

## VENEZUELA

### Modern Heritage

Modern architecture, and 20<sup>th</sup>-century architecture in general, is a topical subject in the cultural heritage of this country and the world, due to the historical perspective acquired with the beginning of the new century. In Venezuela, socio-economic changes and the impact caused by the growth of oil production generated changes in the urban network of our cities, causing the appearance of new uses and new architectural typologies that form the cultural expression of the historic moment. These changes are significant for our understanding as a nation and its analysis in the world context.

Our country came to pioneer a number of works where ideas of modern architecture are expressed – from the first transitional works between historicism and new abstract forms, passing through works that result from the maturity of the modern movement (such as the emblematic Ciudad Universitaria and Centro Simón Bolívar), to later works where new subjects are added to modernity.

### Threats

This rich architectural production is seriously threatened because its historical magnitude has not been appreciated; perhaps because it is seen to be very recent. Its destruction has been caused by several factors: the need of urban land-speculation to create new works; the rehabilitation of the structure to adjust it to new uses, without paying attention to its cultural value; and the absence of a maintenance tradition, among others. As well as the reasons mentioned above, the root of the problem is the lack of a significant inventory of these buildings, the lack of a categorisation to apply to such an inventory assessment process, and limited legal protection.

The range of its expression is very wide. For example, the city of Caracas stands out – in its architectural expression of modern times – not only for the superimposition of its architecture, but also for its urban layout, in spite of any criticism that might have arisen.

Both government and private initiatives have carried out developments of important housing complexes. Among the first ones, La Reurbanización de El Silencio – which was an example of cleaning-up and revitalising an impoverished environment – stands out. The traditional design is kept throughout the continuity of the block. This creates a unit in which an 'edge' architecture is developed, with arcade galleries and interior courtyards incorporated as a mechanism of climate adaptation (1941-1945). Later, we have the advanced experiences by the Banco Obrero, from the works of Coche and Casalta, which are based on the typology of the Siedlungen, to some initiatives inspired by the prototype of the Housing Unit of Marseille – such as the Unidad de Habitación Cerro Grande (1954) and the Comunidad 2 de Diciembre (1955-1957). Important private attempts were also made – like Urbanización La Florida (1929), Urbanización Country Club (1930-1935), Los Caobos (1939), Altamira (1943) and Urbanización Campo Alegre (1929-1932) – where later expressions of the neo-colonial style and the first modern experiences with residential projects were encapsulated. The last example was almost completely demolished during the 1990s because of lucrative exploitation of the urban land. The other works have lost their morphological coherence because of consecutive additions and substitutions.

Political-military complexes, schools, airports, tourist buildings, hospitals, as well as markets stand out because of the architectural and symbolic value of their historical moment. Among them are patrimonial buildings, outstandingly successful from a plastic and formal point of view, with the implementation of new constructive techniques, new uses and new concepts of modernity. However, most of them are today without protection and they have considerably deteriorated.

### Urban Complexes

Centro Simón Bolívar (architect Cipriano Domínguez) stands out among the urban complexes, with its twin towers, its outstanding works of art and its top-quality finishes, which represented for many years the image of Caracas. It has serious damage because of use transgression and the incorporation of inappropriate additions. The Sistema de La Nacionalidad (architect Luis Malaussena), including the Paseo de Los Ilustres, Paseo de Los Símbolos and Paseo de Los Precursores, not only constitutes a recreation space for the city, but also represents a link between the civil and the military. It shows an advanced deterioration as a result of non-planned interventions – which are far from representative of scientific preservation practices.

### Education Structures

During the 1940s, in the educational sector, school buildings such as the República de Ecuador and República de Bolivia (both by architect Luis Malaussena), high school buildings such as Liceo Fermín Toro and Liceo Andrés Bello, were developed. The campus of the Universidad Central de Venezuela, called Ciudad Universitaria, the masterpiece of the architect Carlos Raúl Villanueva, was recently added to the World Heritage List as an expression of modern ideas of urban planning and the incorporation of the arts – among other values. This complex, even though not evidently at risk, has pathological problems in some buildings and it is necessary to approve an adequate Management Plan for such high-category work.

### Tourist-Related Growth

The tourist-sector boom in Venezuela during the period of the petroleum industry development is represented by a wide plan of important hotels and complexes in several places where tourist potential was evident. Some of them are: the Humboldt Hotel at the top of El Avila hill (architect Tomás Sanabria), from where the Caribbean Sea at the north and the capital valley at the south can be seen; the Cumanagoto Hotel, in the east coast; Prado Río Hotel, in the Andes; Hotel Del Lago, in the oil lakeside area of the west part of the country; and Ciudad Vacacional Los Caracas, in the Central Coast, originally intended to attract the working class. However, the Hotel Avila, the first modern hotel in Caracas and the precursor of all the above mentioned – planned in 1939 by the well-known Harrison, Abramovitz and Fouilhoux company – is

threatened with replacement by a complex that will make no significant contribution to the city's architecture and is not in accordance with the expectations of the new millennium. The Corporación de Turismo de Venezuela and the Instituto del Patrimonio Cultural, government entities, with the consultancy of ICOMOS, are taking actions to avoid its demolition and to keep the profitable character of the building.

## Outstanding Building Works

Important welfare buildings from that time, like Maternidad Concepción Palacios and Hospital Militar, continue to be among the main hospital centres of the country today, in spite of the lack of maintenance of many of them. Likewise, among the service buildings, the Markets, developed between 1951–1956, where concepts of standardisation, prefabrication and the use of new techniques were employed, deserve to be mentioned. Quinta Crespo, Guaicaipuro and Catia stand out as particular examples – today they are all in bad conditions and have serious changes to their original structure as a consequence of subsequent additions.

The buildings and complexes erected by multinational corporations are also important, especially those constructed by oil companies, such as Creole Petroleum Corporation, Shell Petroleum Co., Mobil Oil Co. These organisations not only built their headquarters, but also oil 'camps' with particular characteristics, including differentiated areas for the accommodation of executives, employees and workers. They present interesting housing typologies, which employ mechanisms for efficient natural ventilation and solar control. Complementary infrastructure and support needs led to the creation of additional structures, such as hotels, car dealers, shopping malls – all representative of the way of life of that time. Among the above, it is worth mentioning Centro Comercial Las Mercedes (1955) and Centro Comercial La Vega (1956–1958), both of Architect Don Hatch, pioneer works of this typology.

To this complex of outstanding building works, can be added many others that are anonymous; most of them were constructed for housing or office-use, completing the image of national and capital city modernism. Some of them are today uninhabited, waiting demolition or recycling of their structures. The case of the representative Galipán building could be mentioned. It was built in 1950, in Caracas, designed for a combination of three functions: housing, offices and commerce. It was demolished in 2000 to make way for a shopping mall with greater profitability. We can also mention the Pasaje Zing, the Altamira building and the headquarters of the Instituto Venezolano de Investigaciones Científicas in Altos de Pipe, all works of Architect Arthur Khan, a European resident of our country from 1942.

Many of these buildings are in danger of disappearing, even when they keep their original use. This is because they are not competitive from an economic point of view, in a culture where it is considered more profitable to make than to preserve. This is compounded by a lack of legal protection under the Cultural Heritage legislation. The result could be the extinction of fundamental architectural pieces that allow the comprehension of the modern city. Pieces that could – and should – be re-valourised in their dual character as single units and parts of a whole, providing structure to a city identity.

ICOMOS Venezuela



Reurbanización de El Silencio



Centro Simón Bolívar

Paseo Los Próceres, Conjunto La Nacionalidad

