

RESIDENTIAL CONSOLIDATION, PRESERVATION AND REHABILITATION PROGRAMME

Buenos Aires Historic City Centre

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Abstract. This work presents the Residential Consolidation, Preservation and Rehabilitation Programme which is part of the Management Plan of the Historic Center of the City of Buenos Aires, developed by the General Historic Center office of the Ministry of Culture of the Government of Buenos Aires.

The Programme shows how small financial incentives to rehabilitate architecturally significant buildings makes a surprising ripple effect in improving the built environment.

The Residential Consolidation, Preservation and Rehabilitation Programme is part of the Management Plan for the Buenos Aires Historic City Centre, promoting a comprehensive revitalisation of the historic city centre through different intervention programmes.

The Programme's overall aim is to protect and recover the built environment and to enhance the residential experience of the neighbourhood by improving living conditions and maintaining the original population in their own habitat.

The Historic City Centre (HCC) has had a major population decline in recent years, being among the areas with the highest loss of population in the city, as well as being inhabited by low income sectors unable to afford the maintenance of architecturally significant buildings. According to the Census data from 2001, there are 93,912 inhabitants and 17,400 have migrated in the 1991-2001 period, accounting for a 15.6% drop, 2.6 times higher than the city's overall figure .

As regards major achievements, the population has become increasingly aware as to how to safeguard their neighbourhood's architectural heritage, thus spawning an interest not only in the rehabilitation of their private homes, but also, in the active pursuit of environmental improvements within the neighbourhood, resulting in a ripple effect that may be experienced first-hand by visiting the area.

Even though earmarked public funds are limited, and despite new city authorities, the Programme's continuity and sustainability over time have had a major impact, enabling the rehabilitation of numerous buildings, whether of architectural significance or representative of a more domestic scale.

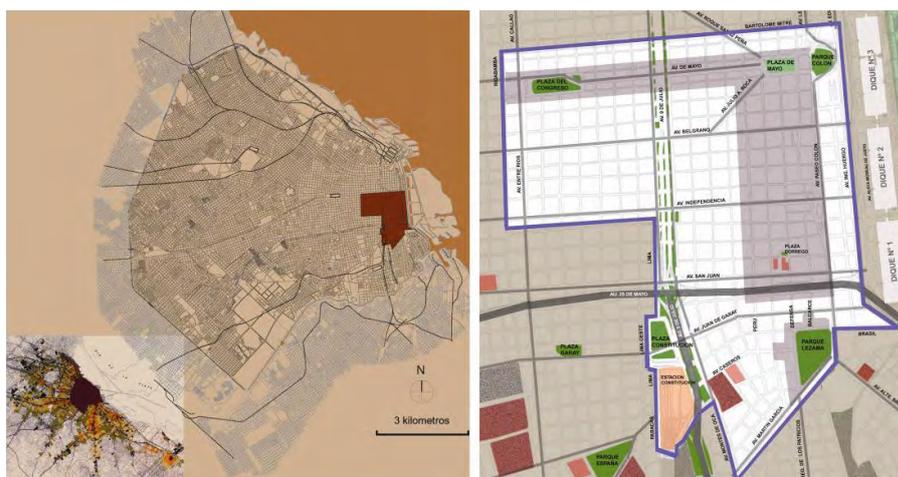
Given the lack of affordable credit, this Programme is an option by which lower income sectors can improve their homes. These incentives act as a trigger to enable public-private investments, as in many cases, depending on the extent of the project, beneficiaries contribute funds to conclude work.

Buenos Aires Historic City Centre and its Management Plan

The Historic Centre of the City of Buenos Aires is unique. No other one in town keeps the memory and history of our country. It's a remarkable place because of its dimensions, the quality of their public spaces and its buildings and because of having been the framework of the greatest events of the past. It's important for local inhabitants as well as for people from abroad.

The Historic Centre is located in the Central Area of the City, it keeps the most ancient buildings belonging to the XIX Century and other heritage buildings from recent times.

This area includes the Avenida de Mayo, with its high symbolic and historical value and the History Centre with its strong identity. But at the same time it represents the most vulnerable and deteriorated part of the Central Area. It is constituted by Montserrat and San Telmo neighborhoods and their areas of influence. It has a strong touristic potential and a residential use, and receives the impact of the public services proper from a city and the urban mobility belonging to the City, Puerto Madero neighborhood and the train station of Constitucion.



Buenos Aires City and the Historic Centre Location

As a consequence of all these reasons, the Historic Centre, not only has a genuine value, but it also develops a strategic role in the retraining of the city as well. To face these problems it's necessary to set strategic lines of action, and most of them have an impact on the whole City.

In this way, there is a Management Plan of the Historic Centre, which sets a whole policy that preserves the values historical-cultural, urban and architectural and makes possible to reactivate this unique sector, taking advantage of its potential and opportunities and overcoming their difficulties and threats.

The programmes of this Plan have different thematic and levels of complexity:

1- Environmental Improvement Programme of the Urban Space

This program proposes the actions on the urban space that tend to improve the quality of the landscape and environment.

2- Conservation and rehabilitation Programme of Heritage Buildings

The aim of this programme is to develop a protection policy and the enhancement of the architectural, urban and cultural heritage. As for the heritage building, its protection and rehabilitation constitute a very important role because it is framework and continent of urban activities. The action on these buildings tends to preserve and show its full value, improving the quality of the neighborhood.

3- Promotion of the Activities Programme

This program undertakes social, cultural and economic themes of the resident population of the area. It develops strategic lines to solve economic drop and the growth of unemployment through job training programmes. It promotes the cultural activity and the intensive use of urban spaces and it tends to the increase social networks.

4- Historic City Centre Workshop School Programme

This programme consists of the training for young unemployed people, giving them the opportunity to learn a trade, and seeks to be an initiative that make possible to articulate training and employment and provides skilled labour for the rehabilitation of the heritage building.

5- Residential Consolidation Programme

This program focuses on the strengthening of the role of the residential use of the area and the improvement of the living conditions of the local population, promoting actions in order to encourage the public and private investment. As a consequence, the residential use strengthens the area.

6- Equipping Community Programme

This program presents the improvement and expansion of the equipment supply and community services and works to focus the residential sector, reinforcing the identity.

7- Awareness and Diffusion of the Heritage Programme

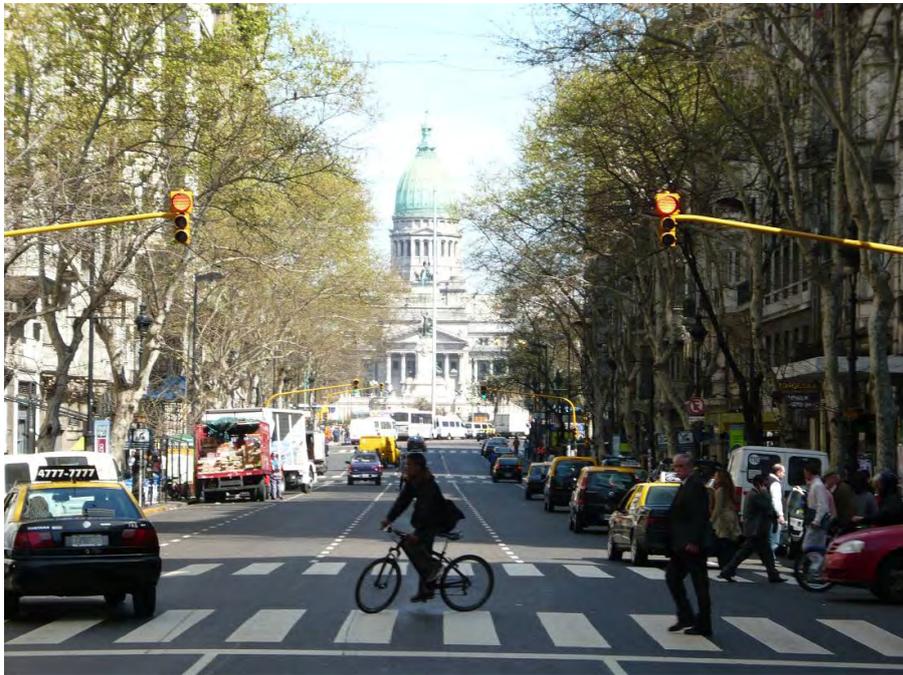
This programme is related to the interaction with the community and actions to raise awareness of heritage. It points this out through people's participation and commitment. These lines of work are not considered individually, but they are joint actions that makes possible the achievement of the of the aims concerning to the revitalization of the Old Town and its environment.



San Telmo Neighborhood



San Telmo Neighborhood



Avenida de Mayo

The Residential Consolidation, Preservation and Rehabilitation Programme.

Key Dates.

2000: Free Technical Counselling Programme initiated.
 2000: Historic City Centre Workshop School (HCCWS) established.
 2004: Metropolitan Fund for Culture, the Arts and Sciences (MFCAS) founded.
 2005: First Architecturally Significant Buildings rehabilitated.
 2007: New City Authorities and Continuity of Programme.

Situation before the initiative began

Old buildings inhabited by a low-income population unable to afford the maintenance of their housing coupled with shoddy work resulting from unskilled labour and/or lack of technical assistance caused irreversible damage. Lack of credit brought on by the 2001 crisis affected the population, impacting negatively on the chances of rehabilitation.

Establishment of priorities

Priorities meet the guidelines established in the Management Plan for the Buenos Aires Historic City Centre to achieve the area's recovery through effective action aimed at benefiting the greatest number of neighbours, including:

- Revitalising the area, by enhancing its appeal, its building and environmental qualities, and the quality of neighbourhood living.
- Providing professional support and the participation of skilled labour to control the deterioration process.
- Facilitating affordable financial alternatives for low-income residents to recover the built environment.
- Keeping the original population in their habitat.

Formulation of objectives and strategies

Objectives

The Programme grants small financial incentives to rehabilitate architecturally significant buildings (prioritising lower income residents), provides technical assistance, and encourages hiring skilled labour trained at the HCCWS.

Strategies

- Promoting and increasing awareness for the need to adequately recover architecturally significant buildings by providing technical support to residents.
- Participating in the HCCWS Programme, which trains unemployed or underemployed individuals showing signs

of conflict and few chances of success in the job market as skilled craftsmen in the building restoration trade.

- Optimising funds earmarked by the MFCAS to restore architecturally significant buildings within the Historic City Centre.

Mobilisation of resources

Programme provides technical, financial, and human resources supplied by city government (basically from funds assigned to the Historic City Centre General Directorate [HCCGD], the HCCWS and the MFCAS), and mobilises financial/technical resources from private stakeholders.

A team of experts under the HCCGD supplies technical advice to residents upon request, evaluating and choosing the restoration projects within the MFCAS framework, thus controlling and monitoring restoration and preservation work.

The HCCWS, along with the HCCGD, provides human resources to train students as skilled workers (craftspeople), facilitates building supplies for labour practices, and encourages the hiring of skilled labour to recover buildings, thereby promoting the incorporation of students into the workplace.

The MFCAS, under the Ministry of Culture, promotes, consolidates, encourages, and safeguards the heritage and cultural industries of the city, by providing grants to execute and sustain projects, programmes, and activities. Private stakeholders (residents, NGOs, religious groups, associations, foundations, civil entities, etc) are MFCAS beneficiaries, providing the necessary economic contributions according to the complexity and/or estimated building rehabilitation budget.

Building contractors, hired by the beneficiaries, supply physical/human resources to execute the project, at times also providing financing for owners to conclude work.

Thus, a ripple effect for investments by private stakeholders ensues.

Process

This ongoing programme gained strong momentum as of 2004 with the establishment of the MFCAS, having achieved broad and sustained acceptance to date, with high expectations among residents.

Basically all buildings surveyed within the HCC are submitted, i.e., those listed in the Buenos Aires Planning Code's urban catalog.

To perform the evaluation, assessment criteria include heritage value of the property under review, project impact on the city and neighbourhood, social value, current status, uses, accessibility, occupants' socioeconomic level, investments made and/or likelihood of private contributions, and location within Historic Preservation

Areas.

One basic requirement is a technical information kit for each building, and free counselling provided by the HCCGD is fundamental to complement the presentation, as it describes building pathologies and provides detailed diagnostics as to the state of the property.

Once project beneficiaries are defined, a period of accommodation begins, with participation by the HCCGD, commonhold associations/owners, building contractors, and professionals in charge of the work.

HCCGH provides technical support, regularly monitoring projects to ensure adequate work. The aim is to incorporate highly skilled labour into the workforce by fostering the participation of HCCWS students.

Upon work conclusion, beneficiaries must submit an expenditure report to the MFCAS and HCCGD to account for project conclusion in due time and form, attesting to strict adherence to the project's preservation criteria. So far there has been a surprising ripple effect in improving the built environment. Specific areas have changed their appearance because of subsequent private investments.

Problems Faced:

1. Diversity of projects led to the need to adjust subsidies criteria, to benefit domestic architecture. The evaluation was initially performed without differentiating categories of buildings (thus, representative buildings were generally selected), but as of 2005, and due to great differences in the complexity and architectural scale of buildings, the evaluation began to differentiate three subgroups: Landmark Architecture, Meaningful and Domestic.
2. Contingency insurance for the subsidised amount mandatory as of 2006, due to a lack of compliance in project execution.
3. Social heterogeneity within the same building is a drawback when evaluating/assessing socioeconomic status.
4. Scheduled work can never be executed because of cost variations resulting from time elapsed between submitting projects to starting work (due to red tape, building permits, project changes, etc).
5. Existence of landmark buildings with irregular occupancy/ownership. Such buildings are ineligible under this Programme. Other legal alternatives are being studied.
6. Growing expulsion of original residents.

Results achieved

So far, our goals have been met, with noticeable improvement within the HCC.

Although the total HCC building rehabilitation budget is

generally low (down since 2008, significantly affecting the number of buildings being worked on), Programme is still in effect. Work is underway to mobilise interest among private investors.

Annually, 40-50 applications. Depending on the budget, only 3-10 projects may benefit for a maximum amount per building not exceeding USD 21,000.

Overall positive effect is noteworthy, particularly among beneficiaries for whom subsidies are essential to initiate, continue and/or conclude work at a scale that otherwise could not be addressed solely by private investments.

Forty buildings were rehabilitated. Net public investment strictly for construction amounts to USD 600,000. Approximately 31% of private funds should be added as consideration, coupled with physical/human resources provided by HCCGD, HCCWS and MFCAS.

Demand for experts and skilled labour rose significantly over the years, and HCCWS training is fundamental. There is free public access to the HCCGD database of craftspeople, companies and professionals dedicated to the rehabilitation of the built environment. Database is very useful when seeking specialised labour.

Increased awareness and concern among residents as to caring for the built environment. Besides the conclusion of properly executed projects, outreach tasks and regular meetings with HCC residents are a direct channel to communicate both what has been done and its effect on the built environment, as well as a way to encourage future applicants and take note of their needs and worries.

Sustainability

Financial and Economic: The Programme is made possible by the joint efforts of the DGCH, HCCWS and MFCAS under the City of Buenos Aires Ministry of Culture. These areas contribute with funds or with part of their working budget. The contribution of private stakeholders also plays a fundamental role in the sustainability of the Programme.

Social: The Programme is designed primarily to benefit those sectors with fewer resources. Nonetheless, other middle sectors residing in unique buildings and unable to afford rehabilitation without government aid are also eligible.

Please note that this is not a profit-making social programme. Its purpose is to facilitate the improvement of the HCC building inventory, prioritising lower income residents and buildings with a high landmark status.

Cultural: Awareness campaigns as to the HCC's cultural heritage and its preservation for future generations are part of joint efforts between the City of Buenos Aires Government and HCC residents who, aware of the message, perceive the subsidies as a means to improve their buildings.

Environmental: The environmental sustainability of the HCC results from executing the Management Plan (in effect since 20 years ago) which, in addition to this Programme, makes use of additional measures and comprehensive work that take into account the various problems of the area.

The renewal of different areas within the HCC, in addition to improving environmental quality, benefits the tourism sector, given that a revamped historic city centre has a direct impact on local businesses, hotels, restaurants, etc.

Institutional: There has been a remarkable integration between the local administration and residents' strong and sustained support when executing the Programme. The Programme has been in effect since 2004, thanks to funds from the Ministry of Culture assigned to the MFCAS.

Lessons learned

One lesson is that it is possible to effectively introduce improvements in historic city centre buildings and their urban context with low public investment programmes that trigger interest among private stakeholders.

Another lesson is that the concept of caring for the cultural heritage and the importance of its preservation may be instilled among residents to improve living conditions and neighbourhood appeal.

To enhance this Programme, it would be important to:

- Optimise and reduce the Programme timeframe (administrative channels, building permits, accreditation of funds to beneficiaries, etc) to enable fast-tracking results.
- Increase the annual budget, to ensure the execution of more projects and thus enhance the Programme's impact.
- Have special consideration for those buildings that pose a high risk, even if they fail to comply with the Programme requirements.

Transfers

This Programme is in effect not only in the Historic City Centre but throughout the City of Buenos Aires, including a Subprogramme aimed at restoring movable property.

This initiative can be replicated elsewhere regardless of the size of the city. The following aspects should not be neglected:

- Budget
- Administrative coordination
- Technical team specialising in rehabilitation and preservation
- Information and awareness campaigns
- Specialised labour
- Institutions, NGOs and residents supporting the Programme

Related policy/ies or legislation

In 2004, the City of Buenos Aires Government passed Decree No. 1020/04 establishing the Metropolitan Fund for Culture, the Arts and Sciences, and providing economic and financial support to carry out and sustain projects, programmes and activities related to the development and promotion of culture and science in its various manifestations.

This fund serves the following purposes:

Financing of projects for the creation, production, and promotion of music, the visual arts, mixed media, and other artistic and scientific disciplines;

Financing of promotional and artistic and scientific training projects, to rescue and promote traditional place-specific cultural manifestations, cultural and scientific events and programmes;

Financing of preservation, rehabilitation, and promotion projects for intangible and tangible assets, real estate or otherwise, as well as research, rescue, preservation and promotional projects of different cultural manifestations; Financing of construction, repair, accommodation and equipping of cultural and scientific infrastructure;

Financing of projects to create, maintain, and develop cultural industries;

Financing of projects by individuals with a cultural or scientific background, for their training, continuing education or specialisation in Argentine or foreign institutions, whether public or private, of renown academic prestige.

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