

**REPORT OF THE
16th SYMPOSIUM OF THE
INTERNATIONAL SCIENTIFIC COMMITTEE
ON WOOD PRESERVATION**

“Wood Preservation in Heritage Buildings”

At the invitation of the International Scientific Committee on Wood Preservation of ICOMOS (International Council on Monuments and Sites) and under the auspices of ICOMOS Mexicano, A.C.; the ICOMOS Committee of Michoacán; the ICOMOS Committee of Jalisco; the Government of the State of Michoacán; the Michoacán Institute of Culture; the Ministry of Tourism of Michoacán; the National Institute of Anthropology and History (INAH); the University of San Nicolás de Hidalgo in Michoacán (UMSNH); and the Department of Wood, Cellulose and Paper of the University of Guadalajara, experts from six countries met from November 10 to 14 in the picturesque city of Pátzcuaro, Michoacán, to share opinions on three basic topics:

- Techniques for manufacturing wooden objects found in surviving pre-Hispanic and colonial structures in Mexico;
- Methods for identifying and evaluating the physical and mechanical properties of historic wood in architectural structures;
- Criteria and policies. Considerations on preserving historic wood, replacing it or preserving deteriorated structures in monuments. Conservation of forest resources for restoration.

To make these proposals feasible and to create an environment in which the theoretical work will be complemented by daily practice in the use of wood, visits have been scheduled to typical areas in the Purépecha Meseta, and a group of expert artisans skilled in various techniques was invited. One session was devoted to a workshop on materials technology, cutting and woodworking tools, carving and sculpting of columns. In a space specifically for this purpose in the community of Tupátaro, we were able to see the corn stalk paste sculpting workshop project that the INAH is carrying out there, with extraordinary results.

In another visit, this time to Tzintzuntzan, the former capital of the Purépecha kingdom, the project to restore the former Franciscan convent was presented. Its construction is

typical of the Patzcuaro lake region, and it will be possible to proceed with the work, thanks to support from various sources inside and outside the region. This large-scale project also includes creating a training centre for skilled personnel in carpentry, bricklaying, masonry, etc.

Another session was on the book about the wooden roofs of church buildings in the Patzcuaro lake basin in Michoacán, written by Luis Torres Garibay, a member of the group that organized the meeting, and participants visited the roof of the Basilica in Patzcuaro.

The final working session consisted of a series of visits to various communities in the Purépecha Meseta that are significant for their wooden architecture or for the use of wood by local inhabitants.

CONCLUSIONS

- The preservation of wood in buildings and cultural property in general requires the participation of specialists from various disciplines;
- Cultural property made of wood must be registered, studied, preserved and restored, given the environmental conditions and the effects of weathering on wood;
- To conserve and document the wood used in cultural property, it is advisable to involve the communities where these items are located in their preservation;
- The harvesting of specific species in Mexico requires appropriate programs in the states concerned, especially for those species needed to restore buildings and architectural structures. For this, the support of SEMARNAP (Ministry of the Environment, Natural Resources and Fisheries) is necessary. It must be involved with forest producers and artisans to create forest reserves for solving the current problems;
- In intervening and replacing the wood in monuments, it is essential to design and make the pieces according to traditional manufacturing techniques;
- In proposing treatments to preserve wood from insects and fungi, it is essential to know the ecological balance and to maintain it. For this, research must be conducted on natural products like non-toxic extracts and resins to control attacks of insects, micro-organisms and other agents.

On this basis, the Organizing Committee, the presenters and the participants at the Symposium reject the government's proposal to disband the Institute of Forestry, Agriculture and Livestock Research (INIFAP), the College of Graduate Studies, the Mexican Institute of Water Technology and other institutions that are essential for the educational, scientific and technological development of this country. We urge the Mexican Congress to work for a solution and to find alternative funding formulas, without attacking institutions and groups that must not disappear.

COMMITMENTS

The Scientific Committee on Wood Preservation of ICOMOS, Mexico, undertakes to:

- Receive, keep, gather, study and organize donations of materials to generate a "wood library" from specific regions and monuments;
- Develop jointly with INIFAP and the graduate studies in architecture program of the UMSNH the databases necessary for a catalogue of the wood used in Mexico's architectural heritage;
- In collaboration with other related official and private institutions and entities, organize an annual symposium that would be a forum for discussion, analysis and presentation of topics of interest, in order to propose and promote actions to solve current problems.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Tlaximalli, a pre-Hispanic woodcutting technique, has been maintained by artisans in the Purépecha meseta for over four centuries. Nevertheless, its preservation as a living testimony of a thousand-year-old culture is threatened by such things as a series of obsolete state laws that have made its production and use an almost underground activity, restricting its open use in the necessary restoration of the rich cultural heritage of Michoacán made with this technique. It is recommended that the authorities of the State of Michoacán review these legal provisions and bring them up to date for the real current needs, in order to promote use of this technique under controlled conditions.

- Educational and research institutions should produce a catalogue of historical monuments made of wood, along with a technical description for each one.
- Generate a multidisciplinary network of specialists, in order to have a directory with regional information as well as data on restoration work and research projects under way and completed.
- Create a documentation centre with materials on wood uses, techniques, technology, etc.; with international, national, regional and local information, with support from such institutions as UNESCO, ICOMOS, ICCROM (International Centre for the Study of the Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property), INAH and UNAM (Autonomous National University of Mexico).
- Set up a Web site to strengthen the above proposals; this site would also be a cyber meeting place for people interested in various wood-related issues.
- Create a “wood library” with a systematic collection of samples of wood used in architectural monuments from various regions of the country. Develop a technical specifications sheet to complement the “wood library.”
- Include on the agenda for the coming meetings of the Scientific Committee on Wood Preservation of ICOMOS discussion of the two world natural heritage sites in Mexico and wood-related aspects.
- Propose fire prevention standards for historic buildings made of wood and/or with a wood structure in Michoacán and throughout the country.
- Together with the federal government’s forest authorities, develop initiatives for a “forest reserve” where those species used in restoring and producing cultural property will be grown.
- Urge the authorities of the State of Michoacán, through the Michoacán Institute of Culture, to conduct a careful and thorough review of the electrical installations in the chapel of Tupátaro and others in the region.
- Concerning intangible cultural property, investigate the environmental/ideological impact in various contexts if multidisciplinary criteria are not applied, according to the specific objectives.

- Consider historical, narrative, chronological, utilitarian, functional and other issues at the same time as semiotic and iconographic interpretation, for more in-depth knowledge of the cultural content of architectural works.
- Consider the possibility of preserving and restoring movable and immovable religious property as part of culture, in the context of “tangible property,” considering it from the time it was created until now, so that it will be restored not merely as a museum or collection piece but as part of a living context.

Recommendations to the Municipal Authorities of Charapan, Michoacán

- It is necessary to have appropriate municipal regulations and standards in order to preserve the traditional image of the community. As well, the importance of conserving and restoring local wooden houses is noted. For this, the advice of various groups of experts and NGOs, specialists in heritage conservation, is available.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

ICOMOS Mexicano, A.C., the Organizing Committee of this symposium and the attendees thank the civil, religious and academic authorities of the State of Michoacán for the attention received and for the facilities that made it possible to hold this important meeting.