

# TERRA EUROPÆE - EARTHEN ARCHITECTURE IN EUROPE: A PROJECT FOR EARTHEN-ARCHITECTURE AWARENESS

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Abstract

Traditional and contemporary earthen construction can be identified in most European countries. The ecological and sustainable advantages associated with European earthen-building traditions make it a relevant material for construction nowadays. However, despite recent technology, earthen heritage remains fragile and threatened. This is why, this unique heritage and contemporary earthen architecture in Europe deserve to be further acknowledged and supported.

In that aim, a European project was implemented in 2006-2007 making a state of the art of earthen architecture in Europe, particularly in France, Italy, Spain and Portugal. In order to complement these results at the scale of the European Union and to ensure a widest dissemination, the project ‘Terra InCognita – Earthen Architecture in Europe’ was launched from 2009 to 2011. The aims of this last research project were challenging: a scientific publication gathering the contributions of authors from the 27 European Union countries; an updated European Atlas concerning traditional earthen techniques; a scientific exposition and a photography exhibition, a European label, as well as a comprehensive website ([www.culture-terra-incognita.org](http://www.culture-terra-incognita.org)). The research project also initiated the launch of a European network during a symposium held in Marseille (4-6 May 2011).

This paper presents the results of the Terra InCognita project, as well as a reflection concerning the relevancy of this kind of research initiatives, as they can contribute for the advancement of knowledge regarding earthen heritage, as well as the establishment of strategies to protect earthen heritage.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

In the framework of Cultura 2000 – Education and Culture, European Union Programme, a first project named “Terra Incognita – Conservation of European Earthen Architecture” was approved and implemented in 2006-2007. The project provided a general state of the art concerning earthen architecture, particularly in Italy, France, Spain and Portugal. A referenced publication was edited with two scientific books focused on discovering and preserving a common heritage (Guillaud, 2008) (1).

With the conclusion of the project, it became relevant to complete an assessment of the state of art of earthen architecture in the European Union, but also to promote initiatives to raise public awareness for earthen architecture, its heritage and its current applications. These aims provided the need for the development of a new project untitled “Terra InCognita – Earthen Architecture in Europe”. The project was approved in the framework of Cultura Programme 2007-2013. It started in November 2009 and was completed in October 2011. The project leader was

École d’Avignon (France) and its project partners: Escola Superior Gallaecia (Portugal), University Polytechnic of Valencia (Spain), University of Florence (Italy) and CAUE - Adviser in Architecture, Urban Planning and Environment of Vaucluse (France).

The principal aims of this new Terra InCognita project were restructured for a profounder and richer impact and a real contribution to knowledge. Therefore, the project was organized in three complementary stages of work: a Scientific axis; an Educational and Dissemination axis; and a Networking axis.

## 2. SCIENTIFIC AXIS

To integrate scientific procedures into the research project, it was fundamental to define a more accurate methodology of work, with more consistent and systematic outcomes. This was possible due to different undertakings:

### 2.1. Scientific missions

The institutional partners undertook scientific missions to the 27 countries of the European Union in 2009 (the starting year of the project). Their assignments were: i) The definition of a state-of-the-art earthen architecture, in terms of available expertise regarding earthen heritage and contemporary architecture, conservation and related training, education and academic research, professionals and producers, etc. ii) To identify accurate earthen-heritage data in order to establish an up-to-date cartography of each country. iii) To identify key contacts (experts and institutions) contributing to earthen-architecture awareness regarding national and European networks.

### 2.2. Comprehensive questionnaire

Prior to their missions, partners prepared a comprehensive questionnaire that circulated throughout European contacts, with the assistance of National and International ICOMOS Committees. This questionnaire was designed to identify key actors in architecture and conservation of earthen-architectural heritage in each country, as professional categories or joint sectors. It also aimed to identify the state of the art of the earthen-materials industry in Europe today.

### 2.3. Scientific publication

Terra Europae: Earthen Architecture in the European Union is a scientific publication dedicated to selected outcomes of the two years of research. The book's content starts with a photography overview, followed by 27 articles from 47 authors from all of the European Union countries, overviews of seven European regions, and to complement this extensive and inclusive publication, cartography of European earthen-architectural heritage in 2011. An intensive and valued teamwork generated maps and texts from the selected regions. The outcomes were systematically and consistently combined to create a relevant overview of the state of the art of earthen architecture in Europe (Correia et al., 2011) (2).

### 2.4. European Atlas of Earthen Architecture

As a result of the scientific missions, an accurate cartography was developed and verified by at least three to four experts from each country. The European atlas brought some clarity to the presence of earthen architecture in common geographic areas of the European regions.

## 3. EDUCATIONAL AND DISSEMINATION AXIS

Improving educational knowledge, raising awareness for the recognition of earthen architecture and providing information regarding earthen architecture in each European country defined this axis.



Fig.1 *Terra Europae* publication (editors: Correia, Dipasquale and Mecca, 2011)

### 3.1. European symposium

Project findings were presented on the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> of May 2011 at the Hôtel de Région Provence-Alpes-Côte d’Azur in Marseille, France during the European symposium organized by Terra Incognita partners and ICOMOS France. The first day was dedicated to the outcomes of the European research project and the second day, organized by ICOMOS France, was committed to earthen-architecture preservation. 37 speakers, representing European experts and researchers, discussed the theme “Building with earth: from cultural heritage to contemporary architecture”. An overview of earthen architecture in Europe was addressed from heritage and its conservation through material innovation and its contemporary application. All were embedded in wider issues, such as education and training, economic development of the industry, and earthen-architecture regulations. The symposium received 160 participants, representing 23 countries, from which 17 were European Union countries. Digital proceedings of the symposium were also prepared and distributed during the event (École d’Avignon and ICOMOS France, 2011) (3).

### 3.2. Website

The website (<http://www.culture-terra-incognita.org>) has become an important tool for contact. Initially, the aim was a simple page for dissemination, but through the project, it became a platform for communication and contribution of all the findings: availability of photos from each European country (under ‘Photo Gallery’); download of the scientific exposition; access to questionnaires; reports per country of each scientific mission (key people identified; key institutions identified; key



Fig.2 *Terra Europae* chapter on regional approaches (editors: Correia, Dipasquale and Mecca, 2011)

people contacted; sites identified; sites visited; contributors to cartography; notes), information concerning the European symposium; data regarding European Label; etc.

3.3. European label

The Award for ‘Outstanding Earthen Architecture in Europe’ was a distinctive recognition of earthen-architectural quality. Three categories were established: 1) Buildings with archaeological, historical or architectural interest; 2) Buildings subjected to a remarkable and relevant intervention (restoration, rehabilitation or extension); and 3) Buildings built after 1970. The initiative received a considerable number of candidacies from 15 European countries. An international jury of nine members appointed by ICOMOS ISCEAH (International Scientific Committee on Earthen Architectural Heritage) and the different project partners awarded the label to 42 European buildings. The award initiative brought an insightful perspective of the existent earthen-architectural heritage, significant earthen-architectural heritage interventions and contemporary earthen architecture.

3.4. Scientific exposition

An important contribution was made by a scientific exposition with an educational and academic purpose. The exposition was developed based on the findings of each European region. Additionally, an important illustrated overview of the variety of European earthen-building cultures enhanced the exposition. This synopsis was most relevant to understand the contribution of each region to the diversity of earthen architecture in Europe. The exposition is itinerant and will be exhibited in several European countries. It is also available for free download, on the Terra InCognita project website.

3.5. Photographic exhibition

Another input was developed through the conception of a photographic exhibition. The synopsis results emerged from a photographic campaign of earthen architecture in the four countries representing the Terra Incognita partners: France, Italy, Portugal and Spain. From June to September 2010, the Belgian



Fig.3 Atlas of earthen architectural heritage in the European Union, from *Terra Europae* book (editors: Correia, Dipasquale and Mecca, 2011)

photographer, Pierre Buch, travelled through Normandy and the southwest of France, Andalusia and Castile in Spain, Alentejo in Portugal, and Piedmont in Italy. The photographic campaign revealed his search for the art of building long forgotten or overlooked. The selected images are the subject of an itinerant exhibition composed of 20 images focusing on public awareness.

3.6. Booklets for general dissemination

Two booklets were also published contributing to the general dissemination of earthen architecture. The first was a photography catalogue, *A photographer's look at earthen architecture – Terre en vues: Regard d'un photographe sur l'architecture de terre* (Buch, 2011). It presented an overview of Pierre Buch's photographic exhibition. The second booklet concerned the Label catalogue dedicated to the 42 awarded structures, selected and recognized as Outstanding Buildings for their architectural quality (CAUE de Vaucluse, 2011) (4).

4. NETWORKING AXIS

To strengthen the existing partnership and to extend it to a national and European platform for knowledge exchange were the main aims of this stage.

On the 6<sup>th</sup> of May 2011, following the Symposium, a formal reunion was organized by the project partners to focus on the launching of a European network on earthen architecture. Participants attending the meeting represented 18 European countries: Belgium, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Spain, Sweden, Turkey and UK. The 80 participants present in this first meeting recognized the importance of

launching a European Federation or Association. This could well sustain the work of research and reflection undertaken by the project, and ensure in the long term, an exchange of knowledge and experience in preservation and new construction, as well as earthen-architecture standards and regulations. This structure will encourage an intensification of professional and scientific exchange, and the sharing of technical expertise and joint projects dedicated to earthen architecture.

Scientific missions confirmed that the actors in earthen construction wanted to unite efforts and energy to contribute to the development of a European-level sector. As a result, professionals, researchers and interested people contacted during the scientific mission chose to keep in contact and attend the European meeting on the 6<sup>th</sup> of May 2011.

The visit of the project partners during the scientific missions had a definite impact regarding the creation of national informal and formal networks. This was the case, for instance, for Belgium and Hungary. The result of this work exceeded the goals that the project set. It has since led to identify the needs and expectations of the experts, predicting that similar missions might be assigned to a future European structure concerned with earthen architecture.

5. CONCLUSION: OVERALL CONTRIBUTION

The project findings were relevant for the state of the art of earthen architecture in Europe. Also, it brought together experts who, until then, believed there were a few that were interested in earthen architecture in their country. The project contributed to create awareness for each European Union country's heritage and an inspiration to start research, to go beyond and to discover an unrevealed earthen-architectural heritage.

Notes

- (1) This publication was made possible through the contribution of a Scientific Committee and an Editorial staff established within the project partnership: CRATerre-ENSAG (France), École d'Avignon (France), Università degli Studi di Firenze - Facoltà di Architettura (Italy), Escola Superior Gallaecia (Portugal), Universidad Politécnica de Valencia - Escuela Técnica Superior de Arquitectura (Spain).
- (2) This publication was made possible through the contribution of a scientific committee and an editorial staff established within the Terra InCognita's partnership: École d'Avignon (France), Conseil d'Architcture d'Urbanisme et de l'Environnement (CAUE) de Vaucluse (France), Università degli Studi di Firenze - Facoltà di Architettura (Italy), Escola Superior Gallaecia (Portugal), Universidad Politécnica de Valencia - Escuela Técnica Superior de Arquitectura (Spain).
- (3) Proceedings of the symposium held in Marseille, 4 and 5 May 2011. This publication on CD-Rom was made possible through the contribution of a Scientific and Editorial Committee established within the Terra InCognita's partnership and ICOMOS France "Earth Working Group".
- (4) The publication was made possible through the contribution of a Scientific and Editorial Committee established within the Terra InCognita's partnership.

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Fig.4 European label (booklet) (credits: CAUE de Vaucluse 2011)

The research project also provided the opportunity to identify European institutional partners for future research and consultancy, for professional projects or networking. It brought acknowledgment of other experts, academics and professionals involved in the field and a real interest for national collaboration and European networking. This will result in more coordinated efforts to establish research projects and continued scientific research responding to actual challenges.

It is undeniable that the outcome that the Terra Incognita research project brought was an important contribution to knowledge. This was possible due to the general commitment of the project partners; due to their perseverance to carry through the project and to present more results than the initial aims and, especially, due to their demand for higher quality and exceptional results.

The involvement of all the authors, key contacts and key institutions made this project a reality with relevant findings, which definitely made a difference.