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The ICOMOS Finnish National Committee
INTERNATIONAL COUNCIL ON MONUMENTS AND SITES
CONSEIL INTERNATIONAL DES MONUMENTS ET DES SITES

To the highly esteemed Governor of Leningrad Oblast, Aleksandr Drozdenko,

To the highly esteemed Director of the “National Historical Architectural and Natural Museum Reserve The Monrepos Park”, Aleksandr Buyanov

The historical park of Monrepos, with its historical wooden buildings, is a rare example of a surviving historical landscape park in the harsh Northern climate. It deserves a most delicate and scientifically motivated conservation and restoration, without loss of material authenticity, beauty and its characteristic genius loci.

Since the restoration of Monrepos was commenced, it has been keenly observed by the restoration specialists in Russia and in Finland. Today, there is a growing concern about the methods applied at Monrepos that climaxed in January 2019, when a group of Russian restoration experts, including Mikhail Milchik and Iren Khaustova, voiced their concern for the fate of the main building of Monrepos, when the library wing had been completely dismantled. Consequently, the restoration was brought to a temporary moratorium.

ICOMOS Finland shares the feeling of great concern expressed by ICOMOS Saint-Petersburg and the above-mentioned group of Russian restorers for the measures that are being taken in the restoration of Monrepos park and its built wooden heritage. The implementation of the conservation and restoration project of the historical park and its buildings should, in our opinion, follow

1) the Principles for the Conservation of Wooden Built Heritage, adopted in 2017 by the 19th ICOMOS General Assembly. In the case of Monrepos, it is appropriate to specifically emphasize the following principles:

- Interventions should preferably be to a minimum necessary, follow traditional practices, be reversible, not prejudice or impede future conservation work, not hinder the possibility to later access of evidence, and take environmental conditions into account;
- Installations should be designed and installed so that the environmental conditions, for example temperature and humidity, remain stable.

2) The Florence Charter on Historical Gardens, adopted by ICOMOS in December 1982. In the case of Monrepos, it is appropriate to specifically emphasize the following principles:

- The work of maintenance and conservation, which serve to restore the garden's authenticity, must always take precedence of the requirements of public use;

- All arrangements must ensure that the spirit of the place is preserved;
- Although different types of gardens merit different approaches, all constituent features must be dealt with simultaneously, as the isolation of the various operations would damage the unity of the whole.

When adapting the principles to the Northern conditions, some general ways of restoration thinking should be highlighted here:

In a historical park like Monrepos, which is a result of several historic phases, all successive stages must be evidenced and reflected before any restoration or renovation measures. The historically first plans for the park layout constitute a certain starting point when surveying and researching the evolution of the park, but its direct implementation cannot be understood as restoration. This is specifically the case if the plan has never before in the history of the park been implemented; this kind of implementation would unavoidably add a new, thus a modern, layer to the historical park, and can be considered as conjecture.

In the harsh Northern climate conditions, the ideas of landscape architecture and gardens that have initially been developed in more southern climates, find different forms and plant selections than in their more southern models, whose plant species can only barely manage to survive in the North. Therefore the restoration principles of northern historical parks must be earnestly considered, and take into account the restrictions of the extreme climate, and the botanical and horticultural region.

Still, the visitor of the park should be able to recognize the historical dimension of the park and its buildings, and grasp the temporal evidence mediated through the historical environment, as opposed to a modern park with modern facilities, materials, textures and structures. Similarly, the historical features – bridges, trees, statues, pavilions etc. – intrinsic to the historical park must be treated with great care.

In the restoration of wooden buildings and structures, particularly the method of dismantling historical wooden buildings of Monrepos in order to restore or, maybe, renovate or reconstruct them, arouses great concern among the Finnish ICOMOS. Dismantling and reassembling is not generally acceptable as a restoration method, apart as a rarity in some rural areas, where it still is a living tradition.

As the material authenticity is one of the key values of historical buildings and parks, the restoration should always attempt to preserve as much of this authenticity as possible. In wooden buildings, this would entail a well-considered and minimal intervention and renewal of damaged elements.

We sincerely hope that the recommendations of the international principles that have proved to be helpful and useful on many sites, would be seriously considered by you and that they would be discussed when reflecting on the on-going restoration at Monrepos.

In Helsinki, March 10th, 2019

On behalf of the ICOMOS National Committee of Finland,

Netta Bökk