

ERNEST MARTIN:
President of the «Wood Committee».

Opening Speech in Bergen 13.VI.1983.

Ladies and Gentlemen, Colleagues and Friends

At the opening of our fifth symposium of the ICOMOS specialized International Committee for the conservation of wooden structures I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Norwegian National Committee for its invitation: to his president *Mr. Tschudi-Madsen* who has accepted the responsibility for the success of our meeting, to *Mrs Luce Hinsch*, to our colleague *Nils Marstein* as well as the other members of the organizing committee. In addition I would like to thank the Ministries of Environment and of External Affairs for their financial support.

The «Wood Committee» as it is called, is particularly happy to be able to rely each time upon the collaboration and efficient organization of the ICOMOS National Committees. Our meetings are held each time in a different country, which enable us to make new contacts and enrich our experiences.

The President of ICOMOS, *Michel Parent*, has asked me to represent him here since he was unable to join us, and to bring you his regard and his best wishes for the symposium and its anticipated benefits for ICOMOS.

For the past several years there have been discussions to bring closer the Vernacular Architecture Committee and ours. So far it has not been possible to have a joint meeting. However for the first time we have with us *Mrs. Anguelova* who has been kindly invited by the Norwegian Committee.

At the opening of this symposium it is a good idea to remind ourselves of the proposed goals of this Committee. I should therefore briefly summarize the mission which ICOMOS has given us.

First and foremost our goal is to promote the conservation of wood used in our cultural heritage based upon the Venice Charter and in conjunction with the ICOMOS National Committees. We, as a Committee, are not equipped to undertake either scientific research or technical studies: In fact this is not our role, and our task is essentially:

- to establish reciprocal exchanges, at international level, with experts in our field, researchers, institutes and specialized laboratories.
- To devise a method of communication which will permit a better diffusion of knowledge, both technical and practical, and to assure a wide exchange of information. In some cases conservation techniques have been developed, in other cases information and assistance are required to prevent the deterioration of monuments.

Writing publications and coordinating information with the ICOMOS Documentation Centre in Paris as well as with the Rome Centre (ICCRUM) should enable us to achieve our goals.

This fifth symposium marks an important event – the tenth anniversary of, if I might refer to it as such, our specialized international Committee.

What has happened during the past ten years?

In 1972, during a conversation in which I happened to take part, *Raymond Lemaire*, Secretary General of ICOMOS, proposed the establishment of specialized International Committees which were at the time only titles on paper. Since he had recognized my interest in this field, he said to me something like: «Martin, from this Committee, you know very well how to lead it».

In June 1972 in Budapest, I was installed as President of this Committee, following consultations with the National Committees concerned. The founding members, *Mrs. Berry*, *Michailov*, *Mannerstråle*, *Noak* and a bit later *Demeter* were named by the ICOMOS Executive Committee in December 1973.

At the beginning several meetings were held in Paris and contact was made with Institutes in France, including le Centre Technique du Bois, l'Office des Forêts and l'Association des Compagnons du Devoir, represented here by *Mr. Longépé*. Finally our Committee was enlarged by the addition of corresponding members. In 1977, the first symposium outside of France was held in Stockholm. Then in 1979 in Troyes in the magnificent «Maison de l'outil et la pensée ouvrière». We had reached what I could call our «vitesse de croisière». A study tour in Switzerland was organized in 1980 and in 1982 we were welcomed by the Canadian National Committee in Ottawa and Quebec.

Today we have been graciously welcomed in Bergen for our fifth symposium. Over the last ten years there has been an average of a symposium every other year. Over this period with limited resources we have worked to achieve these goals.

As an architect in private practice, not attached to a special Institute or Organization, the international support that I lacked was supplied by the ICOMOS secretariat in Paris with the gracious and efficient participation of *Rany Keo Kosal* who was enthusiastic about our activities and who has given me a great deal of assistance.

In addition, during this period we have gathered much information which has been published in two conference proceedings from the meeting in Troyes and Stockholm, and the one in Canada.

Having arrived at this point, after three terms of three years each, as president I shall leave to others the task to continue developing and enlarging our mission.

At this time, the Secretary General of ICOMOS has asked us on behalf of the Bureau, in a letter dated April 13th, to concentrate the efforts of our Committee during the next three years on the creation of a Charter. According to him this Charter should outline the principles of conservation of wooden structures. It should be universal, however it should respect regional differences and specific techniques.

Contemplation of this project as well as the creation of this charter is the task of those who will lead the Committee in the future. We can thereby respond with a statement in article 4 of our Statutes which indicates that in order to reach its goals, the Committee:

«searches for a better definition of the professional ethic in its field and in that of the technical method of restoration».

Here in Norway we will discuss an aspect of this problem in the session concerned with the question of *Authenticity*.

I hope that this discussion will be of a high level, along the lines of the Venice Charter so that it will permit respect for diverse traditions and cultural differences throughout the world.

It is in this spirit that I hope for a successful fifth symposium of our «Wooden Committee» and thereby wish to open this meeting.