

SESSION 1. URBAN LANDSCAPE AND CONTEMPORARY CREATION.

Reflections on the Conference and Introduction to the First Session

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Excelentísimo Señor Alcalde de Sevilla, Don Juan Ignacio Zoido Alvarez,
Señoras y señores autoridades y representantes de las organizaciones internacionales,
Señor Delegado de Urbanismo,

Estimados amigas y amigos,

En primer, quiero agradecer a la ciudad y a su alcalde por la inmensa oportunidad que se nos ha concedido de organizar esta conferencia internacional sobre un tema de actualidad que nos concierne a todos.

Señor Alcalde, permítame también agradecer a su equipo por su excelente trabajo y su generosidad en la organización de esta conferencia. Han logrado un trabajo estupendo y merecen un fuerte agradecimiento por ello.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The theme we are going to address in these three days has been a recurrent topic of heated discussions, debates, and negotiations around the World between cities authorities, heritage protection specialists and civil society that is still going on and even increasing.

What is it about ?

At first sight, one can get the impression that there cannot be but a conflict of interest between the protection of the urban built heritage and contemporary architecture; that it is once again the very old conflict between tradition and modernity.

In my opinion, this is plainly wrong.

For looking at the built heritage protection and conservation as the unique way to manage historic places is as wrong as wanting to introduce anywhere and any way

contemporary architecture at all cost. *In medio stat virtus* and this *virtus* is what we shall be after throughout these three days.

Obviously, the goal we aim to achieve is not to find a panacea, the ultimate solution. Rather, we are aiming at bringing to the larger debate of urban management a contribution that would somehow open new avenues of thinking and of research: we hope that at the end of the conference, we shall have identified objective instruments, tools and criteria that, with more research, will give decision makers, urban planners and heritage specialists the ability to decide more scientifically on the introduction of contemporary objects in historic settings wherever they are located, be they world heritage or small discrete settlements.

The organizers want this conference to be the contribution of Spain and of Sevilla to the broad international debate that is taking place around the management of World Heritage Cities. The presence with us throughout this conference of representatives from UNESCO's World Heritage Centre, ICOMOS international Secretariat, the Organization of World Heritage Cities, the Getty Conservation Institute and of cities from over the World is a clear sign of the importance of the topic and of their interest in our debates. It also sets this debate at a global, general level and does not limit its scope to a given city.

The Conference is organized in three blocks. In the first block – today - the speakers will set the theoretical scope and each speaker will address the conference topic from a different angle. The second block, starting tomorrow, will provide illustrations - case studies from all continents - and will also offer presentations about today's methods of impact evaluation and of urban management together with some new and different avenues of heritage management.

We shall then conclude by a closed meeting between speakers and moderators to agree on the avenues of future research.

To open today's presentations, allow me to introduce them by a few thoughts that came to my mind while reading the texts of the speakers:

All speakers address the matter of time and of its importance even when they do not address it directly. Time is present everywhere and seems to be a key factor that we shall need to consider.

Time is paramount: ideas change, our reading of heritage changes and we may well, later in time, accept as heritage objects that would have never been considered as such before exactly as, today, we patrimonize objects that had not been built to become heritage.

Then there is the concept of heritage, its contents and meaning as well as its geographical scope: there is an obvious need to refine the concept and maybe even to revise it, but this goes much beyond the possibility of this conference. As you may see, time and the understanding of heritage are connected and, if we understand and accept this relationship, then we must avoid the danger of the inversion of perspective, that of looking at things of the past, with our eyes and minds of today.

I would like also to point at a set of attitudes or factors that divert our thinking and behavior in heritage management. They are:

- the excessive expansion of the protected heritage (more and more heritage is demanded),
- the romantic and nostalgic reading of our heritage and of our cities, of the monuments and sites,
- the confusion between heritage and beauty – must heritage be necessarily beautiful? and,
- finally the overuse of heritage by the tourism economy and the patrimonization of objects for the sake of tourism.

The combination of these together leads to confusions and is extremely detrimental to the appropriate management of heritage.

In a text on “The City and Utopia” Françoise Choay warns us by quoting Thomas More, writing that “the re-appropriation of heritage does not reside only in the respect of and the fidelity to the past of the places and to the communities that have built them, but also in the acceptance of the innovations to come in these places, projected in the future by its local actors, as diverse and opposed as they can be.”

Some consider cities and landscapes as being palimpsests continuously evolving in a dynamic process that is the essence of life. But here again, we must be cautious and understand that excessive freedom is not the remedy to meet all expectations: diversity and opposition work as long as respect of the difference prevail.

I would like to conclude by a short text by Jorge Luis Borges from his book “El hacedor y otros textos”.

It is entitled “Museo: del rigor de la ciencia” and I think it says it all:

“En aquel Imperio, el Arte de la Cartografía logró tal Perfección que el Mapa de una sola Provincia ocupaba toda una Ciudad, y el Mapa del Imperio, toda una Provincia. Con el tiempo, estos Mapas Desmesurados no satisficieron y los Colegios de Cartógrafos levantaron un Mapa del Imperio, que tenía el Tamaño del Imperio y coincidía puntualmente con él. Menos Adictas al Estudio de la Cartografía, las Generaciones Siguietes entendieron que ese dilatado Mapa era Inútil y no sin Impiedad lo entregaron a las Inclemencias del Sol y los Inviernos. En los Desiertos del Oeste perduran despedazadas Ruinas del Mapa, habitadas por Animales y por Mendigos; en todo el País no hay otra reliquia de las Disciplinas Geográficas.”

*Suárez Miranda: Viajes de varones prudentes,
libro cuarto, cap. XLV, Lérida, 1658.*

