

About the Charter on the Built Vernacular Heritage

The Charter on the Built Vernacular Heritage has its early roots in the conservation thinking of the 1980s. The first draft was already prepared by Rachele Anguelova in 1984. This draft was reworked during the following years by the vernacular committee's chairman, Nicolas Moutsopoulos, and by members of the committee. All the work of that period resulted in a joint paper that was presented to the committee in 1992. In the 1990s ICOMOS President Roland Silva prepared a paper focused on the conservation of vernacular villages. These ideas were included when the joint paper was once more redrafted by the vernacular committee in 1996. During these basic working phases the charter adopted ideas from classical conservation *in situ*, from the conservation work that was done in open-air museums and from the wide experience in research and conservation design of inhabited houses, villages and towns as well as from their immaterial traditions. The early drafts carefully covered the general and detailed features of vernacular buildings, the final draft tied together the issues concerning the conservation of any single building, any group of buildings alone or as part of a cultural landscape. It was finalised and distributed to be commented in 1996.

The comments that the committee received in 1997-98 showed that the general and global viewpoint which the charter had introduced covered many parts of the world's vernacular heritage. However, some of the main definitions were difficult to translate into all languages and cultures. The draft was presented to the colleagues in three languages, in English, French and in Spanish. The most controversial issue was the question of definitions, mainly the differences between traditional, popular and vernacular. The second most argued issue was whether the charter could be applied to the conservation of modern vernacular heritage. There were also demands for a much more practical paper that would give a conservationist the tools for common field work. The final round of discussions was also held in the three languages and resulted in clarifying the definitions and the general guidelines. Additions concerning educational work were made. The final charter text was adopted in the three working languages in 1999 by the general assembly in Guadalajara, Mexico.

Since the adoption of the charter the committee has tried to continue the discussion by enhancing the work on regional guidelines which at their best will concentrate on the issues vital to the region and result in finding and documenting the common and the particular when conserving the region's own vernacular heritage.