

Charter on the Built Vernacular Heritage

Written by Gaëtan Juillard

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Ratified by the ICOMOS 12th General Assembly, in Mexico, October 1999.

The built vernacular heritage occupies a central place in the affection and pride of all peoples. It has been accepted as a characteristic and attractive product of society. It appears informal, but nevertheless orderly. It is utilitarian and at the same time possesses interest and beauty. It is a focus of contemporary life and at the same time a record of the history of society. Although it is the work of man it is also the creation of time. It would be unworthy of the heritage of man if care were not taken to conserve these traditional harmonies which constitute the core of man's own existence.

The built vernacular heritage is important; it is the fundamental expression of the culture of a community, of its relationship with its territory and, at the same time, the expression of the world's cultural diversity.

Vernacular building is the traditional and natural way by which communities house themselves. It is a continuing process including necessary changes and continuous adaptation as a response to social and environmental constraints. The survival of this tradition is threatened world-wide by the forces of economic, cultural and architectural homogenisation. How these forces can be met is a fundamental problem that must be addressed by communities and also by governments, planners, architects, conservationists and by a multidisciplinary group of specialists.

Due to the homogenisation of culture and of global socio-economic transformation, vernacular structures all around the world are extremely vulnerable, facing serious problems of obsolescence, internal equilibrium and integration.

It is necessary, therefore, in addition to the Venice Charter, to establish principles for the care and protection of our built vernacular heritage.

GENERAL ISSUES

1. Examples of the vernacular may be recognised by:

- a) A manner of building shared by the community;
- b) A recognisable local or regional character responsive to the environment;
- c) Coherence of style, form and appearance, or the use of traditionally established building types;
- d) Traditional expertise in design and construction which is transmitted informally;
- e) An effective response to functional, social and environmental constraints;
- f) The effective application of traditional construction systems and crafts.

2. The appreciation and successful protection of the vernacular heritage depend on the involvement and support of the community, continuing use and maintenance.

3. Governments and responsible authorities must recognise the right of all communities to maintain their living traditions, to protect these through all available legislative, administrative and financial means and to hand them down to future generations.

PRINCIPLES OF CONSERVATION

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1. The conservation of the built vernacular heritage must be carried out by multidisciplinary expertise while recognising the inevitability of change and development, and the need to respect the community's established cultural identity.
2. Contemporary work on vernacular buildings, groups and settlements should respect their cultural values and their traditional character.
3. The vernacular is only seldom represented by single structures, and it is best conserved by maintaining and preserving groups and settlements of a representative character, region by region.
4. The built vernacular heritage is an integral part of the cultural landscape and this relationship must be taken into consideration in the development of conservation approaches.
5. The vernacular embraces not only the physical form and fabric of buildings, structures and spaces, but the ways in which they are used and understood, and the traditions and the intangible associations which attach to them.

GUIDELINES IN PRACTICE

1. Research and documentation

Any physical work on a vernacular structure should be cautious and should be preceded by a full analysis of its form and structure. This document should be lodged in a publicly accessible archive.

2. Siting, landscape and groups of buildings

Interventions to vernacular structures should be carried out in a manner which will respect and maintain the integrity of the siting, the relationship to the physical and cultural landscape, and of one structure to another.

3. Traditional building systems

The continuity of traditional building systems and craft skills associated with the vernacular is fundamental for vernacular expression, and essential for the repair and restoration of these structures. Such skills should be retained, recorded and passed on to new generations of craftsmen and builders in education and training.

4. Replacement of materials and parts

Alterations which legitimately respond to the demands of contemporary use should be effected by the introduction of materials which maintain a consistency of expression, appearance, texture and form throughout the structure and a consistency of building materials.

5. Adaptation

Adaptation and reuse of vernacular structures should be carried out in a manner which will respect the integrity of the structure, its character and form while being compatible with acceptable standards of living. Where there is no break in the continuous utilisation of vernacular forms, a code of ethics within the community can serve as a tool of intervention.

6. Changes and period restoration

Changes over time should be appreciated and understood as important aspects of vernacular architecture. Conformity of all parts of a building to a single period, will not normally be the goal of work on vernacular structures.

7. Training

In order to conserve the cultural values of vernacular expression, governments, responsible authorities, groups and organisations must place emphasis on the following:

- a) Education programmes for conservators in the principles of the vernacular;
- b) Training programmes to assist communities in maintaining traditional building systems, materials and craft skills;
- c) Information programmes which improve public awareness of the vernacular especially amongst the younger generation.
- d) Regional networks on vernacular architecture to exchange expertise and experiences.