ICOMOS IRAN
Scientific Committee on Vernacular Architecture
The First Report (Formation of CIAV-IRAN) - Summer 2018
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On the Nature of Vernacular Architecture

Vernacular architecture has been the subject of various, widespread discussions. But what is “vernacular architecture”? In posing this question, we should not overlook the question of architecture itself and take it as granted. If we understand the true meaning of “architecture” the concept of “vernacular” changes accordingly and remarkably, leading us in the direction of the committee’s goals; that is, in its simplest form, the fact that architecture is neither the “architect” nor the “work of architecture”, but the evaluation of how well the human needs and demands adapt to the capacities of the environment.

If we put aside the idea of architecture as buildings or as designing buildings according to the whims of the architect, be it his material or spiritual inclinations, and instead, consider the architect as someone determining people’s material and spiritual needs and exposing hidden and evident opportunities found in nature; someone who makes use of
the materials, substances, light, sound, rhythm, and all such possibilities to meet those needs and demands, then architecture becomes twofold: on the one hand there is the human needs and demands and on the other hand the possibilities the nature has to offer in order to fulfill the mentioned requirements.

The sources on vernacular architecture have mostly focused on this second aspect, in which the environmental means, in the form of vernacular architecture, satisfy the human needs. The reason behind this approach is our ability to exploit the lands, areas and regions and their riches. But we should never forget that man changes when he/she settles in different environments, and thus desire different things.

For instance, the spatial proportions designed for someone living in Bushehr [a southern port in Iran] could differ from those suitable for the inhabitants of more confined cities of central Iran, as they are corresponding to his inherent openness and his vast surroundings. That is why we should not consider a work of architecture only in terms of its form, constructed through the employment of some technical knowledge about the combination of materials. Preserving such a structure could by no means be deemed as preservation of “vernacular architecture”.

What there is, i.e. conditions set by the environment, affects people, shapes their desires and changes their outlook on life. We are all affected by a kind of cultural uniformity, imposed by the media and the huge economic mechanisms behind it. The downside to such uniformity is the loss of all intricacies and subtleties specific to each land, and all the taste and sensitivity there. Despite some attempts to endorse
such uniformity, it is in fact a serious problem, a menace to vernacular architecture. Preserving vernacular architecture as such, means to protect the various lifestyles established in every part of the country, with regard to their characteristics, beauties and intricacies. If we succeed at protecting the content, then the container is saved as well. Preserving vernacular architecture signifies the understanding of the human conditions and its subtleties in each and every region. Just like the economic, material and technological issues, vernacular architecture is extensively complicated. We should primarily attend to the soul of a land rather than its body. Indeed, the focus of the vernacular architecture committee is the soul and they will endeavor to save all aspects of our vernacular regions and ensure their endurance. Today the real threat is neglecting what actually is going on in our various cultural fields. We are embellishing our lands to conform with the taste of the tourists. It is a futile attempt to save the mere form of buildings for the future, just turning them into some sort of a theme park, whereas the next generations do not get to inherit any of their vernacular properties like cuisine, confectionery, accents, dialects and such. That is why the committee should take into account two main issues: The first issue is what we actually consider to be architecture; bearing in mind that it is the needs, the demands, and the environmental capacities that constitute architecture. The other is understanding and acknowledging people, their nature, their qualities, and their subtleties, that prevails in all vernacular regions. If we truly understand these cultural manifestations and study them
carefully, we will see that protecting vernacular architecture, in fact means defending the very right of these regions to exist. It shows our will to let them survive and flourish, not merely embellishing or preserving a dead shell. We must truly empower them to survive and live on.
Formation of CIAV-IRAN

A number of experts and members of ICOMOS Iran submitted a proposal for the establishment of a scientific committee on Iranian vernacular architecture in early 2018. Following the agreement and approval of the board, the committee was officially established in cooperation with some affiliated members and interested individuals. Mr. Siavosh Saberi and Ladies: Afsaneh Jebrielzadeh, Afroz Tahmasebi and Bahareh Allahdadi have participated in establishing the committee. The founder members of the committee hold PhD And MA degrees in architecture and restoration and they have profound professional backgrounds in the field of restoration and urban and architectural management. Due to increasing activities, the committee invited two new members to join the founding team: Ms. Atefeh Amraei and Ms. Zobeydeh Bayat, holders of architectural expertise in the field of “architecture and energy” (MA & PhD candidate).
It took no less than 30 sessions in order to finalize the objectives, approaches, and basic definitions of the committee. The related documents were presented to ICOMOS Iran board and after receiving the approval of the board, statement of establishing of the committee, containing the objectives, approaches, overall plan, and first year plan was issued. The secretariat of the national committee published the announcement in the committee’s website and social networks, and consequently about two hundred individuals showed interest by sending e-mails. At this stage they were kindly asked to inform us that how and in what capacity they would like to cooperate with the committee. To make the process as easy as possible, we provided our audience with prepared forms to fill in. We received about 120 forms and so started our mission. Now the committee has almost the same number of members.

In this phase, ICOMOS Iran Scientific Committee on Vernacular Architecture does not have any special restrictions (i.e. age, education, occupation, etc.) in accepting members. We believe in this, because we also believe that vernacular architecture is fully understood by the presence of all aspect of human life, studied by experts...
from various disciplines, but also with the help of people in direct and deep connection with the forgotten or even neglected aspects of the common lived experience.

Fortunately the diversity of our members in many aspects is in harmony with our belief. To give a few examples, our members’ age is between 24 to over 60 years old. They have a variety of specializations including architecture, architectural restoration, urban restoration, restoration of cultural monuments and they have various professional backgrounds related to the tradition of Iranian architecture, photography, etc. Many of them are holders of BA, MS, and PhD degrees and some of them despite not having any academic background, are among experienced craftsmen. There are faculty members of the universities, among our members, as well as students, and many individuals who are active in public and private sectors.

The enrollment process initiated with the primary identification of volunteers to cooperate with the committee. Since many of them were not members of Iranian cultural institute of ICOMOS, following the committee request, institute approbated gradual admission in order to facilitate the admission process through financial support by means of financial burden reduction, aiming to encourage volunteers' cooperation.

Concurrent with the growth of membership rate, the committee introduced its executive workgroups based on the pre-planned schema and in accordance with its members’ interests and potentials. Subsequent of board’s confirmation of working groups’ topics and agenda, committee engaged in correspondence with all members in regard to the declaration of their preferred workgroup to cooperate and also their proposed timetable for its execution. Correspondingly, three teams
were founded: Studies and research, documentation, monitoring and archiving, and training and promotion. In this step, a detailed agenda of each team is prepared and sent to its members.

Moreover, at this stage, reading materials on the vernacular concept in addition to the translation of some relevant texts and also ICOMOS charter on vernacular architecture were sent to every member. Considering the important role of nomadic architecture in the formation of Persian civilization architecture and in response to the committee chairman's request, a specialized workgroup under the title of nomadic (temporary) architecture was established. The Iranian committee on Vernacular architecture aims to propose this concept through an essay to the ICOMOS, after the documents’ compilation and consolidation.

Within three months of the committee formation, specialized work groups have their priorities to start the cooperation. Studies and research team has sought to identify Persian references in the field of vernacular architecture; documentation, monitoring and archiving team has started to collect relevant documents, and training and promotion team has taken steps to identify enthusiasts to hold scientific meetings with the aim of reviewing those studies and researches which have already been conducted in this field.

On the 6th September 2018, in response to the request of the members, the first meeting of the Scientific Committee on Vernacular Architecture of Iran, took place at the office of the ICOMOS Iran in Tehran, attended by over fifty volunteers, as well as the president and deputy of the institute, number of the committee heads and mass-media reporters. Due to the start of the academic year and the
involvement of members in educational institutions as well as proximity to the cold season and traffic challenges, it was decided that a meeting would be convened as soon as possible, with at least one-third of members’ participation. At the mentioned session and after the speech delivery of head of the ICOMOS IRAN on the concept of vernacular architecture, the officials of the committee elaborated on the formation process, theoretical foundations, the similarity and difference between the concept of “vernacular architecture” and its Persian equivalent, as well as the teams schedule and the quantitative and qualitative analysis of the volunteers’ statistical indicators.

Subsequently, in a collective conversation with the presence of deputy director and members of the committee, the audience's opinions were heard, their suggestions were received and the issues of interest were disputed and finally, the statement of the committee annexed to this report was read, approved, applause and signed by the attendants. Subsequently, a set of the pencil and the booklet (eco-friendly) marked with the ICOMOS logo and committee title was bestowed to each of the participants. In the next few days, an illustrated report was sent to absent members and their statement’s confirmation was received through email.

The committee hopes that, in the event of the support and cooperation of the ICOMOS, ICOMOS IRAN can accomplish its mission on protection and propagation of the humane, scientific and artistic values of vernacular architecture in Iran’s cultural sphere. It is also prepared to provide favorable circumstances for the empowerment of local communities in preserving this community capital and participate in Outstretching of this endeavor at a regional and global scale.
Statistical Analysis of Committee Members’ Attributes - (Up to Sep. 28th 2018)

Number of Members: 114

**Gender**
- Male: 45%
- Female: 55%

**Age**
- 20-30: 30
- 30-40: 35
- 40-50: 15
- 50-60: 10
- 60+: 4

**Degree**
- Non-Graduate: 10
- High school: 15
- Bachelor's Student: 20
- Bachelor's degree: 15
- Master's Student: 10
- Master's degree: 25
- PHD student: 5
- PHD degree: 5

**Committee’s Teams**
- Documentation, Monitoring and Archiving
- Studies and Research
- Training and Promotion
- Nomadic Architecture

IRAN VERNACULAR ARCHITECTURE COMMITTEE - FIRST REPORT
### Statistical Analysis of Committee Members’ Attributes - (Up to Sep. 28th, 2018)

#### Field

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Field</th>
<th>Number</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Architecture</td>
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<tr>
<td>Conservation of Historic Monuments and Urban Fabrics</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban Engineering</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conservation of Cultural Properties</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Archeology</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic Staff and Lecturer</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Researcher</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Photographer</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sculptor and Painter</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Travel Guide</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Occupation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>University Student</th>
<th>Architectural/Urban/Restoration Designer</th>
<th>Academic Staff and Lecturer</th>
<th>Employee</th>
<th>Researcher</th>
<th>Journalist</th>
<th>Photographer</th>
<th>Sculptor and Painter</th>
<th>Travel Guide</th>
<th>Others</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>32</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>7</td>
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<tr>
<td>28.1</td>
<td>27.2</td>
<td>23.7</td>
<td>14.0</td>
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<td>0.9</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>12.3</td>
<td>Percentage</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

IRAN VERNACULAR ARCHITECTURE COMMITTEE- FIRST REPORT
Iranian cultural Geography owes its rich diversity to Iran’s long history, its diverse climate and culture, and continual cultural trade with neighboring and distant cultures and civilizations. In the previous century, uneven development processes, dramatic climate change, and natural and human-caused disasters (defining factors that have to be identified and analyzed) have led to the neglect of this huge cultural, civilizational, and scientific wealth. Consequently, Iranian vernacular architecture heritage has been exposed to severe damage and destruction. With sincere belief in changing and redeeming these unfavorable circumstances, in June 2017 a number of experts and members of ICOMOS Iran proposed to the board to establish the Scientific Committee on Vernacular Architecture in Iran. Following the approval of the board and of ICOMOS Iran, the Scientific Committee was officially formed in July 2018. Experts across the country responded to our official call on ICOMOS Iran web site and its social media outlets for cooperation and expressed their support for the formation of the Scientific Committee.

The committee’s founding board, in consultation with the board of ICOMOS Iran, expounded the concept and meaning of vernacular architecture, including its comparative terminological study and defining concepts in the Iranian civilization.

Subsequently, the committee was properly structured to identify the general areas of regional Iranian architecture, define specialized working groups, and assess the interests of those who are intent on cooperating with the committee nationwide.

In this process, the committee benefited from the cooperation of its colleagues who were responsible for holding workshops and case meetings, as well as compilation of bibliography of Iranian vernacular architecture and research on relevant working institutions in Iran and worldwide.

In the first meeting, which was held at the ICOMOS Iran bureau in Tehran, the members and colleagues of the committee expressed concern regarding the rapid and continued negligence and damage to the unique vernacular architectural heritage of Iran. Believing that it is necessary to make the best use possible of the opportunity created by the establishment of this scientific committee, the members are fully committed to redeem the aforementioned unfavorable circumstances and neglect through initiating a scientific movement to inform popular and scholarly awareness, particularly by educating the general public. The committee hopes that understanding the depth and extent of this cause, as well as proper protection and utilization of strategies, will culminate in continued rich experiences of Iran’s vernacular architecture in the
The Scientific Committee expects government authorities to assume and continue to regard their responsibility in this matter. The committee also hopes that ICOMOS International, as a non-government organization, will offer its support for qualitative development of the cause. The committee also announces its willingness to expand partnership clusters in different regions of Iran, as well as collaboration in international common culture.

First meeting of ICOMOS Iran Scientific Committee on Vernacular Architecture, Tehran-September 6th, 2018
The First Meeting of ICOMOS Iran Scientific Committee on Vernacular Architecture
Tehran, Sep. 6th 2018
(Photo: Khalil Emami)
Scientific Committee on Vernacular Architecture - First report (Formation of CIAV-IRAN)

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