CUBA FACING FORWARD

Balancing transition with development in the Caribbean’s most-watched nation

Harvard University
November 14, 2015

Conference summary
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Cuba Facing Forward: Balancing transition with development in the Caribbean’s most-watched nation

The Affordable Housing Institute in collaboration with students from the Harvard Graduate School of Design
Compiled and edited by Dave Hampton, Anya Brickman Raredon, Leah Demarest and Elisabeth Leaning

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Cover: the Bay of Santiago de Cuba from Castillo del Morro, 2012.

This event builds on a number of complementary activities on the Harvard campus, and within the Graduate School of Design specifically. The conference directly expanded on themes that were discussed in an evening panel organized by Michael Hooper, Associate Professor of Urban Planning on September 24th, titled The Challenge of Change: The Future of Havana. This previous event brought Cuban filmmakers, architects, and planners to Harvard to begin a conversation on how to preserve the essence of Cuban culture and historic architecture while opening up to increased demands of tourism.

Cuba Facing Forward was also structured to be part of a series of discussions on cities and countries in the middle of dramatic transitions, and it connected to previous work by the David Rockefeller Center for Latin American Studies, which has an excellent record of engagement with Latin America and Cuba, particularly through the Cuban Studies Program.

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For more information, contact:
Dave Hampton, regroundllc@gmail.com; Anya Brickman Raredon, araredon@affordablehousinginstitute.org
or visit www.cubatransition.org

Cuba Facing Forward: 2015 Conference Summary
Introduction

*Cuba Facing Forward: Balancing transition with development in the Caribbean’s most-watched nation* was a one-day intensive executive-level symposium that brought together the best, up-to-the-minute, forward-looking thinkers on the changes taking place in Cuba-U.S. relations and how these changes might impact the built and natural environments in Cuba. Speakers included leading professionals, both Cuban and international, in architecture, urban planning, ecology, law, and real estate development. The conference took place on November 14th, 2015 in William James Hall at Harvard University, and was organized by the Affordable Housing Institute, a Boston-based 501c3 focused on housing policy and finance in emerging nations, in collaboration with students at the Harvard Graduate School of Design.

The primary goals of the conference were to:

- Create an open, frank, and constructive discourse on Cuba’s future.
- Explore the possible effects of transition on Cuba’s built and natural environment, and how to harness the forces of change to improve both.
- Foster an ongoing multi-party conversation leading to guiding principles for economic, ecological, and cultural resilience in Cuba.

The main themes discussed were:

- The nature of transition: that it is constant, and that moving forward implies paying attention to - and understanding - what was before us.
- How optimism, confidence, and faith exist side by side with trepidation.
- Change, its origins, and what it may bring.
- Tendencies toward unilateralism, specifically Cuba and the U.S. at the exclusion of everyone else.
- Multidisciplinary approaches, partnerships, and collaboration as a model for growth.
- Cuban people as creative, talented, and innate problem solvers.
- Opportunities for nacent civil society organizations and local governments.
- Ensuring that those facing scarcity do not continue to be marginalized.
- Challenging the status quo model of international development and investment.

*Cuba Facing Forward* was attended by over 80 people, including academics, entrepreneurs, developers, policymakers, students, and decision executives.
Authors’ Note

As thousands of Cubans currently press for transit to the United States from foreign countries – fearing changes in that nation’s amnesty laws – it is with a renewed sense of urgency that we offer this record of events and suggest ways forward.

Our hopes are threefold: first, that this and future content will be accessed by a broad audience – American, Cuban and beyond; second, that Cuba Facing Forward continues to be a catalyst for an open, frank, and constructive discourse on Cuba’s future; and third, that such open dialogue will spark new connections – especially among those with the capacity to act or influence thought and policies – leading to measurable outcomes.

We ask that readers rise to the challenge of moving beyond the polarization of excitement and fear towards a new language of possibility. Furthermore, we call for a re-examination of the model of international development, foreign intervention and speculation, and believe that Cuba has the opportunity to become the exemplar of a new model that is more equitable, inclusive of citizen participation and respectful of the built and natural environments. Optimism and imagination may not only be called for, they may well be the most effective strategies for inclusive, equitable, and sustainable development

“The question is not, where are we going? The question is how are we going from here to there?”
–Miguel Coyula, Cuba Facing Forward Conference, November 2015
Following the conference, panelists and participants spoke of how they considered themselves fortunate to be included in such an interdisciplinary discussion on the implications of the thawing Cuba-U.S. relations. An emphasis on balance was apparent throughout the event; some panelists stressed the importance of education and bottom-up initiatives from Cubans, while others underscored the importance of carefully managing the development allowed in Cuba and leveraging this opportunity to challenge standard models of growth.

The panelists were unanimous in recognizing that education and bottom-up initiatives will play an important role in ensuring that Cubans hold on to their unique Cuban-ness, but that this should not be done at the expense of positive development that is critically necessary for struggling Cubans. Cubans are deeply frustrated with the extent of scarcity and crisis that have been a reality for generations, and thus Cuba risks losing a skilled labor-force and facing a limited availability of local professionals, despite the widespread availability of good basic education.

The panelists stressed the danger of the narcissistic notion that as the relations between Cuba and the U.S. begin to thaw and more Americans enter the country, they will slam down their money and get their way. Likewise, the idealist notion of “getting to Cuba before it changes” – commonplace in America today – is not only reckless, but uninformed. Panelists emphasized that Cuba does not exist as a time-warped destination solely for the pleasure of visitors from the North, a concept that promotes a problematic neo-colonialism. In reality, Europeans, Chinese, and Latin Americans have been trying to invest in Cuba for decades and are consistently frustrated by the layers of Cuban bureaucratic red tape that they must negotiate.

Though the symposium discussions highlighted the likelihood of challenges in developing economic policies that balance the interests of Cubans and of foreigners, it was noted that the discussions were generally upbeat in tone, and only briefly touched on issues such as the current state of misery for most Cubans, the fact that many Cubans want to leave and not want wait for the much-anticipated ‘change’, or challenging questions of compensation for both the Cuban nationalization of U.S. property and Cuban claims of damage that stem from the 55-year old trade embargo. Some issue was also taken with the choice by organizers to use the word ‘transition’ in the framing of the discussion, without a clear definition of what transition was being referred, since many Cubans balk at the American expectation that a changing relationship between the U.S. and Cuba will also cause significant political change. This was clarified over the course of the day, defining the ‘transition’ as the change in Cuba-U.S. relations, the potential economic changes stemming from that, and the impacts of those changes on the built and natural environment of the island.

Overall, participants were pleased with the interdisciplinary nature of the conference and suggested that it be used as a model approach to future development of the island – one in which sectors interact. While there are many challenges to the new Cuba-U.S. relationship that still need to be addressed, focusing on how knowledge and research flows between Cuba and the U.S. are of vital importance for the countries’ shared growth. Furthermore, it became clear that institutions, mechanisms, and information to support sustainable development need to be in place before substantial economic changes happen – otherwise it will be too late.
The panelist presentations and conference discussions were oriented around a set of framing questions and key concepts, summarized here for context and further consideration. The conference sought to examine these overarching questions, setting the scene for continued dialogue and action on the shifting dynamics between Cuba and the United States.

Framing Statement

The thaw in Cuba-U.S. relations, highlighted by the opening of embassies in each country during the summer of 2015, is promising. It portends new spaces for dramatic change and improvement in Cuba’s economy, society, and built environment. With this new mobility will come tremendous opportunity to revitalize Cuba’s economy and improve the lives of Cubans, challenges in addressing myriad transitional and structural issues, and urgency to set constructive frameworks, as actions taken over the next several months will shape Cuba over the next several decades.

Cuba is today’s exemplar of contexts in which political change has had broad social, cultural, economic, and environmental ramifications (e.g. Richard Nixon’s 1972 overture to China; Germany’s reunification, ca. 1990, former Soviet states ca. 1993, and Vietnam ca. 2006). Particularly in regard to Cuba, studies have tended to focus on economic effects, at the expense of considering the impacts on the built and natural environments.

Key Questions

1. The economy, built environment, and ecology all influence each other, which, in turn affect and are affected by government policy and regulation. How can Cuba find a way forward that yields a sustainable, prosperous, inclusive island that at the same time maintains its distinctive Cuban character? What can we do to help achieve that vision?

2. What is a transition? Who - and what - sees this as a transition? Is there a transition underway? If so, what is being transitioned? Where do the environment and development fit in?

3. U.S. impact: Will an increasing thaw in Cuba-U.S. relations – driving an increasing number of tourists and investment from the U.S. – tip an already delicate balance of foreign interests and influence in Cuba? What role will / should Cuban expatriates play? How might these challenges be shifted from risk to advantage?

4. How can Cuba become a model of resilient transitional development for future contexts that weaves together the built and ‘natural’ environments? What planning and regulatory tools will need to be strengthened and enforced, and what will need to be introduced to allow for effective implementation?

5. Is the preferred/ideal development model merely a continuation of the traditional, business-as-usual model, or, does it require an updating of accepted development practice to arrive at a more considered, measured, and appropriate paradigm?

6. How can things move forward despite the potential for more open relations to reverse in the 2016 U.S. elections? Will a slower pace of change provide opportunities for a better, more balanced outcome?

Framing the Discussion

“From the talks by the marine scientists; the recognition that the establishment of a new relationship between the US and Cuba, and support for a new civil society in Cuba, may be advanced most effectively not by governmental action but by the quieter efforts of people in the scientific and artistic communities.”

– Belmont Freeman, architect and planner
Miguel Coyula delivered the keynote address for the symposium. He provided the audience with an overview of Cuba’s built environment through a historical progression, while highlighting the transformation of a city perceived to be frozen in time. Coyula noted that Cuba’s building stock is particularly old, with 80% of Havana having been built between 1900 and 1958. And though “it was built very fast, and very well,” it is now destitute: approximately three buildings collapse per day. This, coupled with rapid urbanization in Havana, results in an unmet housing demand of approximately 140,000 homes in metropolitan Havana (2.2 million population). Consistent with Cuba’s socio-political system, there are no homeless people in Cuba; rather, they are housed in ‘transit communities’.

Coyula explained that in apartment complexes, people can own individual apartment units but not the building. Ownership of the building is thus left unclear, with an attitude of, “I don’t know and I don’t care.” Consequently, many buildings are not maintained and the quality of the common spaces rapidly deteriorates. This uniquely Cuban intersection between the built environment and the consequences of a socialist political ideology is representative of present-day Cuba.

He further noted that the Cuban economy faces significant challenges consistent with a limited labor market, a substantial brain-drain, and a rapidly aging population. With one-in-five people over sixty years old and a significant portion of Cuba’s population migrating out of Cuba, the challenges for the future are stark. Particularly as with the warming of relations between Cuba and the U.S., Cuba is likely to see a sudden increase in the number of tourists – the American Society of Travel Agencies estimates 1.8 to 2 million additional yearly visitors in 2016 – a reopened domestic real estate market, and increased foreign investment in real estate. While much of this could be advantageous for Cuban citizens, a potential unfortunate and unintended consequence of these changes might be increased shantytowns or overdevelopment. Coyula illustrated the latter by showing renderings of how vacant lots along Havana’s Malecón could be overtaken by excessive and out-of-scale development, overshadowing the historic façades.

In closing, Coyula reminds us to look at examples of failed development projects elsewhere, adeptly noting: “The human being is the only animal that stumbles twice on the same stone.”
Aynel Alvarez Guerra, Corporate Foreign Staff Associate, Brown Rudnick LLP
Legal Frameworks for Environmental and Cultural Preservation

Aynel Alvarez Guerra provided an in-depth look at the Cuban legal system, particularly in regards to environmental and cultural preservation. He underscored the progress that has already taken place within Cuba in terms of economic and business relations being mandated to work within legal frameworks that function to protect and promote the environment and cultural heritage, as well as bolster community development. A number of amendments made to the Constitution in 1992 necessitated the issuance of special laws – decrees or decree-laws – by various government ministries to ensure that legal protections are in place for culturally and environmentally sustainable economic development. Specifically, such laws established preventative and remedial measures to restore or protect cultural property in the face of development driven by tourism and foreign investment.

With respect to foreign investment in particular, Alvarez Guerra discussed the Foreign Investment Act that was modified by the Cuban Government in 2014, while Presidents Barack Obama and Raúl Castro were in negotiations on normalizing relations. This law has several intents, including diversification and expansion of export markets; broadening access to advanced technologies and import substitution, particularly food imports; enabling foreign financing and resources of employment; developing product chains; and changing the country’s energy matrix through the use of renewable sources of energy (targeting 24% renewables by 2030). The law stipulates who can invest in Cuba, in what sectors, and how those investors will be subjected to environmental and other regulations. In short, the Cuban government has made clear that foreign investment is only to be authorized in cases where it does not involve national defense, security, heritage, and the environment. Two key takeaways of Alvarez Guerra’s presentation are, first, that clear, direct language which holds Cuban citizens partially responsible for the protection of the environment and cultural heritage has made its way into the nation’s guiding documents and, second, that there are legal frameworks to back it.

Hopefully, these premises will remain front and center in the continuing dialogue on “removing those rusty locks on Cuba’s doors.”

Panel 1: Ecology, Culture, and Community

“A [T]hank you... for removing those rusty locks of the Cuban doors and creating a space for dialogue that is so, so necessary to reveal the relations between the two countries.”
– Aynel Alvarez Guerra

The colors and textures of a metal gate in Cuba.
Jorge Alberto Angulo Valdés, Professor, Center for Marine Research, University of Havana

Education, Research, and the Role of Local Communities in Coastal Zone Management: A Caribbean Perspective

Jorge Angulo Valdés brought unique insight into the complexities and contradictions of Cuba from a sector that bridges Cuban and international interests in the Caribbean waters. As an example, he pointed out that all of Cuba may be considered a coastal zone where fish are plentiful, yet one eats foreign fish in Cuba because the government sells Cuban fish elsewhere.

In response to the question Dave Hampton posed in his introduction, “What is Cuba?” Angulo Valdés discussed the futility in outsiders’ attempt to fully understand the lived realities of Cubans. Specifically, he maintained, “I don’t expect you to understand what’s going on here. Just live by it. Try to get to know the people. That’s the real bond of our society: the people.”

Angulo Valdés highlighted how scarcity has shaped – and continues to shape – the mindset of Cubans. When resources are scarce, people learn to look for cheap goods rather than quality goods. For Cubans, this is very much the reality; and for Cubans outside of Cuba, it is often difficult to change this mentality. He also commented that, “we have to survive on making fun of ourselves, and laughing at our own problems…There is no way you can cope with such scarcities and stupid things going on [other] than by laughing.”

From an ecological perspective, what happens in Cuban waters will affect all the islands in the Caribbean, including South Florida. The Cuban population is well-educated and resourceful, but the collective mindset has been molded in times of scarcity, of lacking opportunities, which profoundly impacts everything. Cubans have been focused on challenges on land, not in the sea, but that is beginning to change, largely through greater awareness brought through better education.

As Cuba opens up, changes are happening, although they may not be apparent right away. The marine environmental sector is seeing this gradual progress through increasing opportunities for Cuban emigrants to engage in Cuban-led research initiatives, and the Cuban Coast Guard is now more willing to issue permits for these emigrant researchers to board research boats in Cuban waters – thus opening up new possibilities for collaboration.

“It is a fact that the ocean that is between our two countries, instead of dividing us, is uniting us.”
– Jorge Angulo Valdes

Healthy elkhorn coral, a species in global decline thrives in Cuban waters.
David Guggenheim, Marine Scientist, OceanDoctor

Divided Shores, Collective Ecosystem: Working across the Straits of Florida since Helms-Burton (1996) and Future Directions for Environmental Policy

David Guggenheim and Jorge Angulo Valdés have collaborated on Cuba-U.S. oceanic and coastal conservation initiatives for many years, and Guggenheim reinforced his Cuban counterpart’s calls for better education and greater freedom in partnerships, especially regarding scientific exchange.

Guggenheim started his presentation by pointing out that marine life does not observe borders; sea turtles, fish, and even manatees migrate between Cuban and American waters. And that exploring development from an environmental perspective results in a different type of development, particularly when one puts an economic value on the environment. He emphasized that since Cuba has some of the most pristine and protected marine ecosystems in the world – the coral reefs and mangroves are among the healthiest in the world – it is vital that Cuban communities possess a sense of ownership and responsibility over their environment and take pride in their environmental values.

Guggenheim explained how - through marine science - Cuba and the U.S. have interacted for decades, underscoring that this link between the two countries via environmental research and education is important and must be maintained and strengthened. The connections between Cuba and the U.S. are perhaps most strong in the marine biology sector for as much as our diplomatic relations struggle, we continue to share waters and marine life. Initiatives such as the Cuba-U.S. Sustainability Partnership are bringing the two countries together to develop a set of ethics, guiding principles, and best practices for sustainable development in Cuba. At the root of this is a notion that in order to protect the environment the transition of the two countries’ relationship must be managed carefully so as to avoid a Cancun-style of development.

Throughout Guggenheim’s time in Cuba, one theme has remained constant: the significance of community involvement in environmental protection and sustainable development. Educating the new generation of entrepreneurs on the principles of sustainability is thus vitally important.
Alejandro Echeverri Restrepo, Architect, Founder and Director of URBAM, EAFIT University

Community Focused Urban Development in Transitional Context

Alejandro Echeverri discussed the parallels of Medellin's experience to that of Havana, specifically the urban narratives invoked in these emergent contexts. He began by discussing Medellin's pervasive social segregation and violence and then questioned the market's role in reproducing violence by exacerbating inequality and creating spaces of disconnection.

Echeverri spoke of how ethics and inclusion are necessary principles in urban development and design, especially in transitional contexts. To that end, he highlighted the importance of design employing holistic processes and creating linkages between projects. While architecture and infrastructure undoubtedly play a role in this, programming, particularly platforms for community and institutional involvement, is essential. Design processes must connect at multiple scales, and the “small logics” of place must connect and scale to big systems. Facilitating these connections requires the engagement of institutions and people and including multiple voices and identities. More specifically, design processes must be community-based and allow space for public participation and mediation, dialogue, and collaboration between actors. Such spaces of community engagement and participation, or “soft infrastructure,” ensure that design and development processes are in touch with the day-to-day on-the-ground realities where they take place.

Dilip da Cunha, Adjunct Professor, School of Design, University of Pennsylvania

Respondent

Da Cunha’s response to the four preceding panelist presentations sought to place all that was discussed within a frame of transition. He suggested that transition can orchestrate and usher in change as much as the concept of transition represents change in itself. Reiterating Angulo Valdés’ point, da Cunha stressed the necessity of education in contexts of transition. Additionally, he underscored the importance of moving beyond an overly bilateral focus on transition; it is not only unfair, but inaccurate, to take an entirely U.S.-centric perspective in such discussions of Cuba’s opening.

Da Cunha summed up the ramifications of the Cuba-U.S. embargo – limiting access to technology and resources – and spoke of the positive changes that have come over time, namely the shift in how the environment is viewed. He posited, however, that the whole of transition cannot be compared with the transition of the parts; as with the importance of processes in design as Echeverri stressed, transition must too be viewed as a process. Changes are likely to be gradual, and the thinking must shift from terra firma to aqua fluxus, the latter presenting new possibilities that might arise when considering how an island nation might build upon a ‘ground’ of water.
Discussion #1: Contradictions and Opportunities

The discussion following the first panel revolved around the ways in which Cuba is a land of contradictions, how the 1962 U.S. trade embargo looms large as an ongoing challenge to future progress, how word choice matters in discussing the embargo and a potential transition in relationship to the US, and the role of tourism in past and present contexts. The example of the Cayo Coco causeway presented an opportunity to critique the effectiveness of Cuba’s environmental regulation, centralized governance, and the lack of public involvement in decision making. This highlighted a context where overcentralization, sectoriality, and lack of access to information, equipment, and well-trained professionals must be overcome.

Panelists noted that even after Cuba’s notable engagement in the 1992 Rio Earth Summit, the Socialist model of moving forward without looking back was still the predominant approach to development, which, for some participants, signaled a warning against the tendency to over-romanticize Cuba’s environmental record. Economic development has remained the first priority of the Cuban government, especially since the start of the Special Period, with the production of goods and services prioritized at the expense of other considerations. This is perhaps a hold-over sentiment from the Soviet era, as Miguel Coyula suggested that, “what we inherited from them was that what matters is the goal, not the process.”

A notable example of this approach is a 27-kilometer pedraplén, or oversea vehicular causeway, designed and authorized by CITMA – the Cuban Ministry of Environment in 1988. It was built to connect the mainland to Cayo Coco key, then a new tourist destination. The bermed roadway contributed to the degradation of the bay – including protected mangroves – by restricting the flow of natural oceanwater recharge in the bay through only narrow bridge openings – eventually requiring a redesign and retrofit of the causeway to mitigate its environmental impact. This goal-focused approach failed to apply sufficient understanding of currents and the movement of water and overlooked local input – such as that of area fishermen.

Panelists openly discussed how Cuban government decision-making tends to be confusing, top-down, divided by sector, opaque, and with limited citizen influence. Applicable to every aspect of Cuban society, this is of growing concern as local governments are increasingly faced with decisions about appropriate land-use, managing increased capitalization, and the pressures of commercial (lobbying) interests to development. Civil society is often entangled within national government, so despite the existence of some environmental NGOs, the role of the people in environmental change is limited, even as compared to other international contexts including the former Communist bloc. Furthermore, environmental journalism – prevalent in the U.S. – is nonexistent in Cuba, as it is perceived as contradictory to government goals. Several panelists referred to the fact that neither government nor civil society have the resources to undertake proper research and that what research is conducted is done so along narrow disciplinary lines, highlighting the need for more social science approaches – sociology, anthropology – which could look at, and inform management of, how people behave in relation to resources. Highlighting the depth of the sectoral divisions David Guggenheim described a series of events on the Isle of Youth, where government ministries acted counter to each other’s goals and illegal overfishing occurred at the hands of the official government-sanctioned fishing industry.
Keynote speaker Miguel Coyula referred to the U.S. embargo of Cuba as “the finger in the wound”, designed to create difficulties for the fledgling Revolutionary government that would trigger unrest and – ultimately – the failure of the revolution. The lack of access to technical competence in the design of the Cayo Coco causeway was cited as an example of the fallout of such an isolating policy.

Panelists discussed how the embargo has limited the free flow of ideas, restricted access to critical information, goods, and existing and emerging technologies, and remains a central barrier to the normalization of relations between Cuba and the United States, citing as an example a time-consuming special approval process that impedes the export of scientific equipment from the U.S. to Cuba even for projects with U.S. collaborators. Improvements have been seen since Cuba’s removal from the U.S. list of nations with state-sponsored terrorism in 2015, but barriers to full scientific collaboration persist, among them limitations by the Cuban Government on authorization for Cuban-American personnel to participate in scientific research, access to information on the island, and U.S. academic institutions barring Cuban authors or co-authors on scientific publications because of concerns over what the U.S. Government might consider to be illegal export of intellectual-property.

While a call to lift the ineffective, obstructive, and outdated policy of the embargo was sounded among panelists and participants alike, the embargo was also seen as possibly a temporary check against rampant investment and excessive influence of U.S. capital in the short-term; an opportunity to plan for the “tsunami of North Americans.”

Panelists also discussed how the terminology used could affect the outcomes of conversations on Cuba-U.S relations. For instance, in Cuba the term ‘blockade’ is widely-used, rather than ‘embargo’, and thus referring to the legal framework as such would be more likely to inspire trust in interpersonal exchanges with Cubans. At the same time, it was noted that academic and legal circles have begun to adapt the latter in order to pave the way for more open dialogue with the United States. Aynel Alvarez Guerra explained that many professionals in Cuba want to move on in negotiations and to avoid words that have been causing friction in the past. As an example he noted that the term ‘transition’ elicits strong reactions among Cubans, and carries the connotation of a sovereign nation being forced to accept U.S. guidance toward new economic and political model. Therefore the use of the term ‘transition’ can be problematic because Cuba has clearly indicated its continuing allegiance to the socialist model.

The panel tackled the question of what positive role tourism could play in the protection of marine environments. Panelist’s responses ranged from cautious optimism to high hopes for true transformation, citing overdeveloped Cancún, Mexico as an example of the “mirror of consumption that [tourism] holds up” to be avoided at all costs. It was also suggested that true ecotourism – where local communities have agency and accrue real benefits – might reinforce a paradigm shift away from consumptive and towards productive landscapes. Panelists noted that Cuba has the opportunity to challenge the status quo approach towards urbanism and development and positions itself on the world stage as a starting point for the transformation of the global environment. As David Guggenheim said, “people are willing to pay a premium – tourists are – on authentic experience. Cuba is unapologetically authentic, and that is something that they can market without having to remake themselves into a caricature like other tourist destinations around the world.”
Gabriel Fuentes, Architect, DA|S Design Action Studio for Research, Architecture and Urbanism

History and Modernity: Transition through Cuban Architecture

Gabriel Fuentes discussed how architecture reflects history and socio-cultural contexts, focusing particularly on transition. He also critiqued the narratives of nostalgia that are invoked in many conversations surrounding transition, as they romanticize the false notion of a city frozen in time, echoing Coyula’s earlier concerns. Rather than accepting this implication of Cuban culture as static, the context of transition presents an opportunity to embrace social, economic, and cultural change without repeating mistakes made in the past.

To show that the trope of a timeless city does not reflect the reality of how a city works, Fuentes guided the audience through a photographic tour of the variation and evolution of Cuban architecture, particularly from the 1930s to 1959, with styles influenced by the particular social, cultural, economic, and environmental context of their respective time and place. He explored the influences at work in the Modern, International Style, Art Deco, Beaux Arts, and Art Nouveau designs of many Cuban houses built in the first half of the 20th century. Fuentes emphasized how architects searched for *lo Cubano* in the architecture rather than portraying their design choices as a departure from a falsely perceived monolithic and static and imported culture.

Fuentes’ examples teased out the concepts of form, style, and place, and their interrelationship in Havana’s urban fabric. Form is malleable and fluid, and responds to a particular social or climatic condition or otherwise; change is inevitable and does not necessarily mean a loss of culture, tradition, and identity. The current context of transition thus calls for a thoughtful consideration of the role of design and place in creating architecture that harmonizes the fluidity of form and culture with environmental realities, social needs, and the essence of *lo Cubano*. Drawing on Eugenio Batista’s 3 Ps of Cuban architecture – *patio*, *portal*, and *persianas* (louvers) – he suggested five transitional building elements that also characterize the traditional elements of the Cuban home, and how the best Cuban architects melded imported design styles with local tradition, climate, and building materials.

Panel 2: Built Environment and Housing – Navigating Investment Pressures

Converging polarities - an uncompromisingly traditional aesthetic and a radical departure or Modernist “clean break from the past” - to arrive at something more inherently Cuban.
David Smith, Founder and CEO, Affordable Housing Institute

*Global Context: The interaction of public and private finance on housing and built environment in transitional states*

David Smith delivered a unique perspective on what is potentially in store for Cuba’s development. Consistent with experiences in over thirty countries around the world, Smith cautioned about the unequal race of money and interest in development, land, and environmental protection. Smith noted that, historically, small allowances for development practices have often become big tsunamis – think Cancún. He discussed the importance of reconciling – in a sustainable and equitable manner – three key imbalances, or opposing forces: (1) land-use economics and environmental protection, (2) formal and informal infrastructure, and (3) private and public interests.

Smith cautioned that strong land-use economics so often mean that a transition becomes a method of value capture by the elite, where private interests prevail over those of the public. While this is a key lesson-learned from other failed developments, it does not mean that all development should be thwarted. Cuba’s changing relationship with the U.S. may be a chance to bring much needed urban regeneration to the many destitute areas in Havana. The city is under-capitalized.

The idealized view of Cuba as a portal into history is problematic, as it whitewashes and distorts real poverty and a lack of opportunity. The thawing of relations between Cuba and the U.S. has the potential to open the door for Cuban education, entrepreneurialism, and growth in many other ways – but only if the ‘opening’ of Cuba is managed to ensure against a tragedy of the commons-type development.

Adolfo Garcia, Partner, Brown Rudnick LLP

*Development Pressures: Negotiating a Complex Business Space*

Adolfo Garcia offered unique insight on Cuban and U.S. relations from both a personal – he was born in Cuba and came to the U.S. at a young age – and professional perspective. Garcia shared personal experiences of engaging with Cuban-American views of multiple generations, namely the differing opinions on the pros and cons of the Castro regime. Diverging from the perspective of his mother’s generation, Garcia views the thawing of Cuba-U.S. relations as the next opportunity to not squander the future. However, this does not mean that the opening up of relations should be immediate or all-encompassing – there are still many questions to ask, such as: how do we get to the future? And is U.S. law really the biggest limitation or factor?

Garcia reminded us that Cubans tend to have long memories and remain in the mindset of division. There are also certain byproducts of a closed society, including a dearth of Cuban professional-class counterparts for international negotiations. A drastic increase in training and education will help, but not immediately. Change will be gradual – in fact, change must be gradual, with interaction and exposure on both sides.

“Poverty is photogenic. Poverty is romantic. But you don’t see the pictures of scarcity, and scarcity is the reality.”

– David Smith

“Dismantling the embargo will bring about an unleashing of forces which will be beyond the ability of a totalitarian and dictatorial government to control.”

– Adolfo Garcia
Joseph L. Scarpaci, Executive Director, Center for the Study of Cuban Culture + Economy

Cuba Facing Forward: The Function of Planning in a Regional Reimagining

Throughout his career, Joseph L. Scarpaci has bridged the gap between Cuban and American culture through academia and field research. His familiarity with Cuba and other Latin American cultures has exposed him to many failed development projects, leading him to understand that conventional approaches to development will not work when there is not structural change. The U.S.-centric concept of a dramatic transition occurring in Cuba as a result of thawing Cuba-U.S. relations is largely incorrect, as many other foreigners have been trying to invest in Cuba for years to no avail. He emphasized this point by stating, “there is no transition; it’s just a bump in the road.”

As a development expert, Scarpaci reminded the audience of the internal obstacles to change in Cuba – including a lack of transparency and the top-down approval processes for all foreign investment. Of course, since big developers and investors are likely to find ways around these obstacles, it is necessary to encourage a different kind of development.

Scarpaci suggested that change in Cuba needs to – and will – happen from within – once a balance between local and tourist needs is reached – with a Cuban tax base to finance necessary renovations such as water and sanitation infrastructure, investments in education, and training programs for traditional crafts and trades. This approach, coupled with increased remittances from Cuban expatriates or family members could promote sustainable development in Cuba, and will hopefully avoid Disneyification or Cancún-style development.
Belmont Freeman, Principal, Belmont Freeman Architects
Respondent

As conversations on changing Cuba-U.S. relations continue, Belmont Freeman cautioned against falling prey to four dominant perspectives. First, reiterating Joseph Scarpaci’s earlier point, he challenged the narcissistic attitude of so many Americans that the United States’ lifting of the embargo and Cuba’s opening up to U.S. investment will singularly change Cuba, for better or for worse. It is important to recognize that the United States is not the first to look toward investing in Cuba; individuals and entities from other countries have been trying for decades to enter the Cuban market, and they have consistently run up against Cuba’s rigid bureaucracy and pervasive control over all economic activity within the country.

Second, he countered the decidedly anti-modernization/urbanization lens through which Americans view the specter of changes in Cuba. This echoes the sentiments expressed by Miguel Coyula, David Smith, and Gabriel Fuentes of the danger in romanticizing a timeless Cuba that can be ruined by transition. Freeman thus took issue with the “thoughtless mantra” of Americans who want to visit Cuba before it changes. Rather than ignorantly dreading change in Cuba, he maintained, it has to be viewed as a necessity for the survival of the Cuban people. Continuing to uphold an aesthetic of timelessness obscures the very real hardships that Cubans experience in their daily lives and discounts their ingenuity. To illustrate this point, Belmont raised the example of non-professional construction of housing in which pre-revolutionary houses have been repurposed to accommodate more families than originally intended.

Third, as part of this romanticization, there is often a myopic focus on activities within – and preservation of – Old Havana. While it is unquestionably an important aspect of Cuba’s cultural heritage, this attention occurs at the expense of the greater City of Havana. And fourth, though the Cuban people have already themselves been making changes, irrespective of any shift in their country’s relations with the United States, it would be imprudent to ignore the scale and magnitude of the challenge of development, particularly if the many pitfalls and risks of unfettered development that were raised by other panelists are to be avoided.

“The Revolution has had a certain anti-urban strain to it, in that it has favored rural development and the eradication of rural poverty — which is where poverty existed prior to the Revolution — in great concentration. That’s certainly a laudable goal, but it has come at the detriment of Cuba’s cities.”
— Belmont Freeman

The ruins of Havana’s Hotel Packard, a perennial favorite candidate for redevelopment, slated for an upgrade by French developer Bouygues.
**Discussion #2: Capital Flow and Institutions**

The second discussion session focused on themes similar to those in the first, though with more concrete focus on the built environment and the nature of residential and commercial development on the island. Addressing comments on challenges created by the Cuban government’s over-centralization, panelists focused on an overarching theme of identifying and leveraging both changes and existing systems within Cuba. One participant raised the idea of “remittances as a vehicle of global development,” spurring a discussion on how such cash flows might fuel a more expanded, dynamic, and equitable future private sector beyond the city of Havana, the possibilities of a cooperative economy and collective equity, and the roles of both small-to-medium enterprises and trained professionals. However, Miguel Coyula mentioned that the source of – and destination of – remittances tends to favor urban whites, forcing Cubans of color, or in rural areas, to seek other sources of capital, suggesting that “it’s creating a big disparity by the color of the skin...”

Panelists commented that the Cuban government seems loath to acknowledge – or credit – the role and effects of non-state or local actors, seeing big business as the only solution, when in fact the use of remittances sent by Cuban émigrés is shifting away from merely supporting their Cuban family members toward investment in properties, small businesses, and the improvement of both. For example, paladares – Cuba’s popular home-based restaurants – which have become increasingly prolific, are allowed to hire servers from outside the home and seat up to 50 guests since Raúl Castro’s ascendancy to the presidency. Often advertised by their owners on the internet, and improved with interior design, these small businesses are becoming more sophisticated, and now compete with state-owned restaurants and hotels which struggle to accommodate the increasing numbers of tourists, or deliver a comparably pleasant dining or culinary experience.

Furthermore, it was pointed out that the absence of capital normalization at institutional and government levels highlights the degree to which normalization exists in the most fundamental unit of trust – the family. Such high levels of localized trust create fertile ground for cooperative economies. Citing the successful model of quasi-agricultural cooperatives in China, discussants suggested that the self-formation of cooperatives in Cuba be enabled, particularly for residential buildings. Such a scenario would give building residents ownership of common areas (stairwells, lobbies, etc.), thereby addressing disinvestment in these areas, improving building maintenance, and extending building lifecycles. This model would also offer more individual protections than condominium laws and create opportunities for wealth-building around real estate-based assets.

Professional over-regulation stood out as another glaring roadblock to development. Architect and planner Miguel Coyula echoed his earlier lament on the diminishment of the community architect into a bureaucrat rather than a working professional. He noted that professionals are “not being considered as an additional motor to speed up the process – or to ‘dynamize’ the process of small business in the city,” citing their increasing involvement in the improvement of homes and businesses – such as the aforementioned paladares – while often having to do so por la izquierda – on the side. Belmont Freeman argued for the involvement of design professionals in planning with respect to zoning and other regulations on where restaurants could be allowed and how existing buildings and homes could be modified for expanded or new uses. For as Gabriel Fuentes said, “Moving forward implies paying attention to – and understanding – what was before us.”

“Capital normalization at the lower level will outpace formal capital normalization while the cruise ships are trying to figure out which bahía they can stick the liner in.”
– David Smith
Closed Discussion: From Dualities and Hardship to Opportunities

“Cuba is a country full of contradiction.” - Jorge Angulo Valdés

“Nothing in Cuba is certain unless it’s in the past.” - David Guggenheim

These quotes from two marine scientists – who have worked together for over a decade across an ocean, between two countries at odds – aptly summarize the conference’s closing discussion. Bringing all eleven panelists together into one discussion, the closing panel focused on framing a way forward, and sought to answer the question of how Cuba might direct a rising tide of foreign investment and special interests towards a trajectory of equitable development while working with – and within – a fluid territory of contradiction.

Optimism, confidence, and faith existed side-by-side with trepidation as to the nature of change, and what that change might bring. While hopeful about future prospects for relations between the U.S. and Cuba, discussants referenced earlier discussions that grounded the conversation, offering caution against tendencies to treat Cuba as either a place frozen in amber – a not-unfounded fear when comparing foreign (especially American) influence throughout Caribbean – or a place to be changed from the outside.

Dilip da Cunha noted an overall tendency toward bilateralism during panel discussions themselves, dualities which require balancing acts to navigate, asking whether the U.S. and Cuba are the only actors to be considered, at the exclusion of all others. This question was furthered by asking if the resolution of compensation for expropriated U.S. properties – or Cuba’s seeking of reparations for the economic damages of the embargo – might derail new foreign investment from other countries besides the United States. Furthermore, Joseph Scarpaci stressed the lack of nuance of discourse within Cuba, suggesting that it was too dichotomous.

The excitement around the possibilities of normalizing relations was checked by fears of change – something to dread, something that will impede. The question was raised as to whether the embargo is a limiter – keeping out essential goods, technologies, and people – or an enabler of other things that may, as Adolfo García suggested, “…bring about [the] unleashing of forces which will be beyond the ability of a totalitarian and dictatorial government to control.” Similarly, David Guggenheim specifically referenced the potential impact of additional tourists on Cuba’s environment, stating, “It is ironic that the United States might represent a bigger threat to Cuba as its ‘friend’ than as its enemy.” Opportunity can be ambiguous.

The nature of the conference – cautiously upbeat, with the chance for meaningful dialogue among a multiplicity of voices, backgrounds, experience, and disciplines was lauded. Gabriel Fuentes commented that “The idea that we can have a panel like this blows my mind.” David Guggenheim also noted that this was an “unlikely group to come together and speak a common language: love, respect, and humility for a bigger-than-life small island”. Building on the model of the conference itself, discussants stressed the importance of building partnerships, interdisciplinary approaches, and collaboration within and with Cuba, over the simple application of models from outside the island, as well as acknowledging that change is already occurring.
Joseph Scarpaci characterized the Cuban people as “creative, talented, and innate problem-solvers”. Citing Cuba’s strong environmental and foreign investment laws, David Guggenheim said that “Cuba picked the perfect time not to play follow-the-leader”, further highlighting the value of Cuba’s well-educated population, and relative lack of corruption – at least as compared to other Caribbean nations – at the top levels of government.

The high capacity of Cuban professionals was repeatedly emphasized, in particular highlighting the possibilities of imaginative, projective, and entrepreneurial thinking that design processes could enable. Implied a proactive rather than an ad hoc, reactive approach typical of a siloed national government, Belmont Freeman suggested that attention should be paid to, “how to design a beneficial sequence of change or transition.”

Could more involvement by the Community Architect and other professionals in similarly inclusive teams apply design thinking to help flesh out a place for nascent civil society organizations and local governments? Citing an example of broadly participatory workshops mounted recently by multidisciplinary groups – of average citizens, artisans, and professionals – for the holistic redevelopment of Havana, it was suggested that this approach might begin to address capacity gaps in a governance structure with little gradation between a top-heavy, opaque, bureaucratic, national government and individuals, in order to address the complex planning, infrastructure, economic, and environmental challenges facing Cuban cities.

Discussants also returned to the question of terminology, suggesting that if the prevailing language used to discuss present-day Cuba is loaded with negative meaning – ‘embargo’, ‘blockade’, ‘transition’ – and thus limits possibilities, why not change it? Dilip da Cunha suggested that one “Look to something outside the distraction of polarities…”, including among those things the possibilities of a productive landscape in which visitors might contribute, rather than merely consume.

Ultimately, though the conference did not specifically focus on it, there was a call for a spotlight to remain on the hardships that the Cuban people face – years of crisis and scarcity, being largely sidelined in an interconnected world – and the related vulnerability to increasing socio-economic disparity. As change occurs, there must be recognition of who is being excluded or marginalized, and who benefits from change, both on and off the island.
Panelists

Aynel Alvarez Guerra (Panelist)

Aynel Alvarez Guerra is a Foreign Staff Associate in the Corporate group at Brown Rudnick. His experience includes mergers and acquisitions and corporate governance with a special focus on cross-border and multijurisdictional transactional work. He has also provided pro bono service to non-profit entities in the Boston area. Prior to his departure from Cuba in 2007 to pursue an international legal education, Aynel worked as a legal advisor at the Cuban Ministry of Foreign Affairs where he provided advice on multilateral and bilateral legal issues. He focused on work involving sovereign immunity and the status of state-owned enterprises in international litigation and arbitration. A member of the Firm’s Latin America Practice Group, Aynel is also part of the Firm’s Cuba Initiative to assist clients in transactions and matters related to Cuba.

Jorge Angulo Valdés (Panelist)

Jorge Alberto Angulo Valdés is a full time Professor at the University of Havana’s Center for Marine Research (CIM) and a Visiting Research Scholar at the University of Florida’s School of Natural Resources and Environment (SNRE). He was the Director of the Center for Marine Research at the University of Havana and Director of the International Ocean Institute Operational Center in Cuba. Currently he chairs the Marine Conservation Group at CIM. His research interests include marine management effectiveness of marine protected areas, ecology of reef fish, ecology of manatees and sharks, natural resources conservation and bio economics. He has published over 30 papers and several book chapters dealing with his research areas. He has led several research projects funded by international agencies such as the International Development Research Institute, Canada; the Whitley Fund for Nature, England; and the Sea to Shore Alliance, USA.

Miguel Coyula (Keynote Speaker)

Miguel Coyula is an architect, urban planner, professor at the University of Havana, and international lecturer. Coyula is a graduate of the architectural program of the Higher Polytechnic Institute in Havana and has chronicled Cuban architecture since the Colonial Era. From 1971 until 1990, Coyula worked at the Cuban Ministry of Construction, first as a researcher and later as a specialist in the department of International Relations. From 1990 until his retirement in 2012, he worked at the Group for Integrated Development of the Capital (GDIC), the leading government think tank that advises the Havana government on issues of urban development. Since 2001, Coyula has lectured at over 20 universities and research institutions throughout Latin America, the US and Europe, and served as a visiting professor at the Metropolitan Autonomous University in Mexico City. He serves as a consultant to Cubasolar, an NGO promoting the use of renewable energy and is a member of the Union of Writers and Artists in Cuba (UNEAC).

Dilip Da Cunha (Panelist)

Dilip Da Cunha is an architect and planner, Adjunct Professor at the School of Design, University of Pennsylvania, and a Lecturer at the Harvard Graduate School of Design. In collaboration with his partner Anuradha Mathur he is author of several books. Most recently they have co-edited a book entitled Design in the Terrai. An underlying thread in Mathur and da Cunha’s work is a concern for how water is visualized and engaged in ways that lead to conditions of its excess and scarcity, but also the opportunities that its fluidity offers for new visualizations of terrain, design imagination, and design practice. They are currently working on a project provisionally titled The Invention of Rivers. It stems from questioning the natural status given to rivers and the imaging and imagining that this assumption has inspired. Far from being natural entities, they argue that rivers are products of a cultivated eye that privilege water at one moment in the hydrological cycle when it appears containable and controllable. Through the alternative of a rain terrain – the appreciation of water everywhere before it is somewhere, they are researching an alternate ground for design and planning.
Panelists

Alejandro Echeverri Restrepo (Panelist)

Alejandro Echeverri Restrepo is a Colombian architect born in Medellin who believes in the ethical responsibility of designers to contribute to a better society. His focus has been on emergent territories characterized by informality, exclusion, inequity and instability. He has led multidisciplinary teams in architectural or urban projects that become the backbone for social and territorial development of a flexible and holistic ecosystem. To this end he has built connections with government, civic institutions and communities. The hallmark of his work is innovation and creativity, with design as a constant learning process. Since 2010, he has been the founder and director of URBAM, the Center for Urban and Environmental Studies of EAFIT University. URBAM delves into the urban, environmental and social issues of developing countries, particularly those with weak political and institutional structures.

Belmont Freeman (Panelist)

Belmont Freeman, FAIA, is principal of Belmont Freeman Architects, an award-winning design firm in New York City that he founded in 1986, and earned his Bachelors of Arts from Yale University and his Masters of Architecture from the University of Pennsylvania, Graduate School of Fine Arts. Belmont is an adjunct associate professor at Columbia University’s Graduate School of Architecture, Planning and Preservation. From 1997 to 2008, he was the President of Storefront for Art & Architecture, a not-for-profit design gallery in New York City. He has served on the Board of Governors of the Association of Yale Alumni and the Board of Directors of the Society of Architectural Historians.

An American of Cuban descent, Belmont has done extensive research, writing and lecturing on the subject of Cuban architecture and has led many architectural tours of Cuba. In 2004 he co-produced, at Storefront for Art and Architecture, the landmark exhibition “Architecture and Revolution in Cuba, 1959-1969,” which examined the avant-garde design produced in Cuba during the first, heroic phase of the revolution.

Gabriel Fuentes (Panelist)

Gabriel Fuentes is founder and director of DA|S Design Action Studio for Research, Architecture + Urbanism, as an Assistant Professor at Marywood University's School of Architecture. He earned graduate degrees in both architecture (Florida International University) and urban design (Columbia University), and he has a graduate certificate in architectural history, theory and criticism from FIU. As a designer, writer, and educator his work has been widely recognized. He has presented his research both nationally and internationally, including at the 2011 Cuba Futures Conference. He has published a book chapter on Cuban Modern Architecture.

Adolfo Garcia (Panelist)

Adolfo Garcia is a Partner at Brown Rudnick, and focuses his practice in the corporate and international areas. He has extensive experience handling various corporate and business transactions including financings, private equity, securities, mergers and acquisitions, joint ventures, investments, restructurings and contractual arrangements in the U.S., as well as most other parts of the world. Dolf also represents non-U.S.-based clients with their U.S.-based and/or U.S. law governed matters. Dolf has spent a substantial portion of his 41 years of practice dealing with various types of situations involving international business in countries other than the U.S. Dolf has an intimate understanding of matters involving Cuba-U.S. relations. His personal experience as a Cuban exile at the age of 12, coupled with a strong understanding of U.S. laws and regulations regarding Cuba, positions Dolf well to advise U.S. and non-U.S. companies in matters involving Cuba as Cuba and the U.S. enter into a new era regarding relations with each other.
Panelists

Dr. David Guggenheim (Panelist)

Dr. David E. Guggenheim is a marine scientist, conservation policy specialist, submarine pilot, ocean explorer and educator. He is president and founder of the Washington, DC-based nonprofit organization, Ocean Doctor. He directs Cuba Conservancy — an Ocean Doctor Program, and is in his 15th year leading research and conservation in Cuba focused on coral reefs and sea turtles, a joint effort with the University of Havana. David led the formation of the Trinational Initiative for Marine Science & Conservation in the Gulf of Mexico & Western Caribbean, a major project to elevate collaboration in marine science and conservation among Cuba, Mexico and the US. He holds a Ph.D. in Environmental Science and Public Policy from George Mason University, a Master’s in Aquatic and Population Biology from University of California, Santa Barbara, and a Master’s in Regional Science from the University of Pennsylvania.

Joseph L. Scarpaci (Panelist)

Joseph L. Scarpaci (Ph.D., Florida) is Executive Director of the Center for the Study of Cuban Culture + Economy. He is Emeritus Professor at Virginia Tech where he taught urban planning, Latin American Studies, health and social policy, international development, and marketing. During his 76 trips to Cuba, he has introduced over 800 Americans to the island, including students on 15 study-abroad trips. His current research examines consumer behavior and iconic branding in socialist countries in Latin America and Scandinavia, and was funded by Aarhus University COFUND-Madame Marie Curie Senior Fellowship, European Union.

David Smith (Panelist)

David Smith is the founder and CEO of the Affordable Housing Institute, which develops sustainable housing financial ecosystems worldwide. With more than 30 years’ direct experience in affordable housing, David uniquely combines the roles of practitioner and theoretician, participant and policymaker. His work as an international housing finance policy advisor / program developer encompasses projects in Brazil, Colombia, Egypt, India, Ireland, Kenya, Middle East, Panama, Sri Lanka, South Africa, Turkey, and United Kingdom, and he is a much sought-after speaker on affordable housing issues around the world. A 1975 Harvard graduate, he is an award-winning author with more than 200 published articles in real estate, valuation, and policy periodicals, and a textbook, as well as an influential blog. David is also founder and Chairman of Recap Real Estate Advisors (formerly CASFAS, and before that, Recap Advisors), a Boston-based firm that specializes in complex multifamily asset problems, with an active practice area in the finance of existing affordable housing.
Organizers

Sandra Bonito (Organizer)

Sandra Bonito is a Master of Architecture I candidate at Harvard’s Graduate School of Design. She was born and raised in Cuba and arrived in the U.S. at the age of twenty. Prior to joining the GSD, Sandra worked for Marvel Architects in New York City and Ram-Tech Construction in Miami, Florida. Her interests are in public space, New Urbanism, Latin American Architecture and Urban Planning. Sandra completed an Associate in Arts in Architecture from Miami Dade College receiving the Best Architecture Student of the Year Award in 2009. She graduated with the Highest Honors with Distinction. Sandra completed a Bachelors of Arts in Architecture at Columbia University graduating Suma Cum Laude with Departmental Honors. During her undergraduate education, Sandra has examined, through both design and research, the built future of Havana and aims to continue exploring its horizons. Sandra is a scholar of the Mas Family Scholarship, an initiative of the Jorge Mas Canosa Freedom Foundation, whose purpose is “to advance the education of talented young Cuban and Cuban American men and women” and promote the ideals of freedom and democracy.

Anya Brickman Raredon (Moderator and Organizer)

Anya Brickman Raredon’s interest in how physical space reflects and informs social discourse has developed from her studies in urban planning, architecture, anthropology and dance. As Principal at the Affordable Housing Institute, Anya leads AHI’s work in the formalization and redevelopment of informal settlements and post-disaster urban areas. Anya has directed projects in Ulanbaatar, Mongolia; Port-au-Prince, Haiti; and Sub-Saharan Africa, as well as AHI’s research initiatives on Instant Cities and housing in Cuba. Since January of 2010 she has worked on the development of community-based reconstruction and development strategies for Port au Prince, through partnerships with the MIT Center for Advanced Urbanism, MIT Community Innovators Lab (CoLab), Harvard Graduate School of Design and Oxfam America. Anya received a Masters in City Planning from MIT in 2011, and her thesis “Opportunity in Haiti: Women as Agents of Resilience” was published in the online Gender and Disaster Sourcebook. She received her B.A. from Yale in 2004 with Honors in Architecture.

Dave Hampton (Moderator and Organizer)

Dave Hampton is a Master of Design Studies (MDes) candidate in the Risk and Resilience concentration at Harvard’s Graduate School of Design. Prior to beginning the MDes program, Dave established re:ground llc, a consultancy providing expertise for the integration of natural systems and built environments to clients in international development, urban, and post-disaster contexts. A practicing architect for 20 years, Dave’s experience includes living systems (green roofs, vertical gardens), energy-efficiency, and building deconstruction and resource conservation advocacy with Urban Habitat Chicago and the Delta Institute. From 2010-2013, he worked with Architecture for Humanity, J/P Haitian Relief Organization, UN-Habitat, and Internews to help manage the transition from emergency response to neighborhood redevelopment in Port-au-Prince, Haiti. His research interests are pathways to resilience through constructed/restored ecologies, and urban coastal climate change adaptation, especially in post-colonial contexts. Currently, he is investigating Cuba as a basis for questioning the status quo of international development strategy and designing a future strategy based around inclusive, cohesive, and productive landscapes.

Ali Karimi (Organizer)

Ali Karimi is a Bahraini Masters in Architecture student at the Harvard Graduate School of Design. His interests are in social housing, public space, and infrastructural re-imaginings of the Gulf. Prior to joining the GSD, Ali worked in Dubai with HOK, in Chile with Elemental, and attained regional experience in public and private projects through his time in Bahrain with Gulf House Engineering. Ali completed his Bachelors of Science in Architecture at Georgia Institute of Technology (2011) graduating with highest honors, with minors in Architectural History, History, and a certificate in Land Development. During summer 2015, Ali conducted field research in Havana on social housing and how residents have modified their homes over time.

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