

# Urban Strategies in Old Havana

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*"Cities are an immense laboratory of trial and error, failure and success, in city building and city design".  
Jane Jacobs.<sup>1</sup>*

This report is intended to be a critical reflection of the Cuban reality looking at the project of the Historian's Office as of one of the best examples of decentralised management in the city and the country in terms of self-sufficient urban development.

A lot of transformations are at present being experienced in this area of the city and a lot of new ideas and concepts are being put into practice, however, there are many interests and conflicts among the actors that reveal the complexity of the territory and the project itself.

The present government economic policy, striving to preserve the country's socialist image, is based on a welfare approach that is not being efficient to improve the critical situation of the built patrimony that needs to be urgently reversed. The example of Old Havana is then a unique case that could be multiplied in the future into other city areas.

The regeneration process in Old Havana is taking place equally at three different levels with the participation of many actors. The first is concerned with the top decision-making, policies and planning. The second has relations with both the first and the third as a sort of intermediary that deals with the management of the different companies' projects, financial and operative issues. The third has to do with the direct implementation and construction process. This report will address these three domains through the description and analysis of actors, strategies and project implementation.

## An Overview of Havana

Havana City is the capital of Cuba, the green island that sleeps like an alligator in the middle of the Caribbean. Its total surface is 725 square km from which the urban area is 360 square km. The rest corresponds to suburban areas and agricultural land.

The city has a little over 2 million inhabitants, almost the same amount than fifty years ago, thanks to the government's policies that prevented strong migrations by favouring the development of the countryside areas.

The Cuban nationality is the result of the fertile combination of Spanish and African cultures in the first

<sup>1</sup> Jacobs, Jane, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, 1964.

place, but also of Chinese, North American and Arabian influence. This mixture is the basic element of the Cuban culture, where the traditional always finds a place for the new.

The weather is steady all over the year making some people declare that *Cuba is an everlasting summer*. The average temperature is 21 centigrade degrees and it is also a very humid climate, around 75 % with 1411 mm of rain average.

## A Bit of History

Havana was founded in 1519 on the shores of Carenas harbour. This circumstance made it a very important site during the XVI and XVII centuries for the Spanish Metropolis, as it was the point of departure of the fleet that found shelter in the protective waters before going to Europe. In 1592 the village of San Cristóbal de la Habana received the Title of City.

As a result of the frequent attacks of pirates, from the XVI to the XIX centuries the city developed a system of fortresses that today is part of the World Heritage Patrimony.

Famous for the harmony of its architecture and urbanism, the history of the "city of columns"<sup>2</sup> can be perceived through the urban evolution from colonial times to the contemporary days. It is reflected in the street patterns and building designs, in the squares and parks and in sculptures and ornaments that sometimes have travelled around it according to the modernising or aesthetic intentions of the public and private powers.

Having preserved the essence and authenticity of its urban structure in spite of deterioration, spontaneous changes and neglect, is today one of the main values of Havana city.

## The Local Background

The Old Centre of Havana is nowadays very small if compared to the size of the capital; it only covers 4.5 square kilometres of its total area.

The historic urban layout of narrow streets and dense blocks is well preserved as no large transformations were made in the precedent decades<sup>3</sup>.

<sup>2</sup> Carpentier, Alejo, *La ciudad de las columnas*, La Habana.

<sup>3</sup> During the 50s some plans were developed to make radical transformations to the Old core of Havana. The

The following SWOT analysis aims to offer a comprehensive idea of the present situation of Old Havana and its future opportunities of development.

Some of these statements will be analysed in more detail in the actors' and strategies' sections of the report.

## SWOT Analysis of Old Havana

### Strengths

- Conserved patrimony and historic urban layout as well as tangible and intangible values.
- Existence of the Historian's Office and the law decree 143 of 1993.
- Existence of a monument's law to protect the patrimony.
- Presence of CBOs such as the CDR, FMC, MTT, BPD.<sup>4</sup>
- There are no important illiteracy rates.
- The state owns the land and controls land use.
- Presence of important public institutions such as Banks, Ministries and Cultural Centres. The area is recovering its importance as Central Business District.

### Weaknesses

- Top down model of governance resulting in poor decision making at the local level.
- Deteriorated building stock, environmental pollution, housing overcrowding, and lack of basic infrastructure.
- One third of houses does not have water supply or appropriate sanitation
- 43% of the buildings have structural damages in roofs and walls
- 24% of buildings have caved-in floors
- 51% have leaking problems
- Investment dynamics that take over the planning and management capacities.
- Illegal occupancy due to migration from other country areas.
- Good level of planning but poor implementation.
- Participation is not active. Paternalistic approach, it is rather seen as "giving to the people" instead of "doing with them".

- Social problems such as prostitution, criminality, abandoned children, beggars, lack of urban discipline and urban culture.
- Deficient law enforcement regarding construction permits and urban violations.

### Opportunities

- Historical and cultural values as good potentials for development.
- Multiplier effects and positive repercussion deriving from tourism and real estate development.
- Gradual economic opening of Cuba to the world.
- Political will to decentralise certain aspects of decision-making and authorise value capture from businesses in this area of the city.
- Existence of laws for environmental protection, territorial and physical planning and income tax.
- Access to Internet and other computer technologies.
- Good international relations with Latin America, China, European Community and UN.

### Threats

- Risk of some actors recognising only tourism values to the Historic Centre.
- Negative impacts of tourism: prostitution, criminality, segregation, etc.
- Double economy in dollars and Cuban pesos.
- Poor conciliation among central sector plans and local needs.
- Legislative gaps, lack of experience in the implementation of some laws and inexistence of others.
- Long term projects such as infrastructure modernisation and environmental improvement never begin for the lack of funding.
- Little experience in urban management and urban economics, poor recognition of this situation by the government.
- Impacts of the Cuban-US relations.
- Deficit in technologies and availability of construction materials.

## Strategies in the 90s

The Integrated Development Plan for the Historic Centre includes a number of sound strategies for tourism, housing, economy, social development, participation and infrastructure. The following comments do not intend to be a full and organised reproduction of these strategies but instead more like reflections of a rich and complex process and its problems.

As the strategies are very related, only the most important aspects will be headlined although many common aspects concerning all of them will be covered.

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triumph of the revolution put an end to all those modernising plans. During the 60s and 70s the government concentrated its efforts in the provision of new housing and the development of rural areas therefore there were no resources to make large changes in the inner city. In the 80s the world concerns for the old cities brought awareness about the values of the past to the Cuban architects.

<sup>4</sup> CDR: Committees for the Defence of the Revolution  
FMC: Women Federation  
MTT: Revolutionary Militia  
BPD: Brigades for Production and Defence

## Strategy for Commercial Areas & Tourism

This is the most important strategy in Old Havana, as the above mentioned activities are vital to finance the rest of the project. The main actors involved are the Historian's Office represented by its companies and enterprises, the central and local government and the private sector in partnerships with the Historian or other Cuban authorities.

Around 60% of the Old Centre has potential for the development of commerce and tourism; however, the priorities have been set in the sectors where the most important interests are tourism and real estate, the so-called *golden kilometre*.

One of the main goals of the strategy is to diversify the network of services outside hotels in order to spread the benefits. Planners always include the participation of the inhabitants in the process, at least in theory. Another important aspect is to recover the existing hotel network dating from the 50s, preserving *l'air du passé* but incorporating modern technologies as well.

The promotion of cheaper accommodation alternatives such as hostels and pensions is a good practice to achieve the planned goal to involve the inhabitants in the system. Many households could be capable to manage these establishments. Naturally the hotel standards would differ from those applied to the beach resorts, but the historic areas have to be acknowledged a different category, where the value of the area counteracts for the quality of the accommodation.

At present tourism is only thought of as for foreigners, therefore planners must address the inclusion of Cubans as potential tourists, assuming that their economies will improve. Ideas such as "look for sites and offers according to the Cubans needs" should be disregarded from the strategies as segregationist points of view. Cubans like the same things that any tourist would like, besides, they could eventually have access to all tourism facilities. At the same time this would benefit tourism, for foreigners visit Cuba to see Cubans, not the idea of them that developers may wish to sell and definitely not only other foreigners. Options in dollars and national currency must also be provided both for Cubans and foreigners.

Capacity building is one of the most important subjects of discussion in the strategies. The employment board of the Historian's Office must work on it with the inhabitants that should be the first to have access to employment opportunities in hotels and other facilities, something that is written in theory but not happening in practice. These jobs are well paid and could improve the household's economy. The selection process should also be more transparent so the refused applicants know why they were disregarded and also to avoid corruption.

Capacity building should also address local tradition revitalisation to promote the elaboration of handicrafts to sell the visitors. The Historian's office has recently financed a project with the sisterhood of embroiders and weavers that is not only self-sufficient but also profit making.

Tourism and real estate development plans include a share for social rehabilitation, but at present it is very small. Larger contributions should be established for joint

ventures with foreign capital and other business. These contributions should go to the Municipality as well as a larger percentage of tax profits, to be used for housing rehabilitation.

The private sector could be more active in the area but the present trend of the Cuban authorities is to promote businesses with powerful companies, apart from that, they wish to retain the monopoly without diversifying the role of this actor.

## Strategy for Housing

This strategy addresses the most acute problems of the inhabitants such as collapsing buildings, demolitions, housing overcrowding, lack of water supply and sanitation, relocation, etc.

The main actors involved would be the Municipality and its institutions, the local Popular Councils, the CBOs and the inhabitants. The presence of the Historian's is important in terms of planning and regulations, technical advice and financial contributions to the process.

One of the main issues considered in the strategy is to create a reserve both for temporary housing and final relocation of inhabitants affected by the rehabilitation process.

Transit housing should be, by all means, placed in the territory by filling the vacant plots left by collapsed and demolished buildings, this would help to avoid long distances of the dwellers to school, work and health care facilities and to prevent them from losing their bonds to a neighbourhood where they have probably lived for many years.<sup>5</sup>

New housing areas are in construction for ultimate relocation in a site on East Havana. In 1999 the first 500 units will be completed and the inhabitants will move to a new community that is far away from Old Havana, but that has new houses with good infrastructure and community services. The Historian's Office is fully financing this project, as the affected dwellers' buildings will be adapted for hotels, rental housing and office space.

The participation of the population has been insufficient in these projects. The inhabitants have no choice but to accept what is given to them, as they do not own their dwellings, they have the property in usufruct and do not pay anything for it. In cases of ownership they will have different offers (up to three) to choose, otherwise the Historian's has the right of expropriation. Fortunately this situation has not yet reached this extreme.

Different studies are being developed to achieve a more active participation of the inhabitants, not only in terms of decision making but also to give them access to credit and loans. This could be achieved creating a

<sup>5</sup> The Temporary Community (Comunidad Provisoria) is the first project of transit housing finished by the Historian's Office. Rows of little houses of prefabricated elements have been placed in a vacant plot of land in the proximity of the Old Square (Plaza Vieja), to move the inhabitants of the buildings that surround it and afterwards start repairing them. After completion of the works they will return to their homes.

rehabilitation fund and studying their payment potential and real income levels.

Capacity building of the inhabitants in construction and maintenance, management and cost assessment will be a critical aspect to fully include them.

The NGOs could play a very important role working with the population in neighbourhood workshops to improve housing. Unfortunately this sort of experience is not yet promoted enough by the Cuban authorities that see their actions as out of centralised control.

The Cuban law establishes that the state must assume the total amount of expenses for housing rehabilitation. The survey shows that 50% of dwellings in Old Havana are placed in slums (ciudadelas) and only 10% are rented. The government estimation costs for housing maintenance and new buildings are such, that they cannot finance them. Thus to look for other sources of housing finance is imperative.

The Municipality, whose essential role is to provide housing, should receive a bigger amount of resources from the companies established in Old Havana, as well as tax profits that at the moment go mainly to the Historian's and the Central government.

This actor has to promote a more active participation of the Community Architect and the Direction of Architecture and Urbanism in all the processes. This could be achieved by motivating the people that work in those areas, giving them better salaries and better working conditions to stop the exodus of capable professionals that has been affecting the government institutions in the last years.

One very important aspect is to restore the population's belief and motivation for the rehabilitation project. For a long time they have been promised something that has not come true and they no longer believe it will ever happen; instead of major housing improvements they keep seeing more hotels and dollar shops. To gain their confidence is a vital issue for an active participation and co-operation with other actors. There are plans to improve this situation starting different pilot projects and neighbourhood workshops learning from the mistakes and success of San Isidro.

As the rehabilitation of housing improves, there will be a need for an adequate legal framework to deal with regulations, rent, contracts, security of tenure and real empowerment of laws when facing violations or unauthorised construction.

## Strategy for Social & Economic Development

Planners have addressed this strategy orienting it more to the role of Old Havana within the economy of the country than to a decentralised economy of the Municipality that include the active role of the inhabitants. The proposal is not linked enough with the strategies of participation which state that local economic development is crucial for the area's rehabilitation.

Commerce, transportation, industry and construction have traditionally been the main economic sources of this

area. Tourism and real estate development are now added to the list.

Many harbour and industrial activities that generate pollution and heavy transportation will be relocated in the future to other areas of the city (transferring them the problems), that is one of the main reasons for the diversification of the local economy. The new economic activities must be compatible with the restoration plans in the area, produce employment opportunities for the inhabitants and promote secondary economic activities deriving from the main one.<sup>6</sup>

The management of urban land is another key issue stressed in this strategy. After four decades of revolution, this aspect is gaining importance and urban land is beginning to be seen as a regenerator and integrator of development.<sup>7</sup>

New profit-making mechanisms from property land valorisation and tax incentive are being studied in order to attract new real estate investments.

In one of its sections, the strategy deals with the diversification of the sources of finance for housing incentivating the contribution and participation of private and public institutions and increasing the possibilities of donations and co-operations with international partners.

## Optimistic Scenario to 2005

If the Master Plan strategies are successfully implemented the most probable scenario for the first years of the next century could be as follows:

- Rehabilitation will extend to broader sectors of the Historic Centre according to the priorities established by the Master Plan, however, there will be areas where only punctual rehabilitation of important buildings will be achieved.
- A considerable number of buildings will be lost and demolished due to their bad state of repair; the vacant land will be used for new buildings or public open spaces.
- The local economy will gradually improve as real decentralisation and decision-making powers get to this level. A regulatory framework should control and empower this process.
- The inhabitants will actively participate in housing finance and management of the construction performance.
- Land use will be balanced with social housing and services, tourism facilities and compatible industry.

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<sup>6</sup> For instance, tobacco factories are an industrial tradition in the area, are non-polluting and can be easily commercialised through hotels and shops. At the same time this industry generates other activities as tobacco design, promotion and advertisement of different brands, woodcarving and manufacture of boxes, etc.

<sup>7</sup> The Cuban experience during the revolution regarded land as useful areas to locate urban functions but not as valuable assets. Economic and financial tools to adequately value lands have therefore been missing leading to land value underestimation.

- The main tourism sectors will be completely rehabilitated with strong emphasis in cultural institutions, commerce, hotels and rental housing.
- The works in infrastructure improvement will be partially implemented.
- Land use regulations and management will be a responsibility of the master plan team.

## About Project Implementation

Project implementation in Old Havana is a merit the city owes to the Historian Eusebio Leal. For many years Cuban institutions complained about the decay of the colonial patrimony but efforts never went beyond seminars and professional discussions. One can often hear people ironically say that *-Eusebio thinks Old Havana belongs to him-*, but after saving so many buildings from ruin, after having created an institution of 5000 workers to preserve memories in brick and stone, one could expect no less.

From the very beginning the implementation strategy has been like planting a seed that will grow and multiply. It was in that way that the first works started in 1981; a few people putting a lot of energy to save a couple of the oldest buildings in Obispo street.

### Nature of Projects

The nature of the projects that are being implemented in Old Havana could be classified as:

- Social
- Cultural
- Public spaces and infrastructure
- Tourism and commercial
- Real estate
- Emergency actions

**Social projects:** The social programmes include museum classrooms for children, the maternity home, the handicapped children day care centre, the program for the elderly and the strengthening of civil society through the creation of brotherhoods and sisterhoods.

The construction and maintenance programmes deal with housing, primary schools, neighbourhood clinics, homes for the old and acquisition of equipment for the above.

A radio station has recently been established to let the population know about all the efforts being made to rescue the patrimony and to motivate them to be a part of it.

There are new goals to combine tourism and social rehabilitation. The idea started from the need to rescue an old fortress of the XIX century that is now a squatter settlement in Regla Municipality, across Havana's harbour. In this case housing and jobs will be provided for the squatted inhabitants that will be offered to join in the construction process, they will also be involved in the further management of the tourism complex that the old site will shelter.

The workshop school is a very important project to train young people in the different trades needed for resto-

ration, they learn to work with stone, wood, stained glass and iron; they also learn to restore mural paintings, archaeological techniques and gardening.

**Cultural projects:** Ruled by the Direction of Cultural Patrimony, it includes museums, art promotion centres, art studios and galleries, libraries, ateliers, concert halls in Old Churches and the Music Conservatory in San Francisco Convent. It is very common to find this sort of establishments in a historic area, however they often displace the inhabitants because becoming elegant and fancy areas they attract newcomers with better financial possibilities. As in Old Havana the land is state property this situation can be controlled promoting a better balance of land uses and functions.

**Public space and infrastructure:** There is a comprehensive project to revitalise public spaces such as squares, streets, gardens and parks that play a very important role as elements that structure the city and as places for collective life.

Conceptually the main idea is to assimilate the context as another element of historical value that conforms the urban city profile beyond the thought that only monumental buildings are important.

An indispensable requisite in the revitalisation of public spaces must be the implementation of a strict urban police, supported by regulations.

The works in the public spaces could be classified as:

- Revitalisation of relevant squares and avenues.
- Rehabilitation of parks, gardens and other green areas.
- Restoration of commemorative monuments.
- Restoration and inclusion of urban sculpture.
- Incorporation of the urban graphic.

**Emergency projects:** Contributions to safeguard monuments in areas outside Old Havana. These can range from financial issues to technical assistance.

**Tourism, commerce and Real Estate:** Have been widely analysed before, therefore there is no need to include a detailed explanation in this section.

## Actors & Roles. Main goals & Contradictions

### Main goals

The main goal of all the actors assembled in the inner city is the comprehensive rehabilitation of the historic centre of Havana. Policies have been established to protect the patrimony inherited from previous generations, preserving the residential character of the area, to improve the technical and service infrastructure and to achieve a self-sufficient management, promoting cost recoverable investments and the development of the local economy as sustainable concepts.

## Overall Actors

### *The Historian's Office and its new legal framework*

The Historian's Office was created in 1938 by a group of Cuban intellectuals concerned about the preservation of cultural and historic values. At the beginning it was just a small office that intended to guide the citizens in the knowledge and respect of their national history.

In 1967 Dr. Eusebio Leal Spengler was promoted director of the City's Museum. At that time he started, with great perseverance and very limited resources and support, to create what today is a huge institution that evolves on solid conceptual and professional basis.<sup>8</sup>

In 1982 UNESCO declared Old Havana and the system of fortresses, World Patrimony of Humanity. From that moment on, the Historian was able to seek new sources of donations to keep up the works and expand them to the building and urban domains.

In October 1993, the State Council approved the law decree 143 granting new powers to the Office authorising the creation of tourism and real estate companies to attract foreign currency that could later be reinvested in its physical and social rehabilitation.

These new faculties, for the first time granted to an institution working at the local level, added to the original project a strong economic motivation that rapidly expanded in the form of commerce and tourism facilities.

The Master Plan for the Rehabilitation of Old Havana has been a vital instrument to achieve the new goals. It has been designed as an "open, flexible, manageable project, with legislative and juridical powers, adapted to reality and with a participatory character"<sup>9</sup>. The team is integrated by a highly qualified technical group, responsible for resolving the various interests and multiple conflicts among the actors assembled in the territory.

The Historian's Office is subordinated to the State Council of the Cuban Republic. Its institutional structure, still going through shaping stages establishes two horizontal levels of strong power relations<sup>10</sup>.

The first level includes the technical directions responsible for the development of projects in the fields of cultural patrimony, architecture and urbanism, conservation and restoration, housing and economic administration. The second level guarantees the financial support of the first one and is represented by a group of companies, such as Habaguanex and Fenix, whose essential objective is to collect strong currency.

### *Old Havana's Municipality*

As part of the centralised institutional structure, this level receives from Havana province the main development policies and a year budget.

Its structure is divided in technical directions, thus having a parallel structure to the Historian's Office.

<sup>8</sup> Robainas Barcia, Ayleen.

1997 Lecture given in the "International Conference of Old Historic Urban Centres", Havana City.

<sup>9</sup> Rodríguez Alomá, Patricia.

1996 *Viaje en la Memoria*, Oficina del Historiador, La Habana.

<sup>10</sup> See diagram in annex 1.

One of the main roles of the municipality is to guide the political life and economic management of the Popular Councils, the education and health facilities and other community services.

In 1997 the Municipal Units for Housing Development (UMIV) were created to achieve a more effective management of housing rehabilitation. This team is responsible for setting the housing strategies and action plans with the Direction of Architecture and Urbanism (DAU) and the Master Plan. They also have the possibility to finance projects and receive donations from international agencies.

The Municipality and the Historian work together in the territory, from their interrelation derive certain contradictions in the decision making process that will further be analysed.

### *The State Council*

This actor represents the top authority of the central government. Since October 1993, when the law decree 143 was finally approved, it started supervising the process that takes place in the old city.

The adopted strategies for tourism and real estate development as well as the plans for housing rehabilitation are periodically monitored as an experiment from which they wish to extract a model suitable for other country areas.

The development of the tourism industry is one of the alternatives chosen by the Cuban authorities to save the decadent Cuban economy. Colonial Havana was suddenly reborn to their eyes, offering its attractions and values to the foreign visitors. The potentials of the old city were evident, 90 % of the tourists visiting Cuba go to the Inner City a world-wide famous tourist site before 1959.

### *The Local Government*

The five Popular Councils are the top authority at the neighbourhood level. As part of a top-down model of governance, the municipality influence and decide very much of the life of this actor and CBOs.

Most of the social projects backed by the Historian's Office are co-ordinated with these organisations such as the San Isidro Pilot project for housing rehabilitation, the brotherhoods and sisterhoods, the project for handicapped children, the maternity home, etc.

### *The Inhabitants & the Informal Sector*

The rehabilitation process in Old Havana has the essential objective of providing the residents adequate housing, prevent eviction, speculation and gentrification. This is the fundamental concept behind the whole project including, of course, the active participation of the population.

The social survey shows that:

- 47% of the inhabitants do not feel that the project is reaching them in any way
- 85% think changes are positive and are willing to participate

The informal sector is very active, they sell handcrafts, rent rooms to tourists and open small restaurants popularly called *Paladares*. Many operations happen illegally.

There is an underground market for selling and buying assets that can range from a pair of shoes to a house.

Some undesirable effects of tourism involve this actor, “crime and prostitution have increased, for life without hard currency is difficult and the Habaneros are profoundly appreciative of the benefits that even a few dollars can bring”<sup>11</sup>

#### **The Private Sector**

The foreign companies that form joint ventures with Cuban enterprises represent this actor. In general terms these companies negotiate with the Historian Office but there are some exceptions of powerful companies supported by the central government that run big hotels in the area. In such cases they pay taxes to the Historian.

Though the attraction of foreign capital is one of the main policies of the Cuban State, the Tourism Company of the Historian, Habaguanex has declared to prefer 100% Cuban businesses that have less bureaucratic procedures, thereby reducing the costs for project elaboration and implementation. The role of this actor in housing provision and rehabilitation has not been exploited to a full extent.

#### **The Public Sector**

This actor is represented by several institutions placed in the territory, and could be in one way or the other connected to the rehabilitation efforts. Among the most important ones are The National Centre for Conservation and Museology CENCREM, the National Archives and The Bank of Commerce and Credit of Cuba. At present, only CENCREM is deeply involved in the process of rehabilitation as a methodological centre for professional training, the others could be more integrated to the process in different ways.

#### **NGOs & other International Agencies**

This actor is one of the sources of finance for the rehabilitation projects. Institutions such as UNESCO, the Spanish Agency for International Co-operation (AECI) and Caritas, are contributing with financial resources or technical assistance that are mainly used to develop social and cultural schemes.

NGOs are not very strong in Old Havana; the government does not promote them because they are too independent of the centralised structures, however they could be of great help in the regeneration process, there are many successful international best practices that could be used as points of departure.

## **Conflicts of Interests**

One of the main conflicts between the Municipality and the Historian is *rehabilitation Vs deterioration*.

The Central Government’s directive for the Municipality is to maintain and rehabilitate housing, public spaces and infrastructure, to that purpose each year they allot a restrained budget that hardly covers for administration costs. On the other hand, the directive for the Historian is to reinforce the tourism program that should

reach 1000 hotel rooms by 2003 in addition to the real estate development of rental housing and office space. Since the establishment of the law in 1993 the profits have been growing as follows:

1994	3 million US dollars
1995	11 million
1996	21 700 million
1997	33 million
1998	40 million

There is a big contrast between rehabilitated and non-rehabilitated areas: 19.73% of highly valuable buildings are in bad state of repair, 44.73% of buildings need major maintenance and only 35.52% are in good state of repair according to the not very demanding Cuban standards.

The fact that the Historian’s office has been allowed to establish and administer its own businesses, including construction companies, rights of import and export, publishing and advertising facilities, technical workshops, among other things, has created a self sufficient structure that is much more active and powerful than the municipality and in fact controls the whole administration of the area. This is a very positive aspect of the process if one acknowledges that the Cuban context is very centralised. This is the first time the government has authorised the direct management of a locality, however these powers could be granted directly to the municipality as a means to decentralise the local power and avoid the overlapping of functions that is being improved through the creation of partnerships<sup>12</sup>.

The municipality claims its role, sometimes disregarding or putting bureaucratic obstacles to the strategies developed and conciliated by the Master Plan. To better illustrate this idea, municipality staff members have recently assumed the direction and management of the pilot project for housing rehabilitation in the neighbourhood of San Isidro, changing the concept of this workshop to a more “government type” and considerably reducing the effectiveness and liberty of action that it had, while being part of the historian’s structure<sup>13</sup>.

The historian yearly allots around 5% of its revenues to housing rehabilitation and this figure tends to increase. However, this amount of money cannot stop the rapid deterioration process. The Municipality does not possess the housing stock to allow a deeper rehabilitation of buildings or the relocation of the inhabitants whose dwellings will be used for another function.

Other antagonisms take place within the Historian’s Office institutional structure, where a number of actors

<sup>12</sup> Other municipalities in Havana have declared to be ready to develop similar structures as the historian’s but the government is not yet willing to accept such challenges.

<sup>13</sup> The San Isidro housing project is one of the initiatives set up by the historian’s office in the neighbourhood of the same name that used to be one of the poorest areas in the inner city close to the harbour. This place was a no-go area and had never received any support. An office was opened to revitalise it with the active participation of the community. The project is successful in general terms but there are a lot of problems in the management and implementation of the works.

<sup>11</sup> Barclay, Juliet.  
1997 ‘New life in Old Havana’, Oficina del Historiador, La Habana.

play important roles. The enterprises created in 1993 to be the financial support of the social project, have reached a dynamic of investment and a rhythm of growth that absorb most of the financial resources. They have priorities that contradict the logic of the original project supported by the technical and cultural directions.

The conciliation of interests between the technical level and the entrepreneurial one is not an easy task and many specialists are sceptical that housing rehabilitation be achieved before the pragmatism generated by a larger amount of investments imposes as a source of profits that paradoxically are essential for the survival of the city.

The cost for rehabilitation in the Historic Centre is around 600 dollars per sq. meter<sup>14</sup>. This figure is very costly for the government to support, that is why the inclusion of the inhabitants as housing financiers is so important to solve the contradiction *main goal tourism Vs main goal housing*.

The above cannot be achieved without a change of attitude of the central government in the decentralisation of the local economy, giving the inhabitants opportunity to open small business beyond the homebased economy and building in them the capacities for construction management and self-help.

The central government has so far allowed certain economic activities at a very small scale and with very little incentives. The brave inhabitants that risk opening such businesses have to pay high taxes and go through strict control. With such a picture, instead of promoting these activities the state is, in fact, discouraging them.

The improvement to the infrastructure network, obsolete and overcharged, has only been partially assumed as works deriving from specific projects concerning the surroundings of very small areas around hotels or shops. It is evident that the amount of money required to renovate it can only be provided by a strong central government investment. The lack of capacity of the infrastructure will soon be a major obstacle for further development.

The participation of some actors is still very limited, that is why their fields of conflicts could only be predicted in future stages. In this group are the NGOs, the private sector and the public institutions.

## Actors in Implementation

Some new actors that before were included under *Broader Actors* will be detailed in this section, as they are more relevant in this stage. They are:

- The Project Offices
- The Construction Companies
- The clients
- The Board of Monuments
- The investors or developers

The Historian's Office has two project groups, the Direction of Architecture and Patrimony and the Direction of Projects. The first group is in charge of the rehabilitation and restoration of important buildings for social and cultural purposes such as theatres, churches, colonial man-

sions adapted for hotels, schools, etc. The second group is specialised in hotel design.

Most housing projects are contracted by the UMIV of the municipality to different project groups in the city; the Historian assumes a housing project only in the case of a very valuable historic building.

Some developers hire the services of Project enterprises of the Construction Ministry of Cuba. These enterprises have large staffs and mechanisms to produce projects as if they were factories, however they often lack the specialised labour force to deal with restoration or the necessary sensitivity to work with old buildings.

The relations among clients (developers), contractors (construction brigades), and project groups are supported by contracts. Within the Historian's Office that practice is now established because the relations among these actors were usually troublesome.

In Cuba the government is the most important client, its representative is called the investor. The Historians Office has two groups of investors, one in the Tourism Co. Habaguanex and the other one in the real estate Co. Fenix. These investors establish contracts with the design groups after having the feasibility study for the investment and the location permits from physical planning.

The Board of Monuments is integrated by professionals from different municipal and provincial institutions and by representatives of the Historian's project groups and Master Plan. Its role is very important in the control of building interventions in the historic area, approving or disqualifying the projects.

Before starting the projects archaeological and historical research are conducted after which the project is divided in three stages:

- Conceptual design
- Basic Engineering
- Detailed Engineering

## Conflicts in Implementation

In the stage of conceptual design all projects must be submitted to the Master Plan team and the Board of Monument that give land use approval and project approval respectively.

The main aspects for approval demand the respect of urban regulations, urban morphology, traditional building typologies, historical facades and ornaments, average heights, materials, etc.

Many conflicts arise from these revisions when the projects are not accepted. The arguments with the inhabitants could be solved through a better co-operation with the community architect and the DAU to improve the elaboration of the designs, but the discussions with powerful developers is in many cases becoming a battle against stereotypes and copy of international models, imported as "signs of development".<sup>15</sup>

<sup>15</sup> The Cuban architect and historian Eduardo Luis Rodriguez has defined this dangerous process as the Cancunisation of the Cocacolisation of architecture alluding the banal concepts and simplification of our cultural richness.

<sup>14</sup> Officially 1US dollar = 1 Cuban peso.



The Board of Monuments is not against the inclusion of contemporary design in the Old areas as long as it is authentic, qualified and according to urban regulations. Old Havana also needs good architecture from the end of this century in the same way it has examples of good buildings from other times.

One of the most acute problems is the height of the buildings. As the contribution of the Cuban partner to joint ventures is land, they often set very high prices for it, leading the foreign developer to high rise solutions looking for profitability of his investment.

These impacts can only be controlled through the empowerment of strict urban regulations and discipline because strong companies supported by the government tend to feel secure to do as they like.

During construction designers, investors and constructors are permanent adversaries. The constructors try to blame the architects for every thing that goes wrong and they usually succeed. Architects protect themselves by producing better plans and better contracts. Developers complain for costly projects, expensive construction materials and sometimes decide to change for more economic solutions without consulting the designer. Architects are now willing to have lawyers in the teams in order to protect the authorship of the projects.

The supply of materials is a general problem during the construction and opening stages, many raw materials for restoration are imported as well as finishing materials such as ceramic floor and wall tiles. Furniture and equipment are often imported mainly from Italy and Spain at very high costs.

Security of workers and street passers is another weak point, wood and metal scaffolds are very expensive and the works are often carried out without protection. Luckily only a few buildings have collapsed during construction but they have caused major damages to surrounding buildings.

The construction process is slow; big building sites often take more than 5 years to be completed and small ones more than one year. This problem is partly a consequence of deficient construction organisation but there are also technological and material supply implications.

The quality of the buildings is a major deficiency, the abandon of traditional construction techniques during the prefabrication and standardisation boom has resulted in unskilled workers. Some of the materials used are not compatible with the old structures for this reason the final result sometimes is a strange melange of masonry stone, bricks, soil and wood with cement blocks, modern hollow bricks and concrete. The wood work is outstandingly bad, window and door frames made of low-priced wood frequently have to be replaced the following year considerably raising maintenance costs, nevertheless developers often consider buying cheap a better solution than to buy more expensive wood or modern metal systems.

The inefficient economic controls together with the unavailability of materials to meet the real demand, result in the robbery and depredation of materials, equipment and accessories very needed to informally supply the illegal construction market of the population.

The opening dates are usually engaged with politicians to celebrate important anniversaries or events, this affects the construction quality when the brigades are rushing to finish on time at the final stage which is the most important for the building's final image.

## Conclusions & Recommendations

The regeneration process in Old Havana has the necessary components to succeed. It has, among other things, the professional and technical capacity to make an intelligent use of information and ideas that could be turned into opportunities to benefit both the institutions involved and the inhabitants.

However, there are some aspects that need to be improved along the way.

- The decentralisation and empowerment of the local level must be the first step to achieve an efficient housing programme and local development. Many ideas and projects will fail unless the central government understands this as a main point of departure.
- The programs developed by the Historian's Office in the Old City could be replicated in other municipalities that need to improve the situation of housing and local economy.
- The private sector could play an important role in the revitalisation of Old Havana not only providing opportunities for partnerships with foreigners but also for Cubans.
- The legal framework must be flexible and strict at the same time, incentive local economic development and restrain violations.
- Actors cannot see each other as rivals but as partners in the same business, calling for the establishment of common goals among them.
- Housing needs to become priority number one both for the Historian and the Municipality; its improvement will not only benefit the dwellers but also the performance of the whole process. All actors must be involved and more resources must be provided.
- Infrastructure improvement must be a priority for the central government as its poor condition will become an obstacle for further development.
- Give professionals better salaries and working conditions, their know how and experience is important in the process.
- Improve the relation architect- developer- constructor in order to achieve a more efficient construction management process with better economic and quality controls.
- Real participation of the inhabitants will be crucial; they must be part of planning, decision making, implementation and management stages.
- Capacity building is vital to include the inhabitants in the regeneration process, in housing and in local economy improvement.

The professionals that daily contribute to materialise this project have the obligation to make it better from the relationship among the actors to the eagerness to obtain better social results.

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