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 architectural heritage is presented in a synthetic and analytical form, earthen at an European Union level.

The value, the vitality and the technical nature of this heritage are embodied evidents. 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 already is 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 stemming from new constructive methods was a great chance. Thus, in 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, inventors, recipe-makers, standard setters, activists, 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 work accomplished during the two “official” 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 especially. This awareness was already manifest in 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 heritage, its physical, material, and objective richness but will necessarily find it difficult to convey the wealth of meetings that we held all over Europe. Such meetings were occasionally very formal and organized but were also often impromptu, and made at the discretion of 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, 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 of built objects, 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; the vision that we have noted and built from demonstrates a living, moving whole (?). If it is commonplace to say that we are building today the heritage of tomorrow, this evidence is even greater for earthen architecture.