

TERRA INCOGNITA

EARTHEN ARCHITECTURE IN EUROPE

Project Leader



Ecole d'Avignon, France

Partnership



Università degli Studi di Firenze, Italy



Universitat Politècnica de València (UPV), Spain



Escola Superior Gallaecia (ESG), Portugal



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Terra Europae

Earthen Architecture in the European Union

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Foreword

Patrice Morot-Sir, Marie Chabenat,
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The book that you now hold in your hands is the fruit of work accomplished over two years. A publication that could ultimately be fairly standard, the expected, indeed conventional product resulting from a programme of European cooperation is yet in its content, quite unique: it is the first time that a snapshot of earthen architecture is presented in a synthetic and analytical form at an European Union level.

The value, the vitality and the technical nature of this heritage are embodied. The almost universal techniques and construction methods, guided by the availability of materials, by the aim of construction and then shaped by a workforce with a knowledge enlightened by practice, all demonstrates that while there is already an economic Europe, and while the attempt is being made to build a political Europe, there is already a Europe of earthen architecture.

The qualities of earthen architecture are located today at the heart of "sustainable building and living". It arose from a forgotten constructive method, ignored and discredited as an "old-fashioned" method of construction. Being able at this moment in history, to review the nature of European heritage, to take an inventory, distinguishing it from new construction and stemming from new constructive methods was a great chance.

Thus, in the beginning to map out earthen architectural heritage, we discover the vigour of the world of earthen construction, a world promoted by associations, research organisations, construction professionals, architects, producers, standard setters, residents, etc., and if there is a universality of earthen architecture in Europe, there is, conversely, a huge disparity in the manner of considering it, regenerating it, and returning it to the centre stage. This picture of earthen architectural heritage in Europe is indeed the result of

the work accomplished during the two years of the project "Terra [In]cognita". Created by a team of professionals, researchers, and ultimately friends united by a common vision of architectural heritage, by an awareness of the value of earthen architecture and a desire to return its value to the general public. This awareness was already present at the publication of the book "Discovering European Earthen Architecture" in 2008. But beyond our working group, the present publication would not have been possible without the availability and merit of the people we met during our various missions in Europe. They are all to be thanked. This book will try to convey the richness of earthen architectural, its physical, material, and objective richness. However it would be difficult to convey the wealth of meetings held all over Europe. Such meetings were occasionally very formal and organized but were also often made at random chance that guided us on the path in search of heritage sometimes hidden, sometimes forgotten, yet always present.

We have not lost sight that it is a question of architecture that structures the countryside and draws the framework of life. We have thus entrusted some territories to a professional photographer, whose sensitive eye reveals the life in the architecture, going well beyond the simple subject, even though built of earth. This vision that Pierre Buch gives us acts as a perfect counterpoint to our analytical work.

Beyond the work of the researcher, we draw a primary vision of what could be a network of earthen construction in Europe. It is certainly well past the time to build networks with the sole idea of getting together and being counted.

If it is commonplace to say that we are building today the heritage of tomorrow, this evidence is even greater for earthen architecture.