



# Havana Harbour Charrette

## Summary report by Julio César Pérez Hernández

### Introduction:

The Havana Harbour Charrette took place between March 4<sup>th</sup> and March 10<sup>th</sup> in Old Havana, Cuba with the participation of people from Canada, Cuba, Europe and United States of America.

In the evening of March 4<sup>th</sup> The Havana Harbour Charrette was introduced by Audun Engh, board member of C.E.U. - Council for European Urbanism - and started with a reception at the Condes de Villanueva hotel in Old Havana where The Cuban Chapter of C.E.U. - Council for European Urbanism - was successfully launched. The British Council Secretary of Science and Culture attended the reception together with the both the Cuban and the foreign participants.

The revitalization of the Havana waterfront is one of the key concepts stated in **A Master Plan for XXI century Havana** (1) and the Harbour Sector is one of the sectors defined in it.

C.E.U. became aware of the Master Plan for XXI century Havana since 2004 when it was presented at the IV Bologna Triennale by its author Prof. Arch. Julio César Pérez Hernández, but the Charrette idea was firstly conceived by Audun Engh and Julio César Pérez in 2005 at the C.E.U. Congress in Berlin and later followed up through 2006 and publicly announced at the Venice Charter Revisited international conference held in Venice, Italy and at the Sustainable Urbanism international conference held in Leeds, England also in 2006.

The Norwegian Chapter of C.E.U, represented by Claus Zapffe and Audun Engh, played a key role in the advertising and the back up of the Charrette from outside of Cuba and together with Julio César Pérez Hernández invited a number of prestigious professionals from all over the world to make this joint effort worth while.

*(1) **A Master Plan for XXI century Havana** is a comprehensive urban project conceived and developed by Prof. Arch. Julio César Pérez Hernández and his team.*

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## **Development:**

The Havana Harbour Charrette was developed according to the schedule prepared, proposed and submitted in advance by Julio César Pérez

### **Day 1. Monday, March 5th:**

Prof. Arch. Orestes del Castillo- from the Office of the Historian of Old Havana and the Heritage, Community and Environment NGO- offered a detailed explanation of Old Havana and its historic background and current social programs by a scale model of the city on its first day.

A walking tour and a boat tour of the site was led by Prof. Arch. Julio César Pérez Hernández, who also gave a lecture about **A Master Plan for XXI century Havana.**

US architect Michael Mehaffy gave a lecture about his experience at the Katrina Charrette held in New Orleans and Cuban architect Roberto Moro- from the Physical Planning Department of Havana- was invited to share the department's information about the harbour site and its features.

Working teams were encouraged to be formed based on both affinity and expertise to start working in the different sectors of the harbour site related to the plan mentioned above. There were six teams in total, five of them concerning each of the sectors and an overseeing one led by Julio, Michael Mehaffy, Audun Engh and Claus Zapffe in charge of developing and explaining the overall concepts and general strategy for the project.

The five Sectors that were considered according to the site's vocation and landscape features were the following:

1. Old Havana Sector
2. Atarés Sector
3. Regla Sector
4. Oil Refinery Sector
5. Casablanca Sector

Prof. Arch. Julio César Pérez Hernández stated the following overall concepts for guiding the initial work which started on the second day in preparation for the first public presentation the next day:

1. A Spine boulevard. The creation of a boulevard spine accessible to all along the waterfront to ensure public space for backing up this general concept of the Master Plan for Havana. Plazas, squares, parks and a variety of promenades should be allowed to be part of this by framing views to the water and connecting adjacent streets.
2. Mix use. The design of mix use buildings to guarantee the vitality of the area at different times. Residential, cultural, commercial, office, hotel, entertainment and sports and leisure facilities are key uses to provide amenities able to redefine and give character to the site.
3. Change of character. The transformation of the current industrial character of the harbour and its turning into a recreational, commercial and sport harbour.
4. New buildings respond to waterfront. The design of buildings that respond to the waterfront. The buildings must be a sensitive response to the place in terms of context, history, geography and building culture in a way that they become urban architecture and help place making and not be isolated objects.
5. Open space must add value to both the waterfront and the city and must be defined by buildings that form a continuous urban edge with active ground floors uses related to them.
6. Gate to the city. The harbour site must become a gate to the city reinforcing this historic condition and giving Havana a new image in terms of both economy and urban values.
7. Green. The green must help weave visually and physically the whole area so it helps create a coherent landscape where architecture fits harmoniously.
8. Public transportation. A public transportation system must be envisioned to connect the whole site and to provide access to all areas.
9. Safe environment. Pollution must be eliminated as part of the sanitation of the bay and the rivers.
10. Social and cultural integration. The city, the towns, the neighbourhoods must guarantee that there's no social exclusion for any reasons and should provide access to cultural life and all its manifestations.
11. A long term vision. As everything is connected with everything else, then the approach should be a comprehensive one, that which allows conceiving all the issues as a whole with a systemic approach coming from the general to the particular, zooming in processes, places, etc.

## **Day 2. Tuesday, March 6th:**

A coordinator was selected for each team and a meeting with all of them was held in order to agree on the presentation to take place early in the morning of the third day.

Old Havana Sector. Coordinator Arch. Robert Allsop.

Team: Joel Estévez, Caroline Lwin, Jane Bryant, Ole Jan Skogen, Audun Engh.

Atarés Sector. Coordinator Arch. Juan Carlos Toledo.

Team: Andrés Escobar, Benedikte Landsnes, Ulrik Hegnar, Milvia Céspedes

Regla Sector. Coordinator Arch. Alex Taranu.

Team: Carmen Taranu, Alexis de la Cruz. Ismet Esgin, Yanei García

Oil Refinery Sector. Coordinator Arch. John Pilling.

Team: Guillermo Fuentes, R. Suha, Amanda Belle, Svein Rasmussen, Birgit Skargen

Casablanca Sector. Coordinator Adrian Lee.

Team: Charlotte Brandon- Jones, Esteban Martínez, Camilla, Adrián Fernández. Lourdes Milanés

The different teams started to work intensely at the Hotel Condes de Villanueva, in Old Havana in order to present the first ideas the next day. Several people wanted to come back to the site for more précised judgments and for taking measures although a complete set of scale plans and aerial pictures was provided. As Michael Mehaffy arrived after the tour Julio César took him across the bay in the afternoon to see the fortresses of El Morro and La Cabaña and the Casablanca area and showed him around some of the Old Havana squares and most important streets and buildings. After returning to the venue Audun Engh, Claus Zapffe, Michael Mehaffy and Julio César Pérez Hernández had a meeting with the coordinators to speak about the next day's presentation.

## **Day 3. Wednesday, March 7th:**

Prof. Arch. Julio César Pérez Hernandez introduced the presentation and Michael Mehaffy was asked to work as time keeper.

Several other statements were proposed to be added to the initial ones, such as:

- Connectivity
- Deliverance
- Time frame
- Governance
- Energy efficiency
- Realism

Resilience  
Longevity

The coordinators presented each team's work which was discussed by the audience and enriched by the critics, comments and suggestions, so the first public presentation took place in an orderly manner and several criteria about the work were exchanged along the morning.

The presentations were conducted in both languages English and Spanish. The coordinator of each team conducted the presentation of the work and several common issues arose:

Pollution  
Lack of housing  
Lack of views to the water  
Lack of transportation  
Lack of open space  
Lack of connectivity  
Increasing traffic  
Lack of waterside activity  
Lack of green  
Lack of small hotels  
Conflict between road and rails  
Brownfields  
Parking nearby water edge

At the same time teams identified opportunities like:

Economic development  
Local heritage  
Social and cultural integration  
Increase housing  
New landscapes  
Cultural tourism  
Views to bay and harbour  
Waterside activity and water- based activity (leisure, boating)  
Connected public space (nodes, roads, paths)  
Increase Green space/ more trees  
Marinas  
Maritime museum  
Historic ships  
Pedestrian links  
Navigation school  
Cultural centre  
Open air cafes  
Sports complex  
Increase Access to road  
Soil regeneration

**The Old Havana Sector** was presented by Arch. Robert Allsopp, a Canadian landscape architect who also attended an international conference on landscape architecture that was held in Havana the week before the Charrette.

The work focused on the creation of public space along the water edge following the concept of the spine boulevard and the getting rid of the many industrial facilities located on the piers and along the waterfront that are currently blocking the views to the bay. It also dealt with the redefining of the streets sections, the increase of green space and the creation of new and varied streetscapes.

There was also common ground on the opening of the ground floor arcades of the elongated façade of the Customs House building to provide views to the water. They also agreed upon the planting of trees on both sides of the Harbour Avenue, reaching the area of the Alameda de Paula and beyond. There was a long discussion about the issue of the presence of the National Railroad Station and the enormous and valuable prime real estate area that it currently occupies, its potential for transformation and the need of considering the relocation of the railroad yard though keeping the building- originally designed by US architect Kenneth H. Murchison in 1912- and some facilities. There were also some considerations regarding the conversion of the XIX century Almacenes San José- with a Belgian steel structure- for a cultural and residential use.

**The Atarés Sector** was presented by Arch. Juan Carlos Toledo, a young Cuban architect currently working at the National Physical Planning Institute. He was a former student of Prof. Arch. Julio César Pérez Hernández and he is now a member of his team.

This team's work focused on the continuity of the spine boulevard- that was agreed upon as a general concept- for the creation of public space along the water edge and got advantage of the derelict industrial facilities located on the piers to propose a whole new grid oriented to the sea with a pedestrian system of squares inspired in the nearby Old Havana system of squares but linked with tree lined avenues and streets like in El Vedado district, also in Havana. Mixed- use buildings will be located on this grid that gets advantage of its privileged location overlooking most of the bay area, Old Havana and Casablanca. Abundant open space is provided also with the insertion of parks whose green is weaved with the green area proposed to protect the adjacent Luyanó river banks as a buffer zone for recreation and leisure facilities. The Atarés Castle should be converted into a museum and the surrounding green area into a park to be integrated with the whole system of green.

**The Regla Sector** was presented by Arch. Alex Taranu. Alex is based in Toronto, Canada and he's involved with many professional institutions.

Alex and his team focused on the role and place of the Inner Harbour in the redevelopment of Havana as it is located centrally in the city and was the basis of the

city's development in colonial times. They developed a concept plan according to the potential of the water body, the presence of local heritage, its high visibility and exposure considering it as the city's "living room" and playground, as a major residential, mixed use and recreational redevelopment site, with exceptional tourist and heritage attributes. They submitted a detailed study of the whole sector and considered that the new Regla should build its identity on the existing heritage and more traditional forms resulting in a place with a strong local character inspired by Cuban, Caribbean and Mediterranean traditions.

**The Oil Refinery Sector** was presented by Arch. John Pilling. John is a US architect based in Cambridge and Boston where he teaches at the Boston Architecture Center. He has successfully conducted several parallel Studios with Prof. Arch. Julio César Pérez from 2003- 2005.

John and his team considered the existing Oil Refinery area is a very large area and the most significant source of pollution of the harbour for it will require important efforts and funds. As it offers extreme challenges for cleanup and remediation but due to its larger site and gentle slope towards the water and old city could offer excellent redevelopment opportunities. Providing that all facilities of this kind in major cities around the globe have been relocated far away from residential areas and to sites with easier access, it is also possible to do this in Cuba. The group assumed the future relocation of the refinery and proposed a staged approach for environmental remediation including stopping industrial activity that will allow the elimination of air pollution from this source and will allow starting the water cleanup of the bay in conjunction with changes in the commercial port activities while for the soil and underground water pollution detailed studies will be required. The removal of the most heavily polluted soil, re-planting, the use of vegetation for cleanup and the reuse of the less polluted lands north of the rail line were also part of the strategy.

They discussed connectivity and the need to increase it and in this regard they identified Vía Blanca on a natural ridge with excellent exposure and the opportunity related to access and potential for a major city transit route.

The group concluded that environmental remediation and sustainable, locally based economy; development promoting sustainable social relationships including affordable housing, access to public facilities and spaces, accessibility for all ages and groups, public participation and direct involvement were among the issues this team faced.

**The Casablanca Sector** was presented by Adrian Lee who is Programme Director for Housing Regeneration representing Shoreditch Trust, a UK Government funded program.

The Casablanca group proposal presented three alternatives based on a sensitive development for the site's topography so that the geography is respected and the proposal takes into account the presence of the existing landmarks- the 1630 Morro Castle, the 1774 La Cabaña fortress, the 1958 Jesus Christ's marble statue

overlooking the harbour and its square- and the urban features of the town. The team considered that Casablanca presented a distinctive face to all Havana from across the harbour, crystallizing the preservation of tradition as a living working form alongside modern urbanization that connects naturally with both the existing city and the surroundings. Adrian Lee submitted a very exhaustive analysis called "Regeneration as an economic premise: Proposals for the urban economy and regeneration of the harbour as it relates to the greater metropolitan area of Havana and the Master Plan for a XXI Century Havana" which is a very comprehensive, thoughtful and valuable document whose statements reach not only the urban but the social and economic realms as regeneration proposes the significant transformation of a place where people live providing that it will change progressively, with a dramatic impact over time and that newer communities will take shape around and within older incumbent communities within sustainable principles aimed at revitalizing the economic life of the city to offer genuine opportunity to the citizens to make a good living and a healthy fulfilling life, both material and spiritual. Cuban architect Esteban Martínez emphasized the urban and landscape concepts that the team agreed upon to be further developed.

Audun Engh and Claus Zapffe documented the whole process to keep records of every development of the work and at the end of this presentation Julio César Pérez insisted on the need to consider both a physical and visual link among the different sectors and suggested to use the green for that purpose in a way that continuity was achieved and encouraged the different teams to exchange in order to learn from each other. He also asked for strengthening team work and demanded that the different alternatives that were presented were rationalized.

This session adjourned by lunch time with the agreement upon the need to going back to the site of the different sectors and spending some time there to do field work and keep on working after it.

## **Day 4. Thursday, March 8th:**

Julio César Pérez asked for a rearrangement of teams in order to balance people skills and integrate concepts that were alike. This way the merging of two of the teams was agreed upon - Regla and Oil refinery area by Regla- and Old Havana and Atarés- to gain productivity and a better understanding of the site.

Old Havana and Atarés Sector  
Regla and Oil refinery Sector  
Casablanca Sector

Norwegian architect Ole Jan Skogen introduced the issue of having cruise ships on the harbour as both an economic asset and a tourist attraction which provoked a big debate about the convenience of this to the harbour and its impact on the bay. The discussion focused not only on the size of the cruise ships but also in the manoeuvres needed and

the available area which was solved by assuring that recent cruise ship activity had taken place until recently.

After intense sessions in both morning and afternoon, an evening reception kindly offered by the Royal Norwegian Embassy in Havana at the residence followed.

### **Day 5. Friday, March 9th:**

All teams spent the whole day involved in the elaboration of the drawings and documents in preparation for the final presentation. Norwegian architect Ole Jan Skogen shared accurate information about cruise ships that he obtained by consulting a Norwegian company so that this controversial issue could be approached from accurate data. Work continued in the evening till late night at Cuban architect's homes.

### **Day 6. Saturday, March 9th:**

The final presentation took place after hanging on the walls all drawings and documents that were produced showing a big increase not only in the amount of work but above all in the refinement and quality of it.

The presentation started with a power point presentation by Julio César Pérez as a summary of the whole process and then each team's presentations followed.

**The Old Havana and Atarés Sector** was presented by Joel Estévez as Robert Allsopp left early the day before and Ole Jan Skogen presented a proposal based on cruise ships activities. The work showed an enormous improvement from the previous presentation in terms of the quality of urban design ideas that were consistent with the previous work but much more defined and refined. The public space strip along the water edge linked both Old Havana and Atarés and continued to meet Regla with due organic transitions based on geographic features like the Luyanó River. New and varied streetscapes encompassed promenades, walkways, plazas and parks and provided both continuous physical and visual link and changing perspectives to the different areas now freed from the former visually disturbing warehouses and other industrial artefacts, providing views and access to the water and to the rest of the bay surroundings.

A new image of the street across the Custom House building highlights the building itself while making the street more pedestrian friendly with trees and lighting fixtures that introduce a nicer scale. There was an agreement about keeping the National Railroad Station but relocating its yard to use this area for new parks and housing facilities oriented to the bay in tune with the urban concept used to redevelop the Atarés area which continued the spine boulevard along the water edge and integrated to the new neighbourhood proposed on the former site of a container's zone. The pedestrian

system of squares and the park system was refined to become more consistent with the green concept that informs the whole project and achieved a better matching with the new Regla neighbourhood.

**The Regla and Oil refinery Sector** was presented by architects Alex Taranu and John Pilling who showed the enormous amount of work that their team carried out which encompassed not only a lot of drawings but also documents ranging from development guidelines to urban codes which illustrated a strategy for the entire area as well as for individual components once the heavy industrial uses are removed and the area can be redeveloped. They stated that within the Inner Harbour, the Regla and Oil refinery Sector could play a significant role, integrating heritage areas, restoring environmental areas, regenerating existing residential areas and redeveloping industrial sites.

The Vision for this area is to create complete, balanced, transit-oriented, walkable new communities and places, with a strong character and identity, based on the principles of sustainable development. The Concept Plan that was developed outlines the major physical elements including the main functional and character areas, neighborhoods, centres, nodes and corridors, main transportation routes, linkages, a complex Open Space system and the various redevelopment strategies. The entire redevelopment will be focused on creating a very livable environment, a complete connection to the water including easy pedestrian access and water views, a character based on local traditions and respectful for the context. Furthermore detailed urban concepts have been outlined for the key areas: Old Regla, West Regla, East Regla, Refinery site, etc.

These concepts identify the plan elements, block layouts, proposed built forms and public spaces, main character elements, landmarks, streetscape and place-making elements. It was confirmed that the area around Regla will build their identity on the existing heritage and traditional forms. Both will complement the Inner Harbour, heritage areas with low and mid rise forms resulting in a place with a strong local character inspired by Cuban, Caribbean and Mediterranean traditions.

As the Regla spit advances in the middle of the harbour it has the potential for a great landmark location given its privileged location with views to Old Havana and Casablanca, the fortresses, the entrance of the harbour, all the bay area and the sea beyond as well. Thus a plaza with a monument with marine attributes was devised by artist Alain Pino who was invited to join the team.

Both borders of this huge area were solved accordingly and organically by reinforcing the forest character of the existing ecological reserve between Casablanca and the oil refinery area to the North East and by providing a subtle meeting of both grids with a park system to the West where the new Atarés neighbourhood grid is while connectivity was assured by a new avenue and the incorporation of Vía Blanca to the street network as a major transit way and therefore becoming a transit oriented development.

Cleanup and remediation would take place after the relocation of the refinery and a proposal with a staged approach for environmental remediation will help eliminate pollution and allow for changes in the harbour character as well.

The Concept Plan and proposed typologies implement the principles of sustainable development at all scales of the plan including specific responses to local climate and conditions, use of a mix of low technology, traditional methods and new technologies.

A set of implementation measures is proposed including a strategy for redeveloping “seed projects” at key locations, the completion of the Master Plan, consultation and a variety of economic development measures.

A set of implementation measures was proposed including a strategy for redeveloping “seed projects” at key locations, the completion of the Master Plan, consultation and a variety of economic development measures in order to facilitate the main phases of the redevelopment.

**The Casablanca Sector** proposal was presented by Adrian Lee and Charlotte Brandon-Jones.

As Charlotte Brandon- Jones explained, Casablanca offers a unique opportunity for infill development looking at Old Havana and Regla and also overlooking the whole inner harbour area. The spine boulevard on the water edge encompassing a pedestrian promenade with varied streetscapes provides public access to the whole bay area.

In this regard the Master Plan considered that it was important to emphasize the topographical condition of the site and use the green to link different zones while framing views to the water. The terraced slope allows for a low density urbanism where buildings define streets and squares at different levels while the upper plateau allows for a loose grid pattern development of low to medium density community with mixed- use buildings and large green areas as buffer zones separating the fortresses area and the Monumental Avenue from the new neighborhoods and with buildings interspersed within the landscape for they will be also seen from Old Havana. The buildings located on the plateau would enjoy magnificent views of Old Havana, the harbour, Regla and Atarés. Adrian Lee’s refined document validated the economic potential of Casablanca being applied to the regeneration of the greater metropolitan area of Havana as principles for a transitional development related to key physical built manifestations of the new Casablanca economy to achieve social and cultural integration. The document also considers the importance of the relationship over time between existing development patterns and the vision for the completed urban form though in the transition stage, the current pattern of development in some places should be retained, but subject to a modern standard of regulation, whilst the area as a whole becomes a different kind of urban place. It identifies some relevant issues that are critical for the implementation of the plan:

Infrastructure  
Housing  
Communal Space  
Public Space  
Amenities  
Social Facilities  
Health  
Education  
Commerce  
Cultural  
Religion  
Administrative

The proposal includes open air cafes and restaurants, a centre for regenerative technologies, a performing art center and cultural facilities, a distributed business school, theatres and museums and a leisure park. Finally, Adrian Lee's document calls for a learning partnership activating all the energies of the people who will live and work, design, deliver and decide for the future of Havana; open to new ideas and welcoming the world to contribute its many unique talents and insights to the enterprise.

## **Conclusions**

1. The Havana Harbour Charrette was successful in achieving a high quality work and incorporating all the many ideas discussed along the first days and later refined along the Charrette.
2. A great sense of fulfillment was prevalent among the participants as well as pride for the job that was developed by the different teams.
3. A feeling of solidarity and comradely shared work prevailed above any individual manifestation showing that team work is far superior to any individual endeavor.
4. The participants were extremely happy about the results and its contribution to the regeneration of the Havana harbour.
5. The principles applied to the regeneration of the Havana harbour can be applied to the rest of the city.
6. The Cuban and Norwegian CEU chapters were able to work together reaching common ground about the importance of preserving the values of the city of Havana and at the same time creating both economic and urban values for its future and for its citizens.

7. The concept of the spine boulevard and the green buffer allow for the possibility of dealing with natural disasters like hurricanes and flooding due to climate change in the near future.

8. The concern about the sanitation of the bay and the rivers is to be considered of the highest priority to eliminate the heavy pollution of the area and give way to the redevelopment project of the area.

9. The willingness to learn, adapt, exchange statements, a proposed ethic and attitude for all people involved in the partnership to deliver the vision for Havana turns the city into a strong client.

10. The Charrette concluded with the belief that this area could become a great asset in Havana's redevelopment, its living room and playground and one of the great places in the world.

### ***Havana, March 2007***

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Havana Harbour Charette web site: [www.moderno.no/cuba](http://www.moderno.no/cuba)

C.E.U. Council for European Urbanism web site: [www.ceunet.org](http://www.ceunet.org)