

ARGENTINA

All members of ICOMOS Argentina were invited to submit short papers on specific situations of heritage at risk. This report summarises those individual contributions. Risk is mainly caused by development pressures and the lack of proper planning controls, especially with reference to urban heritage, but also individual monuments and cultural landscapes are currently at risk since they are not properly protected or adequately maintained and conserved.

Development pressures in cities

Some risk situations identified in the country are related to the lack of proper planning controls and normative structures to protect the setting of urban monuments or heritage buildings. Even if individual buildings are protected, changes in the surrounding urban tissue diminish the historic or architectural values of the heritage components. As examples of this situation, the cities of Cordoba and Ushuaia can be mentioned.

The city of Cordoba, located in central Argentina, contains some of the finest monuments from the Spanish period, especially the Jesuit Block, inscribed on the World Heritage List. The extension of the city during the 19th and 20th centuries produced new urban areas, characterised by the presence of boulevards and green spaces or neighbourhoods with specific identities. Some risk situations were reported (Photo 1).

The neighbourhood “Nueva Cordoba”, projected in 1886, was the first extension of the colonial city. Plaza España is a circular green space that serves as an entrance to the city park. The plaza was conceived as the core of the neighbourhood and constitutes presently one of the most harmonious urban spaces of the city. Over the 20th century important residential buildings were constructed surrounding the plaza, including historicist and modernist expressions. The resulting townscape is characterised by the coexistence of diverse architectural trends. The importance of this urban architectural ensemble is not in question but the setting of the plaza is currently the subject of strong development pressures. Proper planning would be needed to avoid disrupting the scale through the construction of high-rise buildings and the harmony of the plaza’s surroundings.

One specific case close to Plaza España is the Ferreyra Palace (1911-1916), internationally recognized as one of the best examples of neo-Louis XVI architecture. The surrounding garden enhances the architectural values of the different façades through the introduction of different species of trees and by its organic layouts. The building was expropriated in June 2005 with the purpose of installing a Museum of Fine Arts. Interventions included work to part of the gardens and aimed at “clearing” the view of the building. The complex of bedrooms on the first floor was completely changed to create three large spaces. To the façade facing Plaza España a glass volume and a stairway were added. Interventions are completely inadequate to assure the proper conservation of the monument’s values, its authenticity and integrity.

Urban areas next to the historic centre of Cordoba are known as “neighbourhood villages” and were laid out at the end of the 19th century. Related to the expansion of the railway system, the settlement of industries and the arrival of immigrants, these areas include specific features related to their community life. Testimonies of this particular way of life are, among other herita-



Cordoba, construction of new buildings next to the World Heritage site of the Jesuit Block of Cordoba City (Photo A. Conti)

components, large one-family houses, social and sports facilities, schools and libraries, commercial buildings, railway workshops, hospitals, bars and cafeterias. Since 2002, an important real estate expansion has developed in the city. As expansion of the historic centre is limited the neighbourhoods next to downtown have become the target for renovation. Buildings bearing historic or architectural values are being demolished in order to erect new high-rise buildings and private condominiums. Between 2005 and 2006 more than 100 new buildings were permitted in the General Paz Quarter, an area consisting of some 40 urban blocks. The urban identity is thus modified in terms of height; many inhabitants have decided to move to other areas since they feel that they are “invaded” by the new urban structure. The traditional social tissue is consequently weakened as well.

Ushuaia, located on the shore of the Beagle Channel in the province of Tierra del Fuego, is considered to be the most southern city in the world. It was founded in 1884 and started a process of development from 1902 onwards, when a high-security prison was established. From the 19th century onwards, the area was constantly visited by numerous scientific expeditions, especially due to its proximity to the Antarctic continent. The city’s cultural heritage is linked to a tradition related to scientists, fishermen, tradesmen and missionaries. The city’s historic centre is characterised by the presence of wooden and corrugated iron buildings.

By the end of the 20th century, policies for economic development were based on attracting industry. These policies, along with the rapid development of tourism, led to a significant population increase and associated building construction. Since 2001, new large hotels have been constructed. Their location in the historic area of the town involved the loss of older buildings. A logical equilibrium between the size of new buildings and landscaped areas in accordance with a small city located in a narrow piece of land between the mountains and the sea has not been taken into account. New high-rise buildings are not only constructed by demolishing historic buildings, they also produce a change of scale in the city’s downtown (Photo 2). Ironically, this development is destroying the building stock which is the main tourism resource of the city.

In the city of Posadas, located in northern Argentina by the Paraná River, the possibility of increasing the level of water in relation to the Yaciretá barrage, could affect not only urban areas but

also heritage buildings; among the buildings threatened is the railway station, a building of prominent historic and architectural interest. The Regional Vice-Presidency of ICOMOS and the University of Santa Fe sent a letter to the President of the Republic, explaining the risks and proposing solutions to the situation.



Ushuaia, high-rise buildings in the city's historic centre (Photo L. Lupiano)

Monuments and sites at risk

The lack of proper protection or conservation policies is also affecting individual buildings and archaeological sites. The church of Alta Gracia (province of Cordoba) is included in the Jesuit's *Estancias* World Heritage Site. Partial interventions altered the visual character of the building and deterioration caused by an increase in natural decay. No major conservation work has been undertaken over the last 30 years and the deterioration process has increased over the last five years; the building needs an integral plan for restoration rather than a piecemeal approach.

The Jesuit mission "Santos Mártires del Japón", in the province of Misiones, presents quite an interesting state of integrity due to the fact that no modern village was constructed in the surroundings and that it is relatively isolated from other urban places. However, a provincial route passes through the mission's plaza, threatening

the ensemble of the remains. Agreements between technical staff and provincial authorities could assure the construction of a by-pass so that the route would avoid the archaeological site. In any case, the site is not properly protected.

Cultural landscapes at risk

In the northern area of the province of Cordoba, important testimonies to the process of occupation have been preserved, including cultural landscapes, the royal route system and some *postas* or relays in the route that provided facilities for travellers and storage space. Just a few *postas* have been preserved; some have been demolished or completely altered. The natural landscape that constituted the setting of these buildings is also at risk. The extension of agriculture has replaced the original forests and has altered the original landscape.

Colonia Caroya is located 50 km north of Cordoba City. Immigrants coming from northern Italy settled here from 1878 onwards, producing a typical cultural landscape featuring specific patterns of divisions of the land, tree plantations, irrigation ditches, architectural and less tangible components. The formation of an urban settlement at the beginning of the 20th century generated a crisis in the structure and image of the territory. The lack of specific protection policies poses further risks to this rich heritage site.

Plaza de Mayo constitutes not only the foundational plaza of the City of Buenos Aires, but one of the most significant open spaces in the country. Some of the main historic civic meetings have taken place in this plaza. A current project undertaken by the Government of the City of Buenos Aires plans to completely change the present state of the plaza and to convert it into a paved space with only some trees preserved. The project proposes to interpret the different configurations of the space over time by means of a floor lighting system. The project has been objected to by several professional and civic organisations that stress the risk of altering the country's most important open space.

This report was written on the basis of contributions by the following members of ICOMOS Argentina: Mirta Alá Rué, Sonia Berjman, Leonardo Lupiano, Melina Malandrino, María Rebeca Medina, Hugo Peschiutta, Ana María Rodríguez, María Clara Supisiche and María Teresa Sassi. Alfredo Conti summarised and translated individual papers.