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Editorial

After missing the previous number unintentionally, it is with great pleasure that I present this CIAV Newsletter which contains three articles written by our colleagues.

The first one is an introductory article from Berenice Aguilar as a new CIAV member: "Mayan Vernacular: The Ethnic Habitat of the Yucatan Peninsula: Empirical Knowledge and Ancient Wisdom" which is a new approach on the subject and well documented testimony, based on her deep knowledge as a professor of Vernacular Architecture at the Mexico National Autonomous University. The article presents an interesting view of the Mayan house concept and the urgent need for its conservation.

The next article is from Hossam Mahdy: "Arab Values: Towards Regional Guidelines for ICOMOS Doctrinal Documents in Arab Countries", which is an interesting insight into the profound use of Arabic terms in Islamic tradition, particularly, regarding heritage conservation.

Finally, we have Randi Sjølie " Building Tradition of the Veps, an Indigenous People in the Russian Karelia ", a knowledgeable article about the building traditions of the Veps and their rich indigenous culture.

I am grateful for the collaboration of all three contributors to CIAV Newsletter. I would kindly appreciate the comments of CIAV members via email.

Valeria Prieto



Mayan Vernacular

The Ethnic Habitat of the Yucatan Peninsula: Empirical Knowledge and Ancient Wisdom

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Throughout numerous trips to the Yucatan peninsula, since the mid-1990s, I have witnessed a gradual but increasing deterioration of what the traditional Mayan villages of the Yucatan peninsula were, leading to a loss of identity and cultural damage, evident in the alteration of the traditional family plot and the Mayan house today. A discordant element that jumps into view is the increase in the number of cement block rooms to the detriment of traditional Mayan dwellings.

This has generated that the empirical building knowledge of the local people - developed since ancient times and accumulated over centuries - ceases to be appreciated by the younger generations and, with some exceptions, is limited to being valued by the elderly. Similar to other ancient societies, the Mayan people have developed, over time, a vast awareness about their overall region, what nowadays we call intangible knowledge. They have become acquainted with their natural environment, the limestone with which they built their Mayan temples in pre-colonial times, their old white washed roads, their small Christian chapels and their modest but pleasant and harmonious houses. The inhabitants of the Yucatan Peninsula have also learned to protect their houses from the damage caused by hurricanes that hit the Caribbean in a cyclical way. In summary, Mayan people have found a way to live in balance with their natural surroundings. However, the irruption of introduced life styles with items alien to their traditional ways that brings about false progress, are starting to impact native settlements in a negative way socially, culturally and obviously environmentally. In this article - which is part of an ongoing research project - I will address the Mayan vernacular dwellings and its site as representative cultural element of local domestic life and the negative impact that a number of factors are causing, consequently affecting Mayan communities and their cultural heritage.

First, I would like to outline that the Mayan peninsular inhabitants perform most of their daily activities outdoors, in the family plot, called *solar* (plural: *solares*) in Spanish (Figures 1 and 2).

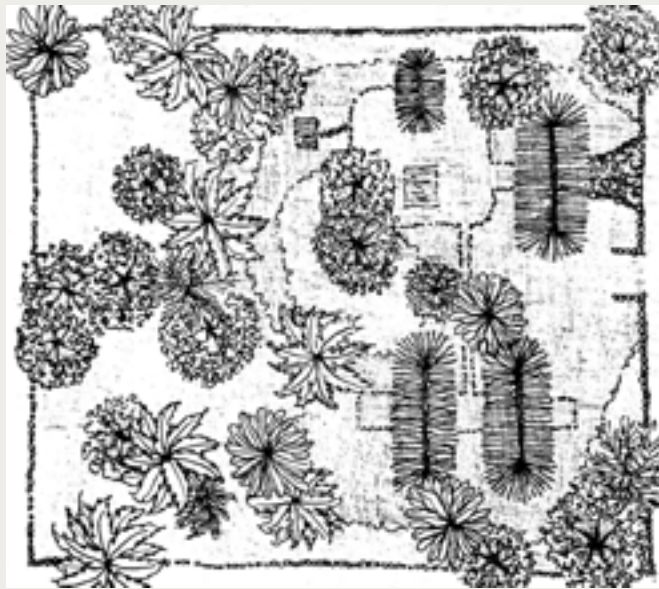


Figure 1: Mayan *solar* view from above. Drawing by BAP*

The *solares* are private land that belong to each Mayan family that in turn make up the communities of towns. In these plots or *solares*, where families cultivate vegetable gardens, they usually eat and rest under the shade of the trees. What is called the Mayan house are rooms mostly used as dormitories at night and as refuge that provides protection against rain, intense solar irradiance and high temperatures. Extreme heat lasts from four to six hours a day, depending on the time of the year. Besides sleeping, these rooms are used to rest during the long hot hours of the day. Cooking, eating and physiological needs are done in spaces other than the house.



Figure 2: *Solar* orchard and dry stone fence, photo: BAP

*BAP: Berenice Aguilar Prieto

The maya house has an apse plan. It possibly evolved from a rectangle plan but in order to prevent damage that hurricanes cause to the corners of the clay daubed houses, the local builders 'killed' the angles, resulting in round short sides. Accordingly, the part of the roof that covers the semi circles is solved by semi cones linked to the thatched gable roof (Figures 3 and 4). Builders use a flexible branch to create the semicircle in the interior.

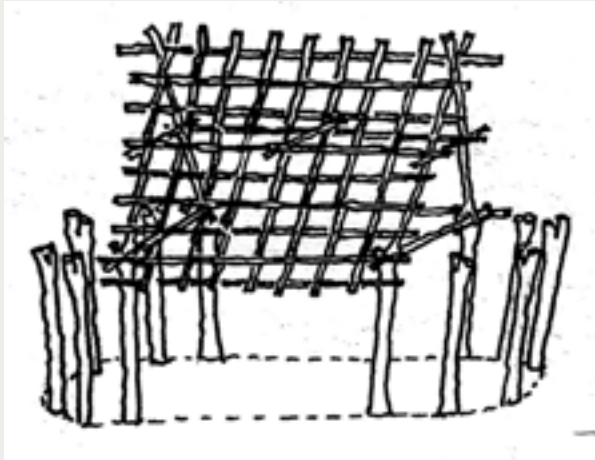


Figure 3: Basic structure and lattice work, drawing: BAP, from VCM*

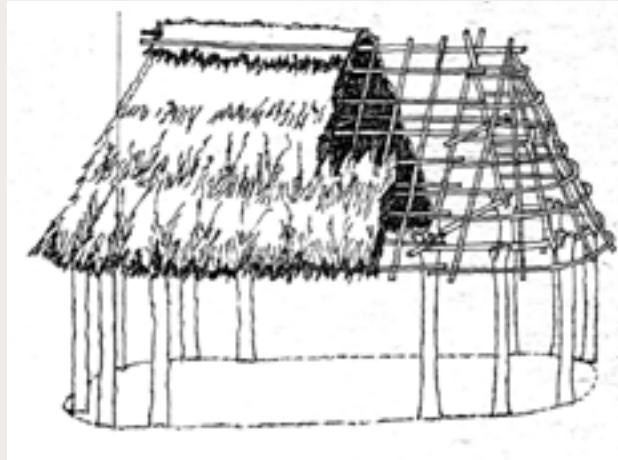


Figure 4: Lattice work and roof palm covering, drawing: BAP, from VCM

The mayan house and its *solar*, have satisfied living necessities throughout generations of Mayan people in an extremely humid and hot region. The building solution of the house, namely, *la casa maya*, creates cool, comfortable dwelling spaces that can be considered a smart dwelling solution. Describing the building materials and building procedure will help understand its smart design through time.

The Mayan house - of 10 x 6 m - is built with wooden poles and branches, limestone rocks, thatched roofs and in some cases, clay daubed walls. The branch-based thatched roof structure or roof skeleton, rests on four wooden posts stuck into the ground; two on each side (Figure 5). A white washed masonry platform, about 40 cm high, is built surrounding the posts that will become part of the room. The platform is used both to reinforce the dwelling containing the indoor space and to serve as a base on which the branches that conform the walls lattice work stand and are kept away from the humidity of the ground.

The four poles of about \varnothing 14 cm, constitute the low structure of the building. They have a V shape at the top on which the roof beams lie and are tied with reed ropes (Figure 6). The thatched roof is made with a certain kind of palm tree called *huano* (pronounced wuano). The palm tree stems are inserted into the horizontal branches of the roof structure (Figure 7).

*VCM: Vivienda campesina en México, Ed. Beatrice Trueblood, Second edition 1994.

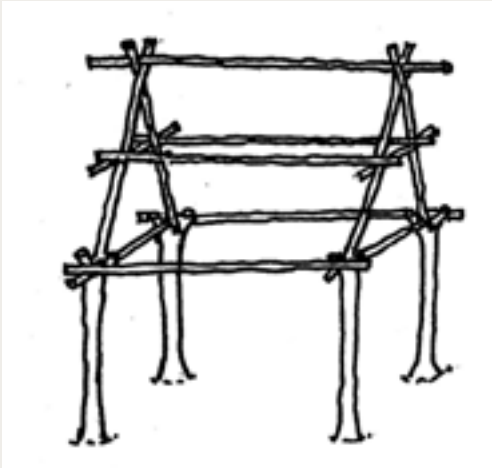


Figure 5: Basic structure of four poles.
Drawing: BAP, from VCM



Figure 6: "V" shaped pole. Photo by BAP



Figure 7: Palm placement for the roof. Photo by FJMS*

*FJMS: Francisco Javier Martínez Sánchez

Their huge overlapping leaves form a tile-like thatched covering that efficiently protects from the rain water and sun light. When hurricanes hit and cause some damages to the roofs, *huano* leaves are easily replaced. A 4m high roof permits hot air to rise generating cool dormitories. The comfort is accentuated by scarce openings which are limited to a front door and a rare one overlooking the backyard. The inner space is dimly lit which adds coolness. In addition, the earth ground floor and the clay daubed walls contribute to keep cool the dwelling space.

The scarce objects kept inside the dwellings are some hammocks and a few pieces of furniture. People sleep in hammocks and babies are kept in hanging baskets raised from the floor, to avoid poisonous animal bites (Figure 8). A wardrobe, a wooden loom for weaving hammocks and a sewing machine complete the dwelling space. Old wardrobes with mirrors are common in mayan houses. They probably became a trend at early XX century. The sewing machine is mostly used for *hipil* embroidery. Yucateco women, traditionally wear a cotton dress with an attached lapel that they embroider with colorful flowers (Figure 9). They are proud of this tradition passed on from mothers to daughters. However, western clothing fashion is having an influence and over the last two decades, while mostly mature and old women wear traditional dresses, young women rather wear a t-shirt and shorts. Both the husband and wife, weave hammocks, for their families and to sell them and make some extra earnings.



Fig 8: Hanging hammocks and roof view from the inside. Photo by BAP



Fig 9: Mayan women traditional dress embroidery and sewing machine. Photo by BAP

Food is prepared and cooked in a small hut separated from the main room or dormitory. Its wooden branch walls, are left without daub to ensure good ventilation. (figure 10) The kitchen hut - covered as well with a thatched roof - does have a rectangular plan. Food is cooked in a low stove (built with masonry or cement bricks) where the mother, often helped by the daughters, prepares food which consists of hand made *maiz tortillas* (cornmeal) cooked in a *comal* or traditional griddle, beans and sometimes meat, cooked in *ollas* (cooking pots, pronounced ojas as in jar). A small table and several wooden chairs, complete the kitchen furniture. Cooking items are hung on the wall branches. The smoke that rises from the cooking helps protect the wood roof branches from humidity, making it last longer in a good condition. It also helps keep bugs away (Figure 11).



Figure 10: Kitchen. Photo by BAP



Figure 11: Smoked palm ceiling and kitchen utensils. Photo by BAP

The kitchen faces the back garden usually with an orchard where they grow oranges, lemons, squash, banana and papaya trees, coconut and *huano* palm trees. Mayan people also raise pigs, turkeys and chicken in pens. Most families own another productive land away from home with *milpas* (land to grow corn) and often an apiary. Through these, their main productive activities, they can be considered self-sufficient communities.

The Mayans have strong roots in their ancestral culinary customs. Some of them are still performed in their *solares*. A Mesoamerican dish made with cornmeal, lard, sauce and stuffed with beans, called *pib* in Mayan, is prepared in the back garden of the *solar*. Mayans continue preparing them as they did half a century ago (Figures 13 and 14). They cook them in a hole that they dig in their *solar* and whose walls are covered with banana leaves, under which lies a bonfire. This ancient cooking method gives the *pib* a special smokey flavor.



Figure 12: Placing of banana leaves for *pib* barbecue. Photo by FJMS



Figure 13: *Pib* traditional dish cooked. Photo by FJMS

According to Mayan custom, toilet and bathroom occupy separate rooms. They are solved in small rooms at the end of the backyard. A wattle fence provides privacy and ventilation. However, concrete block rooms, too hot and not well ventilated, are common nowadays. They do not have running water. They bath with a small container with which they pour water from a water tank. During cold season they heat water using coal.

The *solar* or plot, is surrounded by a dry laid stone fence which together with the thatched roof houses, the orchards and the whitewashed streets conform the classical cultural landscape of Yucatan vernacular (Figure 14).



Figure 14: Mayan house with lime-stone masonry walls. Photo by BAP

But this scenery is quickly transforming. State government policies lack programs to aid the countryside with an approach that acknowledges the native people's culture. For instance, in the aftermath of a hurricane that strikes the villages, the government sends zinc sheets to repair the roofs and concrete blocks for the walls with no regard for the indigenous ways of living and unaware of the many benefits that the Mayan house brings; authorities often blame the rustic houses for the damages and consider the regional typology a synonym of poverty (Figure 15). *Huano* palm tree - basic material for building the traditional Mayan house - is reserved for mega touristic developments in the Caribbean coastline since it is considered a better investment than the local people villages and houses.



Figure 15: Mayan house with bajareque walls. Photo by BAP

As a professor of vernacular architecture at Mexico National Autonomous University (UNAM) since 1995, I currently lead a program based on field work, research, and workshops along with students and professors from Yucatan (Figure 16). Starting in 2018, three field trips have taken place.



Figure 16: Undergraduate students in workshop in Yucatan. Photo by BAP

UNAM students have shown motivation in workshops with local students who started learning to recognize the value of their regional vernacular architecture, not taught in their Faculty. During fieldwork, small groups stay in Mayan houses with local families. It constitutes a new experience to directly learn different ways of life. The sensitivity of the students has been evident, making substantial proposals at the workshops. (Figure 18). A student has even chosen a community architectural project as subject for his undergraduate thesis. Another product is an undergoing small bilingual book (in French and Spanish with main terms in Maya language) where I will include students contributions in the form of texts and field sketches. We are looking for financing options since it might not qualify for university funding as it is not meant to be an academic publication.

I consider these experiences to be significant lessons for young people to broaden their knowledge on how regional communities with rich cultural background have solved their houses. Most students at UNAM and Yucatan State University are taught that the western concept of a house layout is the prevailing one, regardless of ethnic communities living customs, which are often considered undeveloped. Changing the students approach to how people solve their living spaces in the countryside enlightens them about the relativity of cultures.



Figure 17: Field work in Mayan village. Photo by FJMS

Arab Values: Towards Regional Guidelines for ICOMOS Doctrinal Documents in Arab Countries

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ABSTRACT: Conservation of the built heritage is practiced and regulated in the Arab Region by national laws, institutional structures and formal mechanisms that strive to be aligned with international best practices as guided by ICOMOS doctrinal documents, with different degrees of success.

Informal attitudes are, however, a totally different story. Local communities often fail to appreciate values that formal practices propagate. In some extreme cases, the local community is considered the major threat facing formal efforts to conserve and manage heritage resources.

It is ironic that conservation of cultural heritage could be rejected by mostly traditional conservative societies. The premise of this paper is that there is a need for a deep understanding of values related to the built heritage and its conservation, particularly in traditional societies, such as rural or historic quarters in urban settings.

The paper will examine different levels and aspects of values in the Arab Region, such as geographic and environmental factors, Islamic worldview and value system, Arabic language, local traditional norms, pre-modern systems of management, conservation and development as well as modernization processes, including the impact of Orientalism, colonialism and the establishment of modern nation states.

The indicators resulting from the proposed in-depth investigations should inform the compilation of regional guidelines for the Arab Region of ICOMOS doctrinal documents such as the CIAV Charter on the Built Vernacular Heritage and the IFLA-ICOMOS Principles Concerning Rural Landscapes as Heritage.

KEY WORDS: Arabic, Islamic, ICOMOS, Values, Regional Guidelines

1 Introduction

The inhabitants of the historic quarters of Arab cities are known for being conservative communities taking pride in their traditional Arab values. However, their present attitudes towards Arab-Islamic built heritage are passive, careless or hostile.

Some Islamic historic buildings have been effectively conserved and managed for more than ten centuries and up to the modern times, only to be vandalized or misused in the last few

ten centuries and up to the modern times, only to be vandalized or misused in the last few decades. Did historic buildings lose their meaning and values in the eyes of local communities? The problem is much deeper than mere technical or financial issues. The premise of the present paper is that modern conservation and management of the built heritage in the region are formally carried out according to a philosophy that clashes with traditional Arab-Islamic worldview and values.

The paper sheds light on two major issues in order to develop an in-depth understanding of the present challenges facing the effective implementation of internationally accepted best practices according to ICOMOS doctrinal documents. The first issue is the traditional Arab-Islamic views on conservation of the built heritage. The second is the impact of modernization on the way historic buildings are conserved, managed and perceived in Arab countries.

The aim is to identify indicators for the changes that are needed in order to address the causes of the current challenges, which should inform regional guidelines of ICOMOS doctrinal documents for the Arab Region.

2 Traditional Arab values

2.1 Arabic and Islam

The significance of the word within traditional Arab culture cannot be overemphasized. Arabic poetry was the main cultural achievement and pride of the Bedouins who lived in the Arabian Peninsula before Islam. The significance of the word was even more emphasized later by Islam, with the utmost importance given by Muslims to the Qur'an, the exact words of God. The spread of Islam carried Arabic language far beyond the Arabian Peninsula. The connection between Arabic and Islam is unique. On the one hand Islam guaranteed the spread and survival of Arabic as a living language throughout time and place. On the other hand, Arabic contributed to the preservation of Islam as a religion, worldview and value system by enabling Arabic-speaking Muslims to have direct access to the Qur'an as well as other Islamic texts and rituals. Arab values have been formed and impacted by both Arabic language and the religion of Islam for more than fourteen centuries up to the present, without suppressing diverse local values and traditions across the region [1].

2.2 Diversity

The Arabs of today are not a unified race. What is known today as the Arab Region includes a great diversity of races, languages, religions, geophysical areas and geopolitical entities. Arabic is not the only spoken language in the region. Nubian, Kurdish, Imazighen, Swahili and other languages are spoken by different ethnic groups throughout the Arab Region. Nevertheless, the impact of Arabic across the region is overwhelming. Not only because it is the language of education and mainstream cultural activities, but more importantly because it is the language of Islam and the Qur'an. The text of the Qur'an has not been changed for more than fourteen centuries. Muslims have read and memorized Qur'anic texts for centuries and up to the present. Consequently, the understanding and use of Arabic were preserved without major changes.

Although Islam is not the only religion practiced in the Arab Region, the influence of its worldview, value system and cultural framework is manifest in all communities across the region, including the followers of other religions and those whose mother tongues are not Arabic [2].

2.3 Unity and diversity

Despite being agents for unity, Islam and Arabic endorsed and encouraged diversity across the Islamic world. Islamic instructions respected different local traditions and customs as far as they did not conflict with Islamic values. Therefore, the spread of Islam in different regions did not wipe away the diverse cultures and traditions of different regions and communities. This could be seen, for example, in mosque architecture across the world. All mosques are directed towards Makkah, have mihrabs, minibars, minarets and ablution places. Nevertheless, styles of mosque architecture in different countries and regions belong to their cultural and environmental localities [4]. Thus, the architectural style of an Ottoman mosque in Istanbul is closer to the style of Anatolian basilica churches than to Egyptian mosques. And the architectural style of a West African mosque is closer to local pagan vernacular architecture than to Indian mosques [4]. The Islamic views on Arabic further encourages cultural diversity. From Islamic point of view, being an Arab does not indicate a race, an ethnicity or a nation, but simply indicates that a person speaks Arabic. Therefore, many influential Muslim scholars who taught and wrote in Arabic were not ethnically or racially Arabs, such as Al- Bukhari and Al-Tirmithy as well as many others.

2.4 The impact of Arabic and Islam

Arab traditional views and concepts regarding historic buildings and their conservation were formed by the characteristics of Arabic language and rooted in the Islamic worldview and values system. For example, the Arabic word haram expresses a concept of protection that is used for buildings and places. Generally, haraam means forbidden by Islamic law. In the case of buildings and places, it means a protected entity that should be treated according to a specific set of rules. Hence Al- Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem is called Al-Haram Al-Sharif, meaning the noble protected place. The same concept is used in many other ways. It is used regarding places, times, persons and actions. Haraam is used pertaining to specific months of the year, during which, fighting wars is forbidden. It is also used pertaining to specific persons, who should be treated according to certain rules. Therefore, places assigned to women were called hareem, meaning that these places are protected and should not be treated like common places. Linguistically, the root 'h r m' means forbidden. Accordingly, many words and concepts generated from this root are used to express the meaning of 'forbidden' or 'protected', for example:

Al-Bayt al-haram: The protected/ forbidden house, referring to al-Ka'bah;

Al-balad al-haraam: The protected/ forbidden city, referring to Makkah;

Al-haram: The protected mosque, referring to al-Ka'ba, the Prophet's Mosque, or Al-Aqsa Mosque;

Al-haramain: The two protected mosques, referring to al-Ka'ba and the Prophet's Mosque;

Ihraam: Wearing the assigned clothes for performing hajj (pilgrimage to Makkah);
Ahram: Entered an area or a period that is controlled by certain rules;
Hareem al-masjid: The buffer zone around a mosque;
Manteqah haram: An area that is managed by certain rules, and cannot be accessed without permission;
Haram Aamen: A protected place;
Hareem al-bi'r: The buffer zone around a well;
Haram al-rajul: A man's wife;
Al-Shahr al-haraam: The forbidden month (one of four months in the Islamic calendar);
Hurmah: What is forbidden.

The above-mentioned examples [5] highlight the characteristics of Arabic and the unique way the language carries Islamic concepts with regards to protection of places. An Arabic word is often charged with religious, historic and cultural meanings beyond the face value meaning [6]. Although conservation is practiced in modern times as a secular activity, Islamic dimensions of Arabic words remain relevant when commonly used outside the circles of heritage professionals [2].

2.5 Conservation principles in Arab context

The adoption and implementation in the Arab Region of conservation principles that are rooted in European languages, history and culture, should not be mere literal translations into Arabic words. For such concepts to make sense in the minds of traditional Arab communities, in-depth investigations are required to reconcile them with Islamic values and to find the right Arabic words that express them correctly and meaningfully without conflicting with deep-rooted Arab-Islamic values and concept. The Arab Region has a long history of built heritage conservation. The adoption and implementation of international best practices should take into consideration pre-modern approaches and practices. For example, the waqf system was a formidable mechanism for effective conservation and sustainable management of historic buildings throughout the Arab Region for many centuries [7]. Waqf is an Islamic system of endowment. Accordingly, a founder of a charitable or a religious building integrated the building into a waqf arrangement by allocating the funds to establish a revenue-generating project. The revenue was spent in the maintenance and running costs of the building and in financing all its functions. A waqf arrangement was documented by a waqf deed (waqfeyyah) and legally enforced by Islamic courts. No changes were permitted to be made to a waqf arrangement after its establishment unless approved by the judge and only if the change would enhance the state of conservation of the relevant building and/or improve the efficiency of its functions. According to Islamic law, no one had the power to cancel a waqf or to make changes to its arrangements. Arab-Islamic historic buildings are standing today thanks to the waqf system [8].

3 Modern Eurocentric values

3.1 The modernization process

The modernization process in the Arab Region was difficult and diverse. Some Arab countries like Algeria were modernized by 19th century European colonial powers. Other countries, like the United Arab Emirates were modernized by national elites as late as the 1970s. Whereas Egypt and the Levant were modernized by a mix of both European colonizers and national elites throughout the 19th and 20th centuries. Modernization was also a process of Europeanization or Westernization, which was imposed on the majority by the controlling powerful minority. Hence, modernization was not willingly accepted by the majority. Not only because Western culture and values are alien to the Arab mind, but more importantly because of the image and place of the Arab and the Muslim within the European mindset of the 19th and early 20th centuries, which identified the Arab and the Muslim as “the other”, “what the European is not”, or “a man of inferior culture and abilities”.

3.2 The impact of Orientalism

A huge body of Western literature, visual arts and historical essays developed on the subject of the “Orient” and formed what is commonly known as Orientalism. Orientalism produced a portrait of the “Oriental” people, their culture, manners, arts and architecture, which was often not factual, objective, or sympathetic. The “Oriental” Muslim Arab was often portrayed as a mysterious, aggressive, sensual and superstitious, among other imagined and exaggerated characteristics, which were often inspired by the fantastical stories of *The Arabian Nights* [9].

The modernization of the Arab Region produced national elites who acquired modern education according to European worldview, structure and content. They saw their own peoples, lands, cultures, traditions and values through the Orientalist lens. This elite strove to modernize their communities and peoples according to the European model. They often saw their communities’ premodern traditions and values with embarrassment, dismissing them as “backward”, “not modern”, or “not scientific”. The independence of the Arab countries did not bring better understanding or endorsement of Arab-Islamic values and identity. The European-educated Arab elite replaced European colonizers without essential changes to the educational and legal systems or the state’s institutional structure. Arab independent nation states strove to follow the European model of modern nation states, including their formal cultures, educational systems, institutional structures, and legal systems. Globalization and international mass tourism during the last decades of the 20th century further complicated the situation by creating a big market for shallow views on Arab cultural heritage and its values. The economic benefits from mass tourism encouraged Arab communities and authorities to present to foreign tourists what they expected and were ready to pay for: the “Oriental” image of their cultures [10].

3.3 Orientalist approach to conservation

The process of modernization in the Arab Region instated and formalized Orientalists’ clichés, while producing bad copies of Western modern practices. Meanwhile, there are many indications that traditional Arab values remained prevalent for the majority of populations throughout the Arab Region, even if informal. The result is two-tier societies with Westernized formal attitudes adopted by elites, and traditional

Arab-Islamic attitudes adopted by most Arabs. This duality is strongly manifested in the field of conservation for cultural heritage. For example, historic sabils (drinking water fountains) in historic Cairo have been conserved by restoring the buildings' fabric and discontinuing the function of offering water to the passersby. This attitude was initiated by foreign conservators in the early 20th century and continued after independence by Egyptian conservators up to the present. Historic sabils were parts of waqf arrangements. According to Islamic Law, it is forbidden to discontinue a function that was established by waqf. As far as local communities in historic Cairo are concerned, conservation officials have transgressed on others' rights (i.e. the rights of the founders of restored sabils who established waqf to secure their sustainability) [11].

3.4 Formal-informal duality

For the locals, formally conserved sabils are meaningless structures. While, the function of offering water to passersby is still needed. Offering water to the thirsty is considered by Islam a great act of charity. Therefore, local communities produced, and continue to produce, informal sabils in the form of pots of water or water dispensers in many streets and public spaces in Cairo [11].

Another example of the rift between formal and informal attitudes is the demolition of centuries-old vernacular settlements in the vicinity of ancient archaeological sites and grand monuments with the justification of clearing the context for the benefit of international tourists, with no consideration for the interests or the wellbeing of affected local communities. The World Heritage Site of Thebes and its Necropolis in Egypt witnessed a number of such practices: The old vernacular village of Gourna on the West Bank was partially demolished in 2008 to "protect" the ancient Egyptian tombs throughout the site [12]. Furthermore, in 2019 the vernacular settlement close to Karnak Temple on the East Bank was demolished to clear the path for reconstructing the avenue of sphinxes between Karnak Temple and Luxor Temple. Furthermore, the village of Nazlet Al-Semman was bulldozed in 2018 for being in the vicinity of the Giza Pyramids within the World Heritage Site of Memphis and its necropolis. These practices clash with the Islamic attitude towards peoples' livelihood as opposed to the presentation of historic buildings and sites. As far as local communities in Luxor and Giza are concerned, the authorities have been committing grave injustices in the name of conservation of cultural heritage.

3.5 Deceiving appearances

The modernization process in the Arab Region created a misleading appearance of modern conservation practices that do not seem to be much different than those currently practiced in the West, while the philosophy of conservation behind formal Arab practices remains nineteenth century European in essence, which is not appreciated by local communities, whose majority remain traditional at heart. The adoption and implementation of international best practices should strive to guide Arab conservation professionals and decision makers to rectify this situation.

4 Present challenges

4.1 Causes

The adoption of international best practices in the field of heritage conservation, as outlined by ICOMOS doctrinal documents, in the Arab Region faces many challenges. Most of which, are caused by the modernization process following European examples while ignoring or dismissing centuries of Arab-Islamic traditional philosophy, approaches and practices. It is ironic that European philosophy and practices of conservation have been progressing in the West for decades and continue to progress in line with changes in cultural contexts, while nineteenth century European philosophies and practices continue to be followed religiously in the Arab Region since colonial times. A simple explanation is that European, or Eurocentric, conservation philosophies and practices have always been unrelated to Arab cultural contexts. Therefore, the changes in cultural contexts did not prompt major changes to conservation philosophy or practices. Arab professionals and decision makers have been, and continue to be, consumers rather than producers of conservation philosophy, theory, practices and techniques. The laws, the institutional structures and conservation education and training form a vicious circle that makes the status quo difficult to change. The situation is further complicated by the lack of democracy, aggressive development pressures and the threat of armed conflicts.

4.2 Laws

In most Arab countries, laws on protection and conservation of cultural heritage often go back to colonial times. Today, laws protect “antiquities” or archaeology and single monumental buildings, leaving out vernacular heritage, industrial heritage, historic urban fabric, and cultural landscapes, to name a few categories of the built heritage that have been included within the category of built heritage by ICOMOS over the last few decades. Even when laws are updated or rewritten, they remain out of touch with both international developments in conservation philosophy and traditional Arab-Islamic values.

4.3 Institutional structures

Institutional structures are another colonial legacy that lives up to the present day in many Arab countries. The roles and mandates of different institutions often defy the effective implementation of recently developed concepts such as multidisciplinary approach, participatory conservation, stakeholders’ engagement, authenticity as redefined by Nara and Nara +20, to name a few. Another challenge caused by institutional structures is the dismissal or undermining of traditional Arab-Islamic practices. For example, historic mosques are managed by at least two institutions: Religious aspects are managed by the Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs, while their maintenance and conservation are managed by the Ministry of Culture or the Ministry of Antiquities. Furthermore, the Ministry of Tourism and the Ministry of Interior may be also involved to manage tourists’ visits to a historic mosque. These different ministries often do not fully coordinate their plans or activities.

4.4 Education and training

Education and training in the field of heritage and conservation in the Arab Region prepare specialists with convictions, ideas and skills that are fit for old school approaches, which focus on “antiquities”, single monumental buildings, and archaeological sites. Most conservation specialists in the Arab Region are not trained to deal with other categories of the built heritage. They are not trained to engage local communities or stakeholders. They often dismiss traditional Arab-Islamic values and attitudes as backward or unscientific. As a result, local communities and the general public are often absent from the decision-making process. Hence their lack of interest and low awareness of their heritage and its conservation, which remains an elitist interest. Foreign mass tourism does not help as it further alienates local communities from their own heritage, reducing it to a mere source of financial gain.

5 Towards regional guidelines

5.1 Philosophy and theory

There is a need to revise approaches and attitudes that were established during the modernization process. Colonial legacies should be deconstructed and examined in-depth for suitability of Arab contexts. Definitions, principles, concepts and practices of conservation for cultural heritage should be reconciled with traditional Arab-Islamic worldview, values and concepts should whenever appropriate.

5.2 Arabic language and terminology

Glossaries of Arabic terminology should be developed, discussed and used with careful study of historic, cultural and religious aspects of Arabic concepts and meanings. Local communities and stakeholders will be engaged and empowered only if Arabic is used in all aspects and phases of the conservation and management of their heritage.

5.3 Legislation

Laws protecting the built heritage should be revised with view to endorsing up-to-date concepts, principles, and processes of conservation for cultural heritage. Furthermore, mechanisms for continuously revising and adapting laws and regulations should be put in place in order to accommodate for the continuous development of conservation thought.

5.4 Institutions

The existing formal institutions should be critically analyzed with the view of adapting their aims, mandates and structures to effectively protect, manage and present the built heritage according to the above-mentioned revised philosophy, theory and legislations.

5.5 Education

The right balance should be sought between international development of conservation theory and practice on the one hand, and on the other hand local and national cultural contexts, social needs and traditional Arab-Islamic views.

5.6 Waqf

The waqf system merits to be studied, revised, updated and considered for reconciliation with internationally accepted methods and tools for the conservation and management of the built heritage.

5.7 Geographic, environmental and cultural diversity

Regional guidelines for the Arab Region should be considered high level guidelines that do not override the diverse geographic, environmental and cultural diversity within the region.

5.8 Armed conflicts

The built heritage in the Arab Region is hugely impacted by armed conflicts due to wars or civil unrest. Preparedness, mitigation and risk management plans should be prepared and updated.

6 Conclusions

Effective implementation of ICOMOS doctrinal documents in the Arab Region requires in-depth understanding of traditional Arab-Islamic values and views on conservation for the built heritage. In addition, the impact of modernization following European examples should be carefully analyzed.

The rift between formal and informal attitudes as well as the absence of clear and convincing philosophy for conservation practices in the Arab Region should be addressed and guided by Regional guidelines for ICOMOS doctrinal documents on national and regional levels.

Effective and sustainable changes in the right direction require major changes to the philosophy and theory of conservation, the legislations, Institutional structures, education and training curricula. Careful attention should be paid to Arabic language and terminology, the waqf system, the geographical, environmental and cultural diversity throughout the Arab Region and careful planning and response to risks caused by armed conflicts.

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Building Tradition of the Veps, an Indigenous People in the Russian Karelia

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The Veps is an indigenous people living in the south of Russian Karelia. The term Veps for this indigenous group is comparatively new, from the 1930s. Previous names of the group have been Ves´(water) or Chud (from far away or foreign). From 1931 comes also the use of the Latin alphabet in the Vepsian language. This was later abandoned, during the period when oppression of indigenous people and minorities became harsh in Russia. Many Vepsian villages were subject to extinction campaigns, institutions were closed and people had to leave their homes. The Veps have been moving around the area, partly because they were being pursued and did not feel at home. They felt the need to hide. The triangle between the lakes Ladoga, Onega and Beloj have been their areas. Still today, this indigenous people has low status. Today the Veps live in three areas, north, south and west. These three groups speak their own local variant of the Veps language. The Vepsian language belongs to the Finnish Ugric language group. The Veps are Orthodox Christians.

For a long time I have wanted to visit the Veps and study their building practices. They are an indigenous people. The Sami are an indigenous people living in Scandinavia and Russia, and I have worked for many years in managing the Sami building heritage in Norway. Another reason to visit the Veps is that they use multifunction houses, houses where living part and outbuildings are built together in one building body, as we in earlier days have used it in the Eastern part in the county of Finnmark in Northern Norway. The people of Karelia and The White Sea area have also used such houses. This means that there is a contiguous area with such houses from the eastern part of Northern Norway, through the White Sea area, Karelia and further down south in Russia. The roots of such houses have not yet been shown. Wendland in northern Germany, the area we visited with CIAV in 2016, also had combination houses.

The area I visited was inhabited by the north Veps group. Their villages are located west of the Lake Onega and are about 70 km south of Petrozavodsk. Their main town is Sheltozero (approx. 1000 inhabitants) where also the Vepsian Museum is located.



Sjeltozero, the main city. Written in Veps and in Russian.

This museum was opened in an old building in 1991. This house was built by the Melkinen family in 1819. It has been through major restoration works, most recently in 2013. This Vepians group has 8 – 10 villages located along a main road. Several smaller villages are located by side roads a little away from the main road. The surroundings are characterized by abandoned agriculture and the barns are not in use. The family gardens around the houses with potatoes, apples, cucumber and tomato were in full operation. Some of the village buildings may appear to be in use only during the summer months. The surrounding area is otherwise covered by forest, a mixed forest where conifers are most dominant. The Lake Onega is large, almost an inland ocean. The Veps have chosen to build their village some 100 meters away from the seashore. Only in a few glimpses could I see the water between the trees. The explanation for this is that severe storms can occur and large waves sweep inland. These villages are located at about 61 degrees north latitude and 35 degrees east longitude.



Vepsian residential house with two family units, built together with the outbuilding. The house has two chimneys, one for each unit. The front has four windows, two for each unit. The corner boxes are decorated with squares, which is to symbolize their land.

The houses in the Vepsian area are multifunction houses, the vast majority of them what we call type I. This type has a long building body where the dwelling part is located in the front and the outbuilding in the back. The front of the house is nicely equipped in all parts with decorated windows and solid roof, while the outbuilding part is more simple. The building customs of the Veps are closely related to the customs elsewhere in Karelia. This is a wooden architecture, and the houses are timber log houses, constructed from local timber. In the villages the houses are built on both sides of the road with the gable facing the road. The museum building was also a multifunction house, but of type II. In this type the building body containing the living part is lying alongside the road while the outbuilding part is built perpendicularly on the living part. The outbuilding part of the museum is in use as an exhibition room and assembly hall. A concert was arranged there during our stay.

The entrance to the living area in type I leads through a small entrance building placed in the middle of the long wall. The outbuilding has more entrances, both by a bridge to the barn upstairs and to the cowshed downstairs. The living part has a relatively high base, also constructed of timber. The room in the base serves to stock vegetables. The sill logs of the house are usually placed directly on the ground without any special foundation and are therefore subject to rot. This has resulted in obvious damage to the houses. A houseowner we visited and discussed this matter with, said that it was maybe not tradition to think about these rot injuries. The houses may not be meant to last that long. The timber in the house walls was otherwise densely grown pine of good quality. Timber walls for heat insulation are important here as it is a long winter with many degrees of cold weather.

The interiors of Vepsian and Karelian homes are dominated by large stoves. These are natural stone-lined structures with plastered surfaces. There are several openings into the ovens. They were used both for cooking food, baking bread and for heating. Some ovens also have possibility for connecting a coal-fired samovar to the chimney in the oven. The fireplace is located in the middle of the house so that the chimney is accessible from all the rooms, where there can be placed stoves for room heating. The entrance to the house leads from the entrance building up a short staircase to the hallway between the dwelling and the haybarn. This hallway is at the same level as the living room on the one side and the barn on the other. Under the dwelling is the base and under the barn the cowshed. Some houses may have a double hallway between the parts living and barn.

The use of saunas are also common in the Vepsian tradition. From earlier times the settlements have been grouped along the small rivers flowing through the area. Closest to the river you can find the many small notched saunas, many still in use. Other buildings found at the settlements are light wood shed and notched grain houses. The wood sheds are still in use filled up with nice, split wood, while the grain houses just testify to previous grain cultivation.

Here in the Veps area there were some slightly larger houses, called five-walled houses. The fifth wall divides the multifunction house along the entire length of the house into two family units. The façade facing the road have four windows, two for each of the units. These four windows in the gable towards the road, might according to the museum manager Fateev be a difference between Vepsian and Karelian building practices. Otherwise the houses in Karelia have three or five windows in the gable. Important color combinations in Vepsian culture are red combined with teal. Especially red is an important color. Vepsian culture celebrates some trees as holy, and celebrates a festival in the summer in honor of the trees. The depiction of trees or a symbol of trees are used as a theme for decoration on house facades and in window frames.



Gabledecorations on residential houses. The sacred tree is the main motive

In the village of Sjosja I visited two large, traditional Vepsian houses. These were of the five-wall-type and had two floors. In one of the houses we met the owner Mr Mygatsev with wife and granddaughter. They were harvesting the vegetables in their garden, but took their time to invite for tea and biscuits. They considered themselves being Veps, and the grandparents mastered this language. The granddaughter did not, but on the other hand she spoke some English. Their house was built by the grandfather's grandfather back in 1904. He was himself 84 years old and had had a professional life as a stone driver, while his wife was a doctor. He played Tilt, a traditional stringed instrument, and gave us a small concert. He was a little uncertain about the future of the Vepsian language, but hoped it could be in use still fifty years ahead.

The Vepsian people have had good craftsmen. Carpenters, smiths and masons. However after finding a valuable rock – gabbro diabase – in their area some 150 years ago, their economy turned more towards rock mining, where there was more money to be made. This change led to the loss of traditional craftsmanship. This stone is used for street bodies, bridges, houses and tombstones. The Red Square in Moscow is paved with stone from the Vepsian area. Vepsian craftsmen took part in building the wooden churches on Kihzi, the famous museum island in the Lake Onega.

It is said that these craftsmen built their own churches in their own villages as practice before their big tasks on the Kihzi Island. These churches are still here and are listed on something called Project Russian Silver Necklace / Wooden Architecture Route.



Kitchen cabinets with traditional colors – blue and red – and with traditional squares in the door mirrors



Door to the outbuilding. Traditional bluepainted door with tree recessed battens. These doors are broad and low



The residential street Goristaja in the main village Sheltozero. Several older residential houses are situated here.



Gable toward the road on the house of Mr Mygatsev, a Vepsian residential house, built in 1904



The house of Mr Mygatsev, from the back side with the outbuilding. Mr Mygatsev to the right, my guide and driver Pavel Erokha to the left



Church in the Veps region, in the village of Sjeleiki (Kall)