proposed charter is above all the result of the contribution of the international colloquy "Conservation and Use of Ancient Theatres", held in Sicily in 1995, which led to the Segesta Declaration, the first achievement of the activities of the Network following the initial meetings in Orange and Mérida. This achievement has been amplified and enlarged upon in the framework of the MINOTEC project, which was launched with the support of the European Union (DG X) in association with various institutions in France, Greece, Italy and Spain. The colloquy "New technologies and the enhancement of ancient places of performance" of August 1997 (Verona), following upon seminars held in Messenia (Greece) and Lyon (France), has made it possible to open new perspectives for an improved use of ancient places of performance, which are important vestiges of cultural heritage and poles of development.

The Council of Europe Cultural Heritage Committee recommended the dissemination of the Charter during its March 1998 meeting.

The activities of the European Network of ancient places of Performance and the MINOTEC project have been managed by the European Foundation for Heritage Skills.

Charter on the use of ancient places of performance

Ancient places of performance, such as theatres, amphitheatres and circuses are among the very few monuments still - in some cases - serving the purpose for which they were originally designed. As ancient cultural landmarks, they form a heritage encompassing not only the monuments of Greco-Roman times but also the history of the alterations made to them, the successive uses to which they were put and the cultural and artistic traditions associated with them.

Today, the objective is to preserve a store of scientific information, manage the monuments in the perspective of development and, where circumstances permit, infuse ancient sites once more with their full role of places of artistic creation, shared enjoyment and emotion.

I. Resource preservation

Ancient places of performance are a vulnerable resource threatened by the erosion of time and the improper uses to which they are sometimes put. It is up to governments and the authorities that own these sites to set up for this heritage appropriate conservation strategies which form part of the general context of policies to conserve the architectural and archaeological heritage, town planning and the environment. Any changes made to the heritage must respect the principle of reversibility.

II. Conveying accurate information

i. Many of the best known and most frequented ancient places of performance remain inadequately researched and documented. Progress in information technologies offers sophisticated aids to research monuments and their history, assist in conservation and restoration, disseminate information, education and heighten public awareness;

ii. However, the growth of virtual information and in particular the use of synthetic images call for vigilance in terms of professional ethics and a clear distinction between scientific purposes and images with a view to popularisation.

III. Facilitating comprehension by the public

- i. Conservation of ancient places of performance is meaningful only if it makes it gives the general public access to this heritage and makes it better known at various levels;
- ii. Subject to restrictions due to safety factors or maintenance requirements, public access to ancient places of performance must be promoted by offering visitors aids to understanding and interpretation;
- iii. Selective, low-cost scientific work should serve as a basis for supplying information to the public at large, whether through information instruments for cultural tourism or through cyberculture media;
- iv. Arousing young people's awareness of a heritage category widely established throughout Europe, the Middle East and North Africa should help to convey an ethical message centring on common values embodied in a heritage reflected in a shared urban art of living.

IV. Enhancing the sites by using them

- i. Whereas all buildings are not suitable, owing to their state of conservation, for the current organisation of performances, the use to which they are put gives them all their meaning by updating their function;
- ii. Whatever the type of event, it is essential to take account of the site's vulnerability and for also for performances to help enhance the heritage and arouse the audience's interest in the ancient site in which they take place.
- iii. A balance must be struck between the need to protect monuments and the expectations of audiences, visitors and local residents. To this end, systematic co-operation must be arranged between the municipalities which own the sites, those responsible for conservation and the organisers of performances, and regulations should be adopted for the use of each site specifying a minimum rules for their proper use;
- iv. Proper use of the sites should reduce the risks of material damage to ancient structures by performances and prohibit non-removable stagings or modifications for the public. It will bear in mind staging requirements when planning the maintenance and rehabilitation of the monument so as to ensure that its functions as a place of performance and as a heritage asset dovetail as naturally as possible;
- v. The staging of live performances and hi-tech pageantry shows on the place's history will profit from the use of new technologies for lighting, images and sound with a view to improving the very quality of the performance through an enhancement of the site;
- vi. Contemporary creations should be encouraged when organising performances, provided that the artist is able to interpret the spirit of the site and use it to benefit both the performance and the monument.

V. Managing places of ancient performance by contributing to development

- i. Places of performance are both a resource and a focus of local development, so they act as major tourist attractions generating economic spin-off for the towns and regions concerned. They may

fulfil this function more fully than other monuments when they continue to attract both visitors and large audiences for the performances held there. The use of the heritage of performance sites should be viewed as part of a process of sustainable development;

ii. The sustainable management of performance sites will only be possible if there is sufficient consensus among the various partners with regard to the conservation and use of the sites. This will entail drawing up a management plan defining the aims pursued and the partners' responsibilities as well as identifying a coordinator to reconcile the different interests in the site;

iii. Strategies for promoting ancient places of performance must be incorporated into a comprehensive intersectoral development scheme based on combining interregional and international initiatives and co-operation arrangements. With a view to attaining balanced cultural tourism, these strategies must bear in mind the monument's saturation threshold and seek to redirect tourist flows to alternative sites in need of further development;

iv. The development of ancient places of performance should centre on a range of cultural projects that create jobs for local residents without subjecting the latter or their environment to excessive disturbances.

VI. Improving skills through networking

i. Adequate information will have to be supplied to contractors, planners and all other partners on the possibilities afforded by the development of techniques for improving skills for the conservation and use of sites. In addition to the initial and further training required for both conservation and entertainment professionals, special training courses will have to be organised to ensure that new technologies can be used effectively in places of performance;

ii. The international character and similarity of problems relating to the conservation and enhancement of ancient places of performance call for transnational professional cooperation. Networking should be developed to foster the exchange of scientific information between research teams, organise advanced professional training courses for researchers, managers and professionals involved in the production of performances and set up high-quality tourist projects based on the heritage asset;

iii. A system for pooling data and co-ordinating initiatives should be adopted to generate synergy between intellectual and material efforts to promote ancient places of performance as part of the heritage.

Appendix I to the Charter

Technical details concerning the conditions of use of ancient places of performance

The experts who took part in the activities of the European Network of Ancient Places of Performance and the MINOTEC project have drawn up a series of guidelines for implementing the "Charter on the Use of Ancient Places of Performance".

I. Heritage resource preservation and data accuracy

i. Maintenance, reinforcement and restoration work carried out on ancient places of performance must be based on sufficient scientific documentation and thorough archaeological analysis. Furthermore, it must:

aim to incorporate the principles of the International Charter for the Conservation and Restoration of Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS, 1964),

respect the aesthetic, historical and scientific integrity of the monument,

leave certain areas in reserve with a view to the subsequent resumption of further research or scientific testing.

ii. If places of performance are to be opened to the general public, steps will have to be taken to minimise the risk of damage caused by the presence of too many visitors. Such steps will consist in:

informing the public of the vulnerability of the sites, by means of signs, documents, etc.;

building attractive paths that steer the public away from fragile areas. In some cases, access to sensitive or dangerous areas will have to be prohibited;

providing appropriate facilities (e.g. seats, public lawns, rubbish bins, toilets, access to water, etc.) which reduce the risk of pollution and damage;

iii. Use of new information technology will facilitate the tasks of recording, analysing, scheduling and monitoring work carried out on the sites by professionals, and may also help to relieve the pressure of excessive numbers of visitors, in the case of fragile sites that are too popular, by offering people interested in the sites the possibility of remote access via virtual imagery and the multimedia.

iv. Concerning the spread of information and popularisation, interdisciplinary teams set up to develop multimedia products should be able to minimise the risk of scientific data becoming irrelevant or distorted. In any event, the persons responsible for setting up a project will need to define the level of their particular objective (e.g. scientific research, evocation or popularisation). Professionals in the specific case of ancient places of performance will have to comply with any ethical and moral principles adopted in the future at international level concerning the use of new information technology in the cultural sphere.

II. The quality of public access

Measures to improve the quality of public access will help to ensure that sites are well preserved, while at the same time fostering public understanding of the values conveyed by the cultural heritage today.

1. Improving public understanding of the site.

Necessary measures will include:

designing circuits which follow the paths used in ancient times, so that the public are able to discover the sites gradually and are led to relevant vantage points;

providing aids to understanding the remains, in the form of brochures, audio guide tapes and guidebooks adapted to suit the different categories of public visitors. Trained guides capable of organising educational workshops should be on hand at major sites;

opening a visitors' information centre, strategically located at the main entrance to the site, to explain to visitors how to interpret the site, placing it in its historical perspective (explanations concerning the ancient world and local history, comparisons with other sites). At major sites, such information centres should gradually be equipped with interactive and multimedia tools which promote understanding of the site's history and successive uses. "On-line" telematic and "off-line" multimedia information sources can help the public to prepare their visit and also encourage them to find out more about the site afterwards.

2. Promoting the site image by guaranteeing high standards for visitors and spectators:

- i. Owing to their historical and architectural significance, some ancient places of performance that are open to the public are veritable cultural enterprises and a factor of local development. Nonetheless, the public admission strategies adopted for each site must fix the maximum number of visitors that is compatible with ensuring the site's sustainable preservation and maintenance.
- ii. Wherever possible, sites must be able to offer visitor-friendly amenities and equipment, such as public telephones, credit card facilities, information display units, signs in several languages, queuing systems, cloakrooms, etc.
- iii. Facilities for the disabled must be as similar as possible to those for other visitors, although special evacuation and safety procedures will be required;
- iv. Whenever performances are organised in ancient sites, the specific logistical needs of the performers will also have to be taken into account. The desire to provide maximum personal comfort must be reconciled with respect for the cultural heritage;
- v. In order to ensure high standards for visitors, staff must receive continuing training and must be well-suited to the PR and language requirements of a highly image-conscious cultural enterprise.

3. Safety

- i. Measures in keeping with the site layout or position of the monument will have to be adopted for dealing with not only the effects of a fire or any other hazard, but also, and above all, the panic that might ensue among the throng of visitors or spectators.
- ii. Steps will therefore have to be taken to:
 - * define a safety zone around the monument or site that prevents random parking and allows the police and emergency services to circulate freely.
 - * draw up specific safety standards for each site. Such standards must define:
 - maximum capacity in terms of the number of visitors or spectators,
 - public safety measures, including hazard prevention, medical treatment, and emergency facilities.

III. Use of sites as a means of enhancement

Equipment used for performances should be such that the ability of the public to interpret the monument and understand its historical significance is impaired as little as possible. This remark is particularly important in the case of festivals taking place at the times of year which attract most tourists.

1. Irrespective of the wide range of different productions that can be put on in ancient sites, performances must comply with the site preservation and protection rules.

It is advisable to attempt to satisfy all users and all sections of the public, not only by integrating stage devices and safety measures in an intelligent manner, but also by trying to make the most of such devices and measures by using them to show off or improve understanding of the site, by:

restoring the stage to its original level and layout in ancient times;

positioning scenery, backdrops, sound equipment, and stage coverings to coincide with the ancient stage walls, which have usually disappeared. In the case of theatres, it might be possible to leave certain structures as permanent fixtures, provided they are as transparent and inconspicuous as possible and provided their outline echoes the shape and layout of the ancient walls;

using light as part of the scenery, so that excessively bulky sets can be avoided;

imagining virtual stage scenery that can be adapted to different locations;

using mini-equipment for the lighting, projectors, wiring, control unit, etc.;

giving priority to the restoration of ancient staircases and corridors when creating public walkways and evacuation routes, so that the structure of the original monuments is more obvious.

2. Virtual imagery will be useful for putting on productions that cause no building damage and can minimise erosion of performance sites. For example, virtual scenery can be superimposed on ancient buildings.

3. Where necessary, computers can be used to develop acoustic models that can help design new ways of using space and scenography. Three-dimensional sound reproduction can be used to complement the use of virtual images by conveying additional information through the re-creation of sounds specific to the particular site. The evocative quality of sound, when coupled with images, affords spectators a deeper insight into the nature of the ancient sites, given that acoustics are an integral part of the cultural heritage.

IV. Adoption of negotiated codes of good practice for each site

The precautions that need to be taken in respect of ancient places of performance will be based on general principles laid down by the Council of Europe and other international organisations. A set of specifications for use will have to be drawn up for each site,

on the basis of negotiations between the local authorities that own the site and the services in charge of conservation;

stating the constraints associated with the site and laying down the rules of use that must be observed by organisers of performances and other events.

V. Networking

Professionals offering their services, in whatever capacity, in connection with ancient places of performance will benefit from working together to develop a network approach.

Given the many similarities between the problems of enhancing ancient places of performance, an approach whereby information and initiatives are shared among European countries and between European and Mediterranean countries will help to promote not only research, but also continuing training and large-scale public awareness.

For example, joint projects can be set up in the following areas:

scientific research and the communication of research findings (e.g. virtual image bank and production of "on-line" and "off-line" tools) ;

the promotion of cultural events inspired by this specific type of heritage (e.g. travelling exhibitions, historical research seminars);

the promotion of lasting products of cultural tourism that evoke the ancient heritage of places of performance as well as their past and present significance.