

CASE
STUDY
I

Palacio del Segundo Cabo: An Intercultural Bridge in Havana



Work Team at the Palacio del Segundo Cabo of the Office of the Historian of the City of Havana

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Background

The Palacio del Segundo Cabo, an emblematic example of Cuban baroque style, is the work of Cuban engineer Antonio Fernando de Trevejes and Zaldivar. It was built during the last decades of the 18th Century, as part of the urban project around the Arms Square, and was a reference for the neighboring Palace of the Captains General. The majestic colonial palace is located to the north of the Arms Square, at O'Reilly Street, No. 4, between El Puerto and Tacón Avenues.

The building was conceived as the headquarters of the General Post Administration of the Island of Cuba, making Havana the center of all postal communication between Europe and the Ibero-American colonies. Later on, it was to successively become the office of the Second Corporal Inspector General, the seat of the Senate, the Supreme Court, and the seat of the Academies of History, of the Spanish Language, of Arts and Letters, the National Council of Culture, and finally of the Cuban Book Institute.



The restoration and rehabilitation of the Palacio del Segundo Cabo as cultural center is a joint project between the Office of the Historian of Havana, the European Union and UNESCO



Organización de las Naciones Unidas para la Educación, la Ciencia y la Cultura

Oficina Regional de Cultura para América Latina y el Caribe
UNESCO La Habana



Patrimonial Rescue and Cultural Development

The Palace is being restored for cultural purposes, as part of the Patrimonial Rescue and Cultural Development in Havana project, an international cooperation initiative by the Office of the Historian of the City together with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the European Union (EU), through its delegation in Cuba.

After initial coordination between the three entities in the year 2008, this project was identified as the first joint cultural development project, being its objectives the full restoration of the building and the establishment of a meeting place between Cuba and Europe in the fields of culture and heritage.

This is the first activity in Cuba being financed by the European Union through the subprogram "Access to local culture, protection and promotion of cultural diversity," the objectives of which are to improve the access of developing countries populations to foreign and local culture; promote intercultural dialogue, and foster all forms of expression while respecting cultural diversity, equality among men and women, as well as religion and ethnicity; and preserve short term endangered heritage.



Satisfaction is the first word that comes to my mind when talking about this work at the Palacio del Segundo Cabo in Old Havana, which has been included in the World Heritage list and being a permanent lab of ideas as to preservation, rehabilitation and development strategies (...) Extreme crisis leads to its antithesis: opportunities. I am convinced that this new cultural project of the Palacio del Segundo Cabo will be even more innovative, considering the role of heritage as a factor for human development, social improvement and communication and dialogue.

Herman van Hooff

Director of UNESCO Regional Office for Culture in Latin American and the Caribbean
Havana, Cuba

Project Launching Ceremony, Havana, November 2009



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Engineering work: preserving the endangered heritage

Successive transformations, changes in its use and a prolonged lack of maintenance, brought about the severe deterioration of the Palace and its structure. At the beginning of the restoration process, the building was suffering from significant cracks in its walls and arcades, overweight on the load bearing framework due to inadequate use of the building and the numerous subdivisions and added level on the top, parasitic plants, bats and other pathologies of a biological origin, as well as problems caused by humidity and its proximity to the sea.

Given the fact that this is a building of great historical and patrimonial value, with Protection Degree I, the intervention strategy adopted has been to remove the subdivisions and elements added to the Palace, trying to recover as much as possible its original spaces, typical of the Havana baroque style.

Based on the diagnosis carried out, it was technically decided that rescue should be done by underpinning the foundations with micro-piles in order to stabilize the building on a solid support before proceeding to seal and consolidate the cracks and fissures.

Parallel to this, the roof is being replaced by a light structure made of concrete joists and expanded polystyrene overhangs. Work is also being done in the restoration of the ironwork and woodwork elements, finding and dismantling the old nettings, cleaning the facades and the demolition and rebuilding of deteriorated balconies.



Courtyard©OHCH, 2008



Team Work:

A Unique Experience

Being this an innovative project which since its conception included two goals: patrimonial rescue and cultural development, it has brought about the set up of a mixed team of investors, designers, cultural and museological researchers, communicators, experts on technological systems, and coordinators, in a dynamic of constant communication and joint work.

The rehabilitation process has been assumed, from the beginning, from a multi-layer pers-

pective linking the construction, cultural, technological, and management aspects. This has enriched the project along the way, with significant contributions by the three institutions involved, increasing its initial scope.

In this regard, it is a very positive pioneering experience in the country in terms of developing comprehensive projects in the field of heritage, and particularly, for giving new cultural and museological uses to historic buildings.

Meeting of the Project management Committee ©OHCH,2011



Cultural Project: Linking Two Worlds, Two Cultures, and One Idea.

The idea of the Palacio del Segundo Cabo project stemmed from the first workshop on conceptualization, held in April 2010, when Dr. Eusebio Leal Spengler, the Historian of the City, define it as “something totally different from a museum or a cultural center, a center for construing cultural relations between Cuba and Europe.”

This is how the idea of proposing an interactive and participatory space, based on and contributing to new museology criteria, came up. The main objective of the center will be to show the intercultural dialogues that have shaped the identity of the Cuban nation, opening new spaces to promote cultural exchange projects, as the venue to share knowledge and research on related issues.

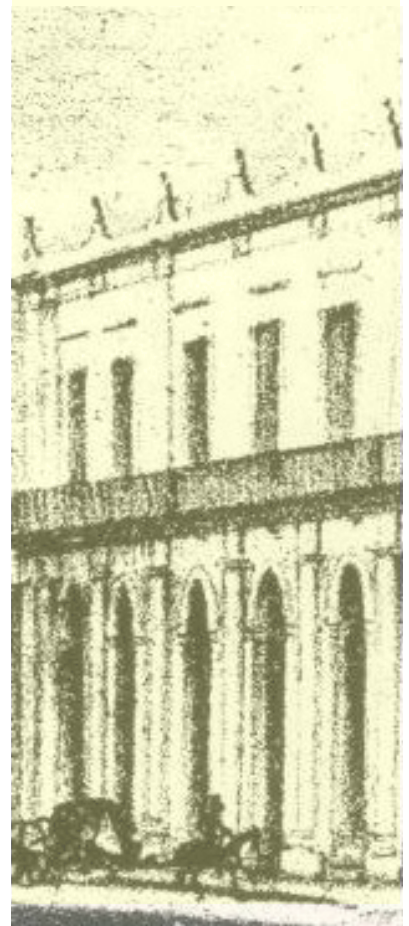


It has to be completely different. This is the best contribution we can make to the global historiographic discourse. This island has had the unique privilege of having culture at the core of all things and culture in the universal sense. This is what we are going to bring to this cultural interpretation center at the Palacio del Segundo Cabo.

Eusebio Leal Spengler

Historian of the City of Havana

First Workshop on Conceptualization Havana, April 2010





The Palacio del Segundo Cabo, as a center for construing Cuba-Europe cultural relations, will deal with, from a symbolic perspective, exchanges between the island and the old continent, based on the material and intellectual outcomes of this process, a central issue in the formation of the Cuban nation. In this regard, the center will exhibit the European contributions to the Cuban culture and the Cuban contributions to the European and universal culture, from multiple expressions of knowledge and through permanent and temporary exhibits, lectures and other activities.

Restoration
work
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The center and its services will be aimed at a diverse local public and other visitors, without restrictions as to gender, age group, race or religious belief, favoring the participation of vulnerable groups like children, adolescents, the elderly and the disabled.

The cultural program of the Palace will be part of the cultural management system of the OHCH, establishing synergies with relevant events like the Havana Biennials, the cultural weeks of European countries, photography exhibitions, international workshops, as well as dance, music and film festivals, as spaces fostering closer relations between both horizons, within the principles of respect and diversity.

Five centuries of cultural Exchange must be expressed through brief and attractive messages, with clearly defined educational purposes. Museography should move away from the traditional systems, incorporating suggestive and ludic resources, attractive environments and mobile structures that will encourage participation and develop motivation to learn more about the topics presented.

The new technologies shall be used as tools to encourage visitors to learn more about the cultural contents presented, including the testimonies of reporters and travelers, books and important figures who influenced the social and scientific thinking of their times, the

model matrixes that lined out the image of the city, cartography as a means to travel the seas or the understanding of a voyage, the to-ing and fro-ing across the Atlantic, as a convergence of life experiences cutting across the relations between Cuba and the Old Continent.

Sensory stimuli shall be combined with the exhibition of physical pieces, enabling an interaction between the public and the contents of each hall. Exhibits shall not be aimed at explaining in detail five hundred years of history but rather to provoke emotions that will encourage the need to learn more about the social and cultural processes through a rational-sensitive experience in



which each visitor can make his or her own interpretation of the cultural event.

The encounter between cultures, the collective memory of the social reality of the city, the development of scientific thinking, the book and the literature, traveler's accounts, cartography, architecture, and town planning are the different dimensions from which the ongoing cultural relations with Europe will be dealt with in the permanent exhibits.

The Palace will also have halls for temporary exhibits, a multi-purpose hall for conferences, films, theater, music and dance activities, a mediatheque specialized in research and heritage

topics, promoting contacts with European experts in this field, workshops for children and adolescents, as well as spaces to admire the building's magnificent architecture, like the protocol room and the great hall.

After 220 years of its construction, the Palacio del Segundo Cabo, once the Post Office of the Island will once again play the role of linking Cuba and Europe, this time from the comprehensive perspective of culture and new museology. The educational, open and participatory approaches, the premise of considering the institution a living organism in constant interaction with its environment and public, and the use of new technologies, reaffirm its appropriateness in a context where participating in culture is changing and favoring inclusion, exchanges and experimentation ■



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We hope to successfully work together to back the Palacio del Segundo Cabo to the place it deserves as a architectural masterpiece and a place for cultural exchange (...) Culture is an indispensable tool for dialogue and peaceful relations among peoples. The work of the Historian's Office and UNESCO goes beyond building restoration. So will this project that we hope will contribute to build new bridges between Cuba and the European Union.

Karel de Gucht

European Commissioner for Development and Humanitarian Aid.

Project Launching Ceremony, Havana, November 2009



EU Cultural Counsellors Visit ©OHCH,2011



Irene Horejs's visit, EU Regional Delegation for Cuba and Dominican Republic, ©OHCH,2010



Cultural Counsellors Visit ©OHCH,2011