

“For the value of what is ours.”



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THE RECOVERY OF MOVABLE CULTURAL HERITAGE AS A TOOL FOR THE RECOVERY OF MEMORY AND THE CONSERVATION OF EXPRESSIONS OF THE CULTURE OF CARTAGENA DE INDIAS, CARIBBEAN REGION OF COLOMBIA.

Articles and expressions that form the cultural heritage, as objective identity references, require, in order to be interpreted correctly, knowledge, dissemination, promotion, and a guarantee that their aesthetic and historical values will be retained, as well as their sociocultural significance and their materiality. Through these expressions self-knowledge, appraisal and cultural identification are recognised and constructed.

People who do not recognise their own cultural heritage are not aware of their own identity and have no sense of their relevance. This has a negative influence on their development, as it does not allow people to take ownership of their well-being and the processes that feed into it.

Tackling the issue of movable cultural heritage requires dealing with the regional circumstances, as it is from these that cultural development will be facilitated, as shown in the maintenance, dissemination and conservation of heritage assets that are representative elements of customs, way of life, coexistence and creativity.

In Cartagena de Indias, the deterioration and loss of these assets and expressions directly impacts the decreasing quality of life of the inhabitants, and affects the tourist industry, especially cultural tourism, which has great potential for development in the region because it has been a World Heritage Site since 1985. These facts affect the economic development, with negative consequences on the economic income distribution between its inhabitants.

Undertaking a programme for the recovery of memory through the disciplines of conservation, restoration and museum science, to reach Cartagena de Indias and the Caribbean Region of Colombia, and be developed at both local and regional level, meant including participatory strategies in which the actors see themselves as active individuals, as they are the ones who have to take responsibility for bringing about, encouraging, and planning the actions to recover the movable heritage. These programmes, developed by the Grupo Conservar, have been adapted to previously-identified local circumstances, bringing elements of reflection that trigger processes facilitating access for the populations to their heritage assets.

An analysis of this issue led to *For the value of what is ours* because of the lack of a governmental policy to recover cultural heritage in the regions and in light of the sparse

coverage by local and regional entities in developing programmes to recover and work for the movable cultural heritage.

We therefore decided to open up a regional space to solve our own problems and seek recognition and evaluation for our cultural heritage abandoned to its fate, among other reasons because of the scant political will in this area. This space is intended to recover the tangible and intangible memory of the city and of the Caribbean Region of Colombia and to open up spaces for dialogue and for life, to reaffirm the present by identifying, recognising and evaluating its past.

Safeguarding these heritage assets required designing strategies that would guarantee effectiveness and coverage, taking account of various factors: the volume of assets and the fact they are always increasing, their continuous deterioration, the resources available to the bodies taking care of them, the lack of training among the staff managing this and their lack of awareness of its importance.

Grupo Conservar as a foundation designed various strategies for conservation, restoration and enhancement through museum science and by providing courses and workshops which have enabled a series of programmes to be developed in the city and the region, for the recovery of this unprotected movable cultural heritage.

The collection management Programme for museums, churches and cultural institutions which are the custodians of movable heritage includes diagnosis, inventory, specialist maintenance interventions, conservation - restoration and museum projects. A similar project, but for sculptures in the public space, is called *Heritage Concerns us All*. The third is called *Feeling our Heritage*, and concerns awareness-raising and education, with workshops, seminars and the publication of catalogues, books and other resources.

We were established in 1999 and from then on we have focussed our human, technical and financial resources on working for the movable cultural heritage of Cartagena and the Caribbean Region of Colombia. We have managed to recover and promote collections in various different institutions and major groups of sculpture in the public space. In addition, we have worked with religious images, and this has involved taking our work to regions far from the cities. We design, manage and carry out projects aimed at the cultural development of the communities which are the custodians of the cultural heritage.

We do this because of our commitment to the recovery of our memory and *for the value of what is ours*.