

VERNACULAR ARCHITECTURE AND THEIR SETTING VULNERABILITY : ONE EXAMPLE OF RECOVERING HERITAGE AND SETTING

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Vernacular architecture frequently makes up the setting of a site or a monument; this fact is of great importance for its conservation and adequate use. In other occasions, vernacular architecture is immersed in a natural setting that is an essential part of the value of the vernacular heritage as a whole. A third scenario is when compounds of vernacular edifications are located in urban settings of a historical nature, around monuments and heritage buildings. In any case, the setting proves to be of the utmost importance for the integral conservation of vernacular compounds; therefore it is imperative that their study, dissemination and protection be attended to with rigor. It is necessary to have concrete indicators that help define and delimit vernacular heritage and its setting in order to protect both of them.

The setting of a vernacular group of buildings can be defined as the natural or urban environment that surrounds it as far as a spectator that stands at any point in the complex can see. Within that setting, human settlements with the culture native to that location are taken into account, as well as the socio-cultural aspects of the group or groups that belong to the setting.

A convenient starting point is to create a classification that is simple and at the same time applicable to most of the locations that still possess some samples of vernacular heritage. The following indicators can be applied for defining the compounds composed by vernacular architectural samples:

- a) Architecture that is proper to the place.
- b) Construction that is made with local materials and traditional building systems.
- c) Anonymous architecture that is the product of a specific group.
- d) Edifications that reflect a clear response to climate and environment.

With the aim of knowing the state of the vernacular compound and its setting, the following indicators relative to vernacular edifications should be included and applied:

- 1) They preserve their original characteristics.
- 2) They are partially altered but preserve the fundamental

elements of their construction.

3) They are altered by more than two thirds and have lost their historical-vernacular value.

In order to classify the vernacular compound in its terms of its setting and cultural heritage, the following indicators are suggested:

1) Between 90 and 100% of its original characteristics are preserved in its edifications.

2) 40% of the complex is altered.

3) Over 70% of the compound has lost its original characteristics.

4) The original layout of the compound is preserved.

5) Over 50% of the original layout of the complex has been altered.

6) Over 70% of the material in streets, sidewalks and open spaces is preserved.

7) Squares, corners and other spaces preserve their basic original characteristics.

8) The compound has been distorted by the insertion of urban fittings of inadequate characteristics.

9) The vernacular compound has been altered by the insertion of new, out-of-context architecture by over 30%.

10) Economic, housing or social pressures have deteriorated the compound.

11) To a large degree, the destruction of the vernacular compound is due to the absence of a legal framework to protect it.

12) The compound is destroyed or deteriorated due to neglect and lack of maintenance.

With precise answers to these questions, strategies for conservation and rehabilitations can be formulated.

Once the previous diagnosis has been made, indicators can be defined for the setting of a vernacular compound:

If it is a natural landscape setting:

1) 80% of the setting is preserved.

2) More than 40% of the natural setting has been altered by the insertion of edifications, buildings and the expansion of the urban sprawl.

3) More than 50% of the natural setting has been altered by the introduction of foreign plant species and by accelerated deforestation.

4) The setting has been considerably altered due to social

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pressures.

5) Unemployment and other economic and cultural factors influence the destruction or alteration of a natural setting.

6) The natural setting has been altered by the exploitation of its natural resources such as mines, forests, and water, as well as by soil and water pollution.

7) Immoderate tourism has destroyed or altered a determined natural setting.

In the case that the vernacular compound's setting is of an urban nature:

1) 80% of the setting is preserved.

2) More than 40% of the urban setting has been altered by the insertion of edifications or constructions that are alien to the context.

3) The urban setting has been altered by immoderate growth and does not have an urban planning program. The development of architecture that is completely alien to the vernacular compound makes the setting worthless and is an element of distortion instead of an adequate framework for vernacular heritage.

4) The wrong use of the urban setting goes against the conservation of the vernacular-historical compound's nature as heritage.

5) Different social and economic pressures contribute to the setting deterioration.

6) The local traditional culture of the groups that have settled in some particular setting has been distorted by economic factors or by urban-rural trans-cultural process.

7) The vernacular architecture's setting, be it natural or urban, lacks any legal or administrative protection.

8) The pollution of air, soil and water has influenced the deterioration of the urban setting.

If the above indicators are applied to a specific problem related to the setting of a vernacular compound, the reasons for altering or destroying it can be defined and strategies can be developed that can reconstitute and preserve it better.

New formulas have to be promoted for the adequate use and preservation of the landscapes that make up the urban and rural settings of vernacular architecture.

These measures must go beyond legal and administrative aspects, which are necessary but insufficient. In the specific case of vernacular architecture, legal measures should be proposed for its protection and rational use, and they must be extended to the urban and natural setting of vernacular compounds. Legal measures should strive not only to conserve complexes and their settings, but also to improve

the quality of life of their inhabitants and to create economic activities that do not deteriorate the setting and the permanence of local customs, traditions and culture.

The permanence of social attitudes in the communities that have a relationship with a specific setting should be fostered and preserved, taking into account the fact that the changes within them have occurred due to the speed of technological processes and urbanization, as well as the influence of urban areas in rural communities and the ways in which the setting has been affected.

The following is an example of the preservation of a vernacular location, the adequate management of its setting, and the multidisciplinary aspects needed to integrate all the social, economic, ideological and cultural factors in a process of recovery of heritage and reassessment of the setting.

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In May last year, the ICOMOS Mexico Scientific Committee for Vernacular Architecture held a workshop related to the possible rescue and preservation of the most important vernacular samples prevalent in the indigenous region of the Purepecha Meseta. As a result of the workshop, attended by Dr. Christoph Machat, president of the ICOMOS Scientific Committee for Vernacular Architecture, a small community of around 180 families was selected who live within a settlement delimited by a natural landscape that is not only well preserved, but also fundamental to the history and life of the community. This village has lived from forest resources for many years, since that is where their first cultural heritage emerged from: the Purepecha wooden house.

Despite the fact that the forest and the mountain have been exploited for survival, the landscape and its setting remain practically unaltered, providing sustenance and a natural historical framework for that community.

Many other locations within the region that had an important vernacular heritage of similar characteristics have been affected by its destruction or alteration, and the value of the setting has been lost. Isolated vernacular houses, as opposed to monuments that have had their value preserved despite the alteration of the setting, are of no value as heritage; thus the importance of preserving the vernacular compounds in such a way that they themselves are the setting.

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In order to carry out the necessary studies and projects in the San Antonio location, through its Committee for Vernacular Architecture ICOMOS proposed an agreement last year with the University of the State of Michoacan. Since then professors, graduate and undergraduate architecture students, as well as students studying wood engineering, have been collaborating in the implementation of fieldwork for detailed research alongside the executive conservation programs. The ICOMOS Mexico Committee for Vernacular Architecture is conducting the project as an advisor and also manages the resources. To date there are blueprints for developing the urban planning layout and 180 floor and facade plans have been drawn for each house in the location, as well as for their constructive systems and to determine the state of the wood the heritage architecture is built from. There is also a project in place to improve the kitchens, the construction of a room for personal cleansing and the reposition of roofs and wooden pieces.

The state government and the city council are cooperating with the transportation of students and are paying their room and board. Contact has also been established with different government agencies in order to introduce potable water, cobble the streets, and improve and conserve housing, as well as to generate productive activities with their subsequent sources of employment.

The establishment of a of a clay oven bakery and the provision of sheep for wool production have both been programmed. The natural setting, composed of the mountains with forests, is being protected through reforestation; vernacular compounds and houses will be improved in their traditional form, and the introduction of sanitary services and small improvements in the kitchens will allow inhabitants to appreciate their own heritage again and feel proud of it, instead of adopting constructions that are completely alien to their culture, the climate and the setting. With this, the local landscape that represents the nearby setting will be preserved for the inhabitants themselves, and the forests in the mountains that naturally frame the community will be preserved through rational use.

The following is a table of the investments obtained by ICOMOS and the financial requirements that are still needed.

There is also a table of the investment and actions implemented to date.

On the other hand, the project includes the elaboration and implementation of a simple book of municipal rules and

regulations applicable to the edification of new constructions and the expansion of existing ones.

With the aim of recovering vernacular heritage, maintaining urban and natural settings and fostering the integral development of marginal indigenous populations, we aim for this project and its recuperation program to become a model for the state government to apply and follow in other similar indigenous locations.

Abstract

Vernacular architecture is the most vulnerable of all built heritage, and it is in danger of disappearing in most countries in the world. In most cases, the protection of its setting has been left out of legal and administrative considerations.

Specific indicators that help define vernacular architecture and its setting with precision are necessary to protect them. In the case of built vernacular heritage, it is useful to start with a simple classification that can be applied to most of the places where it still exists. Once this classification has been accepted, it can then be related to the corresponding natural and urban surroundings, taking into account tangible and intangible heritage as well. In this way, it will be possible to use universal concepts to define and even to catalogue the heritage landscape settings that are an essential part of the context of the vernacular.

To preserve the setting of urban and natural landscapes it is necessary to establish specifically norms and; the protection that is currently in place can then be extended to the entire setting and in each case the differences related to urban and rural aspects can be clearly defined.

It is necessary to promote new formulas for the preservation and adequate use of the landscapes that form the urban and rural setting of vernacular architecture. These measures should go beyond the administrative and legal arena, which is necessary but not enough on its own. They should take into account the social attitudes of the communities linked to the specific setting, and understand the changes that have been brought on by the pace of technological change and urbanization, as well as the influence of urban areas on rural communities and the ways in which the setting has been affected.

Finally, an analysis will be made of how the destruction and modification of the setting of vernacular heritage will end up contributing to the disappearance of a large part of the intangible heritage.

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CONTRIBUTIONS IN 2005

GOVERNMENT	LOCAL UNIVERSITY	MUNICIPALITY	ICOMOS	COMMUNITY
Water studies and project \$ 20 000.00	Projects and Research \$30 000.	Room and board for students and teachers \$ 2 500.00	Technical advice Project and coordination Resource management \$ 3000.00	Volunteer Work Support for students and teachers \$ 10 000.00
Streets executive Project \$ 4000.0				
Small sewage Works project \$ 50 00.00				
Productive Activities \$ 3000.00				
Housing architectural projects \$ 10 000.00				

TOTAL INVESTMENT 2005: \$ 87 500.00 USD

INVESTMENT REQUIRED: 200 000.00 USD