

DEMONS, BULLS AND BOLEROS: ATTEMPTS TO PRESERVE THEIR CONTEXT.

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Abstract. Preserving the spirit of place is often an ambiguous endeavor, since determining precisely what is significant, what is not and what lies in between can be challenging. In many places, the significance of features, history and traditions has been modified by a variety of agents, such as artists, tour operators or public authorities, at times with good results, other times altering authenticity.

This paper analyzes different cases in Bolivia, Spain and Cuba, with the objective of showing how the spirit of place has been preserved, changed or even positively transformed, bringing about a new identity. It examines the contradictions between preserving intangible and tangible heritage; the misinterpretation of heritage due to the banalization of culture; and it looks at worthy examples of heritage that are well preserved, still in use, and in some cases, in a permanent state of revitalization.

1. Symbols, meanings, image.

The spirit of the Roman dwelling was the *genius loci*, who had its own shrine and was in charge of protecting the family, to whom it was tightly bound through the physical substance, that is, the house and the shrine. Christian Norberg-Schultz (1986) used that name to give a poetical explanation to the meaning of the place. In other words, it is nothing new. It has just been the beginning of a new stage in an international debate that had been too confined to the academic world and which includes the contribution of city planners, architects and critics such as Kevin Lynch, Spreiregen, Hesselgren, Gordon Cullen, Bacon, Sybil Moholy-Nagy, and others. In general, apart from the works of Gordon Cullen's and, partly, those of Lynch's, they

approached meanings taking into account the *ex novo* design and not the identification of bygone meanings.

Transmitting meanings ---or showing the *genius loci*--- can be done in several ways:

- Through the direct relationship between the functional container and the immaterial function. In the field of architecture it would be what is called *character*, that is, the expression of the primary function through the communicative function.
- Through an identity based on urban-scale referents, such as those identified by Kevin Lynch in *The Image of the City*.
- By means of landscape, urban, and architectural forms, or any other arts forms, through the process ranging from the primary sensations to the primary emotions and, eventually, to feelings. I would include both the transmission of a welfare perception and communication using abstract and figurative symbols. I would also include the assumption shared by those who know such symbols of an originally non-intentional symbolic meaning. This would be the case, for instance, of associative cultural landscapes.
- Through interpretation elements such as museum exhibits, signposts, graphics, etc.
- By using whatever information has been transmitted about a specific place by historiography, literature, art, urban legends and even *kitsch* and tourist propaganda. In the latter, the identity of the place might as well be distorted. All this adds a further historical meaning (sometimes false) to the place. Nonetheless, if the false meaning has endured for a long time, its value perhaps depends, then, on how universal or significant that added meaning is.
- By means of artistic or craft expressions characterizing the place.
- Through the combination of some of the expressions aforementioned. Perhaps, the most famous case is that of the Greek classic temple, originally conceived to express harmony and coherence, later in time identified as a transmitter of democratic ideals. Then, in the XIX century, it was assumed as a sign of stability and, eventually, with Postmodernism, it was recovered as a guarantor of prestige or became the target of mockery by iconoclasts who, at the same time, made it their own.

It would be interesting for the collective debate to give the possibility of identifying other ways of transmitting meanings. However, there is an opposite trend, based on a fundamentalist

functionalism, which refuses to give a communicative function to architecture.

Eliana Cárdenas and I had an interesting discussion with Claude Schnaidt in 1992 which led us to making a list, unfortunately lost, of names given by people to places or architectural works such as “The Crocodile” to Melnikov’s Street Car Worker’s Club, “The Thermometer” to the best rationalist curtain-wall building in Oviedo City, and, of course, in the case of Cuba: “La Raspadura” (sugar molasses cone) at the Revolution Square, “The Butterfly” at the Sports City, and others.

This topic is also related to the immaterial heritage, mainly to its urban or architectural space ---whether it has universal significance or not--- not only as a functional container, but as a spiritual transmitter as well. It also deals with the interpretation of historical places, often times regarded as commercial products, as it appears on the Interpretation Charter to be approved at the XVI ICOMOS General Assembly.

Undoubtedly, the spirit of the place, or meaning transmission, is an everlasting and complex issue and, above all, an exciting and difficult one to be dealt with full objectivity. Perhaps, that is what makes it so attractive. One of its problems could be the potential contradiction between the immaterial function and the spatial container. For instance, regarding the Oruro Carnival, which in 2002 was considered as one of the Masterpieces of the World Oral and Intangible Heritage, the current development of dance performances would require some of the streets of the city to be widened. However, that would affect the urban heritage whose values result from the communication of a completely different aspect, the boom of tin in the early XX century, with its subsequent expression through a regular urban grid and a beautiful eclectic architecture with European aspirations.

In Oruro city ---and now completely linked to the religious syncretism also resulting from the carnival as an offering to the Virgin of the Mine (Virgen del Socavón)--- the traditional culture has identified several rocks with the demons the Virgin had fought against.

Symbols can appear completely as icons not only when dealing with urban spaces, but also as part of the architectural structure itself. Sometimes they are topological and determine the architectural type, for instance, on defining the location of windows and doors, the relationship between spaces, etcetera. Some other times, they are

elements that have a mythical and magical meaning while, at the same time, having a functional character.

Maybe, it is more complex and contradictory to deal with the so-called sad memory or, in general, the heritage bound to events of a negative nature, sometimes horrible events such as Hiroshima, Auschwitz, and Robben Island, which are included on the World Heritage List in order to be remembered forever.

Others, less dramatic or long-time gone, imply, at least, the adoption of a stand in the face of ethical or cultural aspects, such as the meaning of power or classical slavery (the Roman Coliseum, Almadén's Gaol of the Forced, bullrings, shanty towns, etc.).

2. - *Genius Loci*, Cultural Routes and Serial Properties.

The concept of spirit of the place is similar to any kind of property, but the way of transmitting meaning differs according to a scale and, logically, to its symbolic significance. That is, a sculpture requires fewer resources than a landscape, but, at the same time, the figurative element in the former can play a role that is forbidden, in general, to the work of nature.

This kind of complexity also occurs in serial properties resulting from a cultural route, although it is easier to overcome contradictions in series stemming from some architectural type or function, mainly in those with few components.

Regarding preservation, assessment and interpretation, the problem lies on how to make objective decisions. It is very difficult to discover an existentialist character or dimension that, as Norberg-Schulz puts it is beyond history. It is particularly difficult to discover the relationship existing between past meanings and present meanings, but...how can one be sure that the meaning conferred by the specialists is the real meaning of the place or architectural work? There are many individuals receiving the meaning: residents, property owners, specialists, visitors, tourists.

“How can a place keep its identity under the pressure of a historical force? How can it get adapted to the demands of the change of public and private life?”(Norberg- Schulz 1986)

It is important to consider the spirit of the place when contemporary elements are included, although there is a contradiction between respect and the identification of what is contemporary. Can Boito's principles respect the *genius loci*?

Although it is not possible to come to a real truth, it is possible indeed to come to a relative truth. The solution may lie on trying to get to know the subjective aspect through objective data as much as possible. That is, on the one hand, seeking to find historical meanings in historiography, as well as in any other sources such as legends, oral traditions, etc. and, on the other hand, among the present inhabitants of the place, so as to know their interpretations, assessments, criteria.

It is also necessary to consider the authenticity and integrity of the ascribed meaning as a fundamental aspect in the subjective dimension.

In fact, there are different levels of responsibility on facing the place and its *genius loci*. If it happens to be a place of universal significance, decisions are more complex and should be based on solid grounds. If the scale has a more local character, people's opinions, as well as their traditions and values are of paramount importance.

In cultural routes, the concept of "spirit of the place" and its identification would be linked to its entirety. This is self-evident in cases such as the pilgrimage routes. However, due to the complexity of such routes, where different types of constituent elements may be present, there are added meanings related to the identities of the different places.

Meanwhile, in the case of complex and multifunctional routes, the spirit of the place may be somewhat varied, since meaning changes according to the specific type of place. However, what is important is that its essence has not been distorted by lack of integrity or "felonies" against authenticity.

It is the processes of history that truly give significance to places or monuments, as has happened with the cultural routes, where their capacity for creating cultural dynamism and a cross-fertilization among the affected cultures ensures a response to the dissemination of their values, uniqueness and diversity. Individual peculiarities in terms of age or size are not the only significant factors for the recognition of universal value when properties are elements of a cultural route. Those of world-wide scope have been the axes of history and, as such, they have their own significance.

An interesting case is that of the "Camino Real Intercontinental" (Intercontinental Royal Road) and, in particular, the properties related to the mercury route along that road.

The dynamic character of the Camino Real is distinctive in its complex historic functionality related to the use and control of the territory and for its specific geographical dimension, as well as for

constituting a fundamental basis for relations between Europe and a large part of America.

It demonstrates how mining activities gave rise to particular cultural expressions and determined specific intangible and unique characteristics whose main value is the conservation of the spirit of the site as manifested by the community's commitment to its history.

3. - Almadén in the Camino Real Intercontinental. "Bulls".

A mining culture has certain peculiarities that arise in mercury and silver works, and these specific traits are manifested in tangible heritage. There are influences in terms of the means and system used for transportation, with a noteworthy contribution from ship building on both sides of the Atlantic. Other influences can be seen in architecture, formal patterns in cities, and the immaterial heritage and in technological exchanges.

The work carried out by miners and mining engineers contributed to shaping the urban appearance of the towns, with emblematic and singular buildings, demonstrating the complete technical training possessed by professionals of that time and their skilful use of materials, spaces and forms of use. The development of mining is not an isolated and exclusively technical element, but a whole, a way of giving form to the different elements making up the environment of the mine, ranging from the way of working to way of living of its inhabitants.

Together with other material aspects, mercury and silver mines developed a very special and significant immaterial culture, the culture of mining, and in particular that of mercury production. In general, the hard life of miners has throughout history produced certain manifestations of a culture with characteristic features.

One particular case is all of the culture, of extraordinary dramatic impact, developed in connection with the work of the mine's forced labor in Almadén. The culture responded to the harshness of mining life and as regards the resources that were developed by the population to transform their lives in a triumph over adversity. The intangible culture and craftwork, music, choir-singing and artistic manifestations were largely the direct product of the work of the miners' family-members or tributes to their daily heroism and therefore symbols.

As result of the care-provision In Almadén, the Saint Raphael

Royal Miners' Hospital was built, partly financed by the construction of the second bullring in Spain, hexagonal in shape and with housing incorporated. The bullring also became the new town centre as it was the venue for fairs, markets and all manner of meetings of the local residents. The hospital started operating in 1774 and was most active between 1780 and 1808, although it did not close down completely until the 20th century.

The sad face of the mine is its use of forced labor. Following a design by Silvestre Abarca, a military engineer, 1751 saw the construction of the Cárcel Nueva (New Gaol) to replace the old Crujía (Gangway). This was an extraordinary building that was demolished in the 20th century.

"The arrival of 1999 meant a change of air for Almadén, and it can even be said that things began to move in Almadén with respect to its heritage: we can see how rehabilitation works got under way at the Bullring (an 18th century building declared a National Monument in 1973) in order to turn it into one of the most interesting attractions for visitors as it now combines a high-quality hospitality complex (hotel and restaurant) as well as museums (one devoted to bullfighting and the other to local customs), and the possibility of being used once more as a bullring and for other events in the open air. It successfully re-opened in 2003(Mansilla, Luis, 2006)".

4. - Oruro: A contradiction between what is tangible and what is not? "Demons".

At first glance, owing to an astounding geographical position at an altitude of 3 800 meters, the inherent difficulties on the way to the *soroshi*, the desolate appearance of the landscape, the strong winds and the feeling visitors have of being in the middle of nowhere, have made Oruro appear, to some people, as a place difficult to preserve. Nonetheless, it is perhaps one of the places in the Americas where ancient culture still prevails in everyday routines and is one of the pillars for the creation of a future.

The city is located on the Pan American Highway, at a three-hour bus ride from La Paz, four hours away from Cochabamba, and a few hours away from the Salar de Uyuni (Uyuni Salt Pan), highly valued as a natural heritage, and directly connected to Chile by road.

The development of Oruro took place as a result of some silver mines discovered at the same time as those in Potosí.

For centuries, the syncretic cult devoted to the “Virgen del Socavón” (Virgin of the Mine) has been developed. It is a miners’ version of “La Candelaria”, whose sanctuary is the final point of destination of the carnival. The city is surrounded by what can be classified as an “associative cultural landscape”, but linked to a cultural route. They are telluric formations that, historically, have had mythical and religious meanings for the people and are linked to the liturgy of the “Virgen del Socavón”. Such formations are “El Sapo” (the toad), “La Víbora” (the snake), “El Cóndor” (the condor), and “Las Hormigas” (the ants). This latter landscape is a sandy area that still exists today.

In May 2001, UNESCO included Oruro’s Carnival on the list of Masterpieces of World Oral and Intangible Heritage; however, the recognition of the tangible heritage is far from being effective. This is due, to a great extent, to a wrong concept of modernity that led, first, to underestimate earthen architecture, including the baroque churches of the vicinity and the cathedral itself. Also, the eclectic mansions that emerged with the boom of tin have been somewhat forgotten. Nowadays, the recognition of the existing values has been transferred to the carnival, mostly because it is the only thing bearing international interest. The people in Oruro, even the professionals linked to the heritage, feel that Potosí’s amazing architecture has won over their city.

4. - Havana’s Tenement House. "Boleros".

The historical value of tenement houses in Havana is not only the result of the role they have played in the evolution of the city as a whole, but, mainly, of their impact on the morphology of central areas.

This historical process has resulted in a very characteristic urban-like lifestyle, typically from Havana and marginalized to some extent. It is closely related to the spatial and functional organization of the collective dwelling. Since the very beginning, the common grounds, the courtyard, and the corridors became the center of a necessarily collective life. This fostered the development of liturgical activities of syncretic cults. Also, it brought about the emergence of musical compositions and styles, sometimes related to those cults; in the case of the “rumba” played using wooden boxes (rumba de cajón), it emerged as an expression of the need people had to get together.

That form of collective life, supported by the very existence of a courtyard, contributed to the development of other artistic expressions, such as “comparsas” (dance parades) that, although rehearsed on the streets, had their agglutinating cell in the tenement house (la ciudadela). The courtyard in the tenement house is a type of architectural structure that had not been created for the function it acquired later; quite the contrary, the activities performed there have constantly enriched the space created for other purposes.

However, this does not necessarily mean that communal living is positive, but ---as a form of fighting against adversities--- in many tenement houses there appeared a strong feeling of belonging in there that was far more powerful than the quarrels brought about by the constant frictions and clashes when sharing, for example, so few toilets by so many people, being the courtyard or corridor the spatial component of this, of course.

Some tenement houses in Havana have been the scene of specific events dealing with working-class struggles, but they have been the scene, mainly, of cultural events. However, there may be some confusion or exaggeration when giving significance to some tenement houses due to the somewhat anonymous character of this architectural pattern. An interesting example is that of “La California”, in Central Havana, one of the few tenement houses with a square courtyard and a silk-cotton tree right in the middle of it. It is said that Isolina Carrillo, a famous Cuban singer and composer, lived there. It is also said that Chano Pozo, a famous Cuban musician played his drums there. However, many other tenement houses claim the first place regarding the presence of the musician. This is very interesting, because it confirms both the impossibility of making an absolute individualization of the pattern and the peculiarities of the architectural type.

What is valuable in any place having a cultural meaning entails an automatic incorporation of the place or building to daily life. That is, the very fact of restricting the meaning of myth to the architectural work eliminates the danger of turning the historical place into a museum disconnected from reality. Moreover, it is not a question of minimizing the importance of paradigms, but of understanding the meaning of what is not exceptional, but characteristic, since massiveness is not harmful when it has a high quality, as it becomes an identity feature.

Havana's tenement houses are found in huge urban areas signaled by neoclassicism and eclecticism and where architectural solutions, the purity of ornaments, or the balance of proportions are unimportant. What is important, in fact, is the unity of variety, an astonishing, yet very well known, harmony.

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