

P4 Reflections

Project Titel: A school for crafts; the fight against deterioration

Problem statement: The decay and neglect in Vedado pose a serious threat to its population, their health and wellbeing

Research question: How can a vocational school aid against the decay in Vedado and give exposure to stimulate local participation

Ambition statement: Create participation by designing a self built school to stimulate small scale preservation and a place for social exposure of preservation techniques.

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Graduation studio Complex Projects

Introduction:

This graduation project is based in the neighborhood of Vedado in Havana, Cuba. The now socialist country of Cuba has had a turbulent past 80 years. This turbulence was the revolution against its former leader Fulgencio Batista, led by Che Guevara and Fidel Castro which lasted from 1953 until 1959. After the revolution Cuba became a socialist state and because of this there was an immense population growth. The neighborhood of Vedado consisted of many upscale mansions and villa's and because of its modern approach was, with its urban grid structure, designed for cars but also for the comfort and health of its inhabitants. The government was established for the people and serving the people. Because of conflicts, The United States put an embargo on Cuba to prevent trade with the country, putting a halt to goods coming in and going out of the country. Scarcity therefore was a big issue. Nevertheless the population grew larger. This put a lot of stress on housing and thus houses were split up into many households to cope with this growth. The socialist approach of Castro and his expenditure focussing on healthcare and education resulted hardly any

Aspect 1 the relationship between research and design.

Within my field of research I wanted to address the issue of decay and therefore further clarifying how this is addressed in Havana as a city and Vedado as a neighborhood. through this investigation I came to the conclusion that much of my research was directed towards the social conditions in Cuba, a non-architecture related aspect you could say. Nevertheless of extreme importance to my eventual design and to architecture in general. This social aspect became of such big importance because of the condition Cuba was and is in. This condition being a country of life outside of homes, on the streets of Vedado where big entities in the neighborhood such as the Malecon function as hotspots for this social life. For giving exposure to my graduation studio subject, in my case the deterioration, the necessity for such a social focal point was crucial. the three topics in which my research was related to the design were of spatial, social and environmental nature.

focus on construction and therefore the deterioration of the buildings stock commenced. Almost all of these buildings were property of the government and therefore no one maintained the house they lived in. What is characteristic of Vedado is also its relationship with the environmental factors. The Malecon, a sea wall designed to push back on the forces of nature is insufficient therefore flooding half of the Vedado fabric and working as a catalyst on the deterioration process and posing a threat to the living conditions of the inhabitants.



Spatial

During my research, the lack of public space, ironically because Vedado was designed so spatially, was something that came forward early on in the research. In a country which's social conditions are mainly based on this spacious layout this should have more value. Because of overpopulation, Vedado's public space has hardly any value left or is lacking to cater to the residents. My project thus aims to strive in giving value to existing public space and subsequently working as a catalyst for social conditions. By creating public terraces and leaving open as much ground level space the project redefines catering for the residents of Vedado.

Social

One of the main issues distinguished when in Vedado and in my field of research was the fact that all social interaction happened outside of the homes of people. The project is located in the heart of a residential block closely to the Malecon. The Ruin of the Trotcha Hotel acts as a beacon and the embodiment of this Neglect and deterioration. For this reason the site was defined

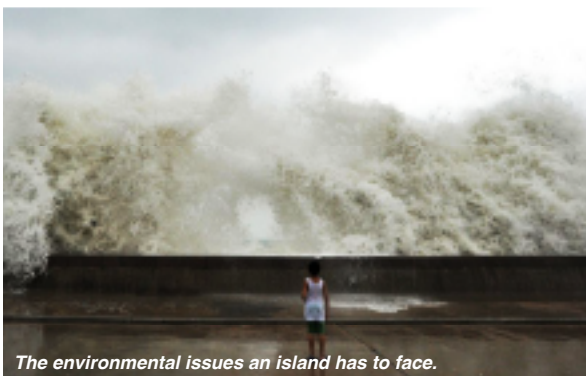
by this entity. As a place for social interaction but foremost because of its lack as functioning as an interaction spot. therefore rejuvenating this public space towards what it aimed to be.



Social issues such as the critical living condition of cubans.

Environmental

Cuba has dealt with many environmental disaster due to its lack of resilience to flooding. Much because of early research in this topic, Cuba's incapability of dealing with it and its relation with the deterioration, this was an evident part of my research and design strategy. Creating a project that can cope with this, placing it 1.2 meters high on a raised plaza, excluding the possibility to flood was essential for its exposure within the public space.



The environmental issues an island has to face.

Aspect 2: The relationship between the theme of Complex Projects (Havana) and the subject/case study of deterioration.

Complex Projects investigates settlements around the world that are ambiguous in their development and embedded in the process of globalization. They studio strives to look critically at our surroundings; to gather, organize, and question the complex forces that ultimately manifest themselves into our built environment.

Much so has been the complex studio theme of Havana. A country where political conditions and its effects have greatly affected and formed Cuba to the country it is today. In knowing this, it was vital to understand these affects and how as a designer to intervene in such a complex context. With this in the back of my head I was much looking towards the future and how in short and long term a significant change could be made to issues arising within our architectural grasp. The underdevelopment of the city has come to a point where it affects the people and their health. By addressing this issue, living conditions can be improved, knowledge can be dispersed throughout the country and awareness for the future can be given to their modern heritage and how to cope with issues arising within its Caribbean context.

By introducing a vocational school and using the strength of the socialist country, they can benefit from new possible international relations and knowledge to the issue of decay. It was imperative for me as an individual for my design process in relation to the research to have a multi scalar approach not to just redefine the issue in my given context, but to a possibility of future change because of Cuba's political history and possible outcomes. The possibility to "change" as an entity and allow for alterations has been a focal point in the design.

Aspect 3: The relationship between the methodical line of approach of the graduation lab and the method chosen by the student.

The line of approach within the complex projects studio is based on interventions in highly unusual and multi-scalar context. Based on an extensive research based approach coming up with designs that take into account the multiplicity in scales as well as the future possible conditions the project could be subjected to. My individual approach related much to how the graduation studio tries to steer towards. As a starting point for my individual



approach the distinction of an issue deriving from extensive research relative for the big scale of Cuba as a country to even taking into account similar condition contexts on the topic of deterioration. Towards trying to achieve on a more architectural scale an approach and language which is relevant for Cuba and try to refrain from “westernization” of the design. The design ranges from the national involvement and its urban conditions all the way towards site specific factors such as residents circulations and social spots. Because of this approach I was able to distinguish how Havana dealt with preservation and how this can be approved. Also I was able to create an intervention that would be beneficial for social life, giving exposure to new techniques as well as creating a module which could be applicable as a framework for the other neighborhoods that are in need of preservation.

Because of my emphasis in the design process of creating an entity that is capable of coping with change over time when the context changes. the design is allows contextual development or adaptability and in by doing so relating much to the approach that comes forth from the graduation studio. It is also one that helped me to define my design approach and understand how to handle the delicate context in which I designed.

Aspect 4: The relation between the project and the wider social context.

As a topic deterioration plays a big role in the international portrayal of the city of Havana. The project addresses to solve a big portion of issues that are raised and hardly visible or recognized by the international attraction of Cuba. The project is a physical embodiment of how public space and modern heritage can be treated in the future while still staying true to cuban tradition and its socialist ideal to take matters into their own hands. It gives a new view on the education system of Cuba and on a non capitalist society which can give the residents more possibilities, ownership of their homes and the possibility and will to take care of their heritage.