INTERVENTIONS IN THE HISTORICAL CENTER OF THE CITY OF GUANAJUATO – MEXICO

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Abstract
The conservation of the cities, mainly those enrolled in the UNESCO List of Cities Patrimony, is in the urgent necessity of doing things in order to recover and conserve the patrimony. This task is not simple because several factors as the historical, the technical, the economic and the social ones affect the conduit of them.

From the beginning of the 80s, the City Government jointly with the University of Guanajuato and the associations of local professionals have participated and asked the Federal and State Government for economic and technical support in order to target the conservation of the city. The result of these efforts is that Guanajuato, capital of state of the same name, became part of the list of the Worldwide Patrimony in December 9th, 1988.

From that date, actions taken are bigger every time and have been able to be reflected in the attitudes of most citizens who, valuing the work done, have committed and turned into watchers of the conserved and critics of each one of the interventions being done.

Keywords: Interventions, restoration, historical center

1. Some historical information

The City of Guanajuato has evolved from the beginning as establishment of the indigenous tribes of Huachichiles & Chichimecas throughout the years and thanks to the discovery of the San Bernabe’s vein of mine in “Mineral de la Luz” in 1548 and the work done by the Spaniards. The conflicts between Huachichiles & Chichimecas with the Hacienda’s owners resulted in the construction of bunkers for safeguarding the goods of such, therefore in the year of 1554 a bunker named “Real de Minas” was built.

In the City of Guanajuato four bunkers were established; the first “Real de Santiago in Marfil”, the second the one in Tepetapa, the third in Santa Ana and, the fourth in Cerro del Cuarto.

The first mines to be operated formally were the ones of Mellado & Rayas, being the workers who lived in the areas of Marfil & Tepetapa who worked on them.

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With the pass of the years Guanajuato became stronger as human establishment acquiring in 1557 the origination of the first “Mine Establishment” that was a place surrounded by high and heavy walls with a single access and where the actual activities of the extraction process and benefit of minerals were done, as well as of the houses of the employees called “cuadrillas”, the chapel, the main house and the administrative offices, in 1658 it was named “Santa Fe”, in 1679 the King grants the title of “Villa and Real of Mines of Santa Fe de Guanajuato”, in 1742 it is given the title of city “Santa Fe and Real of Mines of Guanajuato”.

The “Cuadrillas”, with the time were insufficient due to the growth of the families who lived there and, in other cases because of the disintegration of the properties sometimes for sales, donations or as debt payments so gradually the workers and their relatives built their houses outside the walls of the "seats of mine" becoming quarters and districts at the moment. The instructions of the King of Spain Felipe II referring to the planning and construction of the cities in the New Spain, in this case, were not observed because the topography did not allow it and the city grew apparently with great disorder, nevertheless analyzing at great length the urban structure, it can be detected that the plan of the city, well-known as "Broken Plate", obeys to the land’s slopes, the natural gorges and the rare relatively flat spaces of the zone that in some time were used as patios of benefit from the mineral extracted from the mines and that at the moment are the so distinguishing parks, seats and squares of city.

The combined talent and ability with the knowledge of the place of those who constructed their houses are worth to consider, we observe how the alleys are not but the areas of natural pluvial drains and the houses are located next to them, in other cases this same gorges offered enough space to hold this water in preys to supply this vital liquid to the population as well as the proper activities of the mining.

It is important to comment that although with the pass of the years several "Seats of Mines" tended to disappear, there were also new Mine Haciendas created that in some extent, replaced the previous ones.

Being built in capricious and deep gorges and pronounced slopes, the city and its inhabitants had to survive devastating floods. Since being downtown the river’s natural flow, the rain constantly devastated everything around its pass, causing human and material losses.

The 5th of July of 1760 the city lost almost two thirds of it due to a terrible flood, to solve this serious problem several works of pluvial water evacuation were done, nevertheless this was not enough so it was determined to rise the level of the river, now Hidalgo Street, this way the properties on the sides elevated their level until they reached the new streets built on the top, leaving the original city buried. Real examples of what’s been mentioned are the rescues of the “Temple of San Diego” downtown, as well as “Temple of Belen” located in the Juarez Avenue.

With successful mines, the landowners made civil and religious works of great architectonic wealth and diverse styles like the Baroque, Churrigueresque and Neoclassic. Along with time and constructions proper to the architectonic styles of those days, are a distinguish seal of the population.

Therefore the architecture of the city shows a clear influence of the Spanish architecture, which simultaneously maintains characteristics of the Arab architecture and that with the use of the materials of the region, were intermingled with amazing harmony in the constructions giving the result what Guanajuato is at the moment.
Some of the granted recognitions to Guanajuato throughout their existence are the following ones:

- 1679, Receives the title of “Villa and Real de Minas Santa Fe of Guanajuato”.
- 1742, Receives the title of “City of Santa Fe and Real de Minas of Guanajuato”.
- 1982, July 28th, it is declared zone of Historical Monuments by the INAH.
- 1988, December 9th, it’s registered in the list of Worldwide Patrimony.
- 2005, International Award of Cultural Patrimony “Alcalá de Henares”.
- 2005, Receives the nomination of “Cuna Iberoamericana de Cervantes”, by the Government of Alcala, Spain.
- 2005, Obtains the Vice-presidency of the Organization of Cities Worldwide Patrimony (OCPM).
- 2005, Receives the nomination of “Capital Cervantina of America”, by the UNESCO.
- 2005, Receives the nomination of “Worldwide Capital by Cultural Patrimony”
- 2006, The National Geographic Magazine considers it as the fifth world’s most beautiful city.

2. Guanajuato’s location and characteristics

The city of Guanajuato is located in the geographic center of the Mexican Republic, in a mountainous and extremely rough land. As a result the urban plan is complicated, nevertheless these factors are perhaps what make the city different from others and its conservation particularly complicated.

The city of Guanajuato is immersed in a series of deep natural gorges, being the Historical Center the one that is located in the main gorge naturally formed by the Guanajuato river. The small village is located hills of hills above giving the visual impression of a great disorder, although innumerable small gorges form the streets and alleys (“Callejuelas o Callejones”), like squares that allow access to the houses, commerce and the diverse services.

In the view from the “Pipila’s viewpoint” the city appears as a colored landscape inside the mountains (IMAGE - 1).
The main streets are narrow and irregular with an organic plan, obeying to the natural topography and located in the deepest part of the gorge. Until the 60s the streets were sufficient for the natural movement of the inhabitants, from the end of the 60s and beginning of the 70s, the State and Local Government conducted important road works. Perhaps the most important one at its moment was the vault ("Embovedamiento") of the Guanajuato river that crosses great part of the city and that forms the Street Miguel Hidalgo and Costilla. Later a series of tunnels are made to cross the different hills where the city is conformed, in order to make the vehicles transit agilely and releasing the Historical Center of cars which allowed the urban center to later become a large walking zone for enjoyment and benefit of citizens and tourists.

It is important to mention that the Street Miguel Hidalgo, well-known popularly like Underground Street ("Calle Subterránea"), has been from its inauguration cause of astonishment by its structure and the details that compose it and, is itself a big topic to talk about but that in this occasion it is not possible to deepen. Recently this street participated in a national contest promoted by a television transmitter and was catalogued as one of "the Thirteen Wonders of Mexico".

When being released of vehicles, the downtown of the city brought, as a logical consequence, the beginning of important conservation work on streets, squares, gardens, parks and even more in areas located away from the center such as preys, mines and their adjacent areas, emphasizing the restoration works on civil and religious historical buildings dated in its majority of centuries XVII, XVIII and XIX, which have given the city an image of example of conservation on the national and international level (IMAGE - 2).
But to reach these results the road has been arduous and difficult since the conservation and patrimony rescue’s criteria, like in any other country, has had to be put on trial and for that, in the year of 1981 The Construction and Conservation’s Appearance of the State Capital’s Of Guanajuato and its County’s Regulation was elaborated jointly by the Honorable City council and the School of Architects of Guanajuato (León Barajas Rogelio et alli, 1981). From the application of this regulation, it has been possible to watch every work of conservation and city development done with deep respect to the patrimonial inheritance and firm intentions not to make previous mistakes that had already caused the loss of important elements of the patrimony and the alteration of the urban image of the city.

3. Past interventions of rescue and conservation

From the 1980s, this subject has been cause of debates and discussions because of the way interventions of conservation have been done, the criteria’s unification has been fundamental, fortunately the city’s urban trace does not allow great alterations and the visual impact with what has been done has been beneficial, although there are exceptions such as the building that used to be the Quarter “Primer Ligero” and was demolished in the end of the 1950s in order to build apartments and which were also demolished last year to build a parking garage and commercial stores. Although other interventions, in it’s the majority have favored the image of the city and the conservation of Historical Buildings.

4. Present interventions of rescue and conservation

The Municipal Presidency of Guanajuato by conduit of the General Direction of Urban Development and Strategic Planning of the General Direction of Public Work are now making a great amount of work leading to the conservation, rescue and restoration of buildings and public areas which belong to the zone declared Worldwide Patrimony (1980).

Some of the interventions are mentioned now including gardens and buildings. The restoration of the Main Garden of the “Poblado de la Luz”, mining town in which the city of Guanajuato has its roots, consisted of gardening, paving, urban furniture, lighting and signing. The restoration of the “Presa de la Olla” can contemplated architectural elements, the curtain of the prey, the wharf, of the vegetation, pavements, lighting, signing and urban furniture. The restoration of the
Park “Florencio Antillón” and the restoration of the Garden “El Cantador” worked on architectural elements, vegetation, pavements, lighting, signing and urban furniture.

The restoration and rescue of the “Old Railroad Station” worked in order to rescue the site from informal commercial shops that have been there through the years. The proposal was to recover the space to be used by people and restore the areas of ticketing “Taquilla, Waiting Hall “Sala de Espera”, and Storage Room “Bodega”. In the restoration of the Park “The Frogs” and in the “Presas de los Santos” interventions can be contemplated architectural elements, the vegetation, pavements, lighting, signing and urban furniture.

In most of the restorations, work done to improve the urban image include paving, lighting, installations and signing on the streets and alleys, as well as interventions of building’s restorations. But, not everything that has been done during the current administration has been satisfactory in the conservation and image of the city. There are interventions which contrast drastically on what has been done in past administrations and that create uncertainty even to the experts.

This is the case of a pedestrian bridge at the park “Embajadoras” and the flattened in the vaults of the street Miguel Hidalgo. The Bridge is a simple resource that lacks study to resolve a problem of pedestrian traffic during certain hours of the day, it was done with materials that coarsely intent to copy the work done by the end of the 1800’s and beginning of the 1900’s.

The bridge has not been designed to be used by people with special need, it does not have ramps or any other elements needed for these people. Therefore it is discriminatory and limited. The height of the bridge although it agrees with the Federal Law, it completely contradicts the Relative Recommendation to preserve Historical Areas and its Function in Contemporary Life, emanated from the United Nations General Conference for Education, Science and Culture, in its 19th Reunion celebrated in Nairobi from October 26th to November 30th 1976; this is considering Guanajuato as a Historical Area.

Another recommendation that was not considered is the Relative Protection of Beauty and Character of Places and Landscape which emanated from the United Nations General Conference of Organization for Education, Science and Culture, in its 12th Reunion celebrated in Paris from November 9th to December 12th 1962; this is considering the aesthetic value of the place where the bridge was built (IMAGE - 3 e IMAGE - 4).
The flattening on the vaults from the street “Miguel Hidalgo, Calle Subterranea” is an intervention that has caused in its majority annoyance by the people who live in the city and by international experts as well. The appearance of the Vaults at this present time is impressive because it is completely different from the image of which Guanajuato had when it was registered as Worldwide Patrimony (IMAGE - 5 and IMAGE - 6).

The argument to justify the flattening of the vaults was “To Protect Them from Contamination due to intense traffic of vehicles and the vibrations of themselves and also, water drainings. As it is true the necessity to protect the material, the solution simply lacks logic and with time it will only be worse because the flattening applied was made with a mortar of cement-lime-sand-water and will not allow the ventilation of the building materials. On the other side, the vibration of vehicles and water drainings will only make all this “flattening” come down with its logic consequences.

In this case the “Recommendation to Preserve Cultural Goods that Public or Private Work Development can put in Danger”, emanated from the United Nations General Conference of Organization for Education, Science and Culture, in its 15th Reunion celebrated in Paris from October 15th to November 20th 1963; it should have been looked at and its general principles considered.

Conclusions

As in any part of the planet, the human effort is not enough and falls into contradictions, Guanajuato is not and exemption and even as a Principal Plan or Urban Development, The Public Work Law, The Building Regulations and Federal Law for Monuments and Archeological, Artistic and Historic Areas exist as well as several regulations that are in theory correct, when it comes to projects around the city, these are not always convenient or come into conflict at the moment of being interpreted and taken into action and, therefore the results are far from ideal. Examples of this are the San Pedro Parking Garage, Embajadoras Pedestrian Bridge and the Vault’s Flatenning on Miguel Hidalgo Street.

To work on Projects around the city, which is what we are talking about, there is a whole procedure in order to meet the “Contract Adjudication”. This process is complicated since the origin of the economical resources could come from the Federal, the State or the City so the rule is different in each case and it is applied in a particular way to the exercise.

The bidding of a Project and its Development has a purpose the contest of experts on the subject and, the Contract Award is given considering the technical,
economical and legal capacity as well as experience and behavior of the contestant, in its contractual obligations to execute public work, analyze and evaluate the proposals, circumstances to meet the needs, effectiveness and economics according to the city’s reality.

Although the economic factor is predominant in most of the cases, the adjudication is given on priority to the cost of the proposal and not to the technique that considers the experts needed to do the job.

The convenience in this case is that authorities can receive some guidelines from specialists like Architects from Guanajuato Worldwide Patrimony A.C., Restoration Architects, City Planners, Landscapers and experts in the University of Guanajuato as well as School Organizations before, during and after the bidding process in order not to make mistakes.

As we can see, the birth, growth and consolidation of the city of Guanajuato have been complicated, the problems that historically appeared like diseases, floods and revolutions among others were saved by the inhabitants with hope and tenacity resulting in a city that has been awarded and admired by owners and strangers.

The present problems of conservation are others, contamination, accelerated growth of the population and tourism are the new challenges that will have to be solved carefully.

If describing the city of Guanajuato with words is a difficult task, it is even more the way the conservation of the city is looked for; is necessary to live it in order to feel the existing harmony between what’s been built with nature, the materials, the scales, the people and their costumes. The one who live on it, gladly accept what our ancestors bequeathed us and also the compromise with future generations.

In order to meet this compromise is important to deepen the knowledge so interventions and conservation of the Patrimony are done correctly and with the consciousness of preservation.

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