

REBINDING THE CENTRE

An urban restructure proposal of the Historical City
Core of Managua through its cultural, landscape &
heritage assets

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REFLECTION

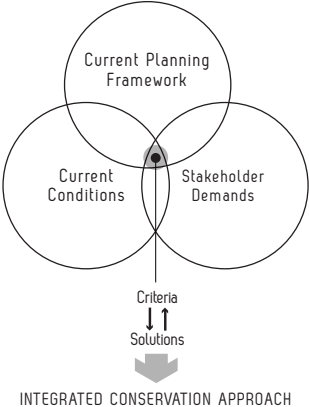
Image 195. View South towards where Managua has its growth tendency pattern. Source: taken by Silvio Balladares. Photo taken for the purposes of this thesis on May, 2013.

INTRODUCTION

Throughout this section I reflect upon the final symbiosis of the research carried out for this thesis project and the design process. The exploration of the incorporation of research into the design process starts with the definition of the subject. This process of defining the main focus of the project, as well as the variables of exploration, began with a thorough literature review based on the main interests I had within the context of spatial quality and development in Nicaragua and urbanization of poverty and informal processes. As the subject was taking shape, the theoretical research became the backbone of the concept and the data research took the main stage.

Consequently, the theoretical and data research have been part of the whole projects course, but it can be resumed in mainly three stages of the design process: before design; during design; and after design. Before design, which includes: intrinsic research, library research and the first overview of the site inventory and analysis. During design, as findings that influence the concept generation process and the application of the concept on the site. And after design towards the evaluation of design and its justification.

In a parallel process the methodology was chosen, defined upon through the first findings of the existing conditions of the spatial planning framework of Nicaragua and specially of Managua. In this process was were the three fold integration approach was decided upon. The integration approach is based on the combination of the critical review of the current planning framework, the current conditions of the urban systems of the city and the stakeholder demands of the intervened scale towards coming up with criteria and solutions that respond to the context.



Nonetheless this integration approach is particular for the case of the Historical Core of Managua. This particularity is the integrated conservation approach, which aims to link heritage conservation and local economic development, including spatial approaches for conserving landmarks and infrastructure, but also to improve the quality of life of the local community as well as creating the conditions to support job creation and retention. To apply this approach to other emerging centres of the city, the recognizable uniqueness and assets of each of them should be highlighted towards enhancing it and defining its consolidation.

Besides the aspect on the relationship between research and design, this section approaches the relation between the choice of the graduation studio and the projects subject and methodology. Also, the reflection of the project and the wider social context.

1. METHOD OF INTEGRATING RESEARCH AND DESIGN

The process that the elaboration of this thesis undertook and the way it combines research and design follows the analysis-synthesis model. This model applies to the train of thought of this thesis for it involves the acquisition and assessment of knowledge to produce general rules to ground the proposal on real needs.

Milburn and Brown (2003) describe the analysis-synthesis model (see Image 196) as a process that “involves several important assumptions: research information is provided before the onset of the project: the mind collects this information and stores it until a situation arises where it can be applied (Gelernter, 1988); the problem is broken down into elements: the information is accessed, analyzed, and applied to the appropriate elements of the design: the elements are synthesized to create a coherent design or plan: and results are evaluated and stored for future use (Lawson, 1980; Ledewitz, 1985).”

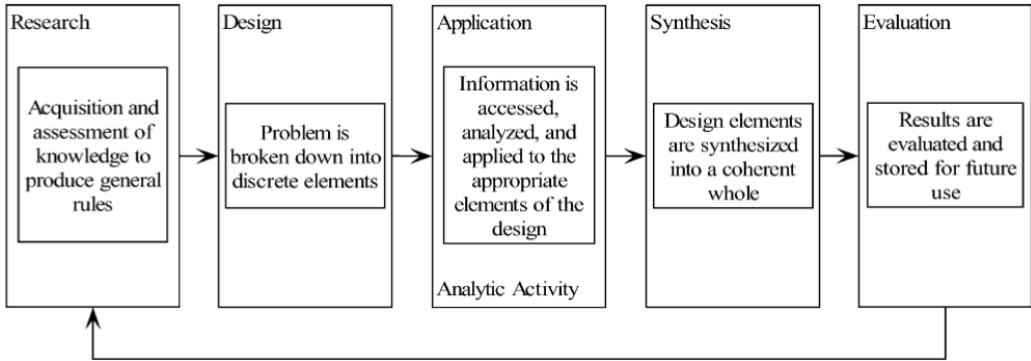


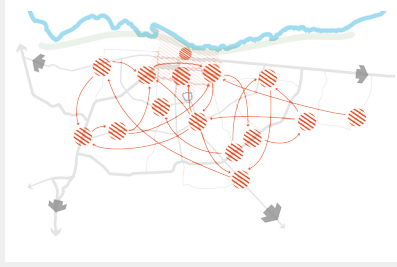
Image 196. Relationship between research and design as identified by the analysis-synthesis model. Source: Milburn and Brown (2003), p.51 taken from <http://www.landscape.cn/upload/article/200541392915320.pdf> on May 14th, 2013.

The model was used as a grounding point in the thesis to underpin the work done within an academic and theoretical framework. However, as it is generally foreseen, through the development of the proposal this model grew and adapted itself within the aim of the project. The model itself was repeated within three phases that correspond to three scales of application: two of which are the context by scalar review (the city of Managua and the Central Area) and the last one as the intervention scale (the Historical Core of Managua).

The process of research and design of this thesis (see Image 197) composed by this model in each phase gives a solid framework by applying information to the distinct scales and then recombining them into a contiguous whole. This recombination is reached at the end of phase III with the evaluation managing the multi- scalar approach. The main aim of this process is to test if it can be applied as a method for other areas or emerging centres of the city; keeping in mind the specific context of each one.

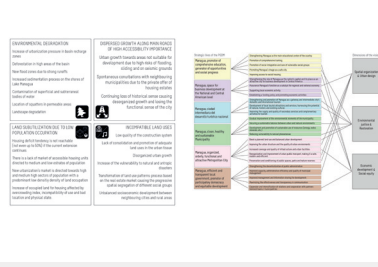
PHASE I

PROBLEM



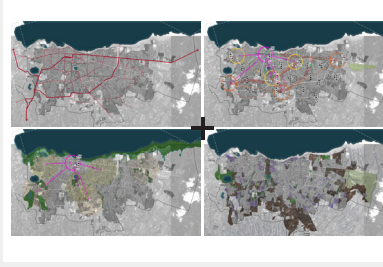
Managua, a multi-polar structure with a high level of dispersion and a complete loss of the sense of history of the city. (Image p.49)

DESIGN



1) Current condition conclusion: Trends of development; 2) Planning Framework Review; 3) Stakeholder demands. (Image p.58 & 62)

APPLICATION



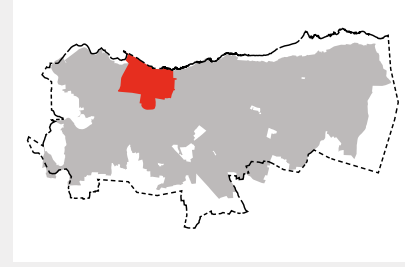
1) Accessibility; 2) Cultural Heritage; 3) Functions & 4) Social Networks. (Image p.65)

SYNTHESIS



City coherence through network of urban centres & road network. The Central Area: main urban core area with the recuperation of its functional primacy (Image p.65)

EVALUATION



Results of the city vision synthesis are evaluated in a local design intervention within the Central Area of the city of Managua.

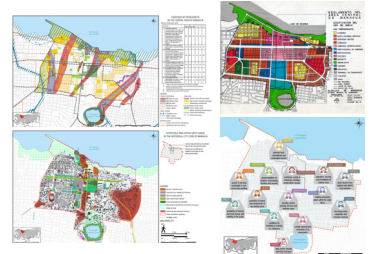
PHASE II

PROBLEM



1) Stagnated decay; 2) Informal process; 3) Risk from natural hazards (Images p.7)

DESIGN



1) Current condition conclusion: problems and opportunities; 2) Planning Framework Review; 3) Stakeholder demands. (Image p.92, 101 & 112)

APPLICATION



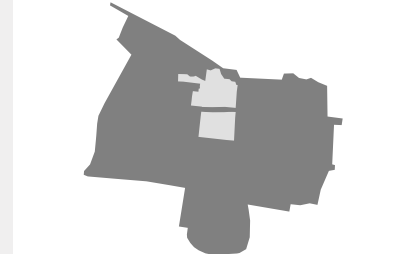
1) Accessibility; 2) Cultural Heritage; 3) Functions & 4) Social Networks. (Image p.115-118)

SYNTHESIS



Structured by the following proposed urban components: (1) Urban environments; (2) Seismic Zoning Opportunities; and (3) Urban Identity Consolidation. (Image p.120-122)

EVALUATION



Results of the Central Area structure are evaluated in the intervention scale: historical and cultural core of the city of Managua.

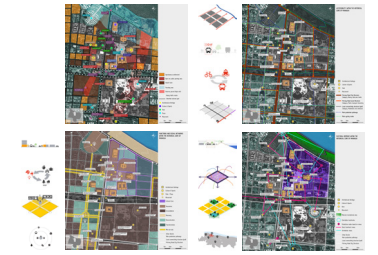
PHASE III

PROBLEM



The Historical city core of Managua is today a complex area with lost functional and structural values. (Images p.136)

DESIGN



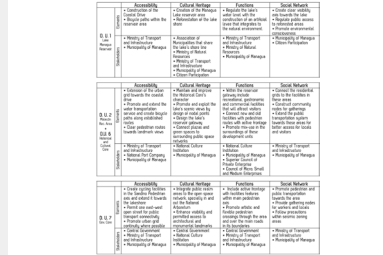
1) Current condition review by focus criteria; 2) Central Area translation (Planning Framework Review and Stakeholder demands). (Image p.137-144)

APPLICATION



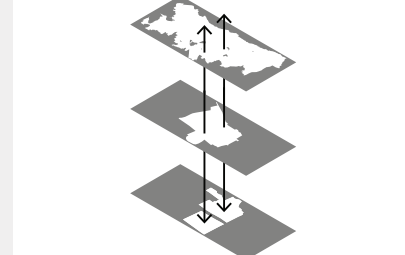
Types of interventions: prospective tasks related to the creation of future alternatives (Image p.*)

SYNTHESIS



Action plan: resources, timing and agents (Image p.*)

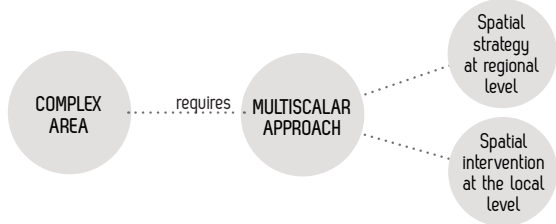
EVALUATION



Results of the Intervention scale will serve as the ending piece for the multi-scalar review: towards completing a methodological model for application in other centres.

2. METHODOLOGY REVIEW AND THE COMPLEX CITY STUDIO

Within this thesis project, the relationship of research and design is reflected throughout the methodology and structure. Nonetheless for the purposes of this reflection an overlay was made of the phases of the analysis-synthesis model (see Image 198) within the overall structure. As it is illustrated, there is a symbiosis throughout the elaboration of this project of the analytical and the theoretical framework. Consequently it provides the resulting grounded strategies and the complementation of each phase with each other. This becomes of vital importance due to the chosen context. The reason for choosing a multi- scalar approach and a build up strategy that involves stakeholder demands and current planning framework responds to the complexity of the Central Area and its Historical Core. The complex area is defined when issues that affect the area involve different contexts and planning frameworks overlap without responding to the needs of the inhabitants and their spatial translations, losing the structural value of the city with an added key issue of a low environmental performance.



Needs that come from higher levels than the one of the intervention scale, are needed to provide a successful recipe of strategies that will ensure a long term improvement of spatial and social structures. Consequently spatial conditions mentioned before for local integration of the Historical Core cannot be reached without the review of the urban systems networks in all the scales with their diverse challenges and general characteristics. If this idea is applied in this intervention scale and its managed to be tested as a model of implementation of spatial design and planning in other emerging centres, the eventual restructuring of the city of Managua can become a cohesive urban space towards the cohabitation of multiple users.

The Complex Cities (and Regions in Transformation under Globalization) Studio has allowed me to explore freely around these scales relating them to their supporting theories in the search for the right criteria to assess the local design. This was provided through the lectures series with a sufficient range of topics going from Spatial Planning, Resilience and Governance as key concepts to Regional Development, Urban Growth and Urban regeneration as key concepts. Also, the incorporation of the stakeholders as a vital part of any spatial strategy is clearly portrayed, as it is evident in this fragmented taken from the Complex Cities Guidebook:

“The studio puts forward the idea that spatial planners and designers should act as articulators between various stakeholders producing the city. Spatial planners do that by assisting those stakeholders with translating disparate interests into spatial organization that is notionally beneficial for society. We do that through the proposition of new forms of spatial organization and spatial intervention, by envisioning new forms of associations between different stakeholders producing the city, by using innovative tools to promote sustainability and by articulating these aspects through RESEARCH and DESIGN.”

In essence, the studio has reflected upon this thesis project the embrace of the chosen complex area as a challenge to shape a correspondent vision that transforms problems into opportunities and creates conditions for development within a balanced social and spatial context.

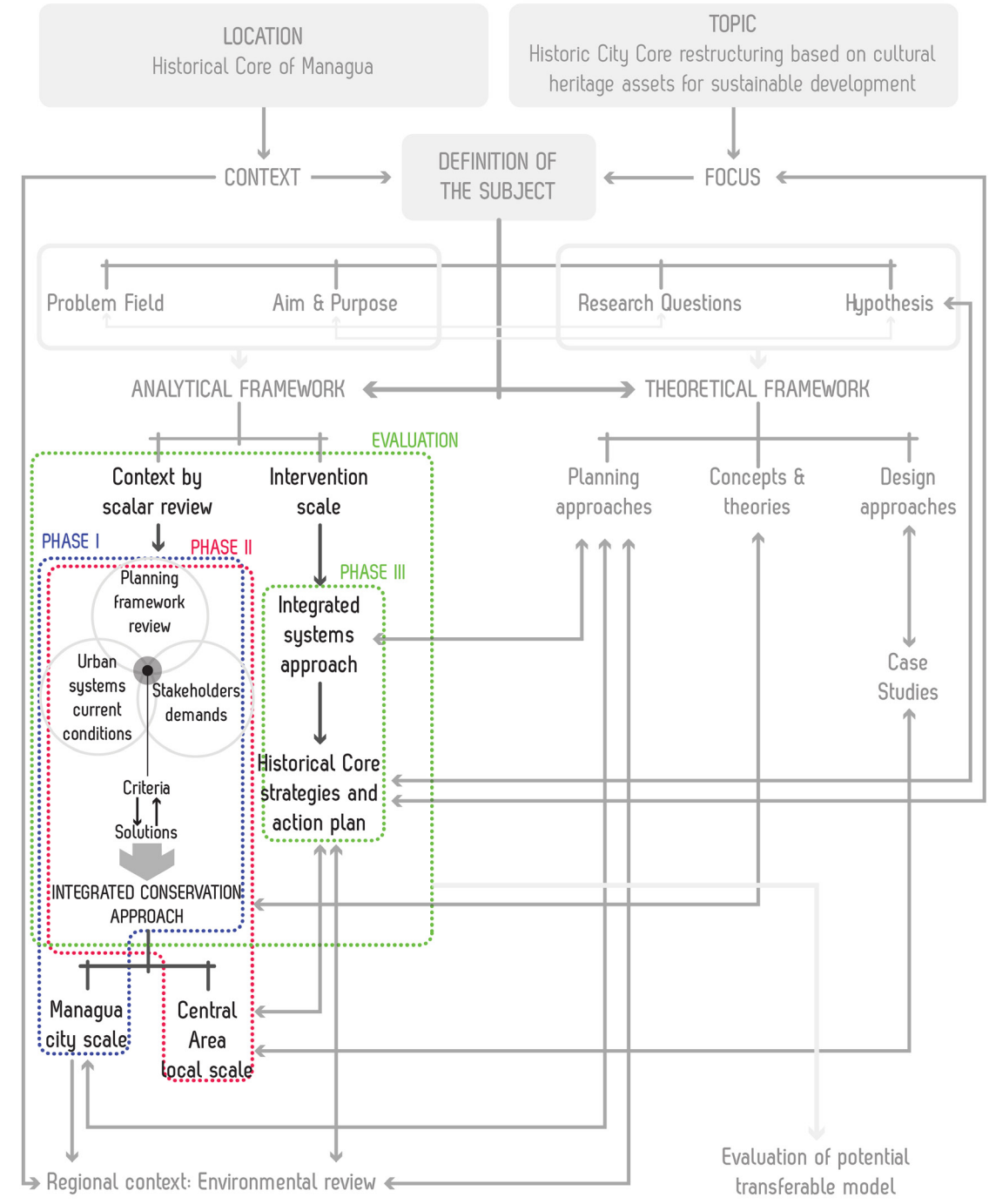


Image 198. Methodology scheme with the overlaying of the phasing of the thesis' research and design model. Made by the author.

3. THE SCOPE OF THE PROJECT WITHIN THE WIDER SOCIAL CONTEXT

The specific starting point of this urban restructure proposal was defined along the necessity of consolidating the urban structure and growth of Managua towards preparing the conditions for positive impact of regional development investment. Parallel to this statement is the need of improving quality of life of the inhabitants of Managua, reducing segregation and spatial fragmentation by considering their needs and capacities into the transformation of the city and the more global developing perspectives.

As starting point the need of the identity reinforcement of the city was highlighted. The Central Area of Managua popped up as the core influential area that would provide the unique character, attraction, continuity and stability, embodied in its Historical Core and heritage assets. As the World Bank (Licciardi and Amirtahmasebi 2012) states “a city’s conserved historic core can (...) differentiate [the] city from competing locations—branding it nationally and internationally—thus helping the city attract investment and talented people. Cities that are the most successful at attracting investment and businesses to meet the aspirations of their citizens, while alleviating poverty and promoting inclusion, are those that harness all of their resources, including their heritage. In addition, heritage anchors people to their roots, builds self-esteem, and restores dignity. Identity matters to all vibrant cities and all people.”



Image 199. Historical assets such as the Old Cathedral serves as background of social environments: two unlinked and separated functional fragments. Image taken by Silvio Balladares on May 2013, for the purposes of this thesis.

In response to this, through an exploratory process that reviewed international literature and planning strategies of Managua, the underpinning of the subject was made. This was based on the hypothesis that the loss of functions of the historical city core added to a lack of interest shown by the planning municipal bodies, has made the city to be conformed by arbitrary individual private building initiatives disconnected to its urban context. This spatial fragmentation today has a deepened social consequence in need of an integration approach to stop the stagnated decay and informal process of the most valuable assets of the city. If there is a functional recuperation of the historical city core by the recognition of its assets (cultural, spatial and social), the identity of the city can be restored as well as the activation of the city’s urban restructuring towards a more coherent urban form development.

Although this cannot be unlinked from larger scales, the local scale becomes the key level to understand the spatial systems interrelations towards a city-wide cohesive structure.

To resume, the scope of the project within the wider social context is reflected through integrated strategies that aim to revert the informalization process of the Central Area, include its inhabitants into the spatial programming and planning process, and re-define its the urban structure role as an activator of the urban tissue to fulfil its structural role by the integration of fragments.

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Cover: Satellite Image of Managua, Nicaragua in 1997.
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