



## NMM in Havana

A presentation Cuba, the largest island of the Antilles and the only remaining Western Socialist society, has been experiencing a critical situation derived from two absolutely extreme components. During the 90's and the first decade of the 21st Century it has witnessed an intense economical crisis produced after the collapse of the Socialist block. Additionally; it suffered the strengthening of the fifty years old financial and economic U.S. Blockade. These processes have taken place in the presence of internal inefficiencies too and had a relevant impact in all aspects of Cuban life with specificities in its urbanisation process. During the last years Cuba has reinforced economic tights with emerging economies such as Brasil, China and Rusia and has promoted alternative political and economic regional alliances with Venezuela, Ecuador, Bolivia and Nicaragua in the framework of the so called ALBA.

Havana covers an area of 727 km<sup>2</sup> equivalent to 0.67 % of the total surface of Cuba. Its population is around 2,2 million inhabitants, which represents around 20 % of the total Cuban population and 27% of those living in urban settlements. The average population density is 3 014 persons/km<sup>2</sup>. In spite of the decentralisation policy that took place during the previous 50 years Havana still concentrated 34% of the National industrial production and major services in 2000 (Peña-Díaz 2008) a tendency that has not been

reversed during the last decade.

### An Exceptional Case

Against the background of contemporary global urbanization, Havana must be regarded as an exceptional case: While on the global scale, urbanization is progressing at a very high speed and overflowing urban landscapes and megacities are emerging all over the world, this development seems to be bypassing Havana almost without a trace (Schmid 2007). The Caribbean metropolis has experienced comparatively little growth in the past 50 years. With its approximately 1.4 million inhabitants in 1958, Havana was one of the large metropolises of Latin America. It was marked by a rapid urbanization process and an intense construction boom (Schmid 2007) during the first half of the 20th Century. The reasons for Havana's almost unique model of urban development is mainly to be found in the nature of the Cuban Revolution, which primarily aimed to improve conditions in deprived Cuba's rural areas (Schmid 2007) and in intermediate cities. By continuously improving the situation in the countryside, rural exodus as the main stimulus of urbanization was largely halted. The strategy of social equality and decentralist development ensured that the basic requirements of the population throughout the city – as in the country at large – were largely met. Particularly in the areas of healthcare, education, and the supply of essentials of daily life, great efforts were undertaken.

The corresponding infrastructure has an even distribution throughout the city. One important result of this policy is that the great urban poverty found in most of the metropolitan areas of the South does not exist as such in Havana (Schmid 2007).

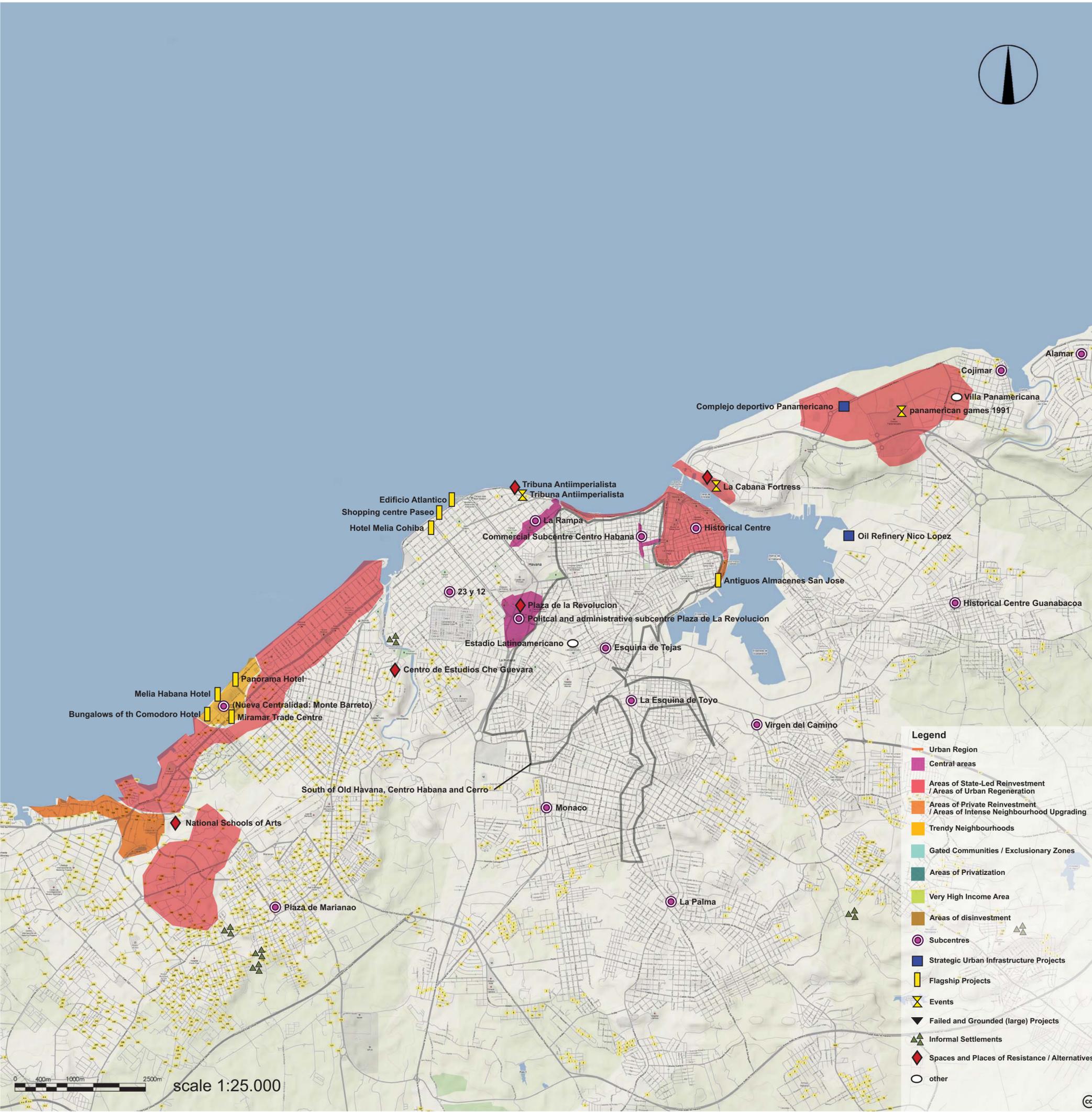
Today three main components build this exceptional case up: On the one hand the reduced growth of the territory the city occupies and influences during a rather long period. Secondly, the prevalence of a decreasing tendency of its population which is accompanied by one of the fastest aging rates of the region. Finally the fact that this process has occurred along the preservation of the urban tissue and consequently most of the components of this fabric remain untouched. (Peña-Díaz 2009).

Peña-Díaz, J. (2008). La Habana: Laboratorio de sustentabilidad urbana? MACDES: Medio Ambiente Construido y Desarrollo Sustentable, La Habana, CUJAE.

Peña-Díaz, J. (2009). La Habana. Patrimonio urbanístico mundial. "Capitale umano e patrimonio territoriale per il progetto locale: contributi di ricerca interdisciplinare in America Latina e Italia". Florencia.

Schmid, C., Jorge Peña-Díaz (2007). Deep Havana. Havana lessons. Teaching and Research in Architecture. H. Guggler. Lausanne, EPFL IAPA: 156-166.

Cuba	110'860Km <sup>2</sup>	* Inhabitants	11'451'652
Urban Region	727Km <sup>2</sup>	* Inhabitants	2'500'000



## Flagship Project Renovation Projects

## Events Alternative Projects

### Miramar Trade Centre and Monte Barreto Development

- **Purpose:** Real Estate Development for offices and Tourism
- **Size:** Around 25 ha
- **Project costs :** more than USD 200.00 million
- **Architects:** ZP International Inc. (Canada) & DCH
- **Built by:** Lares Company. Promoter: Israeli Invest

### Renovation of the Historical Centre Habana Vieja

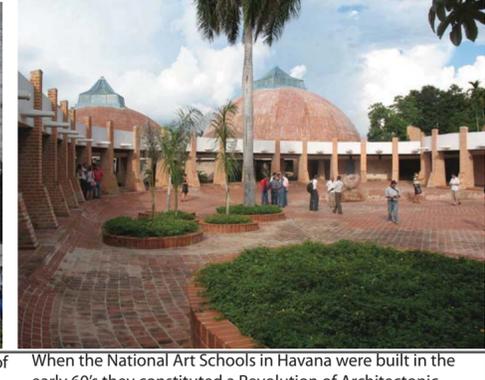
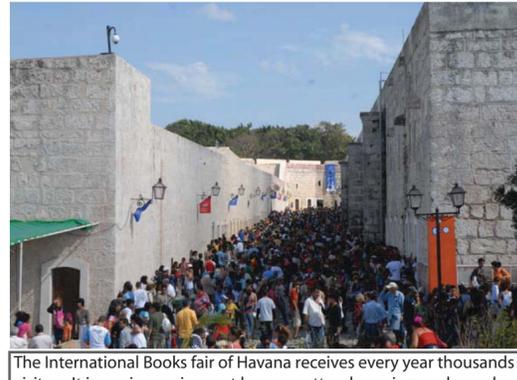
- **Purpose:** Real Estate Development, offices, Tourism, Heritage Conservation, Intensive Social Program
- **Size:** Around 214.0 ha
- **Project costs :** USD 230 million
- **Architects:** Projects office of the Historian Office

### Feria Internacional del Libro (held in the Morro Cabana Complex)

- **Purpose:** Cultural (stimulation to reading)
- **Size:** 10 ha
- **Project costs :** Unknown
- **Architects:** Projects office of the Historian Office
- **Promoted by:** Cuban Books Institute, Ministry of Culture

### National Art Schools (Renovation)

- **Purpose:** Arts Education (National reach)
- **Size:** Around 20 ha
- **Project costs :** Unknown
- **Architects:** Gottardi, Garatti, Porro, and Universo Sánchez
- **Promoted by:** Ministry of Culture



The project is one of the components of the so called Blue Strip. It is a coastal fringe where most of the investments have taken place during the last 20 years. The area of Monte Barreto has become what is known as a new centrality created de to the concentration of new services and facilities associated to the foreign capital. It is embedded within one of the better off neighbourhoods of the City. It includes the Miramar Trade Centre, and Offices building that accomodates many international offices in a proporportion and concentration not to be found in any other place of the city.

The bulidings of the trade center accomodate also Boutiques, Travel Agencies, Airlines offices, Banks, Insurance bussiness, contractors and other uses. Around the trade centre are located several hotels. They work mainly for the international tourism. Also embassies, a large supermarket for tourist and foreigners in general, the Aquarium, and large parking spaces. This combination makes of the area a not pedestrian friendly one. The generated urban space is a small playground of a timid New Metropolitan Mainstream with roots outside of Havana.



The Urbanisation process taking place in Havana constitutes an exceptional case. It is additionally a Historical City that has preserved its urban life within a unique social project that tries to offer an alternative model of development. Paradoxically, the attention devoted by decision makers to these great urban qualities of Havana has not been in correspondance with its intrinsic value. Although scholars and specialist have defended and actively participated in an increasing debate on how to preserve and reinvent Havana, and on how to revert the deficit of housing, in the practice \_both because of the lack of action and due to ill-conceived policies\_ buildings and infrastructure have been greatly neglected and housing demands have not been met.

Under these circumstances, a culture of urbanization evolved that is geared towards improvisation and sparing use of resources. Over the years, the population has employed a great deal of imagination and creativity to arrange itself with daily life in a city that not only originated in a different era, but was also built for a different society(Schmid 2007).

In spite of the exceptionality of this case some timid traces of the New Metropolitan Mainstream (NMM) can be found in Havana. As a response to the crisis of the 90s the country stimulated joint ventures with foreign enterprises which injected fresh capital into the ailing economy. Tourism was one of the sectors "privileged" by these initiatives. Although the largest share of the new facilities created to accompany this development was created in tourist poles related to natural landscapes such as beaches and rural or mountain ranges, part of them were set within urban areas. In Havana the location of this new infrastructure was achieved both through the construction of new buildings and the transformation of existing ones and favoured the area closest to the coast. More than 95% of all hotels linked to international tourism in Havana are located in a fringe which is not wider than 500 meters from the coastal line. Most of the supporting infrastructure is located within the same area.



- Warehouses of San José
- **Purpose:** Handscraft Market
- **Size:** 0.5 ha
- **Architects:** Arq. A. Choy y Arq. J. León
- **Built by:** Puerto Carenas

The recent renovation of the former Warehouses of San José in Havana's Harbour transforms this building into an Icon of the future transformation of the Bay Area. The potential removal of the Oild refinery in the opposite shore opens up new perspective for te transformation of the area south of the renovation project La Habana Vieja

30 years. There an innovative and socially responsible model of renovation has been established. It has recovered from abandonment many of the most important building from the colonial period generating one of the most attractive historical centres of Latin America. This model has been recognised by several Awards which emphasise particularly the absence of gentrification processes and its inclusive and culture oriented approach. Nevertheless the connection to tourism \_ implemented in the context of a currency duality which excludes most Habaneros from access to the services that the new industry has created\_ affects the authenticity of the produced urban scene.

These transformations have been possible because of the creation of a tailored economic and financial framework that supports an effective and efficient management. The absence of similar principles in the management of the rest much larger area constitutes one of the paradoxes that make of its own success also a relative problem.

This process reinforced the spatial differentiation inherited by the revolutionary process of 1959. As a result it is still possible to distinguish an area that has captured most of the investments during the last twenty years from an area that has kept a "natural" deterioration and decay in the absence of sound investments. These new facilities have often introduced an architecture divorced from the local traditions. They have imported models and "styles" that generate an architecture that could be found anywhere in spite of an intense struggle carried out by renowned local experts which avoided the appearance of some little "monsters" within the urban landscape.

The historical Centre La Habana Vieja represents within this milieu a special piece. Its renovation constitutes the most relevant transformation of the built environment that has taken place in Cuban cities during the last



Calle 13, Manu Chau, Maniac street Preaches and other alternative musicians have played their music for Cubans in the Plaza Antieperialista

### Perspectives

The urban question is at stake in a multilateral debate that has been reactivated recently within the Cuban society. Fuelled by artists and intellectuals and the professional sector linked to it, has generated a collective negotiation on what the production of urban space should look like within such a singular society. The presence of elements belonging to the NMM, particularly those related to a standardised and meaningless architecture has been one of the most criticised issues.

New measures oriented towards stimulating the production of houses within a more participatory and multi actors based framework \_although still incomplete\_ reflect already the impact of this social discussion. The generalisation of the principles that ensured the success of the Historical Centre Model is an important part of the demands arising from this negotiation. As a result although the components of the NMM are still very likely to continue appearing \_within the logical constrains\_ in the urban scene of Havana its presence is very unlikely to pass without deserved critiques and increasing questioning of its authenticity.

The proposal of urban paradigmes for an alternative society and for an exceptional case of urbanisation process should constitute the most valuable output of this debate

