

POLITECNICO DI TORINO
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Honors theses

The National Art School Complex of Havana, Modern Cuban Heritage: the reasons for an enhancement project

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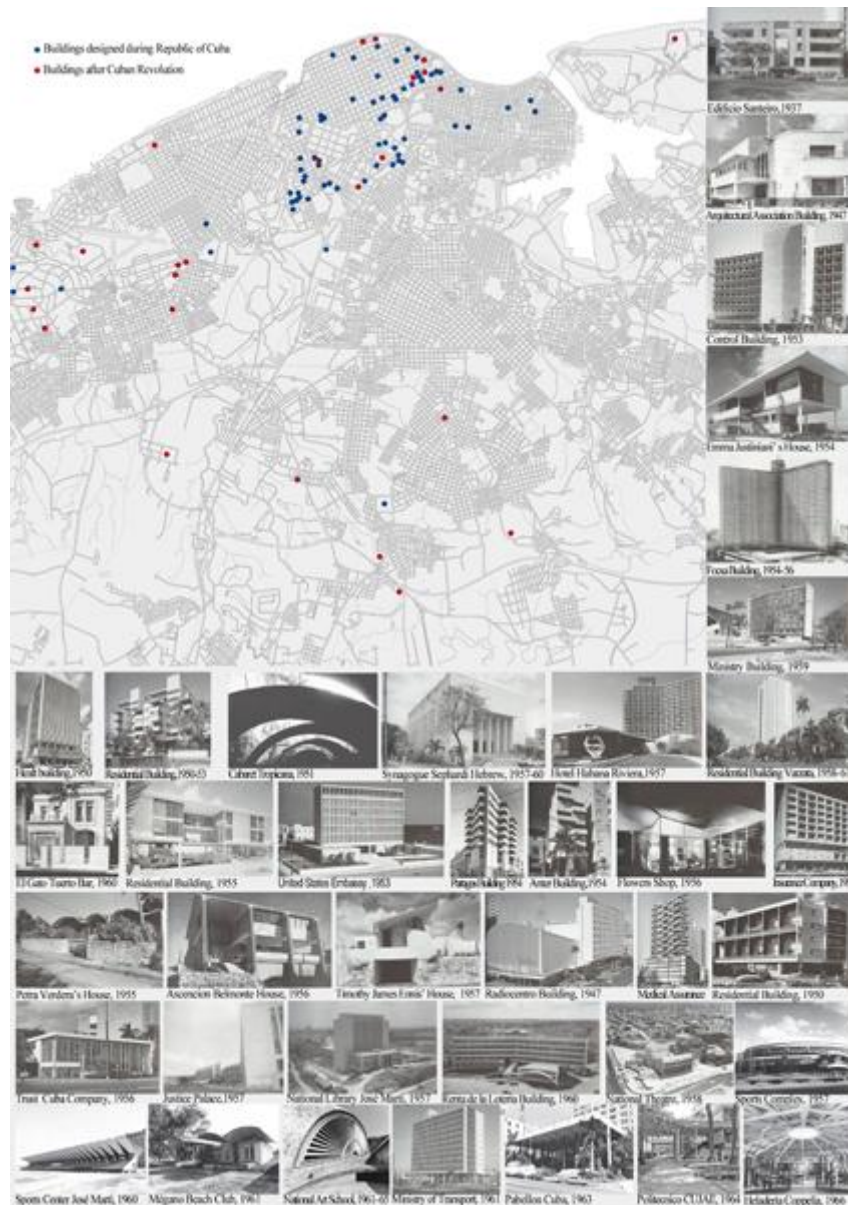
Havana is a complex city. For several reasons, there are problems of knowledge dissemination, documentation and information about its urbanism and architecture. These tasks are largely delegated to oral sources and the sensibility of architects and intellectuals. Regarding its Modern Architectural Heritage its rich repertory has not been sufficiently valued. This is specially true for the *Conjunto de Escuelas Nacionales de Arte (ENA)*.

The construction of the case study and the research project were based on actions aimed at 'gathering memories' and building a process of information re-elaboration coming not only from archival and library sources, but above all from oral ones: meetings and interviews with local architects, artists and intellectuals were essential for understanding the context and became vital elements of the project. It is indeed the result of an intense exchange between Italy and Cuba: the subject was a piece of the architectural heritage of Havana, designed by three architects, a Cuban, Ricardo Porro and two Italians, Vittorio Garatti and Roberto Gottardi.

The examined buildings compound is symbolic because it is a clear example of urgent questions in the contemporary cultural debate, such as the safeguarding and valorisation of the Modern Heritage, 'copyright' and the legitimacy of those called on to work on the artefacts, the unfinished.

The interpretation operates on more than one level:

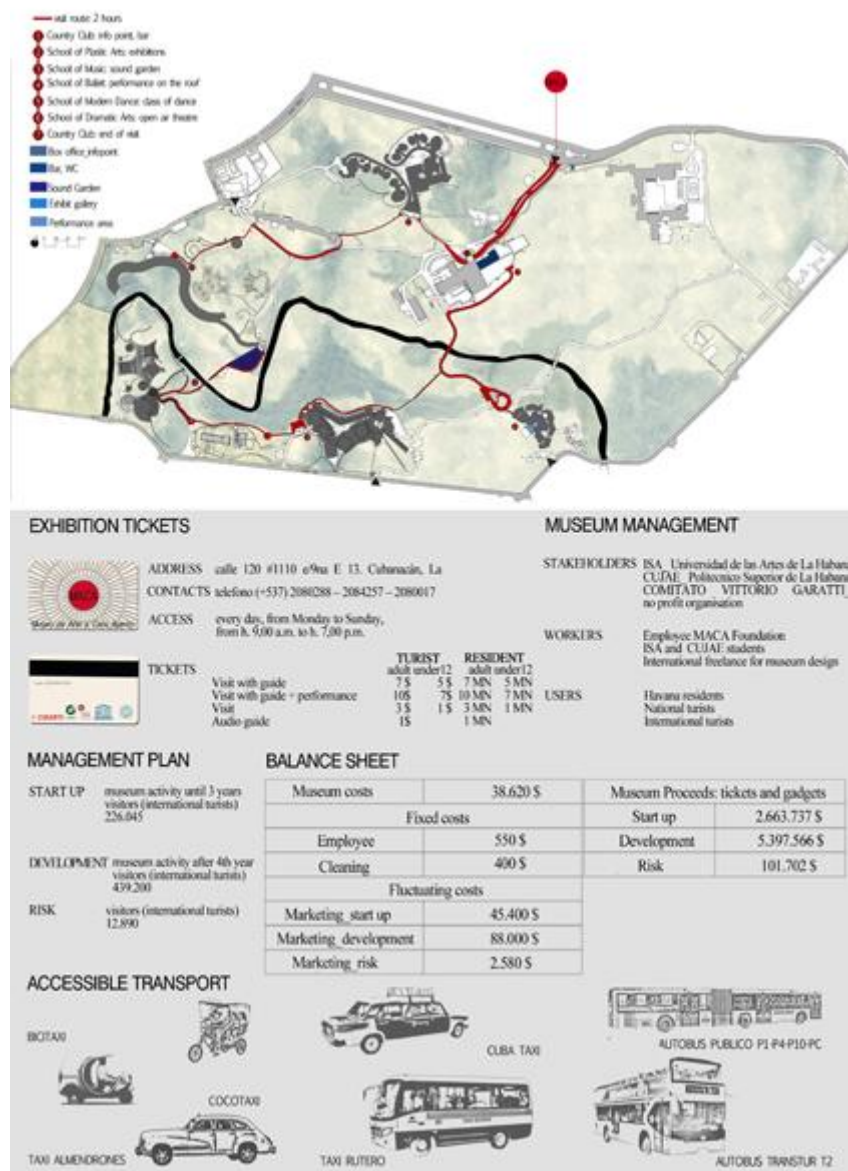
- The understanding of the context, overcoming the clichés that typify the city of Havana;
- The concatenation of historical-political facts;
- The analysis of the contemporary heritage of Havana;



- The analysis of an architectural complex, identifying specific questions and criticalities;



- Proposals for the cultural and economic valorisation of this complex.



The Art Schools represent today a complex that is both active and abandoned. Architecturally speaking, it is likely to be the most important building complex from the time of the Cuban Revolution and the contemporary heritage of Cuba. Its location is a crucial factor: it is in the Playa district, within the Blue Strip, a coastal area with the highest quality urban spaces and the highest concentration of tourist attractions¹.

1 Peña Díaz Jorge, *Mapeando La Habana*, in Planificación Física- Cuba, n.12, La Habana, 2007

International tourists visiting Havana generally have a very limited idea of the city, often made of the product Beach & Sun packages and the colonial city. The project leaded by Eusebio Leal Spengler for the historical city centre *Habana Vieja* is a practical example of a positive development model: "It is about creating a socio-economic base capable of sustaining itself in the long term, respecting the cultural integrity of the territory, recuperating the traditions and generating employment"². In view of such policies for the tourist sector, the valorisation and the maintenance of the buildings of the Art School Complex is even more strategic.

The research project resulted in a proposal for the preservation and valorisation of this heritage – verified in terms of cost/benefit for the community – as an open-air museum with multisensory exhibitions, centred on interactive structures equipped with state of the art communication systems such as digital totems. The economic, social and management appraisal suggests that the project would have positive effects, even just in terms of social externality.

The multifunctional scenario (educational-museum-recreational) proposed is a first practical solution to the problem of finding funds to re-invest in the preservation of the Art School Complex. This new function would allow the area to be utilised, while enhancing its vocation as a public place. The proposal shows that the cultural valorisation of architectural assets can identify areas for financial income, above all in terms of cost/benefit. The research concluded with an economic-management feasibility study for an Open Air Museum: an operation useful for locating resources for the restoration and the maintenance of the entire complex. The museum could be a considerable attraction for national and international tourism: the utilisation is based on culturally sustainable formulas, ensuring good management of the new cultural system and the organisation of a permanent restoration and maintenance department for the entire complex.

2 Gina Rey (edited by), *Centro Habana, un futuro sustentable*, La Habana, 2012.

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