

## CIVVIH IS TWENTY YEARS OLD

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Round anniversaries should always be treated very carefully. We, Hungarians very well know that the millennium of our ancestors' conquest of the Carpathian Basin was celebrated in 1896, with great splendour, despite of the fact that, according to historians, the conquest had been a year earlier. The reason is very simple: the great, national exhibition for the millennium had not been ready on time. It is also known that the Greek would have liked to celebrate the centenary of the modern-time Olympic Games in 1996 in Athens but Atlanta shamefully outrivaled Athens. However, I think next year there will be some sort of a commemoration at the first Olympic Games of the third millennium.

Today we are celebrating the 20-year-anniversary of the establishing the ICOMOS International Committee on Historic Towns and Villages. However, one can wonder whether or not it is rightful to celebrate it today. It was on the 12<sup>th</sup> of December, 1982, that the Executive Committee of ICOMOS decided on the foundation of an international scientific committee for the protection of historic towns, and also, that the headquarters of this committee should be in Hungary, in the historic town of Eger. The committee was given as its first task to compile the charter on the protection of historic towns as soon as possible. It is a lifelong honour for me that I was entrusted with organizing the committee and being its first president with managing the compiling of the charter.

By the eighties it became obvious that ICOMOS needs such an international committee. After the organization had been created in 1965, such committees, working in the various, important special fields of monument protection, were created but at that time they were not so much inflated as nowadays, when the Executive Committee assents to creating new ones upon the suggestions of the national committees – in my opinion – unbridled. The 1982 decision had its antecedents. Professor Ian Zachwatowicz, founding member of ICOMOS and one of the signatories of the Venice Charter, had earlier been entrusted to organize the international committee dealing with historic towns, but this was crossed by his death. The question had been adjourned for years.

It was at the 1981 Executive Committee meeting (at those times there was only one EC meeting a year) that the question was taken up again. The EC decided to tender the national committees, which of them undertakes operating the committee, and what kind of a building they can provide to serve as the headquarters of it. Four countries applied, and the EC found ours to be the most suitable one. And as the Hungarian national committee – having agreed with the then-time first men of the town, and taking into consideration their promised sponsoring which is observed up to the present – suggested the town of Eger to house the headquarters of CIVIH (as this became the abbreviation of the name of the committee), so this is how this beautiful town became the seat of it.

The year 1983 was spent with assembling the committee, but meanwhile drafting the Charter was also going on, partly with the participation of Hungarian experts, and partly through correspondence. According to the then-time rules the number of members was limited to be ten – this is the predecessor of the present Bureau - as the town of Eger undertook hosting ten persons, and does so up to the present. The national committees suggested excellent experts. Ales Vosahlik from Prague, a timid man of great learning, who unfortunately deceased early, and the always serious Heimo Widtmann bore the brunt of the activity. Joviality was provided for by the nice Bulgarian Tzvetana Polihronova, who was always so much late that when she arrived we knew the excursion could set off. José Manuel Valcarcel-Gonzales from Toledo would not have done anything without his wife, and though he was already over seventy, once he came to Eger for only half a day, because he got a message that he had to return home. Walter Jamieson from Canada rarely took off his rucksack, and Daryl Fowler from Britain, one of the professional bulwarks of the committee, our vice-president who recently died young, was interested in everything, even in the gender sex. Professor Urbano Cardarelli from Naples, who perhaps did the most for compiling the Charter, is also not alive any more. No inaccurate adjective was left undiscovered by the slightly blue-stocking Jamila Binous from Tunis. It was a good team, it was a pleasure to work together.

The first meeting of the committee was held between 26-30 March 1984 in Ráckeve, not far from Budapest, regarding the fact that the restoration work of the Eger headquarters was still going on. Michel Parent, the then-time president of ICOMOS participated in the meeting. Naturally, the main topic was the debate about the Charter, drafting of which advanced a lot. It would be long to enumerate all the stages of the birth of this important document between 1984-

1987, which was finally adopted in 1987 in Washington, but these were Eger, Verona, Graz, Toledo and Paris. Maybe the text, which I finally submitted at the 8<sup>th</sup> Congress of ICOMOS is not the best possible one, and the then-time committee wanted something better, but such is the fate of Charters. Life and practice has proved that experts on monument preservation and town-planning consider it to be operative and exemplary up to the present day.

I have to point out two further things in the life of the committee. One of them is, that it had from the very beginning been our endeavour to deal not only with historic towns, but also with historic settlements in general, that is, with villages as well. For some reason or other president Michel Parent was much against it. Then, when in 1990 Roland Silva became president of ICOMOS, disapproval turned into support, and the 1992 statutes already mentions villages too within the name of the committee, that is how, according to the French word “village” another “V” was added to the abbreviation of CIVVIH.

The other important change was brought about by the so-called Eger Principles, that is by the guidelines regarding the ICOMOS international scientific committees. The fact, that when the direction of ICOMOS decided that new directives were needed so that these committees would work according to uniform principles, and ICOMOS accepted the suggestion of the Hungarian national committee for the expert meeting drafting them take place in the Eger headquarters of CIVVIH, is also related to CIVVIH working in Eger. The Eger Principles have been operative since 1991, which fact also contributes to help experts on monument preservation all over the world know that such a Hungarian town exists, even if they had never visited it. These guidelines contain provisions about the number of members of scientific committees. According to it, the number of members cannot be fixed – each ICOMOS member country can have one voting member on the committee and an unlimited number of associate members. This new structure had of course greatly changed the operational framework of our committee, as the number of members have considerably increased.

This heartening phenomenon had left its mark on the work of CIVVIH in several respects. While in the first ten years it was natural that the annual meetings were held in Hungary, and after the restoration of the building of the headquarters was finished, in Eger, besides the special meetings on the occasion of ICOMOS Congresses only one meeting was held somewhere else – in Plovdiv, Bulgaria – , in the second ten years five meetings were held somewhere else. This fact indicates the growing interest about the activity of the committee.

ICOMOS is a democratic organization. One of the evidences of this fact is that not anyone can be president for more than three periods, that is nine years. I think I can consider it as an appreciation of Hungary and Eger, that in 1992 the committee elected president a Hungarian expert again – Tamás Fejérdy. Regarding the above it was logical, that, with the next three periods again finished, it should be another country the president is from. Last year, on the island of Korfu, it was the always jovial Ray Bondin from Malta, someone who had already been a member for a long time, who was elected president by the committee.

None of the founding fathers and mothers of twenty years ago are voting members by now. Not even Tamás Fejérdy, as at that time he was not a member, but the scientific secretary of the committee. This is something natural, as all societies have to be continuously refreshed. However, while tomorrow the ICOMOS International Scientific Committee on Historic Towns and Villages will consider the tasks of the future at its working session, I believe, casting a glance on the past may not have been a waste of time.