



Customs House, Port of Thessaloniki

ICOMOS TheoPhilos ISC Conference
Authenticity from a European Perspective:
30 Years of the Nara Document on Authenticity
Thessaloniki, Greece, November 28-29, 2024
Multi-purpose Cultural Venue "Islahane", Thessaloniki

Conference Organisers:

ICOMOS International Scientific Committee for the Theory and Philosophy of Conservation and Restoration

ICOMOS
THEOPHILOS
international council on monuments and sites

Hellenic Ministry of Culture, General Directorate for Anastylis, Museums, and Technical Works, Service of Modern Monuments and Technical Works of Central Macedonia



1. Issues of the Conference

In 2024, heritage conservators commemorate the anniversaries of the preparation of two very important doctrinal documents – the 60th anniversary of the adoption of the Venice Charter (1964) and the 30th anniversary of the adoption of the Nara Document on Authenticity (1994). Both documents have fundamentally shaped the theory of conservation and remain a point of reference for heritage protection.

The Venice Charter is a policy document for the entire protection of monuments, containing, for example, universal definitions of conservation interventions, while the Nara Document on Authenticity concerns a single heritage parameter: authenticity. Despite their different nature, the two documents are interrelated – the Venice Charter identifies authenticity as an important parameter of heritage, and the Nara Document emphasises the importance of the Venice Charter programme. Therefore, the two documents complement each other and their content should be analysed together.

The ISC TheoPhilos organised a scientific conference in Florence in March 2024 titled *Venice at 60: Doctrinal Documents in the Protection of Cultural Heritage*. The conference presentations focused on the analysis of the Venice Charter, the interpretation of its provisions and the assessment of its continuing validity. In the discussion, authenticity was repeatedly referred to as a problem that requires deeper analysis and elaboration. Therefore, the autumn conference of the ISC TheoPhilos, which will be held in Thessaloniki, is entitled *Authenticity from a European Perspective - 30 Years of Nara Document on Authenticity*.

One of the aims of the Nara Document was to broaden the understanding of the concept of authenticity. This was due to the need to take into account the specificity of non-European heritage, as nominated for the UNESCO World Heritage List. The Nara Document broadens and relativises the understanding of authenticity by stating that it should be evaluated contextually, in light of the specific cultural setting. It also enumerates the aspects through which authenticity can be analysed and evaluated. The Nara Document has been adopted as the basis for assessing authenticity in the UNESCO World Heritage system, although no formal method for analysing authenticity has been developed (only a descriptive Statement of Authenticity).

The broadening and relativisation of the notion of authenticity has also brought about certain risks. On the conventional understanding of conservation (as exemplified in the Venice Charter), authenticity is the basic parameter that determines the scientific, historical, artistic and cultural value of heritage. The lack or diminution of authenticity has a negative impact on these values – in extreme cases, heritage is devoid of them.

The close relationship between heritage values and authenticity means that the study of authenticity should be a very important element in the assessment of the state of heritage conservation and planned interventions (conservation, adaptation, modernisation). Therefore, there is a need for a methodology for analysing the authenticity of heritage – a methodology that allows for the assessment of the authenticity of a monument in the context of various values, indicate systems/measures of authenticity assessment, and ways of monitoring authenticity.

The scope of European heritage is very large and diverse. There is also significant pressure in Europe to transform heritage and adapt it to modern functions and standards. These actions seriously threaten the preservation of the authenticity and value of heritage. Therefore, there is an urgent need to develop analytical methods for assessing authenticity, taking into account the conditions of protection and the specificity of heritage in Europe.

The discussion on the authenticity of heritage and the methods of its analysis will allow for the development of conclusions that will help in assessing the validity and possibility of further use of both the Venice Charter and the Nara Document on Authenticity.

2. Aims and thematic scope of the conference

The aim of this conference is to comprehensively discuss the concept of authenticity in the context of the theory and practice of heritage protection in Europe.

The conference will address three groups of problems (in 3 sessions):

1. The Concept of Authenticity as an Element of Conservation Theory /theory/
2. The Analysis of Authenticity in Heritage Protection /methodology/

3. Authenticity as a Parameter in Conservation Practice – Critical Analysis of Examples /practice/

We hope that the conference will be a forum for exchanging views and shaping opinions for many international and national ICOMOS bodies. We invite representatives of all the International Scientific Committees and National Committees of ICOMOS to join us to discuss the current interpretation and use of the notion of Authenticity in heritage protection.

3. Organisational information

Submission of abstracts for proposed papers is via this web form: <https://forms.gle/SpuvK8UWNxGvG7Tk7>. Proposal abstracts will be limited to 2,500 characters (around 300 words), and you will be asked to indicate the session (1, 2 or 3) within which you suggest your paper would be presented. The deadline for submissions is **15 September 2024**.

The choice of papers to be presented at the conference will be made by reviewers appointed by the Organizing Committee of the conference. Authors of the submitted papers will be informed of the decision of the reviewers by **30 September 2024**.

Please note that presentations are limited to **15 minutes**.

Following the conference, the proceedings will be published in a peer-reviewed scientific journal [Protection of Cultural Heritage](#), published by ICOMOS Poland, ICOMOS ISC TheoPhilos, and the Lublin University of Technology. [Submission information for authors](#).

The Organisational Committee
ICOMOS ISC Theory and Philosophy of Conservation and Restoration
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[Click HERE to submit your proposal](#)



General view of Thessaloniki

About Thessaloniki

Situated in the north of Greece, next to the sea and on the intersection of major land and maritime routes, Thessaloniki is the country's second-largest city, with a population of just over a million. The city is notable for its long history. It was founded in 315 BC, by King Cassander, after his wife, Thessalonike, half-sister of Alexander the Great. From there, it developed into a seat of government in late Roman times, the most prominent city after Constantinople in the Byzantine era, and a major civic center in the Ottoman period. In solid proof of this uninterrupted continuity of nearly 24 centuries, the city's historic center is interspersed with a wide array of monuments, chief among them the Byzantine fortifications and churches, which were inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List, in 1988.

A specially designed walking tour, part of the activities of the conference, will allow us to get a good picture of the city's historic development and built points of reference, while numerous other options are available for independent visits. Highly recommended are the Museum of Byzantine Culture, the White Tower Museum, the lively "Ladadika" district, the nearby cultural hub of the first pier of the city's port, and above all, a leisurely walk along the 5 km seafront at sunset, with the mythical Mount Olympus in the background.

The Conference Venue

Located at the east end of Thessaloniki's historic center, just outside the Byzantine walls, the "Islahane" (the Turkish word for "house of restoration") is the only surviving part of a large building complex begun in 1874 by the Ottoman authorities to house an orphanage, boarding



house, and school of technical education for young boys, regardless of religious background. Built in 1904, the Islahane initially housed the workshops of the school. Then, from the establishment of the Greek administration in 1912 until the 1980s, it accommodated small industries, among them the "Axilithiotis Machine Shop and Foundry".

Laid out around a rectangular courtyard, the building was listed in 1992. After being allocated to the Service of Modern Monuments and Technical Works of Central Macedonia, of the Hellenic Ministry of Culture, an exemplary restoration followed which transformed the building from an abandoned edifice in a ruinous state into a multi-purpose cultural venue, which opened its doors to the public in 2016.



The conference sessions themselves will be held in the space formerly occupied by the school's carpentry workshop; a tour of the building during the conference will allow further exploration of its fascinating history.



Exterior view of the conference venue