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**Information Document:** Report of the Nara Seminar on the Development and Integrity of  
Historic Cities (5-7 March 1999, Nara, Japan)

## SUMMARY

This Information Document provides the conclusion of the *"Nara Seminar on the Development and Integrity of Historic Cities"* organized by the City of Nara (Japan) and the UNESCO World Heritage Centre held on 5-7 March 1999 in Nara, in commemoration of the inscription of the Historic Monuments of Ancient Nara on the World Heritage List in December 1998. Financed by the City of Nara and supported by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Agency of Cultural Affairs and the Japanese National Commission for UNESCO of the Government of Japan, International Centre for the Study of the Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property (ICCROM) and the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS), the Seminar gathered mayors, governors and experts from the cities of Barcelona (Spain), Bath (United Kingdom), Hue (Vietnam), Istanbul (Turkey), Kathmandu (Nepal), Kyoto (Japan), Luang Prabang (Laos), Nara (Japan), Strasbourg (France), Suwon (Republic of Korea), Xi'an (China), and English Heritage, ICCROM, ICOMOS, and the UNESCO World Heritage Centre, with an observer from the Asia-Europe Foundation. A public meeting held on 7 March 1999 was attended by over 200 experts and local inhabitants with nation-wide media coverage.

This Seminar is a follow-up to the *"International Conference for the Mayors of Historic Cities in China and the European Union"*, organized by the Ministry of Construction of China and UNESCO held on 7-9 April 1998 in Suzhou (China) which was supported and financed by the Governments of China and France, the European Union, the World Heritage Committee, and L'Oreal (France), amongst others, and the *"International Conference on Architecture and Cities for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: Heritage and Development"*, organized by the Valencia Third Millenium Foundation, ADC New Millenium and UNESCO, held on 2-4 July 1998 in Valencia (Spain) which was financed by the Municipality, Province and Region of Valencia and supported by ICOMOS, International Union of Architects, International Federation of Landscape Architects, DOCOMOMO, Spanish Order of Architects amongst others. This series of conferences and seminar have aimed to address the critical issues in the safeguarding and development of historic cities by focusing on urban heritage protected under the World Heritage Convention; the activities of which have been reported to the twenty-second session of the World Heritage Committee in December 1998 in WHC-98/CONF.203/INF.12, entitled "Heritage and Development".

## **Conclusion of the Nara Seminar - Development and the Integrity of Historic Cities**

The Nara Seminar -Development and the Integrity of Historic Cities, organized by the City of Nara and the UNESCO World Heritage Centre, supported by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Agency of Cultural Affairs of the Government of Japan, Japanese National Commission for UNESCO, International Centre for the Study of the Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property (ICCROM) and International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS), was held from 5-7 March 1999 in the City of Nara, Japan. Mayors, governors, experts from the cities of Barcelona (Spain), Bath (United Kingdom), Hue (Vietnam), Istanbul (Turkey), Kathmandu (Nepal), Kyoto (Japan), Luang Prabang (Laos), Nara (Japan), Strasbourg (France), Suwon (Republic of Korea), Xi'an (China), and English Heritage, ICCROM, ICOMOS, and UNESCO World Heritage Centre participated. Asia-Europe Foundation attended the Seminar as an observer.

### **The Seminar identified some major issues faced today in the conservation of the special character of historic cities in Asia as:**

- (a) Degradation in the quality of life of the inhabitants resulting from excessive pressures due to rapid urbanization characterised by the coalescence of urban areas, unrestricted urban sprawl, and related socio-economic problems;
- (b) Depopulation of small and secondary cities weakening their social and economic viability;
- (c) Change in the way of life which has led to new requirements in housing and services which adversely affect the conservation and maintenance of the historic fabric;
- (d) Focus on the conservation of single monuments, without due consideration of the sites, areas and other elements of the historic environment, and their settings, which together go to make up the special character of the city;
- (e) Over-emphasis on catering for the demands of tourism rather than reinforcing the cultural identity of the city and maintaining, and where necessary providing, local services for the inhabitants;
- (f) Neglect of the inter-relationships between the historic areas, the wider urban context and the rural hinterland.

### **The Seminar recognized that:**

- a) Cities are characterised by human activities, functions, uses and spiritual or intangible aspects, particularly in their relationships with a variety of physical elements, such as buildings, walls, spaces, streets, waterways, gardens and vegetation;
- b) The coherence of the historic area and its surroundings depends on the fusion of these components, from modest features to grand monuments;

- c) Cities evolve over time, as they respond to pressures for development and redevelopment, and the need to function as living and working communities. They rarely form a unified architectural whole, but are made up of a series of historical overlays;
- d) Heritage reflects the specific needs and values of the past. Attribution of significance can vary from generation to generation, from culture to culture;
- e) The socio-economic development, the welfare of the communities concerned and the conservation of the characters of historic cities are inter-related;
- f) All these aspects together contribute to the integrity of the historic city and constitute a fragile and irreplaceable resource. In the Asian context, there is a wide divergence in the condition of historic cities. There are cities whose integrity has already been severely compromised, others which are at risk, and some where there is still time for preventive action. Recognizing that integrity once lost cannot realistically be recovered, urgent action should be taken, as appropriate.

**The Seminar called for the integrity of historic cities to be protected and enhanced by management in accordance with the following guiding principles:**

- **Understanding** The value of historic areas depend on much more than the quality of individual buildings - on the historic layout of property boundaries and thoroughfares; on a particular mix of uses; on characteristic materials; on appropriate scaling and detailing of contemporary buildings; on the quality of advertisements, shop fronts, street furniture and hard and soft surfaces; on vistas along streets and between buildings; and on the extent to which traffic intrudes and limits pedestrian use of spaces between buildings. The understanding of this value helps provide a framework for the development of other principles for planning policy and how the character of historic cities relates to modern day life through education, documentation and research.
- **Analysis** An appraisal should be undertaken to show how the elements make up the integrity of historic cities. The analysis and knowledge of the evolution through time, the types and forms of buildings and spaces and their mutual relationships and functions are basic references for planning tools and criteria for the management and culturally-sustainable development of historic cities.
- **Sustainability** Cities need to remain economically, socially, environmentally and culturally viable, so that they can be passed on to future generations. Renewal, regeneration, enhancement and management require a medium and long term vision that is both achievable and sustainable, embodying the concept of custodianship for future generations.
- **Equity and accessibility** Cities need to be managed in an atmosphere of common local and international ownership. Action needs to be implemented on the basis of equality of opportunity and access, taking into account the conservation needs and carrying capacity, including both physical and intellectual access.

## **The Seminar recommended the following actions:**

### **For Understanding and Analysis**

- a) Prepare a comprehensive inventory of the elements forming the historic area, based on documentation and research;
- b) This comprehensive inventory should be officially established and its analysis including the socio-economic impact of protecting these elements should be the basis of planning, regulatory and management processes;
- c) Public authorities must provide appropriate supervision and authorization procedures to prevent disfigurement, dilapidation, substantial alterations, change of character or demolition of buildings, spaces or streets, etc. of historic value which form the cities;
- d) A legal framework is needed to regulate respective rights, responsibilities and conflicts between the concerned parties;
- e) This analysis should be used in the designation of protected heritage zones or conservation areas where authorities would control and guide conservation through use of skilled craftsmanship, traditional materials, etc.

### **For Sustainability**

- a) Public funding should be made available in the rehabilitation of areas of historical interest;
- b) Minimize the use of private transport and encourage the consideration of different options of public transportation, to prevent wherever possible, the damage caused by congestion, pollution, disruption of the setting, and measures should be taken to ensure safety and a healthy environment;
- c) Encourage partnerships, initiatives and training to create more jobs, concentrating particularly on small businesses, to strengthen the inherent economic and social viability of the city;
- d) Ensure that the upgrading of basic infrastructure takes into account the special character of the city;
- e) Encourage mixed use and mixed tenure so as to introduce social equity, variety and vitality into the city;

- f) Measures for protecting historic cities from natural disasters should be incorporated at all levels of city planning and administration.

### **For Equity and Accessibility**

- a) Encourage understanding and awareness raising of the special characteristics which give added value to the city, by using modern information and communication technology, as appropriate;
- b) Disseminate information on policies, knowledge and philosophy about the special character of the city to as wide an audience as possible, especially the stakeholders of the city;
- c) Develop partnerships with the mass media for public education in this regard;
- d) Develop partnerships between public administrators and stakeholders, including in particular the residents and business community.

In addressing these issues, the Seminar recalled the need to promote the application *inter alia* of the Convention concerning the Protection of World Cultural and Natural Heritage (UNESCO World Heritage Convention), the UNESCO Recommendation concerning the Protection at the National Level of the Cultural and Natural Heritage, the UNESCO Recommendation concerning the Preservation of Cultural Property Endangered by Public or Private Works, and the UNESCO Recommendation concerning the Safeguarding and Contemporary Role of Historic Areas. In supporting the Suzhou Declaration on International Co-operation for the Safeguarding and Development of Historic Cities, the Seminar called for the further strengthening of existing networks between international, national, local authorities, universities, conservation institutes, non-governmental and community-based organizations with the citizens to promote the recommendations of this Seminar.

**Nara, Japan  
7 March 1999**