

The Southern Launch of the UNESCO Chair

Cuenca, Ecuador, 30 November – 2 December 2009

by Prof. dr. Koenraad Van Balen, director of RLICC

The UNESCO Chair on preventive conservation, monitoring and maintenance of monuments and sites in Leuven was inaugurated on 24 March 2009 by the then rector of K.U.Leuven, Prof. Dr. Marc Vervenne, and by Arch. Francesco Bandarin, director of the World Heritage of UNESCO. This inauguration was attended by representatives of various political and administrative authorities in Flanders but also by a comprehensive representation of the University of Cuenca, led by Rector Jaime Astudillo.

Following the tenth anniversary of the inscription of the town of Cuenca (Ecuador) on the World Heritage list, from 30 November to 2 December 2009 the University of Cuenca and the city of Cuenca, in collaboration with the UNESCO Chair in preventive conservation, monitoring and maintenance of monuments and sites, organized a special inauguration of the UNESCO Chair in the South. This coincided with the start of the second workshop for heritage specialists in the Andes.

During this ceremony, representatives of the University of Cuenca, of the government and of the chair were present.

The Dean of the Faculty of Architecture, Prof. Alcibiades Vega Malo emphasised the role of the built heritage in the realisation of a livable environment and the attention this problem should receive in architectural education.

The Rector of the University of Cuenca, Prof. Jaime Astudillo Romero stressed the opportunities that the interdependence of a university with a historic city could offer. He referred to the possibilities of cooperation offered - as exemplified by the VLIR-UOS programme - by a specific academic exchange and a strong research collaboration involves between the University of Cuenca and the Flemish Universities. Among several themes of interest, we mention the development of management tools for World Heritage cities. According to Rector Astudillo, universities and heritage have in common that they rely on human interaction, they show the importance of diversity of a different kind, support creativity and contribute to a better quality of life.

Upper left

The Old Cathedral of Cuenca

Upper right

From left to right: Anouk Stulens, Mario Santana and Koen Van Balen

Bottom left

Left: Director of the regional UNESCO office in Quito, Dr. Eduardo Matoko

Right: Prof. Fausto Cardoso, local organizer of the South Inauguration and leader of the VLIR-project on World Heritage Cities Preservation Management

Bottom right

From left to right: (1) Prof. Sebastián Astudillo, (2) Prof. Julio Valdiviezo Vintimilla, Vice-dean, and (3) Prof. Alcibiades Vega Malo, the Dean of the Faculty of Architecture of the University of Cuenca

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The representative of the Union of Latin American Universities, Dr. R. Cordera Campos also alluded to the relationship between universities and historic cities. Universities wishing to contribute to the better qualities of life in their environment can do nothing but take account of the urban population among which they live, because more than half the world lives in cities, many of whom have a historical origin. He therefore welcomed the conference and the inauguration of a chair that links preventive conservation and the involvement of people.

The minister responsible for the natural and cultural heritage, Dr. María Fernanda Espinoza stressed that the Ecuadorian government for both the natural and cultural heritage should contribute to the “plan for a better life” in which new forms of public participation are important. The natural heritage is an important resource that provides guarantees for the survival of (bio) diversity and ensures that the natural resources are used in a sustainable manner, for example, the safeguarding of the areas where (portable) water is present. The cultural heritage is a living good composed of buildings and sites but also of the intangible heritage that in Ecuador adopts many forms with its great variety of cultures. The diversity of the natural and cultural conditions in the small country Ecuador ensures great variety, so the country is very rich in heritage.

The mayor of the town of Cuenca, Dr. Paúl Granda stressed that the city stands as one of the four Ecuadorian sites on the World Heritage list. This brings a responsibility and a chance with it. He threw up the challenge of how development, quality of life and heritage conservation can be connected in the

management plan and in the dialogue between stakeholders and the public. First, it is important to know why the rapid updating of the inventory of heritage is important. Thanks to the studies of the VLIR-UOS project, in collaboration with the University in a very short time a renewed model of inventory was created and implemented. The mayor pointed out the substantial scientific contribution of the current VLIR-UOS project. Second, there is a need for well-trained specialists who can give heritage a right place in an intercultural dialogue, in a dialogue of all stakeholders in the management and development of a city. Third, he pointed out the importance of establishing partnerships with public and private actors so that sustainable management of heritage is possible. The economic aspect is also considered, by using micro-financing and underlining the importance of maintenance. Fourth, there is also a need to strengthen the management of the institutions in a country like Ecuador who would like these efforts to continue to yield long term benefits.

Prof. Koen Van Balen read the letter from K. U. Leuven Rector Prof. Mark Waer who apologised for not being able to attend in the early stages of his first mandate. The Rector welcomed the initiative of the UNESCO Chair to connect the two Universities of Cuenca and Leuven in this ambitious undertaking with more support by the VLIR-UOS. Such partnerships also demand, and at the same time can contribute to a sustained commitment of the universities to achieve excellence in education, research and innovation. Both universities are challenged to - each within their own reference framework - to become a driving force in the creation of the knowledge society of tomorrow.



Upper left
Right: Prof. Jaime Astudillo, the Rector of the University of Cuenca,
Left: Prof. Fabián Carrasco Castro, the Vice-rector

Upper right
The minister responsible for the natural and cultural heritage of Ecuador: Dr. María Fernanda Espinoza

Bottom left
Prof. Koen Van Balen

Bottom middle
Director of the regional UNESCO office in Quito, Dr. Eduardo Matoko

Bottom right
Prof. Fausto Cardoso

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PRECOMOS

The Director of the UNESCO regional office in Quito, Dr. Eduardo Matoko explained the role and contribution of the regional office, notably his supporting role in the nomination and the monitoring of the World Heritage sites in the region. He referred to the contents of the World Heritage Convention and the guidelines for the purposes of this convention which are always updated with the aim of safeguarding heritage in the most appropriate way.

Prof. Koen Van Balen, Director of the Raymond Lemaire International Centre for Conservation (RLICC) at the K.U. Leuven and holder of the UNESCO Chair, then explained the objectives and practices of the chair (see www.precomos.org). As an introduction to the second workshop for heritage specialists in the Andes, he pointed out those aspects within the World Heritage Convention which offer specific support for the UNESCO Chair. This applies mainly to aspects of monitoring and maintenance of the cultural heritage. International cooperation with the countries that have signed the convention thus may lead to internationally applicable practices being properly developed while working practices can be exchanged.

An inspiring example of good practice of monitoring and maintenance was presented by Mrs. Anouk Stulens, director of Monumentenwacht Vlaanderen. The organisation she represents is also a partner in the UNESCO chair. In her presentation Mrs. Anouk Stulens clarified the objectives and procedures of the Flemish organization based on more than 18 years' experience. She showed how Monumentenwacht contributes to a more cost-effective heritage conservation policy in Flanders and how this organization supports

owner-managers in their task to deal with the preservation of their heritage.

Dr. Mario Santana who is a RLICC staff member and a lecturer at Catholic University College Sint-Lieven Sint-Lieven gave an introduction on the methods and techniques used for the documentation of the heritage, and he emphasized how they could be deployed for monitoring. Monitoring is part of a more comprehensive management strategy where the change of heritage values can be monitored and controlled.

Prof. Fausto Cardoso, member of the academic staff of the U. of Cuenca and the local project leader of the VLIR-UOS project "World Heritage Cities preservation management" concluded the inauguration celebration and turned to the second workshop for heritage specialists in the Andes. The project results achieved within the first three years include the creation of an improved survey methodology, developing a concept of a management system using a geographic information system, and the launch of a documentation system for tracing damage.

The second workshop for heritage specialists in the Andes in the following days aimed at developing a more comprehensive regional vision to identify the role of preventive conservation, monitoring and maintenance of heritage and World Heritage.

The UNESCO Chair for preventive conservation, monitoring and maintenance of monuments and sites is supported by the Janssen Pharmaceutica Fund for preventive conservation that was awarded to the K.U. Leuven.

Upper left
Dr. Mario Santana



Upper right
Mrs Anouk Stulens,
director of
Monumentenwacht
Vlaanderen



Bottom left
The local support
team of the
Architectural Faculty
at University of
Cuenca



Bottom right
The members of the
4th round table of
the conference



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