



## The Groningen Declaration

### Ambitions of the Groningen Declaration

The Groningen Declaration seeks to establish a set of guidelines of integrated care for canals that have lost their prime function as an economically viable means of transportation of goods and people. The care for these canals has often been transferred to new custodians whose interest is confined to a limited perspective, such as recreational use, water storage and water quality, or water management. A wide variety of players are involved in and around canals, who all invest time, effort and money. The Groningen Declaration aims to stimulate parties within these fragmented interests to coordinate their efforts towards the integrated development of canals and inland waterways. The ambition is to protect and reinforce the spatial quality of waterways, to fight neglect and deterioration, and to enhance their qualities:

- 1. The quality of the resources** deals with the actual canal and its associated facilities, its use, maintenance and preservation.
- 2. The quality of the experience** encompasses the way in which visitors and users experience the canal, both from the water and from ashore.
- 3. The quality of use** addresses the issue of canals being conserved in such a way that their usefulness for their original purpose is maintained.
- 4. The quality of life** aspect is the sustainable and economically viable development of communities alongside the canal.

### Recommendations of the Groningen Declaration

The **quality of the resources** is concerned with the integrity of canals and the preservation of values, buildings, skills and objects of historic, cultural and spatial significance.

#### We recommend

- New developments concerning canals should be in harmony with historic values and should not lead to fragmentation of banks and towing paths, or disturb significant sightlines related to canals and connected infrastructure.
- A heritage impact assessment should be required for new developments that may have an impact on the significance of canals and their setting.
- Historically relevant objects related to canals or other infrastructure related to the function and use of waterways should be preserved.
- Ongoing monitoring should be set up to prevent decay, loss of significance or trivialization of canals and to ensure improvement in preservation, management and interpretation practices. The versatility and diversity of the entire landscape related to the waterways should be safeguarded.

- Historical waterways should be reconnected with each other where possible in order to increase the scale of the recreational use of the water network, which will provide better incentives for its maintenance.
- Historical qualities of canals should be treated with more care in the spatial planning process, because they can be a source of inspiration for future spatial development.

The **quality of the experience** deals with the way in which visitors and users experience the canal, both from the water and from ashore. The quality of the experience focuses on the various ways in which we can satisfy the needs and exceed the expectations of the users and visitors of canals and continuously improve our services to enhance these.

#### **We recommend**

- Panoramic views from waterways and on waterways should receive a protected status. Visibility of the water-related infrastructure has a positive impact on the visitor experience and helps to raise public awareness of the historic values of waterways and their environment. Canal management has to guarantee open vistas from waterways onto the land and vice versa.
- The banks of historic waterways should be retained in the public domain, so that they can also be utilized by hikers and bikers.
- Special attention should be paid to the landscaping alongside canals, preferably in harmony with the cultural and natural setting of the canal.
- Custodians of canals should provide information on the canals at easily accessible locations, and also make information on historic waterways available digitally, through their websites.

The **quality of use** is the way in which canals are maintained in order to preserve their original purpose and usefulness.

#### **We recommend**

- Rehabilitation of canals should be executed within a wider social and economic perspective. Rehabilitation is not only the conservation of what has been, but also the creation of an asset that can be used.
- An integrated approach for the rehabilitation of canals. Only by combining knowledge, resources and efforts will it be possible to revitalize canals as a vital aspect of society, sustained by a community.

The **quality of life** deals with the local community.

#### **We recommend**

- Any initiative aimed at the revitalization of canals should consider the local community as a major stakeholder.
- An assessment should be made of the long-term economic viability of any project, and the social impact of the intended development.
- The local population should be able to gain economic benefit from the development in terms of jobs and spending capacity.
- Interdisciplinary involvement should be standard practice in conservation and management settings.
- Professional training, interpretation, community education and public awareness should be encouraged to support the sharing of knowledge, as well as to promote conservation goals and improve the efficiency of the protection tools, the management plans and other instruments.