

# Jesuit Reduções in the Context of UNESCO World Heritage

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## 1. History of the Concept of Heritage

The term “cultural heritage” dates back to Henri-Baptiste Grégoire (1787-1831), Bishop of Blois in France. In 1794, he wrote an essay denouncing the damage and destruction of works of art after the French Revolution. Just four years later in 1798, the term “cultural heritage” was already included in a questionnaire by the Academie Française.

One hundred and sixty years later, in May 1954, the Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict was adopted. Its purpose was to protect cultural heritage in general, especially during wars and international conflicts. In its preamble it states that “damage to cultural property belonging to any people whatsoever means damage to the cultural heritage of all humankind, since each people makes its contribution to the culture of the world”.

In 1960, the first UNESCO convention on the protection of cultural and natural heritage was both the starting point and inspiration for one of its most important scientific projects, Masterpieces of the World’s Heritage, which was closely related to museums and museology. In Article 1 of the Statutes of the International Council of Museums (ICOM), concerning the name and legal status of the organization, mention is already made of the interest of professional museum workers in museology and preservation.

In 1972, the UNESCO Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage was ratified, entering into force three years later. This convention characterizes the different facets of world heritage: tangible masterpieces, famous buildings, monuments, important cultural and natural sites, some collections that form museums and other cultural properties. At present the World Heritage List covers 151 states and includes 851 properties from the history of civilization: 660 cultural properties, 166 in-situ protections of natural heritage, plus 25 mixed properties of cultural and natural heritage. Additionally, the World Heritage Committee has a programme to protect documental heritage of humankind, including books and manuscripts, film and audio recordings, objects in museums, etc.

## 2. Criteria

There are certain criteria for World Heritage related to different fields. Each member state of UNESCO can propose cultural sites to be included on a tentative list. These sites have to fulfil at least one of a list of conditions in the history of civilization, as either cultural or natural assets. While cultural property is a consideration that puts more emphasis on masterpieces and the development of buildings or architectural ensembles, outstanding testaments to lost cultures, outstanding examples of human settlements,

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etc., the criteria for natural assets include outstanding examples of the geological history of the earth, evolution and ecosystems, natural phenomena and the in-situ-protection of biological diversity and endangered species.

Cultural heritage must fulfil the following conditions:

- to represent a masterpiece of human creative genius;
- to exert influence, over a long period or in a cultural area of the world, on the developments in architecture, town planning or landscape design, as well as large-scale sculptural projects;
- to bear a unique or at least exceptional testimony to a cultural tradition or to a civilization which is living or which has disappeared,
- to be an outstanding example of a type of building or architectural ensemble which illustrates (a) significant stage(s) in human history,
- to be an outstanding example of a traditional human settlement which is representative of a culture,
- to be associated with events or living traditions, with ideas, or with beliefs, with artistic and literary works of outstanding universal significance.

The natural assets must fulfil the following conditions:

- to be outstanding examples representing major stages of earth's history, including the record of life, significant on-going geological processes in the development of landforms, or significant geomorphic or physiographic features,
- to be outstanding examples of significant on-going ecological and biological processes in the evolution and development ecosystems and communities of plants and animals,
- to represent an extraordinary natural phenomenon or an area of unusual beauty and aesthetic importance,
- to contain the most important and significant natural habitats for in-situ conservation of biological diversity, including those containing threatened species.

### 3. UNESCO World Heritage in Latin America

The extensive World Heritage List includes many examples of particular cultural and natural assets in Latin America which were accepted between 1980 and 2005. In this list, both tangible and intangible heritage is of great importance. The latter is expressed in the traditional knowledge and skills, oral history, music, dance, rituals, language, etc. which are preserved by communities, groups and individuals as a part of their cultural heritage. It is a kind of "living cultural heritage" that is evident in traditions, the performing arts, social expression, rituals and festivities related to nature and the universe (UNESCO, 2003).

This immaterial, intangible heritage is closely bound to the tangible heritage expressed in artefacts, objects of different kinds, musical instruments and even entire spaces of culture, such as the Jesuit *Reduccion*es and *Estancias*.

Museums play an important role in this context (VIAREGG, 1999), such as museums of ethnology and world culture, or museums that display objects from the former *Reduccion*es and *Estancias*. These can be seen in the museums of Buenos Aires, Cordoba and Alta Gracia (Argentina), Porto Alegre (Brazil), Asunción (Paraguay) - and of course in any museums in Europe which contain artefacts relating to the Society of Jesus.

The *Reduccion*es *Jesuíticas* are a particularly good example for both excavations and research and communication with the public. Of particular importance in this sense is the Shanghai Charter on museums and tangible and intangible heritage in the context of globalization<sup>1</sup>. In fourteen paragraphs, it describes the most important tasks and responsibilities of museums and museologists with regard to the intangible heritage of the Asia Pacific region. It also focuses on the significance of intangible heritage as defined in

<sup>1</sup> The Shanghai Charter was adopted at a Regional Meeting of the Asia Pacific Organisation (ASPAC, 7<sup>th</sup> Regional Assembly) in October 2002 in Shanghai, China. It was developed by participants at the meeting and signed by Prof. Zhang Wenbin, President of the Chinese National Committee of ICOM, Jacques Perrot, President of ICOM, and Amarewar Galla, President of ICOM Asia Pacific (see MUSEUMS..., 2003).

the preamble, and gives practical advice and tips for putting into practice the different options for safeguarding such heritage.

The cultural identity of Latin America has given rise to a specific cultural heritage. While in Middle Europe, the Chambers of Art and Curiosities (tangible heritage) in the late Renaissance promoted ideas for the development of museums and museology, the cultural development of Latin America resulted first of all from the significant living culture of the indigenous peoples such as the Guarani (initially intangible heritage), and since the sixteenth century was influenced by the voyages of discovery, particularly by European explorers.

Between 1980 and 2005, the particular nature of these cultural assets was established. My case study relates to the intercultural heritage of the Jesuit Reduccioness located in what is now the national territory of Argentina, Brazil and Paraguay.

## 4. The Jesuit State and World Heritage

Former Jesuit Missions, the “Reduccioness” and “Estancias”, are historical and intercultural prototypes of globalization from seventeenth and eighteenth century Latin America. According to the linguistic usage of this period, Reduccioness (derived from the Latin *reducere*) means to unite people in mission settlements. They signify the Jesuits’ concerted effort to save the Guarani from slavery (Portuguese slave hunters and Spanish colonials) (MCNASPY; BLANCH, 1991, p. 8). The Estancias, kind of estates, were used for agricultural purposes and to supply the Reduccioness with food (ASENSIO, 2007).

The remains from the former “Paraqueria” or “Paracuaria” are situated in the area that currently spans the borders of Brazil, Argentina and Paraguay<sup>1</sup>. Each village was on a hill and close to a river. As an extraordinary example of cultural heritage, they represent the amalgamation of the Guarani indigenous and Jesuit cultures.

In these missions, which included a total of seventy Reduccioness and Estancia settlements, some 200,000 Native Indians lived between 1609 and 1767, most of whom belonging to the Guarani ethnic group. The centre of what became known as the “Jesuit State” included 30 settlements.

## 5. What does “Jesuit State” mean?

The spiritual father and founder of the Missions was Father Diego de Torres (1551-1638), chair of the Jesuits in Paracuaria. He started the first settlement for the Guarani people named San Ignacio Guazú about 250 km south of Asunción. After this, another thirty Reduccioness came into being, which together formed the Jesuit State, which was a particular type of state that could also be provided military protection.

The settlements, or “pueblos” (“villages”), were close to the Parana and Uruguay rivers and are often compared with Augustine’s City of God, Thomas More’s Utopia, Tommaso Campanella’s Sun State or Francis Bacon’s New Atlantis. This is no coincidence, as a number of clear ideas underpinned the basis of the Jesuit State.

a) City of God (“De civitate Dei”) by Augustine (354-430) - Augustine was the Bishop of Hippo. He wrote his important essay “De civitate Dei” between 413 and 426 AD. The most important idea was to show the difference between the earthly state and the heavenly state. The heavenly state (Civitas Dei) would be manifested, said Augustine, by the Christian people who were living according to religious rules. Only in this way could mankind find its way to bliss and harmony.

b) Utopia by Thomas More (1478-1535) - In his essay (1516) Thomas More puts forward the idea of an “ideal community”. The framework of the essay is a set of stories told by a sailor about his life with the people of Utopia. The essay correspondingly describes a community which lives together on the principle of equality. It is a Republic under democratic rule and founded on two main ideals: everybody strives for education and there are no private possessions, only common property.

<sup>2</sup> In former times, the area also included parts of Uruguay and Bolivia which are not discussed in this paper. There were other holy orders from the Roman Catholic Church, such as the Capuchins, who founded settlements in Latin America for other purposes than the Jesuits.

c) Sun State by Tommaso Campanella (1568-1639) - Campanella particularly reflects on community life. The inhabitants of the Sun State spend their life together in a kind of village in the countryside. Life goes on very peaceably, everybody dedicates their time to physical and spiritual work, and leisure time is spent playing music and dancing. The education of the children is a common responsibility. Friendship is held in particularly high esteem. Campanella's Sun State is open to everybody. He invites all the peoples of the world to work together and push ahead with all the issues which promote the material, spiritual and moral development of mankind in order to start a "New Golden Age".

d) New Atlantis by Francis Bacon (1561-1626) - The English philosopher and statesman Francis Bacon was a forerunner of empiricism. He is also a representative of modern science. In 1614 he published his essay "New Atlantis". This is also a utopian essay that focuses on the foundation of scientific academies.

The ideas embedded in Christian doctrines and contemporary essays greatly influenced the conception of a Jesuit State to be created together with the indigenous Guarani people. Between the founding of the first Jesuit Reduccion in San Ignacio Guazú in 1609 and the expulsion of the Jesuits in 1767, these principles were determinant for teaching, education and teamwork (in the much discussed "Jesuit education") and also for community life in the Reduccion. It should not be forgotten that the Reduccion were independent Republics in the middle of Spanish colonies. They were determined to give the indigenous people better living conditions and to teach them various handicrafts related to their own culture. For this, certain of their ideas were taken from those of the Jesuit order: to convert the Guarani to Christianity, to protect them from exploitation and oppression and to make cultural progress. The state was the embodiment of the democratic ideal. Based on these principles, the Jesuit State has often been classified as an anti-colonial "Holy Experiment", a "Lost Paradise" or a "Music State".

After the expulsion of the Jesuits in 1767, many of the Reduccion survived throughout the first decades of the nineteenth century on the initiative of the Guarani.

The Guarani and Jesuits together left a remarkable tangible and intangible heritage. It forms a historical and intercultural prototype both for the application of philosophical and practical ideas to the creation of a specific state and for colonization and early globalization in Latin America.

Between 1980 and 2000 several of these were included in the World Heritage List: San Ignacio Mini, Santa Ana, Nuestra Señora de Loreto, Santa Maria Mayor (Argentina), Ruins of São Miguel das Missões (Brazil), Jesuit Block and Estancias of Cordoba (Argentina), Jesuit Missions of La Santísima Trinidad de Paraná and Jesús de Tavarangue (Paraguay).



Picture 1 - Estancia Santa Catalina. Photo: Hildegard Vieregk (2004)

## 6. Reduções and Estâncias - an important museum area in Latin America

The Reduções and Estâncias are an underexploited topic in the museums of Latin America, despite the impact they had on the foundations that were established in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries during the early globalization initiated by the activities of the Jesuit Order. The relics of this period include churches and monasteries, places of work for the indigenous Guarani people, and civil and sociological organizations. At present, at many of these sites there are museums located in the original environment, wrested away from the jungle. Usually these museum areas consist of an archaeological site, reconstructed buildings and houses or restored edifices of different kinds. They are extraordinary examples of the culture and testaments to the history of Argentina, Brazil and Paraguay in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

Trinidad, which is on the World Heritage List, is an archetypal Reducción. The Missions were designed according to a master plan, which was reproduced at different sites. At each settlement there was a magnificent cathedral with furnishings, works of art, frescoes and marblwork. Around it, there were many workshops, lodgings for the indigenous population and a large meeting area. Today, each settlement is a unique, partially open-air museum with an archaeological background.

Many ruins, churches and settlements are still the most important testaments to the high cultural level of the Jesuit Reduções. Museologically speaking, the intention is to show the ruins, reconstructions, archaeological sites and findings at the original site/area in such a way that visitors are given as clear an impression as possible of the religious and cultural life and the sociological body of the "Jesuit State" and the achievements of the Guarani.

The Jesuit Reduções are an example and prototype of World Heritage in a changing world, of international communication and the amalgamation of civilizations, ethical challenges and the responsibility for education. In the extended list of World Heritage, the Reduções are a specific phenomenon in the greater culture of Latin American countries.

The former Jesuit Reduções therefore play an important role in the broader museum context. Associated with them are not only the scientific tasks of carrying out excavations and documentation, but also the duties of presenting and interpreting objects in an aesthetic, ethical and social context, as well as carrying out education activities.

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## 7. Trinidad as an archetype

There are authentic sites and museums in Latin America that focus on the importance of the Jesuit Reduções as World Heritage, displaying objects of different kinds which are closely connected to the seventeenth and eighteenth century settlements.

In their publication, *Paracuaria*, Father Frings and Father Übelmesser SJ clearly describe the importance of the former Reduccion of Trinidad, which is a UNESCO World Heritage site whose preservation was given the highest priority as early as 1972 (FRINGS; ÜBELMESSER, 1982). However, it is just one example of the extraordinary testaments to and sources of the history of Argentina, Brazil and Paraguay in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, embodied by the Jesuit State of “Paracuaria” and legally declared as World Heritage by UNESCO.

Many of these settlements are situated along the main road in Paraguay which forms a triangle from Asunción in the West to Encarnación in the South and Ciudad del Este in the East. The Jesuits themselves built these roads through previously unexplored regions, and many are still used today, such as the road to Santa Maria.

The Master Plan included first a settlement with a cathedral and an area for community festivities in the centre. The lodgings for the Guarani, many different workshops, a school and a bell-tower or watch-tower were arranged all around. The workshops were intended to promote indigenous culture according to their individual skills in handicrafts.

People got up to the sound of the church bells. Accompanied by music, they went to the workshops. Music was very important in the churches and during festivities. There were also orchestras. Indeed, music was one of the factors that most drew the Guarani to live in the Reduções voluntarily.



Picture 2 - La Santissima Trinidad. Source: not stated by the author

Father Sepp SJ, one of the pioneers<sup>3</sup>, describes a lot of different handicrafts and skills developed at Reducción San Juan, which he founded in what is now the Brazilian part of the former Jesuit State. It was a major Reducción with about 3000 inhabitants. The handicrafts mentioned are Tischler (carpentry), Baumeister (architecture), Weber (weaving), Waffenschmiede (armoury), Bildhauer (sculpting), Maler (painting), Steinmetze (stonemasonry), Ziegelbrenner (brickmaking), Schuhmacher (shoemaking) Gerber (tannery), Hafner (pottery), Drechsler, (wood-turning) Lauten (lute making), Harfenmacher (harp making) and Orgelbauer (organ making). There are similar descriptions, such as the one by Father Florian Paucke. Based on the remains and extant objects in museums, it is fair to suppose that these are the handicrafts that were usually practised in the Reducciones, including Trinidad.

Like music and theatre, enthusiasm for dance and entertainment were also used for the mediation of ethical values, artificial expression and religious education. The Guarani were also the first workers to create arms and bells, artificial pieces made of gold and silver, communion-cups and hanging lamps in the European style<sup>4</sup>. Today every site is a unique example of a cultural-historical museum, an ethnological museum or an open air museum of a specific kind.



Picture 3 - Side exit of the church. Photo: Hildegard Vieregg (2004)

<sup>3</sup> Father Anton Sepp (1655-1733) was born in the village of Kaltern, southern Tyrol. In 1691 he arrived together with his friend Father Anton Böhm SJ (born in Amberg, Bavaria) in South America. Before Sepp's decision to become one of the Jesuit Reducción pioneers, he was a choirboy at the imperial palace of Vienna, Austria. After his arrival in South America, he was responsible for the musical education of the Guarani for 41 years, as well as working as a farmer and wine producer.

<sup>4</sup> See: Kobler (1870, p. 441-469).



Picture 4 - *The Jesuits and Music: organ in the Museum of Alta Gracia - a former Estancia.*  
Photo: Hildegard Vieregg (2004)

The Trinidad museum is an excellent example of the intention to found Reduccioness with architectural and sculptural representations of the patron saints in a particular style. Many of the archaeological finds and the restored patron saints are on display in the museum, which is close to the church. They include carved figures of saints, figures of angels and religious objects shown to the visitors in the Sacristy.

One of the most important works in the museum of Trinidad is the Sculpture of the Trinity, with a number of many other famous sculptures of holy saints. These enable the visitors to compare the European baroque art of the time with the craftwork of the Guarani people during the same period. The physiognomy of the holy saints clearly reflects indigenous features. This is a particular phenomenon of the artificial nature of the Reduccioness.

In order to present as many elements as possible of the equipment used and the sculptures of the patron saints, many of these have been preserved “in situ” in the ruins of the cathedral. For instance, in Trinidad, the baroque pulpit is reminiscent of the pulpits in baroque churches from Austria and Germany. The naive forms a unit together with the former sacristy, and is today a museum. The museum also contains some important objects which were taken from the church to the artificial environment of the museum because of the climate: sculptures, parts of frescoes and stucco/moulding, carved figures of patron saints, figures of baroque angels, as well as religious objects shaped by the Guarani people. In every case, the physiognomies of the figures look indigenous, which makes these pieces so valuable as indications of their artistic quality and skills.

Altogether, the Missions are an important part of the cultural heritage and identity of Argentina, Brazil and Paraguay, and an excellent example of community living. In the museums associated to each site, especially in Trinidad, visitors can see important objects, wall paintings, frescoes, sculptures, figures of saints and other items from the workshops of the eighteenth century, designed by the indigenous people. The style of the European works of art of that time, including plans, paintings and sculptures brought to Latin America by members of the Jesuit Order, architects and artists, are reflected in these objects. The settlements themselves and the museums rank as some of the finest examples of inspiration from new ideas, and of cross-cultural fertilization combined with the creativity of the indigenous Guarani people.

Everyone in charge of these museums should convey the core idea of the Jesuit Reduccioness to their visitors: the creation and purpose of the “Jesuit State”, the first democratic and intercultural “ideal” state in the world, a kind of “Utopia”. It was meant to

be a way of life that integrated social, architectural and economical issues. The members of the Jesuit Order delegated to Latin America aimed to create better living conditions for the Guarani people and to support those skills which were an intimate part of the indigenous culture. At prototypes such as Trinidad, these museological preconditions are fully met in terms of their collections, research, preservation, presentation and communication.

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