

INVOLVEMENT AND EMPOWERING OF LOCAL COMMUNITIES IN THE PROCESS OF CONSERVATION OF HERITAGE ASSETS

Abstract

The purpose of this presentation is to share the experience from two major Latin-American cities –León, Nicaragua and Santiago de Cuba, Cuba- that developed a process of local empowerment oriented toward knowledge, conservation and enhancement of their heritage assets and supporting the inclusion of these themes in local and national institution's public policies for development.

Key words

P-GIS; participatory diagnostic; Self-building; enhancement.

The interventions that we present are developed in the framework of international cooperation relating to European Union funding and to decentralized cooperation, that is to say the cooperation co-financed by local authorities, in this case Italian and promoted by NGOs. The actors of these interventions, however, are not only donors or NGOs. A number of individuals come into play bringing expertise (for example from universities, local and international cultural associations); collective and individual interests (citizens, community representative organizations, trade associations); governance (local and national government institutions). Due to the operational contexts these are not so much concerned with projects but processes that need to take root and medium to long timeframe.

The main objective of both the Nicaraguan and Cuban actions has been empowerment, behind the creation of tools for city management, conservation and enhancement (City Planning Documents), as well as the conservation of the architectural monuments and the historical urban fabric (restoration, consolidation or self building actions). Involvement and empowerment of local communities in the identification and investigation of the local values, both tangible and intangible, and later in the activities of conservation and use of these resources is key. We believe that no conservation, or enhancement is possible if the citizens do not identify themselves with their heritage assets in their area, in their city. To fulfill this, citizens must first know (or recognize) their values and then benefit from them in a purely cultural way (value-elements defining an identity, a belonging to a collective history), or also

in an economic way (the growth in tourism that the conservation and enhancement of the cultural and artistic heritage assets often brings).

The identification process of citizens and communities with their own history is the basis for a more reliable and durable far-sighted policies of preservation of historical, artistic and cultural heritage assets. These processes, however, in order to be successful, require the mobilization of citizens at all stages: from the investigation of the assets, the conservation-needs assessment, conservation policy planning and - finally - onward to the decision points, which often determine the future of a monument, a historic fabric, a natural biotope, a landscaped area or an entire environmental ecosystem. To wit: the preservation of historic, artistic and environmental values if it is not to be merely protective restrictions on single monument sites will require the participation of every citizen in the community who lives and works in that space. Beyond the laws and regulations there are those who live and work in a given geographical area (district, city, country) discovering its social and historic reasons who must become the conscious guardians of those values and those resources which the community identifies its self with and where, often the community find its economic sustenance.

Empowerment and involvement in conservation cannot be imposed as an external policy on a community. This approach has historically determined well-known forms of "consumption" and "abuse" of historic and artistic heritage assets, in which the immediate satisfaction of individual needs found no effective limit even with the most rigorous regulations (unauthorized building, destructive changes to monuments, inappropriate uses, etc.). Accountability for heritage asset conservation came into being, in large part, by identifying values and is much stronger and more concrete only when there is widespread knowledge and collective participation; that is, when the individual citizen plays a part in the history and culture of his territory, his city, his community.

Starting from these concepts –shared and discussed with Prof. Michele Paradiso-, in collaboration with the University of Florence, the city institutions beneficiaries of the activities and other local stakeholders, we have developed our actions, some of which we would like to describe.

Methodology and main tools

Before starting to describe these experiences it is useful to briefly consider the methodological approach that, over time, we have tried to systematize. It is an approach based on process phases aiming at monitoring the intervention through the progressive results of each phase thereby facilitating reproducibility in different contexts and ensuring an easily understanding of the development (on both a theoretical and operational level) proposed by all the actors involved, who generally are not people specialists.

Set out below is a brief description of the different phases.

Phase 1 Negotiation. The objectives, the processes to be implemented, and the program of activities should be discussed and shared, or better yet: , negotiated with institutions and local actors and with national and international project promoters, so that the result becomes an

valuable collective asset under an agreed purpose considering different technical and operational functions despite varying roles and responsibilities.

Phase 2. Local support networks. The creation of local support networks is an important prerequisite to sustain the process and ensure the best results. These networks, made up by different actors (stakeholders, community leaders, public and private institutions, universities, local associations etc.) while taking part in the process with diverse capacities, know the project and share its objectives and they will be very important in connecting with both the political and institutional realms and with the public, in accompanying the process, in the aggregation of specific skills, as well as with the facilitation of participatory processes. Finally, they will represent the network of interests around the activities that will ensure the dissemination of the information to less-accessible contexts.

Phase 3. The participatory diagnostic survey. This terminology, borrowed from the first experiences in Latin America, refers to a survey approach that includes investigative activities and as well as the cognitive analysis of the heritage asset sites and artistic landmarks, carried out with the involvement and direct participation of individual community members living in the project area. This is perhaps the most delicate and important phase of the entire process, since its success flows the effective empowerment and involvement of the local community in their heritage asset conservation effort. This phase has a double purpose: first, to create public awareness and "settle" the already available (or collected through more traditional research methods) knowledge base among citizens and, second, to build a new knowledge base by listening and collecting oral and written citizen experiences, followed by field observation (which is both difficult and expensive in specialized surveys, especially investigation of the value of the historic fabric of large areas is required) or by collecting information about oral traditions or information related to traditional knowledge (particularly for the intangible assets). Later on we will focus on traditional and innovative tools relevant to this phase.

Phase 4. Participative identification of the intervention tools. The definition of planning and regulation tools, systems of restrictions, and action programs (plans, norms, projects, direct actions) should take place, in this context, in a participative way. The production of shared tools based on agreed objectives will strengthen the ability of these tools to be understood and to be successfully implemented by public institutions with the cooperation of citizens and non-citizens and not as it often happens in the face of opposition to them.

Phase 5. Dissemination and validation of the results of the inquiry. The results of the heritage assets phase analysis need to be validated in a participatory approach using traditional tools (publications, brochures, workshops) or more innovative instruments (geo-referenced spatial data, feedback the wealth of information from workshops facilitated by interactive tools, or GIS web platforms). In this way the collective effort will return to the community as information, data and knowledge.

Phase 6. Participatory planning pathways. Once information and data collection, processing, dissemination and validation are completed it will be possible to implement real project and

participatory planning proposals. Citizens will be able to contribute to drafting conservation rules and heritage asset conservation and enhancement projects and to be writers of community heritage management proposals. This will produce not only enhanced passive awareness of the deeply-held values in the community but will also promote an active attitude towards the preservation and enhancement of the heritage assets and values.

Phase 7. Self-building experiment. Self-building interventions aimed at the maintenance, conservation and improvement of heritage assets can be successfully carried out only when all previous process stages have been successfully completed. This is the phase where a community recognizes its values and decides to take direct action to improve their physical surroundings. The implementation of this type of intervention confirms the success of the whole process because it demonstrates active citizen mobilization in preserving their heritage assets. These initiatives of course, need to be supported by specialists guiding the action, participating in design, implementation and monitoring of the work.

Phase 8. Community heritage asset management start-up. Self-construction initiatives carried out under community heritage asset management plans demonstrate a proper community awareness of its cultural and artistic heritage. These initiatives are considered success indicators for the efforts to promote the empowerment of citizens in the preservation of heritage assets. Obviously, heritage management initiatives can be carried out only if complemented by appropriate training processes repeated over time.

Phase 9. Direct interventions in monument conservation. Conservation of monuments, when presenting a certain level of complexity, cannot subject to the spontaneity of self-building initiatives. More traditionally, they need to be carried out by specialists (engineers, restorers, skilled workers). Specialists also need to be supported by training programs directed to staff dedicated to the monument protection and people who, for various reasons, benefit from these artistic works. Finally, it should be added, that the success of the monument conservation actions would also depend on the motivation and lobbying efforts of the community. If these interventions use the process pathways we have tried to describe, monument continued existence and daily maintenance would be best ensured

Two examples of intervention: Leon, Nicaragua and Santiago de Cuba, Cuba

These experiences have different objectives and scales of intervention: in León, starting from the production of the Heritage Asset Atlas¹, in the middle of the last decade, a process began that, passing through interventions of restoration and support to heritage asset community management (museum of pre-Columbian indigenous community of Sutiaba²) of self-building (re-zoning of urban space and architectural landmarks³), and of participatory planning (*Plan*

1 Greta Costantini and Paolo Milani ed. Atlas del patrimonio local material e inmaterial de la ciudad de León, Nicaragua. Firenze. Medina. 2006

2 Cf. Chiara Marioni, Luisa Migliorati, Ramiro García Vásquez and Sandra Espinoza Vallejos. Catálogo: Patrimonio arqueológico precolombino de los Sutiabas. Firenze. Medina. 2009

3 Cf. Paolo Milani ed. Gestión urbana y territorial participativa: una llave para la cohesión social y territorial. Firenze. Regione Toscana. 2012

General de Ordenamiento) has culminated in planning for the historic center of the city - currently ongoing-; in Santiago de Cuba, beginning with a participatory survey of the central part of the city and a related re-zoning plan has followed with the on-going restoration of the cathedral⁴.

In León the activities focused on historic and artistic heritage assets carried out by Medina⁵ began in 2004 with the implementation of a project for the enhancement of local resources. This project, among its objectives, created an atlas of the city's heritage assets. This result was achieved with a participatory approach considered old-fashioned in this field of studies. The first step was the creation of an active stakeholder network including the staff of Medina, municipal technicians, local experts, representatives of local cultural and ethnic associations, experts from local University, and representatives of local NGOs. The working group operated using surveys, field and archival research, interviews with citizens, workshops, in-depth analysis with cultural and scientific institutions at a national level, and taking advantage of the first city GIS platform (carried out in the framework of the cooperation between the Medina and the municipality) which resulted in a complete catalog of Leon heritage assets together with databases, technical files and, above all, the data collected was geo-referenced.

From this first experience, supported by both European Union and Region of Tuscany decentralized cooperation funding, we have developed a work plan program that at the present is integrated in the plan of the city historic center⁶. In this process we were able to use innovative tools and initiatives that have improved the effectiveness of interventions and have given life to the participatory approach always present in our actions. The application of participatory GIS methodology (or P-GIS) was crucial and it was applied not only for issues of urban planning, but also for heritage asset conservation. What P-GISi it can be is gleaned from the following extract from a publication dedicated to some of our operations in Latin America: “Schematically GIS is a complex system, but essential for territorial planning and management, it consists of a series of software tools to acquire, store, extract, transform, and display spatial data in the real world. In turn, the P-GIS, combines GIS with community participation approach from PLA Participatory Learning and Action⁷, representing the spatial knowledge of the population and including people's feelings in the process of decision-making for territorial planning and management. The participation of the community and key actors in the elaboration of the GIS layers, through opening of spaces for exchange of views, life experiences, ways of conceiving community relations, allows the creation of a new

4 Cf. Michele Paradiso, Paolo Milani, Martina Cherici and Elena Perria. Atlas del patrimonio arquitectónico y cultural del casco histórico-Santiago de Cuba. Perugia. Medina. 2011. ISBN: 978-88-97119-01-2

5 The NGO MEDINA was founded in 1995 in Firenze. MEDINA began the activities in the field of the international cooperation working in Middle East (Palestine and Israel) and dealing with issues related to local development, revaluation of local resources, conservation of cultural and artistic heritage asset, urban and country planning. Since the late nineties expands its activities in both geographically and thematically contexts. Today, MEDINA is working in Middle East, North Africa, Sub-Saharan Africa, Latin America.

6 It's important to mention that, in 2011, the Cathedral of León was declared a UNESCO World Heritage.

7 Cf. Rambaldi G., Chambers R., McCall M., Fox J., Ética práctica para profesionales, facilitadores, intermediarios tecnológicos e investigadores de SIGP, in “Participatory Learning and Action notes n.54” Mapping for change - spanish edition, IIED, London, 2006.

relationship with a territory, and increases the ownership of knowledge by the poorest segments of society allowing them to interact with government bodies and propose alternatives for analysis, land use planning and management”⁸.

These tools first supported research and then planning actions dedicated to improving areas in the historical center of the city with self-building initiatives (repaving of street sections in the historical center and works of conservation of the warehouse of the old railway station) or other municipal projects; we were able to implement community heritage asset management activities (such as the restoration and reconstruction of the Pre-Columbian Museum of Sutiaba entrusting the management to the indigenous community of Sutiaba in Leon); have validated the general safeguard measures of the Historical Center (contained in the legislation of the *Plan de Ordenamiento General* approved in 2012) and through work sessions open to the active participation of local associations and individuals.

The commitment for the next two years is to give complete a ten-year journey creating, in cooperation with local institutions and, most importantly, citizens of Leon, a plan of the Historic Center that will ensure the conservation of the city, its very considerable heritage assets, its monumental sites and its intangible heritage and at the same time strengthen citizen's identity with these values.

The experience of Santiago de Cuba was also founded in the framework of decentralized cooperation. The University of Florence played a crucial role both in negotiating objectives and operational procedures, and in the construction of a network of actors. This network included teachers and researchers from the Faculty of Architecture of Florence, the Medina NGO, Tuscan local authorities, Archbishop of Santiago de Cuba, the city Conservation Bureau, the Universidad de Oriente, and Popular Power Committees. The agreement among these entities allowed the identification of project objectives and activities. In particular, it was decided to support recovery and conservative restoration efforts that local actors were already promoting for the Cathedral of Santiago linking these efforts to the evaluation of the existing planning instruments oriented to the re-zoning of the historic center. The project participated in the local ongoing processes supporting them from economic, technical and scientific points of view, and planning to achieve some specific technical objectives: the implementation of a participatory heritage assets survey in the area (with the production and publication of the atlas of city heritage assets⁹), the formulation of a strategic conservation and recovery plan for the city center focused on the Cathedral¹⁰ which was also carried out with the support of the local community and, finally, the evaluation and the design of the dome conservation project. The decision to restrict the research and the subsequent proposal to twelve blocks of the central Cathedral and *Parque Céspedes* was taken considering this area the heart of the social,

8 Giovanni Ruffini. Democracia participativa y nuevas herramientas para el gobierno de la ciudad y del territorio: la experimentación del SIG-PP in Paolo Milani ed. Gestión urbana y territorial participativa cit., p.38.

9 Cf. Michele Paradiso, Paolo Milani, Martina Cherici and Elena Perria. Atlas del patrimonio arquitectónico y cultural del casco histórico-Santiago de Cuba cit.

10 “And, when we talk about Santiago de Cuba we refer to the essence of the tradition, is to say a melting pot of buildings, culture, tradition and activities, around its cathedral, and to the devotion of the Shrine of Our Lady of Cobre, and then the whole Cuba”. Michele Paradiso. Synthetic description of the activities carried out in Op. cit. p. 9.

economic, political life of the city of Santiago and of all the East of Cuba. The endemic problems, typical of all city centers across the country, in Santiago are exacerbated by an aggressive tourism with behavioral tendencies and an intensity of exploitation no longer sustainable by civil society, caught between the consciousness of not giving up their dignity and financial constraints that affect every moment of daily life. The work was carried out in two parallel levels (urban and architectural restoration). On one hand were analyzed the physical condition of the monuments, and on the other hand we carried out participatory workshops with local residents and technical and institutional project partners: interviews, urban area surveys, building static and hygienic conditions studies, verification of the services distribution in the area and, in particular, assessment of the conditions of the artistic and cultural elements. These activities led to the definition of some strategic plans for the conservation and recovery of the area that were shared among all stakeholders of the project (citizens, technical institutions, universities). The strategic directive entails: a) urban re-zoning of Santiago de Cuba. Tourism will be the main development driver of the center of the city but without subordinating the changes to an economic "mono-production" scheme. b) This area should not be considered as a sum of artistic, cultural, religious sites, but as a "reservoir" of resources that can fulfill their potential only through a the general and widespread process of re-zoning; c) It should be considered, among the primary objectives, the preservation of the economic and social development of the area, rejecting hypothesis of delocalization of the resident population and the services that always occurs in cases of city centers changes, especially if tourism is the predominant economic incentive of the development¹¹; d) It should pay attention to functional relationships, of use and cultural identification, between the urban district and the rest of the city so that the resolution of the problems of the first does not unload the contradictions on the second; e) it is necessary to identify certain point of transformation (by defining their spatial and social influence) and use these resources as a starting point of the process.

In this context of the conservation and restoration of the Cathedral (which is ongoing) the dome-related work was developed based on the results of investigation and design of the overall initiative and is perfectly consistent with the results of the project.

The action in Santiago de Cuba has found, over time, continued success, but, most importantly, has shown that the link between the interests of the institutions (government, religious or academic), and the interests of citizens is possible and it is this connection that starts the transformation process from a more concrete perspective.

Brief concluding remarks

11 Staying in Latin America, we have to think to the transformation that has suffered in recent decades La Antigua Guatemala that, although formally preserved, has undergone to a strong process of social, economic and cultural transformation, driven by massive international tourism. The main effect of tourism was the complete expulsion of citizens. Today La Antigua Guatemala is a city of hotels and holiday homes, which empties and fills according to the rhythms of unrestrained tourism consumerism.

The described experiences showed that proposed approach for heritage assets conservation and enhancement is an integrated approach in which physical and material elements (urban area, buildings, monuments and artworks) are mixed with social, cultural, economic elements. We firmly believe that any heritage asset conservation and enhancement actions cannot be separated from a participatory approach. Without the support of the community conservation can only be a normative and formal act. Heritage asset conservation, however, must coincide with the interests and everyday life of ordinary citizens.

Only in this way can the proper “care” and constant dialog will keep heritage assets (both material and intangible) alive and facilitate their transmission to future generations.

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Image 1 – La Bodega de la Antigua Estación del ferrocarril de León before the intervention.



Image 2 - La Bodega de la Antigua Estación del Ferrocarril de León after the restoration carried out in self-building from the district.

Image 3 - Summary sheet of the Atlas of Santiago de Cuba

Ficha de Localización de la Manzana n°867



1. Funciones Prevalcientes

Comercial	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Social/cultural/servicios	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Oficinas	<input type="checkbox"/>
Habitacional	<input type="checkbox"/>
Terciario/receptivo	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Civil	<input type="checkbox"/>
Religioso	<input type="checkbox"/>
Abandonados/ruinas	<input type="checkbox"/>

2. Estado de Conservación General

Espacios Abiertos		Espacios Construidos	
Degradación Prevalciente	75%-100%	Degradación Prevalciente	75%-100%
Degradación Relevante	50%-75%	Degradación Relevante	50%-75%
Degradación Pequeñas	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 25%-50%	Degradación Pequeñas	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 25%-50%
No hay Degradación	0%-25%	No hay Degradación	0%-25%

3. Estado de Conservación de las Calles

Buena	Regular	Mala	Descripción:
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		Buona illuminazione nelle strade più fruite, traffico moderato e marciapiedi presenti dove necessario. Gli impianti delle reti infrastrutturali non sono presenti. Gli spazi interni alla manzana sono in parte utilizzati e ben mantenuti ed in parte abbandonati oppure degradati.

4. Presencia de Edificios de Valor Histórico/Arquitectónico/ Cultural

- Hotel Casa Granda - Lote 6
- Teatro San Carlos y Galeria de oriente - Lote 1
- Hotel Venus - Lote 4
- Hotel Bayamo - Lote 3

5. Notas

- Nella manzana ci sono diversi edifici non abitati e dismessi, rispettivamente l'Hotel Venus (Lote 4) e la Estrella roja (Lote 5)
- attualmente stanno riabilitando il piano terra del Lote 5 per farci una sala prove per concerti;
- una tienda molto frequentata e costantemente piena di gente è 'La Bombilla' (Lote 2) in divisa;

Fotografías de la Manzana n°867 y su entorno








Image 4 - Summary sheet of the Atlas of Santiago de Cuba

<p>Fotografía del Edificio</p> 	<p>1. Identificación del Edificio</p> <p>A) Denominación del lugar Casa de Cultura (antiguo Club San Carlos), Galería de Oriente, SANDEC, Club 300</p> <p>B) Dirección Cra. Loret (San Pedro) no.453 esq. Aguilera.</p> <p>C) Período de Construcción y Estilo XIX^o siglo, Estilo Ecléctico</p> <p>D) Manzana de referencia y N° parcela 847 n° 1</p> <p>F) Destinación de uso</p> <table border="1"> <tr> <td>Planta</td> <td>sótano</td> <td>baja</td> <td>primera</td> <td>segunda y tercera</td> </tr> <tr> <td>civil</td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>social/cultural/servicios</td> <td></td> <td>X</td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>terceros/recepsivo</td> <td></td> <td>X</td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>oficinas</td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>religiosa</td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>comercial CUC</td> <td></td> <td>X</td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>comercial MX</td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>habitational</td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>abandonada/ruinas</td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> <td>X</td> </tr> </table>	Planta	sótano	baja	primera	segunda y tercera	civil					social/cultural/servicios		X			terceros/recepsivo		X			oficinas					religiosa					comercial CUC		X			comercial MX					habitational					abandonada/ruinas				X	<p>5. Elementos Arquitectónicos Relevantes</p> <p>No <input type="checkbox"/> Sí <input checked="" type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Descripción: capiteles, ménsulas, balaustrados, preterias</p> <p>5.2 Calidad Arquitectónica</p> <p>A) Alta <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> c) Mediana <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>B) Buena <input type="checkbox"/> D) Ninguna <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>6. Informaciones Históricas</p> <p>Esta edificación constituyó la Academia San Carlos, en honor de don Carlos de Vargas y Machuca, gobernador del Departamento Oriental. En 1844 toma el nombre de Club San Carlos. A fines de 1909 comienza la construcción del edificio bajo la dirección del arquitecto Carlos Segura. Contaba con 3 plantas pero el temblor de 1932 afectó al tercer nivel por lo que se decidió su demolición, quedando el imagen de hoy.</p>	<p>5.1 Fotografías de los Elementos Arquitectónicos Relevantes</p> 																																																
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<p>Fotografía del Edificio y su Entorno</p> 	<p>4. Relación con el Entorno</p> <p>A) Edificio de valor en un Entorno de valor <input checked="" type="checkbox"/></p> <p>B) Edificio de valor en un Entorno no de valor <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>C) Homogéneo con la escena <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>D) En contraste con la escena <input type="checkbox"/></p>	<p>9. Notas</p> <p>- Il piano superiore è attualmente inutilizzato poiché necessita riabilitazione: - la Galería de Oriente è un Salón de exposiciones, esencialmente de obras plásticas. En su patio (in cattivo stato) cuenta con una pequeña sala de concierto donde se ofrecen diversas actividades. Allí radica también un círculo de interés de artes plásticas para niños. - Il Club 300 è frequentato da molti giovani e funziona come bar/discoteca, l'ingresso si paga in CUC; - In angolo c'è una banca, l'ennesimo in questa piccola area della città, molti tassisti sostano proprio in questo punto aspettando clienti; sul lato della banca, davanti all'erogatore di denaro, si crea sempre una lunga fila.</p>	<p>10. Memoria Histórica de los Habitantes de Santiago</p> <p>"Era una antigua club, venían familia pudiente, se comunicava con la galería y el teatro... lo espectador venían, bajava y tenían diferente entrada...no puedo decirle mucha, esta en reparación... trabajamos como club nocturnos... musica techno, clientela local y turistas" (Sign.ra Gertrude, barman del 300).</p> <p>"Estava el Palacio de los Matrimonios, la Galería de Oriente, la casa de cultura municipal, la oficina de aviación " (Sign.ra Liana Fuentes, socióloga).</p> <p>"El club san carlos...tenia un handicap contrario a nuestra idiosincrasia...era solo para blancos.no podian entrar los negros, tuve una historia, que el presidente batista no podia entrar porque era mulato" (Sign.re Gavier Fernandez, Comercial del Hotel Casa Grande).</p>																																																																																																		