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THE CIAM CHARTER OF ATHENS, 1933: OUTCOME OF A SIMILAR EFFORT

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# APPENDIX

## THE CIAM CHARTER OF ATHENS, 1933: OUTCOME OF A SIMILAR EFFORT

The previous generation made an attempt to face the problems of human settlements. This attempt was undertaken by the architects and it led to certain results. The present document gives a summary of their best known document, the Charter of Athens, 1933.

### AN HISTORICAL ACCOUNT

In June 1928 a number of outstanding contemporary architects from Austria, Belgium, Germany, Holland, Italy, Spain and Switzerland met together in the chateau of La Sarraz, Switzerland, at the personal invitation of Madame de Mandrot. From this private gathering came the Manifesto of La Sarraz, and an association of friends called the Congrès Internationaux d'Architecture Moderne (or CIAM) came into being which exerted very great influence throughout a quarter of a century on the development of contemporary architecture and town planning throughout the world. Its founder members announced their impending retirement at the Ninth Congress (Congress of Aix-en-Provence) in 1953 and after the Tenth Congress (Congress of Dubrovnik) in 1956, CIAM, having outlived its youth, terminated its existence.

Throughout its 28 years, CIAM remained a more or less informal grouping of friends with similar approaches to architecture and planning. Though formally recognized as an influential organisation by the United Nations and UNESCO, it was never governmentally subsidised and those attending its congresses either paid their own way, or were privately assisted by their friends. All but three of its ten congresses resulted in some kind of publication, and these were undoubtedly very important in extending the influence of the ideas in which CIAM was devoted. However its worldwide publicity was due to the personal writings of Le Corbusier and S. Giedion.

The most widely known congress of CIAM was its Fourth (Congress of Athens) in 1933. The subject of this congress—«The Functional City»—had been decided at the previous congress in Brussels, and its preparation entrusted to Cornel van Eesteren, newly elected President of CIAM and head of the Amsterdam Department of Town Planning. It was agreed that all delegates to the Athens Congress would arrive with information about their cities and land use maps, drawn to the same scale and employing the same notation. «The preparatory work was not at all easy and... delegates from the various countries

had therefore to meet several times—in Berlin in 1931, in Barcelona in 1932, in Paris in 1933».<sup>1</sup> At the final meeting it was agreed to hold the congress on board the Greek boat, *Patris II*, sailing from Marseilles to Athens and back. «Through the help of friends, this Greek steamer was placed at our disposal, and we hoped that the quiet Mediterranean would afford us three weeks of concentrated work. And, indeed, it turned out to be the most inspired of all congresses. Our assemblies were held on the promenade of the *Patris II*. Although not all participated in the discussions, the presence of musicians, poets, authors and painters helped to keep the spirit of these discussions from being a closed and specialised one. In Athens, with the help of the Greek delegate to the CIAM, Stamo Papadaki, and the Greek group, who secured the sponsorship of the Greek government, the discussions were held in the open court of the University at the foot of the Acropolis, and in the lecture halls were exhibited the plans of the thirty-three cities analysed by the CIAM... During our return and in Marseilles we formulated our point of view on city planning in the «Charte d'Athènes».<sup>2</sup>

«Eighteen national groups made plans of thirty-three cities, representing a great variety of national circumstances and climates. This list included large capitals, like London, Paris and Berlin; new industrial centres like Detroit and Los Angeles; old cradles of civilisation like Athens and Rome; industrial and commercial harbours like Amsterdam, Genoa and Barcelona; residential centres like The Hague, Stockholm, Madrid and Zurich; cities originating as cross-road communities like Warsaw and Zagreb; and colonial cities like Dalat and Bandung».<sup>3</sup>

Three maps and a report were produced for each city: a land use map, a transportation map and a map of the regional setting. The system on which they were drawn up is reproduced, using the example of Amsterdam.<sup>4</sup> There was also a report. This «described the living conditions in each city analysed and was presented in four chapters corresponding to the four functions of the city: dwelling, work (or production), recreation and transportation. While describing

<sup>1</sup> S. Giedion, in Introduction to «Can our Cities Survive» by J. L. Sert, 1942, p. x

<sup>2</sup> As above.

<sup>3</sup> J. L. Sert, «Can our Cities Survive» p. 6.

<sup>4</sup> C. van Eesteren in «Can our Cities Survive» by J. L. Sert, pp. 7, 8, 9.

existing conditions the report also made recommendations for improvement».<sup>5</sup>

The resulting Charter of Athens, which follows, exerted a tremendous influence on those who took part in drawing it up—and this included almost all the foremost European architects and planners of the time (1933), with some from other parts of the world. Its statements and recommendations have also, directly and indirectly, been incorporated in most subsequent town planning legislation, particularly in Europe

#### THE CHARTER OF ATHENS<sup>6</sup>

##### THE CITY IN ITS REGIONAL SETTING

1. The city is only a part of the economic, social and political entity which constitutes the region.

2. Economic, social and political values are juxtaposed with the psychological and physiological attributes of the human being, raising problems of the relations between the individual and the community. Life can only expand to the extent that accord is reached between these two opposing forces: the individual and the community.

3. Psychological and biological constants are influenced by the environment: its geographic and topographic situation as well as its economic and political situation. The geographic and topographic situation is of prime importance, and includes natural elements, land and water, flora, soil, climate, etc.

4. Next comes the economic situation, including the resources of the region and natural or man-made means of communication with the outside world.

5. Thirdly comes the political situation and the system of government and administration.

6. Special circumstances have, throughout history, determined the character of individual cities: military defenses, scientific discoveries, different administrations, the progressive development of communications and methods of transportation (road, water, rail, air).

7. The factors which govern the development of cities are thus subject to continual change.

8. The advent of the machine age has caused immense disturbances to man's habits, place of dwelling and type of work; an uncontrolled concentration in cities, caused by mechanical transportation, has resulted in brutal and uni-

versal changes without precedent in history. Chaos has entered into the cities.

##### THE FOUR FUNCTIONS OF THE CITY

###### a. *Dwelling*

9. The population density is too great in the historic, central districts of cities as well as in some nineteenth century areas of expansion: densities rise to 1,000 and even 1,500 inhabitants per hectare (approximately 400 to 600 per acre).

10. In the congested urban areas housing conditions are unhealthy due to insufficient space within the dwelling, absence of usable green spaces and neglected maintenance of the buildings (exploitation based on speculation). This situation is aggravated by the presence of a population with a very low standard of living, incapable of initiating ameliorations (mortality up to 20 per cent).

11. Extensions of the city devour, bit by bit, its surrounding green areas; one can discern the successive rings of development. This ever greater separation from natural elements heightens the harmful effects of bad sanitary conditions.

12. Dwellings are scattered throughout the city without consideration of sanitary requirements.

13. The most densely populated districts are in the least favourable situations (on unfavourable slopes, invaded by fog or industrial emanations, subject to flooding, etc.).

14. Low density developments (middle income dwellings) occupy the advantageous sites, sheltered from unfavourable winds, with secure views opening onto an agreeable countryside, lake, sea, or mountains, etc., and with ample air and sunlight.

15. This segregation of dwellings is sanctioned by custom, and by a system of local authority regulations considered quite justifiable: zoning.

16. Buildings constructed alongside major routes and around crossroads are unsuitable for dwellings because of noise, dust and noxious gases.

<sup>5</sup> J. L. Sert, «Can our Cities Survive» p. 6.

<sup>6</sup> La Charte d'Athènes avec un discours liminaire de Jean Giraudoux, Paris, 1933. (Translated from the French by Jaqueline Tyrwhitt).

17. The traditional alignment of houses along the sides of roads means that good exposure to sunlight is only possible for a minimum number of dwellings.

18. The distribution of community services related to housing is arbitrary.

19. Schools, in particular, are frequently sited on busy traffic routes and too far from the houses they serve.

20. Suburbs have developed without plans and without well organised links with the city.

21. Attempts have been made too late to incorporate suburbs within the administrative unit of the city.

22. Suburbs are often merely an agglomeration of hutments where it is difficult to collect funds for the necessary roads and services.

It is recommended that:

23. Residential areas should occupy the best places in the city from the point of view of topography, climate, sunlight and availability of green space.

24. The selection of residential zones should be determined on grounds of health.

25. Reasonable densities should be imposed related both to the type of housing and to the conditions of the site.

26. A minimum number of hours of sunlight should be required for each dwelling unit.

27. The alignment of housing along main traffic routes should be forbidden.

28. Full use should be made of modern building techniques in constructing highrise apartments.

29. Highrise apartments placed at wide distances apart liberate ground for large open spaces.

#### *b. Recreation*

30. Open spaces are generally insufficient.

31. When there is sufficient open space it is often badly distributed and, therefore, not readily usable by most of the population.

32. Outlying open spaces cannot ameliorate areas of downtown congestion.

33. The few sports fields, for reasons of accessibility, usually occupy sites earmarked for future development for housing or industry, which makes for a precarious existence and their frequent displacement.

34. Land that could be used for week-end leisure is often very difficult of access.

It is recommended that:

35. All residential areas should be provided with sufficient open space to meet reasonable needs for recreation and active sports for children, adolescents and adults.

36. Insanitary slums should be demolished

and replaced by open space. This would ameliorate the surrounding areas.

37. The new open spaces should be used for well-defined purposes: children's playgrounds, schools, youth clubs and other community buildings closely related to housing.

38. It should be possible to spend week-end free time in accessible and favourable places.

39. These should be laid out as public parks, forests, sports grounds, stadiums, beaches, etc.

40. Full advantages should be taken of existing natural features: rivers, forests, hills, mountains, valleys, lakes, sea, etc.

#### *c. Work*

41. Places of work are no longer rationally distributed within the urban complex. This comprises industry, workshops, offices, government and commerce.

42. Connections between dwelling and place of work are no longer reasonable; they impose excessively long journeys to work.

43. The time spent in journeying to work has reached a critical situation.

44. In the absence of planning programmes, the uncontrolled growth of cities, lack of foresight, land speculation, etc., have caused industry to settle haphazardly, following no rule.

45. Office buildings are concentrated in the downtown business district which, as the most privileged part of the city, served by the most complete system of communications, readily falls prey to speculation. Since offices are private concerns, effective planning for their best development is difficult.

It is recommended that:

46. Distances between work places and dwelling places should be reduced to a minimum.

47. Industrial sectors should be separated from residential sectors by an area of green open space.

48. Industrial zones should be contiguous with railroads, canals and highways.

49. Workshops, which are intimately related to urban life, and indeed derive from it, should occupy well designed areas in the interior of the city.

50. Business districts devoted to administration, both public and private, should be assured of good communications with residential areas as well as with industries and workshops within the city and upon its fringes.

#### *d. Transportation*

51. The existing network of urban communications has arisen from an agglomeration of the side roads of major traffic routes. In Europe these major routes date back well into the middle ages, sometimes even into antiquity.

52. Devised for the use of pedestrians and horse-drawn vehicles, they are inadequate for the mechanized transportation of today.

53. Their inappropriate street dimensions prevent the effective use of mechanized vehicles at speeds corresponding to urban pressure.

54. Distances between crossroads are too frequent.

55. Street widths are insufficient. Their widening is difficult and often ineffectual.

56. Faced by the needs of high speed vehicles, the present apparently irrational street pattern lacks efficiency and flexibility, differentiation and order.

57. Relics of a former pompous magnificence designed for special monumental effects often complicate traffic circulation.

58. In many cases the railroad system presents a serious obstacle to well planned urban development. It barricades off certain residential districts, depriving them from easy contact with the most vital elements of the city. It is recommended that:

59. Traffic analyses be made, based on accurate statistics, to show the general pattern of circulation in the city and its region, and reveal the location of heavily travelled routes and the types of their traffic.

60. Transportation routes should be classified according to their nature, and be designed to meet the requirements and speeds of specific types of vehicles.

61. Heavily used traffic junctions should be designed for continuous passage of vehicles, using different levels.

62. Pedestrian routes and automobile routes should follow separate paths.

63. Roads should be differentiated according to their functions: residential streets, promenades, through roads, major highways, etc.

64. In principle, heavy traffic routes should be insulated by green belts.

#### *e. Legacy of History*

It is recommended that:

65. Fine architecture, individual buildings or groups of buildings, should be protected from demolition.

66. The grounds for the preservation of buildings should be that they express an earlier culture and that their retention is in the public interest.

67. But their preservation should not entail that people are obliged to live in unsalubrious conditions.

68. If their present location obstructs development, radical measures may be called for, such as altering major circulation routes or even shifting existing central districts—something usually considered impossible.

69. The demolition of slums surrounding historic monuments provides an opportunity to create new open spaces.

70. The re-use of past styles of building for new structures in historic areas under the pretext of aesthetics has disastrous consequences. The continuance or the introduction of habits in any form should not be tolerated.

#### *Conclusions*

71. Most of the cities studied present an image of chaos. They do not correspond in any way to their ultimate purpose: to satisfy the basic biological and physiological needs of their inhabitant..

72. This situation is largely a result of the continuous expansion of the field of private interests since the start of the machine age.

73. The irresponsibility of private enterprise has resulted in a disastrous rupture of the equilibrium between strong economic forces on one side and, on the other, weak administrative controls and powerless social interests.

74. Although cities are constantly changing, development proceeds without order or control and with no attempt to apply contemporary town planning principles, such as have been specified in professionally qualified circles.

75. The city should assure both individual liberty and the benefits of collective action on both the spiritual and material planes.

76. The dimensions of everything within the urban domain should relate to the human scale.

77. The four keys to planning are the four functions of the city: dwelling, work, recreation (use of leisure time), transportation.

78. The city plan should determine the internal structure and interrelated positions in the city of each sector of the four key functions.

79. The plan should ensure that the daily cycle of activities between the dwelling, workplace and recreation (recuperation) can occur with the utmost economy of time. The dwelling should be considered as prime centre of all urban planning, to which all other functions are attached.

80. The speeds of mechanised transportation have disrupted the urban setting, presenting an ever-present danger, obstructing or paralysing communications and endangering health.

81. The principle of urban and suburban circulation must be revised. A classification of acceptable speeds must be established. A reformed type of zoning must be set up that can bring the key functions of the city into a harmonious relationship and develop connections between them. These connections can then be developed into a rational network of major highways.

82. Town planning is a science based on three dimensions, not on two. This introduces the element

of height which offers the possibility of freeing spaces for modern traffic circulation and for recreational purposes.

83. The city should be examined in the context of its region of influence. A plan for the total economic unit—the city-region—must replace the simple master plan of a city.

84. The city should be able to grow harmoniously as a functioning urban unity in all its different parts, by means of pre-ordained open spaces and connecting links, but a state of equilibrium should exist at every stage of its development.

85. It is urgently necessary for every city to prepare a planning programme indicating what laws will be needed to bring the plan to realisation.

86. The planning programme must be based on rigorous analytical studies carried out by specialists. It must foresee its stages of development in time and space. It must coordinate the natural resources of the site, its topographic advantages, its economic assets, its social needs and its spiritual aspirations.

87. The architect engaged in town planning should determine everything in accordance with human scale.

88. The point of departure for all town planning should be the single dwelling, or cell, and

its grouping into neighbourhood units of suitable size.

89. With these neighbourhood units as the basis, the urban complex can be designed to bring out the relations between dwelling, places of work and places devoted to recreation.

90. The full resources of modern technology are needed to carry out this tremendous task. This means obtaining the cooperation of specialists to enrich the art of building by the incorporation of scientific innovations.

91. The progress of these developments will be greatly influenced by political, social and economic factors.

92. And not, in the last resort, by questions of architecture.

93. The magnitude of the urgent task of renovating the cities, and the excessive subdivision of urban land ownerships present two antagonistic realities.

94. This sharp contradiction poses one of the most serious problems of our time: the pressing need to regulate the disposition of land on an equitable and legal basis, so as to meet the vital needs of the community as well as those of the individual.

95. Private interests should be subordinated to the interests of the community.

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