SYSTEM OF HISTORIC PRESERVATION AND ITS IMPROVEMENT THROUGH THE METHODS OF COMMUNITY PLANNING
- CASE STUDY OF THE CITY OF CAP-HAITIEN, HAITI -

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Key words: Historic preservation, Community planning, Cap-Haitien, Haiti

1. Problem definition, objectives and background

The city of Cap-Haitien, due mainly to its historical past represents an important place for Haiti. Once a marvelous port-city, and the most prosperous French colony, the area corresponding to the old city, the historical center, is nowadays a unique residential zone. Being more than three centuries old, the structure of the historical center was able to keep its original characteristics until the middle of the 20th. Since the past five decades however, the historical fabric is facing a gradual but severe destruction process.

Although the center has been listed as a national heritage, and regulations worked out for its preservation, the problem is increasing year by year. The objectives of this study are: to highlight the history of preservation in Cap-Haitien in order to understand what had been done in the past and identify the gap in information that should be filled; to point out the problems of the procedure for preservation in the city; to make suggestions and recommendations for improvement.

Previous study about Cap-Haitien and its historical center were mainly focus on the characteristics of the city in the context of a developing country; the characteristics of its architectural and urban pattern; the tourism potential of the city and its surrounding; to produce regulations for the preservation of the historical center. The originality of this paper remains on the fact that it is focus on the history and problems of planning for preservation in Cap-Haitien, and propose strategy to improve the process.

2. Overview of planning and preservation in Haiti

Since 1986, the system of planning in Haiti is a decentralized one where the municipality of each geographical department is responsible for the planning of the area. However municipalities do not have the required financial means to act independently.

Under the supervision of the Ministry of Culture, the Institute for the Preservation of the national Heritage (ISPAN) created in 1979 has the responsibility to preserve the national heritage. Monuments to be listed all over the country are decided by the officers of ISPAN, and made public by a president decree. The monument and its protected surrounding are then bounded, and the basic maintenance works are supposed to be done.

3. Project site: Cap-Haitien

3.1. Location (Fig. 1) and historical aspect

Cap-Haitien, second city of Haiti lies 256 km north from Port-au-Prince, capital of the country. With a population of about 200,000 people, it is also the capital of the North geographical department. The city and its surrounding has been the site of many historical moments. The most important events leading to the country’s independence (1804) occurred in the area. Cap-Haitien, nowadays Haiti’s historical and tourism center, is famous not only for its history but also for its typical architecture and old urban fabric: the origin of the actual plan of the city goes back to 1734.

3.2. The Historical Center (Fig. 2)

All over its history, the historical center had to face a lot of disasters, but each time it could recovered, and its urban

Fig.1. Map of Haiti: Location of Cap-Haitien
and architectural features have been kept unchanged. But from the 1986’s the center had been going through an accelerating destruction process; the blocks had been split up, leading to the loss of the block pattern; wood’s floor and roof are being replaced by concrete ones to allow vertical extension; a new design, with new materials and proportions, new opening pattern and details, is taking place.

4. Planning for preservation in Cap-Haitien

4.1. History of preservation planning (Fig. 3)

Historic preservation in Haiti started mainly under the initiative of one architect, for the restoration of the most important landmark of the country: the Citadelle Laferrière, in Cap-Haitien. Restoration process of the Citadelle, started in 1978, lasted ten years, and in 1988, the “Parc National de la Citadelle” was listed as a world heritage by UNESCO. This is also in 1978 that interests about the historical center of Cap-Haitien started. History of planning for preservation of the city can be divided in four steps:

1) The awareness to the value of the center and the historical assets of the city (1978 – 1987)


4) An attempt to implement rehabilitation projects (1996 – 2002)

4.2. Overview of policies and regulations (Fig. 4)

Prepared by a group of six (architects, urban planners, historian) the “program for the preservation of the historical center” is presented in a four volumes document. The first one explains methodology and strategy of the program, makes suggestions of projects, which realization could reinforce its results. The second one is composed by zoning schemes, which are explained in the third volume. They indicate houses to be rehabilitated urgently, those who should be preserved, conserved or remodeled to the traditional style. The fourth volume defines a building regulation, which application should contribute to the success of the program of preservation.

Table 1. Important matters in the field of preservation in Haiti

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>YEAR</th>
<th>FATC</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1941</td>
<td>Promulgation of the “law on the preservation of historical monuments”</td>
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<tr>
<td>1979</td>
<td>The “National Service of Monuments and Sites” is changed into the “Institute for the Preservation of the National Heritage, ISPAN”</td>
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<tr>
<td>1987</td>
<td>The concept “National Heritage” is defined for the first time in the Haitian Constitution of 1987</td>
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<tr>
<td>1988</td>
<td>End of the restoration of the Citadelle. The “Parc National de la Citadelle” is listed as a world heritage by UNESCO.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1989</td>
<td>All public’s institutions working on a specific aspect of cultural and natural heritage are put together under the supervision of the Ministry of Information, Culture and Coordination</td>
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<tr>
<td>1995</td>
<td>The Ministry of Culture became an independent ministry, separated from the Ministry of Information, Culture and Coordination</td>
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<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>Regulations are worked out</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>Implementation of a “Project for the preservation &amp; valorization of the Historical Center of Cap-Haitien”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>Restoration and rehabilitation of the residence of an ex-president in the center (as a museum)</td>
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<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>Restoration of two parks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>Implementation of a “Project for the preservation of the residential heritage” in the center (presented in a four volumes document)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995</td>
<td>Implementation of the project “Route 2004 – Preservation of historical, cultural and natural assets”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995</td>
<td>33 monuments and a historical center are listed as National Heritage</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Fig.2. Map of the Historical Center

Fig.3 Evolution of planning for preservation in Cap-Haitien

Fig.4 Program for the Preservation of the Historical Center of Cap-Haitien
4.3. Steps and procedure for the application of the regulations
1. A building permit from the municipality is required for all building’s work affecting the area and should be delivered after consultation and agreement of ISPAN.
2. Before starting a project, the owner or its representative have to contact the officers in the municipality to get necessary information according to the zoning scheme.
3. When asking for the building permit a detailed file of the project has to be presented to the municipality council and the project has to be reviewed.

4.4. Analysis of observations
4.4.1. Analysis about preservation and rehabilitation works
In 1995, after the designation of the center as a national heritage, there was a boom in the field of construction in the area: people wanted to quickly build or reform their houses before restrictions become official. After 1996, although regulations had been worked out, restoration of facades continue to be made without any respect of the colonial architecture. From 2000, preservation and restoration projects seem not progressing.

4.4.2. Analysis about the system of preservation
The origin of the problems seems not to be however in the system itself. A comparison between the Haitian system and the Japanese one known as “preservation district for groups of historic buildings” proves that the basic recommendations are same. (Fig.5)

The difference between both systems is the grant subsidies guaranty by the Japanese one whereas it is absent in the Haitian system. But while conservation and rehabilitation projects are successful in Japan, this has not been the case in Cap-Haïtien.

However, historical preservation in Haiti in general is greatly affected by the political, economical and social context of the country (fig6). The consequence is that problem regarding preservation takes a back seat compare to economical and political ones and grant subsidies is not provided; historical and environmental significance is not perceived and respected by the society. Moreover, the regulations have not been enacted, and the building permit is delivered from the town council without any control and without any consultation with the officers of ISPAN as stipulated by the regulations. This makes it impossible for them to review the buildings projects.

4.4.3. Analysis about the method of preparation of the regulations
The basic model for the preparation of regulations in many countries is a series of consultations between professionals who make proposals, politicians who publish them and the population for opinion and reaction. However, in the case of Cap-Haïtien, regulations have been worked out in two steps and public reaction has not been taken in consideration. (Fig.7)

4.4.4. Interpretation of observations about rehabilitation works
It has been noticed that the restoration of the facades is made arbitrarily, without any respect for the colonial architecture and that the preservation and restoration projects advocated by ISPAN, seems not progressing… Various interpretations can be made about those observations (table 1)

Table 1. Interpretation of observations about rehabilitation work

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interpretation</th>
<th>Population</th>
<th>Municipality</th>
<th>ISPAN</th>
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<tr>
<td>Existence of conflict about the idea of conservation</td>
<td>√</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of knowledge about the existence of the regulations</td>
<td>√</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of interest regarding things of the past</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inexistence of collaboration and consensus</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Passive opposition</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Importance of historic preservation is not perceived</td>
<td>√</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Misunderstanding of objectives and strategies of ISPAN</td>
<td>√</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Lack in the diffusion of information</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>√</td>
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<tr>
<td>Inadequacy of strategy</td>
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Fig.5 Comparison between Haitian and Japanese system of preservation

Fig.6 Impact of the Haitian context on historic preservation

Fig.7 Procedure to work out regulations
5. Conclusion and recommendations

5.1. Summary of findings
Interest for the historical center of the city of Cap-Haïtien has started twenty-five years ago and regulations for its protection has been worked out in 1996. But the condition of the center has shown very little improvement.

The history of planning for preservation in the city has revealed the following points:
1. There is a chronic problem in implementing regulations in Cap-Haïtien. The reasons are that, first, a clear consensus on the need for preservation does not exist. Second, there has been a lack of proper method to setting down the regulations.
2. Past activities has also seen little participation of the society in setting up policies and the required measures. The consequence is that the organization responsible for the preservation in Cap-Haïtien is working with almost no collaboration of the large part of the society and that efforts to work out projects is often unsuccessful due the level of understanding of the population. Financial difficulties of the society, too, affect to a great extent the preservation process.
3. The results and objectives expected have not been reached. This makes it important to find another means of intervention.

5.2. Recommendations
Most of the problems pointed can be greatly minimized by three important points:
1. Awareness of the population: The analysis of observation has demonstrated that all sectors of the community need to be strongly motivated about historic preservation and the value of heritages. Awareness should be the first and most important step, which will motivate the participation and collaboration of the community.
2. Involvement of the society: Researches made in this study about the practice of city planning in Japan have demonstrated that citizen involvement was central to improvement of cities and historical sites. This is regarded as one of the key for success.
3. Consensus: It is necessary that the majority of the population come to consensus about the importance of historic preservation and the application of regulations.

Those three points are part of community planning and this method seems to be the approach through which the preservation of the Historical Center has a better chance to be successful.

5.3. Strategy for improving the preservation process (Fig. 8)

As the city already possess it’s system of preservation and it’s regulations which can be considered as appropriated, what is to be done now by the ISPAN is to work toward acceptance of those regulations by the population. By undertaken public hearing and survey to inform and involve as much residents as possible, organizing workshops and meetings to discuss about the community problems and needs, share opinions and suggestions, mobilizing the civil society in defining goals and strategies, and finally, by taking decision together with the residents, this goal can be reached.

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