

## **Buenos Aires Annual General Assembly 3-6 December Newsletter Report**

I have previously been to three ICOMOS **Triennial** General Assemblies in recent years but this was my first time in attending one of the smaller **Annual** General Assemblies latterly necessitated by French Charitable Law. Six members of ICOMOS-UK attended the General Assembly, five of whom shared a lunch on Tuesday 4 December in the grounds of the National Museum of Decorative Arts of Buenos Aires, this being the first ICOMOS General Assembly to be held in South America. Chris Underwood, Secretary of the Shared Heritage International Scientific Committee (ISC) is resident in Buenos Aires, and was able to join us. A total of about 150 international delegates attended at the centre of an urban area with a population of 18 million.

The venue of the first two days was a former eighteenth-century convent that had been converted into the Cultural centre of the Recoleta area of Buenos Aires. The ICOMOS Board meeting took place on Monday 3 December as delegates were registering for the Assembly. The convent is attached to what is often considered the top tourist attraction of Buenos Aires: the walled cemetery of Recoleta. The Argentinian elite of the nineteenth and early twentieth century are buried here in long streets of one and two storey classical, gothic, Art Nouveau & Art Deco Tombs. The great British influence in Argentina is evident in one huge early nineteenth-century iron obelisk cast in 1825, early grills at the entrance were cast in Kirkintilloch. The much smaller scale of the ICOMOS annual assemblies (perhaps one-tenth the attendance of the triennial general assemblies) does allow much greater interaction between delegates, the ICOMOS Board, and officers.

The following morning, the second day of the Congress, there were ICOMOS regional meetings covering Africa, the Arab States, the Asian/Pacific Region, Europe and the Americas. I represented ICOMOS-UK in attending the European regional Meeting chaired by ICOMOS vice-president Grellan Rourke (ICOMOS-Ireland) with 40 delegates attending and the meeting starting at 8 a.m. as happened on successive days. A main part of a very positive discussion reviewed the considerable success of the year of European Cultural Heritage including an important joint project with the European Union designed to ensure that all future EU-funded projects maintain high standards of conservation. Two very enthusiastic emerging professionals gave reports on their activities to the committee which were well received. All ICOMOS Committees are now obliged to support the activities of emerging professionals. ICOMOS-Spain has now been reformed and re-activated and was warmly welcomed back to the regional group. The President of ICOMOS-Ireland, Gráinne Shaffrey, approached me to say how keen she and her colleagues were that our neighbouring ICOMOS organisations should work together and possibly hold a joint conference on a suitable topic. There was a suggestion by ICOMOSs Norway, Denmark, Iceland, Ireland and the UK that Viking Heritage might be an appropriate subject for 2019. There was much interest in exchanging ideas on our regional issues and friendship at the same time.

For those not attending the first sessions there were visits to 'El Molino', a large and striking Art Nouveau Restaurant building in ferro-concrete which had fallen into dereliction. It was next to the impressive Palace of Congress parliamentary capitol building which had prompted the purchase of the adjacent Molino building and the preparation of a restoration programme.

The latter part of the morning was occupied with a relatively new type of session (in fact the second held) of the meeting of the 'national committees' in the gothic former chapel of the old convent which has been refurbished with raked seating. This was followed by a revue of annual reporting procedures. There was some talk of the need to cease any three-yearly reporting by national committees which should be totally replaced by annual reporting which could be used for both international and national purposes. There had been a hope that well-established national

committees would form links with, & mentor, newly established national committees but there was little evidence that this had been done. The ICOMOS secretariat had been establishing which National Committees were defunct, or largely inactive, but were finding it difficult to obtain adequate information from National Committees.

There was a parallel session organised in the morning exhibiting the work of emerging professionals in the field of Sustainable Development. Much of the success of this initiative being due to emerging professionals themselves enthusiastically running the initiative. It had been decided that there should be no upper age limit on this group but rather that the definition should depend on the stage of an individual's career in conservation issues.

As Secretary-General of the International Committee for the Conservation of the Industrial Heritage (TICCIH), which has a Memorandum of Understanding with ICOMOS, I had a lunch-time meeting with two of the ICOMOS vice-presidents – Grellan Rourke & Laura Robinson (Honorary Treasurer, ICOMOS-South Africa) to discuss the continuance and expansion of the joint two-year action plan between ICOMOS and TICCIH. I was accompanied by fellow ICOMOS-UK member Miles Oglethorpe who is President of TICCIH.

In the afternoon there was a meeting of the Scientific Council with reports from the various International Scientific Committees (ISCs). I've been on the advisory-panel of the new Industrial Heritage ISC (IH ISC) since it was formed at the Florence General Assembly in 2016. Its bye-laws of operation were approved by the Scientific Council and passed onto the Advisory Committee (ADCOM) and then the General Assembly for approval. It was later passed by both these institutions and there will be a call for members, the appointment of officers, and the start of a workplan in the coming year,

In the evening there were drinks amongst the striking composite sculptures of the Argentinian artist Hernán Dompé and then a meal in the beautiful gardens in front of the protected classical façade of the Palacio Duhai, now the Hyatt Hotel.

The morning of the third day of the meeting started with a clear and very well structured explanation of the World Heritage process by a succession of authorities very well versed in each stage of the subject. The venue had changed to the Alliance Française at the more central location of Belgrano. It was followed by a further meeting of the emerging professionals.

In the afternoon was the official opening of the congress and the beginning of the Advisory Committee's work in reviewing the business referred to it from the Regional Group Meetings, the Scientific Council and the National Committees Meeting.

The following morning was the General Assembly with a financial report from the Honorary Treasurer, Laura Robinson. The ICOMOS President's Report by Toshiyuki Kono (ICOMOS-Japan) had been circulated earlier. The resolutions earlier examined in the Advisory Committee were largely passed with some lively discussion. This resulted in a complex resolution largely on management procedures, including a proposal to form an ad-hoc committee to examine the annual budget, being dropped as too restrictive. Patricia O'Donnell (ICOMOS-USA) proposed that ICOMOS should facilitate receiving donations and building an endowment scheme in addition to solely using income derived from subventions from the National Committees and sections. It had earlier been made clear that the Secretariat in Paris had appointed an extra member of staff whilst at the same time recognising that some National Committees were having difficulties paying their dues. A motion from the Americas Regional Group asking that Spanish be made an official language of ICOMOS was amended to one making Spanish a third working language of ICOMOS.

The Advisory Committee then reconvened for a further session during which elections were held for officers of the National & Advisory Committees and the Scientific Council. Voting on the composition of the latter was restricted to the ISCs & the National Committees officer elections were uncontested. As Vice-President of ICOMOS-UK I was able to act on behalf of the President in casting a vote in the contest of the two candidates standing for the post of President of the ICOMOS Advisory Committee. Mikel Landa of ICOMOS-Spain, and President of the Wood ISC, was elected President of the ICOMOS Advisory Committee and Douglas Comer (ICOMOS-USA) was voted in as vice-President. Sheridan Burke & Christian Gustaffson were elected to join the Existing officers of the Advisory Committee while Deidra McDermott continues as an officer.

The classical Teatro Colon in Buenos Aires is a world famous opera house with a seven storey stack of boxes in its 2,500 seat capacity auditorium. Delegates were fortunate enough to be able to attend a stunning rendition of 'Pictures at an Exhibition' by the Buenos Aires Philharmonic Orchestra on Thursday evening.

On Friday 7 December, Day 5 of the congress, the Scientific Symposium was held in the city of La Plata with its huge cathedral, claimed to be the largest of the twentieth century. The subject was 'Sustainability: Cultural Heritage and Sustainable Development'. A highlight two very successful 'brainstorming' or 'Knowledge Café' sessions which clearly showed the collective expertise of the assembled delegates to advantage. The first was on 'Indicators for Sustainable Heritage Management in Historic Urban Landscapes' co-led by ICOMOS-UK member Linda Shetabi. The second, which I attended was Patricia O'Donnell (ICOMOS-USA) & Christophe Rivet's (ICOMOS-Canada) ground-breaking seminar examining the continuing economic function of Cultural Landscapes.

The meeting concluded with a visit and reception at Le Corbusier's Casa Curutchet which exhibits both his earlier 'five principles' and his 1940s use of modular construction. However, Alfredo Conti of ICOMOS Argentina noted that the privacy for a doctor's use and the lack of thermal insulation made the building hard to use in both winter and summer. But the originality of the architectural concept was impressive.

Stephen Hughes

Vice-President ICOMOS-UK.