

ICOMOS

INTERNATIONAL COUNCIL ON MONUMENTS AND SITES
CONSEIL INTERNATIONAL DES MONUMENTS ET DES SITES
CONSEJO INTERNACIONAL DE MONUMENTOS Y SITIOS
МЕЖДУНАРОДНЫЙ СОВЕТ ПО ВОПРОСАМ ПАМЯТНИКОВ И ДОСТОПРИМЕЧАТЕЛЬНЫХ МЕСТ
WORLD HERITAGE LIST

N° 412

A) IDENTIFICATION

Nomination : The historic centre of Mexico City and Xochimilco

Location : Federal District

State Party : Mexico

Date : December 2, 1986

B) ICOMOS RECOMMENDATION

That the proposed cultural property be included on the World Heritage List on the basis of criteria II, III, IV and V.

C) JUSTIFICATION

It is difficult to formulate a nomination concerning the monuments, groups of buildings or sites that are located at the heart of the major contemporary city whose origins and growth they most fully and clearly illustrate. In the case of the capital of Mexico, it is truly a case of attempting the impossible. On the one hand, Cortès had the ancient city of Tenochtitlan razed in 1521-1522 in order to abolish any trace of the pre-Hispanic culture. On the other hand, the Spanish settlement, which was slow to prosper (100,000 inhabitants in 1537 compared with nearly 500,000 at the time of the conquest), has been totally swallowed up by today's gigantic metropolis of more than 17,000,000 people. The sole reminders of the Aztec capital and the capital of New Spain, and of the outlying villages, are a few ruins that have survived the flood of concrete which has engulfed the 2,500 km² of the Mexico basin (altitude 2,250m).

The proposal submitted by the Government of Mexico is both limited and realistic. It offers the best delimitation possible of a cultural property whose universal value is obvious but whose integrity is threatened both by natural catastrophes -earthquakes in the region are unusually violent- and by the alarming acceleration of demographic expansion. The proposal concerns two distinct zones : the historic centre of Mexico City and the lakeside area of Xochimilco. The value of these two properties is absolutely unequalled.

The historic centre includes the archaeological site of the Templo Mayor, which was excavated between 1978 and 1982. It presents a remarkable array of colonial monuments, of which the Cathedral is the most famous, and an impressive series of large public edifices from the 19th and 20th centuries, such as the Palacio de las Bellas

Artes. Historical continuity from the founding of Tenochtitlan in the 14th century up to the present day is therefore perfectly represented.

The zone of Xochimilco, 28 kms to the south, is the only remaining reminder of the lacustrine landscape of the Aztec capital, the "Venice of the New World", where the conquistadores destroyed the monuments and drained the canals.

On the edge of the residual lake of Xochimilco (the southern arm of the great dried-up lake of Texcoco where the Aztecs had settled on a group of islets linked to solid ground by footbridges), and in the midst of a network of small canals, are still some chinampas, the floating gardens which the Spanish so admired. This half-natural, half-artificial landscape is now an "ecological reserve", covering 1,138 hectares, of which 500 hectares have been made into a "heritage reserve".

Before any further comments, ICOMOS would like to list the criteria in favor of the nomination of this cultural property to the World Heritage List.

- Criterion II. There is no doubt that, from the 14th to the 19th century, Tenochtitlan, and subsequently, Mexico City, exerted decisive influence on the development of architecture, the monumental arts and the use of space first in the Aztec kingdom and later in New Spain.

- Criterion III. With its ruins of five temples erected before the Great Pyramid, and in particular the enormous monolith of Coyolxauhqui, which symbolized the end of the old cosmogeny and the advent of Huitzilopochtli, the tribal god of the Aztecs, the monumental complex of the Templo Mayor bears exceptional witness to the cults of an extinct civilization.

- Criterion IV. The capital of New Spain, characterized by its checkerboard layout, the regular spacing of its plazas and streets, and the splendor of its religious architecture (Cathedral, Santo Domingo, San Francisco, San Jeronimo, etc.) and civil architecture (palace of the Marqués de Jaral de Berrio), is a prime example of Spanish settlements in the New World.

- Criterion V. Having become vulnerable under the impact of environmental changes, the lacustrine landscape of Xochimilco constitutes the only reminder of traditional ground occupation in the lagoons of the Mexico City basin before the Spanish conquest.

However, along with the overall positive opinion concerning this nomination, ICOMOS should like to express certain wishes and recommendations.

1. While recognizing the great importance of the Xochimilco site, ICOMOS should like to obtain more details on the plan to safeguard it, such as the precise nature of protective measures, the date at which the present presidential declaration takes effect, etc.

2. Insofar as the historic centre is concerned, ICOMOS approves a strict delimitation to be applied to zone A (corresponding to the city prior to 1810), while making zone B (corresponding to the growth of the capital in the 19th century) a buffer zone. However, it requests formal guarantees with regard to the use of certain empty spaces within zone A that correspond to destroyed buildings and expressly recommends the adoption of specific standards that are compatible with the old buildings and which will govern the use of materials, the layout plans and the height of new constructions. Furthermore, any expansion of parking facilities within that zone ought to be strictly limited.

ICOMOS, April 1987

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These assurances were given in a document forwarded to the Secretariat of the Committee on May 21, 1987.

ICOMOS, October 1987