

# The Special Protection Plan of the Historic Center of Santa Marta Aimed at the Integral Management of the Territory

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## Summary:

Since the entry into the force of “Special Protection Plan” (SPP), a territorial management tool, in the city of Santa Marta, the management for the historic center survival and revitalization contrasts with the reality of interventions in the central territory of this city in light of the management proposal drawn up by the SPP of 2005. This exploratory and documentary research uses qualitative data to examine the impact of public space works and of heritage buildings. Such research was developed based on the traceability of diagnostic processes, regulatory procedures, and verification with field visits to “the territory.” It contrasts the conclusive intervention proposal with the comprehensive management. An increase in the improvement of public space and enhancement of heritage buildings in the current context of the tourist, cultural and historical district is the result. There were improvements in the relationship of public space where more than 30,000 m<sup>2</sup> was generated between squares, parks, and pedestrian walkways, thus significantly increasing the indicator of square meters per dweller with the consequential benefits for the community owing to the promotion of socioeconomic synergies for local development and the survival of the heritage resources of the historic center.

**Keywords:** Historic Center, Management, Territory.

## I. Introduction

Efficient territorial management is determined to be a key aspect in light of the objectives of the Sustainable Development Agenda. City centers are the territories called to be main actors in urban planning processes based on the triad of its components: The symbolic component, a fundamental aspect in the collective memory transmitted through the generations of its inhabitants; the symbiotic component, with its associative power in which population members adapt and integrate to achieve common goals; and the polis component, an integrating and organizing urban structure element (Carrion, 2005). Therefore, this triad proposal made by Carrion produces social networks for a holistic analysis of this territory throughout its history. The special management and protection plans (PEMP for its acronym in Spanish) of historic centers assume an essential role, in this context, in the urban organization whose aim is to integrate the old structures into the city's growth and development logic and, additionally, to dynamize these structures with novel uses without adversely affecting identity and ancestral social networks. In this manner, we must not apply globalized schemes or sectorized interventions that affect the interpretation of urban landscape and systematically bring about irreversible changes in buildings. Such urban planning tools determine a path to organize the territory and guide public and private actions that match social and heritage functions that are essential for their survival. This is based on a review of the case of Santa Marta, a Colombian coastal city where inertia is being generated in several aspects as a result of the renovation of its historic center.

As proposed by the 2030 agenda, sustainable and resilient cities can only arrive at such a condition by providing value to the territory as a public asset to balance social demands and economic development based on these two factors. Successful urban plans depend on the integration and complementarity of tasks related to heritage, environmental and socio-cultural areas, to guarantee the production of long-term synergies that will last and integrate most of society's stakeholders to attain common objectives. Thus,

the concept of immovable heritage and its evolution, with additional and different aspects that contribute in benefiting urban development are important. A unique concept was proposed for the valuation of properties in a city independently, in the mid-twentieth century, based on their exceptional architectural features, their age or even the construction techniques. Several decades later, this property was also valued as part of a group or a development sector for a specific period of a city. This added value to the urban landscape context and configuration. The final decade of the 20th century brought about an articulation of immovable heritage with many expressions or social statements with an intangible cultural heritage, enriching the analysis of the assets in relation to their social meaning in core urban centers. During the 21st century, other elements were linked to a heritage perspective (Le Gargasson, Pirela, 2014, p.2), whose aim was to improve the infrastructure, considering the requirements of local and floating populations for their inclusion in the urban context and enhancement for current uses.

Thus, aligning with the evolution of immovable heritage valuation and conservation, Colombia has focused the urban planning process on policies that comprehensively integrate central sectors, heritage buildings, and social fabric. It started by creating and adopting planning instruments such as the National Plan for the Recovery of Historic Centers (PNRCH for its acronym in Spanish), which, as of 2003, presents guidelines to conserve and recover buildings and the urban cultural landscape, along with the dynamics of urban revitalization and sustainability, based on the objectives of the 2030 sustainable development agenda (Sanchez, Perilla, Lopez, Lagos, 2018). The main objective of PNRCH 2003 is the re-functionalization of existing infrastructures, without affecting the tangible and intangible heritage values of urban foundational centers, especially regarding domestic architecture (Sánchez, 2016, p.61). PNRCH's main management instrument is Decree 763 of 2009, known as PEMP. It establishes actions whose aim is to assign differential land intervention rules of the game. Because of its role in the cultural heritage conservation and protection of Colombia

and its departments, PEMP is visualized as a regulatory instrument with a higher hierarchy compared to the framework of the Land Use Plan (POT for its acronym in Spanish). PEMP includes the following functions, among others: the definition of influence zones for declaration purposes, conditions, and levels of intervention, plans for the dissemination and social appropriation of heritage assets, and conditions for coordination with additional urban plans within the context of the socio-cultural dynamics of the territory that they belong to.

## 2. Methodology

An analysis of the regulatory context of Colombia precedes the case study, along with a perusal of international trends to establish references for urban management. Firstly, the case study is analyzed from a qualitative value criteria, based on which it was declared as a national interest asset as related to historical, symbolic, and formal areas. The next research phase studies in a focused manner the traceability of diagnostic processes and regulatory procedures, which were the basis for the 2005 Special Management Plan and its subsequent entry into force. After the proposals of the Special Management Plan have been identified, the verification phase will start with field visits. They will be useful for identifying qualitative and quantitative aspects of the territory and contrasting them with the intervention proposal to create the conclusive integrated management aspects.

## 3. Results

Santa Marta was founded in 1525 by Rodrigo de Bastidas. It became the first city built in Colombia by the Spanish (Alarcón, J. C., Valdeblánquez, J. M., & Magdalena, 1963). It is recognized, along with Barranquilla and Cartagena, as one of the Caribbean pearls, based on its strategic coastal location and relevance for Colombian growth in the transition from the Republican era to the modern era. After going into the effect of Special Plan for the Protection (PEP for its Spanish acronym) Special Protection Plan (SPP) for the historic center of Santa Marta, intervention

projects for old buildings have been increasing based on the specific demand from European, North American, and Bogota investors who have increased the visibility of Santa Marta as the new cultural tourist destination on the Caribbean coast. Therefore, the intervention in heritage buildings is aimed at adapting boutique hotels of excellent quality along with gastronomic and entertainment offers in the city's colonial sector. Recently, the historic center streets have emerged from neglect, with the recovery and extolling of facades and the enhancement of public spaces for inhabitants to convert them into cultural scenarios. The historic center's reactivation strengthens the city's tourism potential and creates job offers for area dwellers, especially in the hotel and construction sectors of the economy.

By Resolution 1800, in 2005, the PEP of the historic center was defined by the Ministry of Culture as the district's essential urban component, which, under a comprehensive approach, has a fundamental and exceptional role in Santa Marta. Within this plan's framework, groups defined by their historical and urban landscape values have been reclaimed and permanent cultural circuits have been generated, in which comfortable pedestrian spaces are a priority. Complemented by many trees and furniture for urban areas such as benches, tables, and floors made of several materials and designs, along with fountains, lamps, streetlamps, and other ornamental elements, urban promenades were designed. Additionally, the plan strengthens the historic center as a zone where residential use is privileged with a combination of socioeconomic levels in healthy coexistence. This allows other uses that are compatible with residential use, whose aim is socioeconomic balance, taking into account the statement of properties as cultural interest assets. One use that has increased its prominence is lodging, especially for boutique hotels that were inserted into the dynamics generated via the panorama of historic centers and their relationship with cultural tourism and investment projections in heritage building restoration.

Therefore, Santa Marta is an important reference for the dynamics of cultural asset re-functionalization. Similarly, a new vision of private actors in terms of the valuation and

revitalization of cultural interest assets in urban productive environments is evident. The PEP of the Tourist, Cultural and Historic District has a background that dates back to 1959, when the historic center was declared a national monument by Law 163 of 1959, based on its historical values and for being the oldest trace of urban genesis detected at the national level, because of its 1525

foundation date. In 1991, the city was declared a tourist, cultural, and historical district by the 1991 Constitution, which granted direct jurisdiction for municipalities as related to the planning and administration of urban land and the Magna Carta, which is the basis for the law of territorial planning.



Figure 1. Santa Marta's historic center (Sanchez F., 2018).

Based on Agreement 027 dated August 18, 1993, the District Council adopted regulations for its historic center. In 1994, the National Council of National Monuments classified 856 properties as part of a conservation category by Resolution 031. Nineteen properties are considered national cultural properties. Thus, such resolution approved the regulation of the Santa Marta historic center. Thereafter, the Culture Law 397 of 1997 was enacted and the historic center was declared of national and cultural interest. In accordance with Law 387 of 1988, the District Council adopted the POT for Santa Marta, which draws up the management, occupation, and use of the land instruments.

In 2003, the PNRCH was presented, which, as mentioned, was the planning instrument that started specific actions to safeguard, prevent, and assert historic centers to contribute to the recovery, conservation, and sustainability of activities related to local culture. Thus, the Inter-American Development Bank supported the coordinated actions of the district administration of Santa Marta and Ministry of Culture to draw up the technical support document for the SPP (PEP), based on guidelines of the General Culture Law. The PEP identified seven homogeneous urban zones or sectors, where deterioration processes were revealed and the intervention proposals of Table 1 were generated.

Table 1. PEP diagnosis and proposal in Santa Marta (Florinda Sanchez, 2018).

Axes	Diagnosis	Actions postulated in the PEP
HOUSING	Traditional buildings are demolished and replaced. Incompatibility with residential activities and resulting housing displacement.	The historic center should promote residential use in a primordial manner for all social and economic levels. It should also be used in the tourism sector.

PATRIMONY	Inadequate interventions.	Architectural heritage preservation and valuing of historical heritage.
	Inadequate treatment of cultural interest assets.	Architectural projects should be incorporated into the spatial, urban, and economic development options of communities.
	Activities are incompatible with buildings claimed for conservation.	A description of the project's management conditions as well as intervention and recovery suggestions and how it will be cataloged must be included in each project.
PUBLIC SPACE	Intrusive uses associated with freight transportation services. Modification of the historic center's edge.	Public transportation route plans must allow access and mobility to entire sectors.
	Inadequate treatment of public spaces.	Design public spaces for integrating the historic center with the Bay of Santa Martha and draw up technical and environmental studies with aesthetic and sustainable qualities.
	Occupation of public spaces by street and other vendors.	Create policies to prevent public space from being used for street trading and encourage pedestrians to use public spaces in optimal ways.
	Traffic congestion at the historic center.	Establish the urban edges of the historic center with the corresponding areas of impact.
	Impairment of the urban landscape because of the existence of overhead power and telephone connections.	Any type of construction or element that alters the understanding of the heritage property or disturbs its viewing is forbidden.
INSTITUTIONAL ASPECTS	Inadequate decisions related to real estate.	When working with the Municipal Council of Culture, the Mayor's Office must develop policies to recognize cultural property or immovable heritage.

### 3.1. Implementation of PEP

In 2018, when a visit was held and several opinions were issued by government officials and private sector entities, there was enough material to amend the opinion set forth by the Ministry of Culture in 2015, as related to actions proposed for each of the strategic PEP 2005 axes.

### 3.2. Housing

The PEP proposed actions such as “consolidating the historic center as a primordially residential area, with diverse socioeconomic levels, a heterogeneity of uses such as residential and tourist activities” (PEP, 2005), to keep and enhance the architectural heritage value. In the

proposal's diagnostic plan, the percentage of residential buildings (highlighted in yellow) is lower or equal to the percentage of buildings used in other ways and it is mainly located at the edges of a protected zone, and it competes with the accelerated alterations of these buildings to be used in other ways, mainly hotels. Demolition, expansion, modification, and adaptation projects are shown in photographs and construction licenses issued recently, in the past years, by the District Planning Office.

Thus, it is evident that requesting construction licenses for change of use from housing to commercial use is a current trend, owing to the tourism boom and arrival of domestic and foreign investors. They use land to create tourism projects, particularly boutique hotels, in accordance with criteria already in place in Cartagena and other coastal communities.



Figure 3. Diagnostic plan of land use. The office of Santa Marta's Mayor, 2004. The yellow areas indicate properties with residential use.

According to the Diagnostic Plan (Fig. 3), in 2004, the historic center's central area was occupied by commercial and local government buildings, and housing was situated on the blocks near the borders of Avenida Ferrocarril and Avenida Santa Rita. Currently, several buildings in these areas are being altered and adapted, with the rigor required by city regulations, according to the license approved for such purposes. Others change facades with inadequate interventions that generate premises for various commercial activities. According to Jorge Laborde, an architect and restorer (J. Laborde, personal communication, June 11, 2014), after the going into effect of the PEP, multiple job opportunities have opened up to restore old buildings. They are

increasing because of specific demand from European, North American, and Bogota investors that increased the visibility of Santa Marta as the new Caribbean cultural tourism destination on its coast. In financial terms, the increase in this construction activity has generated increases of land prices of more than 150%, as of the creation of PEP, especially of properties next to rehabilitated public spaces. Thus, private investment generates 150 direct jobs and 600 indirect jobs per month for tourism and trade activities in boutique hotels, bars, and restaurants (Vives, 2013, p.42). According to Márquez & Cuétara (2020, p.3), in this area, in the international context, the tourism sector guarantees long-term viable economic activities,

whose aim is to report well-distributed socioeconomic benefits for all agents involved in such a process, including the host community.

### **3.3. Heritage**

The architectural heritage enhancement is shown in 856 properties in the conservation category, 19 of such properties are national cultural assets. Some such properties have been renovated with restoration and recycling processes for new uses or for contextual conservation. Therefore, they kept the facades and preserved a homogeneous understanding of the urban profile, thus recognizing the symbolic value of the traditional historic center, especially along the 12<sup>th</sup>, 13<sup>th</sup>, 14<sup>th</sup>, and 15<sup>th</sup> streets and the roads that have become pedestrian areas. Likewise, the culture committee revises construction licenses for buildings in the historic center. It reviews the requests for intervention and modification of buildings and draws up the minutes for the granting of the corresponding construction license. At the bottom of the page, it states:

... since it is in the historic center, it was referred to the Ministry of Culture, to the Heritage Office. The technical file was approved, and the project was sent to the Planning Secretariat to be reviewed by the Monuments Committee, which in Act number 03 ... as it was considered viable, and its architectural plans were approved of in Act No ... (Resolution 482, 2017)

Therefore, the Santa Marta Planning Office states that several licenses are denied due to noncompliance with heritage regulations. Each year, around 20 licenses for building interventions in the historic center are approved. Several other cases are submitted for execution without a

construction license, as discussed in El Heraldo (May 1, 2017):

On a single inspection day for the Santa Marta Historic Center, the District Mayor's Office closed five constructions sites without the needed licenses because they did not comply with regulations. The action was brought about by the Planning Secretariat, which, through its head, Francisco García Rentarías, reported that four projects did not have permits that were issued by the curator's offices, and one, although it had its papers in order, was being built on the outside of the allowed limits. A total of eight buildings in the city were visited to control and monitor the compliance with urban planning regulations.

Based on the evidence discovered, appropriate management conditions were collected from the district management for compliance with regulations related to the protection of immovable heritage, in support of the historic center vindication, so that various sectors of the local economy are energized and synergies between public and private actors on the integral management of such territory are strengthened.

### **3.4. Urban context and public spaces**

The aim of POT is to consolidate Santa Marta as a port and tourist city. To achieve this, the improvement of indexes of public space per inhabitant is sought. They are more necessary in the historic center consolidated area, considering that the urban density in such capital greatly exceeds the density in the total district area, since the district area of 2,393 km<sup>2</sup> is where 499,000 inhabitants live, and the municipal capital has an area of 166 km<sup>2</sup> with 455,000 inhabitants (Table 3).



Figure 4. Map of the district area compared to the municipal capital (Florinda Sanchez, 2019).

Table 2. Calculation of population density in Santa Marta city (Lagos, Sanchez, Palacios, 2019).

Target	Required data	Definitions	Sources	Calculation	Unit of measure
To obtain the population density in the municipal capital of Santa Marta city.	Area of the municipal capital. -Number of inhabitants in the municipal capital. - Area of Santa Marta District- Number of inhabitants in the district area.	Identify the municipal capital: the geographic delimitation of the territory as defined by the National Administrative Department of Statistics, DANE.	Projected population increase between 2018–2020 established by DANE. Cartographic plans of the city where the limits of urban planning are identified.	$D = \#h / A$  D: Population density  #h: Number of inhabitants  A = area	Inhabitants/km <sup>2</sup> .

Table 3. Comparative population density (Florinda Sanchez, 2018).

Zone	Population	Area (km <sup>2</sup> )	Area (ha)	Density (people/km <sup>2</sup> )	Density (people/ha)
	(inhabitants)				
District area	499391	2393	23,93	208	2.08

Municipal county capital	455299	166	1,66	2742	27.42
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Density is shown as inhabitants/km<sup>2</sup> and inhabitants/ha. These are two measurement units that facilitate comparison with other references.

They are determined by means of a calculation.

$$\text{Population density (municipal capital)} = \text{Number of inhabitants (\#)} / \text{urban area (km}^2\text{)}$$

This unit of measurement is the inhabitants/ha, whose result is

$$27.42 = 2742/1 \text{ km}^2$$

Based on the comparative data on population and area (Table 3), the density in the capital of the municipality is 2742 inhabitants/km<sup>2</sup> (27.42 inhabitants/ha). In the remainder of the district area, it is only 208 inhabitants/km<sup>2</sup> (2.08 inhabitants/ha). This shows there is a need to focus actions and efforts for the improvement of the public space indexes in the capital, especially in the historic center's area of influence. It is noteworthy that this is a low density when compared to the average of other cities such as New York, Chicago, Mexico, Tokyo, London, and Quito. In such cities, the average is 8,259 inhabitants/km<sup>2</sup>, according to data established by

Celi Ortega (2018) in a global public transport study.

Therefore, the (PEP) SPP for the historic center was coordinated with the general city proposal by means of the consolidation of a network of public space consisting of parks, small plazas, and pedestrian walkways. In the document of diagnosis, technical studies were drawn up to integrate the historic center with the bay, and to consolidate the public space network, by providing high environmental and landscape values, as described in the support plans of the PEP proposal. At the end of 2009, the works were completed producing a considerable increase in land value and a social development positive impact based on the significant increase in employment sources (Martin & Escobar, 2011, p.154).

Location	Area (m <sup>2</sup> )	Progress status
Parque Bolívar	8,150	Executed
Parque Venezuela	525	Executed
Plazuela San Francisco	875	Executed
Plazoleta de la Catedral	3,125	Executed
Parque Santander (de los Novios)	3,040	Executed
Parque San Miguel	7,500	Executed
<b>Execution percentages</b>		

Total area	23,215	100%
Executed area	23,215	100%

Table 5. Public space areas that were rehabilitated and correspond to squares and parks (Florinda Sanchez, 2019).



Figure 4. Parque de los Novios, recovered as part of the consolidation of public spaces. Sanchez F. 2018.

As of 2019, there is evidence of 100% compliance in works built for the rehabilitation and recovery of squares and parks, as shown in Table 5, for the strengthening of the historic center with the elements of representative urban space that are recognized by the community and are a part of the urban scene due to their scenic and historical values. The urban complexes of Parque Bolivar, Parque Venezuela, Plazuela San Francisco, Plazoleta de la Catedral, Parque de los Novios, and Parque San Miguel have over 23,000 m<sup>2</sup> and have

recovered their symbolic values for residents and visitors. It has thus produced novel synergies based on global dynamics, aiming at the indicators of the World Health Organization related to the square meters of public space per inhabitant, as related to the need to increase it in urban areas. This public area has furniture elements such as benches, planters, sculptures, fountains, and night lights that improve the space and bring about a comfortable environment that will be easily remembered.

Table 6. Areas of public space with pedestrian paths (Florinda Sanchez, 2019).

Location	Area (m <sup>2</sup> ) Pedestrian Paths
Carrera 1 <sup>a</sup>	1,956
Carrera 3 <sup>a</sup>	1,890
Carrera 4 <sup>a</sup>	212
Calle 13	2,904
Calle 19	3,132

<b>Total Area</b>	<b>10,094</b>
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Additionally, the 2005 PEP document diagnosed the requirement to create pedestrian paths as a strategy for the integration and appropriation of the historic center. Its aim was to promote a sense of proximity and reduce the population's dependence on vehicle mobility, along with the network of parks and small squares as already described. In response to this need, work was done to achieve this goal, and as of 2019, the historic

center has more than ten thousand square meters of pedestrian paths (Table 6). They crisscross the historic center from the Bay to Avenida del Ferrocarril in an east-west direction, and from Avenida Santa Rita to the northern boundary, producing a functional network that allows continuous, comfortable, and safe pedestrian transportation.



Figure 5. Calle 19, with pedestrian paths from Avenida del Ferrocarril to Parque de los Novios (Sanchez F., 2018).

#### 4. Conclusions

From the viewpoint of sustainability in the context of global dynamics, Colombia has the regulatory framework required to integrate historic centers into territorial planning. These respond to the recognition of heritage sectors as part of local development, and the inclusion of these sectors in the uses that are demanded by the city densification trend. In this sense, the declaration of the historic center of Santa Marta as a national monument became an important precedent for its safeguarding, enhancement, and re-signification in the national context. This is the basis for the PEP, where guidelines were generated focused on the formal inclusion of the sector in the planning processes, including in its components, in addition to conservation, the heritage asset management of cultural interest and their comprehensive

protection linked to the productive processes of the city.

After the PEP evaluation phase has been revised and analyzed, it is evident that there is a link to the municipal POT, applying the use of the hierarchy of PEMP over POT, thus interlacing the common objectives of the two instruments and responding to the urban dynamics of the 21st century focused on the so-called smart cities, where the development of a territory is valued from a more comprehensive viewpoint from the interrelationships of local actors and the re-signification and enhancement of the central sectors of such a city, taking this relationship beyond the obvious implementation of tourism plans in this city, which in its municipal seat reaches a density of 27.42 inhabitants/ha.

Regarding the implementation phase, quantitative and qualitative improvements are evident, especially regarding public spaces, where more than 30,000 m<sup>2</sup> were assigned to squares, parks, and pedestrian paths. This significantly improved the square meters per inhabitant indicator with the consequential community benefits, promoting socioeconomic synergies in support of local development and the survival of the historic center heritage resource.

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