Planning Culture

Urban Planning in the History of Havana

The city of San Cristóbal de La Habana, founded 1519 under the Spanish crown, was initially a remote village clutching for survival to the defence walls of its first fortress, La Fuerza Vieja. Through a heavy construction of a series of new fortresses, a defensive measure to repel the recurring pirates, Havana established itself as a stronghold of the Spanish empire in the Americas. The Havana Bay became soon a security enclave for cargo ships crossing the Atlantic & the constant flux of newcomers has spurred the city's sudden growth.
The expansion occurred East & SE outside of the fortified belt, claiming increasingly more 'no-one's-land.' Once within the urban terrritory, the land would be a subject to the colonial 'regularity' measures & 'stamped' with an orthogonal raster. Two main axes supported the XVIII c. city spread & the first 'barrios' of Havana originated along them. These neighbourhoods grew densely on one another with few spare spaces, green areas or plazas in between. This density as well as the continuing influence that the European cities have exerted upon the American urbanities has brought a change of attitude & needs to XIXth & XXth c. Havana. Parks, boulevards & representative architecture were now desired and this 'zest for life' would be emulated even in the extreme form of a Caribbean Las Vegas.

A groundbreaking proposal in the 1980s to redirect the city's expansion along three E-W axes was the last large scale urban project until today. Since then, Havana's urban policy is to preserve & consolidate the architectural heritage, an effort that goes hand in hand with attracting tourism.

Fortification of Havana in 3 Phases

Mid. XVI c.
The first phase

San Christobal de La Habana is in the middle of the XVIth century a small urban enclave that grows slowly outside of the commercial routes and colonial interests of the New World.

It owns its existence to the first fortification, **La Fuerza Vieja**, situated at the end of the canal entering the Havana Bay.

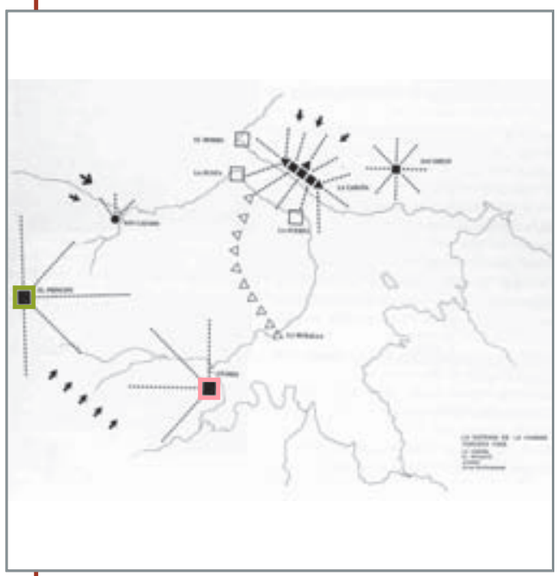
As the town falls regularly pray to the pirates, the castle of La Fuerza constitutes the 1st phase of the extensive process of Havana's defence..

Mid. XVI - XVIII c.
The second phase

By the decision of Filipe II, the king of Spain, to defend his marine domain in face of the threat from other eureopean empires and to sustain the flow of goods, the history of Havana changes radically.

The castles **La Punta** and **El Moro** are constructed at the extremes of the access canal to the bay. Together with the city wall they form the 2nd phase of Havana's defensive process.

XVIII c.
The third phase



In 1763, after Havana is conquered by the English and recuperated by the Spanish Crown, the 3rd phase of the city"s defensive measured is undertaken.

Three new fortresses are built:
La Cabana, at the other side of the canal,
El Principe, in the open field behind the city
& **Atares**, deep inside the Bay of Arsenal.

Joined by two smaller forts: **San Diego** & **San Lazaro** the era of the military predominance in the development of Havana's urban structures is completed.

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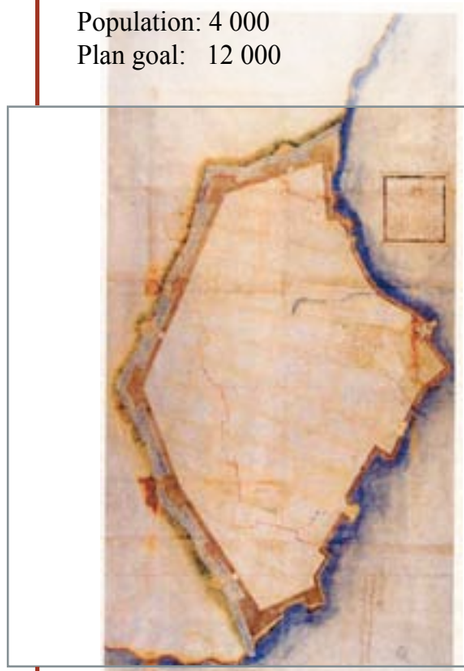
Regularity of Urban Space & Settelment Behind the City Walls

1603
Plan of **Cristobal de Roda**
Population: 4 000
Plan goal: 12 000



It is the first masterplan created in Spanish America. It introduces the 'regularity' to Havana.

To distinguish are:

- City Centre parallel to the harbour
- A wall demarcating the city limits
- General lines that cross to create a street raster with whole blocks left open, most likely to form sparse plazas

This scheme of colonial planning orders the city with an orthogonal raster, a model that will be imitated thereafter.

1763
Plan of **Silvestre Abarca**
Population: 50 000

Already at the beginning of the XVIII c. the space within the fortified walls was too scarce & further settelment occured on the outskirts, behind the 'no-one's-land.'

To remark are:

- Real **Arsenal** de la Habana, the biggest dockyard in the Americas, built south of the city walls;

- First land parcelling outside of the city borders, adjacent to Arsenal: **Jesus Maria** & **Guadalupe** neighbourhood;

- Proposed extention of defence facilities.

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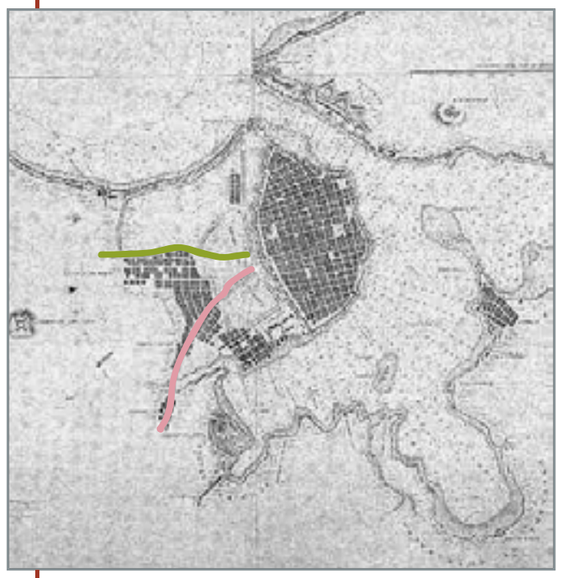
Growth of Havana Beyond the Fortification Walls

1776
Plan of **Luis Huet**

The plan supposes a change in the very conception of the city, whereas the idea of a public space gains for the first time on a meaning.

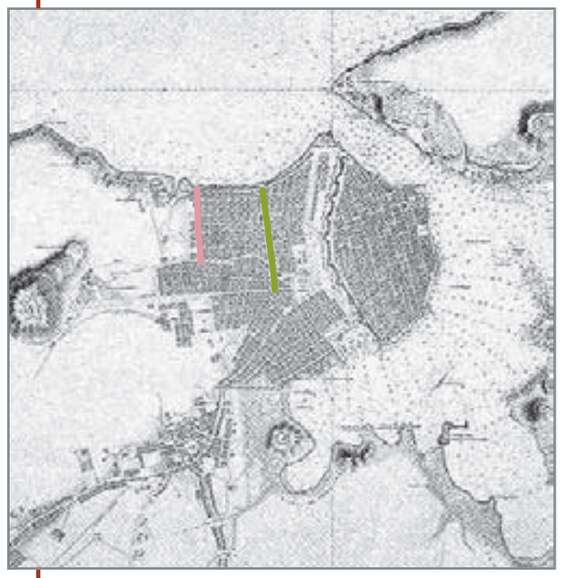
Avenues known today as **Paseo del Prado** & **Almaneda de Paula** are realised & will become the most representative places in XIX c. Havana.

1798
Plan of **Jose del Rio**



The growth of Havana outside of the fortification walls occurs along two fundamental axes that begin at '**La Tierra**,' the city's only gate, and lead East & SE. These roads are **Calzada de la Reina** & **Calzada del Monte**.

Mid. XIX c.
Plan of **Antonio de Arevalo**



Short therafter two other perpendicular roads: **Calzada de Galiano** & **Belascoain** create the limits of **Colon** & **San Lazaro** neighbourhoods.

Further SE **La Salud** & **El Horcon** establish themselves. The 'no one's land' undergoes a total urbanisation until there is no more vacant space.

The 2nd half of the XIX c. witnesses the rise of **El Carmelo** & **El Vedado**, two quarters along the eastern coast.

In 1837 the railway reaches Havana & stations itself on a side of **El Campo de Marte**, outside of the city gate, La Tierra.

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First Attempts to Urbanise the Entire Havana

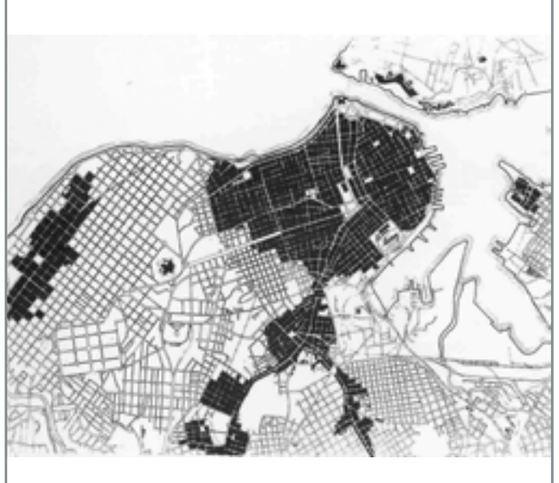
1874
Plan of **Jose Albear** & **Fernandez de Lara**
Population: 170 000

It is the 1st development plan for the entire city area and a basis for all the following city planning measures, well into the XX c.

The streets are bestimmed for the new urban space:
- Boulevards should be twice as broad & have a double lane,
- Side streets should be narrower & privater.

Additionally:
- The underground water supply for Vento was planed,
- An agriculture school was established,
- A coast road, the future **Malecon**, was conceived.

1898
Extention of XIX c. Havana overlapping a contemporary plan



In 1863 starts the demolition of the city wall & its former location replace now two new rows of blocks that unite the two sides of Havana.

The European model of converting the wall into a green belt, the lungs for the city, was here not followed.

Plan for the Enlargement & Beautification of Havana

1926
Plan of **Jean-Claude Nicolas Forestier**
Population: 700 000

Influenced by the Arabian gardens of Andalusia, as much as the XIX c. radical city planning measures of Georges-Eugène Haussmann, Forestier sets out to realise his vision of resplendent Havana:

- The governmental district is of an utmost significance; the most important civic functions are performed here & this distinction must acquire an adequately imposing landscape scenery.

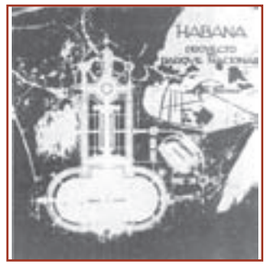
- All the city's representative monuments: be it the Capitol, the docks, the fortifications, Plaza Cìvica or the Park Forestal, are now imbued with a responsibility to 'enlarge & beautify;'

- In order to unify & compose the scattered city elements, magnificent boulevards, based of the Parisian model, are incorpora ted into the plan.

Forestier proposes a green axis that would dominate the city significantly & would be a system of avenues & parks, one of which being a **Parque Metropolitano**.

Due to a deep economic crisis, from the ambitious project only the following are executed:

- The Capitol & its surroundings
- The extension of **Paseo del Prado**
- **Avenida del Puerto**.



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Massive Clusters in Old Town & Las Vegas Island in Front of the Malecon

1958
Masterplan of **Josep Lluis Sert**, **Paul Lester Wiener**, etc.
Population: 1 400 000
Plan goal: 4 000 000

The plan originates at the time of Fulgencio Batista's dictatorship to further persue the vision of grandiose Havana:

- It promotes tourism & free-time activities,
- It proposes & enhances 5 focal points in the city:

  - Plaza Civica
  - **University of Havana**
  - Boulevards on the see coast
  - The economic centre
  - **The governmental centre**

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- It campaigns for the projection of the **Caribbean Las Vegas** off the north coast.

An artificial island in front of the Malecon should be created, thus obscuring Havana's famous view.

East - West Expansion of Havana

1984
Masterplan of **Joel Balleste**, **Mario Gonzalez**, etc.
Population: 1 900 000
Plan goal: 2 300 000

- It offers radical changes to the Old Town, Habana Vieja:

  - Buildings' ground floors are to be reconstructed in order to form arcades,
  - Next to them are to be erected **voluminous structures** (resaulting in a disproportion of scale)

The plan does not anticipate any further changes in the planning policy & is designed for 4 mln. inhabitants.

The enormous 'Mammoth Plan' offers the most diversified expertise knowledge about Havana until today.
Its sustainibility aims at the year 2030.

The debate encompasses not only the city, but its region as well:
- An East - West expansion is designated & anchored in three E-W axes that run parallel to the shore line,
- Environmental protection, based on an accurate resource analysis, is of primary concern,
- Vento's ground water reservoir is declared a fire breat zone,
- Detailed restauration plans are prepared for some city quarters, like the historic district.

This plan has no match in its endeavour to improve the city's image; its ambitious goals are however never reached.

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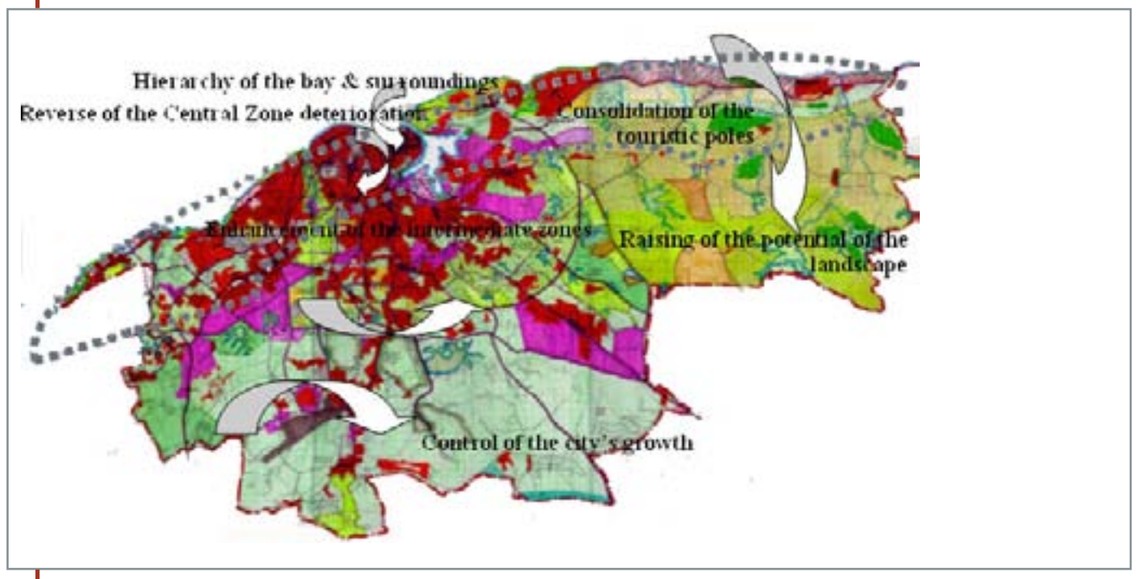
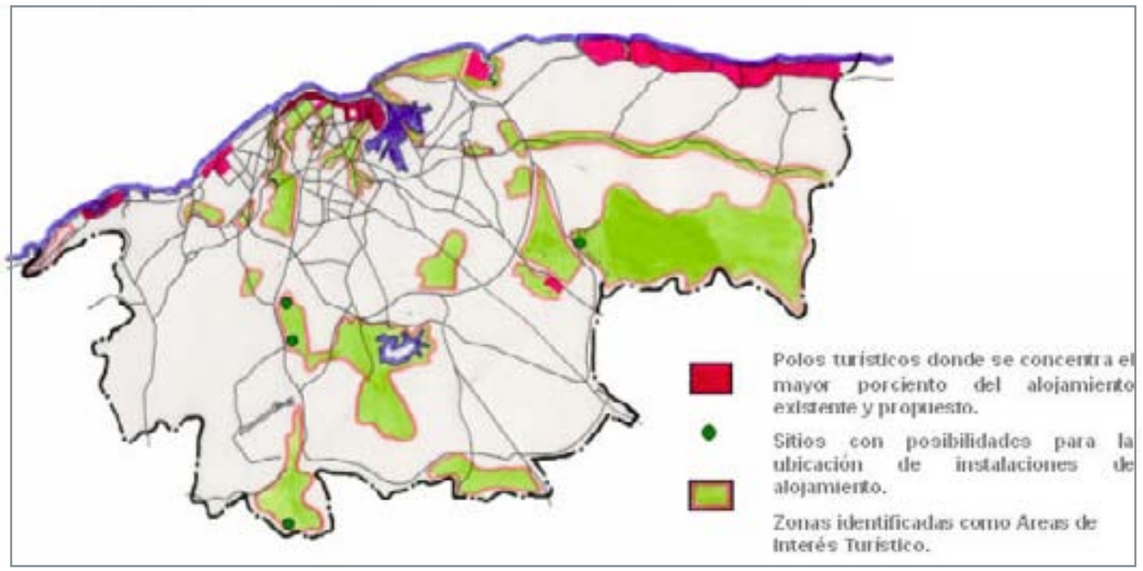
Havana's Sustainability Efforts Today

2007
Population: 2 200 000

Havana's General Plan



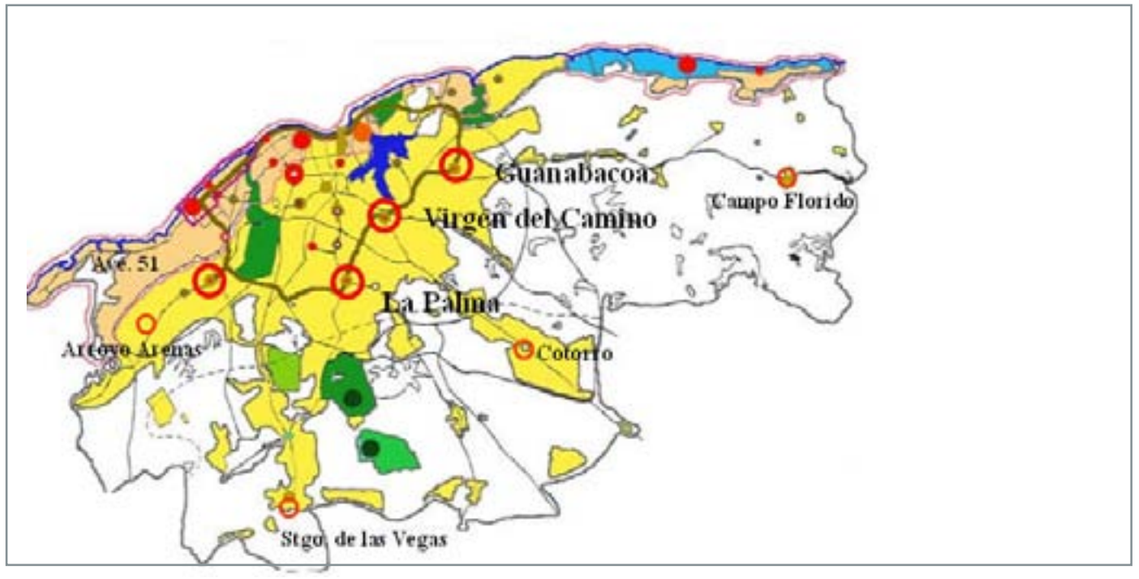
Havana's Touristic Development - to meet the demand of 4 mln.people



Since 1984 the city planning activities have been mostly concentrated on:

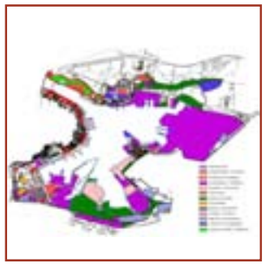
- The recuperation & preservation of the existent architectural substance,
- consolidation & control of the city growth & the land use,
- development of Havana's touristic potential.

Intermediate Center Development



Rehabilitation Plans

Harbour Development Plan



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