

Habitat 67 and Expo – Conserving the Young Monument and its Intentional Universality or the Mode de Vie?

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First, I would like to congratulate ICOMOS Germany to its 50th anniversary and commend it for convening this international meeting in the City Hall of Mainz to commemorate this important milestone in the history of ICOMOS with a very timely and relevant agenda. This will allow substantial discussions and genuine professional exchange on contemporary issues of protection and conservation of monuments, sites and heritage areas.

In that context, Héritage Montréal chose to upgrade its website with a platform to engage professionals and citizens in supporting heritage as a key part of the future of the metropolitan area (see platform at www.heritagemontreal.org). In 2015, such a tool cannot turn a blind eye to experience from previous successes and one of these “InspirActions” is the protection of Habitat 67, the very subject of this presentation. It results from a strategic connection between an



Fig. 1: Montréal, Habitat 67, designed by Moshe Safdie, built 1966–67 for the world’s Fair Expo 67



Fig. 2: Habitat 67 – view towards St. Lawrence River and Victoria Bridge showing the defining architectural texture of the complex and some evidence of exposed concrete reinforcement

The 50th anniversary of ICOMOS and of ICOMOS Germany as transdisciplinary professional organisations coincides with the 40th anniversary of Héritage Montréal, a not-for-profit civil society foundation created to encourage the protection of the built, landscape and urban heritage of Canada’s historic metropolis, and to bridge the various gaps and divides to achieve it.

For our organisation, such an anniversary was an opportunity to reflect on the state of heritage and its protection/conservation in Montreal, an exercise inspired in part by the World Heritage concept of monitoring and periodic reporting and in part by the ICOMOS Heritage at Risk initiative launched by former ICOMOS President Michael Petzet. This exercise is valuable in order not to regret the past nor lament on the present but to inspire and influence the future.

international conversation in ICOMOS on the protection and conservation of the heritage of the Modern era and the ability of a civil society organisation like Héritage Montréal to act to secure its protection and enhance its conservation.

Expo 67 – global rendez-vous with architecture of the future to come

The concept of Habitat was born from Moshe Safdie’s thesis at McGill University’s School of Architecture – A Three-Dimensional Modular Building System (1961) – and his reflections on prefabrication and innovation to provide cities with the necessary housing density without following the high-rise or sprawling suburban models. Yet, the actual pro-

ject of Habitat was born of the spirit that drove the project of Expo 67, the World Exhibition (1st Category) hosted by Canada in Montreal with the contribution of the Provincial and Municipal authorities to mark the centennial of the Confederation (figs. 1 and 2).

Expo 67, as it would be called, was first proposed by the Canadian Government in collaboration with the Government of Quebec and the City of Montreal. The 1967 World Fair was originally meant to be in Moscow to coincide with the 50th anniversary of the October Revolution. In 1962, the USSR withdrew its application and the Canadian proposal for Montreal was accepted. Expo 67 hosted 62 countries, including a large number of African, Arab, Asian and Caribbean nations that had recently gained independence from colonial powers as well as a pavilion dedicated to Canada's First Nations (indigenous people).

Its general theme – *Terre des Hommes* [sic]/*Man* [sic] and his World – was inspired by Antoine de Saint-Exupéry and articulated at a meeting of 12 educators, artists, architects, scientists, writers, journalists and parliamentarians held in Montebello (Québec) on May 21, 1963. One of the meeting's recommendations was to address the interactive relation of humans and their environment which helped to unify the ideas and architecture of Expo. Sub-themes like “Man, the Creator” or “Man and the City” were expressed in dedicated pavilions and proposed for National or Corporate pavilions.

The choice of the site was announced in 1963 and in itself was audacious: Expo 67 would be built on three sites in the middle of the mighty St. Lawrence River totalling over 370 hectares: MacKay pier, a late 19th century jetty created to project the harbour from ice; île Sainte-Hélène, a former military base and public park, and a set of small islets and marshland that would be turned by engineers into Expo's main plateau (Île Notre-Dame) (fig. 3). Overall, this vast construction project with a very tight timetable greatly benefited from a project management methodology developed during the Second World War, in particular planning and executing large operations like D-Day in Normandy.

Expo 67 – unclear future for the heritage of a bold vision of the future

“The Montreal Universal and International Exhibition's aim is to provide an explanation of the world we live in to each and everyone of its visitors, so that they may realize that we are all jointly and severally answerable for and to each other, and that what divides men [sic] is indefinitely less important than that which links them together.”¹

Besides Habitat, the heritage of Expo 67 remains important in quantity and significance although the issue of maintenance and adequate use is increasingly a concern. Major changes to the site of Expo occurred when part of Île Notre-Dame was reshaped to accommodate installations for the



Fig. 3: Expo 67 – Postcard view of the whole site in relation to the river and the city

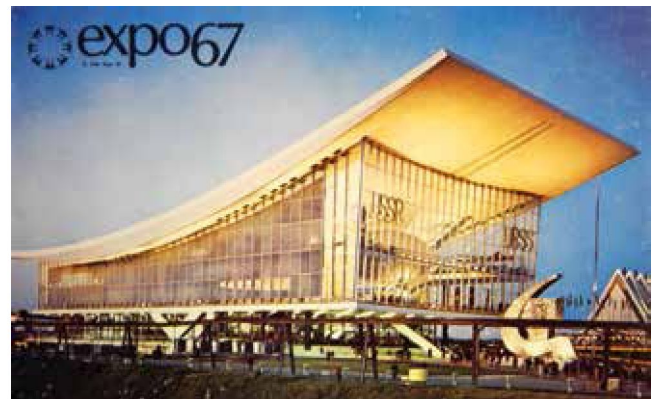


Fig. 4: Expo 67 – Postcard view of the Soviet Pavilion (now in Moscow)

1976 Olympics Games, the Grand Prix F1 since 1978 or the 1980 Florales internationales, and when Île Sainte-Hélène was turned back into a park-like space for the celebrations of Montreal's 350th anniversary in 1992. In 2007, the City of Montreal designated part of the site of Expo 67 on Île Sainte-Hélène as a Heritage Site.

Of the 90 pavilions built for Expo 67, most have been demolished as part of the original scheme and agreements with hosted countries, governments or corporate sponsors. The demolition was not immediate as the site continued to welcome visitors from 1968 until 1981. The Soviet pavilion was dismantled and is now in Moscow, near the VDNKh exhibition grounds and the figures of the Worker and the Kholkozan Women of the Soviet pavilion at the 1937 Exhibition (fig. 4). The Cuban pavilion was also brought back home, but has yet to be located.

Engineering works like Pont de la Concorde (figs. 5 and 6) or the entire Île Notre-Dame and its canal system, or artefacts like the street furniture are still there. Three Disks/Man, a 21-meter stainless steel stabile by Alexander Calder commissioned by the International Nickel Company of Canada, originally at the entrance plaza of Expo, was relocated



Fig. 5: Montreal, Pont de la Concorde

as part of the park for the 1992 celebration of Montréal's 350th birthday. It now faces the river and Old Montreal and is the anchor of the Piknik Electronik, a 21st century festive happening (fig. 7).

The main issue of conservation and adequate use affects two of the main iconic components of Expo 67 – Place des Nations and the former US pavilion. Place des Nations, a modernist ceremonial plaza designed by André Blouin, a disciple of Auguste Perret, was the main entrance of Expo where all international dignitaries were formally welcomed



Fig. 6: Postcard view of Habitat 67 from the Expo Express station

by the Exhibition Commissioner (fig. 8). The planning of the park left it out of the main action, disconnected, neglected and fenced off. Its future use and restoration are currently being discussed since it has received public attention in connection with the upcoming 50th anniversary of Expo 67.

Among the remaining landmarks, the US pavilion with its 76 m-diameter geodesic dome by Robert Buckminster Fuller is the most spectacular, even if it lost its transparent envelope on May 20, 1976, in a fire prompted by repair



Fig. 7: Alexander Calder: Man, Three Disks, sculpture de Calder, Île Sainte-Hélène, Montréal

work (fig. 9). Its future use remains uncertain, but reflections by the Buckminster Fuller Institute and the Société des arts technologiques, and with Héritage Montréal’s support, are underway to bring back the original Buckminster Fuller World Peace Game project of a global collaborative and prospective thinking to resolve the world’s problems, a concept comparable to the hopeful vision underlying Habitat 67.

Habitat 67 – protecting and conserving a lived-in global icon

“The wonderful thing about living in Habitat during Expo 67 was that it was exactly the way I envisaged it to be – a community, almost rural in nature, *in the city*. People were around you in great numbers; not only those who lived there, but all those who were visiting Expo. There were shops, and there were movie theaters, and there were exhibits and parks and fountains, and there were ships docked in front with people coming to visit the city, and there were all the elements that make a good city.”²

Even if it stands as a unique and futuristic structure materialising ideas and concepts generated by a student of architecture at McGill University, Habitat 67 is now protected and cared for as a heritage property through concepts like the «monument historique» invented in the 18th century context of the French Revolution and the 19th century European Industrial Revolution to address the clash between heritage and modernity.

Architects, scholars and aficionados have debated and recognised the architectural, aesthetic or technological interest of Habitat 67 since the 1960s. DOCOMOMO International has included it in its registers and selections since the 1990s. Yet, the formal recognition of its heritage value is a more recent consideration, let alone its effective protection.

In the 1980s, the Historic Monuments and Sites Board of Canada considered a possible non-constraining commemorative federal designation for its architectural value, but Habitat 67 did not comply with the minimum age requirement. In the 1990s, the City of Montreal included Habitat 67 in the list of buildings of heritage interest annexed to its Urban Master Plan and bylaws, but that only meant applying the design review process without heritage protection. Around 2000, residential tower proposals for the lands next to Habitat 67 sparked concerns in the general public and the fear that its setting could be substantially altered, as had happened to some extent at the Sydney Opera House in Australia.

Thus, Habitat 67 became a lived-in *monument historique*, the youngest one on our *Répertoire du patrimoine culturel*. First, on September 17, 2007, the City Council of Montreal registered it as a municipally-recognized heritage property, a status which only provides control over the exterior of the complex. Then, on February 26, 2009, Habitat 67 – the

building’s exterior and site and the interior of Units 1011 and 1012 – were designated by the Minister of Culture as a *monument historique* (now *immeuble patrimonial classé* or classified heritage property since the new Cultural Heritage Act of 2012) under the Province of Quebec’s cultural heritage legislation. In the current Canadian constitution, this is the highest protection status available for such a privately owned property. It results from a formal request submitted by Héritage Montréal on April 18, 2002, the International Day of Monuments and Sites dedicated that year by ICOMOS to the heritage of the 20th century, as suggested at the meeting held in Montreal in September 2001 to define an ICOMOS strategy for the heritage of the Modern era. While the national and international heritage registers count a growing number of protected 20th century architectural landmarks, the case of Habitat 67 can be directly linked to ICOMOS strategic thinking.



Fig. 8: Expo 67 Postcard view of Place des Nations, the main ceremonial square of Expo with the British and French pavilions in the background

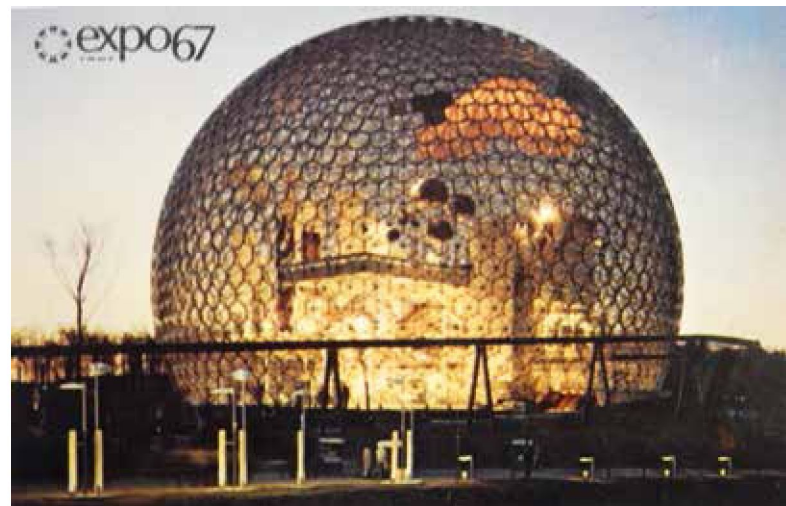


Fig. 9: Expo 67 Postcard view of the US-Pavilion (still extant in Montreal despite 1976 fire)



Fig. 10: Habitat 67 – View of one of the three mega-arches facing the river with indication of concrete conservation issues under the walkways

The nature of Habitat 67's ownership is an important dimension of its conservation and care today. The heritage value seen by the local, national and international specialised communities is also shared by its owners and inhabitants who also have to address its market or real estate tax value and challenging maintenance and repair issues.

Built between 1965 and 1970 (when its Eastern units were finished), Habitat 67 was inaugurated on April 27, 1967 when it comprised 26 demonstration units and 89 rentals. In 1968, its ownership passed from the *Compagnie canadienne de l'Exposition universelle de 1967* to the Federal Government's Central Mortgage and Housing Corporation, a corporation created in 1946 to provide housing to veterans returning from the War. In 1986, it was turned from a publicly-owned rental housing complex to a limited partnership private corporation of which shares and voting rights equal the number of the 354 individually owned modules, either from the original design of the unit they purchased or through expansion by acquiring modules of neighbours.

The current heritage designations, in particular the Provincial classification, identify key defining features. On

the exterior, these include the site's layout and furniture, the relation to the water, the character of the volume with its irregular pyramids made of the 354 modules stacked up to a 12-floor height, its expressive walkways with acrylic screens, staircases and its flat roofs, the sand-finished concrete, the cedar terrace floors, the oak doors, and the shape and play of the openings in the modules and through the megastructure. Interior features considered for the protected Units 1011 and 1012 include the pre-fabricated bathroom, kitchen and storage units, the birch floor, the brown anodised aluminium fixtures, and the indirect lighting.

The formal identification of these features in the protection mandate translates into a series of conservation challenges, some due to the normal aging of the building systems and materials, in particular the concrete or the birch floor, others due to issues such as some owners' wish to improve the energy efficiency of their windows or to turn their outdoor terrace into indoor glazed-in spaces, particularly appreciated in the Montreal winter. Among the current list of conservation challenges are structural stabilisation of the megastructural arches, concrete repairs, upgrading of the windows' energy

performance, sagging terraces’ planter boxes or drainage of the exterior walkways (fig. 10). Because of their impact on the overall identity of the complex, particular attention is paid to the windows and the concrete repair.

Since these works have to be authorised by both the City of Montreal and the Province of Quebec, these issues are now discussed with the benefit of enhanced conservation and engineering expertise and the input of the original designer, Moshe Safdie, who happens to be one of the owners and has provided designs and possible solutions for acceptable window replacements or glazed enclosures of outdoor terraces. From a theoretical point, the implementation of the Provincial classification benefits from the Standards and Guidelines for the Conservation of Historic Places in Canada adopted by the Federal and by all Provincial and Territorial Governments in the country, which includes principles applicable to Habitat 67 and its concrete.

In February 2014, to assist in the reflection on conservation of Habitat 67, Héritage Montréal and ICOMOS Canada, together with the City of Montreal and Quebec’s Ministry of Culture organised an international experts seminar on the concept of integrity as applied to Habitat 67 and to other heritage sites from the Modern era in Montreal, in particular those with reinforced concrete, prefabricated components or mechanical building systems which might create new areas of interpretation for the agreed upon conservation doctrine.

Habitat 67’s values – home, market and heritage – local and global

Undoubtedly one of the most identifiable places to live in metropolitan Montreal and a Canadian or North American residential landmark, Habitat 67 inspired a series of reflections and initiatives on its potential for inclusion on the World Heritage List. Surely this would contribute to filling the List’s observed gap concerning heritage of the Modern era. But can it actually answer the key conditions of a nomination – Outstanding Universal Value; Authenticity and Integrity; Effective Protection, Conservation and Management System? Can the protection of Units 1011 and 1012 offer a positive argument like those typical apartments at the World Heritage site ‘Berlin Modernism Housing Estate’?

Habitat 67 was considered by Parks Canada, the liaison Federal Agency for World Heritage in Canada, as one of 200 sites proposed but not included in the Canadian Tentative List published in 2004. That List is about to be considered for updating but one doesn’t know if architectural landmarks are still welcome in our age of sites.

There are procedural requirements. For example, although this would not contribute to the effective protection of Habitat 67, a Federal commemorative designation for Habitat 67 seems to be a precondition, which requires the owner’s con-



Fig. 11: Habitat 67 – detail 2016

sent (see www.pc.gc.ca/clmhc-hsmhc/ncp-pcn/evaluation.aspx). In that context, a dialogue will be necessary with Habitat 67’s administrators, shareholders and owner of Units 1011–1012.

To put the discussion in motion, Héritage Montréal adopted in 2015 a General Assembly resolution openly encouraging the Federal Government to consider including Montreal sites like Habitat 67 in the upcoming Tentative List, and communicated it to the Federal Minister of the Environment and Climate Change who is in charge of the World Heritage portfolio. We feel it would only be reasonable and right if the original builder of Habitat 67 – i.e. the Federal Government – returned to become a partner of its conservation and promotion.

Habitat is meant to be home, a conversation on its world recognition now needs to start on very domestic – and concrete – considerations. *C’est la vie! Vive la vie! Vive la ville! Vive Habitat 67!*

“Everything about it gave me the feeling of *house* and yet it gave me all the other things I had always wanted in a house but never found in the isolation of the anonymous suburb.”³

Beyond Expo and Habitat, the evaluation and conservation issues raised by these cases in Montreal could make a strong base for ICOMOS to develop helpful conservation principles and guidance. Like Olympic Stadiums and Parks, exhibition grounds and buildings are a type of heritage of the Modern era with particular conservation, care and presentation challenges. The spirit of exploration demonstrated



Fig. 12: Habitat 67 as seen from Montreal's port

by National Committees like ICOMOS Germany could be a guiding one for ICOMOS to move on these heritage issues in our future world.

“In its broad concept and all its details, Habitat 67 is an important contribution to the study of Man [sic] in the Community.”⁴

Readings and sources (web references consulted last on May 29, 2016)

Expo 67 – Guide officiel/official, Éditions Maclean Hunter, 1967

Moshe SAFDIE, Beyond Habitat, Montréal and Cambridge/Mass. 1970 (paperback edition 1973)

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McGill University – The Canadian Architecture Collection cac.mcgill.ca/safdie/habitat/

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Standards and Guidelines for the Conservation of Historic Places in Canada

www.historicplaces.ca/en/pages/standards-normes.aspx

Zusammenfassung

Unter dem Motto „Der Mensch und seine Welt“ feierte die Weltausstellung in Montreal das hundertjährige Bestehen

der kanadischen Konföderation. Zwischen dem 28. April und 27. Oktober 1967 besuchten über 50 Millionen Menschen die Ausstellung und ihre 90 Pavillons. Sie erlebten ein Fest der Architektur und des Designs und erhielten einen Blick auf die Zukunft der Städte, der Mobilität und der Kommunikation.

Von der kanadischen Regierung als Wohnausstellung auf der Expo errichtet, ist Habitat eine der wenigen Konstruktionen, die anschließend bewahrt wurden. Das Konzept der Anlage, ihre Form und Konstruktion stammten von Moshe Safdie, der zunächst Architektur an der McGill Universität studierte und später beauftragt wurde, die Anlage zu erbauen. Neben dem Entwurf ist Habitat 67 auch eine herausragende Ingenieurleistung, die mit dem estnisch-amerikanischen Ingenieur August E. Komendant in Verbindung gebracht werden kann.

Auf einer Eisbrechermole aus dem 19. Jahrhundert gelegen, umfasst Habitat 354 Betonmodule (12,5 x 5,7 x 3,2 m) an einem landschaftlich gestalteten Ort. Vor Ort hergestellt und mit Fenstern, Isolierung, Küchen, Badezimmern und Innenausstattung versehen, wurden die Module angehoben und dann so gestapelt, dass sie 158 Apartments mit privater Außenterrasse ergaben.

50 Jahre später ist Habitat 67 ein ausgesprochen begehrter privater Wohnkomplex mit Kultstatus. Von der Stadt auf die Denkmalliste gesetzt, besitzt er auch nationalen Schutzstatus, seit das Kultusministerium von Quebec ihn 2009 als *monument historique* klassifizierte und den gesetzlichen Schutz auf die Interieurs von Wohneinheit 1011 und 1012 ausweitete. Derzeitige denkmalpflegerische Herausforderungen sind der alternde Beton, Gebäudesetzungen, schadhafte Fenster und Ausstattungselemente, Anpassung an heutige Energiestandards oder der Wunsch von Bewohnern, das Innere ihrer Wohneinheit umzugestalten oder Terrassen in Gewächshäuser umzuwandeln. Diese Herausforderungen sind nicht neu für Habitat 67; dennoch regt der nationale und internationale Stellenwert der Anlage dazu an, einen Konservierungsansatz zu wählen, der von ICOMOS und seinen Richtlinien profitiert.

Footnotes

- ¹ Expo 67 – Guide officiel 1967, p. 1.
- ² SAFDIE, Beyond Habitat 1973, p. 11.
- ³ SAFDIE, Beyond Habitat 1973, p. 12.
- ⁴ Expo 67 – Guide officiel 1967, p. 31.

Credits

Fig. 1: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Montreal_-_QC_-_Habitat67.jpg, Author: Wladyslaw, September 2008 [24.05.2016]
Fig. 2: Dinu Bumbaru

Fig. 3, 4, 8, 9: collection Dinu Bumbaru
Fig. 5: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Pont_de_la_Concorde.JPG, Author: Colocho, April 2006
Fig. 6: Collection Dinu Bumbaru
Fig. 7: https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/L'Homme_%28Calder%29#/media/File:Man,_Three_Disks_05.jpg, Author: Jeangagnon, June 2011
Fig. 10: Dinu Bumbaru
Fig. 11: Sigrid Brandt, 2016
Fig. 12: Wikipedia: Photo: Nora Vass, Stitch: Gergely Vass