

ARGENTINA

In 1972, at the General Assembly of ICOMOS held in Budapest, Argentina was welcomed as part of ICOMOS. The National Argentine Committee was formally founded on 21 May 1973. Its objectives, stated in its statutes, are to promote the conservation, the protection, the appropriate use and enhancement of monuments, ensembles and sites according to international statutes, charters, conventions and recommendations. Currently, the Argentine Committee is based in Cordoba, and has active members throughout the country, grouped in 16 geo-cultural regions, each one represented by a vice-president, and also has honorary members recognised for their national and international involvement and stature.

The Argentina Report in *Heritage at Risk 2000*

Following the publication of the ICOMOS *Heritage at Risk 2000* report, published under the supervision of the ICOMOS Heritage at Risk Taskforce, and considering the concerns the chapter on Argentina raised in some National Institutions and organisations, the Board of Directors of the Argentine National Committee of ICOMOS issues the following statement to provide some background to the development of this report and the particular references it makes to our country.

- a. In June 2000, Architect Fabio Grementieri, member of ICOMOS Argentina, produced a report indicating his personal opinion on the state of heritage in the country, focusing on his own analysis of some cases located in Buenos Aires, and some other examples in La Plata, San Isidro and Mar del Plata. This personal report was signed by the author and shared by e-mail with Argentine institutions and colleagues as well as with the President of ICOMOS, Dr. Michael Petzet.
- b. Architect Grementieri's text was included as the report on Argentina in the ICOMOS *Heritage at Risk Report 2000*. It was printed, omitting the name of the original author and attributing it to ICOMOS Argentina without consultation with the National Committee.
- c. After the report was published, the issue was discussed at the regular Annual General Meeting of ICOMOS Argentina, in Buenos Aires on 15 December 2000. Considering the confusion resulting from the error in identifying the author of the report, it was resolved to make the necessary representation to the international authorities of ICOMOS.
- d. On 21 December 2000, the president of ICOMOS Argentina wrote to Dr. Michael Petzet to clearly state that the report that had been published was in fact a personal report and, as such, did not necessarily express or reflect the opinion of ICOMOS Argentina.

Considering the inconvenience caused by the report, the Board of Directors of ICOMOS Argentina wishes to express their concern with the style chosen by the author, particularly in the presentation of cases where he disqualifies individuals, working groups, organisations or national institutions. The Board considers that the institutional expression of any critique or disagreement with cases or projects affecting our cultural heritage should be based on human and professional respect and focus on theoretical and technical issues.

The State of Cultural Heritage in Argentina

In 1984, the National Argentine Committee of ICOMOS participated in the establishment of democratic rule by publishing its analysis under the title '*Ante una nueva cultura del patrimonio*'. The goals of this document included:

- broadening the concept of heritage
- reviewing the management structure for protection and conservation
- updating national and provincial legislation
- involving the private sector and encouraging the participation of the whole population in the conservation, enhancement and diffusion of cultural heritage.

Clearly, an appreciation of the last 18 years shows us where progress has been made and where action is still needed. The concept of heritage now includes all forms of human production as well as the environment and the landscape. Indeed, landscape heritage is threatened by its own fragility and the value of the land on which it is found. In addition, cultural heritage is now specifically mentioned in the Argentine Constitution and many provinces have developed their own conservation standards. Training in the field of conservation has grown, with courses being offered by various universities. It is also pleasing to note that interventions in heritage matters follow international recommendations, and that many sites – natural and cultural – have been included in the World Heritage List.

While acknowledging the value of this progress, the Argentine National Committee of ICOMOS still believes that, in most cases, intervention remains inadequate and recommends that the official institutions and private organisations review and strengthen the analysis and examination of their intervention. A current analysis of the situation leads to the following conclusions:

- There is a need to update legal instruments, starting with a reform of the National Constitution, so that Article 41 becomes consistent with international documents and affirms the collective right to cultural and natural heritage. The legislative void is clear, considering there is not a national Heritage Law. So it is the case, in our country, that only museums, monuments and historic sites are under national jurisdiction.
- The national budget allocated to monuments is constantly reduced, which is worsened by the fact that often these resources are only partially used; without adequate criteria, there is a need to gain the support of governmental decision-makers.
- The management of heritage conservation is not yet based on adequate processes, whether at the national, provincial or local level. In the majority of cases, public institutions act or decisions are made without taking into account scientific criteria to guide intervention, such as recommended by international documents relevant to the field. Those responsible for making decisions should have the adequate training and education to do so.
- Most interventions are undertaken without the participation of the numerous, trained and competent professionals in the discipline and dedicated institutions. When ICOMOS opinion was requested, it was not taken into account, or when it expressed a critical view, it was excluded from the decision-making process.

- At the time of intervention, and despite the recognised historical or artistic values of the heritage, the predominance of economic interest leads to misunderstanding of heritage as an economic resource, which results in speculative real estate activities often being carried out at the expense of cultural properties.
- Most actions are stimulated by political benefit, which does not provide for a long-term commitment to cultural heritage and its preservation.
- The loss of cultural heritage and its degradation in all aspects are well known, including intervention that affects or diminishes cultural significance.
- In general, there is a resistance from professional associations and even professions directly involved in works on cultural heritage to recognise conservation as a particular practice requiring specific training and experience.
- Taking into account the gradual recognition of heritage in all fields of society, it is necessary to help people develop informed opinions, which places an important responsibility on official circles to increase education, understanding and diffusion of information.
- There is no policy for the maintenance and conservation of cultural heritage. In actions and realisations, it is important to pay particular attention to criteria for intervention and for maintenance and to ensure that the work is undertaken by adequately trained personnel.
- With respect to companies and contractors working in conservation projects, it is necessary to include technical staff who are adequately trained to act as respondents for the conservation experts, as well as workers and craftspersons who are appropriately trained to accomplish the work.
- The difficult relation between new architecture and heritage areas or individual monuments remains an important challenge to all designers, who are faced with the need to establish an adequate and respectful dialogue with the place of intervention.
- Efforts made for the preservation of cultural properties are generally made by multidisciplinary groups of people coming from different backgrounds. Individualistic or clustered actions do not lead to positive results, in particular when cultural heritage is used as an opportunistic resource in other debates.

In order to explore this issue in more in depth and to diagnose the state of heritage in each region of our country, the Argentine National Committee of ICOMOS has engaged in a process of consultation and exchange to collect opinions from its members. For all regions of the country, the Argentine National Committee of ICOMOS offers its collaboration to any organisation or institution that solicits its opinion and help for intervention related to the protection and conservation of cultural resources.

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