

Reflection paper

Fun bridge

the pedestrian bridge and public space on water

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Research Question

How can Havana transport in an opening future?

Introduction

Havana has through the economic and political sanctions since 1959, found itself with a very unique situation of preservation through lack of means. The city did not experience any post WW2 reconstruction and development, nor did it experience the vast commercial development that dominates the cost lines of in the 70's and 80's as happened in many other Caribbean cities. Simply put Havana has not had much development in general, only a selective restoration of the historic centre to promote its modest tourism industry. Just outside this compact zone in the historic city centre the urban fabric is literally crumbling; it's infrastructure, it's buildings and government. The people in Cuba have a love hate relationship with their country. They are fiercely proud, but on the other hand they know they are living in comparative poverty and the situation is not getting better. (Studio Brief)

Under this studio perspective into Havana, I looked into the topic of urban transportation in Havana. Havana has been through complex development of transport. Every step in this process marked a big change of the city. Investments, revolution and embargo, all these important history events had caused huge impact on the way Havana transport. Now Cuba is opening. Havana is standing on new crossroads. In research part I discussed how Havana can transport in this opening future. And how this new transport notion would influence the city.

Aspect 1&2

the relationship between the theme of the graduation lab and the subject/case study chosen by the student within this framework (location/object)

the relationship between research and design

At the beginning of this studio we were asked about several important questions, and I would explain how I answer these question in my study process.

This city needs to be upgraded, but the question is how? How do you to create planning policies that innovate and enrich the city and its inhabitants? How to do you learn from the mistakes of other soulless commercial developments in the Caribbean cities?

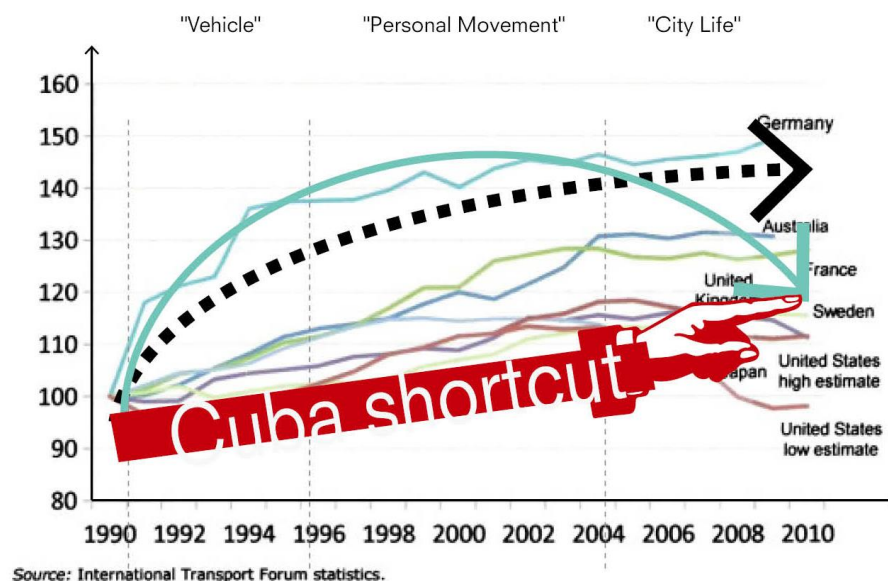
In last 50 years, our acknowledgement of what is a good transport system changed a lot. We once built our cities for vehicles. We built wide roads. We built highways. We built tunnels. We cost a lot of money and turn cities into blank boring spaces. We later found we can never build enough roads for vehicles. Along with growth of vehicle number, damages to cities and citizens become more and more serious. We

realized cities are for people. (Jan Gehl) We should build our cities in people scale and for people. We transformed highways into gardens. We encourage people use public transport system and bikes. We build pedestrian streets to make city feels lively and interesting.

The City of Havana used to be one of the main trading ports of the region: a grand city, with a long history. In the first 30 years of the 20th century there was a great deal of investment in public transport, based around a well-developed network of electric trams and railways, but these networks were dismantled in the early 1950s and replaced with diesel buses as private car ownership increased. After 1959 revolution, policy favoured public transport, with new private cars allocated only by the state on the basis of work performance or function. Bus services were good, but state spending on infrastructure focused on the relatively poor and underdeveloped regions. When the Soviet collapsed at the start of the 1990s, the Cuban economy contracted by one third, fuel consumption by even more, and investment collapsed. Shortages of spare parts and fuel brought a near-collapse of public transport, leading to a huge increase in walking, cycling, animal traction and vehicle sharing. Although Havana developed in a unique way, however now it is transporting in a quite advanced system. Now the transport in Havana is based on walking, cycling, vehicle sharing and public transport system. Also, automobile ownership on the island is 0.04, comparing to 0.8 in US.

Havana's transport system has undergone a tortuous development path. Under embargo, Cuba did not have enough oil, nor new vehicles. However, Havana accidentally possesses an advanced transport system. Havana's transportation system is mainly composed of bicycles, walking, bus, car sharing system, which is actually a very sustainable system. By research, I draw the conclusion that Havana has a unique opportunity to develop its transport system in special pattern. Havana could skip the car-center period and become a new livable and sustainably city.

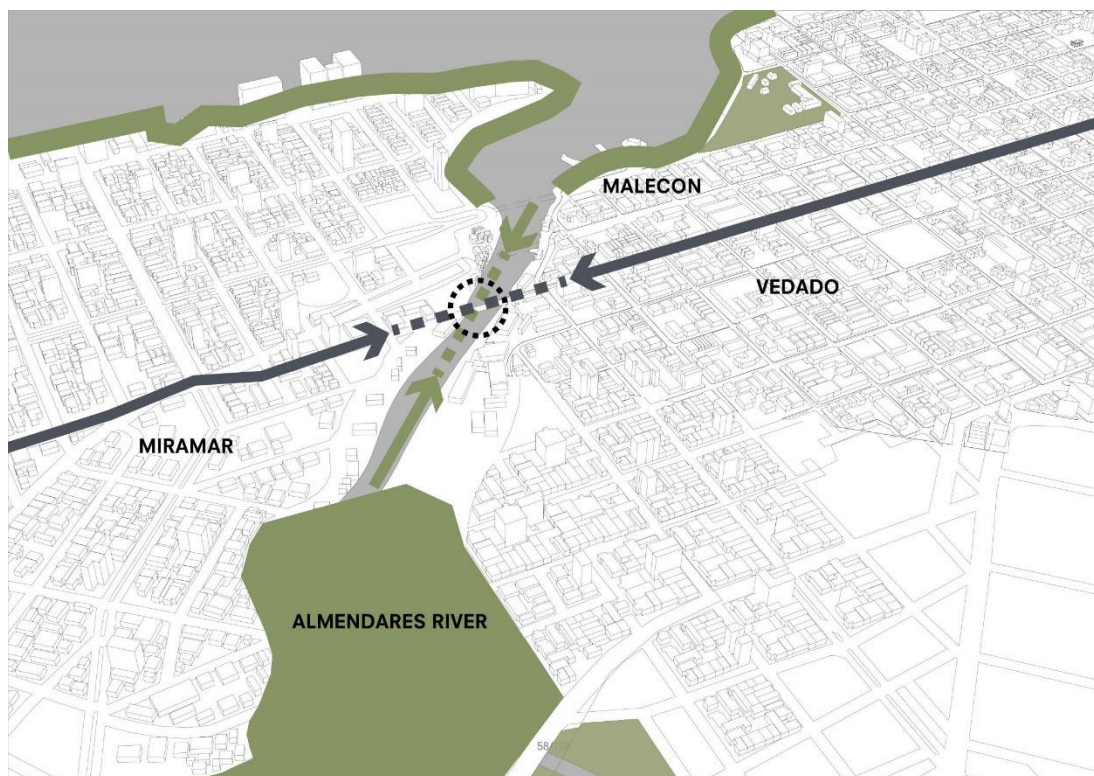
"SHORTCUT" IN TRANSPORT DEVELOPMENT



This conclusion from research is the starting point of my design and influenced every step of my design process. Initially, what I had envisioned was to build a suitable transport hub for Havana. But what is a suitable transport hub for Havana? After I collected more information about urban transport system of Havana as well as other cities, I found that, as mentioned earlier, Havana is in a unique situation. Havana do not need to make a big change to improve its transport system. Instead, by adjust policies, shifting focus point from vehicles to pedestrians, Havana can turn itself into a very advanced city in urban transportation aspect. I realized that what I should do is taking advantage of the Cuban way of transport, using small interventions to improve the special quality of the area, rather than construct one single building trying to solve all the urban transportation problems. After realizing this, my site appears to a perfect urban fragment that fully demonstrated the problems of Havana's traffic policies.

Vedado and Miramar are two important districts in Havana. They are separated by Almendares river. Compared to Vieja (the old center of Havana), Vedado and Miramar are car-dominate areas. On the two-kilometer-border between Vedado and Miramar, only one tiny pedestrian bridge is connecting two sides. Although the bridge is only 8 meters wide, vehicles occupied most part of the bridge, leaving a 1.2-meter-wide path for pedestrians and bikers. So I pick this spot on boarder of Vedado as my site. By improve the quality of this pedestrian bridge, and make it a new public space, it will give back positive influences back to whole street. Also, Cuban government is going to transfer the area into new Riverwalk, this project could be new center of the new public space belt. By insert new programs on this fragment, this area could be woke up and start to renew itself.

Havana is 20 years behind the whole world. For this city, the speed of upgrade is not so important. What important is the direction. In my project, I am not trying to add new architecture to this city. I am only trying to evoke the energy of the city by changing softly a small fragment of the city.

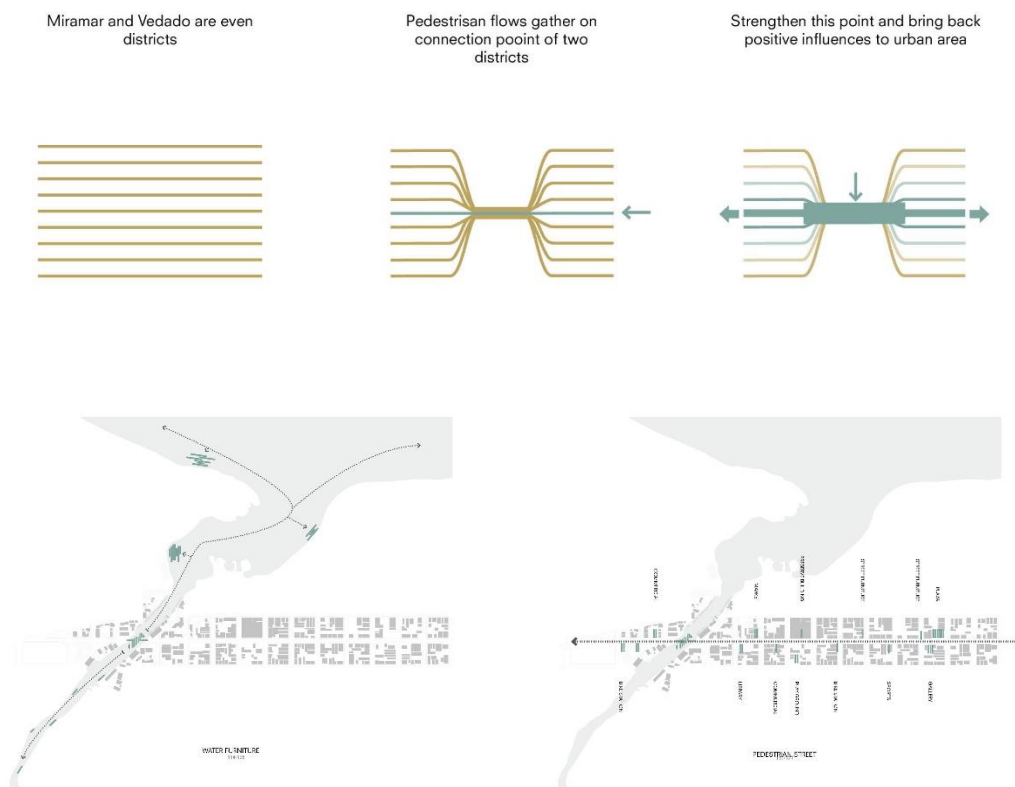


Aspect 3

the relationship between the project and the wider social context

Many cities have tried wrong ways on issue how to develop urban transport. Beijing has built five loop highways in the city over the past three decades. These highways was built to enhance the city's transport capacity. However, as roads being widening, number of vehicles also increased. Daily congestion time in Beijing is more than three hours. At the same time, these highways have negative influences on special experiences in surrounding areas. They block sunlight and generate noise. Most importantly, Beijing is one of the cities with worst air quality in the world. Cuba and China are both communist countries, where policies can completely determine the future of a region. If Havana government can deal with the traffic issue with long-term plan, put citizens in center of these policies, Cuba can easily become a beautiful healthy and sustainable city in future.

URBAN STRATEGY



Aspect 4

the relationship between the methodical line of approach of the graduation lab and the method chosen by the student in this framework

In this studio, we start from an overview of a certain area, then look further into one specific topic. From research on this topic, we generate our own understanding to the area from one certain perspective. Then from facts and conclusions from research, we analysis an area in different scales and generate conclusions from these urban analyses. At last, the project is a collective answer to a series question in different scales. In my case, my research topic is urban transportation in Havana. Urban transportation is a city-level problem, and it cannot and should not be confined to one building on one site. My project start from analysis the history and the current situation of urban transportation in Havana as well as other cities worldwide. Then I draw the conclusion that Havana now have a unique opportunity. This conclusion then become the basis of my entire design. In 1-500 scale, my site is a small piece of water. While in 1-2000 scale, it is the intersection of two axis, the future Riverwalk and a potential pedestrian street. And in 1-5000 scale, this site is the broader and connection point of two new central areas in Havana expansion process. What I am trying to do is insert a small intervention into a specific city node. This intervention would trigger a series of reactions and firstly affects the two linear areas it connected to, then stimulate the area to complete the self-update.

