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## *Where are going to definitions historical centers in Latinoamerican? Territory, City and Heritage*

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### Abstract

*Where are going to definitions historical centers? Territory, City and Heritage. This document discusses the current context of a number of aspects contained in the evolution for the definitions and interpretations, discussions and topics surrounding the heritage-monumental spaces called historical centers. In addition, the new bearings of appreciation of heritage in the city, and not only as officially determined, are analyzed. Thus, some examples are provided to learn about the issues raised in detail about the city of Puebla, Puebla, Mexico; a set with origins dating back to the colonial era, but acquiring urban and architectural testimonies at different times in later centuries that come together today, as a part of a historical and cultural stratigraphy.*

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Key words: Historical centers, heritage, definitions, city, territory.

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### 1. Introduction

The main objective of this paper is to present an approach to enable understanding how the way of defining and studying an historic center (HC) has evolved in the last half century. The first official recommendations were formulated during a conference held in Quito, Ecuador, in this event were discussed topics about Conservation and Utilization of Monuments and Sites, works focused on those possessing either historical or artistic value. Also, the HC was defined as a territory immersed within the city, for which it was recommended to set up legislation actions in order to establish a narrow zone with "supplementary value". Monuments and Sites within the demarcated areas usually experience a raise in its value; based on the idea of equity, the concept of HC can be approached and analyzed by various disciplines; therefore it is important to recognize that there are new outcomes in the HC interpretation. For instance, in 1977, 10 years later of the Conference held at Quito, it was formulated one of the preliminary definitions of HC, which is found in the conclusions of the symposium

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about HC preservation in the frame of a growth process for contemporary cities, event which was sponsored by UNESCO-IPNUD taking place at Quito, Ecuador. In this document was expressed:

"HC are all those living human settlements, strongly conditioned by a physical structure from the past, which can be recognizable as a set representing the evolution of a people. Therefore, they should include two kind of settlements: those that remain intact from villages to cities; and those which, due to their growth, are now part of a larger structure. Because of the monumental heritage that contains HC not only represent an unquestionable cultural value, but also an economic and social one. HC are not only the cultural heritage of humanity, but in particular they also belong to all those social sectors that live within it" (ICOMOS, 1977).

This definition explicitly considers that "old settlements" should be seen as a breakthrough in respect to modern ones, as a result of both the architecture and urbanism identification process based on its historicity. Modernity should be understood as the production outcome from early twentieth century, including what is called "modernism", a typical expression from the nineteenth century.

In a similar way, it can be understood that the above definition, which was born in the context of the 1970's, was the starting point for discussions through which it was initiated a process to provide importance to HC heritage areas belonging to cities in various regions and countries. After all these years, it is seen that a process of evolution and expansion of the concept took place and, when analyzing leading thoughts and actions for the HC defined area, three types of effects have been observed: 1) Expanding the concept of how valuable patrimonial concerns have been pushed from the analysis into a crisis, since performing this analysis will require an interdisciplinary interpretation; 2) as far as HC has been delimited, it was found that in some cases appropriate interventions have been made, but in others a little excess has been exerted onto the successful legacy; 3) it has been observed that legislation to protect HC have been overcome in many ways, before its assets were set up in practice. This facts are leading to new directions for accounting the sense of the assets value as well as the new performance, based on aspects such as sustainability; but at the same time, having respect for the general consensus criteria about intervention and conservation of legacy that is hosted within the defined area, accounting for those which are part of the social, architectural, urban, city.

Some proposals to approach the above problems can be found in the conclusions of a meeting held in 2008 in Mérida, Yucatán (México) whose central subject was the HC; in particular, a document called Charter of Merida (ICOMOS, 2008) recommends the following: 1) Updating the meaning of the historic center concept; 2) a comprehensive handling for the problem of connecting HC with the rest of the city. The last affirmation makes pertinent to review the concept of HC, its values and current conditions, based on reasons like the following ones: knowledge of the conceptual boundaries that define many HC aspects allows to get an insight on how the topics expansion gave rise to them, and how they have been overcome or legally abrogated facing the complexity of the city, territory and heritage.

An analysis throughout the background allows to see that it is more pertinent to ask for new directions in HC concept defining, since a new HC definition should account for concepts derived from territorial values; city values; as well as function based on use and urban concepts expressed as social values; finally it should be accounted for the symbolic, historic and authenticity ones; all the mentioned values should be interrelated between them in a dynamic relationship.

## **2. Background**

After years that the idea of HC was formulated, it becomes evident that this concept has allowed for legal protection of what it is considered equity-monumental, a concept linked to the historical and cultural centrality, in which are included major urban values such as architecture. Otherwise, an approach through the quality characteristics inherently accounts for symbolic, historic, artistic and social status, one or more times. Consequently, in order to appreciate its wealth, the HC can be visualized through a set of models known like the "old town" or "compact city", most of them proposed by several academic professionals at different latitudes, their declarations had emphasized the need for recognition of monumental heritage under traditional precepts, in order to formally recognize how valuable they are. However, now it is possible to understand the heritage value of ancient time heritages; along with the socio-spatial territories containing other morphological-

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