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 bloc. 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 forced economic tightness with emerging economies such as Brazil, China and Russia 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 km² 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 21 % of those living in urban settlements. The average population density is 3 014 persons/km². 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 over-flowing urban landscapes and megacities are emerging all over the world, this development seems to be bypassing Havana situation density is 3 014 persons/km². In spite of the fact that this process has occurred along the preservation of the large metropoles 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) – found in the nature of the Cuban Revolution, which primarily aimed to improve conditions in deprived Cuba’s rural areas (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 influence during a rather long period. Secondly, the concurrent demographic trend of the city’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) – 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 decentralisation, which was based on the fact that this process has occurred along the preservation of the large metropoles 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). 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.

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 much in Havana (Schmid 2007).

The centralist 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.

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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 due 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 accommotes many international offices in a proportion and concentration not to be found in any other place of the city.

The buildings of the trade center accommodate also Boutiques, Travel Agencies, Airlines offices, Banks, Insurance bussinesses, 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 tourists 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 for cars. The facilities of the Fortress of La Cabana offer the adequate setting for this event. The former component of the defensive system of the city, the largest castle ever built by the Spaniards in America. The castle is part of the elements declared as part of the World Heritage list. It has been handfuly to a sound renovation that started in the early 90's. There are several Museums inside of the different former soldiers barracks. Although every night it features a tourist attraction which resembles the ceremony of the closing of the city wall during the colonial period during the Fair it got transformed into Cultural Hub.

The massive event distinguishes its promotion of reading as an alternative to TV and Video Games for kids of one of the central features. Other his major events with an alternative scope like the Art Bienal of Havana, which is funded with millions of dollars, and concentrates most of the investments in Cuba.

This process rephrased 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 30 years. There is an innovative and socially responsible model of renovation has been established. It has recovered from abandonment many of the most important buildings from the colonial period generating one of the most attractive historical centres of Latin America. This model has been recognised by several Awards which emphesise 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.

The International Books Fair of Havana receives every year thousands of visitors. It is a sui generis event because attendance is popular and massive. The facilities of the Fortress of La Cabana offer the adequate setting to this event. The former component of the defensive system of the city, the largest castle ever built by the Spaniards in America. The castle is part of the elements declared as part of the World Heritage list. It has been handfuly to a sound renovation that started in the early 90's. There are several Museums inside of the different former soldiers barracks. Although every night it features a tourist attraction which resembles the ceremony of the closing of the city wall during the colonial period during the Fair it got transformed into Cultural Hub.

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