



THE VENICE CHARTER—BETWEEN PROTECTION AND SOCIALLY USEFUL PURPOSE. EXAMPLES OF WORLD HERITAGE CITIES IN GERMANY AND POLAND

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ABSTRACT: The principles of the Venice Charter are still invoked worldwide as a crucial reference point in discussions and practices related to heritage preservation. However, the Charter's lack of clarity in defining stakeholders and procedural steps raises significant issues about who has the authority to determine the appropriateness of new functions for monuments. This deficiency can lead to decision-making that might not fully consider the diverse cultural values and historical significances of the sites, potentially resulting in conservation outcomes that are more driven economically than socially.

This paper examines how national and international conservation policies have expanded upon the Venice Charter to address social participation and the concept of "socially useful purposes" in World Heritage Site management. Focusing on World Heritage cities of Germany and Poland, our study explores the ways in which national and international guidelines have expanded upon the Venice Charter to incorporate social participation and the concept of "socially useful purposes" in the management of World Heritage Sites. It thus delves into the role of Site Management Plans as dynamic documents that have evolved from strict preservation frameworks to policies. These encompass social participation, thereby enhancing community engagement and meeting a broader spectrum of conservation needs and stakeholder interests.

KEY WORDS: Cultural heritage; Venice Charter, Adaptation of historic monuments and sites, Participation

1. Introduction

The Venice Charter, officially known as the International Charter for the Conservation and Restoration of Monuments and Sites, is a foundational document in heritage conservation. Drafted in 1964 and adopted by the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) in 1965, it established a framework of principles that has had a profound worldwide influence on the preservation of historic buildings and sites. As it articulates detailed procedures for restoration and conservation, the Charter emphasizes the importance of authenticity being maintained, with the aid of scientific investigation, precise documentation and rational intervention. Its guidelines play a crucial role in protecting world heritage, providing a benchmark for heritage conservation and informing legislation and practices worldwide.

The Charter's Article 5 specifically advocates for the adaptive reuse of monuments by assigning them a socially beneficial function. However, it is far from specific in defining what is understood as "some socially useful purpose." Yet, an explanation seems critical, given the need to achieve a clear contrast with economically useful purposes as the traditional core goal of regional development¹. The Charter's ambiguity here denotes challenges with the uniform application of its directives across varied cultural and social contexts. The lack of an operational definition for the concept leaves considerable room for what constitutes societal utility to be construed.

Further related issues concern the Venice Charter's lack of definition of stakeholders, as well as a lack of procedural clarity that raises questions as to who has the authority to determine whether new functions for monuments are appropriate. This can create a significant deficiency, as it can lead to decision-making that fails to give full consideration to the diverse cultural values and historical significances of sites, potentially resulting in conservation outcomes driven more by economic than social factors.

One of the tools for defining "socially useful purposes" for World Heritage sites has become the Site Management Plans. These Plans offer a structured framework that guides the conservation and management of heritage sites, ensuring that their use aligns with the need regarding preservation, plus the broader social benefits they can ensure to communities. Site Management Plans have become crucial where cities have their entire historical centres designated as World Heritage Sites, given the ongoing presence of diverse forms of ownership that make decision-making even more challenging.

The work detailed here has seen us examine ways in which national and international conservation policies have expanded upon the Venice Charter, with a view to addressing social participation and the concept of "socially useful purposes" as World Heritage Sites are managed. The analysis has been conducted through the lens of World Heritage cities in Germany and Poland, with the choice of the cities Toruń and Stralsund, Bamberg and Zamość reflecting both specificity and comparability of these pairs of Sites. These cities were selected for the research for several

¹ Park S. (2012). *Precautions for heritage to be a driver for regional development: A critical review of related principles manifested in the ICOMOS charters from a development perspective* [in:] ICOMOS 17th General Assembly, 2011-11-27 / 2011-12-02, Paris, France.

reasons. First, one of the most important factors is that World Heritage status is not assigned to individual buildings but to the entire historic city centres, including their infrastructure. Fortunately, the historical parts of these cities avoided significant damage during the Second World War and maintained a high degree of authenticity, particularly in terms of location and setting. Also, these four cities have been designated as World Heritage Cities for quite some time. Secondly, these cities were historically important economic centres of their regions. Toruń and Stralsund are first mentioned in historical documents as towns one year apart (in 1233 and 1234, respectively). Both towns were part of the Hanseatic League and their centres, which have World Cultural Heritage status, have similar medieval trading town structures. Bamberg and Zamość were trade and religious centres.

2. Site Management Plans in the World Heritage Cities of Germany and Poland

As was noted above, Site Management Plans have evolved from a primary focus on the physical conservation of sites to a circumstance in which they incorporate a broader spectrum of both needs and stakeholders. "Management plans as a methodology are therefore changing: from focusing mainly on policies for preservation and conservation to the enhancement of communication and ongoing possibilities to implement what Mark Bevir calls "participatory governance," thereby placing community needs and benefits more to the fore"². Moreover, the Plans have gained for themselves a description as dynamic documents that should adapt to the evolving conditions and needs of the Heritage Sites they serve. This puts paid to any status as mere preservation blueprints, leaving the Plans instead as living documents that facilitate communities' active participation in the heritage-management process.

The foundational legal directive underpinning the formulation of Site Management Plans is to be found in the Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention, published in 2023. In accordance with those Guidelines, each Site listed on the World Heritage List is mandated to establish a management system, with the formulation of a management plan strongly recommended. The wording makes clear that the primary purpose of such a Plan is to: "explain how the outstanding universal value of a property can be preserved. The management plan is the central planning instrument for the protection, use, conservation, and successful development of World Heritage Sites"³. The Guidelines mandate that the development of Site Management Plans must incorporate the "use of inclusive and participatory planning and stakeholder consultation processes," ensuring that a diverse stakeholder groups is involved in the decision-making process⁴. The standards of site management set by UNESCO guidelines

² Ripp M., Rodwell D. (2018). Governance in UNESCO world heritage sites: Reframing the role of management plans as a tool to improve community engagement [in:] *Aspects of Management Planning for Cultural World Heritage Sites: Principles, Approaches and Practices* (p. 248). Springer International Publishing.

³ Ringbeck B. (2008). *Management plans for world heritage sites. A practical guide*. German Commission for UNESCO, Bonn.

⁴ UNESCO World Heritage Centre (2023). *Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention* (p. 35). WHC.23/01 24 September 2023, UNESCO: Paris, France.

put a strong emphasis on social participation, stipulating that "the shared understanding of the property, its universal, national, and local values, and its socio-ecological context by all stakeholders, including local communities"⁵, should be foreseen in an effective management system.

However, as the Operational Guidelines do not identify the stakeholders involved in creating the Site Management Plan, they are open to interpretation by the State Parties. The same would be true of what a Plan's content is to encompass, as well as the scope of any stakeholder consultations. Poland and Germany have thus acted separately to develop their guidelines for the founding, implementation and monitoring of the Site Management Plan. Both of these State Parties that we consider have also built an understanding of the stakeholders, within these processes and through their active pursuit.

The German Commission for UNESCO published guidelines under the title "Management Plans for World Heritage Sites: A Practical Guide"⁶. This publication makes no direct mention of the term "stakeholders," even as it offers some understanding of the term by referencing members of the local community connected to a Site, or "immediately surrounding it"⁷. The publication later reemphasizes that, as there is no official UNESCO template for a Site Management Plan, its content should be determined by the respective World Heritage Site⁸. Nevertheless, it seeks to provide a template and propose a structure for such documents that could be adopted by World Heritage Sites in Germany.

Site Management Plans exhibit considerable variation across World Heritage cities in Germany, reflecting distinct local approaches to heritage conservation. In Stralsund, part of the "Historic Centres of Stralsund and Wismar" recognized as a World Heritage Site in 2002, the Site Management Plan formulated in 2015 is characterized by its technical nature. This Plan is designed specifically for professionals in architecture and conservation, demonstrating a specialized focus that may not address broader community needs in a direct manner.

In comparison, the Bamberg Site Management Plan was established in 2004, a decade after the Site was listed (in 1993) on the World Heritage list as the "Town of Bamberg"⁹. Evolving international standards and recent advancements necessitated a more comprehensive planning document incorporating local regulations and authorities. In November 2015, Bamberg initiated a significant effort to refine its Site Management Plan by organizing a kick-off event that led to the establishment of five Specialist Panels. These were organized around key thematic areas:

⁵ Ibidem.

⁶ Ringbeck B. (2008). *Management plans for world heritage sites. A practical guide*. German Commission for UNESCO, Bonn.

⁷ Ibidem (p. 50).

⁸ Ibidem (p. 7).

⁹ Kloos M., Alberth P. (2017). The Case Study of the Town of Bamberg (Germany) Concerning the Combination of Management Plans with Participation Strategies in Urban World Heritage Properties [in:] *Aspects of Management Planning for Cultural World Heritage Sites: Principles, Approaches and Practices* (pp. 209–223). Springer International Publishing.

Architectural Heritage and Urban Development, Education and Research, Urban Gardening, World Heritage and Tourism, and World Heritage and the Economy. The objective of the five Specialist Panels was to develop measures and recommendations with relevance to Bamberg's World Heritage, while considering the city's preexisting planning instruments¹⁰. This approach exemplified a structured yet inclusive strategy for heritage management, emphasizing stakeholder engagement and expert contributions across diverse fields. An updated document was published in 2019, and its guiding principle is based on the inclusion of "a broad base of participants which would enable and stimulate the exchange and contribution of ideas and expertise both by specialists and the general population and all stakeholders who interact with the World Heritage"¹¹.

Instead of the term "socially useful purpose," the document focuses on "social sustainability." Although the term is not explicitly defined, its importance and objectives are outlined as follows: "The participation of all members of society regardless of age, sex, social background and financial means is essential for social cohesion. The objective of social sustainability is to involve the local population in active decision-making and make culture and resources accessible to all"¹². The usage of the term "social sustainability" is increasingly contextualized within the framework of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), reflecting a nuanced interpretation of concepts traditionally associated with heritage and cultural preservation, such as the "socially useful purpose" articulated in the Venice Charter. In contemporary discourse, social sustainability extends these principles to encompass broader issues such as social equity, inclusion, and community resilience.

Similar to the German approach, Poland's development of the Site Management Plans also demonstrated the importance of expert input, particularly from the National UNESCO Committee. Poland's UNESCO Committee thus played an important role in the development of the Plans, in the absence of comprehensive national documents that would identify required content specifically. To address this, the Polish Committee developed guidelines outlining both development procedure and essential content where a Site Management Plan is concerned. These guidelines were made publicly available on the Committee's website, ensuring transparency and accessibility¹³.

Specifically, the Guidelines from the Polish UNESCO Committee stipulate the identification of interested parties as the first step in creating a document. Those parties are to "include representatives of local authorities and owners of areas within the facility and its buffer zones. Stakeholders include government institutions, non-governmental organizations, and private

¹⁰ Ibidem.

¹¹ Alberth P. (Ed.). (2019). *Management Plan for the UNESCO World Heritage Site "Town of Bamberg"* (p. 12). City of Bamberg World Heritage Office.

¹² Ibidem (p. 65).

¹³ Polish UNESCO Committee. *Plan zarządzania obiektem Światowego Dziedzictwa*. Retrieved September 2, 2024 from <https://www.unesco.pl/kultura/dziedzictwo-kulturowe/swiatowe-dziedzictwo/procedura-wpisu/plan-zarzadzania/>

individuals"¹⁴. The document frames the broad involvement of stakeholders as a positive factor in the process by which a World Heritage Site is managed. Stakeholders should participate in management by informing, consulting, participating in decision-making, collaborating on the creation of the plan, and taking part in the implementation of tasks. While establishing recommendations on the procedure by which stakeholders may agree on a Plan, the guidelines reemphasize that "at each stage of preparing the plan, public consultations should take place"¹⁵.

Recognized as a World Heritage Site in 1992, The Old City of Zamość exemplifies the Polish Site that has already adopted a Site Management Plan, through a development and adoption process that adheres to the guidelines from the Polish UNESCO Committee and emphasizes stakeholder participation. The Plan was adopted by the City Council of Zamość in 2019 and offers a ten-year time perspective¹⁶. It is focused on the process of identifying stakeholders and elaborates on the national guidelines. In identifying the stakeholders to be involved in processes of public consultation over a document, it is found to be useful to deploy the stakeholder categories outlined in national law on revitalization. For this is the first national-level law to offer a clear definition of these categories, as they relate to actual participation¹⁷. Furthermore, the document states: "It is assumed that the objectives of managing the property should result from the understanding of its value by all stakeholders participating in the management process, because only then will their real involvement be possible"¹⁸. The aim is thus to guide efforts in the direction of informed participation, with an implicit connection to the management processes of the World Heritage Site so as to ensure the socially useful purpose for the monument that the Venice Charter foresees¹⁹.

As the document does not explicitly reference "socially useful purposes," it implicitly assumes that fostering social participation will contribute to their realization. The document asserts that "it is necessary to discuss the existing protection mechanisms and indicate the correlation of protection tools with individual stakeholders, as well as with the existing threats and challenges in the area of protection of the property"²⁰, thereby integrating social participation within the operational structures of monument protection. Furthermore, it links this approach to the city's revitalization efforts, noting, "According to the vision of revitalization stakeholders, the revitalization area will become a secure environment, stimulating economic and civic initiatives by leveraging its resources and potential—a place where modernity and tradition merge in a manner conducive to the development of Zamość as a city appealing to both residents and

¹⁴ Ibidem.

¹⁵ Ibidem.

¹⁶ Szmygin B., Fortuna-Marek A., Siwek A. (2018). *Stare miasto w Zamościu: dobro światowego dziedzictwa UNESCO: ocena wartości i plan zarządzania*. Retrieved September 2, 2024 from <https://ruj.uj.edu.pl/xmlui/handle/item/69145> The Revitalisation Act of 9 October 2015. Journal of Laws of the Republic of Poland for the year 2015. law number 1777.

¹⁷ Ibidem (p. 124).

¹⁸ Ibidem.

¹⁹ Ibidem (p. 123).

²⁰ Ibidem (p. 75).

tourists"²¹. This formulation, adapted from the city's revitalization goals, reinforces the alignment of Site management and utilization with the aim of fostering a local society and ensuring its social usefulness.

In practice, public hearings and consultations were organized in the process leading to the development and adoption of the Site Management Plan. A shortened summary version of the Plan was created and published before the public hearings, in order for the process of consultation to be made more comprehensible to the public. During the consultations, stakeholders were presented with a questionnaire based on the previously published summary, with the aim being to gather their opinions and suggestions in a structured process. Some of this social input from the process was later incorporated into the final version of the Site Management Plan.

3. The Experience of Toruń

Among the four cases analyzed in our research, a non-standard approach to the establishment of a Site Management Plan was demonstrated for the Medieval Town of Toruń (Poland), which was recognized as a World Heritage Site in 1997. Toruń is the only city among the cases presented here to be still in the process of creating its Site Management Plan. The City of Toruń commenced the development of the first plan for the Medieval Old Town in 2022. The draft version of the Site Management Plan has been published and has undergone two rounds of public consultations, the report from which is still to be published. Our research indicates that the document's contents derive partially from other planning documents of the city, such as its revitalization plan, with parts of the site analysis and the vision for its future reutilized. Public consultations surrounding the Plan included diverse categories of stakeholder and have leveraged previously-established institutional bodies for public consultation, such as the Revitalization Committee. Three stakeholder categories were invited to participate in three separate rounds of public consultations: business owners from the site, NGOs operating within the area, and local citizens. This categorization aligns with what was established for the Revitalization Committee by Polish national law on revitalization.

Social participation in planning facilitates the implementation of Article 5 of the Venice Charter, which pertains to using monuments "for some socially useful purpose," particularly in contemporary social contexts. In Toruń, this involvement is further ensured through the incorporation of the Medieval Old Town into the city's revitalization process, and hence the remit of the Revitalization Committee. Within the Polish legal framework, the Revitalization Committee serves as a formal advisory body for public consultation at the local-government level. Its establishment is mandated to carry out revitalization processes by virtue of the Revitalization Act. Moreover, this legislation understands social participation as a guiding principle. Diverse stakeholder groups are to be included in the planning, management and monitoring of revitalization. This approach is reiterated in the operational guidelines for implementing revitalization, and it echoes the requirements relating to European Union funds

²¹ Ibidem (p. 93).

deployed in pursuit of these processes²².

As a representative public-consultation body, the Revitalization Committee issues Recommendations that can exert a significant influence on urban-planning and revitalization processes within revitalized areas. The vision for its role was further specified within the Revitalization Plan itself, exceeding the obligations set by national law. Here, the Committee gains the power to monitor and evaluate the results of the revitalization program—a circumstance that law nationally does not require. Throughout the revitalization process, the Committee consults on planned actions and recommends solutions, including implementation. Additionally, the City administration of Toruń engaged the Revitalization Committee to participate in public consultations on the Site Management Plan. As a result, substantial parts of the document draft are taken verbatim from the Revitalization Plan. This is true of the vision for the future of the Old Town of Toruń as presented in each document.

The proposed contents of the Plan further emphasize and establish social participation as a crucial element of the World Heritage management system. It claims universal implementation of social participation in the contemporary practice of activities related to the development of Heritage Sites, arguing for the appropriateness of such a solution. Specifically, the Plan states that it has considered social involvement during the work to achieve its creation, noting that "the process resulting in this document was conducted using extensive survey research and then the participatory method with the participation of representatives of several organizational units of the Toruń City Hall and external entities"²³.

Crucially, and as is sustained by empirical evidence surrounding the case, this broad construct of social involvement is based on two assumptions. Firstly, it is asserted that "knowledge important for the development of an organizational system is already present within it, and the task of specialists supporting the diagnosis and planning process is to utilize it"²⁴. This presents a strong argument for adherence to guidelines for the creation of Site Management Plans as regards social participation. It connects directly to the fostering of an effective system offering assurance as to the monument's use for a socially useful purpose, as foreseen in the Venice Charter. Secondly, we can note that: "An important element of the heritage management process (World Heritage Site) is social participation, understood as an awareness of the value of the protected site and involvement in the process of caring for and managing it"²⁵. This statement is notably reflected in actions undertaken by the City administration. As the Revitalization Committee is involved in the process of consultation of the Site Management Plan, this creates an intersection between the UNESCO management and revitalization processes. Such entanglement of the two processes is

²² Przywojska J. (2018). Revitalisation Committee—a Form of the Co-management of the Revitalisation Process on the Example of the City of Łódź. *Przedsiębiorczość i Zarządzanie*, 19(3.3) (p. 16). DOI: 10.34768/rl.2019.v452.02.

²³ City of Toruń (2024). *Draft UNESCO site management plan* (p. 73). Retrieved September 2, 2024 from https://www.konsultacje.torun.pl/sites/default/files/pictures/2016/plan_zarządzania_unesco_projekt_do_konsultacji.pdf

²⁴ Ibidem (p. 6).

²⁵ Ibidem (p. 62).

aimed at boosting the awareness of the value of the protected heritage amongst the stakeholders involved.

The City administration decided to utilize the Revitalization Committee as a ready-made body for public consultation. The Committee, as an institution, was invited to participate in and contribute to public consultations on the Site Management Plan. City officials also emphasize how this involvement is crucial in enhancing the legitimacy and social awareness of both the Site Management Plan and World Heritage status in general. In the city's view, that status may be perceived as abstract and distant from the everyday lives of its citizens, even as revitalization garners more interest in the community. So it is that the intersection created by the city administration between the Site Management Plan and the Revitalization Plan, through both the construction of stakeholder categories for public consultation and the directly-invited participation of the Revitalization Committee, aimed to make the understanding of World Heritage status more relatable to the community and to enhance public participation in the development of the Site Management Plan. This approach aligns with the idea of monuments fulfilling the "socially useful purpose" provided for in the Venice Charter, through a fostering of social involvement, as well as inclusion when it comes to actions planned within the inscribed area.

Among all the cases examined in our study, Toruń most explicitly references a socially useful purpose in its documentation related to the protection of the UNESCO World Heritage Site. The draft Site Management Plan states that "SWOT analysis is employed to evaluate the state of affairs from both the internal and external perspectives of the policy implementer, to achieve a socially desirable change (described by a set of goals)"²⁶. Thus, a socially desirable change is framed as an overarching vision to be realized through the implementation of the Plan. However, the document does not provide a formal definition of this term. It can be anticipated that, upon publication of the final version of the Site Management Plan, a more precise definition will be formulated based on the SWOT analysis presented in the draft. Nevertheless, further studies will be necessary to deepen the understanding of the term based on the goals and actions it sets forth and to assess its alignment with the "socially useful purpose" as defined by the Venice Charter.

4. Conclusion

Aspects not outlined in the Venice Charter are seen to have evolved organically. This evolution was aided by other documents that have served as tools to help define "socially useful purposes" and identify those involved in decision-making. Over time, as heritage conservation has advanced, newer frameworks and conventions have emerged to fill the gaps left by the Venice Charter; particularly those concerning community involvement and the management of World Cultural Heritage Sites.

Site Management Plans have been serving as one platform by which to define the aforesaid

²⁶ Ibidem (p. 73).

"socially useful purposes" and one in which the role of citizen participation is to be identified. The engagement of local stakeholders was crucial in shaping management strategies integrating a Heritage Site into broader community life and development goals. Poland and Germany have different understandings of the stakeholders in social participation processes and on how to ensure social engagement. However, in all four studied cases of World Heritage cities, there is a shared understanding of the importance of broad social engagement in the creation and implementation of the Site Management Plans.

It can be concluded that, thanks to the guidelines developed by the Polish UNESCO Committee, categories of stakeholder are defined more specifically and linked up with Polish national law on revitalization. This clarity can facilitate the devising of Site Management Plans, through specification of the interactions with various individuals and organizations that are to take place, with the ultimate outcome being greater participatory involvement.

Evident in the case of the Medieval Town of Toruń is the impact of the city's Revitalization Committee being involved in developing the Site Management Plan. Substantial parts of its draft version (including the vision for the future of Toruń) were taken verbatim from the Revitalization Plan. The involvement of public-consultation institutions in this participatory approach facilitated the drawing-up of a Site Management Plan that not only preserves the historical and cultural significance of the World Heritage Site but also enhances its social utility. This approach has made the Heritage Site a living part of the city, with an active contribution made to its contemporary cultural and social environment.

The ongoing relevance of the Venice Charter is a testament to its foundational role, even as newer conventions and principles emerge in the heritage-conservation field. Our analysis would suggest a beneficial next step in the current stage of development of the Venice Charter being to provide a more-detailed description of stakeholders who can define "socially useful purposes" within the Site Management Plans. This approach would allow for the inclusion of a broad range of experts in the decision-making process, taking into account the future use of the Sites.

Acknowledgments

The author(s) disclosed receipt of the following financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article: This research is part of the project No. 2021/43/P/HS5/02926 co-funded by the National Science Centre and the European Union Framework Programme for Research and Innovation Horizon 2020 under the Marie Skłodowska-Curie grant agreement no. 945339. For the purpose of Open Access, the author has applied a CC-BY public copyright licence to any Author Accepted Manuscript (AAM) version arising from this submission.



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