

# Recognising and Managing 20<sup>th</sup> Century Heritage: Current Issues and Experiences

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01. Amanda. Photograph by Osmara Alberteris Cañizares



02. Respecting the vision, changing the view. Looking at Vittorio Garatti's school of ballet 50 years later (1970 - 2020). Photographs by Lorenzo Carmellini (above) and Federica Allegretti (above)



# Respecting the vision, changing the view. A Conservation management plan for the National Art Schools of Cuba

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Cuba's National Art Schools (NAS) were built just after Castro's revolution (1961-64) on a design by the young architects Ricardo Porro, Vittorio Garatti, and Roberto Gottardi. They translated the will for social renewal into an innovative architecture where opening, dialogue, equality, and freedom resulted in a perfect synthesis of art, construction, and landscape. The five buildings hosted (and still host) an original model in education based on the integrated teaching of different forms of art to which each building is devoted: visual arts, drama, music, dance, and ballet. Although independent, these iconic buildings were all made using the same materials (bricks, concrete, ceramic tiles) and techniques (domes and vaults) and perfectly integrated within Havana's 56-hectare former golf course.

The NAS were included in the 100 Most Endangered Sites by the WMF (2000), in the Unesco Tentative List (2003), and the National Register of Monuments (2010). However, they have been mainly studied from a critical and social point of view so far, not yet with the aim of being sustainably preserved and managed. Both Cuba and the NAS are nowadays on edge between oblivion and a sudden modernization. Public funds for conservation are lacking, and foreign investors are discouraged due to the scarce control of processes and results. Projects often focus on a single building, with the risk of disregarding the integrity of the complex. Therefore, the NAS's educational model and modernist architecture risk being lost or jeopardized.

To prevent this risk, a comprehensive CMP was completed from 2018 to 2020, based on five points: five steps in the CMP process, five iconic buildings, five forms of arts, and five actions (documentation, conservation activity, landscape protection, energy sustainability, management), five partners involved: Politecnico di Milano, Parma University, Assorestauro (Italy) Universidad de las Artes (Cuba), Princeton University (USA).

Results consist of a clear statement of significance based on a deep understating of constructive history and conservation needs and thanks to a comparative discussion among different points of view (national/international, designers, owner, users). The level of awareness arose among the stakeholders, and a clear list of priorities was defined for both conservation and management. The plan also provides practical solutions for the major issues, i.e., concrete preservation, flood risk mitigation, adaptive reuse.

Managing such a large complex was challenging since it includes multiple levels of completeness, state of repair, uses, stakeholders and expectations. A multilevel and multiscale approach based on a GIS system was crucial. The CMP proved to be a sound basis for the decision-making process and for assessing priorities. The users were involved in drafting the plan to share the methodology fully. A further effort in the capacity-building activity on site would greatly benefit, particularly towards digitalization.

In conclusion: an excellent experience in research and education. Due to the initial mistrust towards a US-financed initiative, it was also an outstanding and not-granted experience of collaboration among Italy, Cuba, and the US. It is perhaps the most result, thanks to the human qualities of all the people involved and the genuine interest in architectural conservation and research in general by the stakeholders in Cuba.