CUBA

Current Achievements and Risks

Cuban efforts to preserve cultural heritage have been widely recognised. Several cultural properties have been inscribed in the World Heritage List in the past years. A paradigmatic and innovative experience is currently taking place in Old Havana under the City Historian's Office. The National Council of Cultural Heritage and local entities with heritage protection authority have achieved countrywide advances with regard to legal protection, research and inventories of cultural properties. However, beyond the achievements obtained in the rehabilitation of most historic towns and many monuments, natural parks and some cultural landscapes, there are other monumental features at risk. The main reasons for their deterioration are the very aggressive, tropical and humid climate (complicated by heavy rainfall and hurricane activity), omnipresent salinity problems, and the severe economic conditions of a trade embargo imposed over more than 40 years.

In the *Heritage at Risk 2000* Report, the ICOMOS Cuba National Committee noted two representative case studies: the 19th-century Reina Cemetery in Cienfuegos and the early 20th-century Jewish Cemetery in Guanabacoa. The first is currently under restoration, supported and funded by the Provincial authority. The second example, however, continues to suffer progressive deterioration and a transformation of its original appearance. Although the local Jewish Community has recently raised funds and successfully restored their most relevant Synagogue in Havana and maintains it as much as possible, it does not currently have the necessary funds to restore the cemetery, a significant Caribbean site of memory.[1]

In the preparation of this report we identified the following sectors as containing major examples of heritage at risk in Cuba:

- Agro-Industrial Heritage
- Wooden Architecture
- Urban Industrial Heritage
- 20th-century Legacy.

Agro-Industrial Heritage

With respect to the first group, which could also be referred to as Rural Heritage, many of these properties are located in isolated territories, far from the centres of activity, and remain empty or misused. These factors have made preservation more expensive and difficult than is the case with urban historic fabric.[2]

The Valley of the Sugar Mills in Trinidad, which was inscribed on the World Heritage List in 1989, and the Archaeological Landscape of the Coffee Plantations of the east of Cuba, inscribed in 2000, are fully protected and subject to preservation programmes. However, alongside these two World Heritage properties, there is a rich legacy of colonial sugar and coffee plantations from the 19th century that need restoration and sensitive re-use proposals to allow their continued role in the community. The majority of these plantations are archaeological sites and the significant remnants of their past require urgent repair and measures to prevent further damage. This is the case of Angerona, a former sugar plantation that was later dedicated to coffee production, located in Artemisa not far from the Capital. An astounding complex of ruins related to the main house, warehouses, slave barracks and driers represent the best agro-industrial traditions of the 19th century in the west of the Island.[3]

Other sites are more intact, such as the Ingenio Carolina in Cienfuegos, a sugar plantation and factory dating from 1835. Although quite deteriorated, it has retained the main industrial building, old offices and dwellings as well as the nursery. The *batey* or centre of the complex has persisted and is now inhabited. Ingenio Carolina is a magnificent example of our industrial heritage, exemplifying the Caribbean Plantation as well as providing a testimony of the history of slavery. However, it would require a large budget to allow the property to be properly rehabilitated by the highly qualified professionals in that region.

Alejandría, a former sugar-plantation close to Guines, not very far from Havana, is the remnant of the first sugar mill with hydraulic power in Cuba. Built by the French in 1790, it was one of the largest sugar factories of its times. It has miraculously retained its impressive aqueduct, raised from the ground level to a height of up to 9 metres along a 300-metre length. It was visited by Alexander von Humboldt.

Finally, among many other important examples, is the site of the Taoro Plantation, near Santa Fe Beach in the outskirts of Havana. Its former owner turned the *barracón* or slaves' barracks into his residence. Although later abandoned, it has retained a watchtower and the slaves' cemetery. This site, due to its beauty, its historical significance (it is linked to the Independence War), and its proximity to tourism enclaves has been subject to discussions urging its rehabilitation, but all efforts to date have been unsuccessful and damage continues unabated.[4]

As well as these plantations and rural industries from the late-18th and 19th centuries, it is important to add those agro-industrial complexes from the early 20th century, many of which are related to the influx of North American commercial enterprises over the eastern portion of the island. The establishment of modern sugar factories in these *centrales*, as they are called in Cuba, profoundly transformed both nature and society. The sugar complexes, many of them huge, attracted a large population and were models of rationalist planning. The subsequent urbanisation resulted in a rigorous social stratification. The larger complexes had all the services of a small town, and were laid-out with streets and green areas. With both their urban planning and the introduction of the wooden 'balloon-frame' architecture, Americans imported into the bateyes an image until then unknown in Cuba, closely associated with their own old towns. These Centrales are also testimonies to workers' struggles for their rights, and today remain as repositories of intangible cultural values.[5]

Basically, because most of these places are still in use and play an important economic role, they have been conserved. At the same time, their continued function often requires changes in order to modernise them. And this is precisely the threat to their integrity. It is necessary, therefore, to achieve ways of modernisation that do not transform the traditional values of these places.[6] An outstanding example is the Central Bolivia in Ciego de Avila Region (former Cunaguas), which was declared a National Landmark in 2000 and is currently under a preservation programme. Also the Central Martínez Prieto (former Toledo) – although not as big and impressive as Bolivia, it is an interesting case study. Located on the outskirts of Havana City and adjacent to the most important technological university in Cuba (ISPJA – built in the 1960s), it is a unique installation. The factory still processes sugar on its final phase (refining) and has a power capacity to meet new demands. In addition, it could become an important recreation venue. The Ministry of the Sugar Industry has envisioned turning

it into a Reference Centre for the Sugar Industry and a tourism attraction. It is important to adopt these plans quickly, in order to avoid any further transformation or loss.[7]

Wooden Architecture

Although wood has always been employed in Cuba for modest popular dwellings in the countryside, a designed and more elaborate wooden architecture appears at the end of the Colonial period, in the late-19th century. As mentioned above, the 'balloon frame' was widely employed in the development of sugar factory-settlements, based on an Anglo-Saxon tradition. In general, almost 100 years ago, spas and coastal villages provided other contexts in which this architectural type spread. The pre-assembled components and qualified craftsmanship promoted a faster construction process. In addition, there was a low maintenance cost as this noble material had good resistance to salinity.[8]

Shady verandas and other wooden elements, as well as steeped roofs with shingles and bright colours, were different to Cuban urban architectural patterns, recalling Caribbean expressions. All this gracious architecture has suffered from the effects of time and lack of maintenance, and particularly from the permanent threat of a humid tropical climate and the plagues to which wood is particularly susceptible. The impact has been compounded because very often the woods employed were imported from the United States, instead of the local timber that could better resist the climatic aggression.[9]

Wooden architecture is a part of Cuban heritage that is undergoing a particularly rapid deterioration and disappearance. However, some examples that are deemed to be of high significance have been restored. The current Hemingway Museum in San Francisco de Paula is not only the great writer's home, but also an architectural work that reflects his origins and personality. It also exemplifies the way in which other cultures have been inserted within the national context.[10] Another outstanding example is Hurón Azul, the home of painter Carlos Enriquez in Arroyo Naranjo. Currently a municipal museum, it has also been restored in the past few years. In Cayo Granma (former Cayo Smith) in the midst of the wonderful landscape of Santiago de Cuba Bay – a tiny and charming cay and leisure resort for wealthy local families – is a fishermen's village. Under the stimulus of the inclusion of the Cayo within the Castillo del Morro's World Heritage buffer zone, a rehabilitation programme for the village is being undertaken by Santiago's Conservation Office.

Unfortunately, however, an amazing amount of wooden construction remains in danger country-wide. In the north-eastern 19th-century coastal town of Gibara, the famous Casa da Silva, which faces the Bay and the mountains, is almost lost – as are the delicate interior gingerbread works of the Municipal Theatre. Other very important examples include San Miguel de los Baños, a nostalgic turn of the century spa close to the City of Matanzas, where a set of pretty and comfortable wooden bungalows wait their restoration and full use as a very particular tourism resort. On Cienfuegos Bay, Cayo Carenas, a former leisure spot, is now almost abandoned. Due to its wonderful location and views, it has been identified as a possible place for tourism purposes. This would be a good way to safeguard its handsome wooden architecture and the natural values. The local authorities in charge of heritage are currently discussing these issues.[11]

Finally, a claim for the definitive salvation of the last wooden remnants in Varadero Beach. With a tremendous effort from the local authorities and the support of the National Council for Cultural Heritage, the Municipal Museum, located in one of the most beautiful houses on the Beach, has been turned into a stronghold of local history. Unfortunately, since the 1950s, the modernisation of Varadero led to the loss of its best wooden exponents. Now, the very few that remain face the perils of fast tourism-growth. Due to the high cost of wood, this type of heritage architecture poses one of the greatest challenges for Cuban preservationists. Since tourism has turned into the primary source of income, it should be possible for this industry to invest in the preservation of wooden heritage.[12]

Urban Industrial Heritage

In addition to the impressive exponents of the rural industry in Cuba, outstanding examples of the national patrimony are represented by various functional buildings or complexes, such as those related to the production of cigars, beer, timber, electricity and paper. These structures are found mainly in the Capital. The Real Fabrica de Tabacos Partagás, built in 1845, is located behind the National Capitol, in the Ring of Havana. It is the oldest cigar factory in the country and one of the most important urban industrial buildings from the 19th century. Although it is still functioning, and great efforts to preserve it have been undertaken, there is a need for more concerted intervention to ensure its preservation as one of the most significant Latin American industrial exponents.[13]

Because most of the old urban industries are characterised by their large dimensions, spacious areas, high quality of construction and, in general, by a coherent design, they attract adaptation proposals that are not always compatible with their cultural values. Until some 10 years ago they were mostly preserved, although altered by additions or transformations of their original appearance. They were considered to be simply public properties and not 'cultural' examples. But currently many of them are being abandoned due to obsolescence and this poses a true risk, with consequences that may be irreversible. At the same time, in line with changes that have taken place in the country during the last years – particularly the opening to new investments, some foreign – there is a pressure to re-adapt industrial buildings to other functions than the original. Due to their relatively good physical conditions and location, they turn into highly valued objects. But, unfortunately, this value is pragmatic and economic, and not related to cultural signficance.[14]

Notwithstanding, some relevant national entities have already demonstrated their concern with regard to this industrial heritage. At the same time, research is being carried out at the academic level. In 1998 an International Symposium on Industrial Heritage was organised by the National Council for Cultural Heritage, and the merits of these industries were discussed and debated in depth. Interesting studies have been made on different industrial sites that are no longer active – due to their image, spatial structure or location in important areas of the cities or within the Great Metropolitan Park of Havana. There are many Cuban industries with a high cultural and economic value. At the same time it is evident that the recovery of industrial heritage requires considerable financial investment. But these buildings are generally owned by powerful entities that have more resources to invest in their properties. For this reason, the rehabilitation of industrial buildings can be associated with intelligent and financially sound management.[15]

The Papelera Cubana (Cuban Paper Factory) is an interesting case study, but just one of many examples requiring urgent intervention. The Cuban Paper Factory was founded in 1919, and is an important urban landmark within the City. It is located on Puentes Grandes Street, within the territory of the Great Metropolitan Park. An additional reason to recommend the rehabilitation of this

factory is that the enterprise that runs it is willing to take advantage of its spaces for new uses that can revitalise it. Undoubtedly, a comprehensive programme for the rehabilitation of industrial heritage in Cuba is urgently needed.

Twentieth-Century Legacy

Another fragile sector of Cuban heritage is the 20th century legacy. Besides its valuable Spanish Colonial built-heritage (covering from the mid-16th century to the end on the 19th century) Cuba has an important heritage from the 20th century that amounts for most of the urban fabric in its cities. This built mass was basically raised in two large construction booms: the first dating from World War I up to the Depression, the second since the end of World War II until the mid-1960s, which followed the architectural codes of the Modern Movement.[16]

The first decades of the 20th century represent a time of impressive change in the country. Havana turned into a very active and cosmopolitan city. This was the time of Havana's greatest construction boom, to the extent that its current urban territory is almost all dateable to the 1940s. This urban growth had much to do with the employment of building techniques of moulding or cast mortar. Notwithstanding, this fact has not yet been properly researched with respect to its importance for cultural heritage. The three styles that shared these techniques – Art Nouveau, Eclecticism and Art Deco – developed in two variants: a minor one related to middle-class architecture, and a major one employed by public entities and wealthy families.[17]

The producers of this architecture, generally Catalonians, were at the same time manufacturers, designers and constructors. This process offered a wide variety of columns, balustrades, cornices, mouldings and ornaments that could be chosen from a variety listed in catalogues. These features characterised Cuban architecture of the times and favoured the development of the rich and extended eclecticism that today determines the most common image of the Cuban townscape.[18]

Due to a fragility of the materials of the many ornaments, and due to age, climate and lack of maintenance, many Art Nouveau, Eclectic and Art Deco exponents are currently in danger. This is particularly the case for the minor or modest expressions of this ornamentation, which form the majority of this valuable heritage item. Art Nouveau, the last Spanish influence in Cuban architecture, is in particular danger. Among the most outstanding Art Nouveau examples that need urgent restoration are the Cetro de Oro, a commercial building and a dwelling, and Crusella's House, both of which are on Reina Street. Another relevant example is Masiá Lampurdá in La Víbora Quarter, strongly influenced by Gaudí. Also impressive are the tenement houses on Cárdenas Street on the border of Old Havana, among the best exponents in all Ibero America.[19]

Among the eclectic examples, probably the most threatened are those in the Centro Habana District, and the more modest ones like the extraordinary ensemble of houses on Primelles Street. One of the most important exponents of Art Deco, the Bacardi Building, has recently been restored; however, there are many others in the Capital which require a full restoration – such as the López Serrano Apartments Building on Vedado, one of the first Cuban skyscrapers.

If European eclecticism – particularly through its generalised *minor* trend widely applied in lower-middle class and even working class dwellings – stamped the first construction boom in the 20th century, it had already been substituted in the 1930s with an American influence through Art Deco. The massive urban growth from the end of the 1940s through the whole 1950s consolidated that influence, and the architecture of the Modern Movement became widespread, especially in the capital city, Havana.[20]

Scores of new housing subdivisions, promoted by real estate speculation, created a first suburban ring of one-storey, single-family houses with Modern architecture. Some in-fill interventions in vacant lots were built, mostly apartment buildings (including the high-rise condos that began to impact the scale of the El Vedado waterfront). At the same time, there was the rapid creation of the most alive, mixed-use modern city-centre, La Rampa. The building boom at that time included some substitutions with Modern architecture in the central business district in Old Havana, but for the most part this rebuilding was located in the main commercial district at Centro Habana. Yet the process was cut short when the 1959 Revolution stopped real estate speculation, sparing most of the earlier built-heritage in Havana and other Cuban cities.[21]

Modern architecture was used not only for utilitarian purposes, such as factories, office buildings or department stores, but was extended into housing across all social layers, including the upper-class. This boom was supported by the availability of good building materials and high skills in construction workers and techniques. Happily, the widespread use of monolithic reinforced concrete proved adequate for the Cuban weather and patterns of use.[22] Nevertheless, the massiveness of this construction boom, plus the negative impact of speculation and the accumulated deficit in maintenance, has worsened the technical condition of the Modern stock, which is now more than half a century old.

Some landmark buildings from the 1950s such as the FOCSA, Retiro Médico, Retiro Odontológico, or 23rd and 26th – just to mention some in Havana – already display significant deterioration. The problem is complicated by the lack of public awareness about the need to preserve this recent heritage, compared to the widespread perception about the values of the old historic core in Habana Vieja. The relatively better physical condition and good location in once-privileged neighbourhoods, with good access for automobiles – and less congestion and social problems than in the central districts – brought these areas where Modern architecture has its best examples into the focus of new investments in tourism and condominiums, seeking urgently needed foreign currency. The search for maximum profit in these investments inevitably places a stress that often results in projects, building heights and mass, and architectural expression that tend to break with the built and social context. Another threat comes from additions, elimination of front-gardens and porches, construction of high fences and other alterations undertaken by the residents themselves. The negative effects are more striking in formerly elegant neighbourhoods, which are often also those in which Modern architecture predominates.[23]

In order to prevent these negative impacts, the National Commission for Landmarks approved a resolution declaring some 20th-century avenues and areas like Fifth Avenue, Avenida de los Presidentes and others as Protected Sites. As a result, all new projects on these listed places have to be approved by this Commission. In spite of this, there are still investors who try to ignore relevant legal conditions.[24]

These problems demand several parallel approaches: a systematic mass-media campaign; research to promote investments that would be sensitive to the preservation of the Modern heritage; intelligent and adaptive re-use of Modern buildings and the recovery of endangered heritage structures by finding a productive use for them; and the passing of new building codes and city regulations more adequate to the new context, including more effective means of dissuasion. Finally, there is a need for visible and public support for a selection of projects to recuperate Modern heritage

that could serve to create a paradigm and exemplar for additional preservation programmes.[25]

Authors

This report is the outcome of a brainstorming session organised by the ICOMOS Cuba National Committee led by Isabel Rigol Savio. The participants were Daniel Taboada, Mario González, Mario Coyula, Angela Rojas, José E. Fornés, Víctor Marín, Felicia Chateloin and Nilson Acosta.

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