

THE RIGA DECLARATION

"Wooden Architecture in Cities"

Europa Nostra, the Pan-European Federation for Heritage bringing together more than 200 non-governmental organisations active in the conservation of the built and natural heritage throughout Europe, organised a public Forum in Riga, Latvia on Friday 7 September 2001, together with Latvia Nostra. The objective of the Forum was to consider the problems and opportunities facing the wooden architecture in cities. Europa Nostra was called upon to draw the attention of the public to those issues and accordingly influence the policies of all relevant authorities and international and national organisations concerned.

Recognising that the wooden architecture and wooden towns is one of the most important contributions of Northern Europe to the World Cultural Heritage and that wooden architecture provides a living quality and a sense of history and belonging for civil society,
It is an interest to all Europe, showing common ideals in architecture and town planning adding to the understanding of the built environment wherever we live.

Recognising the reality of change, which has shaped the character of wooden towns over centuries, the participants in the Forum in Riga shared the view that the dynamic, economic and social developments in many Central and Eastern European countries cannot justify irresponsible damage to the fabric of the wooden architecture in these cities.

Recognising the need to modernise these towns and dwellings, the importance of protecting this very attractive and characteristic architecture was stressed. Wooden architecture is natural and sustainable and vital to all identity in an increasingly standardised world.

Stressing the need to sustain national traditions of craftsmanship, local authorities were urged to take the lead in this, supported by appropriate policies of international sources of financing and technical competence.

Recognising the fundamental need for the views of the inhabitants to be heard, the role of conservation and heritage societies was stressed, not only to maintain pressure for conservation, but also to increase the general level of education and awareness of the social and economical benefits of conserving the wooden heritage.

The participants of the Europa Nostra Forum in Riga:

1. ENCOURAGE the citizens of Europe to use all appropriate forms of civil action and civil society structures in order to:

- Raise awareness of the local communities of the value of the wooden architecture in the cities as part of their quality of life and
- Exert pressure on policy and decision-making bodies to define, adopt and implement specific measures aimed at ensuring the preservation and enhancement of wooden structures.

2. ENCOURAGE programmes for training of craftsmen and the building-up of a network of wooden and timber-framed towns and cities.

3. IMPRESS UPON all local authorities the need to be respectful of all the aspects of wooden architecture, which contributes to the attractiveness of historic towns, and ask the authorities to produce better co-ordinated plans, which will conserve the wooden architecture.

4. URGE the Council of Ministers of the Council of Europe to impress upon its Member States the need to uphold the principles of the 1985 Granada Convention for the Protection of the Architectural Heritage of Europe and to make them more aware of the potential threat to the wooden heritage in towns by uncoordinated planning.

5. REQUEST the Institutions of the European Union to elaborate policy and legal measures aimed at implementing the Green Paper on the Urban Environment published by the European Commission, which inter alia states the following: "The historical centres of European cities, while they remain intact represent an important link with the city's past culture and heritage. In a world increasingly dominated by global styles of architecture and building technology, historical centres provide a unique sense of place which differentiates them one from another".