

# GRADUATION PLAN

## Personal information

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## Studio

Studio ExploreLab18  
Coordinator Robert Nottrot  
Teachers Tom Avermaete  
Theme Architecture and politics  
Argumentation of choice of the studio

Since ExploreLab is a studio promoted and created by students in order to give the possibility of following everyone's own personal interests in what concerns the graduation project, the choice has been dictated by the possibility of investigating my personal concern of the relation between politics and architecture with particular regard to Cuba, where now the economical changes of Raul Castro are drastically affecting the built environment. Furthermore ExploreLab offers the opportunity of self-organize the entire process of research and design through a free choice of methods. Lastly, Explorelab gives the possibility to work in group, fulfilling the desire of those student like me who consider the exchange of ideas, thoughts, critiques and suggestions, a crucial factor in the work of an architect

## Title

Title of the project Ver el cambio invisible (To see the invisible change)  
Place Havana (Cuba)

## Product

ProblemStatement

The actual condition of political and economical transition occurring in Cuba, started after the beginning of a "new stage of the revolution" led by Raul Castro, is affecting the built environment in an unpredictable and drastic way, thus testifying how architecture represents the backdrop of the sociopolitical conflicts embedded within the society.

ResearchQuestion

If architecture reflects society and its conflicting sociopolitical forces, and society shapes architecture according to its logics, in which ways is the Revolution exerted within the built environment and how does the adjustment of the socialist economic model affect the built environment?

Design assignment

The main consequence of the "economic adjustments" by Raul Castro is that individuals who own private capital can ask for a licence and start a private enterprise (Trabajo por Cuenta Propria). Despite the State's ideological rejection towards these new forms of "capitalism", a large part of the population started to transform the house in order to establish the productive space within the

domestic one. The only form of control of these practices is a system of taxation which totally denies any form of spatial organization of the city but mainly focuses on bringing consistent percentage of money to the state accounts. The proposal aspires to embody and recover the principles of the Revolution (centralized control, widespread diffusion of its agencies, education, social equality, institutionalization of the communal) together with the de---stigmatization of private business as the denial of the socialist ideology, and its recognition as an individual contribution to the collective. For this purpose the design will concern:

- 1) a **business incubator** capable of concentrating in itself the coordination of individual entrepreneurial activities on all the levels required: regulatory (eg. allocation of licenses), educational (eg. providing orientation on entrepreneurial activities), taxation (eg. collecting and administrating the taxes), investment (eg. exploitation, reinvestment and redistribution of the earnings).
- 2) A centralized pole, namely a **Ministry**, which will direct the activities of all the "business incubators" widespread on the different municipalities of the city of Havana

This central institution will allocate part of the capital to the state, part to the redistribution to the less advantaged municipalities, but mainly, every agency will be able to reinvest on the collectivity of the municipality in several ways:

--- proper education to the inhabitants of the municipality willing to start an entrepreneurial activity will be granted.

---an incubating function will be implemented both for granting a spatial start---up and for financing.

On a bigger scale, part of the incomes will be directed to the municipality that will be able to invest on the urban infrastructure and to reinvigorate the underexploited existing figure of the 'Arquitecto de la Comunidad' capable to intervene on a smaller scale, on the infrastructure of the single *cuadras*.

This system is then thought as a catalyst for implementing transformations on the built environment, actually liable to phenomenon of destruction and distortion.

In order to allocate these activities, the unused former **spaces** of production will be occupied by these new engines of collective productivity individually empowered. Metabolizing existing buildings responds to the logics of the revolutionary city and takes in account the initial scarcity of resources.

In fact Cuba faced a steep **downsize** in the productive sector, fostering the abandonment of many productive spaces, from medium size workshops to big factories, integrated in the urban tissue within residential areas, which ruins are now scattered throughout a built environment where wealth is produced in less evident spaces.

## Goal

The goal of the graduation project is to show how the architectural project acts as a device which proceeds beyond the dichotomy problem---solution to enter a continuous ongoing process of questioning the complexity of urban dynamics. The purpose is to consider it an investigative and critical device able to condense and metabolize the urban contradictions, acting locally as a propeller to catalyze the future development, while at the same time establishing a methodological ground to be reiterated and reinterpreted: the architectural project as something hardly reducible to a mere solving statement which, on the contrary, constitutes a device able to generate questions and uncertainties

## Process

### Method description

The research has been structured in three different parts:

- 1... from February until March it has been based on literature studies in order to understand the architectural consequences of the main economical adjustments occurring with Raul Castro. This part of the research was also of crucial importance to plan and organize the research on site
- 2... From March until April, the daily contact with the city of Havana during the research on-site, allowed for a deeper understanding of the Cuban reality as well as offered the possibility to collect important documents, books and materials. The photographic and geometric survey of the architectural transformations related to the new private business formed the basis for the next phase of redesign.
- 3... From the P1 until the P2, the research has been based on drawing. Through a historical, typological and morphological study focussed on three different parts of Havana, the transformations of the house into space of production have been analyzed, illustrated and discussed in order to relate them to the socio-political changes of the country. The aim is to show the complex political and economical relations which affect architecture, through the study of the domestic space and its transformations.

### Literature and General Practice preference

The literature consulted varies from scientific articles, books, newspapers and magazines to Urban laws, construction rules and romances of the main Cuban authors. Together with the literature, the research has been based on movies, photographic and art exhibitions and important interviews with some of the famous architect, urban designers, sociologists and economists of the Revolution.

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## Reflection

Relevance of the graduation project

The graduation project aims to underline the socio---political implications embedded in the architectural practice. In the specific case of Havana, with the actual condition of political and economical transition started after the beginning of a "new stage of the revolution" led by Raul Castro, different scenarios for the future of the country can be foreseen. Despite several contributions face this topic, they focus on a political and economical perspective. The architects could engage a similar analysis tackling it through the autonomous tools of the discipline. The projects aims to develop a certain theoretical understanding of the ideological reifications in the built environment and a more analytical knowledge of the architectural transformations occurring in Havana as consequences of the Cuban political choice to move from a socialist reality towards a neo---socialist, if not capitalist, one. Furthermore the project implies a reasoning on the architect's role in a complex social structure and his relationship to history, architectural programs and urban concepts. On this concern, attention is directed to the effectiveness of certain architectural approaches: in particular the notion of "Master Plan" and its thaumaturgic pretensions is questioned, together with other viable approaches which apply their tools and devices on the body of the city. The specific site constitutes excellent material to speculate in such direction, trying to understand what controlled and spontaneous growths mean in a context where top---down power is perceived in a probably unique way, where economic distress presses and where, now, adaptive policies are reshaping the system.

## Time Planning

### > PLANNING

