

The Groningen Declaration

Introduction

A significant number of international charters, declarations and guidelines have stressed the importance of the protection of the built environment in its myriad forms, however the emphasis has always been either on individual buildings or groups of buildings. Little attention is often given by the historical and geographical context in which these edifices have been erected. Neither feature man-made constructions explicitly in the protection of landscape, especially when these bear little relation to traditional farming. In this sense canals are rarely the focus point of protection schemes or even attention from the official institution of monument care or feature in the protection of landscapes. There is attention for specific elements of canals like locks, bridges and harbors, as well as historic ships, but not in the form of an integrated approach of canals and their attributes. The Groningen Declaration is meant to adjust this by issuing guidelines for the integrated care and protection of inland waterways. The Declaration identifies principles of professional ethics, authenticity, intellectual integrity, social responsibility, and respect and sensitivity for cultural uniqueness and local significance. Further the Declaration seeks to encourage public appreciation of inland waterways and canals as vital local resources for sustainable community development. It seeks way to encourage integrated development of canals. Many canals are now the relics of a historical transport grid that once formed a vital network in the local, national, and international economy. These are now referred to as 'cultural heritage'. However heritage is not a fixed reference point in itself, it refers to other sectors as agriculture, spatial development, technological innovations, social structures, local pride and identity. Integrated development seeks to link these different aspects in a cohesive framework.

Ambitions of the Groningen Declaration

The Groningen Declaration seeks to establish professional and ethical principles of integrated care for canals, in that respect four distinct qualities have been identified:

1. **The quality of use**, the accessibility, the usefulness, economic value, and the multiple use of space.
2. **The cultural quality**, cultural history and cultural innovation, engineering design and architectural features, the coherence of cultural and historical patterns and structures .
3. **The natural quality**, water quality, soil, geology, flora and fauna.
4. **The experience quality**, spatial diversity, quiet environment, open spaces.

These core qualities are expressed in canals and inland waterways as an aquatic natural grid with a multiple functionality which includes transport, recreational use, water storage and water supply, water quality, and defense. For these different interests are a variety of agents active around canals, who all invest time, effort, and money into canals. The Groningen Declaration aims to stimulate parties within these fragmented interests to coordinate their efforts towards an integrated development of canals and inland waterways. The ambition is to protect and reinforce the spatial

quality of waterways and to fight neglect and deterioration of the above mentioned values by means of the following recommendations.

Recommendations of the Groningen Declaration.

Remark: the term 'agents' refers to both public bodies and institutions as well as private organizations dealing with (aspects of) the care and management of canals and inland waterways.

1. Develop a common policy among agents with regard to all aspects of a waterway, in order that new developments in an area are in harmony with historic values and not lead to fragmentation of embankments, towing paths, etc.
2. Canals and inland waterways should function as a source of inspiration for future spatial development. Waterways should be treated with more care of their spatial and historical qualities and need more emphasis in the spatial planning process.
3. Canals and inland waterways have to be included in the mapping of cultural and historical mapping of intrinsic values.
4. Agents should make information and knowledge of historic waterways digitally available through their websites.
5. Agents have to guarantee open vistas from waterways onto the land and vice versa. Panoramic views from waterways and on waterways should receive a protected status. The visibility of the water related infrastructure has a positive impact on the experience, publicity and historic awareness of waterways and their environment.
6. Agents can put more emphasis in local policy on the values connected to historic waterways in order to safeguard the versatility and diversity of the entire landscape related to the waterways.
7. Keep the banks of historic waterways public domain, so these can also be utilized by hikers and bikers.
8. Discourage the development of not water related industrial areas near historical waterways.
9. Encourage the use of waterways for public transportation and their use for the transportation of bulk transport.
10. Keep historical waterways navigable and provide them with public in order to keep them viable and lively location in the urban or rural fabric.
11. Preserve historically relevant objects and other infrastructure related to the function and use of waterways.
12. Where possible (re)connect historical waterways with one another in order to increase the scale of the recreational use of the water network.