

SAVING A PANOPTICON TYPOLOGY BUILDING

**Recovering the San Pedro Panopticon
of La Paz, Bolivia**

**Advanced Training Programme of Conservation &
Management of Historic Buildings
Lund University**

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Abstract

When the new jail of La Paz was built by the end of the 19th century, it was located in the outskirts of La Paz city, in an Indian settlement called San Pedro Parish. This new jail was built following the Bentham's Panopticon typology.

Over the time San Pedro became a neighbourhood located in the central district of La Paz city, while the panopticon continued functioning as a jail housing more than 4.5 times the number of prisoners originally it was designed for.

La Paz citizens, municipal and State's authorities are aware about the insecurity the presence of the jail in such a central place represents and they agree that more sooner than later, the jail -as function- has to be transferred to a more suitable location. But the destiny for the building or -to be accurate- the plot of land is an unsolved and disagreed issue.

The fact the San Pedro Panopticon is a jail makes people prone to think the building must be demolished once a new jail is built in another place on the outskirts of the city. Two aspects of the building are ignored: on one hand, the value of the building as an example of Bentham's proposals for a new kind of jail, an innovative typology of building that reflects the spirit of an epoch of the human kind history -the Enlightenment-; and on other hand, the age of the building as an artefact that is part of the history of the city. Therefore, the conservation of the Panopticon is in jeopardy.

Introduction

The main objective of this project is to find the clue aspects that may allow achieving people are on favour for the Panopticon conservation.

This may be done twofold: (i) at an academic level, highlighting the philosophical and historical values of the Panopticon on a universal context; for this aim, the historical antecedents of this building typology will be explained. (ii) Emphasizing the uniqueness of the building in the Bolivian context, besides exploring the possibility of recovering it. These two aspects could make the community aware about the value of the building preventing it for the possible destruction is facing now.

Besides the role the Panopticon played over the configuration of a part of the city will be described.

Because the building still functions as a jail, there is available little accurate information about the San Pedro Panopticon, it is difficult to make a direct survey about the current physical situation of the building. Due to the special characteristics of this jail –that seems a small city- some information could be gathered through visits to the building. Also, interviews with neighbours and citizens were important to understand people's perspective about the building.

Background

About the typology

An important feature that makes the San Pedro Panopticon a valuable architectural artefact lies on the origin of the Panopticon as a new architectural typology developed during the 18th century.

The idea of the Panopticon was developed by the English philosopher Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832). Benham's ideas more than merely thoughts and ideas had architectural character; he demonstrated the possibility of putting in practice his ideas.

His architectonic ideas were developed from his own definition of a prison: "a mansion where individuals are deprived from the freedom they have abused; the aim of deprivation is to prevent new crimes and to stop others from get involved in crime through the terror of the example. Besides it is a correction house where the inmates' behaviour should be mended, so when they are freed they are not anymore a disgrace neither for society nor for themselves."

He was in search of a new kind of jail that would be cheaper and where a small number of persons could take care of a big community, a place where the prisoners receive human treatment with small expenses, a place where the prisoners may serve as an example for free persons so they get away from crime.

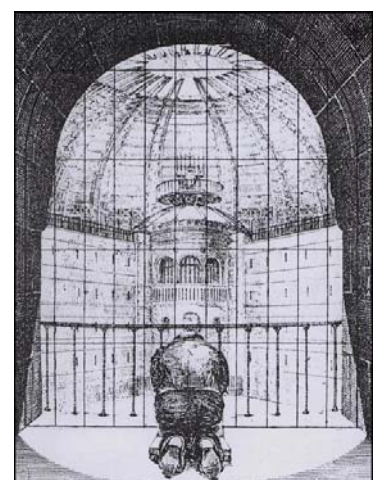


Fig. 1 An inmate praying in his cell, in front of the watching tower.

Michael Foucault who studied the Panopticon, defined it as a jail wise and cruel at the same time, as an authentic museum for human behaviour. For him, the Panopticon put upside-down the principle of the dungeon: whereas the aim of the dungeon was to lock, to hide and to deprive people from light, the Panopticon only have in common with the dungeon the objective to lock prisoners. Foucault said the Panopticon permitted to break the “see and be seen relationship”. The meaning of panopticon (Pan=wide and opticon=vision) has two sides: the discipline and the punishment. Foucault also highlighted the fact that the Panopticon allowed a perfect the exercise of power by reducing the number of those who are in power at the same time multiplying the number of those who are under the first one’s power.

At the end of the 18 century this new typology of jail was a break through and a revolutionary idea, thus, Bentham’s name has become narrowly related to the Panopticon.

An important characteristic of the Bentham’s Panopticon was the idea of “transparency”. To achieve this idea the openness of the jail to visitors to the prisoners -especially during the religious services- became important, this is the reason why to include a church in the building was importante.

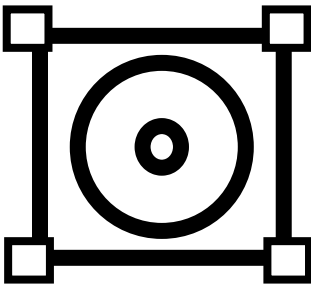


Fig. 2 Panopticon basic scheme.

The basic scheme of the panopticon is as follows: A small circle represents the watching tower, a bigger circle represents the group of cells for housing the inmates. To this simple draw a square can be added, which separates the panopticon from the civilian buildings, in order to keep few surveillance points only can be added a watchman in each square.

According to Bentham’s own description: “A jail should be a round building, or to better say, two buildings, one inside other. The inmates’ rooms would be in the outside six store high building. The rooms would be open towards the inner part... A tower will be in the central round building, this would be the inspectors’ room, it is surrounded by a covered gallery with a transparent celosia. It may allow the inspectors watch all the prisoners’ cells without being themselves seen. This building is like a beehive with all its cells visible from a central point...”

Bentham was even looking for a mechanism that permit everything the prisoners say may be listen by the inspectors, but he could not find the way to avoid inspectors to be listen by prisoners.

The Panopticon should be related to the directions of the sun rise and the sunset, in a way cells could have good sunlight. Besides, hygiene was an important issue; the sunlight would contribute to good health of the inmates.

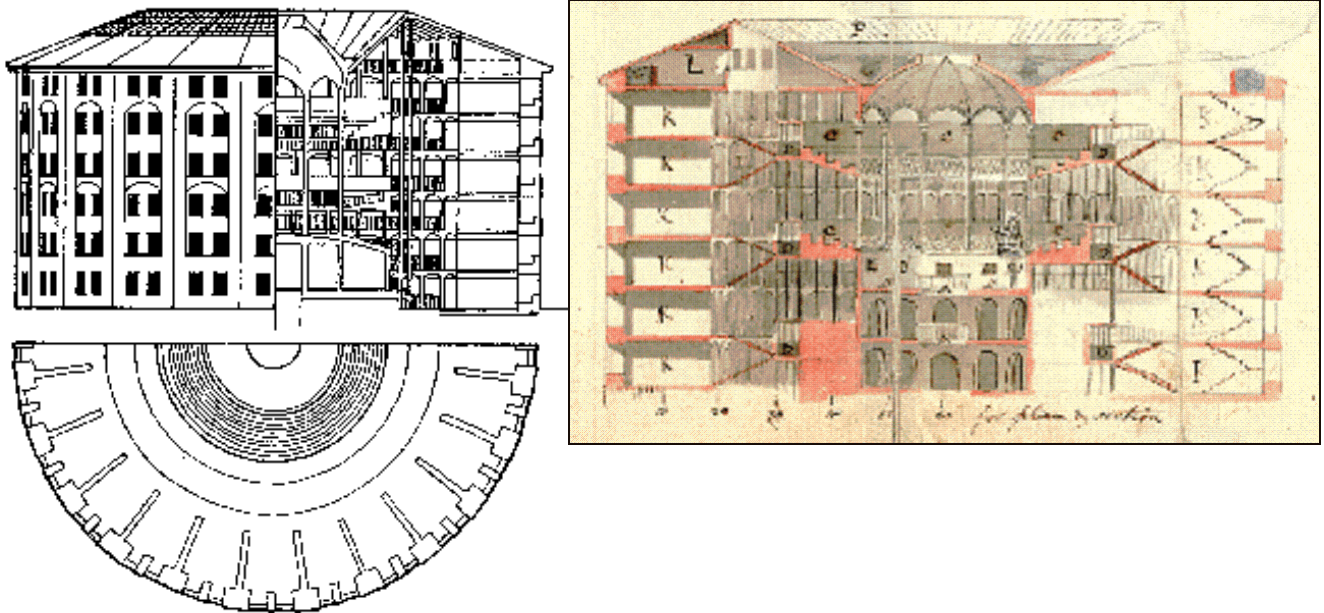


Figure 3. Layout and section of the Panopticon, according to Bentham's proposal

Foucault read the importance of the sun lightening in the Panopticon as the concretion (reification) of the Enlightenment in opposition to the Dark Era, because the dark, cold, isolated, dirty and infested dungeon was contra posed to the transparent cells of this new system.

These characteristics made the Panopticon a typology applied during the 19th century to the design and construction of many jails around the world. Bentham's ideas were also applied to the design of hospitals, schools and other facilities.

It is important to clarify that the classical Panopticon shape was circular, some of the constructions that followed this form were the jails of Breda and Arheimin the Netherlands, the jail of Isla de Pinos in Cuba, the Old Provost jail in Grahamstown, South Africa. Nevertheless other buildings (jails, hospitals, "lunatic" houses) also called Panopticon were constructed following the same philosophical principles of the Bentham's proposal but with a different shape, based in pavilions connected to a central tower and blocks on the periphery surrounding the pavilions. Some examples of this type of buildings are the old jail of La Petite Roquette Prison, France, the National Panopticon (jail) in Bogota, Colombia, the old jail of Vigo, Spain, the Panopticon of Lima Peru (demolished in 1960), the Panopticon of Quito, Ecuador and the Panopticon of La Paz, Bolivia.



Fig. 4 Panopticon in Breda, Netherlands

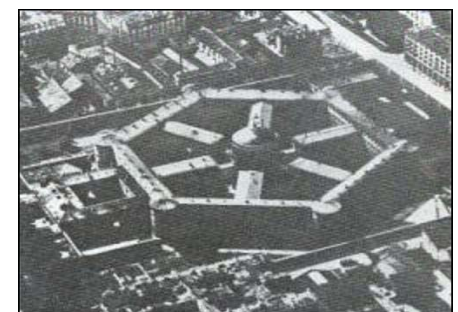


Fig. 5 La Petite Roquette Prison, France

A Panopticon in La Paz

Although Sucre city is the official Capital of Bolivia, La Paz houses two political powers: the Parliament and the Executive Power.

One of the most traditional neighbourhoods of La Paz city is San Pedro, located on the central district where the Panopticon is located.

Geography

Because La Paz city is located in a narrow valley it has a special physical feature and an irregular topography.

The altitude varies between 4.000 meters above the sea level in the highest part of the city, 3.500 meters in the central part of the city and 3.300 meters in the lowest area.

When the city was founded by the Spanish conquerors, many rivers and streams ran from the upper parts of the city towards the central part and from then to the south part, but with the growing of the population and therefore of the city, most of these water currents have been canalized.

The central part of the city has good soil conditions; on the contrary the slopes of the city –specially the west side- have weak soils.

Climate

Can be said the city has two seasons: the spring-summer season between September and March with temperatures ranging from 6 to 22°C which is the rainy season, and the winter-autumn season from May to August when the weather is dry and cold with temperatures going from -4 to 18°C.

Architecture

The city and the Panopticon

La Paz city was founded in the 16th century by the Spanish colonizers in the west bank of the Choqueyapu River that flows from north to south of the valley. This was the Spanish city.

On the east bank the indigenous settlements remained concentrated in two villages or *ayllus*: one led by the *cacique* Quirquincho and the other by the *cacique* Otorongo. The two *ayllus* were divided by the Apumalla river, one of the many rivers that ran through the valley.

During the 18th centuries the structure of the Indian settlements changed and by the second half of the 18th three catholic parishes were settled: San Sebastian, San Pedro and Santa Barbara. San Sebastian in the ayllu once led by *cacique* Quirquincho and that and San Pedro once led by *cacique* Otorongo. The Spanish city was divided from Santa Barbara by the Mejahaira River. To connect this part of the valley various bridges were built.

During an indigenous rebellion, in 1781, the city was surrounded and besieged, during these events the San Pedro Church was put of fire by the Indians. As a way of defence, the inhabitants of La Paz built a wall surrounding the city; the parishes of San Sebastian, San Pedro y Santa Barbara remained outside of the city. In 1800 the San Pedro church was rebuilt.



Figure 7. Map of La Paz in 1781

In 1885 it was decided the new jail had to be built, the San Pedro Parish was chosen as the better place because it was on the outskirts of the city.

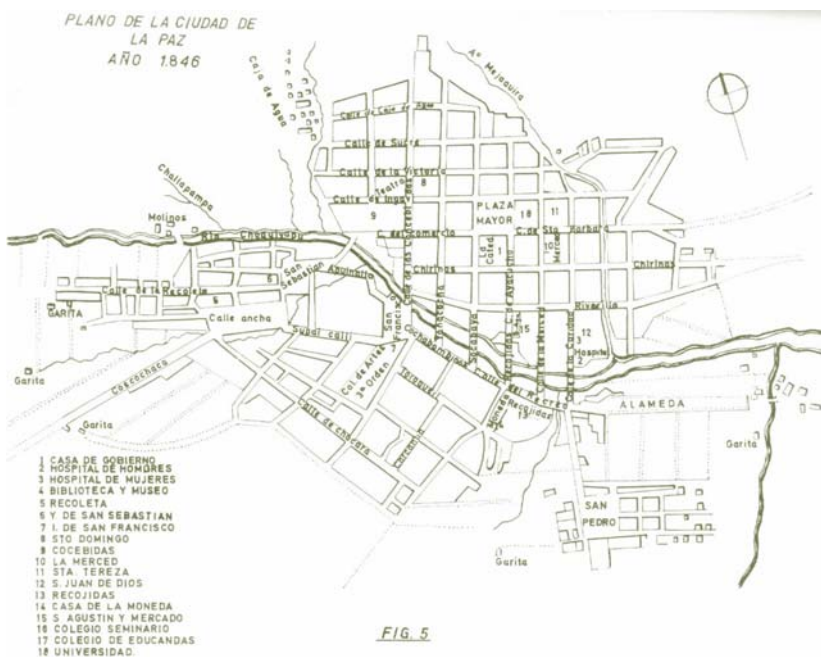


Figure 8. Map from 1846.

The Architect-Engineer Eduardo Idiaquez was appointed to design the jail. When he submitted the project he said his project “instead of a jail where inmates do not have possibility for being prepared to be reinstated to society -thus making difficult their reintegration- was a project of a Panopticon”. The project was designed to host 300 prisoners. In 1897 the Panopticon was finished.

The Panopticon occupied about one hectare and was located in front of the España square that still had a rural character and it was the place where peasants help an open market.



Figure 9. One of the oldest photo of the Panopticon in the España square

Main features of the Panopticon



In front of the entrance of the building the chappel is located. The Panopticon has three pavilions that were connected to a central point where de chappel and watching tower were located. Nowadays the watching tower has been destroyed.

One of the pavilions was meant for female prisoners and the other one for male prisoners. On the floor plan there were various bigger rooms for working, leisure and other collective activities.

Figure 10. Interior view of the chappel.

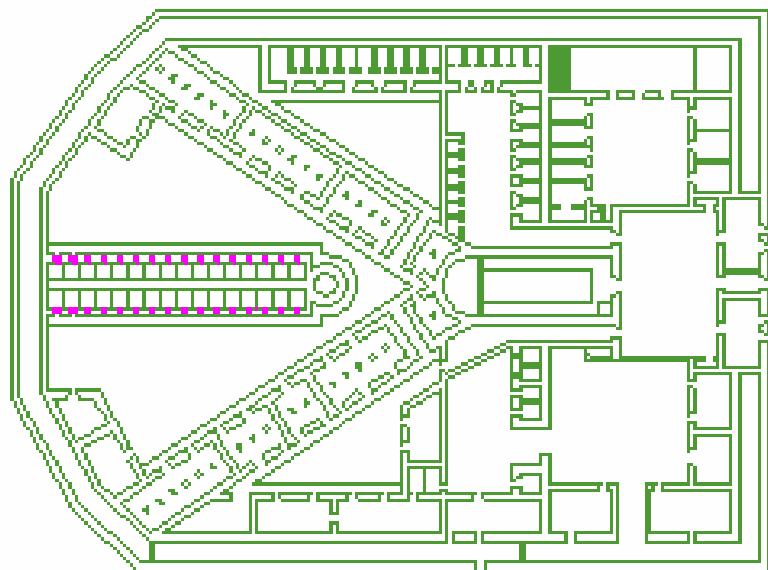


Figure 11. Floor plan

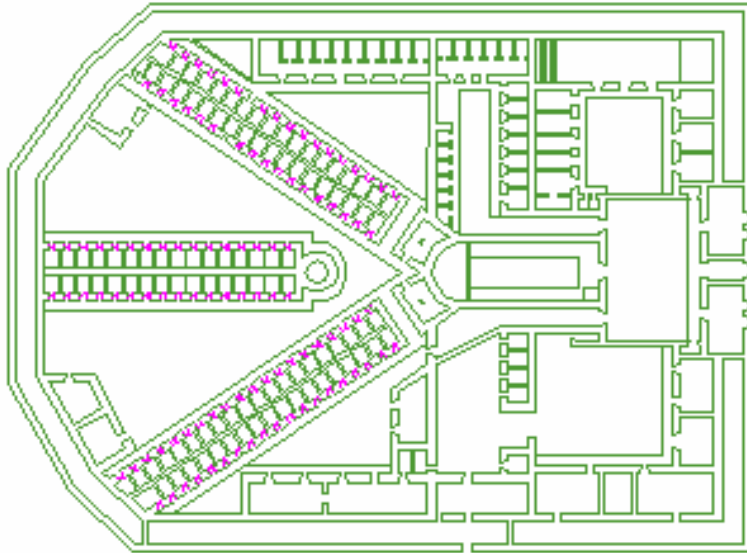


Figure 12. Upper floor

The upper floor of the pavilions had two rows of cells that could be reached by an external gallery.

A special feature of the San Pedro Panopticon is the two parallel and tick walls that surround the building. The space between the two walls was supposed to be filled with sand in order to achieve more security, but it was never accomplished because the load of the sand weight would make the walls collapse.

The materials used on the interior walls were adobe, the two surrounding wall were made in the lower parts of stone and in the upper part of mud. The roof was of ceramic tiles and the roof of the first floor and floor of the upper plan was made of brick on an structure of half point arches.



Figure 13. Interior view of the bigger rooms of the floor plan

Current situation

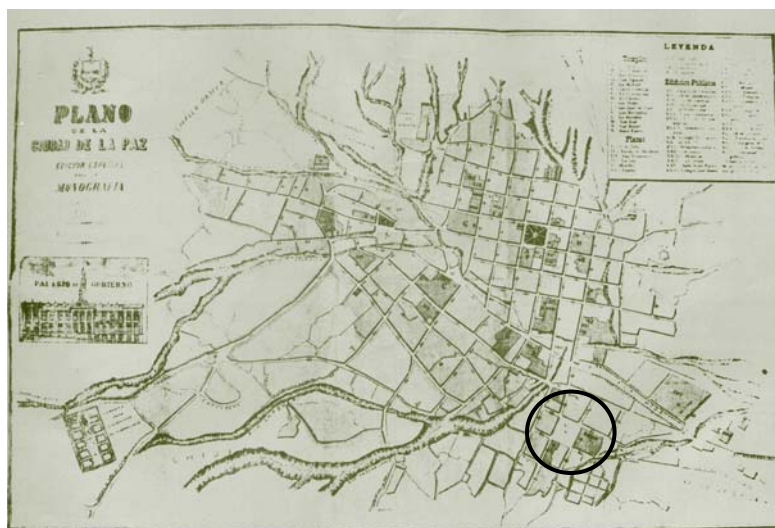


Figure 14. 1925 map of La Paz

Until the first half of the 20 century the city population grew very slowly and consequently the city also did.

In 1952 a revolution changed the social and political structure of the country. The peasants were freed from being servants and free labour of landlords and they got liberty to migrate from farms to cities. This phenomena and the installation of new industries made the city start growing on fast pace.

Over the time, the Panopticon has laid at the Central District of La Paz. In front of the Panopticon the España square -nowadays named Sucre square- has become one of the better know squares of La Paz. It is located two blocks from El Prado, the main avenue of the city.

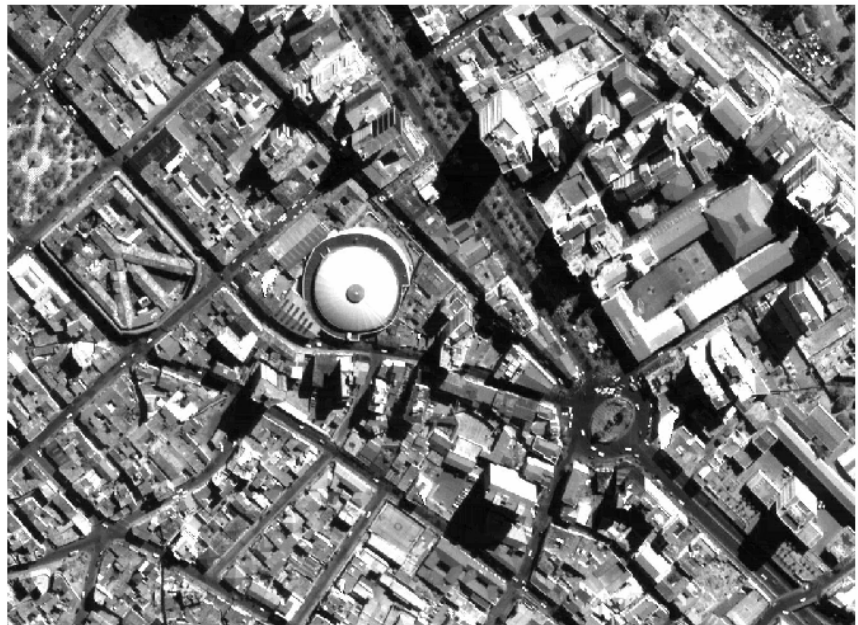


Figure 15. Aerial photography of the panopticon



Figure 16. The San Pedro church



Figure 17. Buildings in front of the Panopticon.

On this avenue or around it most of the high-rises are located. Also, close to the Panopticon the San Pedro Church is a located, it has been declared as heritage.

The Sucre square located in front of the Panopticon is surrounded by 19 century buildings that have been well maintained, constituting an unified urban tissue.

Around the Panopticon, besides the San Pedro Church there are important buildings such as a hotel, a school and even a bank. Behind the Panopticon, attached to the back wall small shops have settled there for more than 40 years.

Inside the building the number of prisoners has increased reaching more than 1300 inmates nowadays. To give room to this quantity of prisoners, the halls of the floor plan of the pavilions originally destined to collective activities have been subdivided and are used as cells; only some of the halls currently function as shops and restaurants.

The Panopticon has become a singular jail: due to the lack of space the inmates are the ones who should search their own rooms. Some of them have to build improvised cells where ever they find space: there are cells on the roofs, and even there are cells carven on the tick security walls.



Figure 18 Kiosks attached to the back



Figure 19. "Cells" on the roof

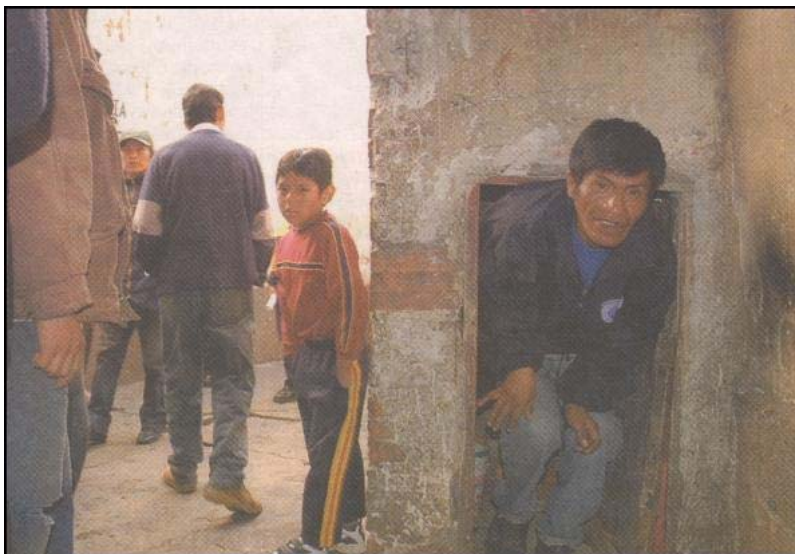


Fig. 20. The "house of don Damian"



Fig. 21 . Small "cell"
(0.65m x 1.2 m)

The watching tower has been destroyed in order to gain more space for cells. The tile roof has been changed for zinc sheets which are all loose because the prisoners have built cells even on the roof.

The lime mortar of the external walls has fall down long ago, and only the façade has been repaired and painted.

The towers of the external corners of the walls have been destroyed, and years later have been replaced by small rooms made of bricks.

The Panopticon has become a small city where it can be found all kind of services. Entire families live there. A serious problem is the presence of children living with their parents.

As it happens in other cities, the Panopticon is divided according to social and economic classes: the more “affluent” buy US\$ 2.000 to US\$ 4000 cells located in the less “insecure” and less crowded areas of the Panopticon, where prisoners even have tv cable service in their cells. The Panopticon had different zones or “neighbourhoods”.



Fig.22. Guanay area - “middle class” prisoners



Fig. 23. Chonchocorito area - “upper-class” prisoners



Fig. 24. Punishment area called “La Muralla”

The space between the two security walls has become the punishment and isolation area.



Fig. 25. View of the Panopticon from a close 12 floor building

VALUES

International culture heritage

As it was explained, the panopticon typology is related to and symbolizes a change of an epoch of the human kind history: the overcome of the Dark Age and the born of the Enlightenment Era.

Due to this reasons, various countries are putting efforts to preserve and maintain buildings constructed on the basis of this typology.

Some outstanding examples are included in the appendix 1.

National: documentary historic, scarcity

In Bolivia the San Pedro Panopticon is the unique example of the typology developed by Jeremy Bentham. This building follows accurately the philosophical principles of the Panopticon.

Besides, the Panopticon has hosted many political prisoners during different military dictatorship governments.

Cultural Values

Notwithstanding the negative image the Panopticon has for most of the people, this building has been part of the history of the city.

Memories of San Pedro neighbours are related to the Sucre square were the Panopticon is a main object.

Some old neighbours told about the activities of the barrio related to the Panopticon, they said many years ago they use to share time and activities with inmates.

Architectural value

Being an example of a typological building makes the building is valuable for architectural history *per se*.

In the Sucre Square, besides de Panopticon and the San Pedro church, there are other buildings from 19 century and from the beginning of the 20 century, that constitute a homogeneous urban area

It is part of the history of the city that shows the technology of certain time. There are considerable parts of the building that conserves the original materials, and are in fair conditions.

One of the most architectural valuable parts of the building is the Chapel.

Use value

Functional values: Despite of the current problems due to overcrowd and lack of cells and spaces, the building is still in use. Its size and shape gives the building different possibilities to new use.

Social value: the current function of the Panopticon makes people have a negative perception of the building.

Economic value: Because of its dimension and its location the building has enormous capabilities to host different functions. At first glance it would be said that to destroy the building will be costly.

The building can attract tourists and can be a way to generate income playing a vital role to emphasise the area as a tourist spot as there are other historic buildings around it.

Educational value: The building is an important research object of architecture and to understand the design and development of the city.

Problem

Over the time, the building has been stigmatized and its presence considered negative for the city.

The excessive number of prisoners, the current status of deterioration of the building increases the feeling of danger and insecurity linked to the building. Many people fear the possibility of runaways.

For people and institutions the building is closely related to its current function, thus the transference of the jail is directly related to the building destruction. This means a serious menace for the building, notwithstanding its value as heritage.

Despite according to Bolivian law any building older than 100 years is considered heritage, recently in October 2005, the municipality of La Paz and the Interior Ministry –in charge of the jails administration- have announced a new jail will be constructed and the old panopticon will be destroyed.



Fig. 27. Street seller marching on the main avenue asking the Panopticon should be preserved to held fairs there. Newspaper notice.

Fig. 26 Two newspaper articles, one announcing the transference of the jail to a new to be constructed, the other announcing that municipality considers a park should be constructed after the panopticon is destroyed.

On top of it, because the building is a jail, it becomes difficult to make surveys to know the current situation of the building.

Hypothesis

The first Article of the Venice Chart says “The meaning of a historical monument includes the isolated architectural creation as the urban or rural compound that is testimony of a particular civilization, of an important evolution or a historical happening. It is referred not only to grand creations but also to other humble pieces that over the time have acquired a cultural meaning”.

The Panopticon fulfils these considerations, but if people are not aware of the values of the building it will not be possible to preserve the panopticon of San Pedro.

Besides, people will see the Panopticon as a valuable building also if they see it offers a social/economical opportunity, for this it is important to develop an adequate definition of the new function for the panopticon which can make more feasible to preserve the panopticon

Method

To develop the work the main sources of information have been the review of newspapers, bibliography, interviews and visits to the Panopticon.

Besides it has been important to look at the internet similar type of works of preservation of Panopticon buildings at the international context.

The information gathered is considered only the start of a work that has to be based on direct information. But this only will be possible once the Panopticon stops housing a jail, or, when authorities understand the importance of the building and allow to make a serious and detailed survey.

One important task is to broke the relation ship Panopticon (as building) – jail, a usefull tool would be to develop a 3D model in a way people may understand and realize which are the possibilities of the building to host new activities.

Results

It has been important to know more about the Benthan´s Panopticon, to understand more the value of the building of the one in La Paz.

In Latin America there are only left few Panopticon buildings, according what have been found:

- In México the Palacio de Lecumberri that houses the General Archive of the Nation
- The old jail of Bogota, now a National Museum
- The Ibague Panopticon in Tolima, that is about to be transformed in a cultural and tourist facility: Museo Panóptico de Ibagué
- In Quito still a jail, and
- the Panopticon of La Paz

Maybe because heritage buildings are part of the people´s culture often these building are rehabilitated and converted in cultural facilities or buildings for leisure or tourism. It is what is happening with many Panopticon buildings. But, on one hand this kind of activities are hardly self sustainable, especially in the developing countries.

Also has been relevant to understand that people weights more the function of the Panopticon as a jail that as a building. During the interviews when they heard about the historical value of the building immediately they start thinking about other purposes for the building. If they see possibilities of economical development by preserving the building they might change their mind and start defending the Panopticon.

One of the most relevant findings of this work has been to realize that the most important aspect for the conservation of the Panopticon of La Paz will

be the definition about its new function. From this starting point will follow the definition of the type of architectural intervention.

Conclusion

The main hypothesis has been despite the Panopticon fulfils the requirements to be considered as heritage, for people the building is closely related to its function as jail, this fact makes them not to be aware of the cultural and historical values of the building.

Besides, people will see the panopticon valuable also if they see the building as an opportunity, for this it is important to develop an adequate definition of the new function for the Panopticon. If people sees the Panopticon as a building that will host another activities –different to jail- this will permit to “broke” the strong relationship Panopticon-jail, making more feasible to preserve the San Pedro panopticon.

Panopticon buildings in other countries have been preserved transforming them as museums -or related facilities-. I think this is because there is a logical tendency to see heritage as culture, then to use them for cultural relates activities. For the Panopticon of La Paz it is important to develop a deeper investigation in order to define an adequate function for it according to the need of people. It is understood that conservation is mainly related to development.

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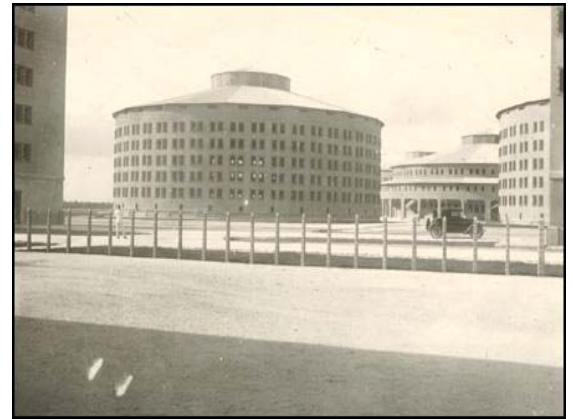
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Appendix 1



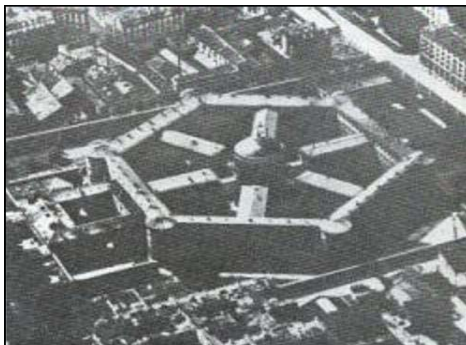
Penitenciaría nacional de Cuba, isla de Pinos 1932



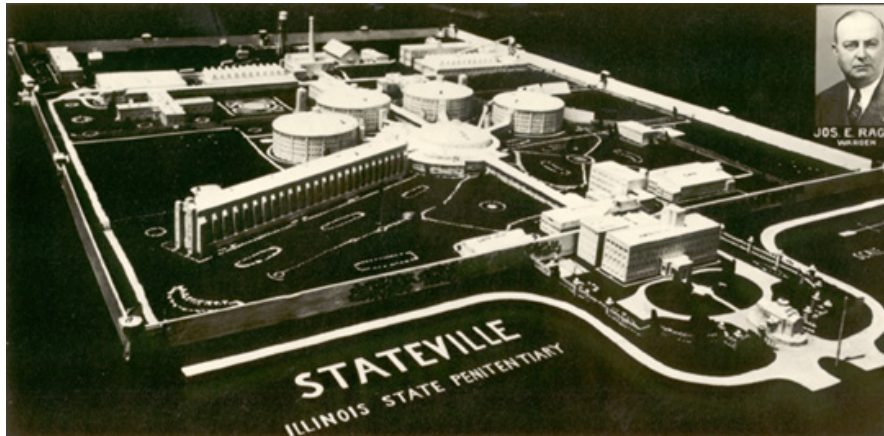
Panopticon in Arheim, Netherlands



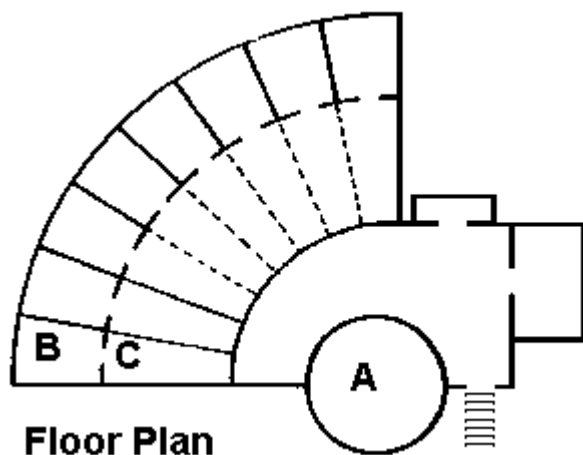
Panopticon in Breda, Netherlands



Prisión de la Petite Roquette.

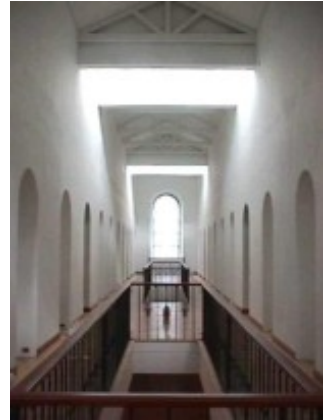
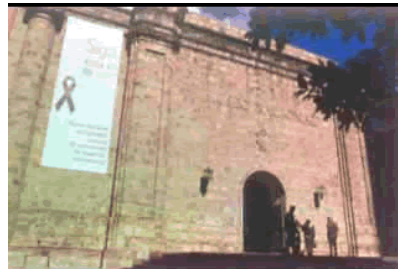


North America
Rahway Prison, New Jersey, USA.
Stateville Penitentiary, Illinois, USA.



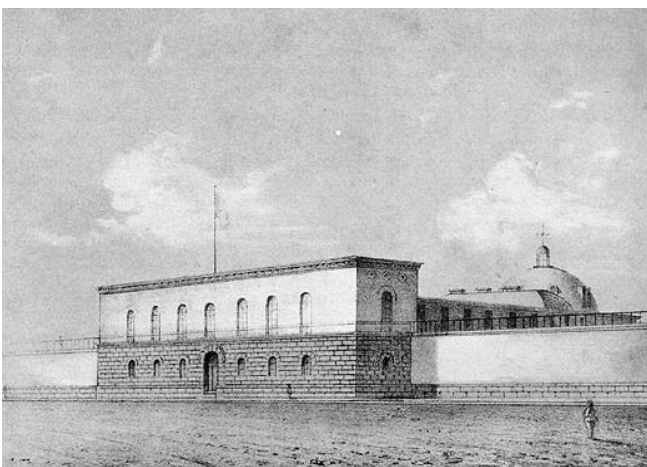
Floor Plan

The Old Provost now the Albany Museum, Grahamstown, Cape province, South Africa



Designed by Thomas Reed en 1850
Built from 1874 on.
Declared National heritage in 1975

***Old Panopticon of Bogota, Colombia.
Current Museo Nacional de Colombia***



**The Panopticon of Lima a
1850 - Mariano Paz Soldán
(demolished en 1960)**



**Centro Cívico Comercial de Lima, built of the
land of the Panopticon**

FIGURE REFERENCES

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Fig. 2 Own drawing
Fig. 3 From Discipline and Punishment, Foucault
Fig. 4 From
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Fig. 5 Id
Fig. 6 Id
Fig. 7 Map From the CD prepared by the Gobierno Municipal de La Paz on transformation of the city.
Fig. 8 Id.
Fig. 9 From “Sesquicentenario de La Paz” Edited by the Comité del Sesquicentenario
Fig. 10 Drawing by O. Aranda
Fig. 11,12 Drawing and reinterpreting the plan of the Panopticon over a plan without an know author, by Omar Aranda
Fig. 13 Drawing by O. Aranda
Fig. 14 Map From the CD prepared by the Gobierno Municipal de La Paz on transformation of the city.
Fig. 15 Id
Fig. 16-18 Own fotografies – February 2006
Fig. 19 Unknown author
Fig. 20,21 La Razon newspaper. June, 03, 2005
Fig. 22-24 Unknown author
Fig. 25 Own photography. February 2006
Fig. 26,27 La Razon newspaper. October 30, 2005