

---

# ICOMOS International Committee on Earthen Architecture

Twenty years ago, the first international concerns regarding the need to preserve the world's earthen architectural heritage were expressed in the City of Yazd, Iran [cf.: *Premier colloque international sur la conservation des monuments en brique crue, Yazd-Iran, Conseil international des monuments et des sites et Icomos-Iran, 25-30 nov., 1972*]. These past twenty years constitute a very rich process that has witnessed the involvement, commitment and well defined role of institutions and professionals active in the field of preservation of the earthen architectural heritage [cf.: *CRATerre-EAG, ICCROM Long-Term Plan for the Preservation of the Earthen Architectural Heritage: The Gaia Project, In: Proceedings of the 6th international Conference on the Conservation of Earthen Architecture held in Las Cruces, NM/USA (October 14-19, 1990), Los Angeles, The Getty Conservation Institute, 1990*].

On the occasion of the 6th International Conference on the Conservation of Earthen Architecture held in Las Cruces, NM/USA (October 14-19, 1990), a meeting of the ICOMOS International Committee for the Study and the Conservation of Earthen Architecture drew attention to the need for a better definition of the role, functions, structure, procedures and activities of this specialized body [cf.: *Minutes of the Meeting of the ICOMOS International Committee on Earthen Architecture, Las Cruces, NM, October 18, 1990, and follow up correspondence (unpublished)*]. Similar considerations concerning all ICOMOS international specialized committees were expressed by the President of ICOMOS in his editorial of ICOMOS NEWS [cf.: *ICOMOS NOUVELLES/NEWS Vol. 1, No. 2 September, 1991*]. In addition, a recent document has been submitted to the attention of the Presidents of International Committees [cf.: *The Eger Principles for International Scientific Committees, Eger, Hungary, December 1991*].

Consequently, on-going reflections regarding the structural definition of the ICOMOS International Committee for the Study and the Conservation of Earthen Architecture as an ICOMOS "frontline unit" for scientific conservation suggest a characterization of the International Committee as the specialized international, scientific and technical body of ICOMOS in this domain [cf.: *Draft Rules of Procedure of the ICOMOS International Committee for the Study and the Conservation of Earthen Architecture*].

The proposed definition of this body needs to have specific functions within the context of the objectives and activities of ICOMOS as mandated by the Statutes and resolutions of its General Assembly.

Preliminary considerations in this respect suggest that the Committee may exercise the following functions:

- to advise ICOMOS, through its Executive and Consultative Committees, on the definition of institutional policies and programmes in the domain of the study and conservation of earthen architecture;
- to promote ICOMOS international cooperation in the exchange and diffusion of knowledge and information in the field of preservation of earthen architecture;
- to encourage cooperation of ICOMOS with the programmes, projects and activities of specialized international or national institutions working in this field;
- to encourage the participation of ICOMOS members in activities related to the field through the activation of national specialized sub-committees on earthen architecture;
- to play an active role as a channel of communication between the programmes, projects and activities of ICOMOS national committees, or their specialized sub-committees, working in the field;
- to collaborate with the programmes, projects and activities of national sub-committees of ICOMOS specializing in this field;
- to provide advice and recommendations to ICOMOS on general or specific points concerned with

---

the conservation of earthen architecture and, in particular, on the inclusion of earthen architecture in the World Heritage List;

- to contribute to the promotion by ICOMOS of the highest standards of conservation in the care of historic earthen architecture.

While the general role of the Committee aims at the overall construction and integration of an international scientific conservation community active in the field of the preservation of the earthen architectural heritage, the above mentioned functions clearly connect this process with ICOMOS members participating in the promotion and the execution of activities within their own national specialized sub-committees on earthen architecture. In this respect, over the long term, the International Committee could also act as a forum for national specialized sub-committees to participate efficiently in the definition and execution of international preservation policies and recommendations. However, there is still a need to identify and generate adequate mechanisms to induce this process.

As an example of the possibilities of this relationship, the ICOMOS International Committee for the Study and the Conservation of Earthen Architecture and the US/ICOMOS National Specialized Sub-Committee on Earthen Architecture (to date the only existing ICOMOS national sub-committee specialized on earthen architecture) have already launched a joint sponsorship initiative [cf.: *International course on the preservation of the earthen architectural heritage, Grenoble, CRATerre-EAG/ICCROM, Sep. 14 - Oct. 02, 1992*]. This activity represents an attempt to promote integral efforts in a field of common concern, cooperation and integration of efforts among ICOMOS international and national bodies, and, cooperation and integration of efforts of ICOMOS with other international institutions active in the field.

This joint initiative has probably stimulated several other National ICOMOS Committees in recommending representations to the International Committee. These representations are most welcome under necessary and indispensable requisites. In this respect, the draft rules of procedure of the ICOMOS International Committee for the Study and the Conservation of Earthen Architecture foresee correspondent membership in the Committee, for all those ICOMOS members who, in their respective national committees, are responsible for the coordination/organization of the activities of national subcommittees on earthen architecture. We believe that this mechanism will ultimately encourage the creation of national specialized sub-committees on earthen architecture broadening participation of ICOMOS members in activities related to the preservation of the earthen architectural heritage as members of these sub-committees. As a result of the visible relationship between the International Committee and the US/ICOMOS Specialized Sub-Committee on Earthen Architecture, the International Committee has encouraged formal commitments for the creation of five new national sub-committees on earthen architecture [cf.: *The CEI (ex-Soviet) National Sub-Committee on Mud-brick, the Portuguese National Sub-Committee on Earthen Architecture, the New Zealand National Sub-Committee on Earthen Architecture, the U.K. National Sub-Committee on Earthen Architecture, and, recently, the Italian National Sub-Committee specialized in this field*].

However, beyond considerations related to aspects of pure representation on the International Committee, we see these events as a great opportunity to encourage the identification and definition of much needed plans, programmes, projects, activities and to implement indispensable strategies in the field. All of this will assist ICOMOS in being actively present in its international role in the protection and preservation of cultural heritage and ultimately active in the preservation of the earthen architectural heritage.

**Alejandro Alva Balderrama**  
Chairperson