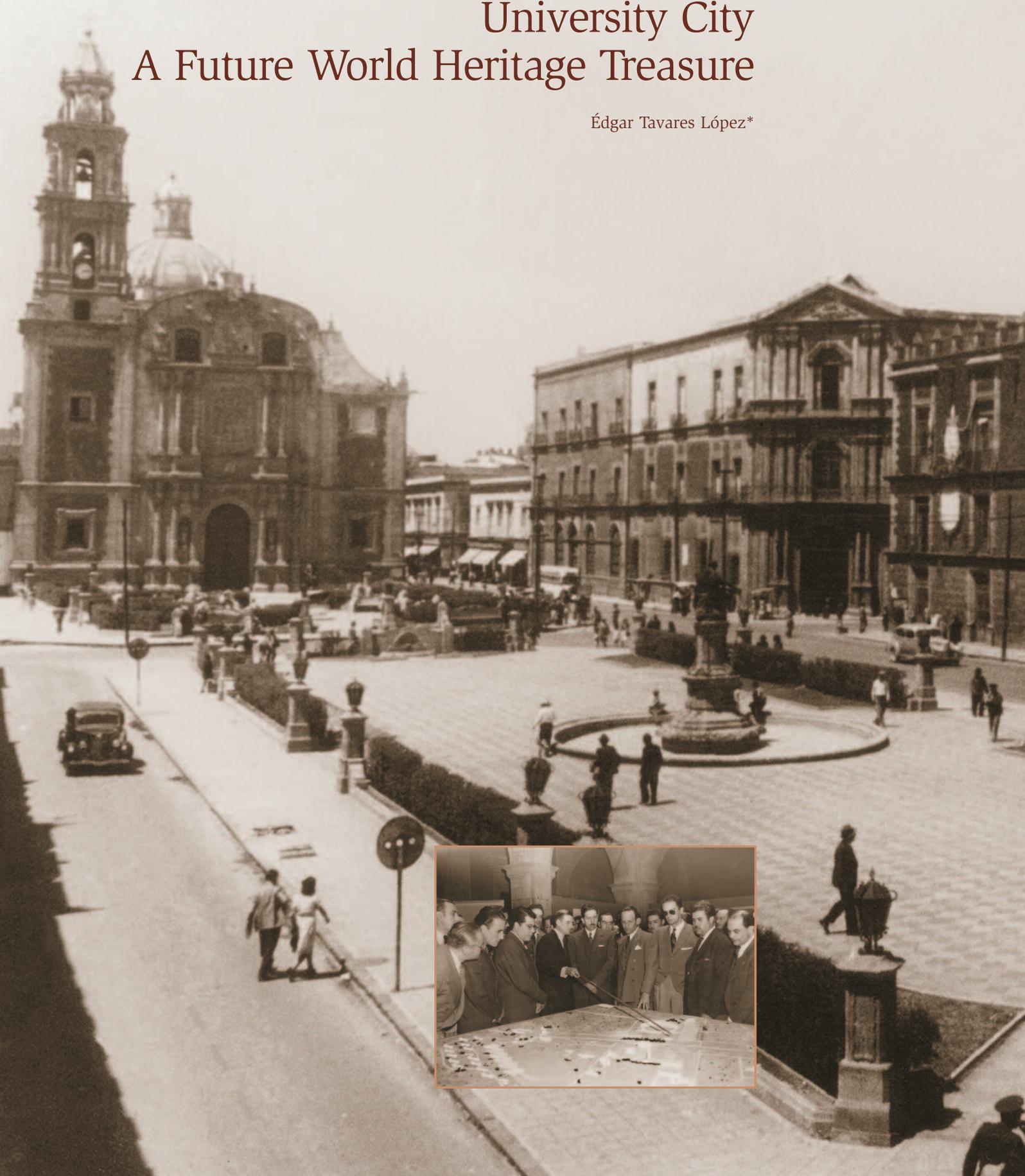


University City A Future World Heritage Treasure

Édgar Tavares López*





AFHUNAM/CESU/Raúl Estrada Discua (RED)

A little more than three decades ago, in 1972, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) approved the Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage, whose main objective is to protect properties of exceptional universal value throughout the world. This gave rise to the concept of world heritage. To put the convention into effect, permanently functioning, effective systems of international cooperation had to be established with the participation of countries interested in contributing efforts to identify, protect, preserve, refurbish and disseminate their own heritage and that which existed outside their borders.

One hundred and eighty countries participate in the convention to date, making it the most successful in the world. Today the World Heritage List contains 812 sites, including the wilds of East Africa's Serengeti, the pyramids of Egypt, the Great Barrier Reef in Australia, the Galapagos Islands in Ecuador, European palaces and cathedrals and colonial cities of Latin America and the Caribbean. These sites illustrate the world's cultural and natural diversity and that of its inhabitants; their destruction would be an irreparable loss for humanity. World heritage is a common heritage; guaranteeing its conservation and full enjoyment is a task of the UNESCO through the implementation of the World Heritage Convention.

MEXICO AND THE CONVENTION

When the Mexican Senate approved the convention in 1984, it became law. But our participation in the convention can be termed noteworthy in the last 11 years. Mérida, Yucatán hosted the twentieth meeting of the World Heritage Committee in 1996 and a representative of our country, María

* Architect and researcher.

◆ For over more than four centuries the National University was located in Mexico City's Historic Center

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By the end of the 1940s, the downtown university facilities were seriously overcrowded. A decision was made to build a new facility, which surpassed all expectations by becoming one of the most innovative works of architecture of its time.



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Teresa Franco, acted as the committee's president during 1997. Our country has recently hosted meetings about issues that are fundamental for the convention like the definition of our modern heritage, representation and the authenticity and integrity of World Heritage Sites in the Americas.

For more than a decade, Mexico has maintained close contact with members of the committee and its board, as well as its advisory bodies: the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS), the World Conservation Union and the International Centre for the Study of the Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property (ICCROM).

Finally, our country has included 25 sites on the convention's list, putting it in seventh place worldwide and in first place in the Americas.

Among the Mexican sites on the list are some natural habitats: the Sian Ka'an Biosphere Reserve, the Whale Sanctuary of the El Vizcaíno Lagoons and the islands and protected areas of the Gulf of California. The cultural sites include different kinds of properties: 1) historic centers or cities: Mexico City and Xochimilco, Oaxaca, Puebla, Guana-

juato, Morelia, Zacatecas, Querétaro, Tlacotalpan and Campeche; 2) archaeological sites: Palenque, Teotihuacan, Monte Albán, Chichén Itzá, El Tajín, Uxmal, Paquimé, Xochicalco and Calakmul; 3) monastic architecture: the sixteenth-century monasteries on the slopes of the Popocatepetl (Cuernavaca, Tepoztlán, Totolapan, Tlayacapan, Atlatlahucan, Oaxtepec, Yecapixtla, Ocuituco, Tétela, Hueyapan, Zacualpan, Tochimilco, Calpan and Huejotzingo) and the Franciscan missions of the Sierra Gorda (Jalpan, Landa, Tancoyol, Conca and Tilaco); 4) civil architecture: the Hospicio Cabañas; 5) rock paintings in the Sierra de San Francisco in Baja California Sur; and 6) modern sites like the magnificent Luis Barragán House and Studio.

MODERN HERITAGE SITES

Modern Heritage Sites are among those least represented throughout the world. In the overall



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terms of the convention, this includes architecture and urban sites from the nineteenth and twentieth century. Of the 628 cultural sites currently on the list, only 29 are modern. These kinds of heritage sites are particularly vulnerable given the weak legal protection afforded them and the general public's negligible appreciation of their value. For that reason, in 2001, the World Heritage Center and the International Council on Monuments and Sites began a program to identify, document and promote this kind of site.

Among the nineteenth-century sites classified as World Heritage Treasures are the major town houses of the architect Victor Horta (Belgium) and the Hospicio Cabañas in Guadalajara (Mexico). The twentieth century gave us, among others, the Güell Park and Palace and the Mila House in Barcelona (Spain), the city of Brasilia (Brazil), the Bauhaus and its sites in Weimar and Dessau (Germany), the Rietveld Schröder House (Netherlands) and the Luis Barragán House and Studio (Mexico).

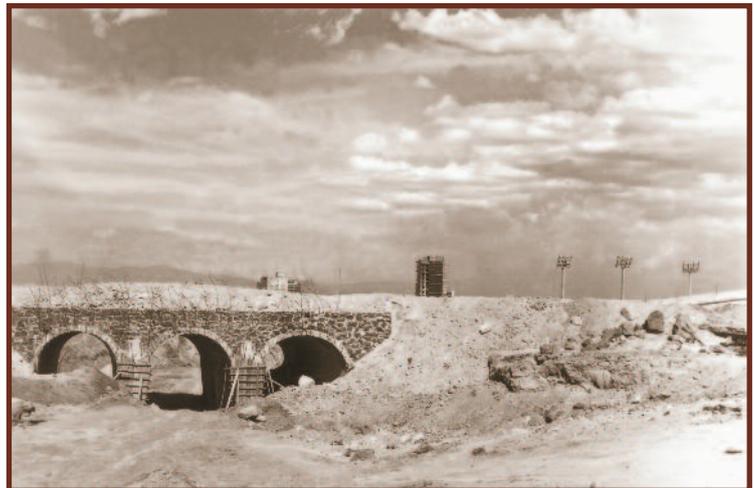
THE UNAM, AN INDISPUTABLE HERITAGE

Our national university has for many years been a site of universal value. It was the first university founded in the Americas in 1551, when King Felipe II issued the order founding the Royal University of Mexico in the city of Toro. The formal inauguration took place in 1553 attended by Viceroy Don Luis de Velasco and the Royal Audience. All the participants in the ceremony met at the San Pablo College and made a procession to the first home of the university in what is now known as Mexico City's Historic Center. The halls of the institution would be walked by figures of the stature of Carlos de Singüenza y Góngora and Juan Ruiz de Alarcón, colonial intellectuals who undoubtedly contributed to the cultural enrichment of New Spain.

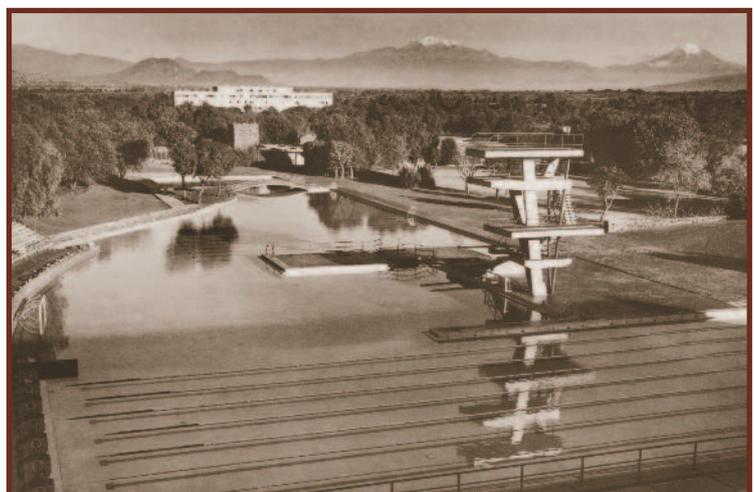
For more than four and a half centuries, the university remained in the Historic Center. Different schools opened up over the centuries, forming a "university quarter" with all the character-



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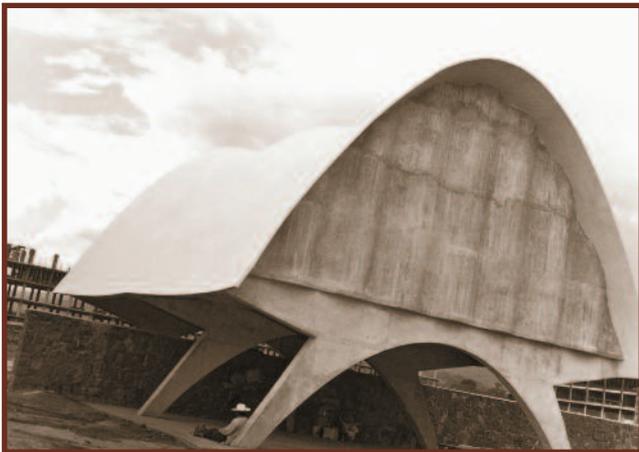


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The original campus of about 200 hectares was inaugurated November 20, 1952. It had been designed by a team of 70 architects under the direction of Mario Pani and Enrique del Moral. The whole creation clearly shows the influence of the so-called “modern movement” of contemporary architecture.



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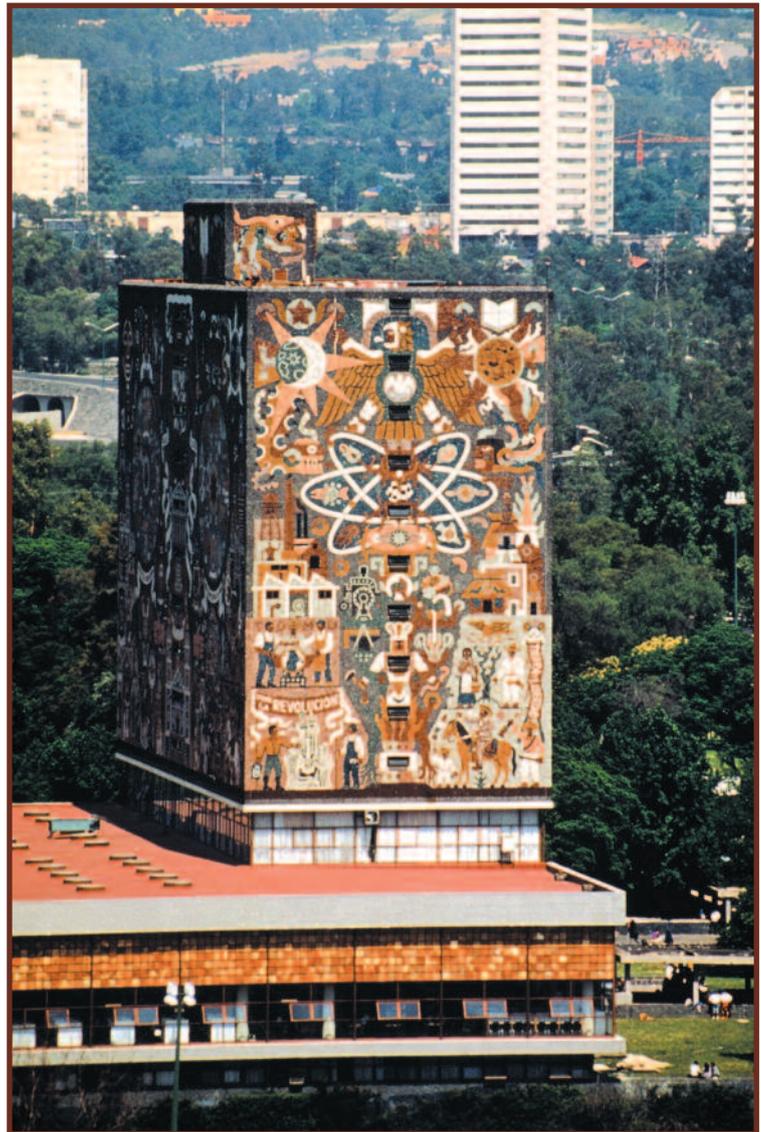
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istics of the life and activities that this implies. In the early twentieth century, the institution began to change profoundly. In 1910, on the initiative of Don Justo Sierra, the university was re-founded as a national institution, and almost two decades later, in 1929, it became autonomous.

By the end of the 1940s, the downtown university buildings were already seriously overcrowded: in addition to not having enough space for the growing student population, the facilities were insufficient for laboratories, classrooms, libraries, open spaces, etc. After several failed attempts, in 1948, a decision was made to build a new facility, which surpassed all expectations by becoming one of the most innovative and representative works of architecture of its time in Mexico City.

University City was built on an area of 1,000 hectares in a historic area of the southern part of the city: a large lava field, six or eight meters thick, created by the eruption of the Xitle Volcano in the first century before our era.

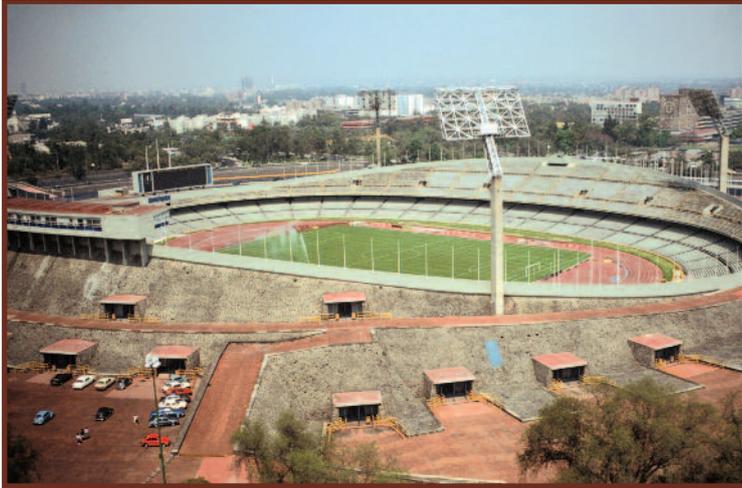
The original campus of about 200 hectares was inaugurated November 20, 1952. It had been designed by a team of 70 architects under the direction of Mario Pani and Enrique del Moral. The whole creation clearly shows the influence of the so-called “modern movement” of contemporary architecture, reflected in the use of simple geometric volumes, sometimes elongated or in the shape of towers; floors raised on columns and



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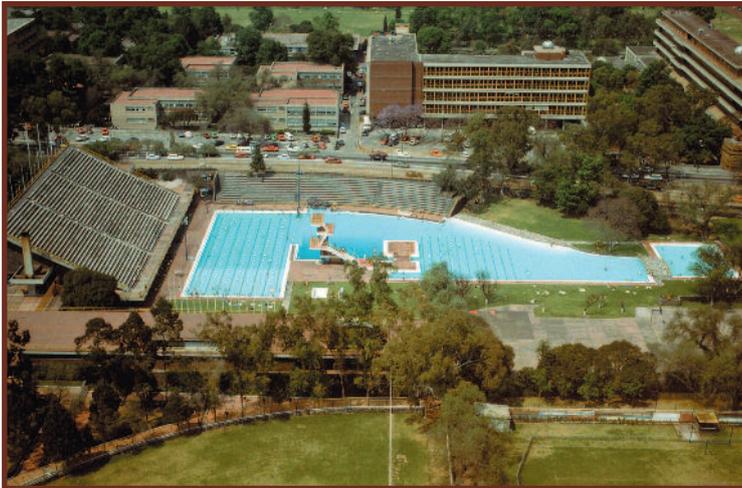
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open to circulation; and asymmetrical structures, among others. The buildings' facades show a clear difference between the support structure and the dividing walls that make up the spaces; the windows with their lattices are reminiscent of architect Le Corbusier's work on his *bri-soleil*; and the diverse formal treatment on the last levels of the buildings is also noteworthy.

Mexican architecture makes its own contribution in several fields, such as, for example, landscaping architecture which uses the volcanic environment, the scale and the semi-desert vegetation. The influence of pre-Hispanic architecture can be seen in the decorative taluds that show the skirts of volcanic rock on the stadium and the handball courts in the sports area. University City also boasts very original structural solutions such as the Pavilion of Cosmic Rays, by Félix Candela, who used 1.5-centimeter-thick shells—an enormous challenge at the time—and blocks of vitrified clay on most of the walls and facades.



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We should also emphasize the visual integration of University City's architecture: a group of world renowned Mexican artists, like Diego Rivera, David Alfaro Siqueiros, Juan O'Gorman, José Chávez Morado and Francisco Eppens, contributed to covering the walls and facades with murals and other artistic works.

Undoubtedly, Mexico's University City possesses exceptional universal values, meriting its inclusion on the World Heritage List, just as Francesco Bandarin, the director of the World Heritage Center said during his 2004 visit. The World Heritage Convention establishes several criteria that are amply covered by University City, proving its exceptional universal value. The main one is that the planning, the landscape architecture and the monumental art that are all part of its buildings and grounds make the campus a masterpiece of human creativity. Also, its construction represents the consolidation of the "modern movement" in Latin America, and its conception in terms of architecture, urban design, landscape architecture and monumental sculpture exercised considerable influence on other similar developments in countries of the region in the 1950s and



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1960s. Lastly, its urban-architectural solutions clearly show the influence of the modern movement worldwide, which is proof of the cultural, technological and artistic development achieved by a developing country like Mexico in the mid-1900s. It should be noted that both Venezuela and Argentina followed the example of our University City's design, and the UNESCO proclaimed the Caracas University City a World Heritage Treasure in 2000.

Being put on the list is no easy matter. Besides the universal value of a site, other issues enter into play. Also, today, University City has some problems that must be attended to, such as the enormous amount of traffic on its streets and park-

The planning, the landscape architecture and the monumental art that are all part of its buildings and grounds make the campus a masterpiece of human creativity.

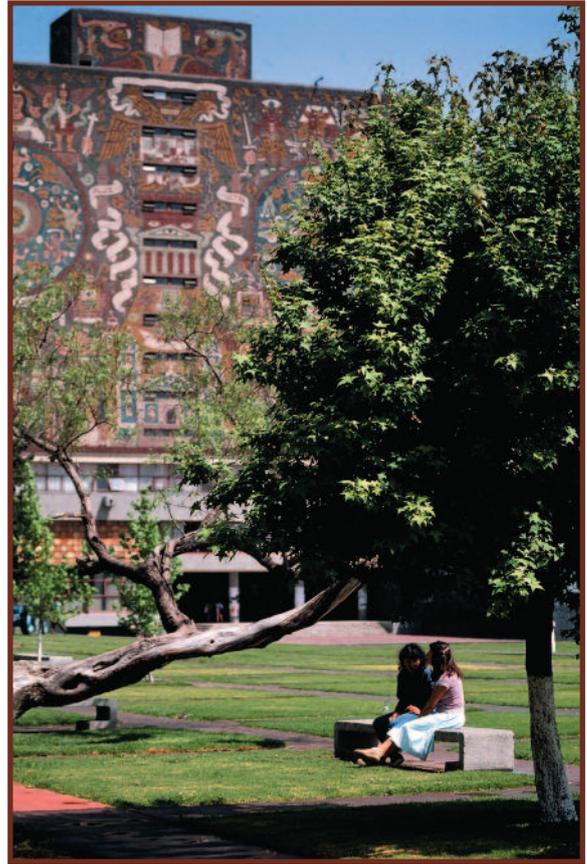


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ing lots, the itinerant vendors with stalls outside some of its schools, the graffiti on its buildings and the need for the design and implementation of a management plan.

The application for World Heritage Treasure status, supported by UNAM Rector Dr. Juan Ramón de la Fuente, coordinated by Felipe Leal and developed by a team headed up by Dr. Enrique Xavier de Anda, has been turned in to the World Heritage Center, and is awaiting evaluation by an expert from the International Council on Monuments and Sites. If everything goes well, in July 2007, we will be celebrating the inclusion on the list of a marvelous Mexican site, representative of our modern heritage. ■■■

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