

Turku, 23 February 2011

Attention:

European Commission
Department of Culture
The Monitoring and Advisory Panel

Subject: Cultural Heritage Destruction in Turku, the European Capital of Culture 2011.

To: The Monitoring and Advisory Panel of the EU Commission's Department of Culture

Dear Sirs and Madams,

We would like to bring the European Union Commission's attention to some recent distressing cultural developments in Turku, the European Capital of Culture 2011, which have a detrimental effect on our common European cultural heritage.

Established in 1229, Turku is the oldest urban settlement in Finland, which is why Finns refer to the city as the cradle of Finnish culture. The preservation of Turku's cultural heritage is therefore extremely vital for future generations.

However, unfortunately, the city of Turku has, puzzlingly, decided to go ahead with some controversial decisions that have a detrimental effect on the cultural heritage of this historical city, which is the current European Capital of Culture 2011 host. Last week, despite strong public objections from cultural organizations, architects, political figures and national media outlets, an Art Nouveau building, which dates back from 1902, was torn down. The city government has also given the green light for demolishing several other architectural treasures in the city. Among historical buildings slated for demolition is a wooden empire building built in 1831 (There are only 15 other similar buildings remaining in the city) and unique wooden houses from the 1850's. One architectural treasure earmarked for destruction is a 184-year-old building, which houses a hostel and was designed by the famous Finnish architect, Carl Ludvig Engel, who masterminded the design and layout of the Senate Square in Helsinki.

The undersigned organizations regard the actions and plans of the City of Turku as a serious threat to Finland's cultural diversity and architectural heritage. Furthermore, the reluctance of the city decision makers and administrators to listen to the wishes and desires of the inhabitants of Turku is a fragrant violation of Finnish and European democratic values and traditions.

The European Union's selection criteria for choosing a European Capital of Culture city is that the cultural programme submitted to the EU should "highlight the richness of cultural diversity in Europe." Furthermore, the programme should be, "sustainable and be an integral part of the long-term cultural and social development of the city."

Turku, in the view of the undersigned organizations, has not fulfilled or abided by the spirit and letter of the European Capital of Culture programme, and we appeal to the European Union to institute the necessary steps and measures in order to prevent further destruction of culturally and historically valuable buildings in the city.

The undersigned are therefore, hereby, cordially inviting The European Union to carry out a monitoring and assessment exercise to stop the wanton and senseless destruction of our common European cultural heritage.

Sincerely yours,

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Additional information (pictures):

http://www.koivuharju.fi/puujatalo/wikestrom_press.htm

<http://www.meidanturku.gofreeserve.com/sinisentalonpurku.php>