



Italia
Nostra

TAORMINA DECLARATION “SAVING EUROPE’S MEMORY AND IDENTITY”

**Adopted by the participants of the EUROPA NOSTRA FORUM on “Safeguarding Europe’s Historic Small Towns and Villages and their Surrounding Landscapes”
organised in cooperation with ITALIA NOSTRA
Taormina, Sicily, 4 June 2009**

Europe’s historic small towns and villages should be considered as gems of European cultural heritage. Each small town or village bears witness to its own unique development and history, through the evidence of its architectural and urban built heritage, and that of the natural and created landscapes in which it is set.

As such, historic small towns and villages constitute an important repository of European memory, and thus of the foundations of many European citizens’ and communities’ sense of identity.

Europe’s historic small towns and villages are faced with great challenges and concrete threats to their integrity, brought about by modern social and economic developments which unrelentingly occur in quick succession. These place the small towns and villages in positions of extreme vulnerability.

Moreover, the recent earthquake that struck L’Aquila and the Abruzzo Region on 6 April 2009, reminds us to what extent historic small towns and villages can be devastated when hit by the forces of nature or acts of God.

In order to seriously and effectively safeguard the integrity and the authenticity of the inhabited historic centers of these small towns and villages, and consequently to enhance the quality of life of their present and future generations of inhabitants, and by extension that of the wider population, public authorities must act at all levels - European, national, regional and local - to put into practice, responsible and sustainable protective political initiatives. In order to achieve this, the local communities must be engaged and players of Civil Society must bring stronger pressure to bear.

It must be stressed that the wide and intricate web of historic small towns and villages spread across the vast and varied territory of the continent of Europe, constitutes the essential fabric and basic structure of the European landscape itself. It is essential that this web, and its individual components, are protected and supported to help them flourish.

Therefore, the participants of the Europa Nostra Forum on Safeguarding Europe’s Historic Small Towns and Villages, assert the following:

- The protection of the landscape should be pursued following appropriate guidelines and methodologies – creating landscape zoning - which will govern rural and town planning, as well as the functioning of related organisations. In Italy, for example, these are prescribed in the recently established Cultural Heritage and Landscape Code. Such Codes must be thoroughly and accurately respected by the National and Regional governments, and must include realistic and enforceable timetables.

- The protection of the rural landscape, with its traditional crops, cultivation methods and the scale of and techniques for land division, should represent the essential aim and outcome of the introduced rural and town planning and zoning regulations, bearing in mind that today the rural landscape is threatened by the irrepressible and rapidly expanding urban sprawl. These protective regulations must be in accordance with the Council of Europe's European Landscape Convention. (www.coe.int/europeanlandscapeconvention)
- The restoration and redevelopment of historic settlements, including smaller ones, should be carried out following thorough and accurate historic, anthropological and typological research. Further, this work should fully respect the principles of conservation and urban renewal, in order to encourage the re-use and adaptation of existing structures and spaces as the effective alternative to new urban expansions which tend to waste land and non renewable territorial resources.
- Before any restoration or regeneration project is to commence, strict assessments must be carried out regarding the quality of the project and its potential impact on the historic fabric of the town or village in question, and on the environment of its surrounding landscape. During the project's realisation, strict supervision and control must be maintained, and an evaluation should be carried out afterwards to provide feedback and suggestions for improvements.
- Urgently, these criteria must be followed in Italy regarding the reconstruction and repair of the villages after the recent earthquake in Abruzzo. It is crucial that demands are met for an immediate and strict rehabilitation and revitalisation of the urban center of L'Aquila with its unique monumental compound, as well as the other less known surrounding historic small towns and villages, which were damaged by the same earthquake.
- It is essential to engage the younger generation through multiple educational and training projects, within and outside of schools. These can assure a wider sensitivity towards civic responsibilities and towards the beauty and value of the surrounding landscape.
- An appeal should be addressed to Universities, for them to fulfill their essential roles of granting professional training and creating educational programmes in the field of cultural heritage protection and enhancement, for both the built and natural, urban and rural heritage.

At this moment of renewal amid the elections for the European Parliament, the participants of this Taormina Europa Nostra Forum appeal to all European Union Institutions to fulfill their responsibilities and to take urgent and effective action, including the necessary financial support (through structural and other funding), to protect Europe's historic small towns and villages and their surrounding landscapes.

The English, French and Italian versions of this Declaration are available on www.europanostra.org