

Caracas (Venezuela)

No 986

Identification

<i>Nomination</i>	Ciudad Universitaria de Caracas
<i>Location</i>	Municipality of Libertador, Caracas
<i>State Party</i>	Republic of Venezuela
<i>Date</i>	29 July 1999

Justification by State Party

The Ciudad Universitaria de Caracas, created by the Venezuelan architect Carlos Raúl Villanueva, is an example of outstanding quality representing the highest ideals and concepts of modern city planning, architecture, and art.

The Ciudad Universitaria de Caracas represents a work of art that constitutes a masterpiece of human creative genius, its most transcendental value. The urban and architectural spaces created by Villanueva integrated with the works of the artists who participated in the “integration of the arts” are of incomparable quality and character. The essence of the work is in the message and in the aesthetic emotion that its authors have managed to transmit.

Criterion i

The University represents the fulfilment in Latin America of a great part of the propositions made by the artistic and architectural avant-garde movements of the early 20th century in Europe. It constitutes an outstanding example in a small enclosure of a utopian world reflecting that time and expressing the quality of modern urbanism, the application of modern technology, the creation of modern abstract forms, and the construction of a spatial integration of inside and outside reflected in the dimension of time. The ensemble represents the best example of the integration of the works of avant-garde artists.

Criterion ii

Being an exceptional and exemplary testimony of modern city planning, architecture, and art, the Ciudad Universitaria de Caracas is intimately bound to the culture and conditions of the place. It constitutes an ingenious interpretation of the concepts and spaces of colonial traditions and an example of an open, ventilated, and protected architecture, appropriate for its tropical environment.

Criterion iii

The Ciudad Universitaria de Caracas is an outstanding example, and one of the best in existence in the world, of the modern urban, architectural, and artistic concepts of the early 20th century. It therefore illustrates in an excellent way this recent but already significant period in human history.

Criterion iv

Category of property

In terms of the categories of cultural property set out in Article 1 of the 1972 World Heritage Convention, this is a *group of buildings*.

History and Description

History

The origin of the Central University of Venezuela is in the foundation of the Royal and Pontifical University by a decree of Philip V in 1721, promulgated during the Spanish colonial period. It operated in the Santa Rosa Seminary, located in the main square of the city of Caracas, today the Plaza Bolívar. In 1827 Simón Bolívar promulgated the new Republican Statutes for the University, and in 1856 it became independent of the Seminary and was transferred to the former San Francisco Convent, two blocks south-west of the Plaza Bolívar. The University soon started growing and occupied other buildings outside the convent. The dispersion caused problems to the work and it was thus decided to concentrate the university in a new enclosure, a campus in the outskirts of Caracas. The new university demanded a modernization of the institution, in order to correspond with the new requirements of the time.

In 1942 the studies for the new university campus began, focusing first on the faculty of medicine and the clinical hospital, its main element around which the University was organized from the beginning. In the following year a Co-ordinating Commission was created, composed of representatives of the Ministries of Education, Health, Social Attendance, and Public Works. The Ministry of Public Works appointed the architect Carlos Raúl Villanueva. The site of the Hacienda Sosa in El Valle was chosen as the location for the campus. The commission consisted of Dr Armando Vegas as co-ordinator, Villanueva as planner, and the engineer Guillermo Herrera as technician. In October 1943 Government Executive Ordinance No 196 established the Instituto de la Ciudad Universitaria, assigned to the Ministry of Public Works. Dr Frank McVey from the University of Kentucky (USA) was hired to advise on the project.

The first plan, prepared in 1943, consisted of several groups of buildings, including the administration, the different faculties, dwellings for students, faculty, and personnel, as well as facilities for sports and a botanical garden. Villanueva, who was not yet responsible for the project, had not signed this plan. In 1944 he participated in a commission sent to study the university campus of Bogotá. After this experience it was decided to establish a unique architectural team to control the entire design process of the campus. Villanueva emerged as the principal planner-architect of the team. In 1944 a new plan was prepared, maintaining the academic criteria of the previous project but aiming at a higher complexity within the ensemble and the buildings. The main axis was here provided with an ending, the Olympic Stadium, which was to remain in this location even in future plans.

The construction of the first buildings started in 1945 with the Clinical Hospital and related buildings. The building of the Industrial Technical School was started in 1947, changing its position from what had been initially proposed. Here Villanueva abandoned the symmetry of the medical

complex and introduced some of the latest avant-garde ideas in architecture into the projects. Another group that started at the end of the 1940s were the residential buildings, referring to models developed especially in Germany after World War I and consisting of horizontal blocks, separated by open spaces and surrounded by gardens; the buildings had large open balconies that also served as solar protection.

The 1949 plan evidenced the first important changes in the urban layout. The covered walk that crossed the campus from south to north, separating the medicine group from the Rector's Office and the Aula Magna, seems also to have separated two historical moments in the planning process. A radically different approach started now with the sports stadium project. The change was expressed in the new way of using reinforced concrete and became apparent in the projects for the Cultural Directive area, including the Plaza del Rectorado, the Covered Plaza, the Aula Magna, the Library, etc. The works were finished and inaugurated in 1953. From here on the project was developed in an organic and dynamic manner. The asymmetric disposition of the structures, the audacity of the forms, and the use of bare concrete structures, conceived as sculptures, characterized the constructions. It led to the creation of a complex, open, and integrated space which was at the same time protected from light and heat.

The project of the Faculty of Architecture in 1953 was another key element in the development of the University. Villanueva gathered in this building, particularly important for him, the development of a complex consisting of varied low volumes contrasted to the high prismatic towers of the Central Library. This building initiated a stage which showed the way for the faculties of Pharmacy, Dentistry, and Economic and Social Sciences. This last faculty was built after the death of Villanueva. This period highlights the idea of integrating the different arts into one ensemble, and several artists were invited to participate in the process. This involved, for example, the finishing of the exteriors, by Alejandro Otero in the Faculties of Architecture and Pharmacy and by Omar Carreño in Dentistry.

Since the death of Villanueva there have been various modifications, including new buildings or provisional structures in the exterior and division of spaces in some interiors. There are also a number of new constructions, such as the building for the Deanship of Engineering designed by Gorka Dorronsoro, who was one of the young collaborators of Villanueva and who clearly had the wish to continue the spirit of the great master. There have also been changes to the buildings designed by Villanueva, some of these unfortunate. The University Cafeteria underwent two enlargements in the 1980s. The great volume of these can be seen as an aggression to the open space of the University City, altering the original spatial relationships.

Description

The architect Carlos Raúl Villanueva (1900–75) was the principal creator, architect, and planner of the university campus of Caracas. He was born in London, son of a Venezuelan diplomat and grandson of a historian. He attended Professor Gabriel Héraud's atelier in Paris in 1920, obtained his diploma in architecture at the École des Beaux-Arts in 1928, and then continued his studies in city planning. In 1929 he moved to Caracas and worked in the Department of Public Works. He was the founder and professor of the

Faculties of Architecture and City Planning and received many honours for his professional work.

The urban setting of the Ciudad Universitaria de Caracas was a site located at about 870m above sea level and covering about 164.2ha. It is part of a district with mainly residential and commercial functions. It is bounded in the north-east by the Francisco Fajardo Highway, the city's main transit road, and the area corresponding to the Plaza Venezuela; in the south-east, its boundaries are Los Chaguaramos and Santa Monica, a set of popular residential-commercial areas, and the El Valle Highway. The ensemble is visually dominated by the Hospital Clinico, the Library, the Department of Architecture, the buildings of Dentistry and Pharmacy, the Stadiums, and the Covered Gymnasium, which project from the green mass of the gardens.

The architecture of the university involves the use of spatial elements that have been extracted from Venezuelan colonial architecture, such as bright colours, latticed windows for ventilation, and internal gardens of copious tropical vegetation joined with the use of new materials and modern aesthetics. These ingredients allow for the creation of spaces with their own particular nature, where the architectural poetic inspiration benefits from the climate and light of the place. The economic and political situation of Venezuela at the time of Villanueva allowed him to experiment with new technologies, such as special types of structures in reinforced concrete. The plasticity of the material offered possibilities for daring solutions even to the most common structural problems. Villanueva was able to use the material in such a way as to deliberately highlight the importance of the structure within the architectural composition. In his design process from 1948 onwards Villanueva developed different types of elements that were subsequently to characterize his work, including sun breakers, covered pedestrian passages, bare concrete structures, latticed windows, and works of art incorporated in the architectural and urban ensemble.

The University City is articulated through zoning and there are several groups that are identified with the unity of their functions: 1. Cultural and Directive Centre, 2. Medicine, 3. Engineering, Economics, Liberal Arts and Sciences, 4. residential units, 5. Botany, 6. Architecture, 7. Sports, 8. Industrial Technical School, and 9. services. The campus includes a series of large buildings, in particular the Faculties of Architecture, Economy, Pharmacy, and Dentistry, the Library, and the Hospital. These high volumes are the elements that announce the presence of the University as seen from the city. In order to emphasize the system of articulation and taking into consideration the adversities of a tropical climate, Villanueva designed a set of covered pedestrian halls that go along or across the different building ensembles and serve to connect the vital centres. These halls are linked with vehicle circulation and aim at giving a sense of unity to the place.

The principal architectural ensembles of the University include the following:

- Directive Centre

The Directive Centre consists of a series of buildings that are pure in their forms and laid out in a way that the volumes form a ceremonial patio of overwhelming proportions, the Plaza del Rectorado, reserved for large meetings. The ensemble includes the Museum Building, the Rector's Office Building, the Communications Building, and the Clock

Tower. Villanueva's project dates from 1952 and includes works by several artists, such as A Barrios, O Vigas, and F Narvaez.

- Cultural Centre

The Covered Plaza is the heart of the University and it is associated with the main institutional and cultural buildings, including the Aula Magna, the Hall of Honour, the Concert Hall, the Library, and the Cooling Tower. The Covered Plaza is the linking element that connects all components of the group. It is a composition of architectural and artistic elements in which the promenade is led by the relationships between murals, sculptures, columns, and gardens and by a cover of irregular perimeter and changes in heights. The planning of the ensemble was from 1952 to 1953 and Villanueva again integrated the ensemble with the contribution of several distinguished artists – F Léger, H Laurens, J Arp, V Vasarely, P Navarro, and M Mataure, who also contributed in other parts of the University. Particularly impressive are the "Clouds" created by Alexander Calder in the Aula Magna.

- Medical Centre

The medical group of the University is made up of buildings that correspond to several stages of the planning process. The buildings thus show the evolution of Villanueva's ideas. The ensemble includes the Clinical Hospital, the Institutes of Experimental Medicine, Anatomy, Tropical Medicine, Anatomy-Pathology, the Chapel, the National Institute of Hygiene, the Nursing School, and the Faculties of Odontology and Pharmacy. The planning mainly took place in the second half of the 1940s and the execution extended into the 1950s.

- Humanities and Science

This group of buildings is linked by means of covered corridors but with green areas between the buildings, thus giving the whole a sense of unity with rich and varied architecture. The Faculty of Humanities was designed in 1953–59, the Faculty of Economics in 1963–67, the group of classrooms and the Library in 1949–53, the School of Engineering in 1949–52, the laboratories mainly between 1949 and 1956, and the Institute of Materials in 1964.

- Architecture and City Planning

This complex, one of the landmarks of the University, consists of two elements. One is the vertical element housing classrooms within a volume of rectangular plan, articulated with the body of elevators and the main staircase. The horizontal body contains the common areas and the workshops, solved in a succession of changing spaces. The planning dates from 1954–56 and the construction took place in parallel with the design. The contributing artists include A Otero, A Calder, F Narvaez, M Mataure, V Valera, A Oramas, and J Soto.

- Sports Centre

The sports area is located in the eastern part of the campus and is composed of three clearly distinguished groups: the stadiums (Olympic, baseball, tennis), the pools, and the covered gymnasium. Planning of the various ensembles dates from the 1950s and 1960s.

Management and Protection

Legal status

The lands and the constructions of the Ciudad Universitaria de Caracas and the Jardín Botánico de Caracas are the property of the Venezuelan State, assigned to the use of the Universidad Central de Venezuela (Central University of Venezuela).

The ensemble of the Ciudad Universitaria de Caracas, the Botanical Garden, and the Casona Ibarra have been designated a National Monument by the Junta Nacional Protectora y Conservadora del Patrimonio Histórico y Artístico de la Nación, ratified by the Institute of Cultural Heritage (Resolution 002/1998), and is thus under full state protection under the national law on the protection of cultural heritage of 1994.

Management

Relevant regulations from the legal protection are being integrated in the Plan of Local Urban Development of the municipality of Libertador, developed by the City Planning Institute of the Faculty of Architecture and City Planning. The plan is pending a second hearing for definitive approval. Furthermore, the University Council approved the standards for the conservation of the constructions and open areas in the Ciudad Universitaria in 1999. These standards provide guidelines for the management, maintenance, and repair of the whole ensemble, the single structures, and open spaces.

The university campus is an integral part of the modern city of Caracas, with which it has a close relationship. Considering the size of the campus area proposed for the nomination, no special buffer zone has been identified. It should also be noted that the area has barriers, which provide it with a natural protection. This is the case especially in the north and east, where the area is delimited by a viaduct and a park. In the south and west there are protected zones. The only potential problem area is in the direction of the Avenida Minerva, but consideration is given to the zoning of this part in the revised Urban Development Plan (Plan de Desarrollo Urbano Local, PUDUL).

At the national level the Institute of Cultural Heritage manages the protection and conservation of the university campus; at the institutional level, this is the responsibility of the Commission of Conservation, the Planning Department, and the General Services Department of the University. There is a collaboration agreement between the different institutions.

It is estimated that the campus is daily used by some 100,000 persons. There are about 58,000 students, over 8000 teaching faculty, about 8000 administrative personnel, and about 2500 workers. The various facilities of the campus, including the concert hall, exhibitions, museum, conferences, sport games, and libraries, attract some 68,000 visitors, and the Clinical Hospital, serving the whole metropolis, is daily visited by some 30,000 people. The University provides for visitor management, including itineraries, guidance, and information centres.

The region of Caracas is a strongly seismic area. Although built prior to the existence of anti-seismic regulations in the country, the University was built adopting the anti-seismic norms of North America. In 1998 the University has approved a project defining strategies for improving the

security of the campus. Further development of relevant plans and projects is under way.

Conservation and Authenticity

Conservation history

Various parts of the university campus have been subject to intensive use since their construction. There have also been some additions and modifications to the original plans from the time of Villanueva. These can be considered part of a normal process of ageing in an institution that was built to serve particular purposes. Since the time of the legal protection of the site for its cultural significance, however, the University has undertaken a systematic long-term study to survey and monitor its state of conservation. The survey has focused on three main aspects: the state of conservation of the urban ensemble, the state of conservation of the architecture, and the state of conservation of the works of art. The University should be complimented for this study, which has been made in a serious and objective manner and based on a clear methodology applied systematically to the different types of property.

The overall layout of the urban ensemble of the University campus has been maintained fairly well intact. Nevertheless, there are new constructions built in recent years which have not always been designed in accordance with the original criteria. Such is the extension of the University Dining Room, carried out in different stages and resulting in architectural forms considered foreign to the campus. Some new buildings have not fulfilled the quality criteria originally required. At the same time there have been alterations that have actually enhanced the complex, such as the Plaza del Rectorado, originally a parking place and subsequently transformed into its current civic use for large meetings.

Most of the buildings have maintained their architecture and their structural system intact since the construction in the 1950s and 1960s. The problems relate partly to changes in use, partly to the behaviour and decay of the building materials and structures. As a result of changes in use, there have been works of amplification or subdivision of spaces, as well as the introduction of the technical facilities and equipment. Unfortunately such works have often been carried out without proper control of their quality and adequacy to the architectural context. There are also problems that result from structural behaviour and ageing of materials; these include structural cracks in reinforced concrete, leakage in roofs, and problems caused by humidity. Another problem is the detachment of surface materials such as mosaics in some building elevations.

The works of art are made in different materials and can be divided in groups: murals in vitrified mosaics and enamelled ceramic, stained glass windows, mural paintings, sculptures, carvings, casts, and assemblages. There are different types of problem that relate particularly to the works that have been exposed to the tropical climate, such as the mosaics and open-air sculptures in stone, or have been subject to mechanical damage caused by the users of the building.

As a result of the survey the University is now considering the establishment of a systematic monitoring process and training its technical personnel to carry out preventive maintenance and timely repair of damages.

Authenticity

The general layout and setting of the University campus has been retained, even though there are minor modifications and changes related to the functional need of the institution. There have been minor changes to existing buildings as well as some new constructions. There are also some problems of maintenance of the buildings and works of art designed and built under the direction of Villanueva. As a whole, however, the site can be considered to satisfy the test of authenticity in the design, materials, workmanship, and setting.

Evaluation

Action by ICOMOS

An ICOMOS expert mission visited the Ciudad Universitaria de Caracas in February 2000.

Qualities

The Ciudad Universitaria de Caracas is a realization of the ideals of modern city planning, architecture, and art in the middle of the 20th century. Its particular quality is in the skill of integrating new architectural forms and contemporary art into a spatial and environmental whole, satisfying the functional and ideological requirements of the institution. The most notable buildings in the campus are the Aula Magna with the magnificent “Clouds” of Alexander Calder, the Olympic Stadium, and the covered plaza (Plaza Cubierto).

Comparative analysis

The comparison of the university campus of Caracas can be seen in two aspects: as a work of modern architecture and as a university campus.

The development of the Modern Movement in architecture found expression in the complex relations of urbanism, building design, and works of art, joined into a spatial and architectural unities aiming at the realization of the future ideals, as well as responding to political and social objectives. From the 1950s particular attention was given to the use of exposed reinforced concrete and the treatment of structures almost as if these were sculptures, as is seen in Le Corbusier's work. The experience of Mexico and South American countries was greatly influential in this context, and also included works by Oscar Niemeyer and Lúcio Costa in Brazil, Felix Candela, Juan O’Gorman, José Villagran Garcia, and Louis Barragán in Mexico, and Carlos Raúl Villanueva in Venezuela. Villanueva's project for the university campus of Caracas is contemporary with some major urban planning and architectural schemes, including the scheme of Brasilia by Costa and Niemeyer (already on the World Heritage List), Chandigarh by Le Corbusier, and the National University of Mexico. In this context, the Ciudad Universitaria de Caracas is an outstanding example of the development of the most significant currents in modern town planning, architecture, and art.

Regarding the comparison of the site with other examples of 20th century university campuses, it may be noted that some of the earliest examples include the University of Rio de Janeiro in 1936 by Le Corbusier and the University of Bogota, initiated in 1936, by Leopoldo Rother. The Ciudad Universitaria de México was designed in 1950–52 with a master plan by Maria Pani and Enrique del Moral and the

participation of more than fifty architects and ten artists. Furthermore, mention may be made of the universities of Río Piedras de Puerto Rico and of Panamá. The University of Mexico in particular has some similarities with Caracas, although the qualities of the work of Villanueva are perhaps more comparable with the city of Brasília. From this comparison, however, the University of Caracas emerges as an outstanding example of modern architecture and university building, whereby it is well justified for inclusion.

ICOMOS recommendations for future action

Two points were not adequately dealt with in the nomination dossier. First, more information was required about the management structure, and in particular on the measures in place for coordination of different forms of intervention and conservation. Secondly, mention was made of the Botanical Garden but no details were supplied, in particular regarding its conservation and management regimes.

At the meeting in June 2000 of the Bureau this nomination was referred back to the State Party, requesting further information on management coordination and the Botanical Garden, as proposed by ICOMOS.

In July supplementary documentation was received from the State Party and studied by ICOMOS. This described the new management decision-making structure, which will be fully functional on 1 January 2001. Detailed information was also supplied about the state of conservation of the elements making up the Ciudad Universitaria, including the Botanical Garden.

Brief description

The Ciudad Universitaria de Caracas, built to the design of the architect Carlos Raúl Villanueva from the 1940s to the 1960s, is an outstanding example of the Modern Movement in architecture. The university campus integrates the large number of buildings and functions into a clearly articulated ensemble, including masterpieces of modern architecture and visual arts, such as the Aula Magna with the “Clouds” of Alexander Calder, the Olympic Stadium, and the Covered Plaza.

Recommendation

That this property be inscribed on the World Heritage List on the basis of *criteria i and iv*:

Criterion i The Ciudad Universitaria de Caracas is a masterpiece of modern city planning, architecture and art, created by the Venezuelan architect Carlos Raúl Villanueva and a group of distinguished avant-garde artists.

Criterion iv The Ciudad Universitaria de Caracas is an outstanding example of the coherent realization of the urban, architectural, and artistic ideals of the early 20th century. It constitutes an ingenious interpretation of the concepts and spaces of colonial traditions and an example of an open and ventilated solution, appropriate for its tropical environment.

ICOMOS, September 2000