

Expertise of the Report Final of Vilnius Old Town Revitalisation Strategy

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EXTRACTS

ICOMOS expertise (further ICE) considered Vilnius Old Town Revitalisation Strategy (further VOTRS) in two aspects:

Usefulness for Vilnius Old Town – as the World Heritage and Lithuanian Heritage City – conservation purpose;

Compliance with the international methodological standards for conservation of historic cities.

Statements and Assessment

Assessment of Strategy Goal

... THE VOTRS VAGUELY FORMULLATES NAMELY THE GOAL OF THE MENTIONED STRATEGY:

The very VOTRS's objective is couched in not precise terms: the keyword "revitalisation" characterising the goal is neither defined nor explained in the objective and in the VOTRS's text.

... Throughout the whole text of the VOTRS one can notice active use of only one concept related specifically to heritage conservation, namely *restoration* (including *reconstruction* as well). Concepts *related* to contemporary urban conservation such as *integrated conservation, rehabilitation, sustainable development, use and change, management of change, heritage resources management* is not used altogether.

Such obscurity allows for subjective interpretations viewed by the very VOTRS's authors very negatively and is a sure promise of constant conflicts when different interests are clashed.

Therefore, the ICE suggests to give a clear and unambiguous definition of

1. Goal of the Strategy,
2. All concepts used indicating their relation to cultural heritage conservation.
3. Relation of all processes and procedures proposed by the VOTRS to:
 - a. Principles of conservation strategy of the World Heritage cities;
 - b. Vilnius Old Town, indicating their potential positive and negative impact on authenticity and cultural value of the Old Town.

Hieratic Structure of Public Goals

1. The VOTRS raises no question as to who should decide the fate of Vilnius Old Town, this part of the World Heritage and the greatest treasure of Lithuanian People historic and cultural heritage, who is interested to preserve it: the People, Vilnius citizens only, only the community, owners and users of Vilnius Old Town. The made questionnaires cared only for opinions of Old Town residents, owners and users....

IN THE OPINION OF THE ICE, THAT COMPRISES TOO NARROW A RANGE FOR DECIDING THE FATE OF THE WORLD HERITAGE CITY ...

THE SUGGESTION OF THE ICE IS TO ADJUST AND EXPAND THE LIST OF PUBLIC GOALS FOR VILNIUS OLD TOWN TAKING INTO ACCOUNT:

2. Interest of the People and responsibility of the State to preserve the World Heritage City;
3. Formation of a more positive attitude of Old Town residents, owners and users towards heritage and provision of means which would encourage conservation activities.

Weaknesses observed in the "International Experience Analysis":

- 3. The VOTRS does not analyse the strategy for World Heritage cities' conservation.

Assessment of the VOTRS Proposals:

The following has been noted:

1. CONSERVATION MECHANISM. A majority of financial and partly legal mechanism proposed by the VOTRS are neutral regarding the goal, in other words, they can be applied both to preserve cities and to alter them substantially. THEREFORE, WHILE AGREEING WITH THE PROPOSALS MEANT TO ENCOURAGE PRIVATE INITIATIVE, WE SUGGEST TO RELATE THESE PROPOSALS CLEARLY AND UNAMBIGUOUSLY WITH THE URBAN CONSERVATION GOAL OF VILNIUS OLD TOWN, AS THE WORLD HERITAGE CITY.
2. RATIO OF CONSERVATION AND MODERN USE. We had been noted that trends, nature (character) and scope of contemporary adaptive use proposed by the VOTRS are basically not related to the requirement to preserve historic character of the Old Town and continuity of its traditions. On the contrary, the latter are proposed to change through "lowering development restrictions".

SINCE REGULATION OF USAGE (FUNCTION) IS ONE OF THE PRINCIPLE FACTORS FACILITATING CHANGE OR PRESERVATION OF CHARACTER OH HISTORICAL AREAS, WE SUGGEST THE FOLLOWING:

1. TO SUPPLEMENT STRATEGY OF FUNCTIONAL REGULATION (MANAGEMENT) OF THE VOTRS AND RELATE IT MORE CLEARLY TO THE REQUIREMENTS OF INTEGRATED CONSERVATION AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT OF VILNIUS OLD TOWN SO AS TO PREVENT FUTURE MISTAKES DONE IN VILNIUS OLD TOWN DURING THE SOVIET TIME.

RATIO OF CONSERVATION AND DEVELOPMENT. Priority of conservation of Old Town authenticity is denied by the VOTRS's proposals:

1. To encourage free economic development through intensifying new building developments in the Old Town which should “*fill in the empty plots and make insertions*” both in the Old Town and its “*outskirts*”.

WE SUGGEST TO USE THE TERM “*SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT*” RATHER THAN “*DEVELOPMENT (EXPANSION)*”, DEFINING AND EXPANDING IT IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE CONCRETE CONTEXT OF VILNIUS OLD TOWN CULTURAL VALUES. THE ISSUE OF NEW BUILDING DEVELOPMENTS HAS TO BE HARMONISED WITH UNESCO REQUIREMENT FOR AUTHENTICITY PRESERVATION AND THE PROPOSALS OF VILNIUS OLD TOWN REGENERATION PROJECT.

Separation and autonomisation of Old Town management processes (their planning, financing, and implementation) presented in the VOTRS is rather artificial and not useful to Old Town management because it does not allow to get a view of the Old Town actual state and the needs determined by it. Furthermore it does not allow to have a flexible planning, financing and implementation mechanism which would suit to monitoring, assessment and planning of the Old Town urban conservation process and, most important, to react to urgent or unexpected situations in a flexible way.

We suggest to follow the further order of priority:

1. TO LEGITIMISE THE STATUS OF THE OLD TOWN AS A HERITAGE SITE CORRESPONDING TO THE CULTURAL AND HISTORIC VALUE OF THE OLD TOWN (while included in the World Heritage List, according to the Lithuanian legislation, Vilnius Old Town has only got the lowest level protection status – it is *an immovable cultural property*, but not a *monument* and is not qualified as a *protected area*);
2. TO ELIMINATE GAPS AND CONTRADICTIONS IN THE LEGISLATION in particular those obstructing implementation of ECONOMIC INCENTIVES MECHANISM OF CONSERVATION PROCESS;
3. WE SUGGEST TO DO THIS IS A SIMPLEST AND SHORTEST WAY – BY PRERANING AND ADOPTING A SPECIAL LAW OF THE OLD TOWN AS A WORLD HERITAGE CITY;
4. SINCE THE OLD TOWN VALUES HAVE NOT BEEN SET AND ENFORDED IN THE LEGISLATION YET, AND THIS CONSTRAINT CANNOT BE ELIMINATED QUICKLY, IN THE FIRST STAGE OF MANAGEMENT WE SUGGEST TO TAKE ACTIONS WHICH WOULD ALLOW TO IMPROVE THE OLD TOWN ENVIRONMENT, E.G. TO CONSERVE RUINS OR THE LIKE, WITHOUT CAUSING CHANGES IN THE OLD TOWN CHARACTER.

ASSESSMENT OF THE REVITALISATION STRATEGY

1. **BASIS PRINCIPLES.** In the option of the ICE, they are not formulated sufficiently clearly and are not harmonised with principal statements of the World Heritage cities conservation:

The ICE proposes: to change this VOTRS’s formulation, clearly defining the goal of the Old Town preservation in compliance with the World Heritage Convention and integrated conservation as a process to implement Convention’s objectives.

2. **STRATEGIC GOALS.** Proposed strategic goals do not completely correspond to the conclusion of the VOTRS’s analysis:

In the opinion of the ICE, the process should start with the preparation and adopting of legislative acts, since only then it will be clear what the possibilities of the conservation process are, and what means (including institutional structures) will be needed to implement it.

3. TACTICAL GOALS.

In the opinion of the ICE, before adopting them, an agreement has to be reached regarding the strategy and its legislative foundation has to be created. In addition, Old Town, as part of the World Heritage, values have to be clearly defined, and a strategic plan for their protection, preservation, presentation and enhancement developed, because tactical – action plans can only be based on them. On the other hand, even now it is possible and necessary to develop programs and action plans which would partially enable to solve most urgent Old Town problems, e.g. rescue of ruins, etc.

CONCLUSION AND PROPOSALS

Based on the reasons mentioned in the ICE, we assess proposals of the VOTRS only as a part of the future Old Town Integrated Conservation Strategy that has been a good start. However, the proposed mechanism cannot be a Goal – in – itself. Therefore, our proposal is to harmonise all the VOTRS's proposals with the international standards of World Heritage preservation and to propose management, financing and public participation models which would ensure integrated conservation (they are abundant in the practical activities experience of World Heritage and other protected historic cities):

1. To improve and supplement the VOTRS harmonising it with the integrated conservation strategy (see proposals and conclusions presented in the ICE). Improvement proposals should include:
 - a. Regulation method of all Old Town management problems as one whole (including all integrated conservation process stages and monitoring of the process);
 - b. Active means of Heritage Conservation (i. e. means shaping a positive attitude of Old Town residents, owners and other users towards the Old Town as cultural heritage and encouraging them to act in the direction of heritage conservation and sustainable development rather than free development destructive to heritage);
 - c. Commercial i. e. economically beneficial and giving pay back of investment means of heritage conservation (through its use);
 - d. A more rational fund accumulation and use method which would allow to assess the integrity of Old Town needs and accumulate and allocate funds (which will probably for a long time remain scarce Lithuania) for most important at that or another date goals of integrated conservation;
 - e. Furthermore the VOTRS's heritage concept has to be adjusted in accordance with the concept of historic cities as heritage sites presented in the World Heritage Convention and related international heritage protection standards; the Old Town cultural values and priority of authenticity preservation, as a priority of the World Heritage city management, have to be defined.
2. The issue of reconstruction and particularly new building has to be harmonised with the UNESCO requirements for preservation of authenticity of World Heritage objects.

3. The mechanism proposed by the VOTRS can be used, however, first the goal has to be defined – conservation of the world heritage city as the duty of the Lithuanian State for its People and as an international obligation.
4. VILNIUS OLD TOWN STATUS AS THE WORLD HERITAGE CITY AND THE GOAL OF ITS MANAGEMENT HAVE TO BE LEGITIMISED ON THE HIGHEST LEVEL, I. E. BY A SPECIAL LAW, because as the VOTRS's legal analysis has established fairly, this is the fastest and optimum way to harness present decay, deterioration and destruction of the Old Town and to ensure participation of residents, owners and users through encouraging and incenting them. The law should also provide for the specified components of the conservation mechanism such as financing sources (the Old Town), NGO's authorised to participate in the process (agencies and the like), etc.
5. Pilot investment models should be selected in a way that would demonstrate prior trend of the Old Town Management (conservation). Therefore, their selection have to be based on the cultural value. And the porposed reuse has to ensure preservation of these values. Models should also demonstrate economic benefits of preservation as well as conservation techniques and technologies.
6. It is obligatory to ensure continuity of the Old Town research, of making its inventory (where Intersave could be useful) and interrelation of the research and monitoring of Old Town's present state with the general comprehensive conservation process.
7. Until strategic statements given under items 1-5 are developed, we suggest take up means possible at present:
 - a. Enforce the status and powers of the Monument Preservation Department of the Vilnius Municipality and set its priority rights in the Old Town management matters, providing for its role as a co-ordinator of all required approval process steps, etc.
 - b. Start, as the VOTRS fairly indicates, with small modest programs and projects that can demonstrate the usefulness of conservation activities and attract people and that can be implemented on the basis of effective legal acts.