

El Adon Bey
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Prof. Nduom

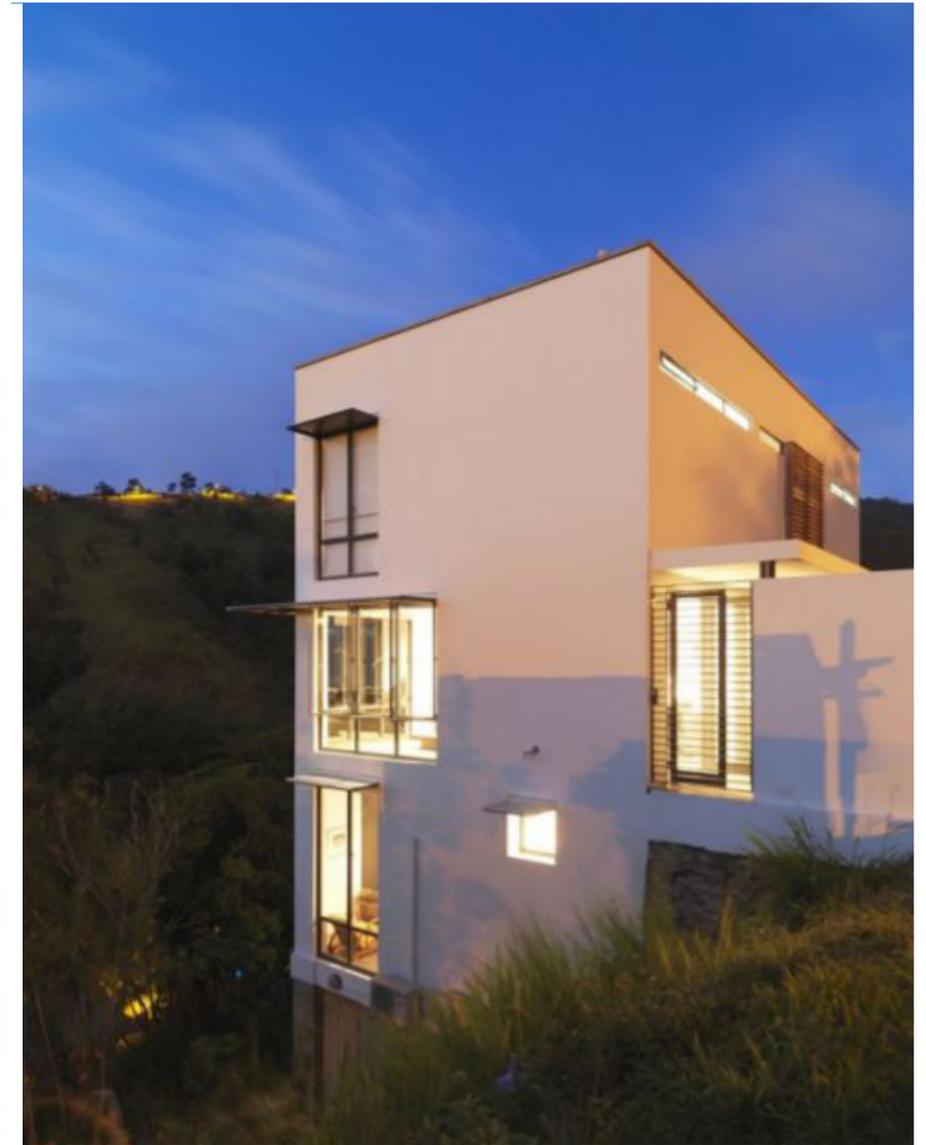




Figure 1: St Kitts Vernacular Architecture

Historic Preservation of Caribbean Architecture and Tourism

The visual culture spawned by the tourism industry over time has had a large impact on countries' landscapes and culture. As they further evolve into a relationship with the tourism industry, as it seems to be a permanent entity among the Caribbean islands, every island must consider the effects of the tourism industry on their local economies, culture, and architecture. Thus far, the tourism industry has had negative effects on the islands in terms of local community benefit and architectural preservation. Some countries have started to develop systems that mitigate the effects of tourist culture on the architectural landscape. This has called for an evaluation of the architecture in tourist spaces and a motion to preserve the identity of the countries' individual architectural aspects. Historic preservation has been tied to the impact of the tourism industry because of the movement from the framework of traditional tourism to quality tourism, which tends to place focus on historic sites unique to each country. However, the impact of tourist media and visual culture on architecture is so prevalent that it begins to blur the lines of what aspects of each country's architecture is actually an authentic articulation of the country's style. The dynamic and challenging history of each country also contributes to this complicated issue. It is hard to say what exactly is authentic among each country since there have been many influences and changes of power over time.

First, we'll take a look at the visual aspect of the tourism industry to see how it affects the architecture in past and present. The formation of the visual culture of tourism stems back to the early era of colonization, where the landscape began to change due to the new agriculture and trade between Europe. The African slave trade also contributed to the change of the landscape since plantations and the production of certain crops required the removal of the natural setting and the insertion of waterfront docking. These changes impacted not only the visual legibility of the landscape but also the ecosystem, which are effects that ripple through the present day. Many plant species that are iconic to each unique country are not native to said country, since

they were imported and mass cultivated for economic profits. Infrastructure that was used for economic trade in the past, especially waterfront ports are now used for the tourism industry, one of the largest contributors to Caribbean economies. It was around this early time that the visual identity of the Caribbean began to be established, since settlers wanted to encourage people to invest and come to the new colonies. The new world held a stigma involving disease and impoverishment, which caused hesitation against departure from the established society to venture to the New world. So, colonizers set to beautify the land by adding many foreign crops, additional changes to the landscape, and the translation of European architecture to the tropical setting to give a sense of familiarity. These were all portrayed through paintings and postcards, which were distributed back in Europe and other places. We can see by studying these visual medias that the intent was to amplify certain traits of the land and architecture, romanticizing them, all while suppressing cruel slavery conditions and the "untamed" landscape of the islands.

Since the intention in early visual media was to amplify aspects of the land that appealed to potential travelers, we can see how that agenda translates to the tourist culture as it was introduced in mass during the late half of the 20th century. Tourist media began to solidify the principles of early promotional media used in the colonization era. From the romanticization of the land and culture and the picturesqueness of the tropical scenes that are portrayed, we see a pastiche begin to form, displaying a generic typology used for and to promote tourist resorts. The architectural language of many resorts follow a international modernist style, which was extensively replicated because of the massive influx of tourism in the 20th century as corporations introduced cheap flights, package deals and cruises in the 1960s and 1970s. Mass tourism in the late 20th Century accelerated the use of visual media and solidified the presence of the tourism industry in the Caribbean. Tourism at this time was marketed to families looking for a perfect getaway vacation, and so this is what is often portrayed in tourist media, alongside the pastiche landscape that's been "fine-tuned" in a sense for tourist consumption. These advertisements of this time tried to encapsulate the romanticized ideals of the Caribbean. As tourists interact prominently with the Caribbean landscape due to the widespread growth of



Figure 2: Habaguanex brochure advertising the historic hotels operated by the Office of the Historian

tourism, the impact on the architectural and cultural relationships between tourists and local communities is substantial.

Recently there has been more consideration to the tourist agenda and the impact of the industry on various countries. As said before the tourism industry tends to have a negative effect environmentally and geographically on their surroundings, taking up large amounts of coastal space which residents usually don't have access to. Also, local communities don't benefit much economically because tourist resorts are privately owned, which means profits are usually being realized overseas. Governments receive payment for the usage of land, but there are many variables that contribute to the funds not being able to be used to improve the condition of the country, since they rely so heavily on the industry. Considerations include recovery from natural disasters, corrupt governments or sudden changes in power. An alternative to the traditional approach of tourism is to make use of "quality tourism", which places more of a focus on the cultural experience and historic sites of a country. This can serve as a good alternative to mass tourism because there is an opportunity for local communities to benefit from the economic activity and contribute to it positively as well. It also counteracts the fabricated visual idea of the Caribbean tourist imagery discussed before. There is also an opportunity for countries with less of a common presence to celebrate their individual architecture to attract visitors. Many countries feature a rich architectural legacy, consisting of old colonial churches, houses and fortifications built by the Spanish, English, and Dutch colonizers. The character of these historic sites are largely influenced by Georgian, Baroque and

Neoclassical styles and these span all types of building typologies. Each individual country however has their own unique architectural features and techniques, and these are what is looked to be celebrated in the agenda of quality tourism.

Quality tourism aims to preserve and express historic elements of a country and accentuate certain architectural aspects. Since quality tourism has proven to be a lucrative alternative to mass tourism, many countries have formed initiatives which focus on the rehabilitation of historic architecture and sites. Habana Vieja, Cuba is a city where this reconstruction of the architectural image has occurred. In 1993 the Cuban government allotted one million dollars to the rehabilitation of patrimonial areas while ensuring the maintenance of a clear social and cultural vocation. The office of the Historian was tasked with this, with Eusebio Leal Spengler leading the effort. He oversaw an office of 5,000 workers including 130 architects and engineers and was able to rehabilitate over 100 structures. There was a delicate process to the rehabilitation as well, each individual building was evaluated to determine how it would be preserved as well as its future programming. The success of the project is hard to fully articulate. The office is entirely self-sustaining and has complete domain over the neighborhood which allows for quick and autonomous identification and completion of projects. It also controls the revenue and profits that are collected from tourist activity of the area. The office was able to repay its original million-dollar endowment in only 3 years after conception. Leal continues to be widely respected around the world for his knowledgeability and passion considering this project.

Something interesting that resulted from the reconstruction and preservation of Old Habana is the erasure of certain part of Cuba's history involving capitalist rule and the negative relationship with the US. Tourists perceive tourism sites as a reflection of the overall culture of a country, and since the Office of the Historian had complete control over the architectural landscape, they ultimately control the identity of the architectural language for the entire country. This begs the question of who gets to determine what the authentic architectural language for an individual country is actually, as this model of historic preservation is translated to other countries. In the case of Habana Vieja and thus Cuba, the socialistic nature of government allowed for a direct and irrefutable decision of what is to be preserved and in their case it turned out well. For countries with different governmental, historic, and socialistic structures, it is hard to determine who makes these decisions. As mentioned earlier, many countries have complicated history and a susceptibility to complete destruction due to natural disasters. Therefore, their architectural language is constantly being redefined as resources and motives vary throughout time. In addition, as countries transitioned into independence, they made attempt to define and establish a unique architectural language by building substantial projects, for instance the City Hall Building in Kingston, Jamaica which features a blend of European architectural and modernist styles but also adding the countries character in the articulation of the design. However, many other building typologies have existed in the Caribbean over time. Currently historic preservation agenda seems to prefer the accentuation of traditional colonial styles and architecture dating to the early colonization era. However, there



Figure 3: Talbot House, highlighting traditional porch placement and roof volumes, copyright Taft Group.

were architectural styles prevalent before then which may not have been seen as sophisticated among European standards but were brilliantly designed for the climate and offered insight to architectural and environmental strategies that would be utilized in the future.

Since the agenda of visual culture, tourism and historic preservation has constantly evolved, I think its important for every country to invest in the preservation of their history and character. I think that evaluating the key characteristics of a country and its people is the best way to start thinking about the preservation of these traits and how they manifest into the architectural landscape. I think a reform of the tourism industry would be beneficial, since it seems that the tourism industry's hunger for growth can't be fulfilled. As we know, resources are very limited and sustainability is essential for every economic model moving forward.

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