

## Redevelopment in Old Havana: The Master Plan and Achieving Equitable Resilience

### Remodelación en la Habana Vieja: El Plan Maestro para lograr una resiliencia equitativa

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**ABSTRACT:** Old Havana has faced daunting economic, social, and political challenges, including most recently during the Special Period of the 1990s. These challenges have included addressing the needs of vulnerable populations, the precarity of the building stock, and sustainable economic development concerns, while maintaining a commitment to historic preservation and the Cuban political project. We argue that the Master Plan of the Office of the Historian of the City of Havana was designed to address acute threats and lead to resilience in what may be considered a gold standard for redevelopment efforts. This paper presents Old Havana's socioeconomic context and assesses its ability, through the Master Plan, to achieve equitable resilience. We argue that the successes of the Master Plan have led to new challenges and that renewed strategies are needed to support ongoing equitable resilience.

**KEYWORDS:** equitable resilience; Old Havana; Master Plan; Office of the Historian of the City of Havana.

**RESUMEN:** La Habana Vieja ha enfrentado enormes desafíos económicos, sociales y políticos, incluido el más reciente durante el Período Especial de la década de los 1990s. Estos desafíos han incluido abordar las necesidades de las poblaciones vulnerables, la precariedad de los edificios y las preocupaciones del desarrollo económico sostenible, al tiempo que se mantiene un compromiso con la preservación histórica y el proyecto político cubano. Argumentamos que el Plan Maestro de la Oficina del Historiador de la Ciudad de La Habana fue diseñado para abordar amenazas agudas y conducir a la resiliencia en lo que puede considerarse un estándar de oro para los esfuerzos de reurbanización. Este artículo presenta el contexto socioeconómico de La Habana Vieja y evalúa su capacidad, a través del Plan Maestro, para lograr una resiliencia equitativa. Argumentamos que los éxitos del Plan Maestro han llevado a nuevos desafíos y que se necesitan estrategias renovadas para apoyar la resiliencia equitativa.

**PALABRAS CLAVE:** resiliencia equitativa, Habana Vieja, Plan Maestro, Oficina del Historiador de la Ciudad de la Habana.

«Cubans are a resilient people». This is a refrain you often hear from Cubans who have lived through decades of change, particularly since the Special Period following the collapse of the Soviet Union and in light of the ongoing challenges posed by the United States' embargo. With increasing openness to foreign trade and tourism, Cuba is now in the midst of a new period of questioning the future of economic policy and the political regime. In this context, the City of Havana lies at the center of the negotiation between preserving the legacy of the 1959 revolution and a future in which Cuba must find its place in the global economy. Cubans, again, are faced with the task of navigating new challenges, drawing on the powers of resilience gained over a lifetime of uncertainty.

Managing this balance between economic change and cultural preservation, for over two decades Havana's Office of the Historian of the City of Havana (OHCH) has directed a process of rehabilitation in the historic center of Old Havana through its Master Plan. Like many colonial city centers in Latin America, Old Havana contains historic churches, wide plazas, and ornate architecture. But, unlike many others, Old Havana also contains a dense and diverse population of residents, many of whom have lived in their apartments as designated by the state since at least 1959. The decades-long process of redevelopment, following great decay, has brought innumerable changes to the neighborhood in terms of economic opportunity and increasing tourism, but the Master Plan has also established social projects that aim to protect and improve the lives of existing residents.

The experience of Old Havana provides new evidence for the debate on how to elicit redevelopment without engendering the challenges that come from gentrification.

Understanding the best ways to implement redevelopment projects to protect and improve the lives of current residents is increasingly vital as cities across the Global South and North seek to maximize the use of space and economic opportunity for growing populations. In this paper, we argue that the concept of «resilience» encapsulates the goal of reinvigorating a community post-degradation or devastation to not only bounce back, but to thrive. The focus on resilience as the objective of redevelopment allows us to think holistically about how people are prepared for and experience change, and emphasizes the potential of communities for adaptability and transformation. Moreover, the goal of equitable resilience identifies the changes in governance, access to opportunities, and resources that should enable urban communities to thrive while minimizing the negative effects of gentrification, such as displacement and cultural marginalization. Further, the goal of equitable resilience seems particularly relevant in the case of Old Havana, where residents have long maximized their capacity to weather change within a socioeconomic contest that emphasizes equality of opportunity, wealth, and status.

Though the concept of resilience has most often been applied to post-disaster redevelopment, this paper seeks to apply the concept to the long-term urban redevelopment of one neighborhood in response to deterioration in infrastructure, housing, and government services. The designers of the redevelopment project in Old Havana were cognizant of the benefits and problems that might ensue for residents with increasing investment and change, and as such designed a Master Plan to prioritize cultural preservation and socioeconomic development while also encouraging tourism and private enterprise. As a center of foreign investment in the country, once long in decline, Old Havana would

seem poised for real estate speculation and displacement of current residents. The Office of the Historian, however, has endeavored from the beginning to prevent displacement and «Disneyfication» (Foglesong, 1999) of the neighborhood through slow, deliberate renovation. We argue that through the Master Plan, the Office of the Historian has pushed for equitable resilience in the city center, though we find clear threats to the community in maintaining and increasing equity in the long term.

In this paper we provide background on Old Havana and the Master Plan, review the theoretical concept of resilience, and provide an overview and assessment of the redevelopment of Old Havana in light of the resilience framework. Based on personal interviews, primary source documents, and relevant contemporary literature, we then review the goals of the redevelopment plan, its implementation, and the impact of change on the community. We find that the beginning state of relative equality in Old Havana makes it a unique case, and that the slow pace and strong, well-connected leadership of the Office of the Historian has served to prevent significant displacement and fear of change. New investment, particularly from tourism, and the risks of water shortages, natural disasters, and the continued embargo, however, have and will continue to stretch the limits of the community's capacity for resilience.

### **Background on Old Havana and the Master Plan**

In 2019, Havana celebrated the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of its settlement along the northern coast of Cuba. Soon after its founding, the port became a hub for transatlantic trade and commerce as the growth of the sugar industry led to the development and commercialization of the old city's center (Bailey, 2008; Chase, 2011).

Independence from Spain in 1898 and increasing relationships with U.S. corporations cemented Havana's role as a «playground» for American tourists in the late nineteenth into the twentieth century (Roland, 2010). With the triumph of the revolution in 1959, official policy sought to upend the elitism and cosmopolitan allure of the city: it attacked the city's corruption and sought to enhance the attraction of agrarian life by addressing the socioeconomic needs of the rural sector (Colantonio & Potter, 2006). Yet, as the country's capital, Havana hosted the administrative and political headquarters of national government and arguably remained the center of cultural and political life (Colantonio & Potter, 2006).

Although Havana has expanded well beyond its original center, Old Havana has maintained an allure due to its architectural richness and historical significance. Its 528-acre city center consists of 3,370 buildings, of which over 551 are considered to have «high heritage value» (OHCH, 2011). It is composed of two parts: an old city originally built within walls; and a contiguous segment constructed between the mid-nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (OHCH, 2011). The Bay of Havana Fortification System, physically located across the bay, also forms part of the city center. Unlike many other Latin American historic city centers, Old Havana is characterized by a significant residential presence. According to the Office of the Historian of the City of Havana (OHCH), its gross density is 259 inhabitants per hectare, or populations at the block level of between 100-1000 residents (OHCH, 2016).

Efforts to preserve the cultural heritage of Old Havana started over two decades prior to the revolution. Emilio Roig de Leuchsenring, Havana's first City Historian in the OHCH, was installed in 1935. The OHCH was created to protect and promote the cultural and historical

assets of the capital city (Castillo & Menéndez, 2014). Roig's work focused on preserving architecture and space, helping to facilitate the government's decision to designate Old Havana as a «protected zone» (Toft, 2011). Yet little sustained restoration or protection efforts immediately emerged.

When Roig's assistant, Eusebio Leal Spengler, was named City Historian in 1967, Leal faced a dire situation: buildings and spaces in Old Havana were rapidly deteriorating and residents increasingly perceived the area to be dangerously unsound. Leal's restoration of the Palacio de los Capitanes Generales triggered a partnership between the Cuban Ministry of Culture and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), helping to fund the establishment of the National Center of Conservation, Restoration, and Museology (Toft, 2011). Leal formed new partnerships with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), including the designation of Old Havana as a UNESCO World Heritage Convention site of international cultural value in 1982; this distinction drew international and domestic attention to his efforts. Yet Leal faced the challenges of a government sometimes more focused on building housing on the urban edges than in Old Havana (Foster, 2003). Moreover, the socioeconomic hardships of Cuba's Special Period challenged Leal as limited funds constrained the ability of the OHCH to restore crumbling buildings. Amidst widely-reported housing collapses in 1993, however, the government issued Special Law 143 to designate a Priority Zone for Conservation within Old Havana. This law also triggered the launch of the Master Plan for the Comprehensive Revitalization of Old Havana («Master Plan») the following year (OHCH, 2011).

The Master Plan (discussed further below) has been key to operationalizing a variety of the

OHCH's strategies: the foregrounding of social projects in its portfolio; advocacy for the consistent implementation of codes to protect historic buildings and spaces; relative independence from the Cuban administrative bureaucracy; creation of self-financing efforts; and careful planning for and implementation of rehabilitation projects that include participatory democracy mechanisms. The OHCH has received international praise for initiatives resulting in access to foreign currency that support cultural restoration and socioeconomic transformation (Matos, 2006; UNESCO, 2006). In fact, by 2006 UNESCO had declared that the work of the OHCH had «turned the Historical Centre into a place for living, walking, visiting, investing...a place in which heritage is preserved, people are respected, jobs are created, income is generated, squares and buildings are used and re-used» (Toft, 2011, p. 46).

In this paper, we argue that the Master Plan is a model to address acute threats and to cultivate equitable resilience (discussed below), a potential gold standard for redevelopment initiatives. Although the Master Plan has functioned as a compass and as a tool for residents in quickly changing times, however, new phenomenon—some brought about as a result of the Master Plan's goals and successes—threaten the future of equitable resilience in Old Havana.

### **Resilience and Urban Redevelopment**

As noted above, the concept of resilience has most often been applied to communities in the aftermath of natural disasters. Cities that are resilient, we would expect, are better prepared and therefore better able to recover post-disaster. As Welsh (2014, p. 15) argues, «Resilience is primarily conceived as the property that captures the capacity of the entity to anticipate, adapt to, and recover from the event such that it resumes

its original configuration, shape, functional relationships or trajectory afterwards». In this conception of resilience, individuals, communities, and eco-systems need to be prepared for adverse events to reduce the impact of external shocks on the status quo. Communities simply need to prepare for uncertainty as a matter of course and anticipate dangers to their economic, social, and political stability.

More recently, however, resilience has come to encapsulate not just the ability to bounce back, but the ability to transform and thrive after a shock to the system (Folke 2006). For instance, in the case of New Orleans after Katrina, Polese (2010) describes resilience as not only the ability to survive shocks, but the ability to change and even reverse previous decline. In other words, cities that are resilient not only rebuild, but in the process they also confront existing economic, social, and political challenges to emerge even stronger. The process of urban redevelopment, occurring after a natural disaster, economic crisis, or the influx of new capital, presents significant challenges to residents forced to readjust their lives. The possibility for disaster exists based on the conditions of risk and vulnerability, and residents need the capacity to adapt in order not only to survive, but to surmount real and perceived disadvantages (Brink & Wamsler 2018).

Beyond single external shocks, ongoing processes of change also require long-term adaptation and capacity for resilience. Chelleri et al (2015) argue that globalization has led to an increase in social differentiation, conflict, and greater inequality in the distribution of resources, and that local economies must be prepared with responses to external threats. Further, she argues that the experience of globalization requires «the empowerment of vulnerable groups so that they can manage the necessary transition and innovation for sustainability». Social cohesion is

vital to this process of collectively confronting centers of power.

As resilience has come to represent a new objective in development, akin to sustainability, scholars have pointed out that resilience alone is not a pro-poor concept; one can be very poor and unwell, but also very resilient (Bene et al, 2014; Brink & Wamsler 2018). To apply the concept of resilience to redevelopment, we need to recognize that planning requires judgment about which people and infrastructure should receive resources at which moments. The status quo may not have been very just or equitable, and as such, transformation post-shock involves negotiation with residents over the politics of redevelopment (Vale, 2017).

Based on this recognition, Matin, Forrester, and Ensor (2018) take the concept of resilience further by defining «equitable resilience» as the goal of taking into account «issues of social vulnerability and differential access to power, knowledge, and resources...to avoid imbalances of power into the future» (Ensor, 2018, p. 202). While resilience involves the capacity of residents to prepare and respond to change, equitable resilience occurs when everyone has the individual and shared capacity to respond to change. Matin et al lay out four indicators of equitable resilience to assess in practice: 1) *subjectivities*, grounded in individual's cultural, racial, ethnic, gender, and other social attributes, which establish the ability of individuals to mobilize these attributes in their favor; 2) *inclusion*, stemming from new formal and informal forms of governance; 3) *scale*, involving linkages across geographies and levels of government to reduce vulnerability of all groups; and 4) *transformation*, as incremental improvements that enhance residents' coping systems. Through these indicators, Matin et al lay out the outcomes

by which the achievement of equitable resilience may be measured.

While we find these indicators useful as a guide, we develop a set of what we view as more concrete variables against which to measure the extent to which Old Havana demonstrates the concept of equitable resilience. These measures center on the importance of individual and collective capacity of residents to ensure greater future equity. Capacity refers not only to current coping strategies, but also to the potential individuals and institutions have to reduce and adapt to future risks (Brink & Wamsler 2018). The means by which individuals and communities increase capacity include: skills, access to resources, incorporation into networks, leadership, and participation in decision-making and problem solving (Chaskin, 2001). To promote equitable resilience, we propose a set of variables along the lines of social, political, and economic factors, which would indicate the degree to which the concept exists in practice in Old Havana. We evaluate the five pillars of the Master Plan (discussed below) in light of these factors.

### **Social**

Community networks and associations provide a voice for residents in official redevelopment efforts as well as a safety net for residents to rely on each other in times of difficulty. The Master Plan should maintain the social fabric of the community while facilitating greater connections among neighbors as new residents, tourists, and business people enter the space in which they live. In addition, redevelopment planning should increase the human capacity of residents through access to quality education and health services. We would expect to see increasing satisfaction with community amenities and growing social capital among residents of diverse backgrounds to ensure equitable resilience.

### **Political**

To bounce forward, communities need increasing opportunities for political voice and the ability to challenge existing power structures (Shaw 2012). Further, residents should have the right to access social, political, and economic resources to ensure equitable resilience (for rights-based approach to resilience see Walsh-Dilley et al., 2016). In their book *Heritage and Citizenship*, staff members from the Office of the Historian write that in order to guarantee the permanence of the population, the community must not only be observers of the rehabilitation process, but they must participate in making decisions, allocating human and financial resources, and managing the administration of the process (Pérez Cortés & Iglesias Pérez, 2014). Below we assess in what ways the Master Plan allows for citizen participation and the ways in which participation has taken shape over the last two decades. To promote equitable resilience, all citizens should have access to government officials through enhanced institutions. In practice, increased voice should translate to greater accountability of government in providing services to residents.

### **Economic**

Residents need the capacity to weather economic changes by diversifying and securing decent livelihoods in the new environment. To be resilient, residents must be able to cope with new circumstances, in this case related to increasing tourism, investment, and currency valuation, by taking advantage of financial opportunities. To foster this form of resilience, we would expect that the Master Plan create new avenues for employment and income generation among current residents. In practice, we would then aim to evaluate the success of these mechanisms and

the current threats to the future financial security of residents.

### **Redevelopment in Old Havana**

#### **System shock: The radical changes of the Special Period**

Cuba of the late 1980s/early 1990s was situated on the brink of transformation. The start of the Special Period, triggered by the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (COMECON), ushered in sweeping economic, legal and administrative change. Cuba had depended heavily upon the economic support of the Soviet Union for favorable import/export markets, for oil, and for machinery, the disappearance of which led to significant hardship for everyday Cubans (Coyula & Hamberg, 2003; Gott, 2004). As GDP contracted by more than one third between 1989 and 1993 (Coyula & Hamberg, 2003) and income became insufficient to meet household needs (Espina, 2001), Cuba was forced to institute economic and institutional reforms to ensure its survival.

A number of key reforms enabled by passage of Special Law 143 and the declaration of Old Havana as a Prioritized Preservation Zone led to a transformed climate for redevelopment and rehabilitation work of the OHCH. The OHCH responded to the changes with the 1994 Master Plan which had at its center five pillars: to achieve a self-financed integral development that would make investment in assets recoverable and productive; to avoid the displacement of the local population and to establish adequate neighborhood densities and quality of life; to safeguard national identity via research, promotion, and development of culture; to provide technical infrastructure and basic services that ensure functioning in accordance with contemporary needs; and to protect national

heritage, rehabilitating Old Havana through a Special Continuous Integral Development Plan with legal force (Jimenez, 2018).

The following describe interventions in social programming, approaches to political participation, and economic planning by the Master Plan designed to advance redevelopment aims.

#### **Social Programming Context and Interventions**

The important role of housing to address socioeconomic needs in Old Havana cannot be overstated. As a centuries' old host for migrants and transitory persons linked to global trade, Old Havana has grappled with both permanent and temporary housing issues for most of its history. A legacy of defective housing and poor maintenance leading to building collapses and displacement, exacerbated by weather conditions, has long existed (Díaz-Briquets, 2009). Housing has been among the most urgent tasks of the OHCH since its origins: descriptions of Old Havana in the 1960s and 1970s highlight the neighborhood as dirty and dangerous due to deteriorating buildings and overcrowding (Toft, 2011).

Housing conditions and needs in Old Havana during and since the Special Period have continued to be challenging, with thousands of people living without adequate shelter. Although the government's Low-Consumption Houses program began in the early 1990s, it was soon abandoned due to its low quality and unsuitable setting (Coyula-Cowley, 2000). Other programs focused on providing basic housing as an alternative to collective shelters followed (Coyula-Cowley, 2000). Yet by 2001, Havana was home to over 100 neighborhoods characterized by substandard housing and public health concerns (Coyula & Hamberg, 2003). Today, estimates

suggest that 40 % of current housing stock in Old Havana is in poor condition, and approximately 1,000 units are slated for restoration (Leal, 2018; OHCH, 2016). Many live in such poor conditions that they will eventually be forced to evacuate once the building collapses (OHCH, 2016). Research conducted by the Master Plan has found that 46 % of buildings in the area require emergency action, 21 % rehabilitation, 3 % demolition, and the remaining 30 % maintenance (OHCH, 2016). Between 2000-2013, at least 3,856 buildings in Old Havana experienced some degree of collapse; in other words, an average of 6 buildings each week (OHCH, 2016). Master Plan efforts and funding, therefore, have focused on rehabilitating, rescuing, and/or restoring the building and housing stock in Old Havana.

The Master Plan has also concentrated on vulnerable groups such as seniors and youth. Nationwide, distinct populations such as senior citizens and youth required renewed attention in the wake of the Special Period. As a modest recovery initiated in 1996, the government prioritized these groups for neighborhood outreach and development programming (Pérez, 2002; Strug, 2004), a departure from the traditional attitude that every Cuban citizen would receive the same government services regardless of level of need (Uriarte, 2002).

Given increases in the cost of living, average real social security dropped by over 40 % between 1989 and 1998, forcing Cuba's disproportionately large senior citizen demographic to make due with less (Strug, 2004). The Master Plan has prioritized senior needs in innovative ways. A major project has been the creation of a senior center with supportive housing in the Convento de Belen, a property built as an all-boys' school and meteorological center in 1704. Today the center serves between 300-500 seniors, including residents and day-use clients who live with their

families (San Cristóbal tour, 2018). The center provides medical services administered by doctors and nurses, physical therapy, and free milk and meals, and also hosts recreational programs such as sewing and dominoes. A fourth grade classroom is located on the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor, with the aim of educating students about the gifts and needs of seniors; an on-site kindergarten provides opportunities for seniors to interact with children while accommodating the child care needs of neighborhood residents (San Cristóbal tour, 2018). Over 6,000 seniors who previously lived alone can now access this and other similar senior centers in the city (Leal, 2018).

Recreational, educational, and employment projects illustrate the Master Plan's response to concerns over holistic youth development. During the 1990s, the socioeconomic needs of children and young people grew, with increasing numbers of out-of-school and unemployed youth, in addition to single mothers, lacking viable economic or social avenues (Strug, 2004). Between 1989 and 1994, secondary education enrollment dropped by 20 % (Oficina Nacional de Estadísticas, 1998–99). Unemployment rates among Cuban youth soared, to a high of nearly 15 % in 1995 (International Labour Organization, 2019). Segments of youth began resorting to criminal and underground market activity to survive (Wooden, 2004) and concerns over increasing rates of crime and youth violence accelerated (Rodgers, 1999). In response to these concerns, the Master Plan focused resources to provide recreational, vocational, and social opportunities for Old Havana's young people. For instance, a modern youth center in the heart of Old Havana was conceived and financed to host arts, radio, television, and communication programming (Leal, 2018).

The Master Plan also prioritized the diverse employment needs of students in the

neighborhood. One example is the transformation of the historic Church of San Francisco de Asís into a trade school. Students in the program were provided with uniforms and a living stipend as they enrolled in a two-year trade course. At the completion of the program, students have the opportunity to continue on for further schooling or to start work with a construction company. The original trade school has since been replicated and relocated to several other locations throughout the city (San Cristóbal tour, 2018). Another example is the Arte Corte program, which runs training schools for barbers, hair stylists, and bartenders in state-owned facilities. The programming does not only prepare students for a profession, but in the words of founder Gilberto Valladares, «reinforce[s] the collective nature of Cuban culture, which is different from the consumeristic and individual nature of the U.S.» (Valladares, 2018). Presumably, this reinforcement is crucial as Valladares mentioned that program graduates often go to work in the cruise ship and tourism industries. Training prepares students for financial self-sufficiency as it reinforces cultural values and Cuban identity.

The health needs of general and vulnerable populations form another aspect of the Master Plan's social projects portfolio. For instance, as malnutrition, food shortages, and access to clean water impacted the population during the Special Period, the number of low birth weight babies increased (Mesa-Lago, 2002). At the same time, concerns over the needs of disabled children in the face of underfunded health services and deteriorating facilities accelerated (Strug, 2002). Today, programs like Hogar Materno Infantil, located on a key commercial and residential thoroughfare in the heart of Old Havana, house expectant mothers from marginalized neighborhoods for the duration of their pregnancies. Meanwhile, at a nearby home for

disabled children, mothers learn nursing skills to care for their children. The home also hosts community-building and skill-building opportunities for children. These projects feature additional social support systems critical to addressing health concerns of Old Havana residents (San Cristóbal tour, 2018). It is important to note, however, that in spite of the economic crisis of the 1990s, declines in health indices were limited, possibly due to the relative absence of extreme poverty and the universal nature of healthcare access (Cooper, Kennelly & Ordunez-Garcia, 2006; Keck & Reed, 2012).

### **Political Participation Context and Interventions**

A key feature of the Master Plan has been its development of mechanisms for community participation and voice. Master Plan staff view the consultative work as «multisectorial and multidimensional in nature... with access to ways to disseminate information across vulnerable and diverse groups» (Rodríguez Alomá, 2018). From its start, the Master Plan set out to study the issues of Old Havana and to propose strategies to address problems using conversations with residents as its foundation (Plan Maestro). It initiated its efforts by conducting censuses to gather demographic data on Old Havana in 1995, 1999, and again in 2001 to understand the residents, their priorities, and their concerns. These initial conversations uncovered the issues of housing, overcrowding, and water supply as primary concerns: in turn, the Master Plan acted on these worries by prioritizing rehabilitation, repairs, and establishing neighborhood planning mechanisms (Bailey, 2008). Again in 2011, the Master Plan launched a consultative process that solicited feedback from residents in a variety of ways: via distribution by the local council (Consejo Popular) followed by public debate; via distribution

by community-based groups such as those dedicated to athletics, education, or health; via email; and via audiovisual devices (Cabrero, 2018). This regular consultation process, held by locally elected members of the municipal assemblies, invited participants to create a «map of risks and resources» on a street-by-street basis as needs and plans were developed; in turn, those proposals considered most useful and cost-effective were designated for implementation (Hearn, 2004). The Master Plan process has also relied on participatory governance structures such as the Neighborhood Transformation Workshops that bring Cubans from different professional fields together to address the problems of the neighborhood (Bonilla-Santiago, 2018).

Once the feedback from the popular consultation has been collected, all development plans must be approved by both key Master Plan staff as well as a Board of Monuments, with an eye towards issues of design, use of materials, and cultural and historical authenticity (Bailey, 2008). According to Master Plan leadership, development decisions have been influenced by the consultative and interdisciplinary process (Rodríguez Alomá, 2018). There is evidence that conflicts unfold, particularly when foreign business requests additional space or floors to maximize their revenues (Robainas Barcia, 1999). In at least one case, Cuban stakeholders resisted the desires of overseas investors to convert a school on Plaza Vieja into a tourist hotel (Bailey, 2008). This is one example of a way that Cuban representatives in development approval processes can advance the collective concerns gathered through the consultative process.

### **Economic Context and Strategies**

When the Cuban government declared Old Havana's Historical Center as a Prioritized Preservation Zone and passed Law 143 in 1993,

the OHCH was granted legal status to enable it to enter into its own commercial contracts. The government also transferred ownership of key properties to the OHCH, which provided it with heightened autonomy and flexibility. Through these processes, the OHCH gained financial powers and the power to control hard currency, which led to its ability to access resources for rehabilitation work and to aim for economic and social sustainability. The law transformed the work of rehabilitation from a state-subsidized activity to a self-financing enterprise able to generate tax revenue for Cuba's budget (Tuft, 2011). Furthermore, no longer under the authority of the Havana City Administration, the OHCH was not forced to compete against other public agencies for scarce resources (Tuft, 2011).

An essential tool of the Master Plan is the Habaguanex Tourist Company, founded in 1994. Habaguanex manages hotels, shopping, and cultural opportunities as it promotes the architectural, cultural and historical assets of the Historic Center of Havana. Habaguanex uses its proceeds to support the restoration work of the OHCH and sees itself as forming a part of the nation's sustainable development efforts (Habaguanex, n.d). Because the OHCH is Habaguanex's primary shareholder, it can channel proceeds from Habaguanex into Master Plan priorities, such as restoration and social programming (Toft, 2011). Some of the restoration projects include key tourist bars and restaurants such as the Monserate Bar, El Zaragozana, El Castillo de Farnes and the Café de Oriente; small hotels like Florida, Santa Isabel, Telegrafo, Palacio O'Farill, Raquel, Santander, Saratoga and Ambos Mundos; and boutique hotels, including La Valencia, El Comendador, Los Frailes, Tejadillo, San Miguel, Beltran de Santa Cruz, and Conde de Villanueva (Toft, 2011).

As development has ensued, the Cuban government has embraced the work of the OHCH and the Master Plan not as a cost, but instead as an investment in cultural heritage and social welfare development that will pay back dividends (Rodríguez Alomá, 2018). Political leadership has recognized that the work can generate revenue for the state while addressing social needs. State authorities have increasingly allowed diversification of capital, opening of private business and self-employment in retail and services, and the use of the U.S. dollar (Coyula-Cowley, 2000). The OHCH was positioned to facilitate elements of these changes via the Master Plan given its relative administrative autonomy coupled with its historical perspective and expertise.

The relationship between the Master Plan and the private business sector has developed in unexpected ways. Although Master Plan leadership had initially worried about how collaboration with private business would fare, its views gradually began to shift:

*The number of private businesses was quite small in 1994 when Law 143 passed, while today the sector is much larger. The private sector can be quite positive for us, as it can make contributions to the Office [OHCH] through taxes and to the locality through physical improvements. We began to view the sector as an ally in development efforts.* (Rodríguez Alomá, 2018)

Master Plan staff had not anticipated the rapid acceleration of the private sector and was unprepared for the accompanying administrative and philosophical challenges: in the words of the Director of the Master Plan, «We needed time to think through the linkages between private business and cultural heritage» (Rodríguez Alomá, 2018). Yet it has enhanced its capacity to collaborate with private business, provide

entrepreneurial training, and support small private initiatives. While it has also had to handle accusations that the private sector is actively destroying the city's heritage, it simultaneously must educate private enterprise on the importance of Old Havana's culture to its identity and success (Rodríguez Alomá, 2018). Master Plan staff work to bridge the gaps among government, business, and residents in an effort to advance equitable development in alignment with the goals and values of the OHCH.

### **Analysis**

Here we assess the ways in which the Master Plan has promoted equitable resilience through programs and new institutions.

### **Social Welfare**

Social welfare concerns pervade the Master Plan's pillars. The Plan explicitly sets out to avoid displacement of Old Havana's residents, improve residents' quality of life, provide basic services, and protect national heritage. Notably, it identifies vulnerable groups of residents, like seniors and youth, to target with programming. This differentiation marks a significant shift in the way the government sees «special populations» in a society designed to foster equity.

The Master Plan has made significant contributions to address the housing crisis. Since its first housing project, OHCH has restored a total of 700 dwellings (Leal, 2018). Yet, this number still represents a small portion of the buildings needing renovation. The Master Plan has implemented mechanisms by which citizen preferences and needs are incorporated into the process. For example, an ongoing challenge is where to locate residents while their homes are being restored (Leal, 2018). Furthermore, in the case of overcrowding, decisions need to be made regarding which families will remain and which will

relocate. To address these choices in an equitable fashion, the Master Plan developed a process to determine who is best suited to staying or leaving based on family size, economic opportunities, age of family members, employment, and—critically—resident preferences. It also designs state housing (viviendas sociales) for vulnerable populations and manages the process by which some senior citizens trade their private homes in exchange for a spot in state housing (San Cristóbal tour, 2018). After restoration of any space occurs, the Master Plan commits that the OHCH will care for the physical infrastructure and maintain the space (Rodríguez Alomá, 2018). During our interview, the Master Plan staff articulated the need to balance demands for private housing with projects that benefit whole communities, such as school and health clinics, and to engage stakeholders in valuable discussions about social projects (Rodríguez Alomá, 2018). Meanwhile, the goal of building housing remains a priority: «Today we see there is a lower density of bars and restaurants [in Old Havana] than in earlier eras. We believe this to be positive. We want to see adequate housing available for our residents and visitors» (Rodríguez Alomá, 2018).

This sentiment echoes a reflection from the City Historian, Eusebio Leal, when he commented at a conference presentation of Cuban and U.S. scholars that, «[Development] has to be first for the Cubans, and then for others parts of the world» (Leal, 2018, n.p.).

Amidst its focus on social welfare issues, the Master Plan has not abandoned its role in the preservation and promotion of historical and cultural assets (Leal, 2018). From 1993 until today, significant buildings and spaces, including the Plaza de la Catedral, Plaza San Francisco de Asís, Plaza Vieja, and the Plaza de Armas have been rehabilitated, while hundreds of mansions and colonial houses have been converted into

museums, libraries, art galleries, artist studios, and social and cultural institutions (OHCH, 2016; San Cristóbal tour, 2018). Between 1993 and 2008, estimates suggest that 174 churches, cultural institutions, museums and hotels, 60 speciality shops, 16 buildings containing 30 of the OHCH offices, and 60 social services buildings have been restored (Bailey, 2008). Moreover, 70 % of Old Havana's streets now have lighting and infrastructure improvements, while 20 parks and squares have either been designed or re-landscaped (Bailey, 2008). Rather remarkably, residents' homes, businesses, and social services seem to coexist with tourist attractions and amenities. In sum, hundreds of spaces for families, social projects, business, and visitors have been created or restored through the Master Plan's redevelopment scheme.

### Political Participation

Although popular participation in Master Plan consultative processes was not explicitly articulated by the OHCH as a pillar, Master Plan leadership has assumed that it will play an important role in the Plan's success. Yet participation and confidence in these processes have been uneven. A number of participants understand the significance of engagement for the welfare of their community and the potential impact on social issues such as trash collection, community beautification, family health, and wellness (Pérez, 2018). Some interviews underscored the excitement participants experience during the process, noting that a combination of self- and community-oriented interest motivates participants' responses:

*They get excited and involved when they see that we [government representatives] are listening. Their self-interest moves their participation...I have spoken to many people, especially women, who*

*keep getting more involved in participation when they see that someone is listening. They even come back to this office to continue to share their experiences with me. (Pérez, 2018)*

Others note the confidence in participatory processes demonstrated through residents' participation in the recent constitutional reform consultations. In an interview, Master Plan Director Rodríguez Alomá remarked, «Many people have participated and have trust in the process. I have faith in the process when I see people participating... taking advantages of lunch breaks and other spaces to participate» (2018).

Critiques, however, also exist. Casual conversations with Cubans reveal a degree of ambivalence and occasionally a veneer of distrust towards consultative processes. Some assume that the government will make pre-determined choices no matter what the consultative process uncovers, while others believe that the top-down approach characteristic of the country's political campaigns will be replicated in the Master Plan process (Kennedy, Rivera, & Tilly, 2003). In fact, some critical research claims that community input is not central to development decisions for Old Havana (Scarpaci, 2000). Others lament limited participation among residents. In an interview with one of the co-authors, OHCH Director Eusebio Leal indicated that while the Master Plan has done much to revive the community, it has not transformed the participation of residents, «as much as I would like» (Leal, 2018). The popular Cuban television program, *Vivir del Cuento*, featuring comedian and satirist Panfilo, dedicated an episode to the consultative process around the constitution—admittedly a process with national scope—underscoring the varying degrees of trust towards the government among the population (*Vivir el Cuento*, 2018).

### **Economic Well-Being**

How do Master Plan interventions to strengthen economic health measure up? Based on our interviews with key stakeholders, the Master Plan has facilitated new economic enterprises, spurred job growth, and increased opportunities for income generation in Old Havana while promoting and protecting cultural heritage. Each is a goal expressed as one or more parts of the Plan's five pillars. Government employees and private citizens alike noted the opportunities resulting from the process. Undoubtedly, the restored cultural heritage and commercial sites have served as an economic development tool, with 60 % of foreign tourists to Cuba visiting Old Havana alone (Besel & Pico, 2017). Our interviews align with initial research indicating that most Old Havana residents perceive there to be important socioeconomic benefits to tourism including employment generation, the rehabilitation of public spaces, and cultural exchange (Echarri, Korstanje & Robert, 2019; Guilarte & González, 2019).

The research available indicates that through the partnership with Habanaguanex, the Master Plan has multiplied gross revenues from income-generating projects (Scarpaci, 2000). The number of employees working at Habaguanex nearly quadrupled between 1996 and 2014; an estimated half of these employees were residents of Old Havana's city center (Guilarte & González, 2019). The rehabilitation process has created over 13,000 direct and 2,000 indirect jobs in construction, tourism, and culture (Leal, 2007) and has stimulated the rehabilitation and development of hundreds of residential buildings (Delis, 2015). Rapid growth in the private sector has triggered an increase in license applications to hire new employees, start restaurants, open transportation businesses, and rent homes or other spaces: notably, the majority of these licenses belonged to

residents of Old Havana (Guilarte & González, 2019; Marrero, 2014). Many self-employed individuals have also chosen to work in Old Havana's tourism-dominated sector (Peters & Scarpaci, 1998).

### **Key Threats to the Master Plan's Contribution to Equitable Resilience**

In spite of many impressive results, significant threats to the success of the Master Plan loom. Growing inequality resulting from the two-currency system, exploding levels of tourism, and the opening to private enterprise may be poised to accelerate. Key interviewees as well as more casual personal interactions revealed growing awareness and concern about the possibility of increasing inequality through gentrification (Rodríguez Alomá, 2018). These concerns are reflected in literature that suggests that the pressure of gentrification come not from fellow Cubans, but from tourists and foreign business (Scarpaci, 2000). Some observe that individuals are beginning to sell their homes to businesspeople and leave Old Havana (Pérez, 2018). Low wages and lack of access to the more desirable convertible peso (CUC) hamper residents' ability to keep up with the rising cost of living in the historic center (Guilarte & González, 2019; Scarpaci, 2000). Meanwhile, increased levels of migration from the island's interior into Havana exacerbate already fragile housing and overcrowding situations (Jimenez, 2018). Each of these factors threaten the ability of the collective and the individual to sustain equitable resilience.

Colantonio and Potter (2006) discuss seven categories of environmental threats to development: air pollution; noise pollution; deforestation; water provision via obsolete systems; inadequate treatment and disposal of liquid waste; inadequate management of solid waste; and hospital waste management (CITMA-

CH, 1998; Colantonio & Potter 2006). Not discussed at length in this paper are the environmental concerns that threaten the well-being of Old Havana: lack of appropriate and sufficient plantlife and green spaces; the rising waters of the bay; resilience to extreme weather events; and air pollution (OHCH, 2016). The ability to handle solid waste and supply clean water also challenge an area of the city with aging and crumbling infrastructure (OHCH, 2016). As the full impact of climate change is emerging, the Master Plan has started a harbor development project to address flooding concerns (Plan de Manejo Paisaje Cultural Bahía de La Habana, 2018). Any one of the above environmental issues could derail tourist investment and resident welfare, thereby endangering equitable resilience.

Challenges related to Old Havana's dependence on the tourist market may present the most difficult to address. Cuba continues to depend upon tourism as an important aspect of its economic growth (Rodríguez, 2013) which may be positive for cultural and historic preservation as the character is what draws foreigners to the neighborhood. Clearly, Cuba has recognized that tourism plays a driving role in its development strategy (Colantonio & Potter, 2006) and has permitted more space for the private enterprise market and personal consumption in its economic system (Rodríguez, 2014). Yet greater attention to the tourist market may weaken the country's incentives to invest in social programming, as pressures to invest in tourist infrastructure heighten. Given that research estimates that approximately 80% of recent construction nationwide is linked to the tourism sector (Coyula-Cowley, 2002), what might happen if tourism slows as a result of global political or economic change? Will ongoing resilience continue? The state may also struggle to keep up with and manage the administrative burdens of licensing

and inspections as private individuals seek to open businesses (Guilarte & González, 2019).

Although in today's geopolitical environment it may be difficult to imagine, estimates also suggest that, if the U.S. embargo were lifted, up to 3.2 million additional tourists from the U.S. might visit Cuba (Padilla, 2003). If tourism increases, the amount of housing in Old Havana may not meet the demand, as experienced after President Obama's 2016 visit (San Cristóbal tour, 2018). Furthermore, residents are already experiencing the impact of cruise ships on consumer goods' prices. In spite of government limitations on the number of cruise ships and passengers that may dock in Old Havana, officials worry about the impact of foreigners on the city's cultural heritage and values (Rodríguez Alomá, 2018). As the island increasingly relies on tourism, will the collective, non-consumer values of everyday Cubans survive (Taylor Jr. & McGlynn, 2009)? Given ongoing concerns about the accountability of the one-party government, transparency regarding the ways decisions related to tourism are made is likewise critical.

Admittedly, limited access to comprehensive data and interviewees prevents a thorough analysis of the contributions of the Master Plan as well as the extent of the challenges Old Havana faces. This lack of access to comprehensive financial measures complicates researchers' abilities to analyze the economic success of the Master Plan for everyday residents of Old Havana. Access to individuals for interviews is likewise complicated and restricts qualitative data collection.

### Conclusion

The year 2019 marked the 500 years anniversary of Havana, with many celebrations taking place, including festivities around the restoration of the national Capitol building. This

achievement was lauded and celebrated throughout the country, but in a special way in Havana. What better signal of the nation's development and intrepid survival than the restoration of this iconic building, once seen as an ape of the U.S. imperialistic style of architecture, and now made its own?

In spite of the seemingly insurmountable challenges presented by the Special Period, Old Havana has demonstrated equitable resilience through adversity. It has seen economic growth, increasing income opportunities, the restoration or creation of infrastructure, the provision of social services, the preservation of cultural heritage, and new forms of citizen participation to address residents' needs. The legal and administrative mechanisms instituted in the 1990s and operationalized since have provided space for the OHCH's Master Plan to chart a path for equitable development through social programming, participatory governance, and economic tools. Threats related to the tourist sector and increasing levels of inequity do loom, however, and must be addressed for sustainable equitable resilience to prevail in the long run.

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#### Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

#### Author's Contribution

Maureen M. Donaghy: conducted the research and wrote the manuscript collaboratively.

Tara Carr-Lemke conducted the research and wrote the manuscript collaboratively.