

The local community in the appreciation of rural heritage

Francisco Arias school in Lavalle

La comunidad local en la valoración del patrimonio rural. La escuela Francisco Arias en Lavalle

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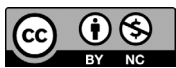
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Abstract

This paper addresses the study of the Francisco Arias de Lavalle school (Mendoza, Argentina) from the perspective of cultural heritage. Rural schools in Mendoza are a topic of special interest, both for the heritage dimension of these constructions and for the relevance of their impact on their context of insertion. Besides, the need for such a study is based upon a deficiency detected regarding the analysis and valuation of the built heritage in rural areas of Mendoza, therefore accentuating its current vulnerability. Thus, a case study is used to investigate the heritage dimension of an everyday building such as the school and its potential as a resource for local development and as an element of cohesion in rural areas. For this purpose, document analysis, direct observation and semi-structured interviews were used. The results obtained indicate the relevance of built heritage for a community, not only for its material values, but also as a repository of symbolic aspects, and the importance of considering the local population in the study, valuation and conservation of heritage.

Key words: Elementary school; cultural identity; collective memory; cultural heritage; rural development; rural education; supplementary education.

Resumen

El presente trabajo aborda el estudio de la escuela Francisco Arias de Lavalle (Mendoza, Argentina) desde la perspectiva del patrimonio cultural. Las escuelas rurales mendocinas se presentan como un tema de especial interés, tanto por la dimensión patrimonial de estas construcciones como por la relevancia de su impacto en su contexto de inserción. Se detecta una carencia respecto al estudio y la valoración del patrimonio edilicio en zonas rurales de Mendoza, lo que acentúa su actual vulnerabilidad. Es así como se indaga, a partir de un caso de estudio, en la dimensión patrimonial de un edificio de uso cotidiano como la escuela y su potencial como recurso para el desarrollo local y como elemento de cohesión en territorios rurales. Para ello, se recurrió al análisis de documentos, a la observación directa y a entrevistas semi-estructuradas. Los resultados obtenidos señalan la relevancia del patrimonio edificado para una comunidad, no solo por sus valores materiales, sino también, como depositario de aspectos simbólicos, y la importancia de considerar a la población local en el estudio, la valoración y la conservación del patrimonio.

Palabras clave: Escuela primaria; identidad cultural; memoria colectiva; patrimonio cultural; desarrollo rural; educación rural; educación complementaria;

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Introduction

This study is part of the research line developed by the Heritage History and Conservation team of the Institute of Human, Social and Environmental Sciences (INCIHUSA) of the Scientific and Technological Center of the province of Mendoza, Argentina. The work done depicts a continuity with the research projects by the group – dedicated to the identification, enhancement and activation of Mendoza’s cultural heritage – and it is connected to the postdoctoral researches of the authors, as financed by the National Scientific and Technical Research Council - Argentina (CONICET). Its aim is to advance in the study of Mendoza’s cultural heritage, and extend its value outside its Metropolitan Area, the main focus of the study so far.

Gutiérrez and Petrina (2011) have referred to the need to address the constructed heritage from a broader category, that of cultural heritage, and not only from historical recognition. Likewise, they point out the relevance of considering the environmental dimension of heritage in the Latin American context, in relation to the need to take advantage of constructions with the possibility of a useful life. In the last decades, cultural heritage has revealed itself as a wide and multidisciplinary field of knowledge, which is not only linked to material aspects, but also involves the symbolic aspects of a certain population in an articulated relationship.

It is worthwhile to mention also the specific condition of rural schools as local heritage, a category that is associated to specific characteristics that need to be taken into account. According to Prats, the scale factor introduces meaningful variations as to the conceptualization and management of local heritage. This heritage “is made up of all those objects, places and local manifestations that, in each particular case, preserve a metonymic relation with cultural externality” (2005, p. 23). Accordingly, the local heritage is interesting not only through the creation of a considerable flux of visitors but with the important meaning that it bears for its community as a memory forum whose activation allows, starting with the present’s worries and challenges, to reflect on the past in order to project the future.

Such considerations go hand in hand with the ones promoted by the United Nations Education-

al, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO, 2016), which understands the cultural heritage as a strategic resource for the creation of more inclusive, creative and sustainable cities. In addition, in the specific case of the rural heritage, it is pointed out the potential of cultural, material and non-material resources to improve the overall regional context and incentivize a balanced territorial development.

The specific issue discussed here, the rural school, is especially interesting both for the social and architectural values of these constructions and for the relevance of their impact within the context of insertion. Indeed, these buildings are bound to their surroundings and have become elements for a community's reference and cohesion.

In the Mendoza province, the origin of many rural schools goes back to the end of the XIX Century – coinciding with the extension of public education and with important migratory movements – when they started out in loaned or rented constructions intended for other uses; their specific buildings were constructed afterwards, as the result of a social demand. The different state initiatives for the construction of rural schools in Mendoza had, as their common objective, to modernize the rural areas: the school building would become a symbol of progress. Thusly, their designs involved in each case the ideas of contemporary vanguard related to the disciplines of architecture and pedagogy and, in addition, to the local conditions and the territory.

The Mendoza's public work in the 1930's has been acknowledged thanks to its historical and architectural values by different specialized studies (Raffa, 2009; Raffa and Cirvini, 2013; Cremaschi, 2015). Nonetheless, just some of these buildings have been recognized due to their heritage dimension: Recently, the Museum Cornelio Moyano – Playas Serranas health resort originally – and the Videla Correa and Urquiza schools, located within the urban areas in the cities of Mendoza and Maipú respectively, have been declared national historical monuments (Ministry of Justice and Human Rights, August 8th 2017).

Other schools built during the period by the same architects and under the same criteria have not been officially valued yet, among them, the school that is the subject of this study. It is interesting to point out that most of the buildings recognized in the region as cultural heritage are limited to Mendoza's metropolitan area, and the pending works are the identification and enhancement of the architectural heritage in the rural areas.

The lack of studies associated to the educational architectural heritage of Mendoza's rural areas induces to explore the issue. This work is part of a larger research dealing with rural schools built in the province during the first half of the XX Century. This time, the study is about the specific case of the Francisco Arias school; the selection was due to the announcement of its prompt demolition (Mendoza Government, 2017). As of the interviews to different local actors – residents, teachers and school directives –, and within a context of heritage lack of protection by provincial institutions, the important incidence is seen that the community has to preserve a property tied to its associated meaning and to its change throughout time.

The Francisco Arias school, object of this study, in La Pega district, belongs to the Lavalle department, in the Mendoza province. Even though this school started its activities in 1919, it worked in a loaned construction: an adobe building. It was in 1934 when the provincial government built a specific building, as part of an important public infrastructure plan that included constructing schools (Raffa, 2008; Cattaneo, 2011), and which served both urban and rural areas. The Arias school building has been preserved until now, and it serves its original use, even though it has undergone different renovations and extensions that have had to do with demographic changes in the place as well as with educational requirements.

Frequently, the sustained and habitual use of the school building overclouds its value. Furthermore, in this case the peripheral location is added, in relation to urban centers together with the lack of knowledge regarding its material and symbolic values by the political classes. Indeed, the lack of awareness of the heritage dimension of these works has entailed also deficiencies in their maintenance as well as inadequate interventions. This condition of vulnerability is frequent related to the heritage constructed in the XX Century; that is why different international organizations – such as UNESCO, ICOMOS and Docomomo – have warned about the need to act urgently in order to guarantee their preservation.

The starting hypothesis is that the school building is a relevant heritage asset that involves articulated and symbolic materials with a strong incidence in the local culture since it brings together broad generational layers, and it is the community's meeting point. Acknowledging the rural school values will contribute to reinforce its meaning both for state institutions, the ones responsible for their preservation and functioning, as for the



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local population who will see their bond to the local well-being and identity. The purpose of this work is to find out the school's heritage character and the identification of its associated values – historical and artistic ones – as well as its meaning for the community, with a view of acknowledging the main aspects that have influenced its preservation until now, and the factors that have foretold its demolition.

Cultural heritage as confluence between architecture and territory

Prats (2005) defines the following as the legitimation criteria for a heritage asset: nature, history and creative inspiration. In our case, an asset's symbolic efficacy is reinforced by the condensation of its attributes and meanings due to the combination of different types of values. Silvia Cirvini (2012) has specifically defined these values for the architectural heritage, where the historical value refers to its documentary nature as a cultural testimony of the past: its capacity to offer information on the practice of architecture and, in addition, on the society that produced it and inhabited it.

On the other hand, creative values are related to the specificity of the architectural discipline, and attend to artistic, constructive and spatial parameters that take place within certain territorial dynamics. To this must be added the symbolic value that population assigned to the building because in rural areas the schools go beyond merely academic activities and incorporate family and community activities that reinforce them as a reference and meeting point for the community.

Recent studies on heritage warn about the complexity of the notion of *cultural heritage*, whose analysis must transcend the academic studies of different disciplines – such as anthropology, architecture, art history, among others – and where their meaning for society becomes important as a legitimation criterion which, at the same time, is tightly bound to the heritage processes of declarations (Criado-Boado y Barreiro, 2013).

Accordingly, authors such as Valera-Pertegás (1996) and Benedetti (2011) consider that there are specific spaces or surroundings that have the capacity to endow themselves with meanings and valuations since they are the outcome of diverse social practices carried out in time, up to the point that they identify a social group with them. Thus, the interest lies on focusing on the community, on the social memory and on the associated symbolic values since, according to Pratts (2005, p. 28), the main way to transform the local heritage into an open and future instrument starts from absolutely prioritizing the human capital: persons ahead of stones.

On the other hand, the current concept of cultural heritage entails the valuation of an asset not as an isolated object but in relation to its natural and cultural context, as a fact ensembled into the territory (Lourés-Seoane, 2001; Llull-Peñal-

ba, 2005; Casado-Galván, 2009). This implies to consider the territory's natural characteristics regarding its interaction with the culture of the population inhabiting it (Utrera-Santander, 2016; Gómez-Alzate, 2010). Thus, a multi-scale focus is proposed, whereby architecture becomes an interpreter of what has taken place, reflecting the culture of each epoch together with the territory transformation in time (Flórez, 2004). This vision allows to consider heritage far beyond its monumentality, a leading aspect that took place during a first historical moment of its study and acknowledgement (de Mahieu et al., 2003).

In the study of the relation between heritage and its territory, there are some authors who aim to differentiate the urban heritage from the rural one. By means of such a classification they pretend to identify different social, economic, and environmental aspects affecting each one of them. Rural architectural heritage is analyzed as of its intimate relationship with the territory where it is located, since the object-context relation provides coherence to be correctly understood and valued (De la Puente Fernández, 2010; Quintana, 2008). More so, many authors analyze rural heritage from the concept of cultural landscape to point out its strong relation with the territory, as a social construct, with the architectural object (Consejo de Europa, 2000; Nogué, 2007).

There are extensive works where the rural cultural heritage is investigated in its direct relation to tourism as a development axis, and in which both negative and positive aspects that this activity could generate in a given area are analyzed. Indeed, several authors advocate for tourism as one of the main factors that affect the protection and conservation of cultural assets but which, later on, ends up dissociating the population from their own heritage (Conti y Cravero-Igarza, 2010; Pastor, 2007), while, at the same time, influencing the planning of certain sectors of the territory to the detriment of others. That is to say, it seeks to value heritage buildings surrounding mostly on areas defined as touristic ones and in relation to cultural routes, but *overlooking* other areas of territory that do not provide a tourist attraction, or else, that have heritage referents with scarce interest beyond the local community. To this must be added the undermined attention given to the role of local community has a key actor in the management and preservation, as well as the first receptor of the heritage (Luquez-Sánchez, 2014; Venturini, 2010).

Methodology

Due to the nature of the proposed objectives, research methods associated with both quantitative and qualitative methodology were combined: historical-narrative study (reconstruction of the historical context), quantitative data analysis (censuses and other data), analysis of visual material (plans and photographs), semi-structured inter-

views (different actors involved) and discourse analysis (symbolic aspects).

In a first phase, data collection, contextualization and characterization of the architectural values of the original work were undertaken. Then, the transformations of the school building over time were identified -linked to historical, political and social changes in its surroundings and community- until its current situation was defined in relation to its state of conservation and its appreciation by the different related actors: both by its community and by the institutions on which it depends. This allowed, on the one hand, to define the heritage value of the Arias school building and, in addition, to evaluate the incidence of the different related actors in its valuation and conservation.

During the development of the research, different documentary sources were consulted and analyzed, with the aim of obtaining data about the building's original project and its successive transformations, its history and link with the territory. Sources such as local newspapers, government and school memoirs, together with plans and photos (from the government, the school archive and those provided by neighbors) were used. This way, data were obtained that allowed to reconstruct the historical, political, and social context of the province and municipality where the school building was to be erected. At the same time, inquiries were made as to the conception of the architectural project, references and conditions that led their authors to define it, its disciplinary context and the specific characteristics and contributions of the building.

A metric and graphic survey of the current building was also made, in order to extract information linked to formal and constructive characteristics, as well as to identify its transformations with respect to the original state. The redrawing of plans is identified as a valuable technique in the study of architecture. In this case, it made it possible to recognize the main characteristics of the original work and to define its transformation over time. The different spaces were also quantified in terms of the surface and height of the building, in order to contrast with the historical and current environment, and to identify constructive materials, building pathologies and the changes in the use of the different spaces.

In addition to the above, semi-structured interviews were conducted (Valles, 2000), in order to gather information regarding the perceptions of local residents and users about the building and its surroundings. Through this method, information was obtained that cannot be directly observed, but that was necessary to understand the processes and evaluations around the school property. The selection of the informants was based on an intentional sampling considering the relevant actors of the educational institution: head-

master and monitors. Then, using the snowball method (Alloati, 2014), some local residents were contacted¹.

To undertake the interviews, categories of analysis were previously constructed, in relation to the theoretical framework, which were then used as guidelines. Thus, through observation and interviews, data were recorded regarding the importance of the building within the town, the activities it was centered on and the ones currently carried out outside the educational environment, the place of birth of the interviewees – in order to find out whether they are former students of the institution - and their perceptions regarding the building and its state of conservation, etc.

Results

Characterization of the original building in its natural and cultural context

Lavalle department is located northeast of the Mendoza province. The city centre, Villa Tulumaya, is 34 km from the provincial capital city. Its peripheral condition has had an effect in the department's social and economic development and it has determined the historical rural profile that characterizes it. The area has an arid climate, with less than 200 mm of rain annually, and with a wide daily and annual thermic amplitude. Lavalle department has 3% of its surface with access to irrigation², which belong to the province's northern oasis – and the other 97% of its surface corresponds to not irrigated dry lands (Grosso y Raffani, 2013). This has conditioned its demography and the productive activities historically registered in this site.

The Arias school is located in La Pega district, southeast of Lavalle, and inside the irrigated territory, as shown in Figure 1. This district is one of the principal access to the department, where the population concentrates around provincial route No. 24, which connects Mendoza's metropolitan area with the city centre of Lavalle. According to historical narratives, this area had soils with low water absorption, which meant that when it rained the road became impassable; carts were stuck in the mud and only after drainage was it possible to go ahead. This is where his name and his stop-over status on the road come from

1 It is important to point out that the interviews were done during the vacation period, and they coincided with the news of the possible demolition of the edifice. That is why it was difficult to interview players within the institution, and why work was done with those who labor during this recess.

2 Mendoza province is located in the South American arid diagonal of dry lands, where two sub regions coexist in relation to the use and appropriation of water. On the one hand, dry irrigated lands – oases – territories with a greater access to surface water and, therefore, to irrigation, and with the possibility of raising crops, and where the highest population density is found. On the other, dry and not irrigated lands, with low population density, scarce presence of surface water, and cattle activities for subsistence (Mendoza Government, 2016).

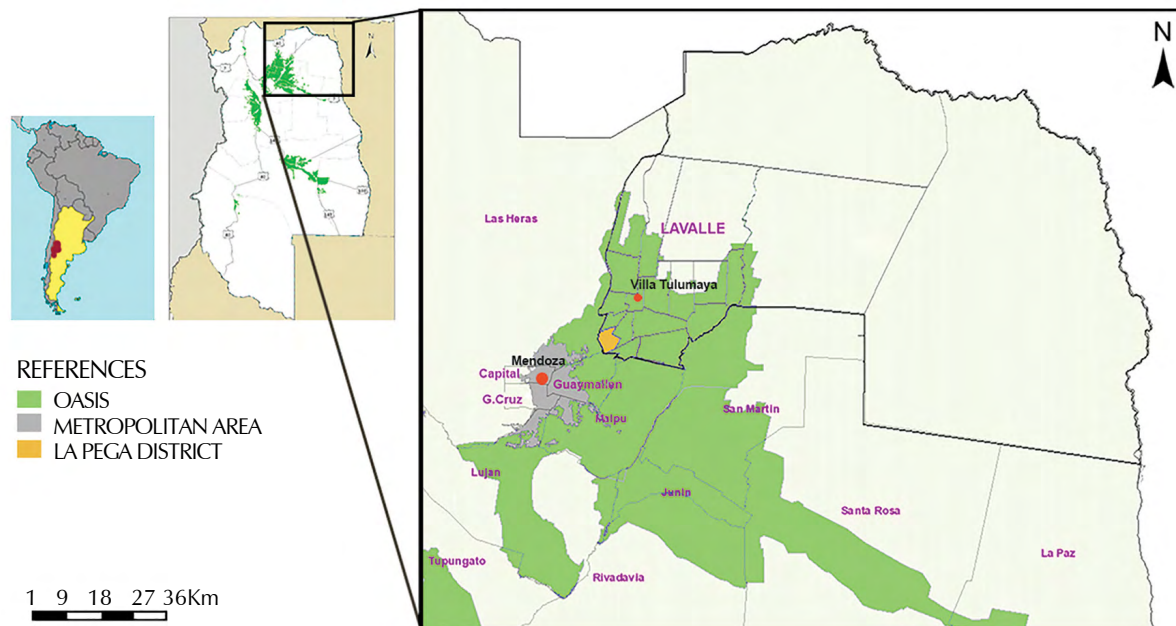


Figure 1. Location of Lavalle department and La Pega district, in the oasis north of Mendoza

Source: General Department of Irrigation (s.f.) and Berón et al. (amendments by the authors) (2013). CC BY

(Maza, 1990). La Pega has been traditionally a rural zone with disperse housing, where the population worked in cultivated fields or in industrial establishments in the area, mainly wineries.

According to written records kept in the place³, the Francisco Arias school was founded in 1919, under the direction of Carlos Garet. In its origins, it was in the property of Mr. Vitolicio Barbini and it was located in El Chilcal district, north of its present location. It was a house with three adjacent rooms; two of them served as classrooms for the first and second grade, and the headmaster lived in the other. It also had an ample verandah and an enormous yard with trees. According to the interview with the current school headmasters, this house was built with mug and clay: adobe and wattle and daub walls. The roofing was made of wood straps and a cane mesh, upon which a mud cover was set, with a slight slope.

In accordance with records written in the school history annals, in 1929 school activities were transferred to La Pega district, to a house owned by Mr. Carlos Laudecina; it was also made of mug and clay. Nonetheless, among neighbors of the area there was the wish to construct their own building and, by mediation from the headmistress at the time, Ms. Lucila Guevara, finally a one-hectare lot was found in a nearby area, which was donated by Mr. Antonio Clement in 1932. The construction of the school building took place in 1934, and it meant a meaning-

ful change for the local community and for the zone's educational activity.

As regards the data obtained from newspaper records in 1939, *La Quincena Social* (LQS) – an up-to-date magazine of the center-west zone of Argentina – referred to the economic characteristics of Lavalle department. This text emphasized the department's favorable conditions, which foresaw an outstanding future for the province, associated to its growing agricultural, fruit, melliferous and wine growing activity; but, at the same time, it pointed out the demand from its inhabitants for a greater attention by the public powers, in reference to their lack of infrastructure (hydric, sanitary and road communications) (LQS, 1939). Together with the above, Hirschegger (2010) explains that the Lavalle department showed a relative socio-economic backwardness even in the 1940's, when its population represented 2% of the total provincial one (Presidency of the Nation, 1947), without a strong city centre and with predominantly disperse population.

As to educational matters and according to the 1943 School Census, Lavalle showed a 26.1% illiteracy rate and a 92% school desertion rate, figures much higher than the ones of the province city capital, with a 9.6% illiteracy rate and a 73% school desertion rate (Hirschegger, 2010). These numbers were due to internal and external factors related to the provincial educational system.

Among the internal factors, the lack of school buildings and teachers as well as the bad conditions of the existing constructions and the population's low density coupled with their land dispersion. External factors were represented by child labor, poverty, the bad condition of roads and the great distances to be covered to reach educational establishments (Hirschegger, 2010).

In tune with the exposed factors, the Arias school historical annals refer, from their inception, to the problem of the students' lack of

³ Among the documents with historical value kept in the Francisco Arias school archives, it is worthwhile to highlight the school History annals, a source of special relevance for the research, and which is mentioned several times in the school's history reconstruction and its context. It consists of a record of the institution, begun as of its inauguration and the start of its educational activity in 1919; therein, the corresponding direction jots down information about the most relevant events taking place at the school during the year and, also, in its community. In addition, it has abundant photographic material. It is supposed to be a collection of notebooks with annual records, which has been growing with time and with as many authors as directors the institution has had.

attendance that had special incidence during the first months of the school year, which coincided with the time of higher wine production activity. Among the difficulties faced to attend were the bad conditions of the road, epidemic diseases, and “the one thousand hardships that come across living in the countryside.”

For the first school course, 64 students registered, and the median attendance was 33. In the next two decades, the number of registered students was variable: it fluctuated between 32 and 87 students, and it did not show any specific tendency. The year when the school was moved from El Chilcal district to La Pega District, in 1929, coincides with the one with the higher number of registered students: a total of 87, even with a median attendance of 34, so there was not an associated increase. In 1934, the year when the new building was inaugurated, 58 students were registered. Likewise, in the school history book there are references to the characteristics of the neighborhood: low-income families, cordial rapport with the teacher, and familiar environs.

As to the building infrastructure, referring to Lavalle at the time of the inauguration of Arias school, there is a text published in LQS, where the department’s main events are recorded through photographs, as well as its most modern constructions, among which its schools were highlighted, since half of the images referred to them (LQS, 1939). Among these photographs, was the Juan Lavalle school, located at the city centre and built at the end of 1920, as well as the rural schools Francisco Arias, from La Pega, and Presidente Derqui, from the Costa de Araujo district, both inaugurated in 1934. These images in LQS point out the importance educational buildings had for the department.

LQS highlighted in 1935 the provincial government’s work in relation to other provinces of the country regarding education, especially in the construction of school buildings:

It can be stated that, in the construction and educational order, a revolution has taken place in delayed systems and customs. Rural schools showed a very sad spectacle. No air, hygiene or amplitude, health was in danger. Just recently, a movement has started which is an honor in these renewal times when the student is taken into account, and he is protected by dignifying pupils and teachers within the comfort of the classrooms since, before, instead of rising the spirit, he felt depressed within the rudimentary countryside pigsties. (LQS, 1935, s.d.)

Likewise, the text alludes to the modernity of the new educational installations: “They are anti-seismic buildings, with all the conditions required by modern pedagogical science and by school architecture,” (LQS, 1935, s.d.).

Indeed, provincial governments carried out, in the 1932-1943 period, an important public infra-

structure construction plan that included building schools. These projects were developed by the Architecture Provincial Direction, in charge of architects Manuel Civit (1932-1938) and Arturo Civit (1939-1943), who executed this work as part of the construction of the public work aimed as a social function (Durá-Gúrpide, 2018).

The rationalist style character of Manuel and Arturo Civit’s work would be associated to the graduation trip they took to Europe in 1932, where they stayed for a year, during which time they were in contact with modern European architecture (Raffa, 2008). Thus, the new school centers projected by their architectural office were aligned with the international vanguard in school architecture, whereby the use of blocks of classrooms was predominant, as they were correctly positioned to take advantage of solar light with large windows and large recreation areas. Knowing the authors of the work and their history was a fundamental datum to understand why rationalist architecture was used in rural areas, and the message of progress meant to be transmitted through these constructions.

The Francisco Arias school was part of a construction plan of thirteen schools: five were urban and eight were rural. In the urban areas, specific projects for each case were drawn up whereas in the rural areas the option was taken to use prototype projects to optimize their execution. The construction of these schools would try not only to contribute to deal with the deficiencies in education in the poorest areas and which showed a higher number of illiterate persons and school desertion, but also in order to extend modernity to the rural environs. In this construction plan in the Lavalle department, in La Pega, El Vergel and Costa de Araujo districts, three rural schools were constructed which corresponded to the same project or prototype (LQS, 1935).

This prototype would be called “of third category”, and it was characterized by providing a single classroom for the educational activities. This prototype was the most used at the time since it implied the basic school unit from which the “second category” (3 classrooms) and “first category” (five classrooms) were derived, and to which a larger number of classrooms was added but preserving the same general characteristics.

This third-category schools had a classroom with a capacity for 80 students and annexed living quarters for the headmaster. The classroom had a main space of large dimensions (55m²) and other associated to complementary spaces: an additional adjacent classroom of smaller dimensions (20m²), with a deposit (6m²) and two lateral spaces conceived as cloakrooms (6m² each).

The classroom organization proposed responded to the needs of active pedagogy, and it was being promoted from the main debate forums on

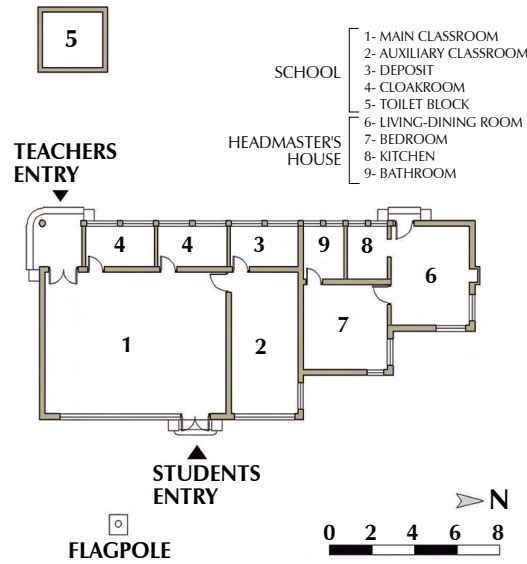
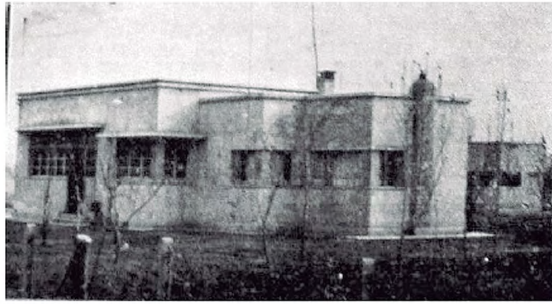


Figure 2. Photograph of the building at the time of its inauguration, and drawing of the school plant. Source: Photograph, LQS (1939) and the authors' own elaboration as of the original plan. CC BY

school architecture. The house for the teacher had a living-dining room, kitchen, bedroom and bathroom (a total of 43m²). This prototype involved also an independent block for the students' bathrooms and the water tank, a separation that had to do with sanitary reasons.

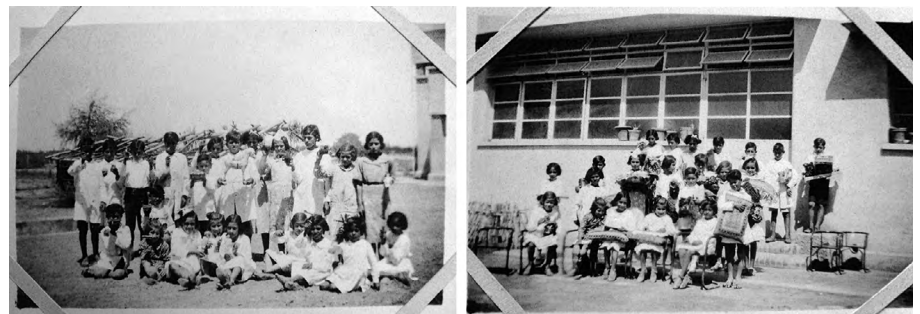
The main classroom had two access venues, the main one located to the east, and students entered it crossing the recreation area; and a secondary access located at the southeastern corner of the building, used by the teacher, as shown in Figure 2.

The Arias school was built with a reinforced concrete structure and brick walls, in order to guarantee its perdurability and resistance to earthquakes. For the roof timber beams and reed ceilings were used together with mud and corrugated zinc iron. The roof (with a 10% slant) was hidden behind the exterior finish of the walls, to achieve a resultant of pure volumes, which hid the roof materials and their slope, as it is seen also in Figure 2.

Also, there were important glass surfaces, which can be seen in Figure 3, made up of the adhesion of window modules of smaller size –some fixed, others movable– and protected from solar radiation by concrete eaves in the classrooms, and by metal blinds in the headmasters' house. An adequate illumination was sought as well as natural ventilation according to hygiene standards of the time and taking into account the lack of electricity, which, as stated in the documents of the school history annals, was not installed until 1960. For the inside, plaster ceilings suspended at different heights, according to the hierarchy and scale of each space, and the whole building had calcareous tiles on the floors. To sum up, the school construction was of high quality for its time and rural context, as seen in Figure 3.

Daniela Cattaneo has done research on the Argentinian school architecture of the 1930 decade in different provinces, and has highlighted the relevance of Mendoza's rural schools within the national context.

These prototypes of rural schools show a qualitative leap regarding the contemporary initiatives in the rest of the country. An inclusive intent is shown, where the use of local constructive materials and techniques does not deprive them



from having a design and an image according to the normalization to which they correspond. (2015, p. 106)

Figure 3. Photographs of the school in the 1940 decade. Source: Photographs from the Francisco Arias school history.

It is worthwhile to point out that Mendoza has had outstanding experiences regarding education within the national context. Indeed, it was the first province to implement free public education in 1958, and to sign the first promotion ladder for teachers, in 1918.

The introduction of the ideas of the New School and the Montessori system at the end of the 1920s can also be mentioned among the advanced pedagogical experiences in the region. (Fontana, 2001; Luquez-Sánchez, 2003). Besides, in various academic works the value of the school construction building has been highlighted as a reflection of the changes in architectural discipline, in pedagogical practices and from socio-cultural conditions (Cervini, 1994; Cattaneo, 2015; Durá-Gúrpide, 2017 y 2018).

Another aspect that is worthwhile mentioning about the Arias school is its relation to the territory. Photographs show the landscape into which the building was inserted, of accentuated rural character and without nearby constructions, and where the school building stands out as a milestone in the territory and opposed to the agrarian landscape. The architecture, with pure volumes of abstract character, contrasted with the zone's traditional edifications, mainly considering the height of the school building (5,25 m high), the use of wide glass surfaces, industrialized materials and the white color of its walls.

By contrast, the constructions of the area -houses, mainly – were small adobe volumes with a huge verandah placed preferably towards the north and windows of small dimensions, to reduce the exchange of temperatures with the exterior (Esteves, 2014). Thus, the new school building reaffirmed itself as a reference to its surroundings and as a symbol of progress, not only by means of the education it offered but also through its formal resolution.

Its location in the area was due mainly to its geographical orientation: the large windows facing the east in order to get the most illumination gradient possible in school hours. Besides, it was placed parallel to the nearby road to emphasize its representative character for La Pega community and facilitating the students' access to the building.

The school's transformations

The building and the grounds where the Francisco Arias School is located have undergone several transformations, in line with the dynamism of its surroundings. Demographic, socio-cultural and educational changes have been coupled with new needs that have implied the adaptation of the school infrastructure. Next, a temporary sequence is presented, where the most relevant changes are analyzed, according to data recorded in the school documents and which were contrasted in the interviews to local actors.

Since its inauguration, in 1934, up to the middle of the 1980's, the building did not suffer any modifications; that is, for almost 50 years it kept its function without changes to the original project. Then, at the beginning of the 1980's, the construction of a block with a classroom towards the north of the school property is recorded, placed independently and without any direct connection. In this new classroom the kindergarten activities would be centered, to separate them from older students. Also, at the end of the same decade, an expansion was executed, which consisted of the construction of a new classroom block of dimensions similar to the first one, but made up of three classrooms and

two bathrooms, which significantly increased the capacity of the educational center.

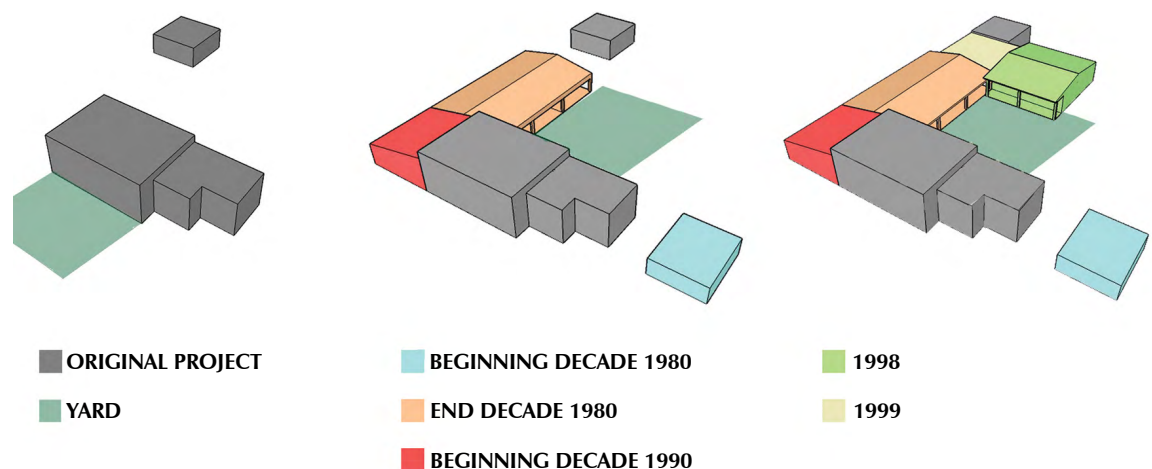
This new volume was placed independently towards the south of the school property, perpendicular to the school original building, as seen in Figure 4. The new classroom block did not show the same formal resolution as the original because its height, for example, was lower, and its roof was inclined with a great slant (approximately 25%), which is also shown in Figure 4.

This block had a verandah facing towards the north which, in addition to serving as solar protection, incorporated a covered space for games to the school. Besides, the initial block of bathrooms was remade as a kitchen, taking advantage of the existing sanitary installations, which allowed to improve the school service.

The construction of this new classroom block meant a relevant change in the use of the school buildings and their relation to the surroundings because the location of the blocks contributed to the definition of a new school yard: with a higher demarcation of its limits, where diverse activities were then carried out (school functions, celebrations and class recesses); more so, the new configuration took away some luster to the building front, which had meant the school's representative image up to then, in favor of the school yard. The relocation of the flagpole from the front to the new yard also contributed to this situation.

At the start of the 1990's a new classroom was built, which would connect the original building to the new classroom block to consolidate the disposition of the ground floor in "L" of the buildings, as can be appreciated in Figure 4. In 1987 the construction of another block of two classrooms was started, in a differentiated volume. Its edification was postponed, since it was inaugurated in 1998. As recorded in the history annual books of the school and in the interviews, the delay was due to difficulties trying to get financing. This new construction was located in front of the initial building and after the new expansion, as seen in Figure 4. This way, the group

Figure 4. Graph depicting the transformations of the educational center in time. Source: the author's own elaboration (2008) CC BY



of buildings would acquire a “U” organization, which contributed to the definition of the playground. The formal resolution for this new block was similar to the expansion made at the previous stage, with a roof with two slopes, and a verandah looking towards the main yard.

As shown in the photographs illustrating the school’s records, no significant new changes to the structure and premises of the original building were recorded until 1999. That is, up to that moment the school facilities got adapted to the new educational needs and to the increase in the number of students by means of the construction of new expansions that attached the new spaces and did not affect the characteristics of the original building.

It was in 1999 when a series of alterations were done to the original building, which had a significant effect on the characteristics of its interior spaces. In the school history annals of that year it is stated that “before the startled eyes of teachers, monitors, students and people from the community, remodeling of the school building was begun.” The main alterations were: divide the main classroom into two areas of the same size – one to be used as a classroom and the other to be turned into a kitchen – and the transformation of the additional classroom into an IT room with an independent access.

The headmaster’s house was adapted as the institution’s administrative area. Cloakroom and deposit spaces were significantly modified when they were transformed into an open verandah towards the yard, from where access was provided to the new spaces, and which gave continuity to the gallery of the building compound. These modifications also implied substantial changes to enter the site: the original eastern access was eliminated and a 1,50 m wide entrance corridor was built by the southern side of the main classroom. As for the rest of the group of buildings, the last classroom and kitchen blocks built were demolished in 2017. For 2018, the demolition of the existing group of school buildings is planned to make way for the construction of a completely new building.

As recorded in the school history annals, the building’s maintenance was associated, from its inauguration, to the permanent presence of a cooperating commission and of the mothers’ club, made up of the families of the children attending school. They were in charge of collecting funds for the various maintenance tasks such as painting, fixing cracks and purchasing materials during the school year periods. These two groups and the tasks they carried out appear in the school’s written documents up to the 1990 decade, when maintenance jobs were fully taken up by the provincial State, through its School’s General Direction.

According to photographic records, it can be seen that the original construction is in good con-

dition at the time the cooperating commission and the mothers’ club were present there. Indeed, in the record books no claims or descriptions of building pathologies have been found, which can be presently witnessed and evidence the lack of maintenance in the last years. In the surveys done at the beginning of 2018, the bad condition of the ceilings can be seen in several sectors of the building, due to rain-water filtrations and crumbling of plaster due to humidity.

The lack of maintenance worried the community, who filed several claims to the provincial government and the Schools’ General Direction. Although they got announcements that improvements would take place by the responsible institutions, this did not happen. Consequently, in 2014 parents organized themselves and blocked provincial route No. 24, in front of the building, as a complaint to get the wanted improvements in the school building structure.

Several interviewees refer to the government institution’s maintenance work as superficial interventions that did not solve existing problems; that is why the facilities were under a severe deterioration stage, and a costly monetary investment was needed to repair them. During the present work (beginning of 2018) pathological building problems already mentioned were seen; nonetheless, it is important to state that the school building was in good conditions, overall – which bears witness to the quality of the original construction -, and that it was under a condition to be recovered and become valuable again.

The voices of the local actors: perceptions and valuations

It has already been pointed out that there are spaces or buildings that bear meanings regarding the various social practices carried out inside them. In this sense, two events have been identified as to the school valuation by the community: on the one hand, population from La Pega and, on the other, population not related to La Pega but who have lived in the district for a few years, in nearby neighborhoods recently built.

In the interviews conducted, headmasters and monitors born in La Pega showed, overall, positive feelings regarding the building since they identified it as a referent in the zone and as part of the town’s history. To this must be added that their parents and grandparents had attended the school, which was also a plus in reference to the valuations associated to their family history. Nonetheless, it is worth pointing out that in the said interviews only some social actors themselves would acknowledge the value of the building. Others, in contrast, became conscious of the building’s value only during the interviews, when they were asked about the importance of the asset for them and its role in the community’s history.

Indeed, during visits to the place, every time more interviewees told about the importance of the building for the community, and they provided data regarding anecdotes and stories. In one of the visits to the building, headmasters commented that in the face of the imminent demolition and because of the interviews, they decided to put in the background of the diploma presented to that year's graduates a photograph of the original school building. To ask about La Pega's history and the building's value implied that local actors would show their feelings towards the asset as a referent, and to depict it as an element identifying the place.

In addition to the interviews, in the written and graphic records of the school history annals, various activities of different types were certified – family, school, homeland, etc. – within the school facilities. This is related to the fact that the school functioned as a “great family,” where the whole community would gather to celebrate diverse festivities. In this sense, the local population also did take part within the activities or celebrations since, for example, it is recorded in the school written documents that the mothers' club was in charge of getting “dough and chocolate” for the closing of the events, or that the neighbors would get trees and would plant them together with the students.

To this is added, as mentioned before, that the families ended up being the school continued support for almost 50 years. Indeed, these activities contributed to the consolidation of the school building as one of the town's referents, which would generate its appropriation; nonetheless, various local inhabitants referred to the current deplorable condition of the building due to the lack of maintenance, and the need to have a site that responds to the present requirements of the educational activity.

Negative valuations were also found, related to some inhabitants recently transferred to the district and who do not have any relation to La Pega's history. These local actors appear in the territory when the Provincial Housing Institute builds two neighborhoods around the school, in the year 2000. The awardees of these houses came from different places of the province and, therefore, do not have the same valuation than the one offered by those who were born and grew up around the school and in the town. These new actors came across a deteriorated building; and to it must be added their lack of references about the importance of the asset for the community's history.

In La Pega's case and according to the interviews done, there are only two buildings with a historical reference: The Francisco Arias school and the social club. Because of this, the preservation and valuation of the school site become crucial in the sense of acknowledging the impor-

tance it has within the context of the community's history, and as a reference and meeting point. In this sense, there is a coincidence with Gutiérrez and Petrina regarding heritage in the Latin American context in order to take advantage of the constructions with a useful life.

The building's conservation does not imply the irremediably continuation of its original use but rather, based on the acknowledgement of its material and intangible values and its role in the town's history, its purpose can be changed to adapt it to the school's present needs or to propose its being re-used by the community, independently from the school's purposes.

For the former, and taking advantage of the size of the original classroom, the building could be adapted as a library, a multiuse room, an IT center, or any other activity that demands ample space. Outside the school surroundings, it could be used as a center for community integration or a public library, activities that presently lack a physical space in the district. In any case, its valuation would allow to endow this space with a new meaning as a cultural location and a progress symbol of the community.

Nonetheless, as regards the different possibilities for its use or reutilization, there is a coincidence with Vázquez-Piombo (2016) when he states that some of the main problems of the constructed heritage lie in the lack of flexibility and creativity to tie new uses within and out of heritage buildings. In this sense, and directly related to the Arias school, one of the interviewees commented that for the government, “[...] the idea that the building functions as a community center or a public library – regardless of the school organization, but on the same property - is complicated at an institutional and organizational level.” (Interview to a teacher. Field work, 2018).

It is precisely this vision the one affecting the conservation and use of the building as a reference point for the whole community. In fact, its conservation and valuation have to do with La Pega's history, as it is one of the buildings with greater incidence in the town's development. In this lies the importance of considering heritage as a factor for local development, by taking advantage of the building to be used as part of the school or outside of it, but recovering its importance within the territory and according to its historical development.

Discussions and reflections

The approach to the study of an architectural property such as the Francisco Arias school, from the point of view of the cultural heritage, has allowed us to enrich the reading of the building and its meaning for the local community, while considering the building within its natural and cultural context.

The case study shows that the local community plays a key role in both the acknowledgement and the possible activation and management of heritage. Certainly, from the interviews carried out it was possible to verify the importance of the school building for the community as a meeting point and memory forum. In addition, the value of this space encompasses different generations and the presence of the population in the school to carry out different activities and celebrations implies to return to a known place, that belongs to them, a place that has been lived in and is charged with meanings.

The building's own characteristics with respect to its architectural values also have an impact on the valuation of its heritage. It is a modern building, for its time, where architecture responded in a clear manner to pedagogy's own needs in relation to the debates of the time regarding school buildings and with an architectural conception inherent to modernity.

According to the results of this work, three main aspects are related to the demolition of the school beyond its acknowledgement and protection. On the one hand, the lack of "monumentability" of the building, since the schools recently declared as cultural heritage due to their location in urban areas show greater visibility and larger dimensions, in spite of the fact that these bigger schools and the Arias school belong to the same time period, and their projects were drawn up by the same architects under the same postulates. Besides, when studying the building in relation to its surroundings, it is evident that the Arias school showed in its origins a monumental character in front of the strong rural landscape where it was located.

On the other hand, the lack of tourism in La Pega also has an impact which could enhance the recognition and conservation of the property. In this sense, the work provides a look into the rural areas which differs from those works centered on the articulation between tourism and heritage, and –especially– from those who plead for tourism as the main engine for development in rural areas. In this case, the recognition of heritage has to do with the strengthening within the community, the generation of meeting points and the enhancement of memory and identity. Although the consideration of the school as cultural heritage would not have a significant economic gain, it would have a significant social benefit.

The third factor is the scarce attention given to the local population as a key actor within the territory since, in the face of the imminent demolition of the building, no consultations have taken place to the community regarding these initiatives, which shows that decisions about the future of a heritage asset are made by few actors ignoring the concerned people's voices. It has been demon-

strated that the built heritage could act as a valid tool to manage the territory, which would serve, as UNESCO clearly explains (2016), for the creation of more inclusive, creative, and sustainable cities.

Conclusions

The historical and artistic values of the Arias school have been presented throughout this paper, which are enriched by considering its relationship with the territory over time. In addition to this, the local community has expressed its appreciation for the building as a result of the maintenance work that has been carried out for more than 50 years by neighbors and parents whose children attended the school. This situation was also influenced by the fact that the school condensed the family activities and the various festivities of the village, which led to the appropriation of the building by the community.

Therefore, when articulating material values – historical and creative – shown by the building, added to the symbolic values assigned to it by the local population, is how the Arias school is considered cultural heritage. Nonetheless, acknowledging these values and their importance within La Pega is a scarce fact by some inhabitants as well as by governmental entities and society as a whole. These latter aspects explain its lack of maintenance in recent decades and its upcoming demolition.

Based on the results presented, the school building is considered as a heritage of rural areas and a close link with the local community, since it is the members of the latter who assign value to its use, take ownership of the building and turn it into an identity reference within the framework of their daily life. Therefore, the acknowledgement of architectural heritage in rural areas is shown as a key tool to guide local development, demanding a governmental management committed to the values of the communities, which in many cases implies taking into account social aspects over economic ones.

The reasons that motivate the governmental actors to favor the demolition of the building rather than its conservation and enhancement, and the way in which decisions are made about these assets, which should be recognized as cultural heritage, are still unanswered. A path has begun to identify the school heritage associated with rural settlements. As stated in the introduction, the schools built in Lavalle during the 1930s are diverse, so this is the first step that will lead us to continue investigating the importance of this heritage for the communities of the rural agricultural areas of northeastern Mendoza.

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