

MEMORY, VALUES AND TEACHING IN HAVANA Angela ROJAS*, Cuba

Different people have different values. Poverty, conflicts and social differences are evidenced by disruptions, ugliness and other urban landscapes but, at the same time, they are the answers to functions and symbols developed by people to deal with adversity. Vernacular houses, urban spaces and building typologies are, in those cases, produced by feelings and religious beliefs more than by any other kind of idea. The townscape acquires importance once again, since values are not only produced by historicity or beauty, but by particular ways of life and the way in which people use and understand the environment. To show diversity in heritage could be a way to understand diversity in people.

Cuba is a country with cultural roots in four continents: America, Europe, Africa and Asia. We Cubans are sure that our identity is based, precisely, on mixture. It is also a dynamic identity, changing and improving through time. Havana, founded in 1519, has today almost two million inhabitants and is probably the best-preserved city in America, though many of its buildings are in bad condition. Its intangible heritage is known worldwide.

Colon neighbourhood is an ugly and dilapidated area of Havana but, at the same time, it is full of traditions and place-attachment. It is located very close to Old Havana, the foundation site included in the World Heritage List. Its borders are in good condition. It has beautiful hotels and pedestrian walks, but the interior areas are not in good shape, so investors are not interested in them. Some people say that this neighbourhood must be demolished because it has no value, since there are no beautiful buildings considered in terms of works of art.

We are convinced that Colon neighbourhood must be rehabilitated preserving its values and establishing a pedestrian relationship with Old Havana. It would be interesting for visitors to understand a particular part of Havana's history, evidenced by the people, their feelings and ways of life. This rehabilitation could, at the same time, develop and render this area more dynamic.

This presentation shows the way in which architecture students analysed and detected values focusing on how people use a place and how traditions have created their own urban and architectural structures, landscape and, why not, monuments.

The first thing our team did was an inventory based on cultural values such as historic, architectural, urban and intangible heritage, and each one was constituted by a group of different types of values. The idea was to assess values with a wide approach, taking into account at the same time intangible and tangible aspects.

Historic values have been classified as:

- Historic evolution.
- Historic, scientific facts developed in the area.
- Historic personalities who lived in the neighbourhood.
- Urban form as history.

Jose Lezama Lima, one of Cuba's most important writers, lived in Colon neighbourhood. His house, not so impressive in terms of architectural values, is, nevertheless, a very interesting place to visit, since it has been turned into a museum dedicated to Lezama and his work.

Urban form as history means that one can understand a city's evolution looking at its form, the shape of its spaces, grid scheme, etc. Pre-existing environmental features are printed on the urban form.

Architectural values have been classified as:

- Historic architectural values, including industrial and vernacular heritage.
- Architectural values.
- Relationship between architecture and intangible heritage.
- Type values. *Ciudadela*.
- Social values.

We have established a difference between historic architectural values and architectural values because our team thinks that it is necessary to find not only the historical values, but in fact also those present in contemporary architecture.

There is a special kind of value, the one related to architectural types in terms of their specific qualities. In Colon neighbourhood there is a type of tenement house called *ciudadela*, characterised by a courtyard surrounded by very small rooms that served as dwellings for single workers. They were developed since the 1850s, during Havana's industrial development.

To our team, social value means the importance given by inhabitants to a particular architectural type or example.

Urban values have been classified as:

- Urban form.
- Social values.
- Urban perception.
- How people use urban space.

ABSTRACT

In this case, urban form is understood in terms not of its importance as testimony, but of its particular value. At the same time, it is necessary to remember that people identify urban values in different ways related to a wide range of perceptions.

These different approaches are closely related to the different uses of space.

Intangible heritage has been classified as:

- Traditions.
- Music, dance. *Rumba de cajón*.
- Religion.
- Sad memories.

Rumba de cajón is a rhythm composed by the single men who lived in the tenement houses called *ciudadelas* during the first half of the 20th century. They were so poor that they couldn't buy drums and so they used wooden boxes to play.

We refer to sad memories because Colon neighbourhood was the most famous red zone in Cuba until 1952, when the police closed it down and prostitutes had to move to other areas not so near the urban centre. So, even if it constitutes a sad memory, its role is part of Havana's history.

When we finished our inventory of the neighbourhood, we realised that there were many more values than those assessed using an elementary approach based on architectural values. At the same time, since we believe that there is an indissoluble link between tangible and intangible heritage, we identified on a map the buildings and urban spaces characterised by all possible values.

Finally, it is very important to recognise the role played by 4th year students at Havana's School of Architecture. Since they are young it is very easy for them to approach conservation in a new and open-minded way, and to discuss their ideas with the inhabitants. At the same time, it is important to show them how people live, their problems and necessities, because town planning, preservation and architecture mean very much more than dealing with beautiful forms and spaces.

Students' points of view are an alternative approach to preservation and planning. At the same time, instilling values in students as citizens could be an approach not only to conservation, but to their lives as well.

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Colon neighbourhood is an ugly and dilapidated area of Havana but, at the same time, it is full of traditions and place-attachment. This presentation shows how architecture students analysed and detected values focusing on how people use a place and how traditions have created their own urban and architectural structures, landscape and, why not, monuments. Students' points of view are an alternative approach to conservation and planning. At the same time, instilling values in students as citizens could be an approach not only to conservation, but to deal with current and future conflicts.

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