

CHARTER OF THE NEW URBANISM

A document adopted in 1996 in Charleston, USA, which is a record of the assumptions of the so-called New Urbanism, critical of the urban policy in force in American cities. Another name: New Urbanism Program Charter.

Proponents of New Urbanism pointed to a number of issues of urban policy in the United States: underinvestment in downtown areas, dispersion of buildings, environmental degradation, shrinking agricultural and open areas. The New Urbanism Movement advocated the revitalisation of urban centres and cities in metropolitan regions, the modification of scattered suburban buildings into neighbourhood communities, and the protection of the environment and the cultural heritage. Attention was drawn to the existing diversity of neighbourhoods in terms of their functions, the need to design space with the residents' communities in mind and taking into account the important role of public transport and pedestrian traffic.

The Charter of the New Urbanism refers to social policy, development practice and general design principles, which, according to its provisions, should be adapted to the identified types of areas, i.e.: 1) region: metropolis, large and small town; 2) district, zone and corridor; 3) quarter, street, building. According to the definition in the Charter of the New Urbanism, a metropolitan region is an area with defined geographical boundaries, defined by topography, watersheds, coastlines, regional parks, agricultural areas and river basins. A metropolitan area is made up of many centres, which are large and small towns and villages, which have their own centres and borders, and which remain in a relationship with the agricultural areas and the natural landscape. The most important elements of the development and transformation of the metropolis are the district, zone and corridor. The district should be compact and pedestrian-friendly; zones must be designed according to district-specific rules; corridors provide links within the region between districts and zones. Street grids, in turn, should be designed to encourage pedestrian traffic, reduce car transport, reduce travel time and reduce energy consumption. In the Charter of the New Urbanism, public transport is treated as an alternative to cars, the use of which should be limited in favour of pedestrians and cyclists (e.g. stations and public transport stops should be located a short distance from buildings). Various green areas must be established in the districts, such as playgrounds, public gardens or sports fields.

The Charter of the New Urbanism also defines the impact of architecture on urban space: architectural designs should fit in with their surroundings and take into account local topography, history or building tradition. Newly created squares and streets are to be safe, and buildings should reflect the character and atmosphere of the place. Streets, which encourage pedestrian traffic, are intended to encourage people-to-people contacts and social integration.

The Charter of the New Urbanism is not a legally binding document and serves only to promote specific strategies and visions relating to urban space. [M. K., B. F., M. S.]

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