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This practicum began as a research assistant to architect and Professor Laura Gilabert Sansalvador, Ph.D. Dr. Gilabert Sansalvador completed her post-doctoral research at La Universitat Politecnica de Valencia in Spain focusing on Pre-Columbian architecture in Mexico and Heritage Management. Her original research examined the utilitarian function and the architectural practice of the corbelled arch in Maya structures. These vaulted rooms are found throughout the Puuc areas and are linked to certain Maya history periods. This research led her to New Orleans to conduct research at the Middle American Research Institute at Tulane University to assist with the structural identification of Maya sites using LiDAR scans. It is theorized that the existence of the vaulted hallways gave rise to more monumental architectural support and sophisticated detailing on lintels and friezes, including “negative batter.” While searching through the large collection of materials from the site of Uxmal at MARI, Dr. Gilabert Sansalvador discovered the hand drawings of the Nunnery that were completed by Gerhardt Kramer and Herndon Fair and was fascinated, claiming that these plans rivaled modern-day laser scans of the buildings. This propelled her research regarding the expedition that led to the exhibition and publication of Pursuing Detail; 1930 Tulane’s Expedition to Uxmal.
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1. INTRODUCTION

The reproduction of a Maya building on the banks of Lake Michigan for the 1933 World’s Fair was an ambitious feat whose outcome left crowds awestruck. The original structure was located at the Pre-Columbian site of Uxmal in the Yucatán Peninsula of Mexico which the Spanish referred to as *Las Monjas* or “The Nunnery.” Fairgoers were astonished to learn about these “exotic” people who built great “cities out of stone,” rivaling the other buildings at Chicago’s *Century of Progress International Exposition*.\(^1\) The Fair was a celebration of the city’s centennial anniversary and an exposition of scientific and technological discoveries.\(^2\) The emphasis on technology and progress was presented in rail travel, automobiles, and architecture – most notably in *The House of Tomorrow* by George Fred Keck.\(^3\) The Department of Works wanted to present the advancements in architecture throughout the Americas and recruited the director of Tulane’s Mesoamerican Studies Department; Frans Blom, to share the history of Maya art and architecture.

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Frans Blom was a Danish anthropologist interested in the Maya archaeology of Mexico and Guatemala. His focus was on exploration, and he was regarded for his no-fear approach to adventure with a keen eye for drawing structures and stone carvings. In 1924, Blom joined the Department of Middle American Research and under the leadership of William Gates to focus on expeditions to Mexico.⁴ Blom remained a professor of Anthropology and the Director of the Department of Middle American Research until his retirement in 1941 and completed multiple famous excursions during his tenure.⁵

Due to his connections with Tulane and his previous work in Mesoamerica, the

Works Department for the Chicago World’s Fair was confident that he would be able to document and recreate the Nunnery structure. Building a replica would require blueprints and in early 1930, Blom asked two young students from Tulane University School of Architecture; Gerhardt Kramer and Herndon Thompson, to participate in the trip and document ancient ruins in the Yucatán Peninsula of Mexico. These students never expected that their work would change how anthropologists interpret Maya architecture. Choosing to engage with the Architecture Department and creating an interdisciplinary team allowed for methods of measuring previously unused and assisted Blom to uncover new information about the site of Uxmal.


The Chicago World Fair created a ripple of American interest in tourism to exotic destinations with unique art and architecture. The showcasing of the Maya Temple in Chicago catered to the attraction of the Art Deco aesthetic at the time and the pre-1920s fascination with Latin American temple-pavilions. Despite the onslaught of the Great Depression, there was an increase in the number of middle-class travelers looking for affordable vacations. These coupled with Mexico’s aspiration to participate in the economic advantages of stronger infrastructure by promoting railway development at the turn of the 20th-century—boosted tourism throughout Mexico. Many travelers considered it a “dynamic place to visit” because it blended both ancient and modern life. Explorers, archaeologists, and tourists alike were drawn to the mystery of Mexico’s indigenous past. The rise in tourism and the nationalistic interest in archaeology led to the restructuring of local cultural institutions geared toward managing historic sites. The Revolutionary elite formed a Pro-tourism Commission in 1928 and the National Tourism Committee was formed in 1938 to promote regional fairs “to strengthen local culture.” In 1975 the Secretary of Tourism (SECTUR) was created and on 23 February 1984, Mexico accepted the UNESCO World Heritage

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Convention. Through the acceptance of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization’s (UNESCO) Convention, Mexico’s historic sites became eligible for inclusion on the World Heritage Sites list. In 1987, the Historic Center of Mexico City was the first site to be added to the UNESCO World Heritage list. Then in 1996, the site of Uxmal was declared a World Heritage Site by UNESCO, deeming it one of the most important archaeological sites of Maya culture.

This Practicum uses Uxmal as a case study to determine how cultural heritage sites represent the local community and how heritage conservation and programming decisions directly impact the narratives presented to citizens and tourists.

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2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The research for this Practicum began by reviewing primary and secondary sources for the 1930 Uxmal expedition. The first subgroup will lay out the purpose of the expedition and the team’s findings. To best understand the surrounding context and previous work done in this field, this literature review will include these four topics: The Maya and Mesoamerica, Caste War in the Yucatán and Ejido System, UNESCO’s World Heritage Site background, and Cultural Resource Management. UNESCO’s section will include sub-sections that explain the history of World Heritage Sites, the criteria used for their nomination, and the importance of Uxmal.

Tulane University’s 1930 Expedition: From Uxmal to Chicago

The 1933 World’s Fair “A Century of Progress” was the celebration of development in Chicago as the perfect metaphor for the second industrial revolution and capitalism. A small settlement on the western frontier of the United States in 1833 had become a great industrial city and an important transportation hub. The organizers used the idea of progress to generate optimism in American society in a context of instability and economic decline due to the Great Depression of 1929. To communicate this message and to show people how progress could give them a better future, they
focused on modern architecture, new construction techniques, and the social sciences, to reinforce the idea of technology, science, and social sciences as the engines of human progress.\(^{15}\)

Frans Blom was approached by the Works Department for the Chicago World Fair to present his findings on Maya Puuc architecture in 1930. The idea for the “Century of Progress” World Fair in Chicago was to show the evolution of architecture throughout the Americas in the last 100 years. This provided Blom with the opportunity for a new expedition that would include architecture students from Tulane University. He approached the School of Architecture requesting two students close to graduation, who could assist him in the documentation and creation of blueprints for the reproduction of the Nunnery Quadrangle at Uxmal. Eventually, Gerhart Kramer and Herndon Thompson were chosen to participate in the expedition with Blom and work alongside a multidisciplinary team that would change the course of fieldwork for Anthropology.

With the assistance of Kramer and Fair, the team discovered an architectural technique that was unique to the area and would later be identified as a predominant design of the Puuc Style. The team began to refer to it as “Negative Batter” and discovered that it was an ingenious solution for visual correction that proves the ancient Maya knew the rules of perspective.\(^{16}\) The team dropped a plum line down from the top of the structure and determined that the ground level was set back from the top of the


façade. This allowed the Maya architects to play with perspective and build up and out, giving their carvings a much more defined and impressive appearance.

The result is one of the most detailed and accurate architectural surveys of a Maya building complex before the recent development of digital technologies. This was not their only achievement, they discovered new stelae and hieroglyphic inscriptions, mapped the site, and conducted a thorough architectural study on the Nunnery, which led to the discovery of negative batter on the facades. Dan Leyrer was a well-known photographer that lived in the French Quarter or New Orleans around the same time that Blom was director of MARI. Due to his creative photographic work at Uxmal, another important legacy of the expedition was the photographic documentation of the state of the buildings before any restoration. The team choose to take photos of the stelae and intricate façades at night, which allowed for a shadow effect with the flash. This mimicked the natural shadows that the original Maya carvers worked with and showed the most detail after the photos were developed.
Mesoamerica and Maya Architecture

The cultural area referred to as Mesoamerica includes parts of modern Mexico, Belize, Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador. In a span of over 4,000 years, dozens of cultures developed within different climatic and environmental conditions that nurtured relations and trade between the various peoples.\textsuperscript{17} To further understand the interconnections of these groups, archaeologists have separated the Maya-occupied region into two topographic regions: the highlands and the lowlands.\textsuperscript{18} After these two

main classifications, the area is further separated into distinct areas: Southern, Central, and Northern Yucatán. This geographic zoning is important because although there can be an overlap of highlands and lowlands—the geology, animals, plants, and societies within them are diverse. The Southern Area includes the highlands of Guatemala and adjacent Chiapas, together with the coastal plain along the Pacific Ocean and the western half of El Salvador. The Central Area focused upon what is now the Department of Peten in northern Guatemala, reaching from the Mexican states of Tabasco, southern Campeche, and Quintana Roo across the densely forested southern lowlands to include Belize, the Río Motagua of Guatemala, and a narrow portion of westernmost Honduras. The Northern area consists of the Yucatán Peninsula which is dominated by the state of Yucatán, the northern area of Campeche and Quintana Roo, and the northern tip of Belize. The Northern and Central Areas have much in common since there are no natural barriers to impede cultural exchange or movements of groups of people, and in this area, the Maya population figures remain high even today.

The clear differences lie in the agricultural potential since water in the Yucatán is variable. In the Northern lowlands, areas of large population concentrations are usually dictated by the distribution of waterholes called Cenotes. These cenotes were eventually incorporated into engineering advancements allowing the Maya in the Yucatán to develop unique water resource technologies that successfully supported a population of 1800 to 2600 per square mile at the peak of their Classic Period.

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Laser Imaging, Detection, and Ranging (LiDAR) surveys indicated that the population during the Late Classic period was dense yet unevenly distributed. Marcello A. Canuto, et al. conducted a lidar survey of the central Maya lowland region and determined the population range of 150,000 to 240,000 for the region and an average

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of 80 to 120 persons per square kilometer. Communities were fragmented into many, relatively small, major centers controlling domains that included flat pockets of particularly productive soil known as planadas. It is important to know that the lowland climate of the Yucatan Peninsula is hot, and lakes are rare. The end of the dry season is often met with droughts until the rains come again in May and last until December. However, the rains are not reliable and heavier precipitation is found in the Southern part of the Yucatán that starts getting into the highlands of Guatemala and the tropical forest of Belize. As a response, the Maya excavated and constructed thousands of underground bottle-shaped cisterns or chultuns, allowing them to catch the water when it was abundantly available. This was also an important reason why they were able to settle the area and grow their population.

Powdered lime (cal in Spanish) was one of the most significant and ubiquitous materials in the daily lives of the Prehispanic Maya. Lime was a key ingredient in the mortar used to construct monumental edifices and residential buildings, as well as in the lime plaster and coated facades, floors, and interior walls of these structures. Lime-plastered plazas and house floors were easier to maintain than bare earth, providing a more hygienic environment within densely populated settlements. Also, lime was crucial for maintaining a viable maize-based diet through nixtamalization. By soaking

maize in lime-infused water the people of Mesoamerica not only softened the kernels for grinding but also unlocked essential nutrients such as niacin for absorption into the body. This, along with specialized water collection methods has been lauded as survivalist techniques in a harsh climate.

Figure 7: This picture shows the hills behind the Nunnery Quadrangle in the Puuc region. Leyrer, 1930. Housed in MARI archives. Accessed July 2022.

The history of expeditions in the Northern area of the Yucatán is imperative to understanding why Frans Blom’s 1930 team impacted how both Anthropologists and Heritage Conservationists survey the human-built environment. In his booklet, *Archaeological Studies Among the Ancient Cities of Mexico* (1895), William Henry

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Holmes describes a difference between the ruins of eastern Yucatán and the ruins of middle-northern Yucatán, based on his visit in 1884 and in 1894 – 95. The introduction consists of a pioneering explanation of the function of Maya buildings and how the architect might have designed them. His writings also describe methods of Maya construction and the physical remains of the building materials, such as: masonry, stucco work, columns, pillars, and the vaulted arch. To further explain his findings, Holmes provides his own diagrams of terraces and pyramids, ground plans of Maya temples, different examples of Maya buildings, and the uniqueness of the Maya Arch.

These drawings have been regularly reproduced in 20th-century publications on Maya architecture. In the early 1900s, Mexican scholars; Manuel Gamio, Alfonso Caso, and Jimenez Moreno helped to develop governmental organizations and laws to protect and conserve all the archaeological heritage of Mexico. Since then, several outstanding individuals have worked to protect Uxmal's cultural heritage and kept the site's documentation to high standards.


Maya architecture is one of the most important elements in the archaeological investigation of Mesoamerica. A fascinating part of Maya architecture is the design, function, and engineering of the corbelled vault. This type of architectural feature was used in many sites throughout the Maya area and was a trait that distinguished Mayan architects from their neighbors. A corbelled vault refers to a construction technique that supports the superstructure of a building’s roof. Corbelling uses solid pieces of carved-flat stone to span a high and narrow ceiling within a structure. It is constructed by offsetting successive courses of stone at the spring line of the walls so that they project towards the archway’s center from each supporting side until the courses meet
at the apex of the archway and then are capped with flat stones.\textsuperscript{29} These corbelled vaulted ceilings within the buildings constructed by the ancient Maya are found in specific sites of the Yucatán and correspond with building practices of the Early Classic Period to the Early Postclassic Period (600 – 1200 CE).\textsuperscript{30} Archaeological documentation found that the Southern Area of Mesoamerica did not contain the corbelled vault found in the Northern and Central Areas.

Figure 9: Corbelled vault at the site of Uxmal. Photograph courtesy of Sara Tankersley, March 2023.


The site of Uxmal is in the Northern Lowlands of the Yucatán peninsula. This is an area that is known for its low-lying hills that were used in site design by Mayan architects. The Term Puuc has taken on several meanings in archaeological writings: firstly, Puuc literally translates to “hill” or “Sierra” in Yucatec Maya and denotes the chain of low-rolling hills and ridges that run southeast from the town of Maxcanú in the west to merge with the hills of Quintana Roo in the east and eventually reaching the sea. Secondly, the term refers to a period of ancient Maya culture that flourished during the Classic period (250 – 900 CE) of Prehispanic history, when the area was heavily populated. Thirdly, it refers directly to the unique style of architecture that utilized heavily decorated façades.\textsuperscript{31}

Mayanist scholars have now divided the Puuc into four further descriptive styles that differentiate the stylistic phases and accurately reflect the high period of Puuc culture: Proto Puuc (150 – 600 CE), Early Puuc (670 – 770 CE), Classic Puuc Colonnette (770 – 830 CE), Classic Puuc Mosaic (830 – 950 CE).\textsuperscript{32} The Puuc Region is commonly used when speaking about the multitude of monuments throughout many sites in Northern Yucatán. The principal archaeological site is Uxmal, which is surrounded by seven other sites that each share elements of Maya Puuc architecture from different periods: Kabah, Sayil, Xlapac, Labná, Chacmuktún, Oskintok, and Loltún. Uxmal, Kabah, Sayil, and Labná are all declared UNESCO World Heritage Sites.


The Puuc buildings have facing limestone veneer over a cement-and-rubble core, boot-shaped vault stones; decorated cornices; round columns in doorways; engaged or half columns repeated in long rows; and the exuberant use of stone mosaics on upper facades, emphasizing the usual masks with long, hook-shaped snouts, as well as frets and lattice-like designs of crisscrossed elements. In the perfection of architectural facades, the Puuc emphasizes features in stone that elsewhere might have been modeled in stucco.  

Uxmal is by far the largest Puuc site and a triumph of Maya architecture. The epigraphic evidence implies that Uxmal emerged as the capital of a large, Terminal Classic state that was centered in the eastern Puuc between 850 – 925 CE. Uxmal is dominated by two temple-pyramids called the Great Pyramid and the House of the Magician, which

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both have entrances that are detailed in masks of the God of Rain Chaac. Next to the House of the Magician is the Nunnery, or “Las Monjas,” which is made up of four separate rectangular buildings that are arranged to create an interior court. The complex can be entered from the corners, but the main entrance is a corbelled arch that lies on the south side. The mosaic elements that make up the Nunnery Quadrangle include imagery of a feathered serpent, shields, beaded masks, reproductions in stone of fine textiles, and miniature representations of thatched-roof huts. These huts were the main typology for residential shelters outside the walls of large ancient cities like Uxmal. These huts are visible today and still utilized by the Maya that live in the villages surrounding the archaeological zone.

The majority of Maya architecture is not visible today because it was constructed of natural materials that vary depending on the highlands and lowlands. The traditional home is referred to as Casa de Paja or “thatched roof” and is commonly constructed with palm or grass. The fieldwork of James Stuart Davidson included architectural construction interviews throughout Mesoamerica to determine commonalities in techniques and materials. He reported that timber used in Guatemala, Mexico, and Belize was so enduring that it became part of the inheritance system; that the act of collecting housing timber formed an integral part of Maya identity.\(^{35}\) Another tradition includes the value of cutting timber on the full moon, which has a two-fold purpose. The first is that it ensures a stronger timber for construction and the second is that the

timber will be more resistant to pests. Davidson explains that this added strength and longevity is due to the water from the roots being drawn up into the trunk and branches during the time of the full moon. The oval shape of the house allows for a continuous circle for the thatch which can overlap without gaps and prevent leaking. When traveling in the region, it is common to see Maya houses with mixed materials, such as modern corrugated tin or rubber sheeting.

![Figure 11: Representation of thatched-roof huts at the Nunnery and its real-life counterpart. Photographs courtesy of Sara Tankersley, March 2023.](image)

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36 Davidson, James Stuart. “Casa de Paja: Maya House Architectures Traditions & Transformations, 139.
37 Davidson, James Stuart. “Casa de Paja: Maya House Architectures Traditions & Transformations,” 139.
Monumental stone buildings are mostly studied in Maya archaeology due to their permanence. In Maya architecture, it was common to build on top of older sites to make them grander and more imposing. The Yucatec Maya meaning of Uxmal is “three times built,” suggesting there were separate periods of occupancy. In the 1930s, the archaeological understanding was that Uxmal was a Maya Capital of the Xiu Dynasty. In 2022, Michael D. Coe and Stephen Houston confirm that the site of Uxmal was the seat of the Xiu family, but that, “this was a late lineage of Mexican origin that could not possibly have built the sites.” This is important to note because it recognizes 20th-century occupation on the site and inadvertently addresses race issues by referring to the family as Mexican rather than Mestizo (mixed blood). The discussion of whether this family was responsible for the grandiose architecture is irrelevant when it comes to current-day land ownership. This archaeological recognition of the family’s residency highlights an underlying issue with neo-colonial concepts of land. At the turn of the 19th-century, archaeological writings acknowledge the Xiu family’s occupation, whereas now, archaeologists discredit the Xiu family’s presence as mere squatters. However, while speaking with a local mestizo guide, they explained that the Xiu family still resides in the local town of Muna about sixteen kilometers away and descendants consider it their ancestral land.

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41 Taken from an interview with a local guide at the Yaxcopoil Hacienda.
Caste War in the Yucatán and Ejido System

Mexico has a national narrative that threads its fight for independence, its revolution, and its deeply indigenous past together to form its cultural identity.\(^{42}\) To appreciate why this is problematic for the actual indigenous community, Mexican history must be understood in two parts: the first is the archaeological past along with the present heritage of the Maya people, and the second focuses on the contemporary past following Spanish colonization and the creation of a mestizo class within Mexico.\(^{43}\) The case of the pre-16th-century Maya that built the Puuc sites of Uxmal and its surroundings is complicated because it is discussed in archaeology as well as understood as the definitive story of the Maya people in the Yucatán Peninsula regardless of mestizo identity.

The Spanish instituted a colonial *encomienda* system that rewarded a land grant to conquerors by the crown.\(^{44}\) These lands included any indigenous cities, towns, communities, and families that lived there. This system was responsible for establishing a forced labor structure on natives, that was justified through the Catholic Church as a manner of spreading Christianity. This system ended in the early 1700s but gave rise to the elite ownership of *Haciendas* or “estates” which mimicked the encomienda system and perpetuated their need to keep the indigenous Maya enslaved. Slavery in Mexico


was legally abolished after their Declaration of Independence from Spain in 1821, yet it took almost sixteen years to fully outlaw slavery in 1837. A major contributor was that indigenous people were enslaved on their original lands, making the system hard to dismantle and consequently creating class tensions.

By the early 1800s, traditional Maya extended-family networks were breaking down due to village political identities that were becoming entrenched with economic interests, and thus created divisions between villages. Many people still worked for the Haciendas, collecting and processing henequen to be exported around the world. Henequen is a type of fast-growing and drought-tolerant agave that is native to southern Mexico and Guatemala. The leaves yield a fiber (henequen) that is perfect for rope, twine, and ground down to make paper. At the height of the henequen boom (1880 – 1910 CE), around sixty percent of the Yucatán was taken up by the 1,170 Haciendas—some with up to 2,500 Mayan workers. The success of the local Mexican economy was booming, and cities like Mérida were flourishing. However, the pressure was building in smaller indigenous towns due to the brutal and inhumane treatment of workers at the henequen Haciendas.

The Guerra de Castas “the Caste War” or the Guerra Social Maya “Maya Social War,” began in the Tihosuco Parish of the Yucatán in 1847.\(^45\) This was one of the most successful indigenous uprisings in the history of the Americas and led to the existence of a Maya state that remained semi-autonomous for over fifty years. The Caste War was a

critical period in the creation of the modern Maya as an independent and identifiable cultural group in Central America. The demands of the rebels included the abolition of all taxes and the guaranteed right to sufficient land. By mid-1848, the Yucatán elite population was driven to the capital city of Mérida near the Gulf Port of Progresso, where preparations were being made to flee the peninsula, leaving it entirely in Maya hands. 46

The social and political makeup of a Hacienda was equivalent to the Plantation system in the United States, and after the caste war, most lost massive amounts of land. The Yaxcopoil Hacienda is in Uman and was one of the biggest producers of henequen in the 19th-century and operated on 22,000 acres. 47 This area has a deep indigenous history and is surrounded by Maya ruins and temples that have not been excavated. When speaking with a mestizo guide and resident of the town of Uman who identifies as Yucatec Maya and whose family had historically worked for the Yaxcopoil Hacienda, it was clear the worker’s story was still unheard. He explained that his family had historically worked for the hacienda and vividly spoke about the atrocities that were being committed on the land, especially by the church and the landowners. He discussed the series of events that led up to the caste war and what happened after its success. The biggest victory was the amount of land that was redistributed from the haciendas to the people via the ejido system. During the period that hacienda owners were driven out of the area, the Maya and Mestizo workers united to run the factory

and continue to produce rope from henequen. Sadly, lack of education was a factor in their ability to run the business, and eventually, the community was not able to sustain the factory and its outputs and lost all their connections with European businesses.

A major success of the Caste War was the redistribution of land to its original inhabitants—the indigenous Maya. More than half of Mexico’s territory is social property, owned by an ejido or agrarian communities. Social property refers to land, specifically in rural areas, that are owned by the community as an endowment of the Mexican government. An ejido is a legal entity formed as a type of partnership among Mexican individuals and indigenous farmers, whose land is specially protected by Agrarian Law. An ejido is not a new concept and was noted in records left by colonizers. Bishop Diego de Landa wrote about a codex that the people used to determine times for planting crops (like a farmer’s almanac) and claimed that fields were communally owned and jointly worked by groups of twenty men.49

Today, each ejido is made up of three parts, or an assembly: a council, and a supervisory board. The first is the assembly which is composed of the ejido members, with a minimum of twenty people. Everyone has equal rights in the assembly but diverse rights over their land. The second is the ejido council which contains three members who are elected democratically for a three-year period. The third is the supervisory board which is made up of elected ejido members and representatives from their agrarian communities.\textsuperscript{50} Ejidos have unique characteristics, such as they can be vastly different in size and organization, as well as their willingness to work with foreign or federal investments. Some members of ejidos are zealous in preserving their traditions and can be conflictive when developing foreign partnerships. Knowledge of

legal structures and bylaws, as well as the history of past and current conflicts, is important when understanding any ejido. According to Pablo Gutiérrez, a Mexican agrarian lawyer: “Many legal and social conflicts could be avoided if all parties negotiate with a deep understanding of each other, treat each other with respect, and comply with all applicable rules and regulations. Ultimately, [partnerships are] about generating shared value and seeking to reduce, with every project and at every level, the enormous inequality gap that causes so many problems in México.”

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UNESCO Background

UNESCO was founded as a specialized agency of the United Nations on November 16, 1945, with the goal of “contribut[ing] to peace and security by promoting collaboration among the nations through education, science, and culture in order to further universal respect for justice, for the rule of law and for the human rights and fundamental freedoms which are affirmed by the Charter of the United Nations.”\(^\text{52}\) It was created twenty-four days after the United Nations Charter was sanctioned as a response to cultural destruction post-World War II. The preamble of its Constitution begins with a quote from British Prime Minister Clement Attlee: “Since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defenses of peace must be constructed.”\(^\text{53}\) It continues by stressing the dangers of ignorance: “Ignorance of each other’s ways and lives has been a common cause, throughout the history of mankind, of that suspicion and mistrust between the peoples of the world through which their differences have all too often broken into wars.”\(^\text{54}\) The Constitution further points out that war is made possible by the denial of certain basic principles of dignity, equality, and mutual respect of men. Therefore, at the time of its creation in 1945, it can be surmised that the overall philosophy of UNESCO was humanism and treating all individuals as equals in terms of human dignity, mutual respect, and educational opportunities.

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\(^{54}\) Huxley, Julian S. “UNESCO: Its Purpose and Philosophy,” 27.
While reading “UNESCO: Its Purpose and Philosophy” (1949), it became very clear that when UNESCO originally addressed equality, it was through the myopic lens of Eurocentric thinking. Sir Julian Huxley was an evolutionary biologist, eugenicist, and the first director of UNESCO. He stated that “we can reconcile our principle of human equality with the biological fact of human inequality” and went on to explain that there are inherently two different types of equality: the democratic principle of equality and the equality of opportunity.\(^{55}\) The democratic principle of equality refers to the inalienable rights of humans to have equality before the law, have opportunities for education and jobs, and have freedom of expression, movement, and worship. Then there is the equality of opportunity or in Huxley’s definition, “the biological absence of equality... [that] concerns the natural endowments of man and the fact of genetic difference in regard to them.”\(^{56}\) Huxley makes the argument that some people in the world are biologically predisposed to be intellectually inferior and due to their environment cannot change that reality. Therefore, democratic equality must be adjusted to the reality of biological inequality. This is his justification for the importance of UNESCO as a global superpower to educate and protect the developing world from itself.

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\(^{56}\) Huxley, Julian S. “UNESCO: Its Purpose and Philosophy,” 27.
World Heritage Sites

In the late 1950s, the construction of the Aswan High Dam on the Nile River in Egypt promoted UNESCO to initiate a campaign in 1960 to preserve ancient structures. The dam would have created a lake that forever submerged hundreds of archaeological sites, which caused outrage among the Egyptian and Sudanese governments. UNESCO launched an appeal to the Members States for an International Campaign to Save the Monuments of Nubia. This appeal resulted in the excavation and recording of hundreds of sites, the recovery of thousands of objects, and the salvage or relocation of several important temples to higher ground. This newfound global support for the preservation of ancient sites spurred UNESCO to generate the 1972 Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage. The Convention was drafted to encourage the identification, protection, and preservation of cultural and natural heritage around the world that was considered to be of outstanding value to humanity. World Cultural and Natural Heritage went into effect in 1975 after being ratified by twenty-two countries.

In 1976 the World Heritage Committee and a World Heritage Fund were established. Two advisory bodies were selected to assist UNESCO with the implementation of the convention for cultural sites; The International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) evaluates sites for inclusion on the list and monitors their condition and preservation efforts, and the International Centre for the Study of

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the Preservation and restoration of Cultural Property (ICCROM) focuses on providing technical assistance for research and documentation.\textsuperscript{59}

The Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural Heritage laid out the current framework for the preservation and stewardship of major cultural heritage sites across the globe. It also provides an infrastructure through which to consider the definition of cultural heritage. The \textit{Basic Texts of the 1972 World Heritage Convention} define three types of cultural heritage: Monuments, Groups of Buildings, and Sites.\textsuperscript{60} In Article 1 the Convention further defines Monuments as: architectural works, working of monumental sculpture and painting, elements of structures of an archaeological nature, inscriptions, cave dwellings, and combinations of features, which are of outstanding value from the point of view of history, art, or science. Groups of Buildings are defined as groups of separate or connected buildings, which because of their architecture, their homogeneity, or their place in the landscape, are of outstanding universal value from the point of view of history, art, or science. Sites are defined as: works of man or the combined works of nature and man, and areas including archaeological sites which are of outstanding universal value from the historical, aesthetic, ethnological, or anthropological point of view.

World Heritage nominations are fundamentally concerned with the potential “Outstanding Universal Value” of properties. Developing a World Heritage nomination involves a journey that takes time and effort. The process of nomination and inscription

of properties on the World Heritage List is at the core of the World Heritage Convention and has three key responsibilities: Preparation of tentative lists; preparation of nominations; and effective management of properties that are inscribed to protect, conserve, and manage their Outstanding Universal Value.61

World Heritage Criteria

According to UNESCO’s Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention, there are ten criteria for a World Heritage inscription.62 In Article 14 of The Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage explains that the first six criteria are related to cultural properties and are assessed by the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS); an NGO dedicated to the conservation and protection of cultural heritage places around the world.63

1. To represent a masterpiece of human creative genius

2. To exhibit an important interchange of human values, over a span of time or within a cultural area of the world, on developments in architecture or technology, monumental arts, town-planning, or landscape design

3. To bear a unique or at least exceptional testimony to a cultural tradition or to a civilization that is living, or which has disappeared

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4. To be an outstanding example of a type of building, architectural or technological ensemble or landscape which illustrates a significant stage in human history

5. To be an outstanding example of a traditional human settlement, land use, or sea-use that is representative of a culture, or human interaction with the environment especially when it has become vulnerable under the impact of irreversible change

6. To be directly or tangibly associated with events or living traditions, with ideas, or with beliefs, with artistic and literary works of outstanding universal significance

    The remaining four criteria (below) are related to natural properties and are assessed by International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), which focuses on nature conservation and the sustainable use of natural resources.  

7. To contain superlative natural phenomena or areas of exceptional natural beauty and aesthetic importance

8. To be outstanding examples representing major stages of Earth’s history, including the record of life, significant ongoing geological processes in the development of landforms, or significant geomorphic or physiographic features.

9. To be outstanding examples representing significant ongoing ecological and biological processes in the evolution and development of terrestrial, freshwater, coastal, and marine ecosystems and communities of plants and animals

10. To contain the most important and significant natural habitats for in-situ conservation of biological diversity, including those containing threatened species of outstanding universal value from the point of view of science or conservation.

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UNESCO. Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention, 77—78.
Nomination No. 791: World Heritage List – Uxmal

Uxmal and its surrounding archaeological sites were nominated on September 26, 1995, under the following three criteria:65

**Criterion (i):** The ruins of the ceremonial structures at Uxmal, Kabah, Labná, and Sayil represent the pinnacle of late Maya art and architecture in their design, layout, and ornamentation.

**Criterion (ii):** The richness of the iconography in Uxmal’s buildings is a tangible expression of the complex Maya cosmogony and of the intimate relationship they held with their environment. The art and architecture at Uxmal and its neighboring sites furthermore bear witness to the migration of styles from the Rio Bec and Chenes region, as well as from central México.

**Criterion (iii):** The greatness of the monuments and the magnificence of the architectural styles found at Uxmal reveal the importance of this city as a capital for the economic and socio-political development of the Prehispanic Maya civilization. The complex of Uxmal and its three related towns of Kabah, Labná, and Sayil admirably demonstrate the social and economic structure of late Maya society before it disappeared in the Terminal Classic Period.

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While inclusion on the World Heritage List can be viewed as an achievement, it is important to note that even the type of cultural heritage designation can elicit a perception of its importance, or more importantly, whether it is still a relevant area to living communities. The language used to nominate a heritage site does not explain the connection to living cultural groups. For instance, claiming that a site is a monument gives it an architectural significance that honors the architect/s, whereas classifying a Site as important for its archaeological contributions disconnects it from living people and their more recent history.

A benefit of gaining World Heritage Status is meant to provide an opportunity for the state party and the local community to celebrate a property as one of the most important cultural places on earth. Reaching a wider audience and garnering the support of the local community to foster an equitable and inclusive narrative is the goal
of heritage tourism. However, research has shown that decisions made by economic considerations can favor colonial narratives and disconnect communities from tourism economies.\footnote{Fortenberry, Brent R. 2021. “Heritage Justice, Conservation, and Tourism in the Great Caribbean. Journal of Sustainable Tourism 29, nos:2-3 (2021): 253.}

The preservation of the site of Uxmal for present and future generations should be viewed as a moral responsibility for the societies living in the area today. This presents a major challenge for the creation of strategies to establish sustainable tourism for cultural heritage in general and not just architectural heritage. At the 31\textsuperscript{st} UNESCO World Heritage Committee session (Christchurch 2007), these issues were addressed through “the five C’s:” Credibility, Conservation, Capacity-building, Communication, and Communities.\footnote{UNESCO. 31\textsuperscript{st} UNESCO World Heritage Session. 2007, Christchurch. Accessed March 27, 2023. https://whc.unesco.org/en/sessions/31COM.} In the case of Uxmal, the Maya communities are not asked to be involved in the implementation of the convention but rather to benefit from the large number of visitors who come to the site. This is not the reality, and until Maya communities achieve equity in heritage tourism conservation, they will continue to be marginalized for the economic benefits acquired by the state and the country.
Cultural Resource Management vs. Cultural Heritage Management

Management of tangible and intangible heritage is traditionally considered cultural resource management and is concerned with the investigation of sites with archaeological potential. Heather Burke and Claire Smith in “Vestiges of Colonialism” point out that Cultural Resource Management was developed in the mid-1970s and was also referred to as “contract archaeology, “archaeological resource management,” “public archaeology” or “cultural resource management.”

Cultural heritage management is a diverse discipline that covers heritage archaeology, heritage tourism, heritage, and cultural institutions, such as archives and museums, and the intersection of cultural heritage and ethics and/or law. Not one discipline can claim jurisdiction of the broad realm and diverse prospects of cultural heritage management. While this presents diverse opportunities, problems can ensue when people begin to engage in specific aspects of cultural heritage management without a holistic understanding of cultural heritage.

UNESCO developed the World Heritage Committee in 1972 to determine what countries have areas of Outstanding Universal Value. The Basic Texts of the World Heritage Convention explains the importance of protecting cultural heritage especially because it is “increasingly threatened with destruction not only by the traditional causes

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of decay but also by changing social and economic conditions.” To further understand how to define cultural heritage sites, a discussion of tangible and intangible heritage is imperative. According to UNESCO, intangible cultural heritage refers to the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, and skills that a community recognizes as part of its culture. These can include instruments, objects, artifacts, and cultural spaces that are associated there. Most importantly, intangible cultural heritage is transmitted from generation to generation and is constantly recreated by communities in response to their environment, their interaction with nature, and their history, thus providing a sense of identity and continuity for the group and its individuals.

Tangible cultural heritage can be understood as monuments, town sites, archaeological sites, and art that carry and transmit the cultural features of a society. Frequently, these are places that have scientific, ethnological, or anthropological value.

Heritage and conservation have become important themes in current discussions on place, cultural identity, and the preservation of the past. According to the Archaeological Institute of America, “Archaeological sites have long been a part of the heritage and its display, certainly before the use of the term ‘heritage’ and the formal study of tourism.” Critics of Cultural Heritage Management suggest that Heritage is not actually about truth or authenticity, but more about it being a political tool used by the nation-state to promote a movement. Paul S. Shackel claims that it is “a way to

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promote social cohesion through the creation of origin myths and promote moral examples by providing examples of the past.”73 This posits that heritage has a financial motivation and is largely imposed from above to create a nostalgic past during economic decline.

To discuss cultural heritage management in Mexico means addressing a topic that is full of social and academic challenges that are recognized from its cultural complexity. Mexico was the first country in Latin America to explore the meaning of cultural heritage conservation due to the importance of its indigenous art and architecture.74 Cultural resource management emerged as a concept that applied to archaeological resources but differentiated from the practice of archaeology as an academic discipline. This approach to cultural resource management followed the model of Henry Cleere in the United Kingdom, which was widely disseminated through projects of the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) and the International Centre for the Study of the Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property (ICCROM).75

There is a paradox in the role of archaeologists that has been debated since the mid-20th century regarding the function of archaeology within the discipline of anthropology. Where on the one hand, they are scientists. On the other, they are

stewards of the human past and therefore considered to be the experts on human heritage. Overall, archaeological sites are assumed to be the heritage sites of people and communities living today. However, heritage is not just a study of the past, it is how the past is used to structure the present and create the future. In “Maya of the Past, Present, and Future: Heritage, Anthropological Archaeology, and the Study of the caste war of Yucatán,” Kasey Diserens Morgan and Richard M. Leventhal make a compelling argument about the relationship between Maya archaeology and Heritage, and its impact on the cultural patrimony narrative in Mexico. They point out that it would be dissociative to assume that interpretations of archaeological sites of the past are directly connected to the heritage of a community. “The connection might be historically correct, but accuracy is not how identity and heritage are constructed. [In fact] there is an important and distinctive contrast between archaeological work and interpretations and the way those views are utilized in the construction of the present.” Maya archaeology tends to lack the conversation between its tangible findings and the intangible Maya heritage.

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3. METHODOLOGY

The nature of this practicum is two-fold and is based both on archival research of the expedition to Uxmal in 1930 and fieldwork completed in the Spring of 2023. The first step began in the summer of 2022 at the Middle American Research Institute (MARI) hunting down timeworn files from the period that Frans Blom was the director of the department at Tulane University. The second part took place in the Yucatán conducting fieldwork at Uxmal and interviewing local guides and community members who have direct experience with the site.

The archives at MARI produced a few boxes that included Frans Blom’s correspondences, with numerous folders, but it was difficult to find resources specifically referring to the Uxmal expedition in 1930. Research then turned to the Latin America Library (LAL) at Tulane, which afforded more documentation and photographs from the period of Frans Blom’s expedition. The Latin American Library also included some manuscripts by Gerhardt Kramer and Frans Blom regarding updates on their respective lives after documenting in Uxmal. He spoke vividly of life in the ruins during the three-month period the team lived on site. He described how they slept, ate, and set up working space throughout the halls of what became known as the “Nunnery” within the Quadrangle at Uxmal.
The Mesoamerican Research Institute is located in Dinwiddie Hall on the Tulane University campus and contains an impressive Museum and Archive. One of the most outstanding pieces in the collection is the model of the Nunnery quadrangle constructed by Gerhardt Kramer and Herndon Fair after their three months stay at the site of Uxmal. There is an extensive collection of manuscripts and correspondence papers belonging to Fran Blom discussing the various projects he spearheaded during his directorship at MARI. There was a lot of information about the recreation process of the Nunnery in Chicago and an explanation of how the recession at the time forced them to build only a quarter of the quadrangle. From reading correspondence letters between Frans Blom
and Gerhardt Kramer, Blom had become increasingly disappointed with the building process in Chicago and eventually left all the decision-making to Kramer. After the expedition in 1930, Frans Blom invited the now-graduated Gerhardt Kramer to work at the Department of Middle American Research while he continued his explorations in Mexico and Guatemala. He was left in charge of many of the decisions surrounding the Uxmal representation at the Chicago World Fair in 1933. He also took over as Head Docent once the structure was finalized, leaving him responsible for the artifacts that were on display within the replica.

Figure 4: Model of the Nunnery Quadrangle created by Kramer and Fair in 1931. The model and Photograph are housed in MARI Archives. Accessed July 2022.
While exhausting the resources at MARI and in the Latin American Library during the summer of 2022 to learn about the interdisciplinary team that surveyed the site of Uxmal, a research proposal regarding Heritage Conservation in the Yucatán was conceived. This led to the second part of the practicum which included visiting the site of Uxmal, the other surrounding sites along the Ruta Puuc, and the capital of the State of Yucatán—Mérida. During this time, interviews were conducted with local guides at each of the various sites. While gathering information from key informants in Mexico, further questions formed regarding the development of heritage tourism in the country and its impact on the local community. The questions were multifaceted and based on how the site has developed over the past century regarding its conservation progress and its growing tourism industry. Looking at the larger picture of how this heritage site was managed and by whom meant it was necessary to understand the link between archaeology, architecture, heritage conservation, and tourism. The focus turned to UNESCO and the level of protection it offers to societies and cultures when their heritage sites are nominated for universal importance. Since Mexico was the first Latin American country to be put on the World Heritage Site list, it was assumed they had already adapted and addressed issues of marginalization and sustainable tourism. However, that was not the case, and it was discovered that colonial concepts of governance and site management still exist. Based on how heritage tourism was developed in the country, it became apparent that a romanticized idea of a treasured past and disappeared people was the core of their Heritage Conservation.
4. OUTCOMES AND INTERPRETATIONS

The following outcomes are rooted in the rejection of discriminatory narratives and working toward a sustainable future that addresses issues of inequality and equity in Heritage Management.

Exploring the issues of conservation and heritage tourism by identifying how the government manages its archaeological sites is imperative to conclude whether they are beneficial to the local communities. However, there was no management plan outlined by UNESCO because there was no perceived threat from urban development and instead Mexico’s Ministry of Culture was responsible for site maintenance and research.78 Tourism in Mexico kickstarted in 1884 with the establishment of the Mexican Central Railway and in 1899 with the United Fruit Company’s steamboat services.79 In the 1890 Terry’s Guide to Mexico, it was promoted as the “Egypt of the New World” and included many of the archaeology sites that were just beginning to get international attention. The regime of dictator Porfirio Diaz appropriated the indigenous past for patriotic purposes and the promotion of tourism.80 The Mexican Revolution (1910 – 1920 CE) interrupted tourism in Mexico, but by the 1930s, the Mexican government appealed to United States tourists that were seeking an “exotic”

holiday. “Mexico was responsible for representing itself to Europeans and Americans hungry for exotic themes, and so Mexican designers seized upon indigenous architectural forms.”

After researching who the federal and state actors are in the management of heritage tourism, I wanted to further explore the involvement of living Maya people. It seemed that they were not present at any level of the dissemination of their cultural heritage and only the state was capitalizing on their history.

Preservation of Mexico’s architectural heritage was motivated by an “ethic of civic responsibility” that began when liberals and intellectuals began to challenge the ruling class in 1910. In January 1939, the Mexican government made an official commitment to the preservation of architecture of the past and developed the Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia (INAH). This institution was charged with restoring, documenting, and safeguarding all materials remaining from both the Mesoamerican and the Spanish viceregal periods in Mexican history. INAH was founded along with the National Museum of Anthropology under the Presidency of Lázaro Cárdenas as part of the post-Revolution restructuring of its archaeological and antiquities regime. Before its inauguration on February 3, 1939, there was a predecessor agency called the Inspectorate of Monuments which was seated under the Secretary of Education.

INAH’s governmental position is now located within the Secretariat of Culture (CULTUR), which is the Mexican cabinet office responsible for preserving the culture of

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82 Ruiz, Jason. 2014. Americans in the Treasure House: Travel to Porfirian Mexico and the Cultural Political Empire, 7. Austin: University of Texas, 10.
Mexico and promoting it both at home and abroad through its museums and archaeological sites. They currently have offices throughout Mexico to provide oversight and administration to its seven National Coordination Offices and 31 Regional Centers throughout the states of Mexico. INAH considers its core mission to be the “preservation of the patrimony of Mexican archaeological sites and artifacts through four tasks: conservation, protection, maintenance, and restoration.”84 Currently, INAH has a monopoly on the power to use state resources and authority to maintain the old settlements and structures from the Aztec, Maya, Toltec, and other pre-modern Mesoamerican civilizations. The bureau is responsible for the over 110,000 historical monuments, built between the 16th and 19th-centuries, and for 29,000 of Mexico’s estimated 200,000 pre-Columbian archeological zones found throughout the country and over one hundred museums.85

Determined the success of management plans would be dependent upon the economic stability of local communities. The search for determining the impacts and benefits on local indigenous communities started with a search for poverty rates in the Northern Yucatán Peninsula, including the Puuc area. The state of Yucatán has a population of 2.3 million inhabitants, and 1.16 million people are living at or below the poverty line.86 As reported by the 2015 Mexican census, over 40% of the people in all the municipalities live in poverty.87 Additionally, The National Council for the

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Evaluation of Social Development Policy (CONEVAL) points out that poverty rates in the State of Yucatán rose by 16.6% between 2018 – 2020. Indigenous people who live in these areas are the most impoverished throughout the State of Mexico. CONEVAL published updated figures from 2020 to indicate that seventeen municipalities are in the extreme poverty range – all of them are indigenous communities.

In the 2018 – 2020 evaluation “Multidimensional Measurement of Poverty in the Municipalities of Mexico” the south-central populations of the state (which is the northern part of the peninsula) have the lowest levels in economic matters as well as the least favorable conditions in development and living conditions. The data offered by the agency establishes that the municipalities with the lowest poverty conditions are on the perimeter of the city of Mérida. The economic conditions are reflected more harshly in the south-central part of the state, and CONEVAL established that in a three-year period, the number of people in extreme poverty had risen by 116,000. In this same evaluation of the 2,471 municipalities in the country, 1,335 are on the poverty line, 706 are in moderate poverty, and 629 are in extreme poverty. In the state of Yucatán, there are 42 municipalities in poverty, 25 in moderate poverty, and 17 in extreme situations. When looking at this data on a map of the Yucatán Peninsula, it is shocking that these same areas of extreme poverty are the same communities that exist

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outside of the popular tourist destination of Uxmal.

In Mexico, there are about 53,000 ejidos that occupy more than 82 million hectares, representing 42% of the total area of the country.\textsuperscript{92} This means a significant portion of rural Mexico is held and managed in these social cooperatives. Reforma Agraria provides an interactive map online that outlines ejido lands throughout the country and when looking at the site of Uxmal, you will see that it is surrounded by them.\textsuperscript{93} This constitutes three issues; the first is that a significant portion of rural Mexico is held and managed in these social cooperatives. Secondly, is that the ejido lands overlap the same impoverished areas reported by the Mexican census. Thirdly, the proximity of the ejidos to Uxmal would suggest the potential economic partnership as a feasible solution for heritage tourism management. For instance, a key indigenous informant at the site of Labná and Sayil wanted to develop a partnership by building an Artesanía market where tour buses could stop and support local artisans. However, there is no collaborative space for these community ideas to be shared with tour agencies or CULTUR. If there was advocacy for the people in the smaller towns outside of Uxmal, such as Muna, Ticul, Otkutzcab, and Santa Elena, then there would be more potential for beneficial partnerships.

The lack of economic support for the indigenous communities surrounding these archaeological sites is a neo-colonial form of corruption that needs to be addressed. When the community whose cultural heritage is being profited from is living in poverty,

then the power structure needs to be acknowledged and changed from the current model that continues to marginalize indigenous peoples. When the Spanish arrived, they enslaved the people, and when slavery ended the haciendas and company stores were built to place them in indentured servitude, keeping communities penniless and powerless. Now the descendants of these survivors live on the same lands as their ancestors, working as a contract laborer for the federal government through INAH, receiving no benefits; fighting to keep their heritage alive in an environment where the dominate culture minimize their population.

The advocacy for the Maya people falls upon the same organization (INAH) that is currently profiting from their marginalization. The current national narrative reinforces and justifies structural inequalities. When speaking to several key informants of Maya and Mestizo guides, there is an overall belief that things will never change. When looking at the history of colonialism, their sentiments are valid. Slavery was forced upon them four centuries ago, and even in the wake of a caste war, there has been no centralized interest in economic or educational support. A lack of education led to the unsuccessful takeover of the haciendas, the same lack of education that is perpetuating poverty and non-advocacy within these communities.
5. FIELDWORK

Upon entry to the archaeological site of Uxmal, there are two tariffs that tourists must pay for admission: one was a federal tax to INAH and the other was a state tax to CULTUR. While researching the responsibilities of CULTUR within the state it appeared that the organization’s main role was to facilitate the relationship between the federal government and the tourism industry of Yucatán. They claim that they are transparent with their mission and practices, yet there is no direct understanding of how they manage partnerships with the federal government. CULTUR claims that they “acquire, build, and manage tourist service units” and these “service units” are perceived as charming places for offering visitors a safe, friendly, sustainable, and accessible environment.94 The mission states that they “create and expand service units, foster and disseminate archaeological, historical and cultural values, and, as a consequence, increase the number of visitors and the capture of resources.”95

The National School of Archaeology and History in southern Mexico City sits under the umbrella of INAH and is the center of up-to-date research of the archaeological sites throughout Mexico. INAH also possesses a second academic unit called The National School of Conservation, Restoration, and Museography, which is a government-run academic institution focused on training Mexico’s next generation of

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scholars in restoration conservation, and museum studies. After these academic institutions, INAH also oversees the National Library for Archaeology and History, which contains all the records collected by the Mexican government and other researchers on the topics of Maya architecture and Social Anthropology. According to the different guides at the site of Uxmal, they are responsible for taking a nationalized quiz on the pre-Columbian Maya’s archaeology and history provided by the National School of Archaeology and History. These guides are also expected to finance their own certifications, keep them current, and cannot legally give tours if they are not specifically trained through INAH.

Figure 14: Local Community members who work as guides at Uxmal, Sayil, and Yaxcopoil Hacienda. Courtesy of Sara Tankersley, March 2023.

Tour guides that work for the archaeological sites are not employees of INAH, but rather independent contractors who have unionized to standardize tour fees. Most guides are local mestizos who speak Yucatec Maya and live in the surrounding towns. One guide shared that his father was the caretaker of the site Kabah and he grew up

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among the ruins. He was able to share knowledge of the local plants used both medicinally and as dyes for textiles and structures. The informant discussed his frustration with INAH and its lack of support within the communities. He further explained that up until covid, people would perform traditional religious ceremonies at the different sites along the Ruta Puuc, but now are not allowed to return. He believes that the states and the government have a responsibility to their indigenous people and should at the very least allow them to enter the sites for religious purposes. A common complaint from local guides was that the tour companies coming from Mérida (Capital of the Yucatán) bring their own tour guides. There is a concern that lack of regulation on tour companies coming from the big city continues to prevent the local population from benefitting from tourism.

Mérida is one of the oldest and continually occupied cities in the Americas due to its rich history of Maya civilization that predated the arrival of the Spanish in 1542 and called the city T’ho meaning “city of five hills.” According to the Museum of Mérida, these five hills referenced the pyramids in the area that were eventually razed and used in the building of Spanish Cathedrals and government centers. Carved Maya stones from the ancient T’ho are still visible on the walls of the main Cathedral and the Ministry building. These stones are often pointed out by guides who discuss the tearing down of pyramids in terms of the natural progress and development of Mexican history.
The Yucatán identity centers on a romanticized pre-Hispanic indigenous culture, overlaid by a history of Spanish creoles that now valorizes an imagined view of *mestizaje*, or “mixed blood.” In the end, the emphasis on a Mexican national identity and a simplistic story for the tourists disregards the millions of Mayas in the region. “Modern Maya [are] unrecognized by those constructing hegemonic narratives about
the past [and] have become an almost invisible cultural group, a service underclass.”  

In fact, some tourist sites will even claim that they are nonexistent, for instance, one website claims: “In the early years, the Spanish established convents throughout the city to replace the indigenous culture with Christianity, and by the end of the 16th-century, much for the Maya culture and many of the Maya people were destroyed.”

There is a co-opted indigenous narrative that suits the government and the tourist business’ needs. There are government financial resources that go toward codifying this story in the creation of two large new museums in the Yucatán – Museo Maya de Cancun and Museo del Mundo Maya in Mérida. The Museum in Mérida explains today’s living Maya communities as a minor appendage to the story of a once great Maya civilization that lost centralized power around 900 CE.

Spanish conquistadors brought with them an old-world Eurocentric mindset that solidified the difficulty to accept the inherent humanity of the indigenous American world. Ancient Americans have been viewed over the centuries as heartless animals, noble savages, backward-thinking astronomers, and childlike beings that needed salvation. Perhaps the difficulty experienced in accepting their humanity and their radical diversity from Europeans is linked to the modern epoch and the slaughter of the indigenous American peoples. The Spanish conquest was the greatest genocide in the history of the New World, but the Mesoamerican people were never destroyed, it was their autonomy and agency that was decimated.

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98 Expatsinmexico.com is a website that caters to foreigners that are looking to move to the Yucatán.
The nickname the “White City” is said to come from Mérida’s early history when most colonial buildings were painted white. This is fitting because the colonial fabric is robust and predominant and yet, there is rich Maya fusion in its architecture and design. Maya Revival Style was popular between 1915 and 1945 led by the Yucatecan architect Manuel Amábilis (1889 – 1966 CE). After the Mexican Revolution, he wanted to make a neo-Maya statement using the corbelled arches and cornices, the snake-shaped fretwork, and geometric patterns, as well as the ornamental masks seen on most Puuc-style structures. This fusion goes beyond the built environment and is present in cuisine, music, and clothing. To the uneducated tourist, it seems that there is a positive relationship between the Indigenous peoples of Mexico and the government, one that tells the narrative of a proud Indigenous past and the abandonment of colonial sympathizers. Statues of conquistadors are spray-painted and vandalized, giving the appearance that the Mexican people of today are actively challenging neo-colonial justifications for marginalization. That might be the case inside the walls of the White City, but it is not far outside of them that the truth of poverty is visible. In those communities of Yucatec Maya speakers, there is another meaning used to justify Mérida’s outdated nickname. One that explains a history of injustices based on the color of one’s skin, the continued exploitation of a people, and the misappropriation of their culture. This meaning of “White City” makes much more sense than the one you hear on tour buses.
Figure 16: Photographs taken around Mérida and video mapping of Uxmal. Courtesy of Sara Tankersley, March 2023.
6. DISCUSSION ON HERITAGE TOURISM AND MAYA COMMUNITIES

We believe that tourism, which brings individuals and human communities into contact through their cultures and civilizations, has an important role to play in facilitating dialogue among cultures. Tourism also has the capacity to assist the world’s inhabitants to live better together and thereby contribute to the construction of peace in the minds of men and women. 99

The term “indigenous” has undergone major transformations over the years and has a very specific connotation. From the Latin indígena, meaning “native” or “sprung from the land,” the word has been used in English since at least 1588, not only for people but for flora and fauna as well, likening the term with an air of wilderness and detaching it from history and civilization. 100 The racist nature of the term intensified during the colonial period when “indigenous” or “native” served as a distinction between white European settlers and the non-Europeans who occupied the lands before them.

The discussion of indigenous identity was first typified on August 3, 1989, at a United Nations working group in Geneva, this goal was to consciously remodel the concept of indigeneity to encompass marginalized peoples worldwide. Moringe Ole Parkipuny, a Maasai activist and a former member of the Tanzanian Parliament spoke out about indigenous populations of Africa and their global connections. He stated that the Maasai, along with other pastoral people, “suffer from common problems which

characterize the plight of indigenous peoples throughout the world” and more importantly, “the most fundamental rights to maintain our specific cultural identity and the land that constitutes the foundation of our existence as a people are not respected by the state and fellow citizens who belong to the mainstream population.”  

Making the comparison of indigeneity with primitiveness can be stifling to the economic progress and development of indigenous groups.

When looking at the southeastern part of Mexico, there is even more complex connectivity between the ancient Maya culture and the present Maya in the regions. The current promotion of the Yucatán by tour agencies and the government attempts to link the ancient past of the Classic-period Maya to the Yucatecan heritage of today. This shortsightedness completely disregards the issues of land rights created during the colonial period. Although advancements have been made with the post-war re-establishment of ejidos; continued marginalization exists due to a disconnect between development practices. Modern Maya towns are getting poorer paralleled with the ever-growing city of Mérida and its tourism industry.

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UNESCO was substantiated at a time when Eurocentric thinking and beliefs in biological inequality were normative. After reading the works of the First Director, Julian Huxley, it’s clear that UNESCO was founded on faulty doctrine:

The principle of equality or opportunity must be amended to read “equality of opportunity within the limits of aptitude.” Thus, it is a fact, however disagreeable, that a considerable percentage of the population is not capable of profiting from higher education. It is equally a fact that a considerable percentage of young men have to be rejected for military service on grounds of physical weakness or mental instability and that these grounds are often genetic in origin. Again, many people are not intelligent or not scrupulous enough to be entrusted with political responsibility—a fact which unfortunately does not prevent quite a number of them from attaining it.  

There was a significant perception during the early to mid-twentieth century that researchers working with indigenous people were dealing with a “fossilized” past. At the same time anthropologists were identifying and protecting relict materials remains as tangible human achievements, UNESCO was determining how to implement protections for architecture and/or ruins. This complex history has several implications for the Maya people when dealing with their own heritage—it naturally leads to some crucial conflicts over alternative ways to manage indigenous cultural sites. This is due to the long-standing dominance of archaeologists in allocating resources, defining conservation in terms of restoration practices, and deciding the social use of sites and monuments. The Mexican government, specifically INAH, has allowed the status of archaeologists to become the sole voice of practice and value.

It is time to acknowledge that much of the hierarchy of power has not changed in Mexico, particularly regarding who controls access to archaeological sites and resources. INAH’s own history of rigid principles as an institution serving the states offers it little space for modernization. If INAH has the will to pursue Cultural Resources Management, it confronts its own institutional reality. Kelly M. Robles García and Jack Corbett point out that “in the current institutional framework, there is no way to apply proposals to link the management of cultural resources with matters of development, social participation, poverty or other concerns.” The criticism of Cultural Heritage Management as being non-equitable is applicable in this case because it is not based upon an absolute linkage between the past and the present but disconnects living indigenous people from explaining their own history.

UNESCO’s World Heritage Information Kit describes heritage as both natural and cultural and as the “legacy left behind for future generations.” Today there is a lot of discussion regarding the changes that should take place in Cultural Heritage Conservation. A more culturally sensitive approach to site management is necessary and should start with reframing conceptions of cultural heritage. Cornelius Holtorf and Anders Hoberg explain that “the ways in which people think and act are bound to particular cultural contexts and are therefore specific in time and place.” Direct planning for future Maya generations should be able to benefit the most through

heritage sites. That means planning, establishing, and maintaining certain values and ways of proceeding that are desirable for the communities whose heritage is represented.

The concept of equality needs to be linked to practices of equal opportunities and participation in decision-making processes of conservation and heritage tourism. Mexican archaeologist Alfredo Gonzalez-Ruibal states: “The production of heritage with elements from the present is not necessarily a strategy pursued by institutions or corporations only, but also by communities.”107 This is where empowerment and advocacy within Maya communities would be beneficial in how they choose to manage their heritage. Especially because people may not be so interested in reinstating the past, but in rebuilding local communities and cultural customs left in disarray by the decentralized colonial state.

The Tihosuco Heritage Preservation and Community Development Project is an ongoing collaboration committed to exploring diverse aspects of local cultural patrimony and evolving Maya identity. The partnership includes the Penn Museum in Philadelphia, the Caste War Museum located in the state of Quintana Roo, the Tihosuco ejido, and the mayor’s office of Tihosuco.108 The project aims to: bring small-scale economic growth to the town and community based on its rich cultural heritage and utilize community engagement to create an interpretive framework for understanding

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108 Leventhal Richard. “Archaeology in Latin America @Penn.” Accessed May 10, 2023, https://anthropology.sas.upenn.edu/content/archaeology.
colonial history as presented by the Maya people of Tihosuco.  

The project encourages indigenous Maya communities to take charge of their own heritage stories and self-representation. It proves that it is possible for people to take charge of their local histories within the built environment and advocate for themselves and future communities. Their mission is to create a heritage engagement in the region that centers on peoples’ relationships with anti-colonial movements and economic projects. The hope is that small-scale economic projects will bolster efforts for future cultural development. The biggest influence of the Tihosuco Project is proving that bottom-up models of heritage-based cultural and economic development are possible. This means a major shift in how archaeology and conservation work is conducted. Using the Tihosuco project as an example, we can:

“Broaden the definition of heritage and create a more inclusive picture of, not only the past, but how that past is employed, protected, and disseminated over time. We use this approach to better help us understand the dynamic between temporalities [and be] useful for the community within which we live and work. The past needs to relate to the present and the future”

This approach argues for a more inclusive study linked to “anthropological archaeology,” which calls attention to the pressing issues of social and economic inequalities that directly impact marginalized communities living in perimeters of historic and archaeological sites.


7. CONCLUSION

The Mexican government and its tourist businesses have co-opted the Maya narrative to suit their promotional needs. In Mérida and throughout the Yucatán, the story of the ancient Maya abounds. Yet, this narrative emphasizes the glories of ancient Maya culture while eliminating the modern Maya people from its present-day landscape. Many cultural and financial resources go towards codifying this story. Both Mexican and American Archaeologists write about the great Maya civilization of the past but contribute to the trope that the Maya people were dramatically reduced as a culture or civilization before the Spanish arrived in the 16th-century. This creates a justification for the establishment of colonial powers. It is not just a story for tourists, but what INAH teaches their citizens, including Maya school children, as part of their heritage. The only solution for a pathway forward would have to include these same forces—but with a more equitable and inclusive narrative.

An agency in control of its national history should be inclusive of its countrywide narrative for a proper historical perspective. Discussions with key informants regarding inclusivity within the State of Yucatán suggested a model for partnerships among tour agencies and local towns and communities. Three ideas were devised for potential collaborations among the Yucatec Maya and mestizo community members. It was suggested that this would be a good starting point for tour agencies to behave as
stewards of sustainable tourism by facilitating relationships between the archaeological sites (INAH) and their surrounding communities. The first concept would have a huge economic impact and would be a simple endeavor: an artesanía warehouse on the outskirts of town (Muna) for tourists to stop and shop for locally made indigenous crafts. Currently, there are tight controls on where and when people can sell their art around the archaeology zones that are enforced by the state. The warehouse would be owned and operated by a local ejido, who would organize the upkeep, utility payments, and the management of community resources. This would require community advocacy and ties in with the second suggestion: electing a community spokesperson within the ejido to meet with the state and federal organizations (CULTUR and INAH) to create plans which would address equity in heritage tourism. The last is a community request that addresses the responsibilities of World Heritage Sites. The creation of an employee benefits package for those working at heritage sites, that includes transportation, would be a cost relief for many residents. Due to the poverty in the area, most families are unable to afford a car and rely on community-organized carpooling, and due to the rural nature of the area, there is no public transportation. A company van funded by CULTUR, or INAH would be a small solution to a big problem and would show that cultural heritage sites act to alleviate the economic burden of local communities.

The need for partnerships between World Heritage Sites and the local indigenous communities is more crucial than ever because a government project called the Maya Train is currently being built through the Yucatán. The Maya Train is an intercity railway intended to go through the Yucatán Peninsula, arguably Mexico’s
number one tourist destination. The Train will loop across the Peninsula on a railway network whose length will stretch more than 1,500 kilometers, making 17 stops that connect resorts with ancient Maya sites.\textsuperscript{111} This plan demonstrates the continued disconnect between heritage tourism and the living Maya communities. Local towns are becoming increasingly impoverished while the tourism industry is booming. The revenue from the Maya Train is intended to pay the pensions for the Mexican police, and not for education or community development. Now is the time to establish a culturally sensitive management plan for Uxmal and the Ruta Puuc that includes community outreach and advocacy, to change the impact of exclusionary economic benefits.

The approximately six million living Maya are survivors of a repeated cycle of conquest and oppression that continues today. Exploitation of the Maya people as a politically helpless labor force has existed for over five hundred years. What keeps these cultural traditions alive is their devotion to their land, community, and a strong set of beliefs. A proposal for UNESCO to include community partnerships in its management plan could change exploitative practices within heritage tourism. If standards for developing a partnership with indigenous communities were included when it comes to nominating World Heritage Sites in Latin America, then hosting states could be held accountable for noncompliance. An updated version of the 1972 World Heritage Convention would be a starting point since there is a visible imbalance in the list of sites which reflects the economic, social, and cultural inequalities of the Anglo-Latin divide. These must urgently be addressed and can start with Article 4 of the Basic Texts of the

\textsuperscript{111} Oganga, Jeff. “Everything We Know About the Maya Train (& Its Construction).” Accessed May 23, 2023. Thetravel.com
World Heritage Convention, which already points out the importance of making local heritage projects available for future generations through effective partnerships.\textsuperscript{112}

Heritage Conservationists must engage with heritage sites and their stories in ways that are inclusive to local communities. We need to see a change from the dominance of heritage thinking in archaeology to a more inclusive management plan for World Heritage Sites. This can only be determined through deep collaboration with local communities whose heritage is being shared at a nationalistic and bureaucratic level. Change within heritage practice that challenges top-down approaches and places increased emphasis on the way local people engage with and use spaces will open doors to more equitable practices of conservation, and community advocacy.

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