

HERITAGE AT RISK:

Local development, a strategy for its control: historic quarter of the City of Colonia del Sacramento

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In 1995 the “Historic Quarter of the City of Colonia del Sacramento” was declared World Heritage Site, was the culmination of a process of valuation and protection of the site that went consolidating from the first decades of century XX.

The interest by the site, its natural attractive, historical one and by its quality of life due to its modest scale already had generated the interest of a certain type of Buenos Aires people eager to escape of the anxious life of the metropolis in its time of rest. In the last decades of XX century, the progressive displacement of the resident population takes place that is replaced by weekend inhabitants of much greater and being able economic, was the beginning of a current that would be like a avalanche for the site. The Census of 1975 indicated that 1289 people lived in the Historic Quarter. In a inquiry on 2009 235 were entered.

The great real estate pressure, with the consequent increase of the value of the land, was exerting a value of investment and interchange with the objective of increasing its yield.

Simultaneously, the tourist interest was in increase until, now, the tourist pressure on the site is enormous. In the five years between 2006 and 2010, the entrance of tourists was increased in a 137per cent, happened from 99,358 to 235,789 visitors. , The preliminary data of year 2011 indicate an increase with respect to the previous year, reason why the tendency stays.

Its location in the Río de la Plata, in front of the very next city of Buenos Aires (50 km), was and is, an inexorable data from its foundation to the present time. In its origins, the military siege that exerted the Kingdom of Spain as opposed to the audacious occupation that had made the Kingdom of Portugal of the “Banda Oriental” when founding Colonia del Sacramento on 1680, turned it frequent scene of the confrontation armed between the two colonial powers in the present Uruguayan territory.

Now, the affluence of the Argentine tourism as

international is the generator of the great impact that Buenos Aires exerts on Colony. Notice that the passage to Colonia is offered to the visitors of Buenos Aires, like excursion by the day.

One of the most serious problems for the conservation of the site is its scale, extremely modest, that makes it highly vulnerable. The Historical Quarter occupies a surface of 16 hectares, with 282 parcels which gives account of its size. In this frame, it was tried to construct a pair of projects of great scale that had hit very seriously in the quality of the site. First a hotel - casino located in de Historical Quarter, and a second one consisting in a complex of departments, shopping and port of yachts denominated “Marinas del Sacramento”, that had filled up and occupied part of the bay, forced the authority of the site, the “Consejo Ejecutivo Honorario” to ask for the intervention of the World Heritage Center. WHC sent a mission in 2008 to evaluate the impact in addition to the conservation state of the good. Luckily, they were managed to stop those projects.

But not only these extreme interventions affect the value of Colonia, also the multiplication of stores and tourist services, still small, have seriously altered to their authenticity and the spirit of the place, when moving the population and substitution of the residential use of the ancient houses.

The weakness or lack of conviction of the local government in the control of the interventions, added to difficulties to coordinate between local and national government, where the competitions and responsibilities are in prevention, causes that the management of the site is very difficult. Not yet it has been managed to make a management plan although it has been protested by the World Heritage Center in multiple occasions. Nevertheless, it must be mentioned that the material conservation of the constructions is satisfactory.

In the presence of these difficulties, with the objective to diminish the pressure over the heritage, and to deal with to revert or to diminish the factors

that put it in risk, generated mainly by the massive tourism, the instrumentation becomes necessary of alternative measures.

The idea after this strategic plan, is to harness the heritage and tourist interests outside area "WHS", but in its proximities. In a radius of few kilometers a plot of localities and sites of interest cultural, historical, landscaping and environmental exists that give options to the visitors, who coordinated by the local and national Authorities allow to possibly control and to diminish, the pressure on the WHS. As this strategy already has been evaluated positively, it stands out that recently the Ministry of Tourism of Uruguay has inaugurated the "Center of Interpretation" in Colonia where it offers to information of the tourist alternatives of the zone and rest of the country. Without a doubt that is not the only measurement that would have to be taken.

The complementary supply very is varied. Options of cultural and historical tourism are "Calera de las Huérfanas", Conchillas, the city of Carmelo, Real de San Carlos, Anchorena Park, Estancia and chapel of Narbona, in the department of Colonia. Villa Soriano and other sites located in the near department of Soriano. Rural tourism in several "Estancias" of the zone, where a direct bonding with the agrarian production in contact with the nature can be had. Several vineyards and wine cellars are also a very attractive alternative. Tourism of nature observation is other value, since Uruguay has a rich fauna, specially birds, and own flora of the region. Tourism nautical in several sport ports: Nueva Palmira, Carmelo and Riachuelo. In addition to the most traditional beach tourism, since they are many those that lay out the coast of the department on the Río de la Plata.

The next local communities can and must play a fundamental roll of promotion, management and control of these initiatives of micro local development. The local government would have to be transformed into this sense, to be an important promoter of a participation policy and decentralization.

Moreover, a case exists that demonstrates that this is possible, is the one of "Calera de las Huérfanas", where the community has taken the reins from the recovery and putting in value of a Jesuitical site of century XVIII.

The Calera, denominated originally "Estancia de Belén", constructed in the middle of century XVIII, was integrated to the system of protection and evangelization that the Jesuits orchestrated in the colonies, was not a Jesuit town, like the Missions of Argentina, Brazil and Paraguay, but a productive

unit, that supplied to the congregation settled down in Buenos Aires. The build set included a chapel, residence for the priests, the slaves and some natives, factories and furnaces of lime who supplied to Buenos Aires. At the beginning of century XIX, the vault of the chapel collapsed. The constructions went away deteriorating and in addition they served like quarry of materials for the construction of the neighboring city of Carmelo.

At the beginning of 20th century, almost everything was in ruins, but also the first attempts arose to protect the rest of the chapel to impulses of ladies of Carmelo, in 1938 obtains their declaration like Historical Monument. After several interventions of consolidation, in 2000 a work of historical and archeological investigation begins, but is suspended shortly after, nevertheless much material in the excavations is collected.

The Calera continues in the memory of the inhabitants of the place, who recognize it as she leaves from his past and they value it as a historically and religious symbol. In the presence of the impulse of the community a ONG forms "Movimiento pro Calera de las Huérfanas" that will manage to involve to diverse actors: Consejo Ejecutivo Honorario de Colonia, Intendencia de Colonia, Ministry of Tourism and the civil society, with diverse experiences and capacities, that generate one significant synergy.

The support of United Nations Development Program and the City council of Vitoria-Gasteiz (Basque Country) is obtained to finance educative and investigation activities with center in Calera but with greater implications. Courses of formation of tour guides are distributed. In addition, experts are working in the "Plan Director de Calera de las Huérfanas", destined to his restoration, protection and management.

The high school students in Carmelo also participate, acquiring training in tasks of processing of the collected archaeological material in 2000.

The success of this "experiment" of management and shared protection depends largely on which the impulse of the community is continuous, since the official supports are little. But it is obtained, will be important by the effect multiplied that it could have.