

WESTERN MEDITERRANEAN EUROPEAN VERNACULAR ARCHITECTURE

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INTRODUCTION

For the purposes of this article, 'vernacular' or 'popular' architecture of a specific region is defined as 'the totality of man-made structures intended for living or for other activities, which do not classify within any historic or academic style in the classical meaning of the term but which are a part of the tradition of that particular region'.

The time in which these structures were built is not significant, and the names of their builders are, generally speaking, unknown for the vernacular or popular architecture is essentially an "architecture without architects"¹. It evolves more or less naturally, similar in a way to the growth of plants of the indigenous flora.

In accordance with the above definition, the concept of vernacular architecture is obviously inseparable from the people and their tradition within a region. There may, however, be various sub-regions within the boundaries of a region, each presenting minor differences in character. For instance in Andalusia, Southern Spain, the dominant style is white-washed houses with clay-tile roofs but differences of detail are readily observable from one town to another.

Vernacular architecture may be rural, comprising buildings such as farmhouses, wind or water mills, water wheels, covered wells, sheep-folds, etc. It may also be urban, as in the case of small agrarian town centres, towns of fishermen or other, similar, less-developed communities.

These settlements represent another very important scale of the problem, that of vernacular or popular town-planning. Vernacular architecture must be considered not only through isolated subjects but also through small urban ensembles and, eventually, whole settlements which, in all cases, should be studied within a larger context, i.e. the surrounding landscape.

In this article specific reference is given to the eastern and southern parts of the Iberian peninsula and to the Balearic islands. However, certain basic characteristics and perhaps

1. The term was first coined by Bernard Rudofsky. See RUDOFSKY, B. *Architecture without Architects*, New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1964. (Ed.)

the problems illustrated in this particular region may be common to the whole of the western Mediterranean basin, and probably to all the northern riparian countries of the Mediterranean.

DETERMINANTS OF VERNACULAR ARCHITECTURE

2. For a fuller account of factors determining vernacular architecture see: RAPOPORT, A. *House Form and Culture*, Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc. 1969. (Ed.)

The vernacular architecture of a region is determined basically by four groups of factors: geographic, historic, economic and social.²

The geographic factors include climate, geology (i.e. abundance or shortage of specific building materials), the aptitude of soil for agriculture and the appropriate way of farming, irrigation, etc.

In relation with the historic factors, it must be stated that even though not a product of high-level culture, vernacular architecture is often influenced in one way or another by the sovereign rule. These influences may occasionally last thousands of years. For instance, in the region of Provence, France, in the Balearic islands or in the south of the Italian peninsula the building types e.g. dwellings, covered wells, shelters for livestock, surviving from prehistoric times were still in use until recently. Furthermore, despite the subsequent Byzantine and Islamic domination from 6th to 13th centuries, the current type of farmhouses on the islands of Majorca and Minorca is the same as those depicted in Roman mosaics.

Prior to the Industrial Revolution, building traditions especially in the rural environment were strong enough to remain indifferent to political changes.

Economic factors cannot be isolated from social ones and both are very important in the slow evolution of vernacular architecture which essentially has an agrarian basis.

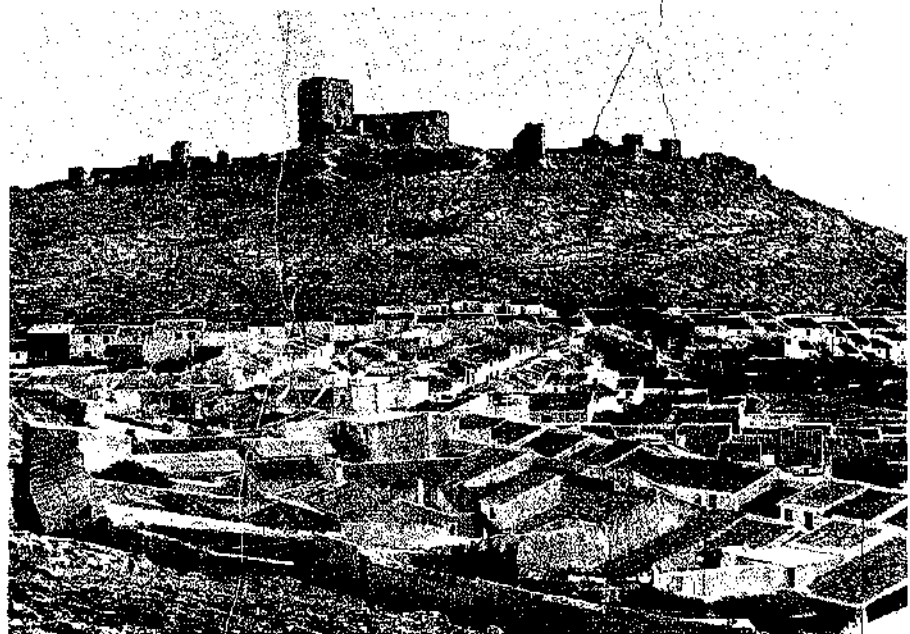


Fig. 1 Town of Teba, in Andalusia. Houses are built of mud-walls yearly whitewashed, covered with roofs of ceramic tiles, that in Spanish are called "arabic tiles". The urban landscape is dominated, as frequently, by the ruins of a medieval castle.

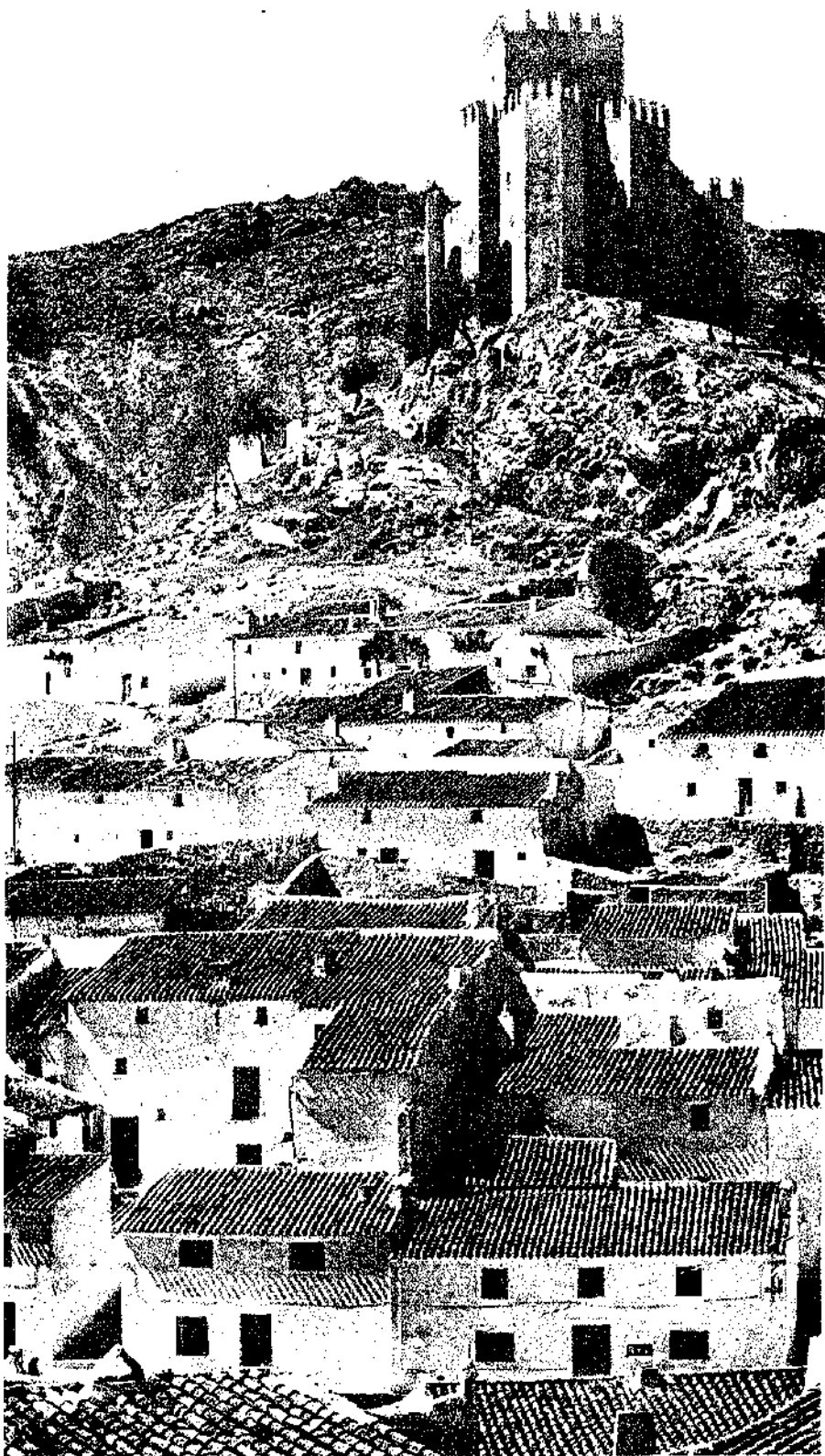


Fig. 2 Velez-Blanco near Almeria, in the southeast of Spain. The exterior of the castle has been recently restored. Unfortunately its patio, about the year 1925 was transported to the United States and reconstructed in the Metropolitan Museum of New-York.

NECESSITY FOR CONSERVATION

All the structures we are dealing with are definitely condemned to death what with the changes induced first by the Industrial Revolution and secondly by and after the World War II. However, owing first of all to the social and cultural values they present and for a variety of other reasons their protection becomes a challenge for the present generations.

The necessity for the preservation of vernacular architecture is recognised today by international institutions such as the UNESCO, the Council of Europe, the Organisation of American States, the International Council of Monuments and Sites, etc., and is generally accepted by the cultured opinion around the world.

The preservation of vernacular architecture should be founded on the following principles:

- . the inclination of modern architecture toward a monotonous uniformity within the human environment on a universal scale is to be opposed openly and avoided as far as possible,
- . that the vernacular architecture is largely integrated into the nature and landscape, its conservation is a part of the already recognised necessity of protecting natural environment and landscape,
- . the vernacular architecture of a region is one of the symbols and an ancestral heritage of the people living in that region,
- . the revivification of these values may contribute to decrease the pernicious trend of migration to larger cities which has affected the balance of population distribution to a very critical extent in many countries,
- . last, but by no means the least, is the aesthetic merits of vernacular architecture in that a great number of rural buildings, in their apparent modesty, are genuine masterpieces of the best architecture.

Fig. 3 Partial view of the city of Ibiza (Balearic Islands). Here, the african and oriental influence determines the terraced roofs. On top of the town remains of the medieval walls, possibly of Byzantine origin, and XVI century bullwarks erected against the Ottoman expansion under Suleyman.

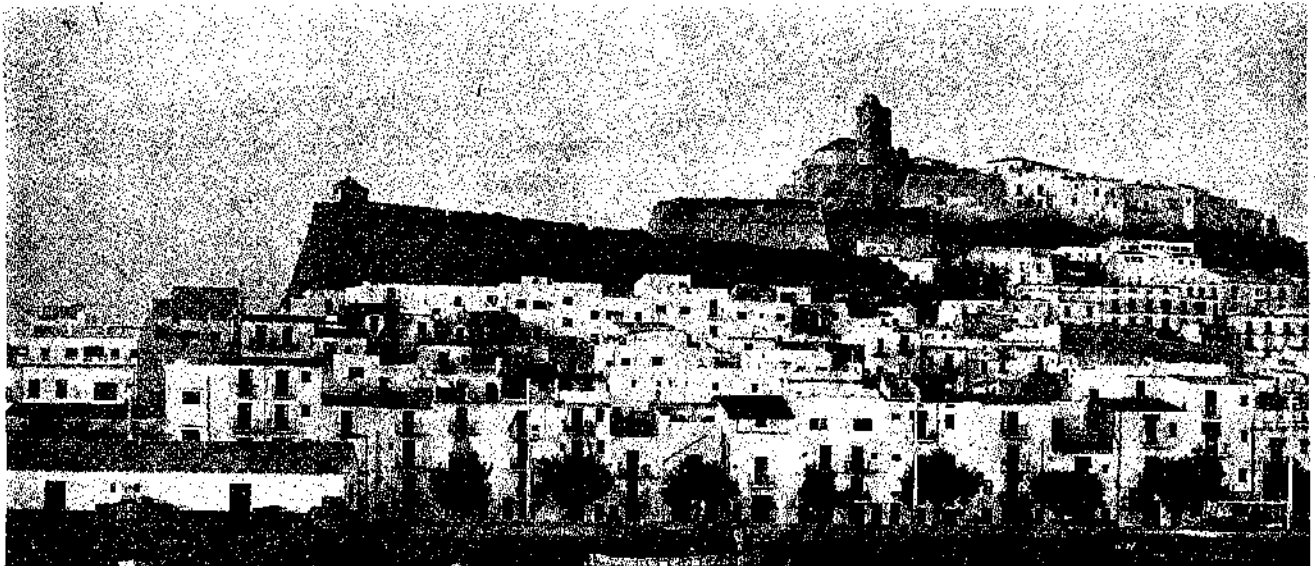




Fig. 4 Albarracín, in Aragon, northeast of Spain. Here the same types of roofs of Andalucía are normal. But the walls are built in stone, or rubble-work without plaster, or plastered in the same colors of the stone. The house in the foreground (center of the photo) is modern, but aesthetically integrated in the urban landscape

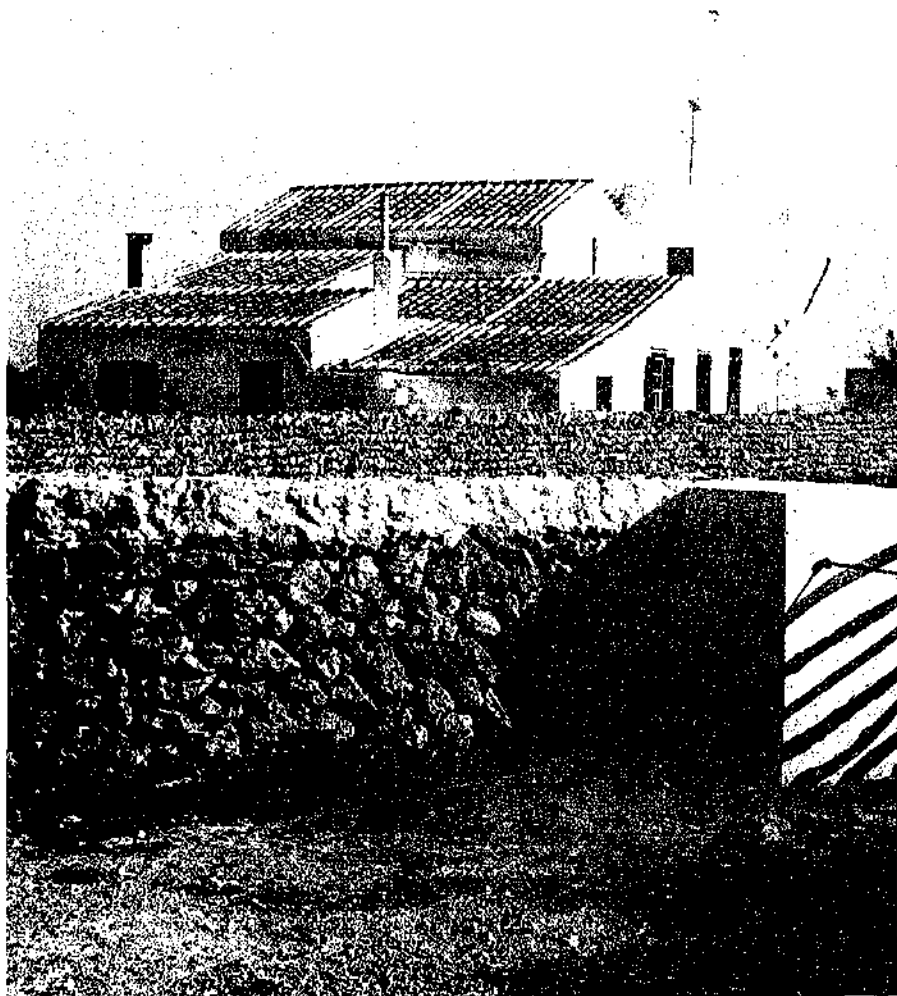


Fig. 5 Old farmhouse in the island of Minorca



Fig. 6 Albarracín. One of the streets of the medieval town. Many of the houses of this town, that is in process of ruin, have been acquired by people living in cities as a secondary residence, to be fitted inside for modern life.

CONSERVATION PROBLEMS OF VERNACULAR ARCHITECTURE

The conservation of vernacular architecture has, in the main, two aspects: the technical and the socio-economic.

The technical difficulties stem primarily from the lack of skilled technicians and workers. The shortage of trained personnel in this field is more or less a universal problem. The educational institutions must take on responsibilities in training specialized staff in addition to architects and planners. Other technical difficulties may be overcome by substituting modern, stronger materials (such as concrete) for the less durable ones (like mudbrick or earth) while structural consolidation necessary may easily be concealed within the existing fabric of buildings.

The real problem lies in the social and economic aspects of the conservation of vernacular architecture. If the vernacular buildings in small towns are abandoned because they are no more useful or because the original function is now extinct, the only solution and the first step in their conservation is to give a new function to these obsolete structures. The reconstruction and restoration alone is not sufficient if a new lease of life is not ensured.

We can thus draw the conclusion that technical conservation in itself is not enough remedy. The true solution lies in the 'integration' of the vernacular buildings and towns with the life and activities of our present era, in adapting them to the needs of time, or in giving them a new use which may be domestic, cultural, touristic, etc.

It could also be inferred that the studies in vernacular architecture must be a point of departure in all regional, local, physical, social and economic planning.



Fig. 7 Another Andalusian town, Olvera. There is at right a new house that does not break the unity of the urban landscape. Here, the town is dominated, not only by the medieval castle, but by the church, built in late XVII century in an academic style. The contrast between the popular style of the houses and the classic one of the church is rather shocking, but beautiful.

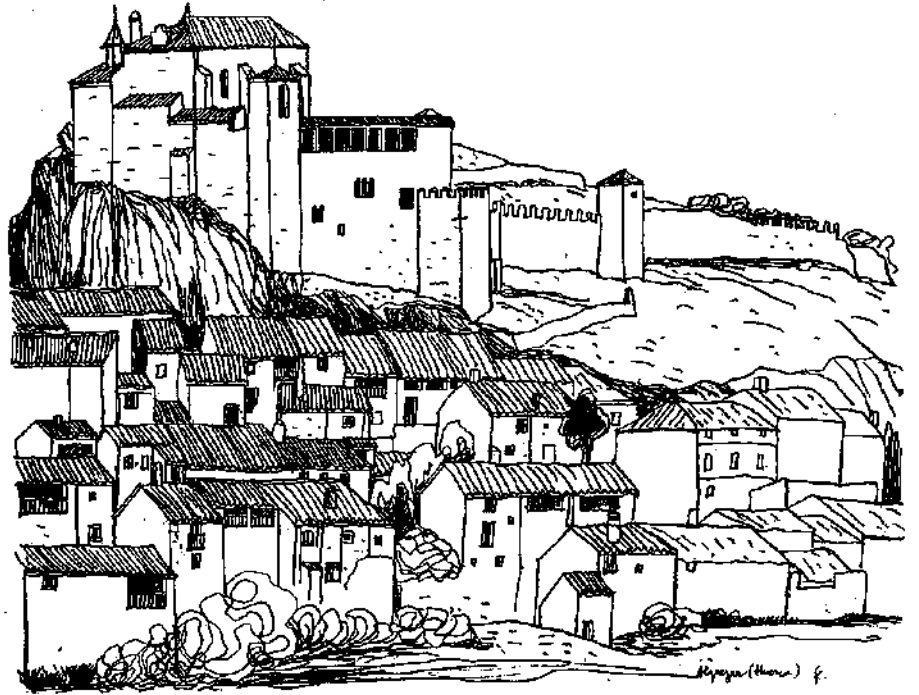


Fig. 8 Alquezar in the aragoneses Pyrennes. Spain (Sketch by architect García Fernandez)

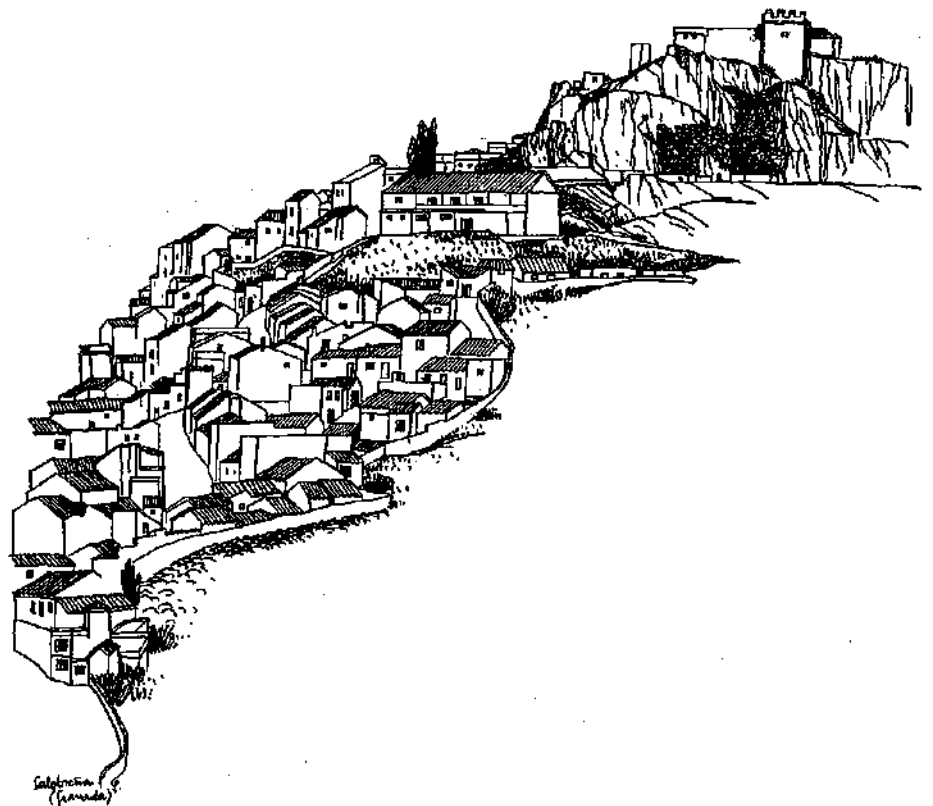


Fig. 9 Salobrena in Andalucía (Sketch by architect J.L.García Fernandez)

BATI AKDENİZ'DE YÖRE MİMARLIĞI

ÖZET

Bu yazıda yöre mimarlığı 'yaşama ve başka etkinliklerin gerektirdiği, belli bir yörenin yapı gelenekleri çerçevesinde üretilmiş, ancak bilinen anlamıyla herhangi bir tarihsel ya da bilimsel sınıflandırmaya konu edilmemiş yapıların tümü' olarak tanımlanmaktadır.

Bu yapıların hangi tarih dilimi içinde yapıldığı ya da yapıcılarının kim oldukları önemli değildir. Önemli olan, yöre mimarlığının yörenin halkı ve geleneklerinden ayrı ele alınmaması gereğidir.

Yöre mimarlığının hem kentsel, hem de kırsal örnekleri, tanımı ve doğası gereği bir tüm olarak düşünüleceğinden sorunun bir boyutu 'yöresel yerleşmeler' ve 'yöresel planlama biçiminde belirlenmektedir.

Yöre mimarlığının biçimlenişi genellikle 'tarihsel', 'coğrafi', 'ekonomik' ve 'toplumsal' etmenlere bağlıdır. Gene de, kurumsal mimarlığın dışında gelişmesine karşın yöre mimarlığı da tarih boyunca zaman zaman egemen yönetimden belli oranda etkilenmiştir. Bu etkiler kimi zaman yüzyıllar boyu sürer ve, bir bakıma, yeni etkilenmeleri önleyici rol oynayabilirler.

Sanayi devrimini ile ve özellikle de 2.Dünya Savaşı ertesinde ortaya çıkan toplumsal, ekonomik ve değişiklikler karşısında yöre mimarlığı örnekleri varlıklarını sürekli yitirmektedirler. Kalan örneklerin korunması, büyük bir sorumluluk olarak bugünkü kuşakların görevi olmaktadır.

Yöre mimarlığının korunması ile ilişkili olarak benimsenecek ilkeler arasında, çağdaş mimarlığın duyarsız ve evrensel ölçekte tekdüze bir çevre yaratma eğilimli örneklerinden kesinlikle kaçınmak başta geliyor. Yöre mimarlığı örneklerinin doğa ile içiçeliği açısından, bunların korunması çoğunlukla doğal çevrenin korunması ile birlikte düşünülecek, bu da bir başka ilke.

Önemli bir diğer nokta, yöre mimarlığının büyük estetik değeri olabileceği ve örneklerin çoğunun en iyi mimarlık tasarım ürünleri arasında sayılması gerektiğidir.

Yöre mimarlığının korunmasında ise teknik ve sosyo-ekonomik olmak üzere iki önemli boyut var. Teknik hususlar bu konuda özel olarak eğitilmiş personel sayısının evrensel ölçekteki yetersizliğinde düğümlenmekte. Ancak, bu sorunun çözümlenmesi ile iş bitmiyor. Toplumsal ve ekonomik sorunların da üstesinden gelmek, yöresel yapıların günümüz kullanışları içinde yerlerini almasını sağlamak gerek.

Bu açıdan, yöre mimarlığı konulu çalışmalar tüm bölgesel ve yerel, fiziksel, toplumsal ve ekonomik planlama eylemlerinin başlangıç noktası olabilecektir.

