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Modernist heritage and memory politics in Spain: shifting values for the adaptive reuse of Seville's former police headquarters

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Abstract

The political significance of modernist heritage architecture continues to be an unsolved question, particularly its identification and conservation. In Spain, the chronology of modernism stretches through the whole of the Spanish Civil War and Franco's dictatorship. The passing of legislation on memory politics in Spain (i.e. the 2007 Law of Historical Memory and the 2022 Law of Democratic Memory) offers a unique opportunity to address this unsolved question by discussing two uncharted heritage debates: namely, the motivations for the heritagisation of modernist architecture in Spain and the challenges in the adaptive reuse of modernist buildings with controversial histories. The former police headquarters in Seville exemplifies the complexities of both debates and to what extent conflicting views about heritage architecture may determine debates about its reuse. Through a documentary review of the heritagisation of Seville's former police headquarters, a discourse analysis of intervention proposals and press articles and interviews with relevant stakeholders, this study explored how the rise of memory politics in Spain has changed the interpretation of the former police headquarters' significance in the last two decades and influenced the choices for its adaptive reuse.

Keywords Heritagisation, Modernism, 20th century heritage, Memory politics, Dark heritage, Adaptive reuse

1 Introduction

This study deals with the relationship between changes in the political significance of modernist architectural heritage and its adaptive reuse in the context of the rise of memory politics in Spain. This relationship has been relatively unexplored, although the official chronology of Spanish modernism (i.e. 1925–1975) overlaps with the Spanish Civil War (1936–1939) and Generalissimo Franco's subsequent dictatorship (1939–1975). Many modernist public projects were developed during Franco's

regime and have undergone heritagisation by public and private institutions¹ following the Spanish Transition to democracy (1975–1986). However, the debates about their contentious character have yet to be addressed fully, especially buildings connected to the repressive actions under Francoism. These buildings include the headquarters of Francoist institutions, which continued to be used during the transition to the present day. However, other types of Francoist buildings, such as police stations and military facilities, have been rendered obsolete by new functional requirements and pressure from the real estate industry.

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¹ As a private non-governmental organisation, the Iberian Docomomo Foundation has spearheaded the identification and documentation of modern architectural and urban heritage in Spain and Portugal since 1993. Other private organisations, such as the local Architects Associations, have also supported this heritagisation process, either by cooperating with Docomomo or developing their own documentation and dissemination initiatives. Spanish public institutions at the local, regional and national levels have shown divergent attitudes towards modern architecture and urbanism as cultural heritage. Among the most active organisations, the Regional Government of Andalusia, through its Culture and Public Works Ministries, and the Spanish National Government, through the Institute of Spanish Cultural Heritage, have stood out with publicly funded research projects, plans and legislation for heritagisation.

Seville's former police headquarters is a particularly representative case. Popularly known as La Gavidia Police Station (Comisaría de La Gavidia) after the name of the square in the historic city centre where it is located, the building was designed by architect Ramón Montserrat and built in 1964. Its origins are linked to the maintenance of public order during Franco's regime, including the repression of political dissidence. Its construction was related to a large-scale inner city redevelopment that projected the political power of the regime in a dense historical context. The building's function relates to conflicting memories that reflected the political divisions within Spanish society; that is, it was either seen as an administrative centre or as a place where illegal political activities were harshly repressed.

The debate over the building's fate reached an impasse after the Spanish Ministry of the Interior vacated the building in 2003 and moved to a more modern headquarters in the north of the city centre. The site then attracted divergent interests, such as academic advocacy for its protection, questions about its economic viability and disputes related to its status as a place of historical memory. After 20 years in a derelict state, the debate about its adaptive reuse has encompassed the technical and conceptual aspects of the conservation of modern heritage. However, its political significance emerged following recent legislation on memory politics in Spain: namely, the former Law of Historical Memory (BOE 2007) and the current Law of Democratic Memory (BOE 2022). Both legislations were passed under social democratic governments and paid special attention to significant locations from the Spanish Civil War and Franco's dictatorship; therefore, they centred the buildings' political value in the heritagisation of modernist architecture in Spain. The original attention paid to aesthetic values during the 1980s and 1990s has widened to incorporate various topics, including gender (Rodríguez Ortiz 2018), exile (González Martínez 2015) and colonisation (Carrascal et al. 2015). By bringing attention to the contentious past of Seville's former police headquarters, this research study raises the following questions: How have different stakeholders considered its political value? How have the shifts in political value influenced the design of adaptive reuse proposals? Has the building's increasing political significance been an incentive or obstacle to its adaptive reuse?

The qualitative research methodology used in this study includes interviews with relevant stakeholders, a discourse analysis of documents related to the building's heritagisation and adaptive reuse (e.g. heritage catalogue fiches, newspaper articles) in addition to adaptive reuse proposals that were developed in both the academic and professional fields. This study first reviews the scientific

production related to historical memory and modernism in Spain. The study methodology is described in detail and the data obtained from its application are presented. The study then proposes the notions of 'progress-washing', 'building-blaming' as well as the experience of heritage, and their connection to adaptive reuse. The study concludes by answering the raised questions and indicating the open challenges offered by political significance in the heritagisation of modernist architecture in Spain.

2 Literature review

2.1 Modernism and top-down heritagisation

The heritagisation of modernist architecture in Spain remains unaddressed from a critical heritage perspective. The heritagisation process has invariably been led by architects, either from professional organisations, academic institutions or cultural heritage administrations, who have identified instances of modernist architecture mainly according to their aesthetic and architectural values. Normally inaccessible to popular taste, these values must be 'taught' to and 'understood' by the population (Díaz Otero and Rosales Noves 2007). This top-down architectural approach to heritage has been heavily criticised by critical heritage scholarship because of its lack of interdisciplinarity (Waterton and Watson 2013). As an outcome, the lack of appropriation of modernist architecture as heritage sites by society comes as no surprise (González Martínez 2019).

Exploring the reasons for this knowledge gap leads to the dominant discourses that have stewarded the heritagisation of modernist architecture in Western societies since the 1980s. A review of the literature about the significance of modernism reveals a general identification with the notion of 'progress', which greatly determines its political significance (Pérez Escolano 1996). This link is manifest in the authoritative characterisations of 20th century heritage led by the ICOMOS International Scientific Committee on Twentieth Century Heritage and The Getty Conservation Institute (Macdonald and Ostergreen 2011; Marsden and Spearrit 2021), as well as the Spanish National Plan for the Conservation of Cultural Heritage of the 20th Century (Carrión Gútez 2015). However, the identification with 'progress' requires further exploration, particularly in countries where modernist architecture was developed to a great extent under fascist regimes, such as in Germany, Italy, Portugal and Spain.²

² In the case of Spain, where the established chronology of modernism (1925–1975) stretches through 8 years of democracy (The Second Spanish Republic, 1931–1939) and 42 years of dictatorship (particularly Generalísimo Franco's rule from 1939 to 1975).

2.2 Old narratives of progress and new narratives of democracy

The customary appropriation of the term '*progresismo*' (i.e. 'progressivism') by the political left in Spain influences the political significance of modernism and acts as both a driver and a handicap for its heritagisation. Recent analyses of Spanish national and regional heritage legislation showed how regional authorities leaning to the political left paid more attention to the heritagisation of modernist architecture, whereas governments ruled by conservative parties have been less enthusiastic (González Martínez 2014). This 'default' connection between modernism and leftism greatly influenced the early identification of modernist heritage in Spain, especially during the 1990s and early 2000s. The specific weight of leftist authors like Oriol Bohigas (1970), for instance, meant that right-wing modernist architects like José Manuel Aizpurúa, or specific typologies, such as the '*poblados de colonización*' (colonisation towns, rural settlements promoted during Franco's regime), appeared as rogue elements of a politically loaded understanding of modernism, which hindered their heritage identification.

The recent international emergence of memory politics (Huysen 2000; Lebow 2006; Andermann 2015) introduces an important nuance in the original aesthetic and political approaches to modernism. By putting the focus on people's experience, memory politics acknowledges the complexities of modernist architecture and recognises the dark memories that characterised their use. MacDonald (2009) studied the process of assemblage and reassemblage of this difficult heritage in Germany, which evolved in parallel to the social and generational changes in German society (Schmidke 2023).

Other cases of more recent tragic events in Spain, Portugal or Latin American countries like Argentina or Chile demonstrated a rapidly changing focus on the so-called 'heritage of historical memory', 'heritage of human rights' or 'heritage of democratic memory', which produces unexplored overlaps between aesthetic and political heritage significances for modernist architecture. The literature on the political significance of modernism is in quite different stages of development according to its 'usefulness'. For example, the need to identify clandestine detention centres for judiciary processes in Argentina was key to the realisation of the Memoria Abierta (i.e. Open Memory) in Argentina (Conte 2015).

2.3 Political significance as an evolving question in Spain

The slow development of similar studies in Spain is coherent with the 'forgetfulness pact' that followed the 1977 Spanish Amnesty Law (Fytili and Cardina 2023). While researchers like González Ruibal (2020) have

illuminated the lesser-known architecture constructed during the Spanish Civil War and its aftermath, such as fortifications, concentration camps and forced labour housing, the connections between modernism and the heritage of democratic memory have yet to be explored.

The focus on aesthetic and architectural values during the early heritagisation of modernist architecture in Spain was a political choice designed to avoid difficult questions. In this sense, the production of modern heritage architecture was aligned with the spirit of the Spanish transition to democracy as a formula for reconciliation through oblivion (Álvarez Junco 2022). Explorations of the political significance of modernism in Spanish academia have increased since the 2007 and 2022 Laws were adopted, without any significant advances. In their contributions to an ad hoc volume edited by the Andalusian Institute of Historic Heritage, Navas Carrillo (2019) and Rodríguez Lora (2019) studied specific building typologies, such as social housing, from a theoretical perspective. However, both scholars refrained from deeper criticism and built upon the consensus during the transition to democracy for the need to 'turn the page' and called for the identification of some 'heritage values that go beyond the times in which it was built' (Rodríguez Lora 2019, 245). Nevertheless, the question about which values should be considered in the discussion remains unanswered.

3 Methodology

The qualitative methodology used in this study was based on semi-structured interviews and discourse analyses using documentation fiches, design documents, workshop proposals, local newspaper articles and a documentary.

Subjects for the semi-structured interviews included the original designer, Ramón Montserrat, and three anonymous interviewees, who were two University of Seville researchers specialised in the heritagisation of modernist architecture (Interviewees 1 and 2) and the promoter of the Entreadoquines civic association advocating for the building's adaptive reuse (Interviewee 3). The recorded interviews lasted between 1 and 2 h and were transcribed. The interviewees were chosen for their knowledge about the heritagisation of the former police headquarters. Other stakeholders, such as the current owner and the architects in charge of designing the adaptive reuse of the former police headquarters as a hotel, were contacted for interviews but did not respond to the invitations.

The discourse analyses explored a variety of documents and produced very important information about the changes in the evaluation of the building during its heritagisation process. These documents included



Fig. 1 Seville's former police headquarters under construction in 1964 (Source: Ramón Montserrat)

documentation fiches for the building from the General Catalogue of Andalusian Historical Heritage (CGPHA), the Catalogue of Places of Democratic Memory (CLMD) and the Iberian Docomomo Foundation. Design documents were also reviewed, including the first adaptive reuse proposal produced in 2007 by the Planning Department of the Government of Seville and the most recent produced in 2022 for the current owner, Hoteles Color Especial. Proposals for the 'Patrimonio contemporáneo: proyecto, técnica y materia' workshop held at the Andalusian Institute of Historical Heritage in 2010 were also analysed in addition to local newspaper articles published between 2003 and 2023 (e.g. *ABC de Sevilla*, *Diario de Sevilla*, *Público* and *El Correo de Andalucía*). Finally, the documentary '*La comisaría de La Gavidia: Lugar de memoria democrática*' (2018),³ produced by the Comisiones Obreras (CCOO) labour union was analysed.

3.1 Seville's former police headquarters: value construction and the paradox of modernity

Seville's former police headquarters constitutes a unique example of the contradictions between democratic memory and modernist architecture because of the evolution of Franco's regime (Interviewee 1). The building was constructed between 1961 and 1964 after the first wave of political repression following the Spanish Civil War (Interviewee 2). The General Directorate of Security used the building as an administrative centre for the issuance of identification documents and Spanish passports, as well as a detention centre for common and political

criminals. The building bears a dark memory related to the activities by the Brigada Politico-Social (Political-Social Brigade), which focused on controlling illegal political activities during Franco's dictatorship (Fig. 1). In the absence of verifiable data, the number of detainees who passed through the detention cells was counted in 'the hundreds' between 1965 and 1976.

Discussions about the building's future have stretched over more than 20 years since the Spanish Ministry of the Interior vacated it in 2003, involving multiple stakeholders, legislative measures, technical decisions, public interests and the building itself. Different assemblages have determined different stages in the building's heritagisation. The initial heritagisation began in the late 1990s with a focus on the building's intrinsic value, while the latest heritagisation began in the late 2000s and incorporates the victims' experiences after the implementation of memory politics in Spain.

The heritage evaluation of the building during its first heritagisation surprised even its designer, the architect Ramón Montserrat. When interviewed in 2010, he described the building as 'a risky bet that, unfortunately, had gone wrong.' Montserrat explained his 'complicated relationship' with this project as being due to the difficulties he experienced in the design process, including the halving of the construction budget and his professional fees.⁴ Montserrat expressed a certain pride in some of his design's typological innovations, such as the original

³ CCOO Andalucía. (2019). *La comisaría de La Gavidia: Lugar de memoria democrática* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QS-MMILGae8> (accessed 21 April 2023).

⁴ Montserrat mentions this issue and the harsh negotiations with the then General Director of Security, Carlos Arias Navarro (who later became the last Prime Minister during Franco's dictatorship). Montserrat refers to how the reduction of the construction budget did not allow for the installation of an air-conditioning system, which made working conditions inside of the building unbearable.

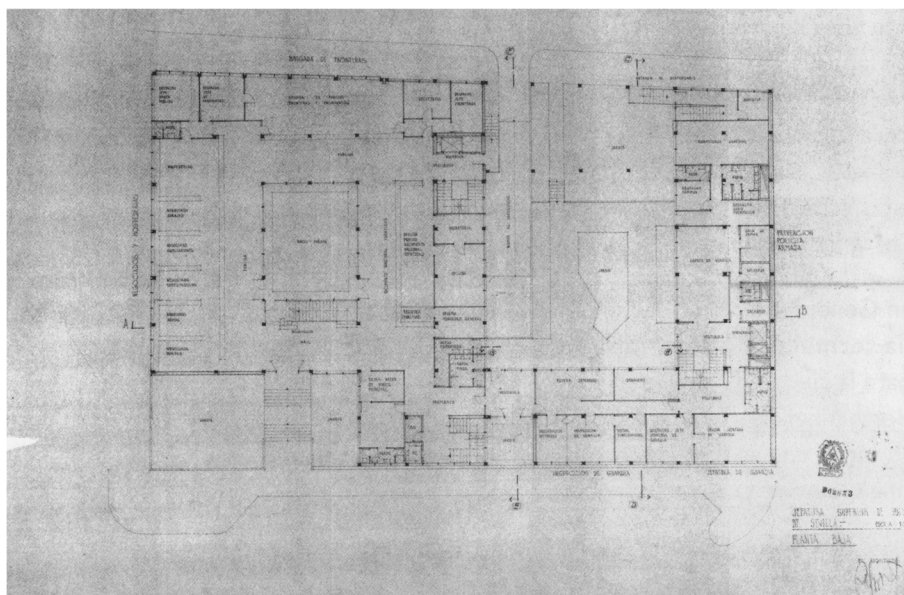


Fig. 2 Original floor plans in 1961 (Source: Ramón Montserrat)

location of the detention cells on the fifth floor of the building, where ventilation and humidity conditions were greatly improved for the detainees. However, the police authorities finally located the detention centre in the basement.

This is not the first case in which an architect disavows his own work, but it poses an important question about how the value of the building was developed as a narrative. The information available in the Digital Guide to the Historic Heritage of Andalusia,⁵ which is the technical report supporting the statutory listing of the building in 2007 in the CGPHA, focuses exclusively on architectural values. This is also the case of the Iberian Docomomo fiche,⁶ which highlights the aesthetic value of its abstract architectural composition and rational floor plan organisation (Fig. 2). Other academic works stressed the historic and scientific value of the building as an architectural manifesto in adapting the technical principles of German architect Mies van der Rohe to the Spanish context (Trujillo Arellano 2015). Building upon the same architectural values, other studies referred to the connections that the building establishes in terms of its scale with the surrounding urban environment, while

achieving the goal of monumentality (García Vázquez and Pico Valimaña 1999).

The defence of the idea of aesthetic modernity, which is particularly rare in Seville's historic city centre, appears to be a primary motivation for the heritagisation of the former police headquarters (García Vázquez and Pico Valimaña 1999). This concept highlights the building's positive contribution to the diversity of the traditional built environment as representative of modernism, that is, as a current against 'ideologies that tended to block any aspirations to progress, innovation and freedom' (Pizza 1999, 103). However, the building's contribution to the value of the urban context also appears to be a difficult heritage question, as the urban context itself must be identified as part of the destructive legacy of Franco's regime in the city centre (Interviewee 1) (Fig. 3). The former police headquarters partially occupies the empty space left by the former Jesuit School of San Hermenegildo, dating from 1580, which was demolished under the mandate of Seville's mayor, Marqués de Contadero (1952–1959) (Fig. 4).⁷ In addition to the building's aesthetics, Montserrat observed that this relationship with urban destruction was one particular factor motivating strong popular opposition, rather than its significance

⁵ Instituto Andaluz del Patrimonio Histórico: Consejería de Turismo, Cultura y Deporte. (n.d.) Jefatura superior de policía. <https://guiadigital.iaph.es/bien/inmueble/22019/sevilla/sevilla/jefatura-superior-de-policia> (accessed 21 April 2023).

⁶ Docomomo Ibérico. (n.d.) Jefatura superior de policía. <https://docomomoiberico.com/edificios/jefatura-superior-de-policia/> (accessed 21 April 2023).

⁷ Through the demolition of a series of historic buildings, as well as residential buildings located in the area, this strategy was embodied in the succession of open squares currently called De la Gavidia, Concordia and Duque, as well as in the buildings linked to Franco's regime that overlook the squares: namely, the army headquarters, police headquarters and the headquarters of the Spanish Trade Union Organisation.



Fig. 3 The police headquarters under construction in its urban context (upper left corner) (Source: Ramón Montserrat)



Fig. 4 Demolition of the former Jesuit School of San Hermenegildo in the location later occupied by Seville's police headquarters (Source: Archivo Serrano/ICAS)

as a place used for the control of public order. This negative evaluation challenges dominant discourses of progress within the professional architectural field (Mendoza 2016).

3.2 A long administrative process and open debate

After ownership of the building was transferred to the Seville City Council in 2006, debates about the adaptive reuse of the building were influenced by different alignments and misalignments between the local, regional and national governments, particularly according to the

institutionalisation of memory politics in Spain with the 2007 Law of Historical Memory. The 2007 Masterplan of Seville promoted by the municipal government of the social democrat Partido Socialista Obrero Español (PSOE) earmarked the building as a service of public and social interest (SIPS) specifically for 'socio-cultural' uses. On the eve of the 2008 economic crisis, this designation was contested by the opposition party, the conservative Partido Popular (PP), which favoured commercial purposes that could be used to inject funds into the municipal budget.

Doubts about the economic viability of the SIPS designation motivated the exploration of alternatives within the municipality itself. In 2007, staff at the Rehabilitation and Urban Renovation Service of the Municipal Planning Department designed an adaptive reuse proposal for internal use as the headquarters for the Tax Office of the Municipality. In a moment when the debate about the future of the building did not delve on its controversial political significance, the authors of this proposal gave particular attention to the space of the detention cells in the basement. The project marked the 167 m² space occupied by the cells with a generic title (i.e. ‘compatible uses’); however, the proposal did not specify its new function or indicate the location of its access.

The positive consideration towards the SIPS qualification endured with political connotations. In 2010, the Andalusian Institute of Historical Heritage organised an adaptive reuse workshop in the building called ‘Patrimonio contemporáneo: proyecto, técnica y materia’ (Fig. 5). The workshop assignment left the participants decision about the building’s new functions to their consideration after performing a multilevel analysis. As the workshop participants discussed, given the building’s low aesthetic value to citizens, its use as SIPS would benefit the population and conjure its controversial past to some extent. Significantly, only two of the eight participating teams considered its political significance. One ambiguously referred to the building’s ‘bad press,’ while the other openly spoke of ‘repression.’ Interestingly, none of the intervention proposals dedicated any space for remembrance of the building’s controversial past.

The main obstacle to fulfilling the masterplan designation was the massive investment required, which made the building a white elephant for the municipality after the 2008 financial crisis. Therefore, the municipal government by the PP (2011–2015) suggested changing the building’s qualification in the masterplan to allow for commercial use. In May 2012, one year after the municipal elections, the Seville City Council approved the change from SIPS to ‘large commercial area’ (GS), which facilitated the property transfer and sale of commercial spaces to potential investors. The opposition parties, PSOE and the left-wing Izquierda Unida (IU), contested this decision to no avail. Considering the stark austerity policies at the national and local levels, the commercial use of the building seemed to be the only economically viable option, to the extent that the new municipal government run by PSOE after the 2015 municipal elections did not reverse the PP’s decision.

Nevertheless, the PSOE proposed the possibility of an ultimate ‘solution’ for the building; that is, its



Fig. 5 Course poster for ‘Patrimonio contemporáneo: proyecto, técnica y materia.’ (Source: the author)

demolition because of the alleged dilapidated state of its steel structure. This proposal was unsurprising after more than 12 years of decay and vandalism (Fig. 6). More importantly, the proposal resonated with various voices in the local society, particularly among the political left, who called for the demolition of the whole building because of its role as reminder of Franco’s dictatorship in Spain. This solution was also discussed at the national level for other significant structures from Franco’s regime, such as the Valle de los Caídos in Cuelgamuros or the Moncloa triumphal arch in Madrid. However, it proved controversial, both as an over-reaction and attempt to erase history (Interviewee 1), and as a lack of consideration towards the experiences of the victims of Francoism.

4 Matters of memory in play

Public discussions about the building became increasingly politicised following the passage of the 2007 Law of Historical Memory (BOE 2007). When the PSOE



Fig. 6 One of the building's courtyards after years of abandonment and vandalism. (Source: the author)

national government promoted the debate, it became interconnected with other international policy initiatives focused on memory (Huysen 2000; Lebow 2006) and aimed to continue the reparation measures that were already implemented in Spain during its transition to democracy (Álvarez Junco 2022).⁸ Among other measures, the 2007 Law created the CLMD, which incorporated various locations, such as battlefields, prisons and commemoration sites, and potentially allowed for the inclusion of the former police headquarters as a place of democratic memory. These new legal measures reassembled the building's heritage condition, which seemed to garner a more widespread acknowledgement of its historical and political values.

Hence, Seville's former police headquarters was resignified as a place of democratic struggle by stressing its significance to the resistance against Franco's dictatorship,

which led to democracy. Therefore, the building potentially appealed to all democratic parties and civil society. But far from achieving unanimous agreement, the debate became much more politically loaded in the context of the social polarisation in Spain that followed the 15-M Movement in 2011.⁹ For this reason, and in light of the consensus between PP and PSOE about the building's commercial use and the possibility of demolition raised by the PSOE, the CCOO labour union promoted the inscription of the building into the CLMD in 2015 with a clear purpose: that is, 'to spare the building from real estate speculation or "retouching", allowing citizens to know the true recent history of Seville' (Serrano 2018) (Fig. 7).

The political significance of the building began to be debated among the local media and academic fora. As an example, the 2016 'Desmontando la Gavidia' workshop (Fig. 8) organised by the Entreadoquines collective with the active intervention of local scholars, saw multiple references to the building's past as the detention centre of the Political-Social Brigade (Interviewee 3). However, this did not mean that the early architecturally oriented heritagisation was substituted for a new politically oriented heritagisation. In the meantime, the Iberian Docomomo Foundation continued to spearhead the acknowledgement of the building's architectural values and partnered with the local Architects Association (Colegio de Arquitectos) and the School of Architecture of Seville to unveil a Docomomo plaque in its main entrance in October 2018 (Fig. 9).

The inscription of the building into the CLMD was a tortuous process influenced by political debates. According to the semi-federal governance system in Spain, the Andalusia regional government led by the PSOE oversaw the regional implementation of the CLMD. The agreement for the inscription of the former police headquarters into the CLMD arrived on July 18, 2017, on the symbolic date of the 81st anniversary of the start of the Spanish Civil War. This agreement gave the regional authorities the power to block any adaptive reuse that would not respect the new memorial character of the whole building (e.g. commercial use). Local scholars considered that the full consecration of the building to political remembrance was a disproportionate measure that

⁸ The 2007 Law of Historical Memory aimed to 'contribute to heal the open wounds among Spaniards and to satisfy the citizens that suffered, either directly or through their relatives, the consequences of the tragedy of the Civil War or the repression of the dictatorship ... deepening in the spirit of re-encounter and concord of the transition, not only those citizens are acknowledged and honoured, but Spanish democracy as a whole' (BOE 2007, 5).

⁹ The 15-M Movement, also known as the 'Indignados' movement, was a citizens' movement formed as a result of the demonstrations on 15 May 2011. After the demonstrations concluded, several groups of people decided to spontaneously camp out in squares in different cities in Spain, with the intention of promoting a more participatory democracy away from the PSOE-PP bipartisanship; challenging the dominance of banks and corporations; as well as calling for an authentic division of powers in the democratic system. https://es.wikipedia.org/wiki/Movimiento_15-M (accessed 26 November 2023, translation by the author).



Fig. 7 A visit to the detention cells shown in ‘La comisaría de La Gavidia: Lugar de memoria democrática’, which was produced by CCOO Andalucía (Source: YouTube)

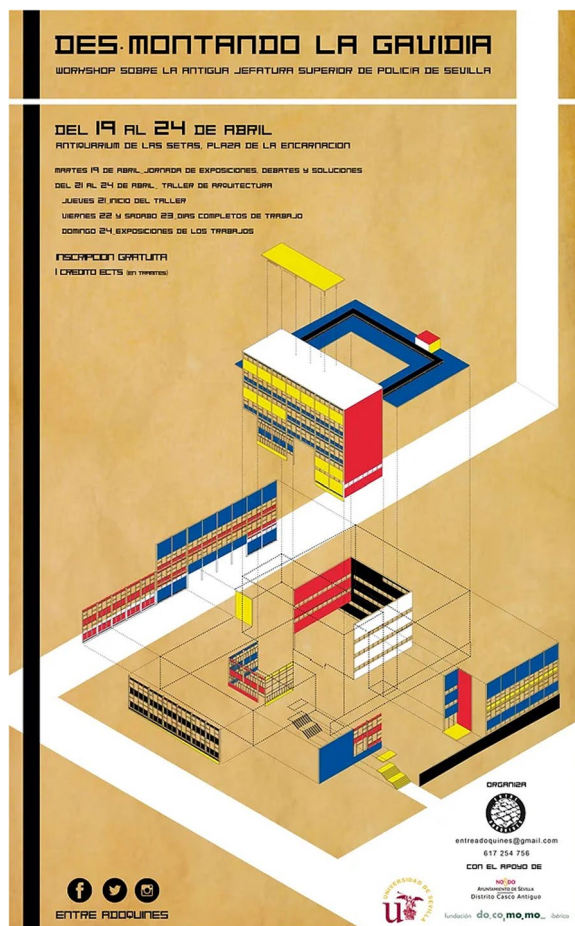


Fig. 8 Poster for the 2016 ‘Desmontando la Gavidia’ workshop (Source: Colectivo Entreadoquines)

could only benefit the far right, which could consider it as an over-reaction to leftist memory issues (Interviewee 2).

The official administrative procedure for the inscription of the building into the CLMD began on January 17, 2019, on the last day of the PSOE regional government after the landslide elections in December 2018, which gave power to the PP in Andalusia. The inscription process was halted following allegations from the new owner, Hoteles Color Especial, which asked the regional government to reconsider the inscription of the full building into the CLMD and proposed a partial inscription of the building into the CLMD instead. This partial inscription referred solely to the detention cells in the basement, which, as Hoteles Color Especial argued, were the only space with political significance related to the struggle for democracy enshrined by the 2007 legislature. Through its Ministry of Culture and Historic Heritage in charge of the CLMD, the incoming PP regional administration agreed with the allegations and consecrated a widely accepted division of the building that only associated the detention cells with a dark memory, whereas the rest of the building was identified as having administrative functions free of any controversy (Interviewees 1 and 2). The regional government sanctioned the inscription of the detention cells into the CLMD, which became effective on 30 June 2020.

Following this Solomonian solution and especially in the context of the local post-COVID-19 pandemic economic recovery, which was strongly reliant on tourism, there was a general agreement on the adaptive reuse of the former police headquarters as a hotel with a reserved memorial space that could inform interested parties about the dark



Fig. 9 Unveiling of the Docomomo plaque in the main entrance of the building (Source: Diario de Sevilla)

recent history in Spain, without overwhelming potential visitors (Interviewee 2). However, details about the proposed memorial space remain unknown, with the only determinations coming from the Seville City Council:

the declaration as place of democratic memory will include the protection of an enclosed space of 215 m², located in the semi-basement floor where the old detention cells are. This space must have an independent access regardless of the use that the building will have as a whole after the bidding process. The space should be, according to the criteria of the City Council, treated as an independent premise from the rest of the building, with an independent entrance from the Plaza de la Concordia (Ayuntamiento de Sevilla 2020, translated by the author).

The adaptive reuse design developed by 2RDIP Arquitectos for Hoteles Color Especial was unveiled in an official presentation to the mayor of Seville in July 2022 (Fig. 10). The proposal incorporates 100 high-end hotel rooms, plus semi-public functions such as a co-working centre in the basement and a restaurant on the ground floor. The design acknowledges the building's inscription into the CLMD by reserving a space in the detention cells area located in the basement with independent access from the hotel, which appears as an empty space to be defined further.

5 Discussion

5.1 Continuity of top-down approaches and 'progress-washing'

The changing political significance of Seville's former police headquarters has made it a rare case of public

debate about the heritagisation of modernist architecture in Spain, which apparently challenged the established assumptions about the original top-down, architect-led characteristics of the heritagisation process. However, despite the apparent openness of the debate, the public discussions were just a different formulation of the usual top-down approaches where powerful stakeholders did not refrain from using heritage as a political tool in dominant discourses. This is the case, for example, in the discourse on modernist architecture's positive contributions to diversity in the historical context, which was sustained in either listing files, documentation fiches, academic research theses and the results of the 2010 course and 2016 workshop. The discourse highlighted the following notions: 'progress', 'innovation' and (paradoxically for this building) 'freedom'.

Pizza (1999) noted that these three terms were assumed within the dominant heritage discourse on Spanish modernism and also refer to the historic period of '*desarrollismo*' (i.e. developmentalism) that started in 1959 under the aegis of Opus Dei political elites. This period was identified with economic growth, infrastructural development and the declining repressive activity during Franco's regime (Juliá Díaz 1999; Álvarez Junco 2022). This dominant heritage discourse allowed to dodge two controversial heritage questions about the dark memories of political repression and the inherent contradiction of the massive urban renewal that preceded the construction of the building. Hence, we may argue that the heritagisation process under these notions acts as a 'progress-washing' of the difficult ties that the building has with Franco's dictatorship.

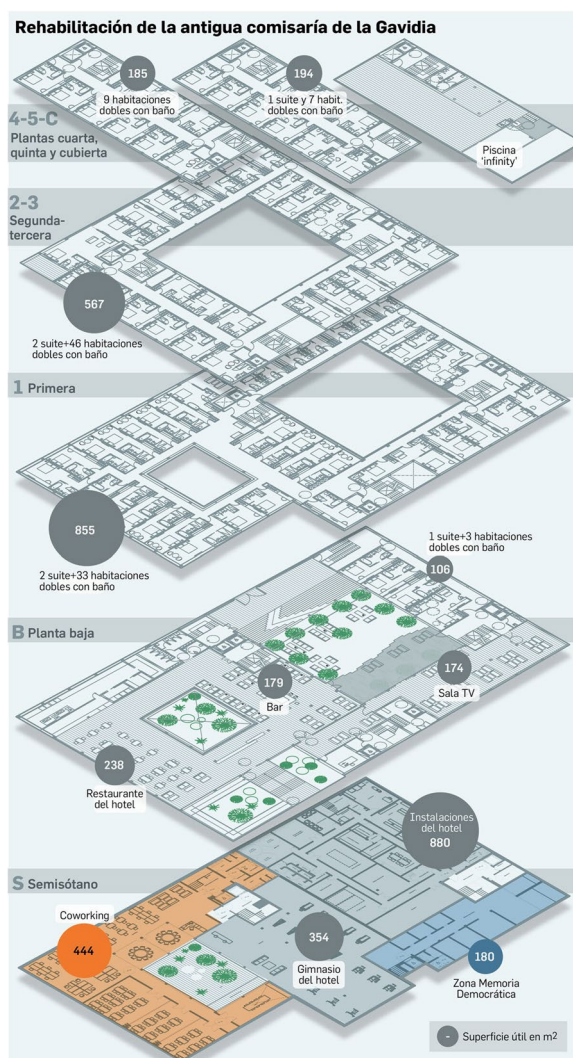


Fig. 10 The new functional arrangement based on the adaptive reuse design by 2RDIP Arquitectos (Source: Sevilla Municipal Planning Office)

5.2 Shifting the focus: building agency and experience-centred approaches

The heritagisation of modernist architecture requires analyses to go beyond dominant discourses, starting by acknowledging the multiplicity of stakeholders and their role in the identification of attributes (Spoormans et al. 2023). Besides the evident differences in criteria for the case of the former police headquarters, a common denominator is how the stakeholders in the fields of planning and politics invested the building with agency. For example, its designation as SIPS ‘compensated’ for its inherent negative memories; therefore, the designation did not ‘destabilise’ its heritage condition (MacDonald 2009). This ‘redemption through reuse’

was also supported by the building attributes highlighted in the listing reports, which omitted the trauma from the prior destruction of the historic environment.

The investment of agency in the building also included assigning a portion of blame. When Juan Espadas, the new PSOE mayor, declared in 2015 that the poor state of the building impeded any future reuse, he was conveying the full responsibility of the building’s fate to its materiality. He was most probably unaware of the dominant heritage discourses about the lack of constructive consistency and experimentality as the greatest challenges for the conservation of modernist architecture (Casciato 2008). Proof of the underlying political interest of his statement is that its contents were ultimately denied by expert reports on the structural integrity of the building.

This building-centred discussion advanced towards acknowledging people who were arrested for political crimes following the passage of the 2007 Law of Historical Memory. This was accelerated after the 15-M movement, which denounced political corruption and radically questioned the hegemonic memory and foundational myths of the Spanish transition to democracy (Kornetis 2019). As the listing initiative of the CCOO labour union in 2015 showed, together with the subsequent ubiquitous presence of victim testimonies in the media, this people-centred heritagisation of the former police headquarters was connected with wider initiatives of memory politics, particularly in Latin American countries (Fytili and Cardina 2023). However, the spirit of the law consciously avoided the formulation of heritagisation as heritage related to human rights (Andermann 2015), but rather chose the less divisive characterisation as the heritage related to democratic struggle.

5.3 Aesthetic versus political heritagisation

The assumption of dominant architectural and political discourses poses the challenge of two simultaneous heritagisation processes. However, both processes have operated independently, completely segregated from each other. The architectural heritagisation process is heir to the spirit of the Spanish transition to democracy, aiming to find values in architectural modernism that could be shared by all walks of Spanish society. Agreeing with Schmidke (2023) on the importance of generational change, the second heritagisation process occurs in a context where the focus shifts to democratic values, with a theoretical analogous purpose of social galvanisation.

Despite their shared purposes, both heritagisation processes reflect the limited impact that the notion of ‘dark’ heritage has had in Spain because the identification of ‘darkness’ operates with a logic of victors and victims, that is, an ‘otherness’ (Huang 2017) that the so-called spirit of the Spanish transition to democracy aimed to

overcome (Da Silva and Ferreira 2015). This is the reason for the conscious choice of various terms, such as ‘*memoria histórica*’ and ‘*memoria democrática*’, which identify the Spanish Civil War and Franco’s dictatorship as ‘deviations’ from a consolidated democratic trajectory that must be projected towards the future (Lebow 2006).

Considering the case of the former police headquarters, the sensitiveness of the discussions about memory politics does not produce opportunities for the ‘morbid fascination’ that appears in international cases of buildings that underwent adaptive reuse, such as converting former prisons or psychiatric hospitals into hotels (Pendlebury et al. 2017). This is shown by the detention cells’ lack of integration into any of the analysed adaptive reuse proposals. Even if the achievement of the partial inscription into the CLMD and the future use of the memorial space are significant, the visitors’ leisure experience will be separated from the building’s dark memories of struggle, which gives architectural shape to the institutional approach of ‘sweeping trauma under the carpet’ of the Spanish transition to democracy.

6 Conclusions

The political value of Seville’s former police headquarters has fluctuated in time and runs parallel to the implementation of memory policies in Spain in the last two decades. Accordingly, the building shows the development of two independent currents of heritagisation. In the first efforts to introduce modernist architecture into Spain’s cultural heritage during the 1990s with the spirit of the Spanish transition to democracy, the heritagisation process focused on architectural values supported by an architectural disciplinary discourse. In the following years, public stakeholders have embraced the more complex consideration of the political value of modernism beyond purely aesthetic considerations. However, the building’s listing in two independent official catalogues, such as the CGPHA and the CLMD, exemplifies the lack of communication between both statutory protection figures and poses an open question: whose heritage does the former police headquarters represent?

The analysis of the testimonies, proposals and public debates in the media show how public awareness about the building’s political values has greatly influenced its adaptive reuse proposals at different levels. On the one hand, architectural and heritage academia have privileged the view of the Spanish transition to democracy to avoid conflict by silencing a difficult past and focusing on functional choices that will ‘redeem’ the building from its controversial memory. On the other hand, the private and public developers’ practical approaches complied with the legal requirements established by Spanish legislation on memory politics. These

developers pragmatically aimed for the most profitable functions (e.g. offices and a hotel) while assuming the musealisation of the detention cells. Nevertheless, this heritagisation process was performed with the same spirit of not letting these dark memories disturb the building’s new functions.

We cannot affirm that the political significance of the building was an incentive or obstacle in any way stronger than other economic, structural, aesthetic or material considerations that have emerged over the years of debate about the building’s future. In any case, it is possible to affirm that the initiative to list the building in the CLMD definitely triggered and accelerated the related decision-making process about the adaptive reuse of the building, which as the dates showed, frequently happened in haste, after or before local and regional shifts of power. This is because the relevance of political discussions in Spain in recent years exceeded the rather specialised academic and professional discussions about the buildings’ aesthetics and heritage modernism, particularly when they were developed in a context of economic crisis.

This study aimed to explore the important factors determining the conservation and adaptive reuse of Seville’s former police headquarters, whose significance can be divided into aesthetic and political factors. Both factors follow dominant discourses that ultimately rely on a top-down perspective of heritage identification, documentation, conservation and management. Further explorations of the building’s public value will show to what extent these official discourses and public opinion may have aligned or not and may constitute a reference for future decision-making processes.

Abbreviations

CCOO	Comisiones obreras (labour union)
CGPHA	Catálogo general del Patrimonio histórico Andaluz (general catalogue of Historical heritage of Andalusia)
CLMD	Catálogo de Lugares de Memoria Democrática (catalogue of places of democratic Memory)
IU	Izquierda unida (political party)
GS	Gran superficie comercial (large commercial area)
PP	Partido popular (political party)
PSOE	Partido socialista obrero Español (political party)
SIPS	Servicio de interés Público y social (service of public and social interest)

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