Revaluation of Callejón del Fino

Design of the Urban Evolution Museum of the Historical Centre of Guatemala

Advanced Training Programme of Conservation & Management of Historic Buildings
Lund University

Author Ana Cecilia Zurita Fuentes
Professor Universidad de San Carlos de Guatemala

March 2006
# Table of contests

Abstract ........................................ 3  
Introduction ................................. 3  
Background .................................. 4  
Social values and identity................. 4  
Geography ................................... 5  
Climate ...................................... 5  
Objective Group ............................ 5  
Architecture and Construction .......... 6  
Barrio “La Merced” ......................... 6  
Urban equipment and services ........... 7  
Urban Furniture ............................ 7  
Monuments ................................... 8  
Landscape of “Callejón del Fino” ........ 8  
Problem ..................................... 9  
Hypothesis .................................. 9  
Method ..................................... 10  
Proposal of design .......................... 10  
Results ..................................... 11  
Conclusion .................................. 12  
Recommendations ........................... 13  
References .................................. 13  
Appendix .................................... 14
Revaluation of Callejón del Fino
Design of the Urban Evolution Museum of the Historical Centre of Guatemala

Ana Cecilia Zurita Fuentes
Architect
Professors- Universidad de San Carlos de Guatemala
azurita@yahoo.com-czuritaf@hotmail.com

Abstract
The Hispano-American countries have experimented a rural immigration, due to the fact that the state powers, and the main economic, cultural and administrative activities are concentrated in the capital city of each country. This cities also the capital cities during the colonial time. This phenomenon has generated a great amount of problems due to the cities lack of infrastructure, urban planning and economic solvency, to accommodate the immigrant population from rural areas. This population see themselves in the need of invading unoccupied land to build their houses, lacking of every basic urban service in the marginal areas. Besides the lack of jobs, generates the delinquency caused by the deterioration of the cities central nucleus, in which are found the most important historic architectonic values.

This demographic increment has originated unorganized growth of the Hispano-American cities; causing the loss of their historical legacies, such as monuments and heritage buildings, inside the contemporary cities. Such is the case of Guatemala city, where architectonic values are deteriorating, quality of life has been lost, and also cultural values and safety. And the urban natural environment has been damaged due to the commerce and delinquency, turning the Historical Centre in an insecure place for living and leisure.

The project presented next, proposes a methodological model in order to give back the values of the streets of the Historical Centre. To achieve this aim The Callejón del Fino has been selected as an example for this methodological application. Also, in order to reinforce the urban intervention and rehabilitate it through cultural and social activities is proposed an architectural project as a solution for an abandoned land with the design of the Urban Evolution Museum of the Historical Centre of Guatemala that will help to preserve the history of the city before the earthquake of 1917 until nowadays.

Introduction
The Guatemalan Historical Center is a collection of patrimonial values, both architectonic and cultural. The way in which the city was traced, some of its buildings and historical monuments that date from different periods, are still preserved.

However, we need to admit that there has been some deterioration. The lack of controls on behalf of the authorities, the lack of respect to the architecture of the Historical Centre, the abandonment and delinquency, have lead way to the abrupt transformation of the urban structure of the Historic City.
modern times, a great number of tall buildings have been built, which have altered the configuration of the urban environment.

If we add to this problem the heavy transit of public transportation with no regulations throughout the streets of the Historic Center, the informal street vendors, delinquency and the frequent public protests, we can understand the actual decadent status of the historic urban area and of Guatemala city.

For such a situation, guatemalan professionals must deal with such problems, which affect the economy as well as daily life in Guatemala.

The scope and limit of the project were determined by focusing mainly on “Callejón del Fino”, known as 10th avenue “A”, and on a piece of land within the alley which is proposed to house a Museum of the urban evolution of the historical center.

Background

By the end of the year 1775, the official move of the capital city of Guatemala took place, therefore the official date of its foundation in the Valle de la Ermita is on January 2nd 1776. From this time on are found on its surroundings the first housing locations for the first habitants located northwest of the city known as “La Parroquia”, which to the date is one of the most traditional neighborhood in the city.

By the year 1778, the census that took place there were already 11,000 habitants (Langenberg 1981:387/ Gaceta de Guatemala), living around the city, these people were mainly servants. By then the water shortage was already beginning and two large aqueducts were built.

The city of Guatemala, founded during the last decades of the colonial times, utilized the spanish model, established by the orders of Felipe II in the year 1573, in which the following general characteristics are manifested: (See picture 3):

♦ Landscape divided by a main square in the center
♦ Streets divided into blocks
♦ One storey houses
♦ A central yard in the middle of each house.

In the year 1791, as an attempt to reorganize the colonial administration the first administrative sub-division took place, derivated from a Spanish system, as a result the city was divided into six major units or parishes and each of this into two housing locations; for each neighborhoods a mayor with well defined obligations regarding the public order was assigned.

Social values and identity

The historical center of Guatemala City constitutes a nucleus of different kind values: cultural heritage, urban, social and economical values, generated through different times of the city.

The people that moved from the “old city” to the “new city” brought along them their social values thus the new city inherited the architectonical, social and urban values. Proof of this is the existence of a large amount of elements of the oral tradition, legends, gastronomy, among others.

Among the social values that compose the living heritage of the Historical Centre are:

Picture 3
Design of “the new city of Guatemala, 1776” by Luis Díez de Navarro, 1776:

This Project was based on the square design, which consists in a “Central Square” or park surrounded by Governmental buildings and the Cathedral; on the four cardinal points other four square are developed with their respective churches.

Picture 4
The artistic expressions such as, monuments, walls, plastic arts, technical and artistic innovations.

- Social and political history.
- Popular art.
- Stories and legends.
- Folklore. (See Picture 4)
- Art work, such as wooden games, piñatas, candies, wax art, leather work.
- Traditional religious community activities.
- Local festivities.
- Traditional local Entities and Characters.
- Gastronomy (2000 typical dishes are known).
- Religious cycles such as lent and processions (See Picture 5) and Christmas.

Geography
The Republic of Guatemala is located in Central America, divided into 22 departments, grouped in 8 regions. (altitud y topografia, valle de la ermita).

Climate
- **Temperature**
  Average temperature for the department of Guatemala is 20 degrees Celsius.
- **Precipitation**
  The department of Guatemala presents a range from 1000 to 1500 mm. of precipitation.
- **Sun lightning**
  Guatemala has a Sun shine of 180 Sun/hours, and indicates a medium level of solar exposure. In the Guatemalan region the sun is in the Zenith from April 29th to April 30th and from August 14th to August 15th.
- **Relative Humidity**
  Relative humidity for the department of Guatemala is 75%.
- **Wind**
  In the country the wind direction is N-E to S-O, during the months of February, March and October inverse fluctuations are registered. Max speed is 50 to 60 Kms/h.

Objective Group
The specific population that will benefited by the project are the inhabitants of the Historical Centre, wich corresponds to Zone 1 of the City of Guatemala.

The change of the quantity of the Historical Centre population has reflected the political, economical and social events in the city. After the revolution of 1944, in the year 1950 the population was 74,523 habitants, as a result of the structural changes this population increased; however the most accelerated growth is registered during the period between 1950 and 1964, when the population grew by 30%, getting to 96,098 habitants (See Picture 7), mainly because a high volume of immigration from rural areas to the capital city. However, since the year 1973, high income people begun the abandonm ent of the central area to settle a new modern business sector. This situation worsen in the later census that indicates that only 7.6% of the population was living in the central area.

1 The information for the analysis of the climatic conditions was obtained through “INSIVUMEH de Guatemala”.

---

1 Porcentaje

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>AÑO</th>
<th>PORCENTAJE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1950</td>
<td>7.60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1994</td>
<td>10.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>20.00%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Picture 6**
Out of the 83,565 habitants of the Historical Center, there exists a balance between the male and female genders, with a slight majority of the female gender. The male gender constitutes 49% of the habitants of the zone while the female gender constitutes 51%. The range of age that dominates the Historical Gender is from 15 to 49 years old, which also constitutes 50% of the total of the habitants, with which can be said that population residing in the Historical Center is in a student productive age.

**Architecture and Construction**
Guatemala city, is divided into 20 zones. The Historical Centre corresponds to the area from 1st Street to 18 Street; and from Elena Avenue to 12th Avenue, including “El Cerrito del Carmen” in zone one (See picture 8).

Among the barrios, the following are found:

- SANTA ROSA
- SAN JOSÉ
- LA MERCED (See Picture 9).
- EL CALVARIO
- SAN SEBASTIAN
- SANTO DOMINGO
- SANTUARIO DE GUADALUPE
- LA RECOLECCIÓN
- SANTA CATALINA
- EL SAGRARIO

For the study, the environment built of Barrio La Merced was analyzed.

**Barrio “La Merced”**
Is one of the oldest of the New Guatemala City. In Marcos Ibañez’s trace appears located northeast of the Central Place. In 1806 was considered to be among the most important ones.

It is a barrio of a lot of tradition, since the last century it had a diversity of population, and also had strong traditions, this due to the fountain located in its plaza that helped distribute the water among the population; besides that, the traditional festivities, processions, Burning of the Devil, etc., give it a special touch to the barrio, which even now a days maintains its religious spirit.
Urban equipment and services

In order to generate a better infrastructure the actual urban furniture is analyzed. The barrio La Merced, has paved roads, electricity, water, phone service and transportation. La Merced church is located on 11th avenue, which is visited by many neighbors on a regular basis, next to it is the Police Hospital, where previously was located the La Merced clerical home, and on the opposite corner are located the police offices. (See Picture 10).

Urban furniture

The barrio La Merced has the following urban furniture:

- **Trashcans**: Structured tin, donated by the local government, located in the busy areas. They do not have a specific design.
- **Phoneboths**: They can be found in certain corners, prepaid card phones. They are located in the sidewalks close to the streets. They are made of stainless steel, aluminum and plexiglass.
- **Advertising fences**: Old advertising fences can be seen still showing the old nomenclature, on the walls about 6 to 8 feet high. They are made out of ceramic, enamel and paint. (See picture 11)
- **Lamps**: The lamps of barrio La Merced, belong to the electric service, made of a concrete pedestal, metallic arm, and glass cover.
- **Traffic lights**: Found in almost every corner, which helps ease the transit, however, 12:00 to 13:00 and 17:00 to 18:00 are rush hours.

Among the urban furniture can also be found, candy both, fruit both, and other both selling food. In the church of La Merced, candle both are concentrated, such both are nothing more than just a wooden table. All of
these furniture is temporary and portable since by the end of the day the sellers leave the place.

**Monuments**

In barrio La Merced, are located value monuments, among which the neoclassical style building are distinguished, such as La Merced Church. Another valuable monument is the one that once housed the offices of “El Imparcial” newspaper, located at the end of Callejón del Fino. The Isabel la Católica park constitutes an ensemble where the vegetation plays an important role, the Cerrito del Carmen hill is also very characteristic of the place and it is very important due to its historical value because the El Carmen Church was built there even before the city foundation. In this neighbourhood is located the well known “Callejón del Fino”, that was named by the neighbors to indicate the place in where a famous miniature painter lived, who was Alberto Cabrera “the man with fine hands”. Also in this alley we can find colonial, neoclassical and art déco style houses. (See Picture 11).

**Landscape of “Callejón del Fino”**

Callejón del Fino is located in the 10th avenue “A” from the 1st to 7th streets of zone 1 (See picture 12). Secondly there is an abandoned land, which still conserves its original front wall, inside the alley, where the Architectonic and Urban Evolution Museum will be developed.
The 10th avenue “A”, previously known as “Callejón del Fino”, has been affected by problems that affect the rest of the Historical Centre; it is a housing sector as it was before, however, it has lost the proportional scale that previously was respected by the social classes once inhabited it, and that today have moved to other residential areas further away, which has yielded to inappropriate use of some of these houses. The street that used to be made out of stones has been paved like the rest in the Historical Centre, and the front of the houses lack of unity and a defined architectonic style.

Among the main factors that cause this problems are:

♦ Lack of unity and integrity among the modern and old buildings in the Historical Centre.
♦ Abandonment of the buildings on behalf of the high income people, wich in turn has generated the buildings are in state of ruin.
♦ Lost of the housing vocation of the sector, due to the new uses poorly appropriate, like parking lots, overpopulated houses and prostitution.
♦ Deterioration of the urban environment due to the architecture, public wiring, transportation and delinquency.
♦ Lack of valorization to the architectonic and patrimonial of the Historical Centre.
♦ Loss of cultural and artistic manifestation.

The problems exposed arise the following questions: How to give an architectural solution to the problem of disintegration between the old and modern constructions of the Historic Center? How to improve the urban environment of Callejón del Fino, through an urban and architectural proposal? How to give a new use to the abandoned constructions, without damaging its original configuration? What characteristics should have a museum of the urban development and architectural evolution of the Historical Center of Guatemala, where besides exposing can be offered maintenance to the works exposed?

Hypothesis

To improve the urban environment of Callejón del Fino, its necessary to propose a methodological model of urban intervention and maintenance plan, in order to give back the streets of the Historical Center their historical value.

Besides an urban solution there is the adequate use of the land, as much as the valorization of the history. For that reason in the abandoned construction found in Callejón del Fino, it could be a good solution to design a Museum with spaces that can show the urban evolution of the historical centre and host some cultural activities.
Method

To carry out the test of variables people specialized in the reconstruction and rescue of the Historical Centre were consulted. It was made a study of the population to serve. The collected material: pictures, blueprints and the object were analized to study the problem of the deterioration of the landscape. And on the base of this sample is presented an architectural solution to the problem proposed.

Proposal of design and revaluation

Analysis of Callejón del Fino

The Callejón del Fino known as 10 avenue “A”, possesses architectural and urban characteristics of a high hereditary value. Its extensive streets, were paved with stone, they measure 9 meters of wide and each sidewalk 1.20 meters.

Callejón del Fino from the first street to the seventh street, offers to the passer-by a historic group of colonial, neoclassical and art deco monuments.

Nevertheless, in spite of the urban development and architectural wealth of the avenue, its difficult to appreciate because during the day it becomes an open parking that generates filth and delinquency. Also in the recent years there have been built houses designed with facades and heights not integrated to the original configuration of the alley. Besides the air wiring of electricity and telephone contribute to the visual contamination of the avenue.

Proposal for the revaluation of Callejón del Fino

After establishing the damages of Callejón del Fino, an urban solution is proposed, the aim is the revaluation of the assembly, by the design of wider sidewalks, underground electric wiring, urban furniture and vegetation; transforming it in a pedestrian alley that will permit to appreciate the architectural and historic wealth of the area.

Plans

For the proposal of the revaluation of Callejón del Fino were drawed the following plans:

- Plan of the current state of Callejón del Fino 1/22
- Plan of Callejón del Fino, proposal of design 2/22
- Plan of a tipical street of Callejón del Fino, proposal of design 3/22
- Plan of the urban equipment, proposal of design 4/22
- Plan of the urban equipment, proposal of design 5/22

Proposal of design for the Urban Evolution Museum of the Historical Centre of Guatemala to the year 1917

On the basis of photographic analysis and the plans of the monument, it was established the present state of the wall to restore; with the aim to propose an architectural design that will permit the revalue the assembly, giving the old construction a new use as a museum, in which can be exhibited original plans, as well as a model to an approximate scale of 1:200 that shows the urban development and architectural evolution of the Historic Centre of
Guatemala before the earthquakes of 1917, that caused a constructive change in the original architecture of the city.

- **Arquitectural Solution:**
  The design of the Urban Evolution Museum of the Historical Centre of Guatemala until 1917, considers the following spaces:
  - Office of the Historian-Director
  - Maintenance workshop
  - Information and technical support
  - Reference library
  - Area for the permanent model exposition
  - Sanitary services (men and women)

- **Structural Analysis:**
  - **Consolidation of external walls:**
    Because of its value as a national heritage in the monument is proposed the minimum intervention of the external wall. In the area that shows cave-ins is proposed the reinstatement of materials and for its consolidation a beam of concrete on a build of brick that should be built along the wall to achieve the integration of materials. Besides, the wall will be joined to the new interior structure through some steel pins that will join the beam to the new steel columns.
  - **Internal structure of walls and roof:**
    The internal structure of the museum will be completely new, for which the steel is proposed as a structural material, with the purpose to cover a greater space with the smaller quantity of columns, because is desired that the area of exposition be quite free. The roof will be “lámina duralita” and tile on this, besides, a “vitral” is proposed on the top of the roof to achieve a better lightning and ventilation.

- **Plumbing, sewage and lightning design:**
  The plans shows the design of the installations for: plumbing, sewage and lightning.

**Plans**
For the designed of the Urban Evolution Museum of the Historical Centre of Guatemala were drawed the following plans:

- Plan of the current state of the monument, inventory of materials 6/22
- Current state of the facade of the monument 7/22
- Plan of the first level of the Museum 8/22
- Plan of the second level of the Museum 9/22
- Plan of the roof structure 10/22
- Plan of Facades of the Museum 11/22
- Plan of sections of the Museum 12/22
- Plan of “Cimentación” 13/22
- Plan of the second level structure 14/22
- Plan of the roof structure 15/22
- Plan of structural details 16/22
- Plan of structural details 17/22
- Plan of plumbing 18/22
- Plan of sewage 19/22
- Plan of sewage installation details 20/22
- Plan of lightning, first level 21/22
- Plan of lightning, second level 22/22

**Results**
The revaluation of the historical centres are an alternative that has had successful results, above all in Europe. The old cities that in many cases were abandoned or lost their commercial and social function due to the
territorial expansion, are revitalized with pedestrian streets, restoration of historic buildings and implementation of cultural activities.

The benefits found are:

- **Urban**: An abandoned and insecure zone revives. It becomes a focus of congregation, with greater security and services. The heavy traffic on the roads is controlled.
- **Social**: The society finds a place with less contamination, more services, security, where the pedestrian is the protagonist instead of the vehicles, it offers a better way to socialize.
- **Economic**: The investors are more interested in this area, due to that reaches a better capital gain. Generally the most luxurious commerce are the ones that like these zones to build their business. Higher tax collection are generated and the land enlarges its property value.
- **Environmental**: With the control of the traffic of heavy vehicles the contamination of noises, smoke and visual trash is reduced.
- **Heritage**: This is an alternative to conserve and to restore the historical centres, besides that are encouraged the cultural demonstrations of the inhabitants.

The objections are found at the moment of convince the population that is a good option, that’s why they must be involve in it since the planning of the revaluation, so all of the population can participate in the decisions. Also, it should be a part of the national politics, so all the sectors can participate and contribute to the success of the management.

**Conclusions**

1. In spite of the present deterioration of the Callejón del Fino, it still conserves a high percentage of its original architectural characteristics, for which its susceptible of restoration and revaluation through an urban and architectural proposal.

2. The architectural assembly of Callejón del Fino is characterized for being a residential area whose dominant architectural characteristics are represented by buildings of neoclassical, colonial type and art deco.

3. The revaluation of Callejón del Fino implies necessarily the conjunction of the architectural, urban development and historic fields.

4. The improvement of the urban landscape of Callejón del Fino revalues cultural and architecturally the physical environment of the avenue, by the incorporation of wider sidewalks, urban furniture, lightning design and crosswalks.

5. With the design and construction of the museum proposed on the abandoned land this idle space is revitalized and the original wall of the colonial facade is restored, accomplishing an integration of a new design with the architectural, historical, and technical aspect of the monument.

6. The Museum of the Urban Evolution of the Historical Centre, will contribute to the recovery, conservation, revaluation and exposition of the heritage of Guatemala City.
7. The urban development and architectural revaluation of Callejón del Fino besides increasing the cultural wealth of Guatemala, will benefit an offer a different option to the national and international tourist demand.

Recommendations
1. As an urban solution is important the quick revaluation of Callejon del Fino, before the excessive growth of the population deteriorate and alter still more the existing architectural configuration, doing more complex the task of rescue.

2. It would be desirable to give a continuity to the present study of revaluation of Callejón del Fino, prompting new projects of recovery of the close by areas in order to concentrate a cultural, economic and touristic attraction that will enrich the quantitative and qualitative value of the Historic Centre of Guatemala.

3. It’s necessary to involve the neighbors in the maintenance plan with the purpose of that they become aware of the cultural, economic, and social importance of the Historic Centre.

4. Taking into account the wealth of Callejon del Fino, there should be promoted cultural activities, as could be workshops of art, gastronomic and musical festivals and folk activities.

References


