



Complex projects

Havana Studio

Jelmer van Zalingen - 4156811

Tutors: H. Šmidihien, C. van Leest

P4 REFLECTION

17-05-2017

...about the old-American cars in Cuba. When you think about Cuba, you instantly picture yourself a nice tropical island in the Caribbean full of old American cars from the fifties and sixties and actually this is true, 3 out of 5 cars in Cuba are from American origins. However beautiful these old cars may look from the outside, from the inside it is a whole different story. In order to keep the old American cars running the Cubans were forced to apply a mixture of Cuban ingenuity together with too much time and a complete lack of spare car parts. Due to this lack of resources the old cars are like a moving collage composed out of all kinds of random parts that they could possibly lay their hands on.

This ongoing struggle of the crippled American-Cuban car in order to let it running can be seen as a metaphor for the overall deteriorate state of infrastructure on the island of Cuba.



PROJECT DESCRIPTION:

The almost sixty year social-communistic Castro regime has driven the island of Cuba into isolation. Infrastructure on the island fully relies on the nation own capacity and since the special period like everything else this is in an overall state of decline and scarcity. However Cuba understands that it cannot longer stay isolated and economically dependent, therefore Cuba is changing and slowly opening up to the world.

The ongoing neglected state of maintenance together with a scarcity of resources and inefficient logistics of infrastructure have made the capital Havana into an immobile city, that opposes numerous problems and underutilized potentials in order to become a modern city. The opposed question is how can Havana become a more contemporary city with a high level of mobility?



The main goal of the project is to connect people, neighborhoods and infrastructure together by merging different transportation options into one building gesture. The main building principles of unity, clarity and connectivity symbolizes a strong transportation typology, that will form a transition zone from the old city to future developments, from fine to bigger scale and from

residential to a commercial character. The building has a perpendicular orientation relative to the infrastructure and so forms a bridge that binds and orders all infrastructure lines together while at the same time giving the traveler full possibility of transfer between.

A CITY OF OPPORTUNITIES

The relationship between research and design

My interest started with a fascination in the potential moment of change in Cuba. Since the revolution the island has had an introvert character, but as it seems Cuba is about to change:

“ We reform or we sink!”

Raul Castro (Ruling president of Cuba)

I'm fascinated how architecture can react and enhance on a assumed change together with the position of the studio to use in-depth research to formulate argumentation for a design. The Chair of Complex projects (CP) that organized the Havana graduation studio is known in the faculty for their research based design approach. Often chairs at the faculty of architecture approach the graduation track with a designated site, building, a building program or a combination of those. For the chair of Complex projects you start with neither of those restrictions. Rather you have to form those restrictions yourself. Therefore the studio CP is very dependent on research to even start with thinking of designing.

I have found this method of working crucial for doing a project in unknown hostile (in terms of retrieving official data and info) countries like Cuba, but therefore also very rewarding. It can really feel sometimes as if you found a treasure of information were you were looking for for weeks. When designing in a unknown context you will need much more research in order to try to understand a much as possible all the different activities and events that can inspire you as an architect. I believe that if globalization has learned us one thing than that is that we cannot project of copy paste our western influenced opinions and methods of designing onto a completely different context. This is especially true for Cuba.

The relationship between the methodical line of approach of the graduation lab and the chosen method chosen.

The design studio is divided into two parts; in the first part of the studio (MSc3-P1) the main focus was on gathering general information about Cuba in a group setup. The second part (Msc3-P2) was more personal and focused on the projects' location and program. It was important for my design method to adopt the appropriate design attitude. This is to consider the rich layers of history but modernize at the same time. Local standards, habits and culture have great value and should be respected and applied. Nevertheless, I have been able to transform design with a contemporary mindset whilst trying to enhance the quality of the city and life of its inhabitants. The most important goal for me was that the project should potentially improve the live of all the inhabitants and visitors in Havana, rather than focusing just on one specific group.

The most important method to be used to assimilate with the culture of Cuba was the fieldtrip to Havana earlier this year, talks and interviews on the street with locals.

Location and reason for the project

For numerous reasons the current central station doesn't function at all. Basically were it comes down to is that the current hub act as an island, almost fully isolated from its surroundings by elevated land, walls or high fences, besides that the questionable orientation of the hub blocks the city axis and 2/3 of its enormous plot size has become vacant. Moreover there is a better more natural and intuitively location to combine and merge the now disconnected transportation options. This location can be found on the area of Atarés named after the presence of the Castillo de Atarés. This spot is located two kilometres south-west of the former station and enclosed the Havana bay to the east and the castillo to the west. This new location is an improvement of the old location, it has accessibility, is directly connected to existing infrastructure, more central location, clearly visible and connected to multiple areas in the city. Another reason to move the station is due to its active program it has the ability to generate urban developments. The hub can form a vital connection and catalyst for redeveloping the former harbour area next to Atarés into a new central business



STUDIO METHOD

district. The Atarés area can be seen as a special zone. Compared to its surroundings it lacks one clear identity and is rather composed out of a lot of different activities. The site itself is enclosed by four main traffic arteries plus a loop of the railroad which creates a border conditions between the edges of the site and the enclosed center. Instead of confronting this conditions we can rather accept it and try to work with it. This border condition is seen as a quality that makes the center more exclusive. This center can function as a more relaxed and free recreational zone to escape the busyness of the surrounding city and could function as a green urban (sport)park only accessible for local traffic and mainly pedestrians. The edges that are located alongside the enclosing four main traffic arteries will orientate fully towards these roads and enforce the exclusive character of the center. The surroundings of the Atarés area are characterized with mono-functional program neighborhoods like residential areas and the new business district in the East. Therefore the current wide variety of activities in Atarés forms a refreshing contrast that adds diversity to the whole district. This quality should form a trait in the new identity of the site and emphasizes the uniqueness of program, function and orientation of the Atarés area.

The relationship between the project and the wider social context.

Mobility in the 21st century.

Mobility is the lifeblood of our cities and essential for urban life. Mobility in a modern society forma the driver of modern day economies and a trigger for urban growth in contemporary cities. It enables trade, powers businesses, connects workers to their jobs and creates opportunities for communities, but most of all it connects people with places and people to people.

The case of Cuba.

Cuba forms an island in the Gulf of Mexico with an isolated character. It is completely surrounded off by water which makes the island more isolated form its

neighboring countries. Besides that the almost sixty year social-communistic Castro regime has driven the island into an even more isolated position. Infrastructure on the island fully relies on the nation own capacity and since the special period this is in an overall state of decline. However the last decade seems a surprising contrast. Cuba understands that it cannot longer stay isolated and economically dependent on one country as is used to be with first the Soviet Union and later Venezuela. Cuba as a country is changing and the country is slowly opening up to the world, it is updating its economic system together with political reforms. With these small reforms comes along a renewed global interest in Cuba. The favorable geographical location of the island makes Cuba and especially its capital Havana very interesting for more foreign investments. In Havana there is this tremendous pent up for new urban development because of the cities very critique condition of the urban fabric. The coming years the Cuban government will continue to open up to the world economy by expanding its economical free trade zones and this will attract more and more foreign investments. One of the most promising future economical free zones would be the soon to be vacant old harbor area that is located to the south of the city center Vieja. Most of this old harbor area is already relocated outside the city to Mariel and its central location in the city makes it very potential for future redevelopments. During the prevailing six decades, the Catro regime focused mainly on developing the countryside and left the capital untouched. This situation led the capital Havana in an overall state of disrepair.

In order to provide for these multiple changes that awaits Cuba, the country needs to drastically update and renew its infrastructure. Today its infrastructure is insufficient to co-op with these future changes and suffers from a continues lack of maintenance, second hand equipment, an ongoing lack of resources and overall logistic inefficiencies. For the capital city of Havana with a (estimate) population of 2,2 million inhabitants, a decent level of mobility is very important. In Havana only 3,8% of the people have procession to personal car use. This means that almost all inhabitants are fully reliable on public transport as their only way of transportation. Especially in Havana there is a

continues decline in transportation facilities that brings the public transport system on the brink of collapse. Therefore Havana can be seen as a city of immobility.

The (new)Habana central station

In order to improve the looming mobility problems in Havana the city needs to invest heavily in their infrastructure facilities. Only till now the Cuban government seems not able at all to construct such big projects, let alone to finance it. Luckily for Cuba there is a growing globally interest to invest in Cuba's infrastructure. Especially because of its rich railroad history, that besides its decayed condition is very much intact. In order to improve mobility, Cuba should allow foreign companies to invest in their infrastructure in a similarly way as China is doing on large scale in Africa. Therefore it is likely that China would be one of the first countries to invest in Cuban infrastructure. On the other hand Russia and Abu Dhabi are at the moment in consultation with the Cuban government to redevelop Havana's decayed international airport. The idea is therefore that China will potentially invest in a new railway line between the airport and the city. In order to fulfill the need of transporting the vastly growing number of tourist that visit the country every year to the city. In order to fulfill the full potential of this new railway line the complete railway system needs to be improved. Today due to its unreliability and the problems with the current central station people often disregard the train as a way of transportation. In order to counteract this downward spiral in railway decline, Chinese investments will also develop a new railway station in the form of a transportation hub that improves the flaws of the current fragmented and badly connected transport system.

The overall idea of the project is to use foreign capital for a large scale intervention and fundamental improvements of mobility which would generate urban growth and trigger

other future developments. The project can work as a case study for developing immobile cities, how they could redevelop potential new districts by using big infrastructural interventions, that in time can establish new infrastructural clusters.

