

# Contemporary Heritage: Public Space and Cultural Production in Veracruz, Mexico 2011

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## Abstract

The heritage of historic centres has been studied from different perspectives and in the Mexican context there has been a tendency to focus on the built environment. However, heritage extends beyond the material elements that surround us; it involves actions and processes through which people reaffirm part of their sense of life, belonging and identity. This study investigates the interrelationship between the cultural role of public spaces and the contemporary production of music and dance heritage. The thesis challenges the separation between tangible and intangible heritage often reflected in official policies and practices, to argue that heritage is that part of the past selected for contemporary purposes. It is a present-centred phenomenon that involves processes by which people use the past to create and re-create their identity.

Drawing on a qualitative methodology using a multi-method strategy, the study investigates the public spaces where the popular dance and music of *Danzon* and *Son Montuno* are performed in the historic centre of Veracruz. The research examines the material characteristics, the spatial uses and the social implications involved in the production of these manifestations of heritage. A key element in the analysis is the crucial role of actors. These include decision makers involved in physical changes, cultural promoters who are intermediaries in the uses of public spaces and the participants who produce the activities. Furthermore it discusses the way in which the regularity of these performances influences the perception of the public spaces and also the city.

A more complete understanding of the production of heritage uses in public spaces can help to explain how these locations are socially constructed and appropriated.

Furthermore these areas are cultural nodes where part of the local culture is produced, adding value to the historic centre of Veracruz. The findings can inform future strategies to include broader considerations of heritage in the historic centres of Mexico and other urban areas.