The Future of a Modern Atlas
Addressing an iconic mixed-use Modern building in the context of a World Heritage historic city center in Lima, Peru

Our research addresses some of the challenges and opportunities of Modernism architecture and urbanism within a World Heritage Site (WHS) through the case of the iconic Atlas building, designed by architects Walter Weberhofer and Jose Alvarez-Calderon (1953-1955) for the Atlas insurance Company and located in the historic city center of Lima, Peru.

Containing shops, offices and housing, and distinguished by its sensitive massing and finely scaled façade articulation, Atlas relates with delicacy to the street and its urban neighbors. Despite years of neglect and piecemeal interventions, Atlas remains an extraordinary example of an unabashedly modern building sensitive to and contextual with the surrounding historic city.

Like many significant Modern buildings within the historic city center of Lima, Atlas is a commercial, mixed-use building, with many owners and stakeholders. This means getting these different actors to reconcile their agendas and to agree on how best to renovate this building is difficult. Peru also has few resources and no clear guidelines on intervening Modern sites in order to keep these buildings functional, sustainable, accessible and resilient, especially within the World Heritage area. These combined factors discourage good conservation stewardship, as well as the necessary investments required to sustain and enhance the properties.

A viable future for Atlas requires engaging the challenges of the social, political, and regulatory apparatus, in order to facilitate sound technical and management that reflect critically on the value of Modern buildings and sites as interventions within the context of this World Heritage Site.

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4: Mid-century skyline of the historic city center of Lima, showing the new Modern buildings among the historic and traditional architecture.
5: The Atlas building in the late 1950’s, next to the 18th century Seguro theatre.
6 and 7: First and second floor layouts of the Atlas building.
10: Architectural details and textures of the Atlas, including glass bricks, green mastic tiles, and black tiles for the elevator corridors.

Biographies

Rosabella Vita Álvarez-Calderon Silva-Santisteban
Archaeologist, urbanist and professor at the Department of Architecture, Pontificia Universidad Católica del Peru, Lima, Peru. She holds a Master in Design Studies degree in Critical Conservation from Harvard University and has worked as a consultant for Peru’s Ministry of Culture and for UNESCO-Peru’s “Heritage Cities” project.

David N. Fixler
FAIA FAPT LEED
Lecturer in Architecture, Graduate School of Design, Harvard University. Architect specializing in heritage conservation and adaptive reuse, with particular focus on modern properties. He has taught and lectured around the world, his work has been published internationally and he plays a leadership role in a variety of global conservation organizations.

APT LATIN AMERICA CHAPTER

ROSABELLA ALVAREZ-CALDERON SILVA-SANTISTEBAN
Lecturer, Department of Architecture
Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú
alvarezcaldron.rv@pucp.edu.pe
PERU

David N. Fixler, FAIA FAPT LEED
Lecturer in Architecture
Graduate School of Design, Harvard University
david@davidfixler.com
UNITED STATES