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The ICOMOS International Scientific Committee on Vernacular Architecture CIAV (Comité International d'Architecture Vernaculaire)

The foundation and the first two decades of activity

The International Committee on Vernacular Architecture (Comité International d'Architecture Vernaculaire - CIAV) is one of the specialized scientific committees, member of the Scientific Council of ICOMOS. It was founded in 1976, the Executive Committee of ICOMOS accepting the requirement expressed by the resolution of the 1975 International Conference for the Conservation of Vernacular Architecture, held in Plovdiv, Bulgaria. The CIAV started working in 1977, headed by the founding President Prof. Dr. Rachele Anguelova, Bulgaria, the permanent seat being installed in Plovdiv. Following the recommendations of the ICOMOS National Committees the Executive Committee of ICOMOS confirmed the 12 permanent (and founding) members from Bulgaria, USSR, Switzerland, Finland, CSSR, Belgium, UK, Greece, Yugoslavia, Romania, Hungary, Turkey and Spain, completed with 10 associate members from Austria, Denmark, France, the Federal and the Democratic Republic of Germany, Italy, Luxembourg, Poland, Sweden, Canada and Australia.

The regular annual sessions of the committee have been held in different places and countries: 1977, 1978, 1979, 1985, 1989 in Plovdiv, 1980 in Smoljan, 1981 in Lovetch, 1984 in Sandanski and Melnik - all in Bulgaria, 1982 in Istanbul and Izmir, 1986 in Istanbul and Ankara - Turkey, 1983 in Helsinki and Seinäjoki, Finland, 1987 in Belgrade, Yugoslavia, 1988 in Petrosavodsk, Karelia, Soviet Union, 1990 in Austria and Switzerland, 1992 in Brauweiler, Germany and 1994 in Sardegna, Italy. There is no doubt that the activities of CIAV would not have been as successful without the very important financial support given by the Bulgarian National Committee of ICOMOS and the Bulgarian Government until 1992 - for the permanent seat in Plovdiv with administration, secretary and library, for the travel expenses of the President and the organization of the above mentioned regular sessions in Bulgaria. Besides these sessions usually combined with scientific colloquies or conferences from the very beginning a special attention was given to an active cooperation with other international scientific organizations inside and also outside ICOMOS: The first joint annual conference of CIAV with the Wood Committee of ICOMOS took place in 1980 in Switzerland, followed in 1983 after the annual session in Finland by a visit of CIAV members to the colleagues of the Wood committee in Norway. In this way active contacts have been established between the two specialized committees, a very remarkable fact considering that wood is the most important building material for both committees. As a consequence the international conference on "Conservation of Wooden Vernacular Architecture", organized by the USSR ICOMOS National Committee in 1988 in Petrozavodsk, Karelia was at the same time the joint annual session for both committees, one of the main subjects being the preservation philosophy for the "Kishi Pogost", an ensemble of two wooden churches, bell tower and surrounding fence (18th century) in bad condition due to wood alteration and structural problems, since 1990 on the World Heritage List of UNESCO.

Contacts to other scientific organizations followed, part of the CIAV delegates working as link members to ICOMOS International Scientific Committees like Cultural tourism or Historic

Towns and Villages, but also to ICOM, the European Association of Open Air Museums, ICCROM and the Council of Europe, Cultural Heritage Division. With the Committee on Historic Towns the CIAV organized in 1989 a joint session in Plovdiv, Bulgaria under the main topic "Historic Towns and Rural Vernacular Sites and the Process of Urbanization". Focussing on the rapid ongoing changes within contemporary life and society and within the architectural heritage, the final resolution of the session pointed out at the one hand the necessity to sensitize and involve the communities in recognition, maintenance and continuance of their cultural values. At the other hand it includes a clearly formulated demand to reorganize, restructure and improve the work of the two committees, studying new methods of assessment, conservation strategies and policies, to establish an international multidisciplinary network including specialists in sociology, ecology, economy, ethnography, town and landscape planning, to coordinate regional and local initiatives, to participate in development projects and to organize educational and training programmes.

Connected to these ideas and tasks the international project "Regional Architecture and Cultural Development in Europe" has been drafted by Marc Laenen, at that time Secretary General of the CIAV and Olga Sevan from the Research Institute for Culture in Moscow. Considering the regional character of the vernacular architecture, the preservation and development problems of the historical milieu of cities and villages in contemporary society and the formation of contemporary regional architecture, the project was presented at the international conference on "Historic Towns and Villages and the Process of Urbanization", organized by the Union of Architects of the USSR and the Research Institute for Culture in Moscow during a cruise on the Wolga river in June 1990 and recommended towards implementation. The CIAV adopted it during the annual meeting 1990 in Austria and Switzerland with an agenda for the future work - international colloquies on three main topics: conservation in situ - open air museums - new vernacular architecture. The active contribution of the CIAV to the Skansen Centenary organized by the European Association of Open Air Museums and the Skansen Museum in September 1991 was part of the project implementation. The conservation in situ as part of the project was the main topic of the international conference on "Preservation of the Rural Heritage. Cultural Landscape and Sites in Europe", organized by the CIAV and hosted by ICOMOS Germany in May 1992 at Brauweiler Abbey in cooperation with the Council of Europe. During the CIAV annual session the German-Romanian project on the "Documentation of the cultural heritage of the Transylvanian Saxons" worked out by C. Machat and financed by the German Federal Government (implemented 1992 – 1998) has been accepted as part of the future scientific work of the committee. Part of the Brauweiler conference was also a joint session of the CIAV and the group of specialists on "Heritage Landscape and Sites", created in 1991 by the Cultural Heritage Department of the Council of Europe. As a result of the Brauweiler conference the Council of Europe in cooperation with ICCROM, CIAV and different European Universities succeeded to organize a pilot training course on multidisciplinary conservation management for cultural landscape areas, held in November 1993 at the University of Applied Sciences in Cologne, Germany. (Unfortunately an international colloquy on the third main topic - new vernacular architecture - is still missing).

Since the very beginning the CIAV has given special attention to the educational aspect of its activities - exhibitions, public relations, publications etc. - to inform a larger public, especially the communities living within the vernacular heritage, on the different aspects of preservation work. Most of the papers presented at the first colloquy on „The Vernacular Architecture“ 1976

in Plovdiv have been published in „Monumentum“, vol. XV-XVI, 1977. A special number of the Romanian „Revista muzeelor si monumentelor“ (Museum and monuments revue, No. 1, Bucharest 1979) was dedicated to the CIAV activities, with papers signed by most of the members. A first exhibition prepared by the CIAV (M.Gschwend, with H.Hiltbrand) on „Rural Architecture in Switzerland“, sponsored by the foundation Pro Helvetia, was shown in 1980 in Romania (Bucharest, Village Museum and Sibiu), in the same year in the open air museum of Ballenberg, Switzerland and in 1981 in Sofia, Bulgaria. In exchange, in 1982 the exhibition „Romanian Rural Architecture“, organized by G.Stoica, was presented in Switzerland, at Zürich (Museum for Ethnology) and the open air museum of Ballenberg and in the year after was included in the programme of the „Romanian-Romanche Weeks“ of the Romanche League in Laax-Flims. Other smaller exhibitions accompanying different sessions or colloquies followed.

Even if the efforts made to publish the most important papers and results of all the CIAV sessions or meetings failed, at least the papers of the Brauweiler conference (1992) have been edited in 1993: „Historische Kulturlandschaften“ (Historic Landscapes, = ICOMOS Journals of the German National Committee XI) and those presented during the international river cruise on the Wolga in June 1990 have been printed under the title „Historic Towns and Villages in the Process of Urbanization“, Moscow 1994. Among the books prepared by different National and International Scientific Committees of ICOMOS especially for presentation at the Xth General Assembly of ICOMOS in Colombo, Sri Lanka, the CIAV was also represented: „Vernacular Architecture“, Colombo 1993.

Thanks to the efforts made by N. Moutsopoulos (CIAV President between 1989 - 1995) and other committee members from the Balkan countries, UNESCO published the volume „L'architecture vernaculaire dans les Balkans“ (The Vernacular Architecture on the Balkans, No 10 in the series =Etudes et documents sur le patrimoine culturel=, CLT-85/WS/48), including contributions on the Greek Popular House and on Vernacular Architecture in Yugoslavia, Bulgaria and Romania. In winter 1992 the volume „Traditional Architecture of the Balkans“ has been edited by the Melissa Publishing House in Athens, Greece. (In the later nineties of the XXth century the Melissa Publishing House continued with editing books on the vernacular architecture of the different Balkan countries.)

The work of the committee after 1995

Considering the results of all the scientific achievements of its work, all the aims and tasks included in the resolution of Plovdiv 1989, the „State of the Art“ of Vernacular Architecture adopted in 1990, the „Recommendations for the Conservation and Renovation of Vernacular Architecture“ presented at the Brauweiler conference in 1992 or the different versions towards a final and generally accepted text for the „Charter of Vernacular Architecture“, some committee and Bureau members of the CIAV became conscious of the main tasks for the future work and started to rewrite its content, the working methods, its international coordinating or cooperative task and to think on a restructuring of its composition in order to become a real worldwide operating committee. As a consequence after the adoption of the Eger Principles for International Scientific Committees of ICOMOS by the General Assembly in Colombo in 1993 new Statutes have been worked out for CIAV in conformity with these principles and adopted at the annual CIAV meeting 1994 in Sardegna, Italy. Based on the new CIAV statutes up to the end of 1994 36 National Committees had already nominated voting members for the restructured committee and the constitutive meeting could take place in May 1995 thanks to the support given by the ICOMOS National Committee of Guatemala. A detailed plan for the future activities of the

committee worked out in strong cooperation between the new members and the new Bureau of CIAV should be mentioned as one of the most important results of this meeting: The committee decided to start operating worldwide by moving with the annual meetings and scientific conferences from continent to continent, enlarging the cooperation with national and international conservation bodies, especially the International Scientific Committees of ICOMOS, but also with specialists outside ICOMOS, trying to establish an international multi-disciplinary network, at the same time continuously trying to increase the number of committee members (at the moment more than 70), to finalize the “Charter”, to pay even more attention to educational and public relations activities, like publications, exhibitions, training programs, to prepare a CIAV home page and a „Vernacular Newsletter“ - which today is at the XIIIth edition (thanks to our Secretary General Valeria Prieto, Mexico).

Implementing the Guatemala decisions the following annual meetings took place in 1996 in Jerusalem, Israel, 1997 in Bangkok, Thailand, 1998 in Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic, 1999 in Morelia, Mexico as part of the scientific conference during the XII. General Assembly of ICOMOS, in 2000 on the island of Santorini, Greece, in 2001 in Québec City, Canada, in 2003 in Ammersfoort, The Netherlands as part of the Dutch “Year of the Farm”, in 2004 in Matsuyama, Shikoku Island, Japan, in 2005 in Xi’an, China during the General Assembly of ICOMOS, in 2006 in Patzcuaro, Michoacan, Mexico and 2007 in Banaue, Philippines related to the famous rice terraces of the Ifugao Province, World Heritage Sites. Among these very well organized and successful meetings two are of special interest: At the Jerusalem meeting the committee members succeeded to finalize the doctrinal text for the „Charter“, prepared by a working group of CIAV members (from all continents) and Spanish specialists during a working session hosted by the Spanish Ministry of Culture in January 1996. The Bangkok meeting in May 1997 hosted by the Department of Fine Arts of the Thai Minister of Culture for the first time offered the possibility to specialists from the Asian countries (even without ICOMOS National Committees) to discuss the topics related to the preservation of the vernacular heritage. More than 120 participants from 24 countries contributed with very interesting papers, active discussions or poster presentations to the success of the meeting. The papers printed in the volume „Proceedings of the International Conference on Conservation and Revitalization of Vernacular Architecture and ICOMOS-CIAV Annual Meeting 1997“, Bangkok 1998 include a large number of contributions from CIAV members and also the final „Recommendations for the Preservation of the Vernacular Heritage“ worked out by the Bureau of the CIAV. Other scientific contributions and papers signed by members of the committee can be found in the proceedings of the XI. General Assembly in Sofia as well as in those of the XII. General Assembly as part of the papers held at the scientific colloquy in Morelia, in the proceedings of the XIII. (Madrid), XIV. (Xi’an) and XV. (Québec City) General Assemblies of ICOMOS. The contribution of some CIAV members to the „Encyclopedia of Vernacular Architecture of the World“, edited by Paul Oliver in 1998 (Cambridge University) should also be mentioned. Last but not least number V of the newly created series on “Monuments and Sites”, “Vernacular Architecture”, published in Munich 2002, edited by ICOMOS International is dedicated to the activities of our committee, including the text of the “Charter” and some examples on traditional houses and housing worldwide.

One of the most important results of the committee’s work is without any doubt the final version of the „Charter on the Built Vernacular Heritage“ in English, French and Spanish, adopted by the General Assembly of ICOMOS in Mexico in 1999, published (in English and French) in the first issue of ICOMOS News 2000. Besides the long history of preparation the text is a real document

of the conservation philosophy of CIAV. Addressed directly to owners, communities but also to specialists, it is deliberately avoiding any definition for the vernacular heritage - which might vary according to the specific cultural traditions in the different regions of the world. For this reason the elaboration of regional guidelines will be a very important task for the future work of the committee. The first step was made as a result of the Santorini meeting 2000: „Guidelines for Tourism in Vernacular Settlements“. Nevertheless all the important achievements in the field of study and conservation of vernacular architecture or the development of preservation strategies are the result of the ongoing scientific work of the committee since its foundation. Starting from the traditional preservation strategies of conservation in situ or in open air museums (in the first years a rather important part of the committee members coming from open air museums) and faced by the rapid ongoing changes within contemporary life and society, the committee learned to enlarge its understanding of what “vernacular” is - from the single farmsteads and traditional village units to urban vernacular areas and settlements, to cultural landscape areas and the links between the vernacular heritage and the geomorphological conditions of the landscape. Being content of the fact that the vernacular is one of the most endangered parts of our heritage new methods and conservation strategies and policies have been studied and worked out, trying to establish an international multi-disciplinary network, to sensitize and involve the communities in the recognition, maintenance and continuance of their cultural values, to coordinate regional and local initiatives, to participate in development projects like new vernacular architecture and to organize educational and training programmes. Since 1993 committee members are involved in international training programmes addressed both to specialists (Cologne, Germany 1993, Tbilissi, Georgia 1998) and administrative bodies (Guatemala 1996) and in teaching activities (architectural conservation courses at universities, ICCROM, post-graduate studies etc.). Since a couple of years the CIAV is much more involved in the evaluation process for nomination and monitoring of the vernacular heritage to the World Heritage List of UNESCO.

The invitation pronounced by the Romanian National Committee of ICOMOS in November 2007 to host the CIAV annual meeting 2009 in Transylvania as part of the “Tusnad Conferences” was unanimously accepted and welcomed by the CIAV members at the Banăoie conference in December 2007. The main theme of the conference “The vernacular and the multicultural dialogue” is promising a rather new experience in the work of the committee facing the ongoing changes inside the vernacular settlements especially in specific multicultural areas of Europe.

The CIAV has at the moment more than 70 members, 60 of them being voting members, the others associate or coopted. The committee is headed by arch. Marc de Caraffé (Canada) as President, arch. Lena Palmquist (Sweden) and arch. Augusto Villalon (Philippines) as Vice Presidents and arch. Valeria Prieto (Mexico) as Secretary General. Dr. Georgeta Stoica (Bucharest) as founding and voting member and Dr. Ligia Fulga (Brasov) as associate member are our esteemed CIAV colleagues.