



**UCLG - MEXICO CITY - CULTURE 21**

4<sup>th</sup> EDITION - INTERNATIONAL AWARD

# **EUSEBIO LEAL**

PROEM  
*FOR NOT FORGETTING (BOOK THREE)*



GOBIERNO DE LA  
CIUDAD DE MÉXICO



**UCLG**

United Cities  
and Local Governments



**culture 21**  
UCLG Committee



## 4<sup>th</sup> INTERNATIONAL AWARD

UCLG – MEXICO CITY – CULTURE 21



GOBIERNO DE LA  
CIUDAD DE MÉXICO



UCLG  
United Cities  
and Local Governments



culture 21  
UCLG Committee



# EUSEBIO LEAL

PROEM

*FOR NOT FORGETTING  
(BOOK THREE)*

*The Jury of the fourth edition of the International Prize “UCLG - Mexico City - Culture 21”, in May 2020, awarded Eusebio Leal the ‘Individual’ distinction for the work he devoted to the preservation of the historical and cultural heritage of Havana. A few weeks later, at the end of July 2020, the world of culture was saddened to learn that Eusebio Leal had passed away. This text has been selected by the Office of the Historian of Havana as a first-person testimony to Eusebio Leal’s commitment to his city, his country and the whole of humanity.*

I have always wanted to leave behind a true account of the work carried out over the years since 1967, when I took charge of restoration work on the former Palace of the Captains General, the Headquarters of the Cuban Government and Havana City Hall. Far from being satisfied, or even believing that everything is finished, I am concerned about how much still remains to be done, although I reaffirm my conviction that what has been built and dreamt of can only be preserved when the political will, the tenacity and the iron determination not to give in to material or subjective difficulties are maintained.

Now, with so much time having passed, memories come flooding back and I am reminded of the voices and the faces of the men and women who worked alongside us, thanks to whom a development project of such magnitude and significance has become a palpable reality. I refer of course to the restoration of the historic quarter of Old Havana, inscribed in the



## 4<sup>th</sup> INTERNATIONAL AWARD

UCLG – MEXICO CITY – CULTURE 21



GOBIERNO DE LA  
CIUDAD DE MÉXICO



UCLG  
United Cities  
and Local Governments



culture 21  
UCLG Committee

World Heritage List under number 27, at the sixth session of the Intergovernmental Committee of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage Convention, held at the UNESCO headquarters from 13 to 17 December 1982.

This has only been possible within the institutional framework and with the legal and administrative prerogatives that the Cuban State granted us by subscribing, on 30 October 1993, Decree Law 143. By doing so, Old Havana became a laboratory of ideas in which several generations of Cubans underwent comprehensive training—including young restorers trained in the diverse arts and crafts—and historiographic, archaeological and sociocultural investigation was conducted, using global experiences as a reference.

Thus, pioneering initiatives include the founding, in 1992, of the Melchor Gaspar de Jovellanos Workshop School, which over time was joined by three others, and, in 1994, the office of the Master Plan for the Integral Revitalisation of Old Havana, which since then has been responsible for steering our work conceptually, based on the development of innovative integrated development planning tools.

Throughout the years, our architects, engineers, restorers, researchers and other specialists have had the opportunity to receive training at various Latin American and European universities and have participated in courses and congresses enhancing their academic capabilities.

Based on basic professional training, and without instinctively copying any model, we established the principle of transforming the experiences gained over the years through tireless work into applied science. To this effect, we have created San Geronimo University College, as an independent faculty of Havana's college of higher education. Assuming, by its own right, its invaluable humanistic tradition, it offers students a Degree in Conservation and Management of Historical-Cultural Heritage, based on multidisciplinary knowledge.

The Office of the Historian boasts a collection of documents that has been treasured for decades, belonging to the Historical Archive, which includes the administrative acts of Havana City Council from 1550 to the present day, as well as engravings and old photographs that have been recovered and preserved. The important library founded by Dr Emilio Roig de Leuchsenring in memory of his friend, the eminent professor and journalist Francisco González del Valle (1881–1942), has also been reopened, housing one of the most important collections of Cuban books and magazines. This invaluable legacy is the precursor to our current publications, among them the magazine *Opus Habana*, devoted to clarifying our position in the Cuban intellectual field as well as divulging our work and working philosophy to the largest possible audience.



## 4<sup>th</sup> INTERNATIONAL AWARD

UCLG – MEXICO CITY – CULTURE 21



GOBIERNO DE LA  
CIUDAD DE MÉXICO



UCLG  
United Cities  
and Local Governments



culture 21  
UCLG Committee

*Programa Cultural*, another important publication, is a monthly cultural guide offering information on all the events taking place in the historic quarter, where not a single day goes by without some form of cultural activity, whether it is an exhibition, a concert or a talk. This activity reaches its climax during the summer months, when hundreds of Cuban families, led by specialists from the Office itself, take part in the Rutas y Andares programme as part of their holidays, learning about the latest news on the restoration work, archaeological findings and historical evidence.

In addition to this are the books published by Ediciones Boloña, edited and designed with great care according to the premise that 'Words fly away, written words remain' (*Verba volant, scripta manent*). This Latin maxim is even applied to the programmes of Habana Radio, a radio station that not only fulfils the very important role of keeping the voice of the Office of the Historian alive for the people of Havana and other provinces, but also safeguards audio-visual archives from our endeavours, in the knowledge that they will be regarded as important items of heritage in the future.

Our daily concern has been sustaining all this, to glimpse, through the veil of ruins, the monumental splendour that takes us from modest dwellings to palaces, hotels or ancient markets, moving from square to square and from street to street, restoring public spaces that were thought to be

lost. We therefore set out to rehabilitate the historic quarter by making cultural values compatible with socio-economic development. To this end, we have created our own mechanisms to guarantee the principle of sustainability, based on capitalising on tourism, tertiary sector and real estate resources and tax payments from manufacturing companies located within the country and from self-employed workers, among other revenue.

These funds have been invested in restoring buildings of high heritage value, in housing programmes and in social work, as well as in gradually improving the living conditions of inhabitants. The latter is attested to by the support programmes for municipal public health, education, culture and housing systems.

It is only fair to note the support of international cooperation to ongoing local development projects, many of which are assisted by regions, cities, universities and non-governmental organisations, among other entities. Beyond their economic magnitude and the unquestionable importance of technological exchange, we value these contributions because, in themselves, they accord greater respectability, in addition to contributing to the good relationship between people and nations. We take a self-reliant approach to our work, but gratefully accept kind support from any part of the world. Therefore, we would like to thank the United Nations



## 4<sup>th</sup> INTERNATIONAL AWARD

UCLG – MEXICO CITY – CULTURE 21



GOBIERNO DE LA  
CIUDAD DE MÉXICO



UCLG  
United Cities  
and Local Governments



culture 21  
UCLG Committee

and other international institutions, such as UNESCO, Local Human Development Programme, the SDC and the Spanish Agency for International Development Cooperation, for their unconditional backing, and so many others that it is impossible to list them all here, although I would especially like to mention the Principality of Asturias and the Belgium Government. In order to manage these funds, the Directorate of International Cooperation and the NGO Heritage, Community and Environment were created.

Thus, like a spider weaving its web, on a daily basis we bind inter-institutional ties and touch the hearts of our fellow citizens, imbuing each initiative with a sense of humanity, solidarity and honour, breathing new life into what seems dead or forgotten. Because it is simply an act of faith, inherent to the meaning of our work, in order to mitigate and solve problems related to the elderly, children, young people and people with special physical or mental needs, for which we have created the Directorate of Humanitarian Affairs, based in the former Belén school.

For this purpose, we have a group of professionals specialising in caring for the elderly, who receive maintenance as well as physiotherapy and rehabilitation services and ophthalmic and pharmaceutical care. The aforementioned office is also in charge of the Assisted-Living System, a new type of service for elderly people living in poor conditions, who are provided with comfortable

apartments staffed by carers. Moreover, in the event of natural disasters, such as those caused by hurricanes, the Belén convent serves as an evacuation centre.

During the school holidays, we are pleased to share the historic quarter with the families who wander through its squares and alleyways, admiring the museums and exhibitions, the hidden courtyards and small gardens. For those who live, study or work here, and for holidaymakers who come to Cuba and its capital from all over the world, this is a particular delight. In Havana they find a living city, with residents whose roots go far back in time and are committed to the cultural heritage that they have learned to enjoy, value and identify as their own; a population for whom visiting museums, concert halls and libraries comes naturally, because they are places where their children study, their parents enjoy themselves and their grandparents are stimulated.

Among many other disciplines of the social sciences and art history, we were trained in the rigour of archaeology, architecture, museography, archival science and librarianship and we have examined the past with gratitude, acknowledgment and hope, in perennial dialogue with the foreseen future.

We stopped thinking only about the injection of financial funds, in the facile belief that, without indispensable resources, it is



## 4<sup>th</sup> INTERNATIONAL AWARD

UCLG – MEXICO CITY – CULTURE 21



GOBIERNO DE LA  
CIUDAD DE MÉXICO



UCLG  
United Cities  
and Local Governments



culture 21  
UCLG Committee



impossible to do anything. Living by the motto of 'Defending utopia', when the economic situation became more strained, the search for sustainability provided us with the formula to persevere in our project.

Thanks to this, our integrated management model for the rehabilitation of Old Havana has achieved recognition and been credited as a unique experience at the international level. Our finest form of advertising therefore are not our promises but our results.

