

ICOMOS principles and contemporary additions: challenges to integrity in Venezuela's colonial heritage.

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ABSTRACT

This article examines how contemporary interventions can affect the authenticity of Venezuelan colonial built heritage. A methodology combining a theoretical-practical contrast analysis is employed, using the intervention at Casa Herrera as a case study, and is complemented by institutional communication from ICOMOS Venezuela. The results demonstrate a methodological disconnect and limited institutional oversight, where the priority of current function compromises historical truth and technical compatibility, altering the morphological and physical integrity of the building. The article's originality lies in its critical and direct evaluation of the actual application of international principles. It concludes that it is urgent to establish defined thresholds for additions that guarantee functionality without distorting historical materiality.

Keywords: up to a maximum of 5 words to identify the area of knowledge of the work, in descending order of importance, from general to specific. Separate each word with a semicolon (;). Use 12-point Times New Roman.

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Contribution of each author

In this work, Oswell Salvador Ippolito Ojeda is the sole author; therefore, he participated in all aspects of the development of this article at 100%.

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Los principios de ICOMOS y las adiciones contemporáneas: como retos para la integridad en el patrimonio colonial de Venezuela.

RESUMEN

El artículo examina cómo las intervenciones contemporáneas pueden afectar la autenticidad del patrimonio edificado colonial venezolano. Se emplea una metodología que combina un análisis de contraste teórico-práctico, tomando la intervención en la Casa Herrera como caso de estudio, y se complementa con una comunicación institucional de ICOMOS Venezuela. Los resultados demuestran una desconexión metodológica y una limitada supervisión institucional, donde la prioridad de la función actual compromete la verdad histórica y la compatibilidad técnica, alterando la integridad morfológica y física de la edificación. La originalidad radica en su evaluación crítica y directa sobre la aplicación real de los principios internacionales. Se concluye que es urgente establecer umbrales definidos para las adiciones que garanticen la funcionalidad sin desvirtuar la materialidad histórica.

Palabras clave: principios ICOMOS; integridad patrimonial; arquitectura colonial venezolana; restauración objetiva; falsos arquitectónicos.

Os princípios do ICOMOS e as adições contemporâneas: desafios para a integridade no patrimônio colonial da Venezuela.

RESUMO

O artigo examina como as intervenções contemporâneas podem afetar a autenticidade do patrimônio edificado colonial venezuelano. Emprega-se uma metodologia que combina uma análise de contraste teórico-práctico, tomando a intervenção na Casa Herrera como estudo de caso, complementada por uma comunicação institucional do ICOMOS Venezuela. Os resultados demonstram uma desconexão metodológica e uma supervisão institucional limitada, na qual a prioridade da função atual compromete a verdade histórica e a compatibilidade técnica, alterando a integridade morfológica e física da edificação. A originalidade reside em sua avaliação crítica e direta da aplicação real dos princípios internacionais. Conclui-se que é urgente estabelecer limites definidos para as adições, que garantam a funcionalidade sem desvirtuar a materialidade histórica.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Buildings designated with historical value are considered, as established by (Arias Salazar et al., 2024), as “tangible bridges that connect society with its history and culture, and their maintenance and preservation are a complex and multifaceted task” (p.7). In Venezuela, the vast architectural legacy of the colonial period, spanning from the early 16th century to the beginning of the 19th century, constitutes a material testimony of the historical, cultural, and social development of many of its cities.

However, its effective preservation in Venezuela faces challenges that go beyond the theoretical, directly impacting the pathology and recovery of structures. This article, in line with the mission of the ALCONPAT journal, whose focus promotes the dissemination of knowledge regarding quality control and the rehabilitation of constructions, examines the disconnect between conservation principles and technical execution in Venezuela.

In recent years, procedures associated with historical conservation have faced various vicissitudes and challenges that directly infringe upon the authenticity and history of buildings. This problem ranges from a lack of funding from government custodians to the need of certain private groups to adapt structures to contemporary standards of safety, comfort, and habitability, often driven by private interests (Arias Salazar et al., 2024; Villarejo Fernández, 2022).

This inherent tension between preserving the past and the functionality of the present frequently leads to restoration practices that can compromise the building's authenticity. In this context, the concept of the architectural forgery emerges as a critical concern. This term refers, according to (González Moreno-Navarro, 1999), to “interventions that, under the pretext of restoration, introduce anachronistic elements or reconstructions without a historical basis, thus distorting the true identity of the building” (p.24). Unlike outright falsification, the central issue of contemporary interventions lies in methodological inadequacy.

The present article aims to analyze whether interventions in Venezuelan colonial buildings adhere to the rigorous conservation principles established by ICOMOS (International Council on Monuments and Sites), an organization of which Venezuela has been a member since 1981. It addresses the academic question of whether or not the original architectural integrity of the country's colonial buildings is being compromised. This entails the need to evaluate material compatibility and morphology in the intervention process of colonial historical structures in Venezuela, focusing on ICOMOS principles.

To achieve this objective, a case study is examined to illustrate the divergence between theory and practice, focusing not on imitation but on the violation of the principles of material compatibility and morphological integrity. Furthermore, the discussion is strengthened by information obtained through a formal interview with the president of ICOMOS Venezuela, providing a direct institutional viewpoint on the application of these precepts nationwide.

Finally, the relevance of this study for ALCONPAT lies in identifying how methodological inadequacy and the lack of technical compatibility criteria not only affect historical aesthetics but also compromise the physical integrity and service life of traditional materials..

2. OBJECTIVE RESTORATION AND ARCHITECTURAL FALSIFICATION


The way in which humanity relates to buildings inherited from the past has evolved drastically and rapidly over time. For a long period, architectural interventions were often executed without a deep concern for historical fidelity; existing buildings were considered canvases upon which substitutions or additions were applied following the language and fashions of the moment, with scant references to their original style, but this panorama began to change notably toward the end of the 18th century.

It is from that chronological moment when a true historical consciousness emerged and the inherent value of built heritage was recognized. Interventions ceased to be mere acts of construction to become a process of interpretive reflection and deep debate on how to interact with structures. From this reflection, fundamental theoretical positions emerged that laid the foundations of modern thought on restoration.


On one hand, figures such as Viollet-le-Duc promoted a vision of restoration as the restitution of the monument to a complete or idealized state, appealing to the logic of its style and construction method, which often implied the recreation of lost parts; this vision was known as stylistic restoration. On the contrary, thinkers such as John Ruskin and, later, Camillo Boito, advocated for a more cautious approach centered on maintenance and conservation; their philosophy of conservation at all costs was based on preserving the structure while omitting operations that were not strictly essential, respecting the authenticity of its contributions over time and demanding a clear differentiation of any necessary intervention.

From this latter vision, objective restoration was born, which according to (González Moreno-Navarro, 1999) is a methodology for monumental conservation that seeks to protect the triple character of a building: its use value, its documentary value, and its aesthetic value (p.30). This approach is based on the preservation of the material and formal authenticity of a historical building as it has endured to the present; it opposes interventions that modify the original composition, emphasizing conservation, consolidation, and reintegration only with original elements or materials that respect the patina of time and the building's architectural history.


Its purpose is to eliminate historical subjectivity and the stylistic caprice of the restorer, basing all decisions on the scientific, historical, and technical analysis of the work; the most influential theoretical framework for this approach is the theory of restoration by (Brandi, 1963) who establishes that restoration is the methodological moment of the recognition of the work of art, in its physical consistency and in its dual aesthetic and historical polarity (p.13). See Table 1..

Table 1. Example of objective restoration	
	<p>In the mural painting, the missing areas of the original fresco were filled only with horizontal lines without the rest of the ornaments. From a certain distance, the eye merges the missing part and it visually disappears, but from up close, the stroke of the reintegration is obvious, differentiating it from the original. The aesthetic reading is restored without falling into falsification and respecting the historical instance of the loss. Photo of the Casa de la Estrella Museum.</p>
<p>Source: author's archive (2025).</p>	

By contrast, the architectural forgery and the historical forgery constitute the antithesis of this approach; as pointed out by (González Moreno-Navarro, 1999), it “compromises the documentary value by inventing a history that does not belong to the building” (p.23). This situation frequently occurs through inadequate or poorly managed interventions that incorporate elements or materials that never existed in the original, which implies an outrage against the preservation of the building's material authenticity. See Table 2.



Table 2. Example of architectural forgeries	
	<p>Ceramic flooring in a colonial building is a historical forgery because it introduces a material and an aesthetic completely foreign to the period and construction techniques, threatening the original integrity of the building. The opening of areas that were previously closed is an architectural forgery because it is an alteration of the form and the constructive essence.</p> <p>Photo of the Puerto Cabello Museum.</p>
<p>Source: author's archive (2025).</p>	

The ICOMOS doctrine seeks to prevent this type of falsification by establishing in the Venice charter that every addition must bear the distinctive mark of the current time to be easily distinguishable and, very importantly, reversible. See Table 3.

Table 3. Example of an easily distinguishable and reversible addition	
	<p>To protect the original slab from deterioration, a glass walkway with a platform-type steel structure was added for visitor traffic, which can be easily dismantled and relocated at any time. The principles of authenticity, integrity, and minimal intervention were maintained, and the use of forgeries is avoided.</p> <p>Photo of the Casa de la Estrella Museum.</p>
<p>Source: author's archive (2025).</p>	

In this context, it is valid and essential to highlight that the term material authenticity in Venezuelan colonial architecture is not restricted to the establishment of an original materiality, but also includes intangible values, as established by (Sosa Pedroza Thomas, 2010), “the sensory and emotional experience, the memory and the historical meaning, and the reflection on society and culture” (p.220) are also included. These values transcend the simple physical construction, connecting the building with the sensations, memories, and identity of its users and the era. For (González Moreno-Navarro, 1999), “falsification is the negation of the history of the work, a practice that denies its evolution and its multiple transformations over time” (p.23). This thought contrasts notably with some more rigorous conservation models, where structures remain faithful

to their original colonial architectural history thanks to objective restoration. Examples include: the Celis house (also known as the museum of anthropology and history) and the house of the star (also known as the star house museum). Both buildings possess heritage declarations and are located in the city of Valencia, Carabobo State; a summary with the most representative historical data is presented below. See Table 4.

Table 4. Summary of historical data	
Museum of Anthropology and History	Casa de la estrella Museum
It is a building of colonial origin dating from 1776 and is located in the historical center of Valencia. Its owner was the Spanish cavalry colonel Ramón Ibarrolaburu. It is one of the buildings with the greatest tradition in the city; currently, the museum functions as the headquarters of the Lisandro Alvarado Foundation, exhibiting pieces that make up the most important anthropological collection in the center of the country. In 1960, it was declared a National Historical Monument, and in 1964 it was placed under the custody of Henriqueta Peñalver, with the aim of serving as the headquarters for the Carabobo Institute of Anthropology and History; the museum was inaugurated in 1971.	It is a building of colonial origin dating from 1664 and is located in the historical center of Valencia. It was built by the Spaniards for the operation of the San Antonio de Padua Hospital. It is one of the oldest houses in the city, which possesses immense historical value for the city and the country due to the various events in which it was immersed and the different modalities it has assumed. In 1980, it was declared a national historical monument according to official gazette No. 31,930. It currently functions as a museum and library where important objects from different periods of its history are exhibited, and where exhibitions and varied cultural events are occasionally held.
	
Source: author's archive (2025).	

3. ICOMOS PRINCIPLES AND THE TENSION BETWEEN CONSERVATION OF INTEGRITY AND MODERNITY

ICOMOS is a non-profit non-governmental organization that acts as a non-binding advisory consultative body within a philanthropic spirit. The organization was founded in 1965, one year after the adoption of the Venice charter of 1964, and has served as the leading voice in heritage conservation on a global level. The 110 national committees, such as the Venezuelan delegation formalized in 1981, have the responsibility to promote the conservation of monuments and heritage sites (ICOMOS, 2017).

The organization collects, analyzes, and disseminates information on all methods of heritage conservation; to its credit, it manages a bibliographic database consisting of more than 14,000 references on world architectural heritage, which are available for open consultation by researchers,

whether or not they are members. In addition to the 18 charters, there is a list of 17 other doctrinal texts, as well as an extensive number of resolutions and declarations. While all are important and reflect the evolution of the doctrine, there is a clear distinction in their nature and weight.

The first ICOMOS charter was the international charter for the conservation and restoration of monuments and sites (Venice charter), which was the concluding document of the second international congress of architects and technicians of historic monuments, held in Venice in 1964, through which ICOMOS was created. It is therefore the foundational charter, from which derivative thematic charters were generated over the years to clarify, expand, develop, or address specific issues (Pérez Gallego, F., Ibañez, M., and Vásquez de la Torre, I., personal communication with ICOMOS Venezuela, November 17, 2025), such as the Nara Document on Authenticity in 1994, which addresses the need for a broader understanding of cultural diversity and cultural heritage in efforts to conserve heritage sites.

All charters have been prepared by groups of experts and submitted for verification by all their members through general assemblies; they can be considered an extension of the Venice charter, under which they are protected and from which they derive, as they complement and refine specific aspects according to themes and types of heritage (Personal communication with ICOMOS Venezuela, November 17, 2025). Table 5 is presented below with a summary of the most representative documents:

Document	Year	Key focus and principles in intervention
International charter for the conservation and restoration of monuments and sites. (Venice charter)	1964	Philosophical and technical bases of restoration. Respect for ancient substance: restoration must stop where conjecture begins. Reversibility: every addition must be distinguishable and easily reversible. Documentation: restoration must be accompanied by a complete archaeological and historical study. Minimal intervention: maintenance is preferred over repair.
Nara document on authenticity	1994	Authenticity in cultural heritage, beyond material and form. Vital for colonial architecture, as it allows for the valuation of history, use, tradition, and the spirit of the place, not only its original work.
International charter for the conservation of historic towns and urban areas	1987	Conservation of urban ensembles and their surroundings. Crucial for the planning and intervention in historic centers, ensuring that individual buildings are treated within their urban context.
Principles for the analysis, conservation, and structural restoration of architectural heritage	2003	Specific guidelines and techniques for structures. Technical guide for evaluating pathologies. It emphasizes that intervention must address the root of the problem, prioritize preventive maintenance, and that all verification and supervision activities must be documented..
Source: author's archive (2025).		

The Venice charter establishes the principles of integrated conservation, a concept that, according to (Feilden Bernard, 2004), “promotes the survival and viability of heritage assets in the long term, giving them a useful function adapted to contemporary needs, avoiding their isolation or deterioration” (p.3); (Reimóndez María, 2023) adds that with integrated conservation “far from pretending to be an epistemological corpus, the criteria that every conservation project should take

into account are collected, based on guaranteeing its impact, in line with sustainable development” (p.1). However, while conservation is intrinsically linked to its social utility, this adaptation must not compromise the integrity and authenticity of the asset.

Although the Venice charter is by far the most referenced and used document for being the standard for any heritage architectural intervention, there is often a generalized tendency to ignore or misinterpret some of its principles; among the reasons why the principles might be misinterpreted or ignored, according to the ICOMOS charter for the interpretation and presentation of cultural heritage sites, in Canada (2008), the following can be mentioned:

- Lack of understanding: there may be a misinterpretation of key concepts if adequate training is not provided.
- Application challenges: exhaustive analysis, detailed planning, and constant monitoring are necessary to ensure they are carried out correctly and not harmfully to the heritage.
- Lack of dissemination: if the principles and ICOMOS charters do not reach all relevant actors, they are likely not to be applied correctly.
- Interest in interpretation: heritage interpretation is a continuous process that must consider the local context and the community's needs.
- Need for standardization: standardized techniques and interpretation must be promoted.

A notorious example is the case of the principle regarding the distinguishability of modern additions, which is frequently misinterpreted by interventionist actors and confused with the obligation to create an aggressive and dissonant contrast. The heart of the conflict, therefore, does not lie in whether the intervention should be visible or if it can incorporate contemporary elements, but in the way this visibility is articulated. The Venice charter already laid the foundation for this debate by establishing that “additions cannot be allowed except in so far as they do not detract from the interesting parts of the building, its traditional setting, and the balance of its composition and its relation with its surroundings,” which underscores an ethic of restraint and respect for the spirit or integrity of the place (ICOMOS, 1964).

It is this subtle but vital difference between distinction and disruption that is often lost in haste or the lack of methodological sensitivity, shifting the focus from technical and conceptual compatibility to a mere stylistic confrontation. Consequently, the methodological problem in Venezuelan practice does not lie in the use of modern elements, but in technical compatibility. ICOMOS principles and doctrines establish that collaboration between specialists is essential to achieve a holistic approach that balances preservation with modern demands (Arias Salazar et al., 2024).

This shift in Venezuelan interventionist practice is not an isolated phenomenon, but is part of the historical dialectical tension that exists between the conservation of a structure's integrity and the constant impulse of modernism. Integrity implies the preservation of the totality of heritage attributes, both physical and historical and functional, ensuring that the monument maintains the authenticity of its material testimony (ICOMOS, 1994).

On the other hand, modern intervention responds to the need to provide heritage with a new utility, adjusting it to the functional and aesthetic demands of the present. The struggle resides in the fact that, for some, any modern addition threatens integrity by introducing a new historical layer that could overlap or, even worse, invalidate the reading of the original. For modern architecture, conservation must be an active and transformative act that guarantees the survival of the architectural structure through its contemporary relevance, arguing that static museification condemns the monument to obsolescence (Hernández Martínez, 2020).

A notorious example of this tension is observed when structural or functional necessity imposes the use of radically different materials and technologies. In the case of modern heritage, for example, the intervention must deal with materials with a short useful life or obsolete technologies that require deep substitutions or consolidations. By contrast, in historical structures, the temptation

to introduce transparent or minimalist elements to achieve the effect of distinction often ignores the structural and thermal dynamics of the original building, resulting in compatibility problems and accelerated deterioration.

The ethical and technical solution is not found in the absolute rejection of modernity, but in a conscious subordination of the addition to the original object, which implies adopting a posture of minimal intervention and maximum reversibility (Martínez Justicia & Sánchez-Mesa, 2017). Modernity must serve heritage and not the other way around; in this maxim or general principle lies the essence of the mentioned interdisciplinary collaboration: ensuring that modern architecture dialogues with the past from deep knowledge and respect for the construction techniques and historical values that ICOMOS promotes within its fundamental principles.

4. THE REGENCY OF ICOMOS IN VENEZUELA

ICOMOS Venezuela cannot carry out its functions without being well-linked to other organizations that assist in its management processes; it works in close cooperation with national and international institutions, and its action is based on the principles and recommendations of bodies such as the united nations educational, scientific and cultural organization (UNESCO). Table 6 is presented below with a summary of its allies:

UNESCO	ICOMOS is a formal advisory organization to UNESCO, acting as the international organization's arm for the protection of heritage in the country. ICOMOS collaborates in the dissemination of postulates and evaluates the feasibility of the sites that Venezuela nominates to be declared world heritage.
IPC of Venezuela	They maintain direct and indirect contact; in fact, some IPC officials in past times were part of the Venezuelan committee of ICOMOS, which is not happening at present. Nevertheless, on many occasions since the IPC's origins, it has requested support as a consultant or advisor from the Venezuelan Committee of ICOMOS.
ICOM of Venezuela	The international council of museums is the organization that represents museums and their professionals in Venezuela. They maintain a fluid relationship with the publication of several articles in recent issues of the <i>Museos.Ve</i> bulletin.
Fundapatrimonio	They share an indirect and collaborative relationship in heritage conservation. Fundapatrimonio (foundation for buildings and endowments of tourist and cultural services) has participated in the organization of events with ICOMOS Venezuela, such as national symposia on heritage.
Source: author's archive (2025).	

The purpose of ICOMOS national committees is to promote the conservation, protection, restoration, rehabilitation, and enhancement of cultural heritage monuments and sites, both at an international level and, in this case, specifically at a national level, as established in Article 3 of the ICOMOS statutes; this is justified by the fact that every national committee must accept the ICOMOS statutes. For this reason, the Venezuelan delegation represents the interests of ICOMOS at the national level, as well as the opinions of its national members within the international ICOMOS network. “The professionals who have traditionally formed the Venezuelan ICOMOS

committee have mainly been architects with graduate-level training in the discipline of conservation and restoration, in addition to engineers, anthropologists, archaeologists, urban planners, and sociologists (Personal communication with ICOMOS Venezuela, November 17, 2025).” This professional multidisciplinary serves as a forum where individuals and institutional representatives can meet to exchange information and viewpoints.

These exchanges cover ICOMOS principles and doctrine, as well as technical, scientific, legal, and administrative issues related to cultural heritage sites; national committees in general, not only in Venezuela, do not establish contractual relationships with contracting companies responsible for restoration or conservation projects and works (Personal communication with ICOMOS Venezuela, November 17, 2025), whereby the professional relationship of a non-binding technical advisory is established. At this point, several relevant questions may come to light, such as: is the law for the protection and defense of cultural heritage rigorous enough to link interventions with ICOMOS principles and apply sanctions in case of non-compliance?, is ICOMOS the body responsible for controlling heritage intervention projects?, and does ICOMOS have the capacity to supervise and influence the country's architectural interventions in an open, direct, and spontaneous manner?

Although the 1993 law for the protection and defense of cultural heritage undoubtedly needs to be updated, the legal framework is theoretically sufficient, but its application presents the major challenges; since the problem does not lie in the law but in its execution and the application of sanctions, sanctions are generally weak and many exceptions are allowed for non-technical interests, which creates a sense of impunity. The legal tools exist in Venezuela but a firmer institutional commitment is needed to enforce them; even so, it remains a pending and relevant task for government entities and professionals linked to the field to retake the initiative of updating the law, allowing it to be clearer and more robust in its technical foundations and more rigorous in its practical implementation.

“The task of directly controlling and supervising projects and building interventions does not belong to ICOMOS. That is the task of the governing body that, in each country, must ensure the conservation of its heritage according to the legal structure, which in Venezuela has been the responsibility of the institute of cultural heritage (IPC) since the 1993 Law. The ICOMOS committee is, in any case, an overseer and advisor body; it is a consultative body when it detects notable problems, inadequate practices, or abandonment due to negligence or other reasons of certain buildings, but it does not have a direct relationship with those responsible for the works. In any case, it raises its voice to the IPC or the organizations coordinating such works (governorates, mayoralties, or others) so that a concerted solution is achieved (Personal communication with ICOMOS Venezuela, November 17, 2025)”.

Therefore, the capacity to directly influence interventions in an open, direct, and spontaneous way in Venezuela is quite limited, which can be summarized by:

- Financial and logistical factors: not being able to have its own equipment or cover the vast national geography.
- Legal factors: not having the power to halt a work or fine an intervenor, as that responsibility falls on the IPC.
- Political factors: since the most direct actions are exercised through public denunciations and declaratory statements based on moral weight.

The state of the art regarding this Venezuelan topic is not very extensive; only a few Venezuelan authors have contributed to the exposition and dissemination of aspects related to the conservation and restoration of heritage; these authors generally discuss the gap between international doctrine and the country's institutional and economic reality, among whom it is appropriate to mention:

- Juan Pedro Posani: an architect and central figure in Venezuelan conservation. His works analyze conservation policy guidelines at a national level and how they are articulated (or

not) with international standards. One of his most relevant publications is framed in “The need for legislation and state management consistent with ICOMOS principles.”

- Graziano Gasparini: an Italian architect who settled in Venezuela. Although his main work is the historiography of colonial architecture, his foundational work is essential for any intervention. His studies on the authenticity of construction systems and colonial morphology serve as the authentic record that interventions must respect according to ICOMOS.
- Luis E. Molina: an anthropologist and conservator. He has analyzed the evolution of cultural and heritage policies in Venezuela and has written about how political instability and constitutional changes have affected heritage management.
- José Hernández: He has contributed to the discussion on heritage management and handling, especially in the context of iconic sites such as the historic quarter of Coro. His works often highlight failures in institutional coordination and the lack of integrated management plans, problems that ICOMOS and UNESCO constantly point out.

These authors offer an essential theoretical and critical body that, paradoxically, highlights a palpable methodological disconnection in national practice. The need for a solid reference is imperative; however, the effective application of standards hits the hard institutional reality. The regency of ICOMOS in Venezuela regarding the application of principles is a highly complex issue, because the organization's independent action has always been limited by law to being an advisory and consultative entity, where its suggestions may or may not be taken into consideration without major repercussions other than raising a call for attention before the IPC.

This limitation translates into fundamental operational problems, especially when the lack of rigor in research clashes with theory. In fact, ICOMOS is aware of projects where restoration or reconstruction has proceeded based on assumptions rather than rigorous documentary or archaeological research; “some interventions have always been executed in which the full required rigor of prior historical-documentary and archaeological research to guide decisions on the removal of additions and reintegration of missing parts has not been met. This sometimes happens in all countries and also depends on the monitoring carried out by the institutions responsible for the inspection and supervision of the works, as specified in the concerted restoration projects (Personal communication with ICOMOS Venezuela, November 17, 2025).”

The root of the problem, therefore, is not solely a lack of theoretical knowledge, but a systemic deficiency in the legal structure of management. Although a legal framework exists, such as the law for the protection and defense of cultural heritage, which seeks to safeguard heritage, Venezuelan architectural buildings face problems such as a lack of budget, inadequate infrastructure, leaders without appropriate knowledge, and a no less important factor, such as the lack of clear policies. This institutional vacuum is aggravated by administrative opacity; the difficulty in contacting IPC leaders and obtaining interviews presents itself as an uphill battle, as they hide behind the veil of non-response without offering reasons, which gives free rein to any intervenor to perform, in many cases capriciously, what is economically most convenient for them and not what is best for the building in terms of its original colonial and historical integrity.

Ultimately, although initiatives are promoted and topics such as sustainability and ethics are addressed, the general situation indicates that there is a considerable challenge to fully comply with international standards in daily practice in Venezuela. The presence of ICOMOS in the country operates under the figure of a qualified observer whose main tool is moral authority and international technical validation. While the national committee disseminates the charters and promotes training, it lacks the legal power to stop or sanction an intervention that departs from conservation principles and doctrines. In essence, ICOMOS establishes the ethical and methodological “ought-to-be” of the discipline; however, the country is going through an administrative instability that, together with the precariousness of resources, weakens the agencies;

a tendency toward the relegation of ICOMOS authority to a mere consultative formality is evident. The effectiveness of its regency is not measured, therefore, by its punitive control capacity, but by the extent to which academia and independent professionals manage to use its principles as tools for pressure and criticism against Venezuelan institutional inertia. In this scenario, unfortunately, the organization becomes more of a bibliographic and ethical reference for criticism than what it truly should be: a true governing entity for decisions regarding heritage.

5. METHODOLOGY AND CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF THE CASE STUDY

The present research is framed within a qualitative descriptive-analytical approach, evaluating a restoration project in the state of Carabobo, Venezuela. The research is structured into three phases: a documentary and theoretical review, a practical contrast analysis, and an institutional perspective, evaluating the interventions carried out under the principles and doctrines of ICOMOS.

The case for analysis corresponds to the Museum of Puerto Cabello, known before the year 2023 as the Casa Herrera in Puerto Cabello, built in 1790. It is a colonial building of a civil nature declared a national historical monument of Venezuela in 2005 with the promulgation of official gazette No. 38,234.

- **Documentary and theoretical review:** a historical approach was carried out to delimit the principles of architectural conservation (ICOMOS, Venice charter, Nara charter, Brandi's restoration theory), focusing attention on the criteria of distinction, reversibility, and material compatibility. This framework served as the regulatory parameter for the critical analysis.
- **Practical contrast analysis:** a critical in situ evaluation of the intervened building was conducted, contrasting the execution of contemporary additions with the reviewed theoretical principles. The analysis focused on identifying violations of morphological integrity, authenticity, minimal intervention, reversibility, material compatibility, and the occurrence of forgery by conjecture.
- **Institutional perspective:** to contextualize the practical application of ICOMOS principles in Venezuela, a semi-structured personal communication (Pérez Gallego, F., Ibañez, M., and Vásquez de la Torre, I. November 17, 2025) was carried out with the board of ICOMOS Venezuela. This interview aimed to determine the degree of participation, the legal power of ICOMOS, and the institutional and regulatory limitations faced by advisory bodies in the country. The results of this phase complement the theoretical discussion and explain the disconnection between the norm and the execution.





5.1 Summary of the documentary and theoretical review:

To establish the scientific basis of the research, the bibliographic sources and collected documents were systematized. First, the historical summary by its chronicler is presented, followed by Table 7, which compiles a summary of the image of the Museum of Puerto Cabello.

- **History:** Its facade, adorned by a cantilevered balcony and a sober stone portal, the short but wide hallway leading to the courtyard and the second floor sheltered by a wooden railing and tiled roof, and especially the lookout tower crowning it, configure a house that must have stood out in the urban environment, observed both from Real street (now Bolívar) and from Lanceros street, toward which it also had an exit and an elegant balcony. It is unknown when the house ceased to belong to the Herreras; at the beginning of the last century, it was occupied by the Hotel Americano, and over the years, it passed to Nina Cecilia Kolster de Méndez, who inherited it from her grandmother Ángela Vera de Kolster in 1937. In 1947, the Puerto Cabello chamber of commerce acquired the property for its headquarters, finally selling it to the Venezuelan development corporation (CVF) in 1967 for the purpose of

remodeling it and establishing the city's arms museum there. Through the initiative of Dr. Aníbal Dao, then manager of the CVF, the opening of the museum was finalized, hiring Rafael Dagostino to develop the decoration plan and acquiring an important batch of replica swords, foils, shotguns, ball maces, halberds, and breastplates in Spain for exhibition. The museum opened its doors and was later handed over to the “Lisandro Alvarado” Foundation for administration, now converted into a museum of history and anthropology, which operated for nearly two decades before closing. Thus began a sad period for the historic property, leading to its almost absolute deterioration and the loss of much of the material existing there. The fact that it was national property decisively contributed to this deterioration, hindering timely decision-making, along with the absence of plans and the little interest from regional and local government entities a situation denounced by the academy of history of Carabobo State in the press and written communications. After the disappearance of the CVF, the property passed to other ministerial entities, ultimately to Conac, the Ministry of Culture, and recently to the government of Carabobo State through a 15 year bailment agreement. By: Sabatino José A. (2023).

- **Evidenced deterioration:** It suffered a period of deterioration due to lack of maintenance and the change of ownership between government entities, a situation denounced by the academy of history of Carabobo State. Information supported by the archives of El Carabobeño newspaper, June 28, 2021 edition.
- **Current ownership:** It passed into the hands of the government of Carabobo State.

Table 7. Historical compilation of the image of the Museum of Puerto Cabello	
 <p>Estimated circa 1915 Illustration by: Galeaxxo Bentivoglio</p>	 <p>Year 1974 Photograph by: José Gregorio (Jgurbidesign)</p>
 <p>Year 1976 Photograph by: León André and Del Valle Carmen (2020). Lisandro A. Foundation.</p>	 <p>Estimated circa 1990 Photograph by: Unknown author</p>



Estimated circa 2000

Photograph by: Don Perucho (personal blog)



Year 2020

Photograph by: Pérez Carlos (personal blog)



Year 2021

Photograph by: Rojas Beatriz (2021). El Carabobeño newspaper



Year 2025




Photograph by: El Aragueño (2025).

Source: author's archive (2025).

5.2 Summary of the practical contrast analysis:

Once the documentary review was concluded, the physical and technical evaluation of the interventions executed in the case study was carried out. Table 8 details the practical contrast analysis, where the observed actions are confronted with the technical intervention criteria, allowing for the visualization of deviations in the constructive praxis.

Table 8. Photographic analysis

	<p>Steel and glass walkway replacing the original wooden corridor. 3 violated principles: minimal intervention, authenticity, material compatibility.</p>
	<p>Total covering of the original ground floor with ceramic material without leaving evidence of temporal witnesses. 5 violated principles: minimal intervention, reversibility, authenticity, material compatibility, avoidance of historical forgery.</p>
	<p>Covering of original walls and ceilings with modern materials without leaving evidence of temporal witnesses. 6 violated principles: minimal intervention, authenticity, integrity, material compatibility, avoidance of historical and architectural forgery.</p>

	<p>Excessive use of steel and glass materials. 3 violated principles: minimal intervention, authenticity, integrity.</p>
	<p>Opening of arches in areas that were originally closed. 4 violated principles: avoidance of architectural forgery, minimal intervention, reversibility, authenticity.</p>
	<p>Error in the historical approach of the color palette on walls and wooden elements. Originally white walls and natural wood. 2 violated principles: authenticity, avoidance of historical forgery.</p>
<p>Source: author's archive (2025).</p>	

5.3 Analysis based on ICOMOS doctrine and principles.

The critical core of this study lies in the evaluation of heritage integrity through the lens of international organizations. From an institutional point of view, Table 9 presents the analysis of the use, documentary, and stylistic value of the building, seeking a foundation based on ICOMOS doctrine.

Tabla 9. Summary of values		
Use Value (Functional and Social)	Documentary Value (Historical and Testimonial)	Stylistic Value (Aesthetic and Architectural)
The use value is remarkably high and has been positively redefined with the intervention. Previously, it was a historical house with residential use value. After its restoration, its functional value has transitioned toward social and cultural use, transforming into the History Museum of Puerto Cabello. This new function guarantees the survival of the building by providing it with contemporary utility (ICOMOS, 1964, Art. 5).	The documentary value of the building resides in its capacity to testify to the history of Puerto Cabello. Historical document: it is a witness to the colonial era and the social and economic dynamics of the port city. Its architecture, with elements from the 18th century, documents the lifestyle of influential families. Symbolic document: it is linked to the history of independence, as its surroundings were the scene of the taking of Puerto Cabello, the final military siege that sealed independence in 1823.	The stylistic value of the Herrera House lies in the dialectical fusion of the old and the modern. Its base is a representative example of Venezuelan colonial residential architecture. However, the recent restoration introduced contemporary elements such as a glass walkway on the second floor and a terrace-lookout with panoramic views of the historic center. This intervention generates a controlled stylistic tension.
Source: author's archive (2025).		

According to ICOM Venezuela, through its web portal (2024), they describe that the museum has “managed to combine the modern and the traditional, with renovated spaces that highlight the architecture of the period and an impressive glass walkway on the second floor;” in the same publication, they add that “furthermore, it has a cozy café where visitors can enjoy a break, whether with a refreshing drink or a delicious meal. The experience culminates on the terrace, which offers a lookout point with panoramic views, allowing you to enjoy the beauty of Puerto Cabello from above.” (p1).

Beyond a digital promotion to call upon visitors who would pay for consumption to see what is described by ICOM Venezuela; there is the worrying observable reality. The 2023 intervention included a series of modern elements such as the glass walkway, ceramic floors, and wall coverings, among others; these developments of modern spaces are visible and distinguishable from the original colonial architectural composition, and therefore, there is no simulation of the old. However, the distinguishability of the modern additions was surpassed, generating a modern environment with a highly aggressive and dissonant contrast with the rest of the structure, representing a violation of the Venice charter and ICOMOS principles.

Given that the modern addition in the internal spaces is so dominant, it becomes so aggressive that it eclipses or degrades the perception of the original value; the obligation to maintain harmony is violated because the addition becomes the new protagonist. The accumulation of these modern additions in excess leaves very little or almost nothing of the original architecture, causing it to lose its physical integrity and the authenticity of the heritage asset. See Table 10.

Table 10. Summary of the contrast analysis with the theory		
ICOMOS Principles	Complies	Doesn't comply
Objective restoration: dictates an intervention approach based on recovering the unity of the structure, avoiding any imaginative interpretation.	X (Partially)	
Authenticity: dictates the quality of an asset to be true and credible in its materials, design, technique, and setting. The essence of its historical value.		X
Integrity: dictates the state of conservation of each of the visible physical elements that make up the original value of the structure.		X
Minimal intervention: dictates acting only as strictly necessary to ensure conservation, prioritizing the preservation of the original matter.		X
Reversibility: dictates that any treatment or added material can be removed in the future without causing damage or alteration to the original substrate.		X
Material compatibility: dictates the use of products whose chemical, physical, and mechanical properties do not react negatively with historical materials.		X
Avoidance of historical forgery: dictates not creating new elements that intend to deceive the viewer regarding their age or chronological origin.		X
Avoidance of architectural forgery: dictates not reconstructing vanished parts or modifying the original structure; the new must be identifiable.		X
Source: author's archive (2025).		

The presidency members of ICOMOS Venezuela were interviewed, in which one of the questions stipulated the following: “A particular case that can serve to exemplify what we have discussed is the Museum of Puerto Cabello in Carabobo, which was formerly the Casa Herrera (decreed as heritage), and which was intervened in 2023; the final result was a marvel for some and an error for others. What role did ICOMOS Venezuela play in this intervention and what is its stance regarding the final result?” Answer: “ICOMOS Venezuela had no participation in said intervention. We have already stated that the competence for supervising all projects and works of protected assets at a national level belongs to the institute of cultural heritage (IPC), which should have dictated the appropriate guidelines when reviewing the project and supervised the works in progress, as it always did through its team of professionals (architects and engineers), which we understand is currently greatly diminished. Perhaps the intervention was carried out behind the Institute's back, which borders on illegality. The IPC can generate legal sanctions when it considers that good practices have not been respected, and can even halt works in progress, as it did years ago in some cases”.

The material authenticity of the Museum of Puerto Cabello is a very complex estimation to define as it must be evaluated through the lens of its recent restoration; although a part of the 18th century structure considered the original matter has been preserved, the excessive insertion of contemporary elements such as the glass walkway introduces materials that, while clearly

distinguishable in compliance with the principle of objective restoration, alter the original physical consistency in the name of functionality and spectacle.

Integrity, in its strict physical sense, is modified by excessive additions, meaning that the original matter of the building was altered when the intervenor touched the original fabric, modifying the physical purity of the ancient structure. It is recognized that these added elements, due to being excessive, are an intrusion in the physical sense and therefore the building is no longer 100% the original colonial structure.

However, considering the points discussed in the Nara document, it can be evidenced that despite the violation of ICOMOS principles, a small part of the building's true power is still latent, residing in its intangible authenticity of use as it continues to be useful to the community by communicating historical and cultural aspects.

This disconnection between theory and praxis is validated by the testimony of regional authorities. In an interview conducted for this research with Dr. Argenis Agudo, who holds a PhD in cultural heritage and is the Director of historical cultural heritage of the secretary of culture of the government of Carabobo State, he pointed out that his participation was limited to the documentary phase: “my role was to document the historical value of the house, its significance within history, the characteristics of the construction, and how it should be intervened or restored according to international regulations, and that is as far as I went.” Agudo denounces that his technical reports and recommendations were filed away and ignored by his hierarchical superiors during the execution of the work. Regarding the final result, he is categorical: “I do not approve of it; I am not satisfied with what was done nor the way the architecture was treated, nor do I agree with the museological script; it is very far from what that house should be” (Agudo, A. Personal communication with the direction of historical cultural heritage of the secretary of culture of the government of Carabobo State, December 11, 2025), mentioning that his work was filed and ignored by his superiors.

It is fundamental to specify the distinction between the frameworks of action of ICOM and ICOMOS, as in interventions such as that of the Herrera House, their objectives often enter into a dialectical tension. While ICOM focuses primarily on management, communication, and the visitor experience within the museum space, ICOMOS prioritizes the safeguarding of material integrity and the authenticity of the architectural container. In this case study, it becomes evident that the need to adapt the building to a contemporary museographic functionality ended up subordinating the criteria of objective restoration, sacrificing the historical truth of the building in favor of an exhibition aesthetic that prioritizes use over the conservation of the original substrate.

While the justification of prioritizing the cultural survival of the asset over its strict material integrity has gained ground in contemporary conservation theory, especially with the Nara document, this stance is not free from risks and criticisms. This mediation in physical consistency, as observed in the insertion of modern elements, opens the door to a dangerous ambiguity. The main risk lies in the fact that the search for contemporary relevance can become a permit to encourage stylistic or functional whim. The priority of keeping a building active by granting it a high use value can easily lead to the manipulation of the original if the modern addition is excessive or reverses structural coherence.

In this sense, (Martínez Justicia, 2017) establishes that “cultural survival is often used as a rhetorical argument to justify drastic interventions” (p.32) which, fundamentally, respond more to economic profitability or the need to create an architectural spectacle than to the true service of historical testimony. This angle threatens to blur the line between ethical intervention and modern forgery. By minimizing the importance of the matter that (Brandi Cesare, 1963) defines as “the only means of transmission of the work of art” (p.13), one runs the danger of turning heritage into a functional scenography or a facsimile of itself, where the idea or concept of the building is preserved, but the irreplaceable authenticity of its historical fabric is lost. Therefore, according to

(Martínez Justicia, 2017) “the priority must always be minimal intervention and maximum reversibility” (p.32), ensuring that cultural survival is not achieved at the expense of the material truth of the architectural document.

6. CONCLUSIONS

The critical analysis of the Museum of Puerto Cabello confirms the existence of a methodological inadequacy; despite the existence of international guidelines such as those from ICOMOS, restoration practices in Venezuela may fail to adhere to the principles of authenticity and integrity, thereby compromising the cultural asset. The findings of this analysis reveal three substantial violations of conservation:

- **Violation of material compatibility:** the use of contemporary materials (steel, glass, porcelain tile, vinyl) as structural substitution alters historical materiality and violates the principle of technical compatibility. The ICOMOS principle for structures requires that consolidation materials be physically and chemically compatible with the materials of the original structure. The installation of rigid and modern elements in soft colonial masonry structures can introduce stresses, disparate expansions, and long-term pathologies, compromising the functional character of the architectural building.
- **Alteration of morphological and spatial integrity:** the addition of new sections and the alteration of space layout to accommodate modern needs without respecting the original distribution of the building was observed, which corresponds to an architectural forgery. This compromises the spatial integrity of the building, whose heritage value resides as much in its external walls as in its sequence of internal spaces. The alteration of the original spatial scheme through the intrusive addition of walkways and the lookout tower configures a falsification, as the new structure neither respects nor complements the history of the building, but rather imposes a new functional and scenographic logic.
- **Forgery by conjecture of authenticity:** the reconstruction of ornamental elements and the facade was identified, based on assumptions rather than rigorous documentary or archaeological research. Although it is not an architectural forgery by imitation, it is a historical forgery by conjecture; this constitutes a direct non-compliance with the Venice charter, which prohibits restoration based on hypothesis. It is concluded that respect for distinction is insufficient if the principles of reversibility and minimal intervention are ignored, turning the purpose of cultural survival into a rhetorical pretext for an architectural spectacle or a stylistic whim.

The detailed non-compliances are not merely technical errors; they are the latent symptom of a systemic deficiency in the national heritage management structure. As evidenced in the institutional communication, the regency of ICOMOS in the country operates under a legal limitation that restricts it to a merely consultative role, without sanctioning power. This institutional gap allows the priority of function and profitability to take precedence over the material truth and morphological integrity of the architectural document. The value of the work of art, as argued by (Brandi Cesare, 1963), “cannot be separated from its physical consistency” (p.14).

The case of the Museum of Puerto Cabello stands as a paradigmatic example in Latin America of what is called negotiated integrity, where a material compromise is accepted in exchange for greater social relevance; however, this study establishes the urgent need to:

1. Formalize the legal link between ICOMOS doctrine and national executing bodies.
2. Establish intrusion thresholds that define the limits of contemporary addition in colonial architecture.

3. Focus future research on the evaluation of structural risk and the durability of incompatible materials in contact with traditional masonry, complementing methodological criticism with an engineering analysis in conservation.

General closing recommendations suggest that it is essential for architecture and conservation professionals in Venezuela to adopt an approach that prioritizes historical truth and technical compatibility over superficial aesthetics. Thus, the adaptation of historical buildings to contemporary needs must be planned so that change does not harm the cultural and historical significance of the building (Arias Salazar et al., 2024). Therefore, greater training and the implementation of a more rigorous legal framework are recommended to link restoration interventions with ICOMOS principles, ensuring that future generations can appreciate not only the beauty of colonial buildings but also the authenticity of their history.

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