

Theater and Industry. European Utopia in Mexican Industrial Archaeological Sites, 20th Century Heritage

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2026.100500862>

Received: 16 May 2026; Accepted: 22 May 2026; Published: 16 June 2026

ABSTRACT

A space within the working-class neighborhood, suggested within the societal utopias of the 19th century in Europe, also became a reality in other countries such as Mexico. Spaces originating in France in the utopian project for Fourier's phalanstère and later its consolidation and realization in Godin's familistère were intended for the presentation of theatrical works about labor life, social movements, daily life, and traditional dramaturgy in its genres, workers' theaters in industrial cities, or housing models that allow spaces to live and carry out human activities. The problem in which they are situated in Mexico is that in many cases they have been abandoned and have not been valued, due to being unknown in the international context and within the complexity of the issue of industrial heritage and its conservation. The objective of this document is to present the influences and importance of these spaces as part of heritage, being one of the elements of the industrial site. The methodology is based on a literature review, visits to the relevant places where this space coexists, as well as the description and historical context of the locations. The findings allow for an understanding of the origins and presence in various industrial sites, such as in the textile sector, in several countries. Mexico is no exception, as these sites are a fundamental part of the equipment of workers' colonies. Utopian projects have also become a reality in other countries.

Keywords: Theater, industry, heritage.

INTRODUCTION

The consolidation of European utopias, including the French ones, went beyond their country of origin. In such a situation, in other countries it was implemented in workers' and everyday life, being at the forefront of industry and its workers. The first ideas were born from a philanthropist, called a utopian socialist, with Charles Fourier's phalanstère, in French phalanstère; they appeared in the mind and dreams, which were built into the actions of one of his followers. A model of a city where workers were housed near the production area, a space where all services coexisted such as housing, education, and entertainment, or a theater to perform plays and have spaces for their meetings. Later, subsequently, a follower of Fourier, a Fourierist, managed to consolidate those ideals in a familistère (in English familistère): J. Baptiste Andre Godin in Guisa, France. A complex that positioned itself as a pioneer in these matters; it also had a theater integrated within a city model that housed all services.

In some cases, the theater in the model of workers' housing around a central courtyard within a city system conceived and influenced by utopian socialists in the 20th century, such as the case of Fourier's utopy and, in reality, Godin's. Model-idea that was replicated in other cases as the avant-gardes to be implemented to mitigate the effects of unchecked capitalism that did not benefit the workers. We share this idea of Servier (1976) and the history of utopia:

The Puritan ideal has become a system. Adam Smith's work, *The Wealth of Nations*, published in 1776, is less an economic system per se than a general overview of economic facts. Its arrangement according to a scientific perspective, the latter founded, in turn, on an implicit ethics: the desire for enrichment turned into the driving force of modern society. (p. 161)

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However, the marginalization and the need for better spaces for workers were fundamental in the thinking of utopists like Owen (1771-1858) in New Lanark and Charles Fourier (1772-1837) in France, who sought with his phalanstery the solution to many housing problems, and beyond the known:

Fourier wishes for all citizens to become co-owners of the city, thus actively participating in the economy of the community. Everyone has the right to a minimum vital income without the condition of work, justification, or even any incapacity to work. The wage system is eliminated and replaced with a profit-sharing scheme, gradually leading workers to co-ownership and co-management of their company. (p. 180)

A follower of Fourier, the same J. B. André Godin, in his familistery, or familistery in Guise, France, which consolidated the ideals born from the phalanstère and decided on an industrial complex for making stoves, a building that reflected the precepts:

Le Familistère bâti par Godin n'est pas le phalanstère imaginé par Charles Fourier. L'un existe, l'autre non. La necesidad de construir en realidad lleva a Godin a interpretar de forma original el palacio sociétaire. Le Familistère n'est pas davantage une «cité ouvrière» au sens qu'on donne à cette expression depuis la seconde moitié du XIXe siècle. Il en est même le contre-modèle (1th text, n. d.).

These ideals were consolidated in France and the United States. They also manifested in other places such as Mexico, where several towns were built for industry and housing. In other cases, these towns developed in different ways. This was the response to the arrival of European-origin entrepreneurs, among them Frenchmen like the Barcelonettes, in Río Blanco, Veracruz, and in La Compañía Lions Freres (Lions Brothers Company), in Atlixco, Puebla. However, in other places they were industrialists with industrialists of various origins, such as in CIASA, Compañía industrial de Atlixco, S.A, in english Atlixco Industrial Company, S.A., in the town of Metepec, in Atlixco, Puebla, too in Mexico. Nevertheless, although the first textile factory in Mexico powered by hydraulic force was promoted by two Mexicans, the best-known Estevan de Antuñano and the other Gumersindo Saviñon, in La Constancia Mexicana, in english The Mexican Consistency in what was then the outskirts of the city of Puebla, now the conurbated area of this city, there is a theater built by the workers in the union offices, and a singular detail in the textile factory complex of Río Blanco in Veracruz, and in the Lions Freres Company (Lions Brothers), in Atlixco, Puebla. Nevertheless, in other places they were industrialists with industrialists of diverse origins, such as in CIASA in the town of Metepec, in Atlixco, Puebla. However, although the first textile factory in Mexico powered by hydraulic force was promoted by two Mexicans, the better-known Estevan de Antuñano and the other Gumersindo Saviñon, in La Constancia Mexicana on the then outskirts of the city of Puebla, now part of the Puebla metropolitan area, a theater built by the workers can be seen in the union offices, and a unique detail, in the Río Blanco textile factory complex in Veracruz, although it did not have a purpose-built theater like in other cases, there was indeed such activity in adapted places and spaces; later having a very modern and monumental Art Deco-style cinema.

These spaces, being related to industry, in recent years have been associated with heritage culture, and around it, in the particularities of industrial archaeology coined by Michael Rix (1955), and the heritage of industrial culture itself. If we start from the idea, based on international documents such as those from Nizhny Tagil (2003), Dublin (2011) and, although applicable to the context of Spain, from the document of Seville (2017), the heritage of industrial sites according to their origin and use is conditioned by differences and particularities depending on the dimensions, the elements that constitute them, and the era or eras that defined them. In that sense, the conditions of what is valuable are seen not only in production buildings, worker colony housing, machinery, or archives, but also in the elements or foundations in the design of each of the buildings, as well as characteristics and conditions of what constitutes the processes in their formation. In that sense, the particularities of the site's elements give that importance to the whole as well as to the very individuality of its design, functions, and typology.

Cinema, the city, and heritage seem intrinsically linked, forming an unusual brotherhood. There is no formula to know when a director and a producer will succeed and achieve an excellent film, but if they do and the feature film's action takes place in a city, it is almost certain that the movie will portray the city with interest and serve as its heritage for future generations.(p.23)

In this sense, industrial sites intended for textiles, as well as for other uses, had not only housing to accommodate workers, depending on their status in the factory, but also the elements that contributed to the development and care of spirituality, entertainment, and personal reflection, as well as places for social gatherings; such is the case of the theater, whose origins in the configuration of the complex are seen as part of the conditions to entertain workers, but also to tell dramatized stories. In this context, this work is presented to allow an analysis of the importance of space as part of this industrial complex, which exposes the need for its conservation for multiple reuse, preserving its historical elements.

The objective of this text is to argue the importance of these spaces within industrial complexes and industrial heritage for theatrical activity, while also spreading the origins and reasons for these spaces in the conservation of the industrial site, a space that not only safeguards material value but also intangible values, as well as the identity of the population, and an emerging historical value due to its relationship with theater and cinema, as well as other cultural uses. The methodology is based on a literature review, visits to the relevant places where this space coexists, as well as the description and historical context of the locations analyzed showed in a table comparative.

Background

This text is based on prior research published in the book: Cultural Heritage in five mexican textile industrial sites (2015), edited at, in spanish BUAP (Benemérita Universidad Autónoma de Puebla), Meritorious Autonomous University of Puebla, México, authored by us, which allowed a review of the periods, conditions of these complexes, and the elements that constitute them. These include the production area, the workers' colony with a temple, schools, and a theater. In this book, the spaces of industrial complexes—or sites such as La Constancia (1835-1993) and El Mayorazgo in the city of Puebla (1842-1991)—are analyzed, in addition to others designed expressly as facilities for worker cities or towns. Some were located in the town founded by the Compañía Industrial de Atlixco, S.A. (CIASA) (1898/1902-1967), in El Carmen, or in the Lions frères Company, also in Atlixco (1898-1969), Puebla, Mexico. In the first case, we can analyze the example of a theater inaugurated in 1923 in 1923 that was part of the complex of the Compañía Industrial de Atlixco, S.A. (CIASA), Industrial of Metepec, (Fábrica de Metepec) (1898-1967).

This property, although intended for theater and later for cinema, as part of the recreational halls for workers, was built as part of this industrial site and, therefore, is part of the heritage. However, the origin of that very singular space, the industrial sites, was not exposed, so it is necessary to analyze and explain its origin and particularities in France, and then in the analyzed cases. Inaugurated in 1923, a few years after the Mexican Revolution, this space was built by the company in the workers' neighborhood. A tribute to Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra: the Cervantes Theater, as its first purpose for this building, was constructed situated within a town with an industrial aim for the amusement of workers dedicated to textile production in the town of Metepec, the second textile factory in all of Mexico, being the most important in technology. Porfirio Díaz himself, in one of his reports, referred to this facility in Atlixco, the town at that time being within the territory with that municipal head, currently as an Auxiliary Board of the same municipality.

During the Porfiriato, theater or the tandas were not unusual. This is how the following author comments:

The theater of the Porfirian era, considered a social practice of great importance, constitutes an important and little-explored source of the socioeconomic conditions of this period. The introduction of the tanda in 1880 reveals a dominant class that finds itself unable to maintain the exclusivity of its cultural life. (Bryan, n.d., p. 32)

After the effects of the Second Industrial Revolution with the advent of electricity, the design of the ensembles took on other particularities, as well as the need for new facilities and infrastructure for the generation of this energy. Likewise, in the Second Industrial Revolution, new elements arose in the formation of towns, leaving behind utopias, and making the implementation of the aspects considered in them a reality. The contributions of utopists or utopian socialists added services such as housing, libraries, and schools to the production areas, which had originated as a utopia born from the thought of Saint-Simon: Count Saint-Simon reflected on morality and the idea of a New Christianity, which perhaps motivated the implementation of temples near workplaces. The Irish, predominantly Protestant; the French, Catholic; and the Spanish, Catholic, were the diverse audience that

gathered in the actual Protestant temples, or under the idea of the Catholic, Apostolic, and Roman religion, which in Mexico, since the Laws of Juárez, allowed the entry of new religions in the 19th century. What was not uncommon was that in the town's temple, the worship was to the Virgin of the Conception.

In that sense, all of these figures contributed something to the idea of amenities in industrial sites, which became a common practice in many manufacturing centers, rather in the design of industrial cities or towns. In Mexico, we see complexes with these conditions in Río Blanco, Veracruz, the Compañía Industrial de Orizaba, S.A. (CIDOSA) in english the Industrial Company of Orizaba, S.A. An industrial complex inaugurated in 1892 by Porfirio Díaz himself, also that of El León and the Compañía Hermanos Lions in english Lions Brothers Company, in Atlitxco, and the case in question. In the first, there was the provision of spaces for libraries, housing, and places for leisure and recreation; they were not strangers to the expansion of the industry in a spinning mill in Scotland, in New Larnak, later with influences in various countries once it was experimented with, and with a consolidation in the way of doing architecture, and even urbanism, to accommodate production areas and residential areas or workers' colonies.

In another national context, but still within the context of industry and the inequalities between workers and employers, a Frenchman emerged, Fourier: Charles Fourier, who proposed not only the need to house workers and their families in a city, but also to provide spaces for the theater. A utopian who had devised a city model, grouped into a phalanx or phalange, a phalanstery that brought together a series of worker families in a single building, where housing, organized and safe spaces, as well as a theater, coexisted; a space that allowed for various activities. The theater (théâtre)[1], a building made specifically for this purpose near the main building for the workers' apartments, which we can see in Charles Fourier's utopian plan, in the Passionate Harmony of the New World, being proposed, even without being built.

Later, one of the Fourierists, who did consolidate this idea, was Jean Baptiste Andre Godin, in his familistère in Guise, France.

“Le palais comprend d’étonnants pavillons d’habitation collective et de nombreux équipements de service: des magasins, une buanderie et une piscine, un jardin et des promenades, une crèche, des écoles, un merveilleux théâtre.”

The theater of the Familistère has still been operating since its inauguration in 1987, both for the inhabitants of the Guisa region and, for some years, for visitors who enjoy the history of industrial heritage and identity. In the following image no. 1, the complex and its very unique architecture can be seen.



Image 1. The theater and the schools of the Familistère as seen from the central pavilion of the Social Palace. Anonymous photograph, 1881. Albumen print on paper. H. 9.8 x W. 13.3 cm. Familistère de Guise (inv. 1976-1-72)" Source: Theater and schools, La Familistère de Guise. Entrance to the theater of the Familistère in Guisa, France. Photograph by Georges Fessy, 2016.

If we could describe the influences of this building, it is initially mentioned that it was designed expressly based primarily on Fourier's idea. It is located within a historical context where opposing schools existed: Neoclassicism, which was based on the drive towards reason, and Romanticism, which stemmed from a philosophy based on feelings and the senses; in both cases with a production that was found in the arts. However, in addition to these influences in the academic sphere, there was the expansion of the use of brick as one of the first effects of the industrial revolution in construction, as well as the use of cast-iron structures, later steel, to cover large spans. In this context, the familistère complex is a unique case of a building, as well as the elements that constitute the complex, the theater, which was built with the same construction and structural systems as the entire complex. Even, with a certain Neoclassic influence.

In that context, the familistery complex is a unique case of a building, as well as the elements that make up the complex, including the theater that was built with the same constructional and structural systems as the entire complex. Even with a certain neoclassical influence in the use of classical elements such as pediments and pilasters in the frames of the most significant entrances and windows. (See image 1)

The Familisté residents in Guisa enjoyed spaces specifically designed for living and activities related to work, the education of their children, and culture. In the theater, collective activities were important for discussing issues of the colony, industry, and society, convened by the members of the Cooperative Association of Capital and Labor. (See image 2)



Image 2. A meeting of the Cooperative Association of Capital and Labor in the Familistère theater. Photograph by Marie-Jeanne Dallet-Prudhommeaux, October 2, 1898. Familistère de Guise Collection” Source: <https://www.familistere.com/fr/decouvrir/le-familistere-par-l>

Such was the influence on the av ant-garde and unique design of Fourier and Godin's buildings that architecture students in Paris became followers of their production and building concepts; such is the case of architect Eduardo Tamariz (1844-1886), who designed the Maternity House in the city of Puebla, inaugurated in 1883 for

a hospital for women of limited means, but which was inspired by Fourier's phalanstery, having at the ends of the main facade two spaces that recalled the location of the theater in the original and utopian project. We published more detailed information about this building in two books: the first is called *Ancient Maternity House, a Fourierist building?* (2003), and the second is *Maternity House*, co-authored with Gracia Dorel Ferré in 2008.

The presence of theaters in utopian industrial cities in Europe was located in workers' colonies, where workers' housing, schools, libraries, and spaces for leisure and recreation coexisted. Fourier's phalanstery and Godin's Familistère contain these aspects. In the analyzed Mexican cases, under different conditions, they have those spaces, and among them, the theater. The following table presents these points and the relationship of industrial sites and the presence of the theater

Site industrial	Utopic	Real	Spaces of the colony	Ubication
1)Phalanster	x	---	Industry and workers colony	----
2) Familistery	x	x	Industry and workers colony	Guisa, Francia
3)Compañía Hermanos León/ Company Lions brothers	---	x	Industry and workers colony	Atlixco, Puebla, México
4) El Carmen/The Carmen	---	x	Colony in the city virreinal	Atlixco, Puebla, México
5) Compañía Industrial de Atlixco, S.A (CIASA)/ Atlixco Industrial Company, S.A	---	x	Industrial city with workers colony	Atlixco, Puebla, México
6) El Mayorazgo/Tha Mayorazgo	---	x	Industrial city with workers colony	Puebla, Puebla, México

Table 1. Explanatory chart of the spaces and their relation to the workers' colony and the industry

The building of the Cervantes Theater-National Cinema was intervened for its conservation through the work of the Association for the Natural and Built Heritage of Metepec, and the work supervised and carried out by Mtro. José Luis Galicia within the framework of the celebrations of the 100th anniversary of the aforementioned venue.

One of the works that were presented in this town is *The House of Tom* or *the Slavery of the Blacks*, *The Awakening in the Shadow*, and a comedy: *The Telephone*, presented in 1923 at the Mayorazgo factory, as cited in Sánchez (2015).

This work presented a hot-button issue, even for those years, such as the abolition of slavery and racial matters, in many theaters, as Thomas mentioned:

The theatrical performances of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in Mexico City in 1857 must be understood as constitutive of the cultural phenomenon 'Tom Mania' that captivated the Atlantic world in the 1850s. However, until now, both historians and literary critics have ignored the resonance of Harriet Beecher Stowe's famous novel in Mexico, also underestimating its importance in Latin America. Consequently, they have overlooked how Spain's pro-slavery and imperial projects influenced the articulation of a Hispano-Mexican intellectual field around topics such as slavery, abolition, and race. (Thomas, 2019, p. 1)

Almost all the performances of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in 19th-century Mexico derived from a script written by the prolific Spanish playwright Ramón de Valladares y Saavedra, whose *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, or *the Slavery of the Blacks*, premiered in Madrid in March 1853. This common reference point for Mexican representations of Tom is interesting in itself, since, in the United States, France, Spain, Italy, Germany, and Great Britain, a plethora of dramatic adaptations of Stowe's novel competed for audiences in the 1850s. (Thomas, 2019, p. 6)

In Atlixco, an important industrial corridor for textiles, the El Carmen factory was built; within it, a space for the offices of (see image), near the production area. Inside it, there was a space for theater plays and a forum for meetings and musical presentations. (See image 3)



Image 3. Office building of the Carmen Union. Source: Photo s/a, provided by Mr. Guillermo García.

The Cervantes Theater, built by the Industrial Company of Atlixco, S.A. (in spanish CIASA), comes to showcase that relationship between workers, work life, and social life. Then, a space revived in the glorious years of the union, being leaders in the national sphere in some of those years. The national cinema dated 1956 responds to a nationalist historical context related to the avant-gardes, technology, and the evolution of film production that would cater to the entertainment of workers and their families.



Image 4. Cervantes Theater-National Cinema of CIASA, factory in Metepec, Atlixco, Puebla, Mexico. Photo. AAS/2025

National cinema

The access volume of the old Teatro Cervantes (see image 4) is framed within a movement that is more than complex, significant for Mexican national history: nationalism. Driven by José Vasconcelos and resonating in multiple spheres of life and art: music, architecture, painting, sculpture, etc. A movement that exalted the idea of the pre-Hispanic past and the notable presence of miscegenation. A mestizaje that did not forget the historical and cultural kinship with Spain.

This volume named Cine Nacional, which reflected that great process within a vanguard that served as a backdrop, although ironically of French origin, art deco, once again had a presence in Mexico, but now as another vanguard that did not express the opulence and monumentalism of the Porfirio era. In that context, emblems of symbolic resonance were added, such as a flagpole, the very name of cinema, and the emblem existing on the letterhead of the CROM (Regional Confederation of Mexican Workers) union of workers. The CROM came to have a leader of national importance: Mr. Antonio J. Hernández.

20th Century Heritage

One of the major problems, even for the legislation and protection of built cultural heritage in Mexico, is the lack of clarity and specificity in the Federal Law on Archeological, Artistic, and Historical Zones and Monuments of 1972, with various reforms. Document where historical monuments are mentioned as those built from the 16th century (1521) to the 19th century (1900). This has generated many problems for the defense of the heritage that was built after 1900, even during the Porfirio period, and which, apparently, is under the custody of the INBAL (National Institute of Fine Arts and Literature) as heritage, as artistic monuments. In that sense, the complex built by CIDOSA-Fábrica de Metepec had its first phase inaugurated in 1902, followed by various buildings throughout the century, such as the Temple of the Conception and the Cervantes Theater, dated 1923 (See image 5, 6). Based on the Madrid Document of 2011, the heritage of the 20th century is defined as:

The architectural heritage of the 20th century is in danger due to a lack of appreciation and care. A part of it is already irretrievable, and another, even larger, is at the same risk. It is a living heritage that is essential to understand, define, interpret, and properly manage for future generations. (SC20C-ICOMOS, 2011)



Image 5. Movie projector, source: Photo AASH/2022



Image 6. Art deco facade attached in 1956. Source: Photo, AASH/2018

Image. Presentation of two books authored by us in the space in question. Source: Photo, AASH.

People have participated in the rescue of this building considering it as part of their identity, and an exemplary historical space of the population. The following images show different activities in which the inhabitants participated, such as cleaning, after the intervention. Among them, the group “Silencer,” a group of young people from sports, took part in this cleaning of the Theater. (Ver images 7, 8, 9)



Image 7. Young volunteers from the town helped with the cleaning of the theater in the face of its abandonment. Source: Fabian Atenco Flores, 2023



Imagen 8. Young volunteers from the town helped with the cleaning of the theater in the face of its abandonment.
Source: Fabian Atenco Flores, 2023



Imagen 9. Young volunteers from the town helped with the cleaning of the theater in the face of its abandonment.
Source: Fabian Atenco Flores, 2023

After the cleaning and restoration of the property, it was left in optimal conditions for its use. A theater that allows having other uses such as a House of Culture of the government of the Mexican state of Puebla of the town, which had been inaugurated by the then Secretary of Culture, the playwright Héctor Azar Barbar.

CONCLUSIONS

The theaters in the analyzed industrial complexes are found within various contexts, ranging from those that have disappeared, such as the former El Mayorazgo factory in the city of Puebla, or the León Atlixco, Puebla, where the building exists but not its use. The theaters that are still in operation are the one in the former El Carmen factory in Atlixco and the theater in the Union building. This one belongs to the workers of La Constancia Mexicana and has been converted into a restaurant. It has only left the stage and some benches from the place. And the one we have recently described, the CIASA, or former factory in Metepec. Restoration

promoted in response to the emerging need to reuse an abandoned space for multiple reasons, including the damage from the 2017 earthquake and lack of maintenance, which left the floors, seats, and, in general, the stage and dressing room areas in poor condition. Recently, in 2023, it was restored to celebrate the 100th anniversary of its inauguration, with the participation of the Civil Association Metepec. Natural and cultural heritage, the Auxiliary Board President of the town and civil society, from successful entrepreneurs to the population of adults and enthusiastic young people. Leaving a functioning building with history, tradition, and identity for the population and the entirety of the Atlxco Industrial Company, S.A. (CIASA).

In that varied context, the existence of a project born from utopian ideals, as we have seen, from Fourier to Godin, and then to the industrial sites of various countries, is appreciated. Currently, it is an indispensable part of the heritage of industrial culture and, in the cases analyzed, with the possibility of being recognized by the INBAL (National Institute of Anthropology and History) as artistic monuments of the 20th century. Exposing an identity of the population and historical-cultural values that can have contemporary uses, alongside their original use.

The places designated for theatrical activity in these spaces, near the industrial area or even in the workers' colony spaces, allowed for theatrical works to be showcased, such as workers' social gatherings, which responded to social and labor movements as the 20th century began with the birth of trade unions.

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