Chapter 17
A Second Look for a New Cycle of Life: From Main Post Office to Bicentennial Cultural Center – Survey and Registry for the Restoration

Ana Ottavianelli
Universidad Nacional de La Plata, Argentina

Eduardo Gentile
Universidad Nacional de La Plata, Argentina

Florencia Minatta
Universidad Nacional de La Plata, Argentina

ABSTRACT
It is not news that the material life of buildings transcends the function that gave rise to them. This circumstance is the leitmotiv of the rehabilitation and recycling works as part of architectural design practice. In the case of the former headquarters of the Buenos Aires Main Post Office, the development of new means of communication made the traditional postal traffic volume decrease, resulting in an oversized building according to present circumstances. In this context, the need was inevitable – and cultural and technical possibility – to give another meaning to the building, starting a new cycle of social use from a program compatible with its urban and architectural features. The present work refers to the graphic documents of the old substance of the building, focusing on the existing element on which the intervention was planned, with the objective of studying the components on which the conservation, restoration and intervention would develop.

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INTRODUCTION

In April 2005 the Department of Culture and the Ministry of Economy of Argentina launched a national and international ideas contest to find alternatives of use for the building, in the context of the forthcoming celebrations of the Bicentennial of the Mayo Revolution of 1810. From the evaluation of alternatives, a new competition was called (“Llamado a Concurso Internacional”, 2006) the following year for the rehabilitation of the building as the Bicentennial Cultural Center (known as CCB from its acronym in Spanish), to be inaugurated on May 2010, but finally inaugurated five years later.

The original building was designed by the French architect Norbert Maillart, and it is configured based on the clear distinction of two sectors: the first one, which gathers representative spaces with a public character, materialized, according to the vocabulary of French classicism of the second half of the eighteenth century; and the other one, of characteristic utilitarian nature, that had service areas designed within the guidelines of the pragmatism supported by the Beaux-Arts architecture, close to the industrial tradition. The generic and flexible nature of the public spaces allowed them to adapt the building, by character and distribution, to a program different than the original one. These characteristics resulted superlative in the utilitarian sector, enabling it as the principal area of intervention.

Figure 1. Fourth floor: original architectural plan and "industrial area"