

ICOMOS

international council on monuments and sites

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The heritage of education

Although it is possible to find several definitions of education, all of them refer to a form of learning in which knowledge, skills and habits of a group of people are transferred from one generation to the next through teaching, training or research. Education also means the transmission of beliefs and values and can therefore be considered as one of the main means for constructing the future.

In ancient civilisations, adults trained the young of their society in the knowledge and skills they would need to master. The evolution of culture and human beings as a species depended on this practice of transmitting knowledge. In pre-literate societies this was achieved orally and through imitation; story-telling continued from one generation to the next. Oral language developed into written symbols and letters. The depth and breadth of knowledge that could be preserved and passed on soon increased exponentially. When cultures began to extend their knowledge beyond the basic skills of communicating, trading, gathering food, religious practices, etc., formal education, and schooling, eventually followed. Schooling in this sense was already in place in Egypt between 3000 and 500 BP.

In ancient Greece, Plato founded the Academy in Athens, which was the first institution of higher learning in the Western world. Alexandria, in Egypt, became the successor to Athens as the intellectual cradle of the Western World. In the East, Confucius was China's most influential ancient philosopher, whose educational outlook continues to influence the societies of China and neighbours like Korea, Japan and Vietnam. In Korea, a form of private lesson was popular during ancient times, but during the Koryeo kindom (918-1392) and the Joseon period (1392-1910), National Educational Institutes existed and, during the Joseon period, regional Confucian academy schools were dominant and still remain conserved in good condition.

The Medieval universities of Western Christendom were well-integrated across all of Western Europe. They encouraged freedom of enquiry and produced a great variety of fine scholars and natural philosophers. The University of Bologna is considered the oldest continually operating university. Elsewhere during the Middle Ages, Islamic science and mathematics flourished under the Islamic caliphate established across the Middle East, extending from the Iberian Peninsula in the west to the Indus in the east and to the Almoravid Dynasty and Mali Empire in the south.

Throughout history and in different geo-cultural contexts, education was practised in a wide range of places or buildings. Open spaces, agora or the protective shadow of a tree could be useful for the transmission of knowledge, but also specific institutional buildings such as schools, universities, madrasas, academies, libraries, monasteries, etc. Many of those buildings, groups of buildings or sites are recognised as bearing not only social or institutional values but also historic or artistic ones, and have therefore become a significant part of our cultural heritage. The protection and conservation of the heritage of education not only implies preserving cultural assets but also, at the same time, celebrating education as one of the fundamental human tasks.

Several heritage properties linked to education have reached international recognition and are inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List: the sites of the Bauhaus (Germany), the University and historic precinct of Alcalá de Henares (Spain), the university campuses in Caracas (Venezuela) and Mexico City. At the same time, several historic towns and centres inscribed on the List house buildings and complexes related to education. In other cases, buildings, ensembles or places are protected at national or local levels. However, many cultural properties linked to education and bearing historic, artistic or social values do not yet enjoy proper protection and recognition. It becomes thus necessary to insist on the fate of schools and university campuses as these are two concrete forms of this heritage, often neglected as we focus our conservation interest on the education programmes instead of the buildings and places themselves.

ICOMOS has selected "The Heritage of education" as the theme for celebrating the 2013 International Day for Monuments and Sites on 18 April, including under that title all kinds of heritage assets that, in the framework of the World's cultural diversity, are related to education.

ICOMOS Committees are kindly invited to organise events related to this important date: conferences, lectures, press releases, round tables, visits to heritage properties, etc. in order to raise public awareness related to this specific type of heritage.

Among several topics to be reflected and discussed, ICOMOS proposes the following:

- Is there a proper recognition of buildings, ensembles or sites related to education?
- Are properties related to education bearing historic, artistic or social values properly protected and conserved?
- Are the values of those properties properly interpreted and presented to society?
- Are educational heritage components properly maintained and used in the context of contemporary standards?
- What could be done to guarantee the good use of the heritage of education whilst preserving its values?
- Have the authorities in charge of education put in place policies, obligations or other measures to protect, conserve and enhance the architectural heritage of the schools, colleges, university campuses or other sites they use for educational purposes; e.g. Heritage Management Plans or Advisory Committees?

We kindly request ICOMOS Committees to inform the International Secretariat on planned events so that we can publish them on the ICOMOS website and share your activities among the members of the world-wide ICOMOS family.

[Visit the 18th April web page !](#)