

docomomo Conference Mexico 2010: “Living in the Urban Modernity”

By Louise Noelle

THE 11th docomomo International Conference took place in Mexico City from the 19th to the 27th August 2010, under the title “Living in the Urban Modernity”, allowing participants to analyze the issues that transformed the city and its architecture during the first part of the 20th Century. Urban area growth brought up an environment that favored the presence of Modern Architecture, in which new materials and developing techniques took new forms. Likewise, and in relation to working and leisure spaces, social changes had a visible transformation influence over education, health, hygiene and housing. In order to explore and to analyze the different elements that transformed the city and its architecture, a workshop was organized and the Conference was divided into five subjects developed in fifteen sessions and five round tables. Three Master Conferences by Barry Bergdoll, Victor Pérez Escolano and Ricardo Legorreta, which dealt with interesting contributions on modernity, also took place.

The Workshop took place between the 19th and 24th August at Casa Barragán Ateliers in Tacubaya, a Modern Movement privileged and stimulating environment, fostered by the Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana. The tasks were coordinated by professors Alejandro Ochoa, Ricardo Pita and Rodolfo Santa María from UAM—Xochimilco, with the participation of Theodore Prudon, Jorge Sánchez Antuñano, Mariano Arias and Miguel Ángel Ronquillo. Roberto Eibenschuz, Louise Noelle and Óscar Terrazas presented conferences on urban and architectural issues. The twenty-student group was divided in four teams in order to elaborate conservation and adaptation proposals for the Melchor Ocampo Square urban space which preserves buildings by distinguished architects of the Modern Movement such as Augusto H. Álvarez, Luis Barragán, Max Cetto, José Creixel and Enrique del Moral.

The inauguration of the Conference took place at the Museo Nacional de Antropología on the 24th August and the events development took place at the *Ciudad Universitaria* of the *Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México*, two Modern Movement emblematic works which gave a particular meaning to

the conference's theme: living in urban modernity. The formal presentation counted with the participation of Consuelo Sáizar, President of the Consejo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes; José Narro Robles, Rector of the UNAM; Louise Cox, President of the International Union of Architects; and Lisandro de la Garza, President of the Federación de Arquitectos de la República Mexicana. docomomo was represented by Ana Tostões, Louise Noelle Gras and Sara Topelson de Grinberg. Mauricio Rivero Borrel, Vice-President of UIA; Sergio Alcocer Martínez del Campo, Secretary General of the UNAM; the directors of the architecture faculties that participated in the organization of the event and other leaders of architectural institutions also took part in this opening event.

The first theme, “Modern Living” referred to the relevance of modern society multi-family dwellings and how organization was the instrument that sought solutions to the incipient proletariat and the developing middle class. Four sessions were introduced: “Housing as a state affair” conducted by Henrietta Moravcikova; “Cultural liberation and architectural diversification”, conducted by Carlos Eduardo Comas; “Images of modern living” conducted by Raquel Franklin; and “Modernity and tradition” conducted by Manuel Berumen.

The importance of the “Civic and Social Infrastructure”, considered an essential consequence of modernity, allowed an appreciation of the different circumstances in which modern buildings were built. Together with social, political and economical issues, also ideological and urban project significance was discussed in three sessions: “Conservation and Design Issues” coordinated by Maristella Casciato; “Urban Scales” coordinated by Horacio Torrent; and “Education and Recreation” coordinated by Gustavo Luis Moré.

The third theme analyzed the triumphs and failures of urban modernity, considering both architecture and planning: “The Modern City”. The ideal city design, where progress and technology were the main statements, and the unbounded growth of some metropolis in this process, gave back answers based on a desire for welfare which was present in the four sessions that took place: “Planning the

Modern City” conducted by Catherine Ettinger; “Temporality and Transformation” conducted by Emilié d’Orgeix; “City and Nature” conducted by Louise Noelle Gras; and “The Modern City from a Contemporary Perspective” conducted by Gabriela Lee.

The essence of the Modern Movement, based on material and technological innovations, is also the origin of docomomo’s discussions on philosophical and physical conservation challenges. The theme “Technology for a Modern Habitat”, approached theoretical and practical aspects regarding building protection and preservation. It was divided into two sessions: “Conservation Issues for the Modern Habitat” organized by Susan MacDonald; and “Building Climates and System Analysis for Modern Habitat” organized by Kyle Normandin.

The Campus of the UNAM *Ciudad Universitaria*, declared World Heritage Site, also offered the opportunity to introduce a fifth theme, that of University Campus, significant to most countries not only because of the intrinsic architecture and art issues, but also because they have been the melting pot of education and knowledge that have allowed a specific academic richness. These ideas were studied in two sessions: “Evolution and University” led by Janneke Bierman; and “The University and the City” led by Eduardo Luis Rodríguez.

The round-table debates counted with a large number of participants that made them very interesting: “Architectural Magazines, Documental Foundation for Modern Heritage”, coordinated by Patricia Méndez; “Movie Theatres, Modern Heritage to be Rescued” coordinated by Alejandro Ochoa Vega; “Brasília: Limits of the Urban Project” coordinated by Carlos Eduardo Comas and Silvia Ficher; and “Modern Movement Architecture in Sub-Saharan Africa” coordinated by Ana Tostões. A fifth round-table on the fundamental issue “Architectural Practice and Conservation” took place in the main auditorium and was organized by Hubert-Jan Henket with the participation of Maija Kairamo, Wessel de Jonge, Gabriel Mérito and Theodore Prudon.

Regarding the diffusion of the 11th **docomomo** International Conference Minutes, a summary of the Papers which had been presented was edited. A DVD with the complete papers and posters presented at the round-tables, together with the coordinator’s presentations, was given to the participants at the end of the Conference. The International Specialist Committees on Registers, Technology, Urbanism and Landscape, and Education and Theory have organized working sessions with their representatives and their conclusions were presented at the Council Meeting.

Guided visits around the *Ciudad Universitaria*, declared World Heritage Site in 2007 by UNESCO,

were also offered to participants during the three days of the congress as well as the four Docotours that took place after the congress. The latter were coordinated by Juan Ignacio del Cueto, who personally guided the three visits to works by Félix Candela, Juan O' Gorman, Mathias Goeritz and Enrique de la Mora, and other dwelling projects, together with Raquel Franklin. Louise Noelle Gras was in charge of showing and explaining the works of Luis Barragán. The participants deeply appreciated this activity because it allowed a rapprochement with important buildings and urban areas of Mexico City.

It is important to stress that we are proud that this conference was supported fundamentally by the *Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México*, specially the Architecture Faculty and the *Instituto de Investigaciones Estéticas*; the *Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana*, specially Campus Xochimilco; the *Universidad Iberoamericana*; and the *Universidad*

Anahuac del Norte. We also counted with the generous organizing participation of the *Consejo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes* and the *Gobierno del Distrito Federal* through Seduvi. Many people voluntarily collaborated in the academic part of the event, including foreign members of the Scientific Committee: Janneke Bierman, Maristella Casciato, Carlos Eduardo Comas, Wessel de Jorge, Natalia Dushkina, Carlos García Vázquez, Miles Glendinning, Susan Macdonald, Enrique Madia, Rahul J. Mehrotra, Raúl Monterroso, Henrieta Moravciková, Gustavo Luis Moré, Alona Nitzan-Shifan, Kyle Normandin, Theodore Prudon, Eduardo Luis Rodríguez, Dennis Sharp and Horacio Torrent; and Lourdes Cruz, Catherine R. Ettinger, Raquel Franklin, Gabriela Lee and Alejandro Ochoa from Mexico. The Organizing Committee was formed by Louise Noelle and Sara Topelson as Co-Chairs; Iván San Martín as Secretary; Lourdes Cruz as Treasurer; Alejandro Ochoa and Rodolfo

Santa María regarding the Workshop; Juan Ignacio del Cueto, Lourdes Díaz, Raquel Franklin and Catherine Ettinger, together with María García Holley, in the Secretariat; Jordi Messeguer Gally with the organization; Gabriela Gutiérrez Saucedo with the accounts and register; Claude Constant as the computer technician; and Celia Facio with the design, among many others. I also want to emphasize the support of Maristella Casciato, former Chair of docomomo International, and her team in Paris, as well as that of the present Chair, Ana Tostões, and the Barcelona team with Ivan Blasi and Laura Arenas.

With nearly 400 people from around 50 countries attending and participating in the events, we were able to come closer to understand the real dimension of the significance of what to live, to act and to enjoy Modern Movement Urban Areas means, emphasizing the importance of its adequate conservation and safeguard for future generations.



Figure 1. Inauguration of the Conference at the *Museo Nacional de Antropología*. Photo: María García Holley.

Figure 2. Master Conference by Ricardo Legorreta. Photo: María García Holley.

Figure 3. Ana Tostões with students at the Conference Workshop. Photo: Ana Magalhaes.

Figure 4. "Architectural Practice and Conservation" round table. Photo: María García Holley.

Figure 5. Docotours: Louise Noelle presenting Casa Gilardi by Luis Barragán. Photo: Ivan Blasi.