

## ARGENTINA

### Cultural Landscapes and Historical Gardens

The Argentinean urban public-space pattern, based on Spanish plazas without vegetation and the ensuing French park with vegetation, gave our cities a similar image to those we wanted to imitate overseas. We had the privilege of a majority of parks (both private and public) and plazas of great heritage value, most of them with enough value to be considered as historical gardens. We did not take correct care of them and we did not respect them. We no longer have them as they were in the past.

The current Argentinean crisis led an increasing number of people to move to urban public space with their few belongings. Homelessness in such quantities is a new phenomenon in Argentinean cities. Authorities and neighbours usually think that these poor people must be thrown out of the parks and plazas, instead of attacking the deep reasons of our economic fall. I think all of us must begin thinking of alternative uses for our public parks and plazas to combine the different population needs: recreation and surviving. If not, things will lead to a declining protection of our landscape heritage.

Together with this enormous problem, economic crisis and increasing corruption have led to the worsening of historical-gardens maintenance. Fragile green heritage and statues and monuments are the first objectives of vandalism. The erroneous and extremely scarce maintenance actions taken by local governments only emphasise the problem. More and more commercial events are allowed, producing a de-naturalisation and a loss of design values of sites.

Today we face a harsh reality regarding our general heritage, and landscape heritage in particular. The main problems are:

1. lack of a historical garden and landscape inheritance culture;
2. ignorance of our natural and cultural heritage values;
3. lack of knowledge and non-compliance with the criteria established in international documents that the country has already adhered to;
4. ineffective, non-professional, politicised, non-transparent management of landscape and garden heritage by public agencies;
5. incorrect maintenance of listed monuments;
6. insufficient and incorrect legislation;
7. absence of relevant trained professionals and technicians in public agencies;
8. an insufficient number of landscapes and historical gardens listed as protected heritage.

#### Main Problems

##### *Alarming decrease of green surface*

Caused by illegal usurpation and legal but confusing concessions of land in public spaces: almost all our public parks have been invaded by private clubs and institutions using enormous surfaces that must be returned to the public. These usurpations facilitate the loss of land integrity and cuts in the global spatiality of fragile properties deserving specific and specialised care. Because of insufficient green surface, all our parks suffer a constant over-use, to the extreme of spatial suffocation and an alarming flora and fauna depredation.

##### *Loss of original design*

Caused by usurpations, by wrong maintenance by public agencies, by lack of surveillance of maintenance by private sponsors. Bas-

tard elements have been included altering original design and equipment, such as: fences, wastebaskets, lights, non-aesthetic monuments, publicity, following neither the original style nor the original quality. Some years ago, a City Mayor demolished Burle Marx's unique public masterwork because he did not like it!

##### *Incorrect maintenance*

Maintenance must include the *whole* property with its different components (design, vegetation, art masterworks, equipment, services, uses, signification, toponomy). It must be undertaken by multi-disciplinary professional groups that are not available in the public agencies, and they must permanently consult with NGOs. A fountain lighting or the unveiling of a new statue must be thought of as parts of a general professional project – not as a result of political or diplomatic pressures or of a government office's fancy. All historical gardens must have a Master Plan, professionally designed and with the consensus of corresponding government agencies, specialised professionals and non-profit neighbour associations.

##### *Non-suitable uses*

The enormous and incorrectly prepared musical or sport gatherings in historical gardens cause unforgivable damage. Motor vehi-

Ruin of art masterpieces





cle transit in the historical gardens and parks should be prohibited, minimised, or only allowed if at low speed. The construction of parking under historical gardens works against the vegetation by limiting the root growth.

### ***Incorrect organisation of government agencies responsible for public promenades***

The previous Public Parks Agencies lost the concentrated power they had in the past and today several and different agencies take part in garden maintenance resulting in uncoordinated and overlapping actions. Public Parks Agencies should concentrate all maintenance actions using surveillance and protection legislation. Financial resources should be used with common sense.

### ***Lack of correct legislation***

Historical gardens constitute the majority of our public parks and urban squares. Only the Parque 9 de Julio (Tucumán city) is protected by a national law taking into account its landscape values. Private examples simply do not exist. Parks, gardens, squares are not included in the National Law of Protection.

The following actions must be taken urgently:

1. update and introduce adequate protective legislation at national, provincial and municipal levels;
2. engage specialists with sufficient experience in heritage protection and conservation theory and practice;
3. include experts in different heritage fields in the National Commission of National Historical Monuments;
4. compile a scientific Historical Gardens Inventory and Catalogue as a first step to their legal protection;
5. fill positions in all Public Parks agencies by means of public, open and clear contests for executive, counselling and technical positions;
6. organise local specialisation courses and seminars and offer scholarships to study overseas projects, as we have very few experts in historical gardens and cultural landscapes.

## **Properties at Risk**

The lists below do not include private properties, but they are also impacted by the current economic crisis.

### ***Cultural landscapes:***

- Iberá Lagoon, Corrientes Province – savage exploitation of natural resources and risk of construction of a bridge, altering ecosystems without an environmental impact study. Also, the construction of a hydroelectric dam in the Paraná River is causing the rise of the water level in the lagoon system.
- Martín García Island, Buenos Aires Province – jurisdictional incompatibilities produce damage in the site's natural-cultural equilibrium.
- Costanera Sur Ecological Reserve, Buenos Aires City – more than 300 provoked fires, alteration of water salinity, intentions of 'cultural gardening' in a natural site.
- Río de la Plata, Buenos Aires City – environmental alterations, loss of the open river view.



'Killing' trees instead of pruning

### ***Historical gardens:***

- Approximately 300 historical plazas all over the country.
- Parks: 3 de Febrero (Buenos Aires), Independencia (Rosario), San Martín (Mendoza), 9 de Julio (Tucumán, National Historic Landmark) – usurpations, spatial desegregation, insufficient and incorrect maintenance, inappropriate uses, over-use.
- Costaneras: Sur and Norte (Buenos Aires) and Corrientes City – construction of an airport with coast refilling, loss of cliffs and inappropriate uses.

### ***Great residences and palaces:***

- Palacio San José and its gardens, Entre Ríos Province, National Historic Landmark – incorrect conservation works.
- Villa Ocampo and its garden is a UNESCO property, San Isidro, Buenos Aires Province, National Historic Landmark – lack of maintenance, fights between government and NGO groups, incorrect recycling projects.

*This report follows a more comprehensive discussion in Heritage at Risk 2001/2002 (see pp. 238–240) and this can be read to further highlight the extent of the problems.*

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