

P4 REFLECTION

Architecture of Power

A political landmark for a post-totalitarian Cuba



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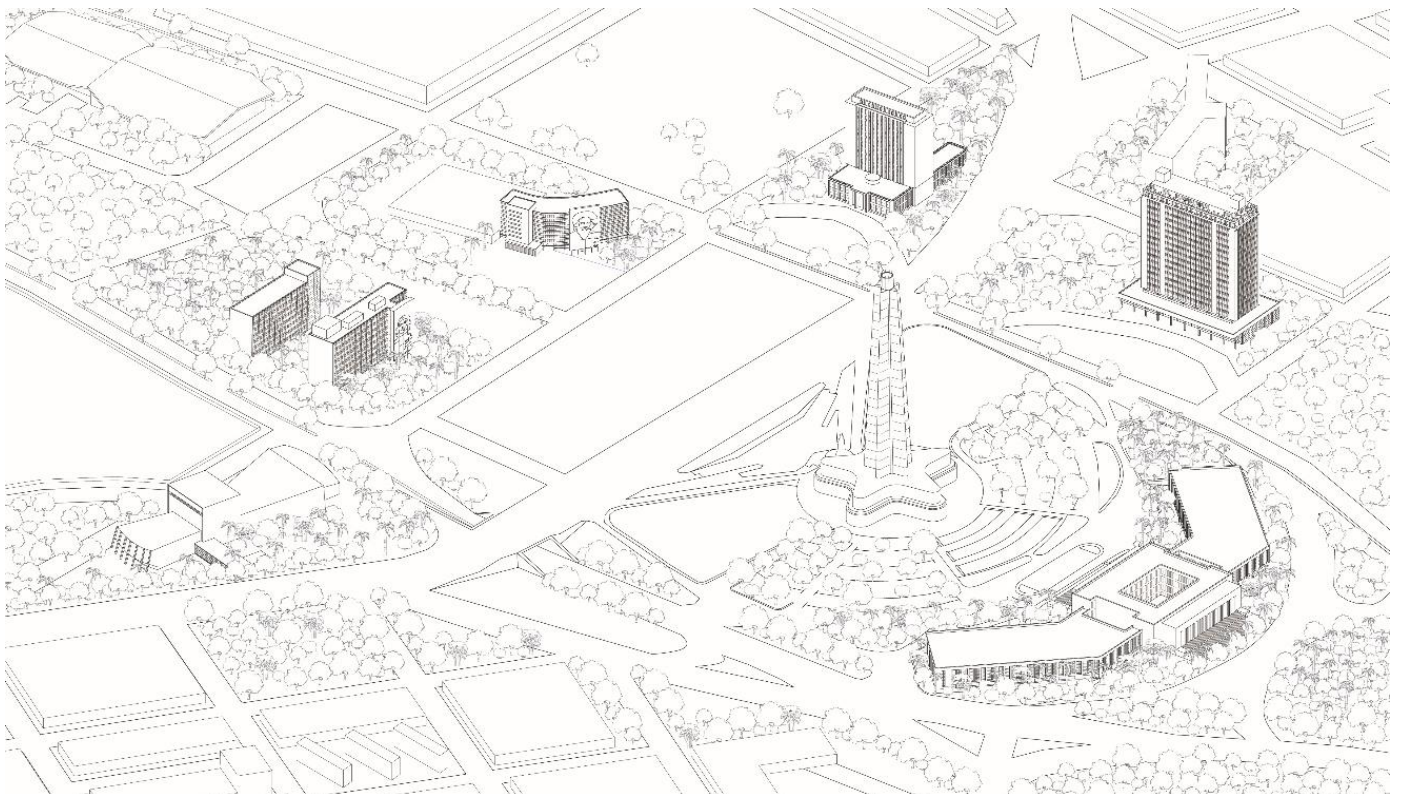
Relationship between research and design

The topic of Architecture of Power is particularly relevant to Havana's urban fabric. The present thesis elaborates on the problem stated and reflects on it, in an international context. The research preceding the design focused both on the relation between architecture and power (in Havana and worldwide) and on Cuban Politics, in the way they affected the city's urban condition and architecture.

Alongside the individual research topic, a site analysis on the intervention area was developed. For this matter, several group discussions were held within the Havana Vieja group and ultimately a group strategy was outlined. The overall storyline defined that all of the group's designs will take into account a possible future scenario, in which an unbridled wave of capitalism shake the country to its foundations, consequently bringing foreign investment and the need to upgrade the country's infrastructure and system of trade.

The research conclusions led to the formulation of a research question that launched the basic design problem to be addressed. The building designed strives to answer the question: Can architecture be a symbol of power by expressing the new political and economic shifts happening in Cuba? The narrative developed in order to fulfil the desire contemplated in the research question emphasises the lack of freedom in Cuba and how this aspect of the daily life in the country have repercussions in its citizens. Both the lack of freedom of speech and freedom of trade revealed to be challenging. However, in order to develop a clear design proposal, the lack of freedom of trade was prioritized for justifying the building's program, a contemporary Stock Exchange.

More accurately, this project is a World information and Trade Centre (WITC), or in other words, a Stock Exchange that brings together offices for the World trade Organization (WTO) and financial media and software companies. The upgrade that this new program brings to the existing typical Stock Exchange typology is that it determines more specifically which kind of companies will occupy the office floor area, hence providing a more globalized, accessible and transparent access to the stock market.



Aerial drawing of Revolution Square/Propaganda Square

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

The graduation studio's theme focuses on the border condition of Cuba. Not only is this condition literal due to the fact that the country is only surrounded by water, but it assumes a more metaphysical meaning as well. The political ideology in Cuba gave rise to a society that is very much detached from the rest of the world, one that has a very different understanding of the world when compared to other western nations. The studio's theme is very broad but it is implicit that each student should develop a holistic analysis on the country's challenges for the future.

The most challenging aspect about designing in Havana is the unforeseeable political, social and economic changes that will likely take place in the nearby future. Nevertheless, globalization is piercing through the government's attempts to keep the country unconnected from the rest of the world, thus having an immense impact on the mindset of the Cuban society. The obvious acknowledgement of this transformation in motion raises the question on how to deal with it.

The realization of Cuba's opening to globalization has triggered to a set of events that led to the Port of Havana's shut down, the site location for the design proposal in this thesis. The reallocation of the country's major industrial port, with foreign investment and with the aim of making it an international hub, has left an immense plot of land almost completely abandoned, right next to city centre, across a bay. For those reasons, this area (Haiphong Peninsula) was defined in the group strategy as the location the business district of Havana, in order to fulfil the future demand for working areas in the financial sector.

The WITC is the positioned on the tip of the peninsula, on the new main axis, stressing the power of capitalism and its arrival. If dealing with globalization is a viable way of dealing with the studio's theme, then designing the pinnacle of global trade in the premises of the old Port could be regarded as the ultimate link between Cuba and the rest of the world, from a geo-political point of view.

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

Complex Projects is a studio that centres on a wider understanding of context. The studio's approach contemplates the consideration of *inputs* from other fields of knowledge as design constraints, as valid as the traditional fundamentals aspects of architecture (*Venustas, Firmitas, Utilitas*).

The emphasis of the building designed, on expressing the new political and economic shifts happening in Cuba, is in line with the studio's methodical line. Despite that the aforementioned fundamental principles of classical architecture are indeed taken into account as well, the main challenge that is being addressed (research question) highlights a more contemporary and multidisciplinary approach to the role of the architect and the approach to design.

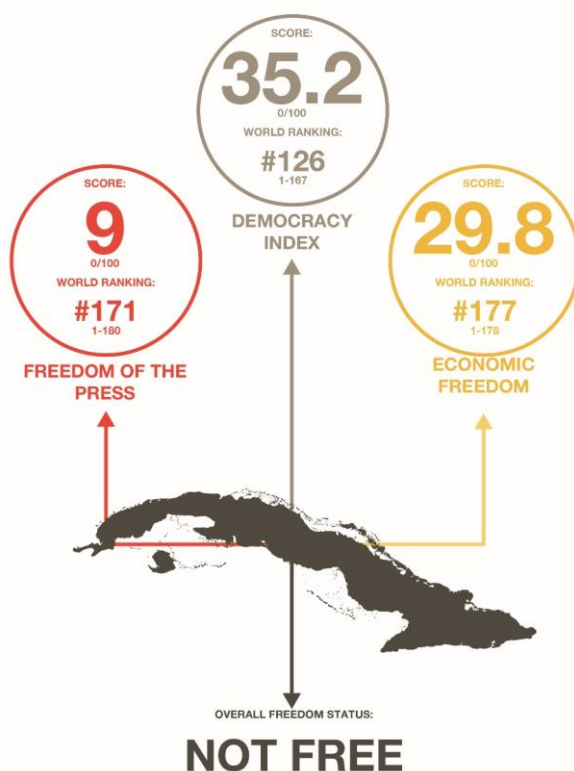


Diagram of freedom rankings In Cuba

Relationship between the project and the wider social context

The way this particular project impacts a wider social context happens in distinct ways, yet complimentary to each other. The narrative of this design was developed in such a way that it takes into consideration the impact of politics in the architectural heritage of Havana and the most important historical episodes in which architecture was used as a symbol of power. In addition to reflecting critically on this past, the WITC provides a new chapter to this developing sequence of events. The immediate effect of such a progressive way of designing a symbol of power is an attempt to create at the same time a landmark that celebrates the freedom that utterly lacks in the country.

The Strategic location for the building provides the opportunity for future developments, aiming the financial growth of Havana. Fortifications are a recurrent presence along the bay of Havana and the WITC replicates this same condition. The analogy strengthens its character as a symbol of power, but above all else, it replicates the position of dominance and visibility in the landscape, that was common to all the buildings of this typology. The newly arrived “fortification” should be visible from everywhere in the city in order to be in pair with the ambitions and challenges that free-trade and corporatism will bring. Nevertheless, by extension of an increased amount of capital circulating in the economy of Cuba, it will also be in a more metaphorical way a celebration to an ascending middle class.

The functional programme of the WITC will be distinguishable from that of most Stock Exchanges (if not all), due a higher degree of publicness. Within the group strategy for La Habana Vieja is being developed a requalification of the waterfront that prioritizes pedestrian and public transportation flows. This development should be emphasised at the tip of the Haiphong Peninsula due to its strategic location and to the already mentioned symbolism of the WITC. For that matter, the ground levels of the new financial building will have the most public functions that can be used by everyone who's walking by, without even having to go through the main entrance. By separating degrees of publicness in height, this project manages to fully address not only the functional requirements that come with a Stock exchange, but also the public life that must find its place within a larger strategy of waterfront redevelopment.



Inner Façade of Trading Hall/Foyer