

The Urban Center, Monumental and Archaeological Heritage of Tepeaca De Negrete, Puebla¹ Mexico in the Face of the Loss of the Landscape and the Values of the Whole

Andres Armando Sanchez Hernandez¹, Alejandro Bribiesca Ortega², Leticia Villanueva Gómez³,
Gabriela Vidal García⁴, María de los Angeles Saloma CA⁵

Facultad de Arquitectura, Benemérita Universidad Autónoma de Puebla, San Andres Cholula, Puebla,
Mexico

DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2026.100601471>

Received: 29 December 2025; Accepted: 06 January 2026; Published: 20 January 2026

ABSTRACT

The city of Tepeaca de Negrete, in the Mexican state of Puebla, is a site with numerous publications, despite the existence of several studies that have emphasized its history and archaeology from different periods, primarily the Toltec-Chichimec era and data on viceregal architecture and urban planning. However, the central problem is the need to protect a fundamental aspect of the site, which is currently undergoing degradation of its cultural and natural landscape problem applicable to all urban and rural areas. The objective is to highlight the importance of conserving the often-overlooked aspects of this site, as studies generally focus on the historical, aesthetic, or religious aspects of the monuments rather than their broader contribution to the cultural and natural landscape. The findings will provide new tools for understanding this broad topic, applicable to any town or city. The methodology is based on observation of the site's various conditions, as well as on studies in other contexts that provide arguments for its application to this topic. The conclusions will offer arguments for understanding the importance of this issue in all settlements.

INTRODUCTION

The research of the Academic Body of Territorial and Urban Studies CA-117 of the Faculty of Architecture of the Meritorious Autonomous University of Puebla (in spanish, Benemerita Universidad Autonoma de Puebla, México) and participants from Engineering already has experience in different studies aimed at understanding the values, problems, and possible solutions in various urban and rural settlements in the state of Puebla for years, with a series of interdisciplinary research and results published in different journals, book chapters, and books. In this case, we are referring to a study guided through different areas of knowledge to understand the values, problems, and conditions of both the natural and cultural aspects in the municipal seat of the Municipality of Tepeaca de Negrete², in the Mexican state of Puebla. A settlement that originated on the hill and its meander during pre-Hispanic times, related to Toltec-Chichimec history, which, after Hernan Cortes arrived in 1520, was called Villa Segura de la Frontera, and was later called a city by the kings from Spain. Tepeaca de Negrete³ was given as a native homage to this settlement after it heroically participated in the Battle of May 5, 1862. The municipality is made up of a territory that balances between urban and rural, but it must be protected and preserved within a series of values and problems that affect it, including the archaeological landscape and the historic urban landscape, since in recent years there have been actions that put its integrity at risk. Among these, the extraction and processing of the stone known as Tepeaca marble has been identified, obtained from the quarry

¹ Google Earth, https://earth.google.com/web/search/Tepeaca,+Puebla/@18.97039832,-97.90469205,2250.75193253a,8794.70319496d,35y,0h,0t,0r/data=Cn4aUBJKCiUweDg1Y2Y4YzQ1NmY4NWVvKzTc6MHg4NzYyYjhmNThhODNmNzZiGQRIZNpl9zJAIYE0rV6PeVjAKg9UZXBIYWNhLCBQdWVibGEYAIAiYKJAnkX2IHtf4yQBE3DqnbHsyQBIB5BCQmunRYwCF_Rdu2J39YwEICCAE6AwoBMEICCBKDJ_8BEAA

² <https://www.inegi.org.mx/app/mapa/espacioydatos/>

³ <https://geoportal.puebla.gob.mx/>

located on the hill that gave rise to Tepeyacac. The environmental impact goes beyond nature, as it affects the original area of the settlement, which is an archaeological site. Another case is the construction of a building right in the heart of the city that exceeds the height limits and alters the aesthetic conditions of the area, being just a few blocks from the main square. Tepeaca de Negrete, in the Mexican state of Puebla, is a place with several publications, even though there is a series of studies that have focused on the history and archaeology of different periods, mainly on Toltec-Chichimec history and information about colonial architecture and urbanism. The problem addressed here is that a fundamental aspect of the area needs to be preserved, being within processes of degradation in the cultural and natural landscape—a concern that can be applied to all urban and rural areas, especially the urban center, and the monumental and archaeological value of the city of Tepeaca. The goal is to emphasize the importance of preserving the less noticed aspects of this ensemble, since usually the focus is on recognizing the historical-aesthetic or religious aspects of the monuments rather than on what, in sum, they show about the cultural and natural landscape that contains notable values within identity and aspects related to the idea of heritage. In this context, this document aims to analyze some issues that highlight the lack of official protection and the interest in safeguarding different elements and aspects of heritage values.

The findings will provide new tools to understand what this broad topic means, which is applicable to every population or city, where the urban landscape is the sum of all the actions through which a society preserves, alters, or integrates into new eras without losing its fundamental values in a historic ensemble. UNESCO has already removed sites from the World Heritage list due to alterations in a historic urban landscape, as happened in the Elbe Valley in the German city of Dresden in 2009. This occurred because visually, the construction of a bridge, the Waldschlösschen, seriously altered the integrity of the cultural landscape. Although in this case, the city of Tepeaca de Negrete is not listed on that list, nor does it have a federal declaration protecting the ensemble, only some buildings, which makes the situation even more complicated.

The methodology presents the application of various arguments to identify and evaluate problems in reality based on a review of the literature to address the issue of the historic urban landscape applicable to pre-Hispanic archaeology and the polysemic and multifunctional ensemble, allowing us to identify that the history of the city and its first foundation is related to the presence of the connection with the Toltec-Chichimec tradition, which was established on the hill that gave the name to Tepeyacac in pre-Hispanic times, and the alteration of the urban landscape through the construction of a building that is not very sensitive to its surroundings and exceeding the height profile formed by the presence of colonial-era buildings, as well as the definition of visual landmarks such as church towers and urban landmarks like the rollo, etc.

The pre-Hispanic settlement of Tepeyacac, later known in the colonial period as Villa Segura de la Frontera, Tepeaca, Thepeaca, etc., has been understood as a settlement that evolved from a village to a town and later became the municipal seat of the municipality. It has been a process of shaping an urban area following the grid layout models of New Spain. An almost perfect grid due to the topographical conditions that allowed it to expand, conceived after the conquest, although it is associated with the Renaissance, but it can also be linked to the urban and architectural reconfiguration of the most emblematic places of Tenochtitlán after its fall and refounding by the Spaniards. Within the category of heritage, there are historical and archaeological monuments, which are defined according to the Federal Law of Monuments and Archaeological, Artistic, and Historical Zones of 1972, the law on which the INAH (in Spanish, National Institute of Anthropology and History) bases its legal practice, such as:

ARTICLE 28.- Archaeological monuments are movable and immovable goods, products of cultures that existed before the establishment of the Hispanic culture in the national territory, as well as human, plant, and animal remains related to those cultures. (Chamber of Deputies, Congress of the Union, 1972[2005]), p.7) ARTICLE 35.- Historical monuments are goods linked to the history of the nation, starting from the establishment of Hispanic culture in the country, according to the respective declaration or as determined by law. (Chamber of Deputies, Congress of the Union, 1972[2005]), p.9)

ARTICLE 36.- By determination of this Law, the following are historic monuments:

I.- Buildings constructed from the 16th to the 19th centuries, intended for temples and their annexes; archbishoprics, bishoprics, and parsonages; seminaries, convents, or any others devoted to the administration, dissemination, teaching, or practice of a religious worship; as well as for education and teaching, for welfare or charitable purposes; for public service and ornamentation, and for the use of civil and military authorities. Furniture that is or has been in such buildings and important private civil works carried out from the 16th to the 19th centuries inclusive. (Chamber of Deputies, Congress of the Union, 1972[2005]), p.9)

Although the set of historical monuments is not associated with a process of identifying an area of monuments or a historic center, they do have an implicit value that connects them. Therefore, their conservation has been noted in viceregal buildings, and in many cases, 20th-century heritage has been lost, such as the neocolonial benches that were located in various spots of the main square and were removed. In the Federal Law of Archaeological, Artistic, and Historical Zones and Monuments, which we have already mentioned earlier, these zones are defined in CHAPTER IV. Of the Monument Zones.

ARTICLE 38.- Monument zones will be under the jurisdiction of the Federal Powers according to the terms set out by this Law and its Regulations. (Chamber of Deputies, Congress of the Union, 1972[2005]), p.10)

ARTICLE 39.- An archaeological monument zone is the area that includes several immovable archaeological monuments, or where their existence is presumed. (Chamber of Deputies, Congress of the Union, 1972[2005]), p.10)

In that context, the historical monuments of the Municipality of Tepeaca are listed by the INAH, and their care is inherent to its labor and legal responsibilities. However, the city's heritage has been gradually disappearing; for example, there used to be some arcades at one end of the plaza, and they are gone. The same goes for some neocolonial benches that were around the main square, which were destroyed. Let's remember that cities like Atlixco still have their benches, which are part of the city's identity and even led to making a copy in New York by the residents originally from Atlixco to remember their beloved homeland.

There is also a later production of these three 16th-century buildings that we can see around the main square, such as the parish house, the current city hall, whose spaces were adapted from what used to be an old hospital. The Temple of the Child Doctor, with its architectural-stylistic description, and the connection with the Municipal Guadalupe Bautista de Castillo Hospital. Building for the health inaugurated on May 5, 1942, although it has several completion dates for different parts of the building, we can see that it still retains the stylistic influence of 19th-century eclecticism.

The following table shows some of the most significant buildings, although there are more to identify in the city. Among them are viceregal houses, which have been modified, leaving behind traces of many, blurred among alterations, remnants, and various interventions. Additionally, in the national catalog of INAH, we only find three registered, which are the first ones in the following table.

Property	Ubication	Stylistic and historical description	Periods	Importance
Hernán Cortés House	Poniente 116 Centro CP 75200, Tepeaca, Puebla/ 116 Poniente Downtown ZIP 75200, Tepeaca, Puebla	It has various influences, although the central courtyard has been used in different cultures and contexts. It features Talavera Baroque ornamentation from the Puebla-Tlaxcala region of	It contains several periods ranging from the 16th to the 17th century and the restoration in recent years	Iconic house because it was built by the conqueror Cortes.

		the 17th century on the facade.		
"The Roll" Clock Tower	Morelos Sur 200 Centro CP 75200, Tepeaca, Puebla/ Morelos Sur 200 Centro ZIP 75200, Tepeaca, Puebla	Building with different elements from various origins: kind of Islamic influence from the Moors in Spain. Added details of shields and jaguars.	The feathered dogs nearby don't belong to this place, but to a fountain that was destroyed.	The rollo is one of the iconic elements of the 16th century built by the Spaniards.
Former Convent of Saint Francis of Assisi	General Maximino Ávila Camacho Avenue Downtown Neighborhood ZIP 75200, Tepeaca, Puebla	This religious complex, a convent-fortress complex, is located within a transition period from a late outgoing Gothic in Spain due to the arrival of the Renaissance. In this case, we see the use of the typology.	It's a set associated with several periods, but the 16th century stands out.	An iconic set for the history of the Catholic religion, Franciscanism, and evangelization.
The tax office	Calle 3 Oriente No. 111, Colonia Centro, Tepeaca, Puebla, C.P. 75200. / 3 East Street No. 111, Centro Neighborhood, Tepeaca, Puebla, ZIP 75200.	This building showcases a very unique type from the viceroyalty. Solid construction dominates over openings, and there are Franciscan-style roofs with wood, fill, flat roofs, and plaster.	It's a set associated with several periods, but the 16th century stands out	A restored building, although partially, has preserved its heritage and is currently a Cultural Center.
The portals	Ubicados en la esquina 18°57'52.92"N 97°54'07.05"W	Portals with round-arched bases	16th-16th century before the Baroque	It's the only existing gate in the city. There used to be others at the ends of the main square, but they were demolished.
Other	Various urban and rural locations	No data	No data	No data

Tabla, núm. 1. Monumentos históricos. Fuente: Elaboración propia con base en https://sic.cultura.gob.mx/lista.php?table=monumento_icahe&estado_id=21&municipio_id=164

However, the idea of what is valuable in the area of built cultural heritage in the municipality is not the only thing, because there is also a mix with the archaeological in the hill that gave the name to Tepeyacac, which together defines areas of study of the cultural landscape.

The following image from the 1940s-50s shows the conditions of what the hill was like where the village-city of Tepeaca was refounded by Cortés in 1520. Then, it shows the conditions of what have been the buildings from the 16th century, like the pillory, the town hall, and the Temple of the Niño Doctor, which took on different influences within the context of a main square. (See image 1)



Image 1. Urban landscape in the 1940s-50s. Source: Photo provided by Paulina E Vargas.

The archaeological landscape and the historical landscape

Yes, we understand cultural landscape as the relationship of natural elements where humans have participated, leaving evidence of pre-Hispanic, historical, or industrial archaeological interest in the Mexican case. The idea of heritage in the landscape, or the landscape as heritage, came from combining the definitions and elements considered valuable or heritage by UNESCO in its 1972 Convention on the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage. This amounts to the union of the natural and the cultural, as we have said. Within this framework, we understand the importance of the permanence of the elements that define the whole not only as urban profiles, the prominent presence of landmarks, spaces with social or religious significance, the uses, and, above all, the idea of the whole that has gone through different stages for the formation of an urban center and heritage from different periods.

The following image shows the lasting elements and continuities from the previous image (1), in a current context, where historical elements from other periods, like the benches and tree vegetation of the main square, have been lost. (See image 2)



Image 2. Historic urban landscape, and previous similar image. Source: Photo AASH/2026

In the following image, we can see a building that has broken the idea of a coherent whole, and that highlights the need for regulations and laws that protect not just individual historic buildings, but the ensemble as a whole. It could, —or rather should— contribute to this, but political will is required to apply the 1985 Law on the Protection and Conservation of Typical Towns and Natural Beauties of the State of Puebla, ratified in 2017, which stated: “General provisions. ARTICLE 1.- The purpose of this Law is the protection, conservation, and restoration of towns or parts of towns that are typical, as well as the natural beauties within the Entity.” (Gov. of Puebla. 1985[2017], p.5.) This is a building that might not have been authorized if the aforementioned state protection law had been in place earlier (see images 3 and 4), as it established:

ARTICLE 36.- The construction of real estate in towns or parts of towns, or in areas of natural beauty declared a "Monumental Typical Zone," will be subject to the requirements and conditions set by this Law and by the corresponding municipal regulations. (Gov. of Puebla. (1985[2017], pp. 11-12)



Image 3. Historic urban landscape and building (in the background) that altered the ensemble. Source: Photo AASH/2026



Image 4. Historic urban landscape and building (right side) that altered the ensemble. Source: Photo AASH/2026

The following table provides a summary of the aspects and factors of the urban landscape, along with the image of the city, recalling Kevin Lynch in his Image of the City.

Historic Ensemble	Assumed Periods	Implied Cultural Aspects	Implied Natural Aspects Legal Protection Type	Protection legal tipe
Urban center of Tepeaca de Negrete from Puebla State of Mexico	Centuries XVI, XVII, XVII, XIX, XX	Urban aspects, urban profile, religious aspects, aesthetics, patrimonial value of building-complex.	Old vegetation removed, presence of new vegetation introduced for aesthetic purposes.	Federal and state legal protection.

Table No. 1. Landscape Aspects, Source: Own elaboration, 2026

CONCLUSIONS

One of the big problems is how limited Mexican laws currently are when faced with the complexity and breadth of the idea of what constitutes natural and cultural heritage. Federal and state laws, with the latter being a possible alternative for protecting the whole, exist today. But it is important for civil society to be aware of these values in order not to harm them, and instead become the caretakers of that legacy. This example helps us understand how there are different sites going through degradation processes for multiple reasons, including the lack of attachment and oversight from authorities and the absence of broad and complex legislation.

In this context, the importance of preserving and protecting the cultural and natural legacy of the urban, monumental, and archaeological center of the old town-city of Tepeaca, for years in Negrete, Puebla, faces the need for the direct custodians, the inhabitants, to become aware of their identity and the value of both old and new buildings in the face of the imminent dangers of losing the landscape and the values of the ensemble.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

1. Gob. de Mexico. (1972 [2025]) Ley Federal de Monumentos y Zonas Arqueológicas, Artísticas e Históricas de 1972. Última Reforma de 2025. <https://www.diputados.gob.mx/LeyesBiblio/pdf/LFMZAAH.pdf>
2. Gob. de Puebla. (1985[2017]) Ley sobre protección y conservación de poblaciones típicas y bellezas naturales del estado de Puebla 4 de abril de 1986. [file:///C:/Users/user/Downloads/Ley_Proteccion_Poblacion_Tipicas_29_Diciembre_2017%20\(2\).pdf](file:///C:/Users/user/Downloads/Ley_Proteccion_Poblacion_Tipicas_29_Diciembre_2017%20(2).pdf)
3. Sánchez, H., A.A. (2022) El paisaje como patrimonio. En libro de actas: II Simposio de Patrimonio Cultural ICOMOS España. Cartagena, 17 - 19 de noviembre de 2022. Universidad de Valencia, España., <https://doi.org/10.4995/icomos2022.2022.15350>
4. UNESCO, (1972). Convención sobre la protección del patrimonio mundial, cultural y natural. <https://whc.unesco.org/archive/convention-es.pdf>