

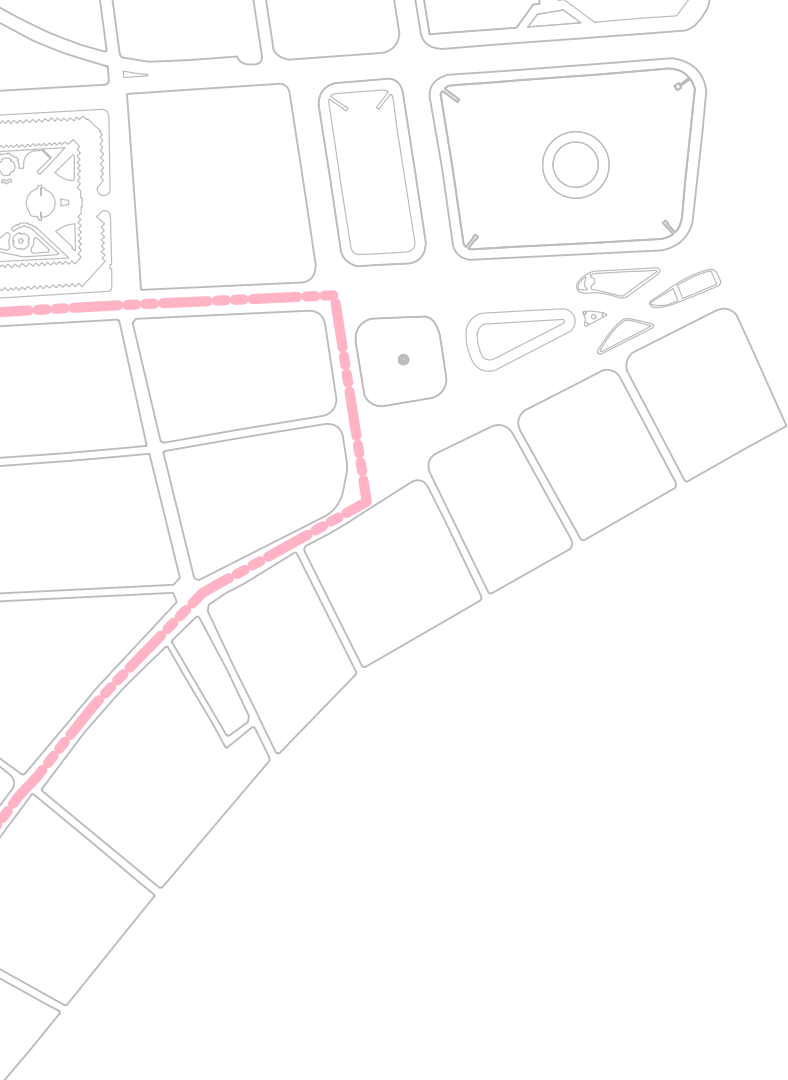


# *Public Space in* **LOS SITIOS**

*Centro Habana, Cuba*

**Havana Spring 2020 Studio**  
*Graduate Center for Planning and the Environment, Pratt Institute*









Source: Havana SP18 Studio

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Source: Havana SP18 Street

## CHAPTER 01

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# INTRODUCTION

The Spring 2020 Havana Studio was a partnership between the Pratt Institute Graduate Center for Planning and the Environment (GCPE) and the José Antonio Echeverría Technological University of Habana (CUJAE). The primary focus was on the Centro Havana neighborhood of Los Sitios where our planning, placemaking and design efforts aimed to build upon and expand student recommendations from prior years' studios. We represent the Pratt disciplines of City and Regional Planning and Urban Placemaking and Management; the CUJAE students and faculty are affiliated with the CUJAE School of Architecture.

The Pratt students who worked on this report come from a variety of professional backgrounds and academic perspectives. Our original plan was to partner with the students from CUJAE over the course of 10 days in Havana to learn alongside them sharing the principles from respective fields and experiences. Unfortunately, due to the COVID-19 pandemic affecting global travel and international cultural exchange, our trip was canceled. However, our studio carried on and adapted to the change of plans. Instead of a trip to Cuba, Pratt students and

most of the rest of the US sheltered in place to flatten the curve. CUJAE also canceled such international exchanges. This drastic change in how we live impacted this studio in many ways. Switching to remote learning in the middle of the semester was a challenge for everyone. The students of this year's Cuba Studio would like to acknowledge that the collective trauma we have been experiencing influenced the work presented here.

Being confined to our homes for the last few months has reinforced the value and necessity of public space. As social beings, humans need community and connection to survive. The public spaces many took for granted prior to the pandemic are now a refuge for urban dwellers. We recognize the labor of "essential" workers, such as sanitation and farm workers, who keep our societies running in times of crisis. We recognize that this burden often falls on the most vulnerable communities. We take our job as planners seriously in working towards cities and societies that are more equitable and value the health and well-being of all people.





This studio, which focuses on the Los Sitios neighborhood in Havana, uses placemaking as a lens for strengthening public spaces. Placemaking is a “collaborative process by which we can shape our public realm in order to maximize shared value” (What is Placemaking, 2007). This process, which relies heavily on community input and expertise, is challenging to complete from afar. Without local input, the recommendations provided in this report are just that – recommendations. Our goal for this report is to share global best practices and make suggestions for how they may fit in a Cuban context. In this report we provide recommendations on mobility and alternative transit systems, water management, waste management, and use of vacant lots and plazas. These recommendations operate as an overall strategy for the public realm built on the work of previous Pratt and CUJAE studio reports and rely on the knowledge of our Pratt professors and advisors, as well as CUJAE professors.

During this studio we were tasked with thinking critically from afar to examine the existing conditions of Los Sitios. We received input from Cuban professors through virtual meetings that would inform the proposals you will see in this report for future development and use of the public realm. We sincerely hope that this report reflects a vision of what a vibrant, sustainable and equitable future can look like in Los Sitios.





Source: Havana SP18 Studio

## Cuba

The Republic of Cuba is located in the Caribbean, just ninety nautical miles from the coast of Florida. It is the largest island in the Caribbean with a land mass of over 42,000 sq. miles. It has a population of over 11 million residents with over 2 million concentrated within Havana alone. In 1959, the revolution led by Fidel Castro caused Cuba's government to transition from a capitalist to a socialist system. This created a centralized government which controlled almost all economic development and limited private ownership of land and business.



Source: Havana SP18 Studio



Its closest ally over the following decades was the Soviet Union (USSR). The USSR provided Cuba with economic resources to counter the trade embargo imposed by the United States which began in 1961. The USSR exported oil and cars to Cuba, and in return was a recipient of natural resources such as nickel and sugar. . The USSR gave Cuba the ability to maintain trade and support the growth of the economy through its allies in the Communist Bloc.

In 1991, a great change came to Cuba with the fall of the Soviet Union and the Communist Bloc. At this moment in history Cuba began what is known as the “special period,” a major economic crisis affecting the island for almost a decade. Cuba was no longer able to depend on the Soviets for oil or financial support. Due to this, Cuba had to form new partnerships with countries in the region such as Venezuela, which was sympathetic to the Cuban cause and allowed the nation to slowly regain economic stability (Romero Gomez, 2014).



Source: Havana SP18 Studio



Source: Havana SP18 Studio



## Havana

Havana, the largest city in Cuba, is a province made up of 15 different municipalities. It represents the cultural, political and economic capital of Cuba. Within Havana there is Centro Havana, which is the most populous of the 15 municipalities and home to the study area of Los Sitios. Centro Havana is located to the west of Habana Vieja (Old Havana), and East of Vedado, which is where many cultural institutions and embassies are located. Within Centro Havana there are five Consejo Populares (People's Councils): Cayo Hueso, Colón, Dragones, Los Sitios and Pueblo Nuevo. The Los Sitios Consejo Popular is located in the Southeast portion of the municipality; our study site covers the part south of Calle Reina.



Source: Havana SP18 Studio



Source: Havana SP18 Studio



Source: Havana SP18 Studio

## Los Sitios

Los Sitios is home to over 30,000 residents within a 0.26 square mile area; it is the densest area of all Havana. Over half of its residents are women, with about a quarter between the ages of 45 and 59 (Mi Sitio en Los Sitios, 2017). They are represented by the Consejo Popular which is akin to the Community Boards of New York City, although in Cuba its members are local elected officials representing the area. In addition to the official government body of the Consejo Popular, there are many non-governmental community groups involved in local affairs.

The streets of Los Sitios are used as vibrant public spaces, as is seen on many of its narrow streets. Because of the density and its lower tourism traffic, there is less investment in its infrastructure from the central government than there is in Havana Vieja -the main tourist area of Havana. The following recommendations will be grounded in community-based solutions that are low-cost and possibly relatively easy to implement.











Source: Google Earth

## **MOBILITY+SUPERBLOCKS**

The streets of Los Sitios are used as vibrant public spaces, as is seen on many of its narrow streets. Because of the density and its lower tourism traffic, there is less investment in its infrastructure from the central government than there is in Havana Vieja -the main tourist area of Havana. The following recommendations will be grounded in community-based solutions that are low-cost and possibly relatively easy to implement.

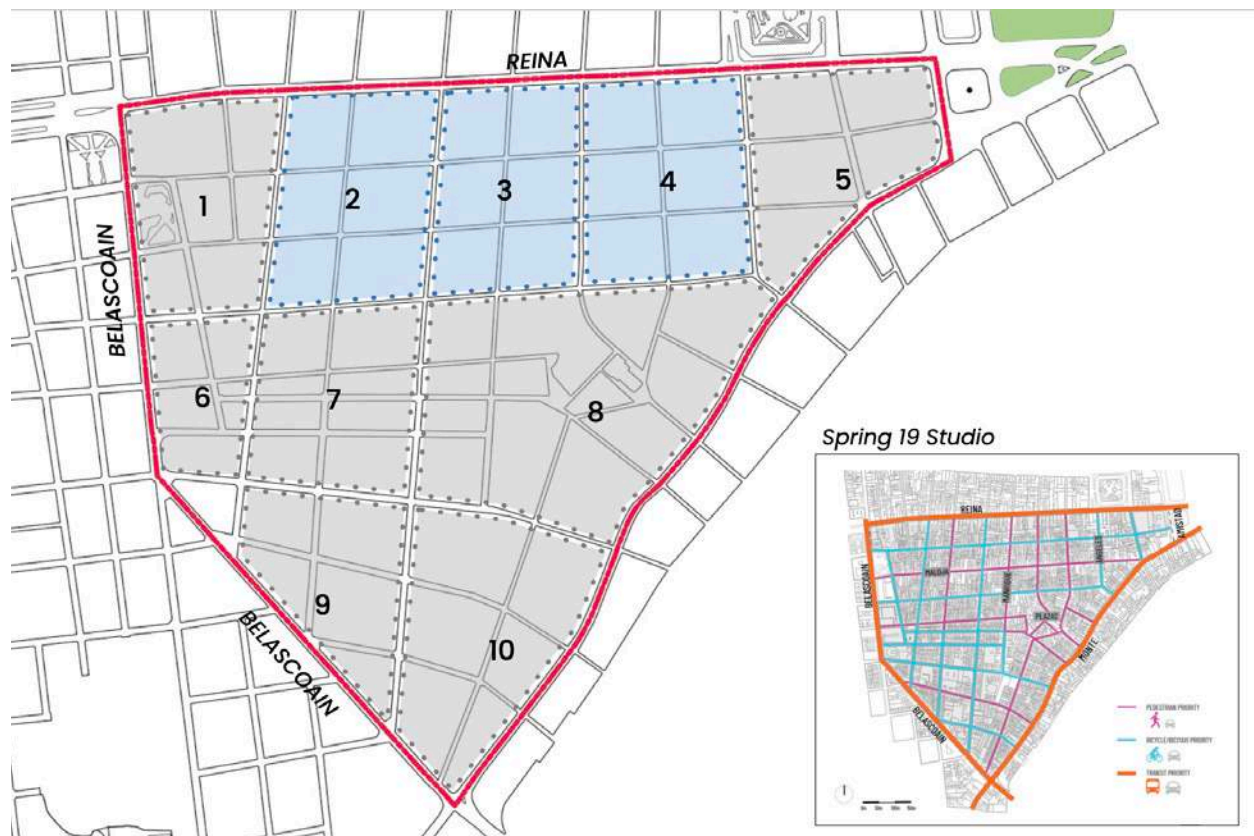
The superblocks at the center of our proposal begin with a focus on how streets can move people more safely and more efficiently. The mobility plan proposes a superblock pilot, which converts the standard street grid into three adjacent superblocks. The superblock will be created starting with informal, cheap and flexible solutions in order to test before moving into permanent, capital-intensive solutions and provides flexible solutions to common problems. The superblock model is inspired by the notable pilot superblock in Barcelona's Poblenou neighborhood, which is part of a larger plan to implement a network of 500 superblocks

throughout the city. It would involve reducing vehicular access to three-by-two-block squares made from 18 existing city blocks – in the case of the Los Sitios pilot superblocks – so that only local, delivery and emergency vehicles can pass through at a reduced speed of 10 km per hour. The effect is three consecutive city blocks that operate as pedestrian-focused public spaces. Our decision to focus on proposed superblocks 2, 3, and 4, is based on the 2019 Pratt Havana Studio's analysis of the street grid.



The proposed superblock plan will provide pedestrian-centric spaces without the need to demolish buildings or undertake expensive redevelopment. The superblock, as used in Barcelona and proposed here, is a tool that closes designated streets surrounding a neighborhood block to through traffic. While in the case of Barcelona, the superblock's main purpose is to restructure existing issues related to traffic and congestion, Cuba's lack of dependency on the car makes mobility issues unique to this context. The country's economic, political and social relationship to the automobile provides the capital city with the opportunity to "leapfrog" past the auto-centric planning many countries have had to develop in order to deal with large amounts of personal car ownership (Morris, 2015). Havana hosts

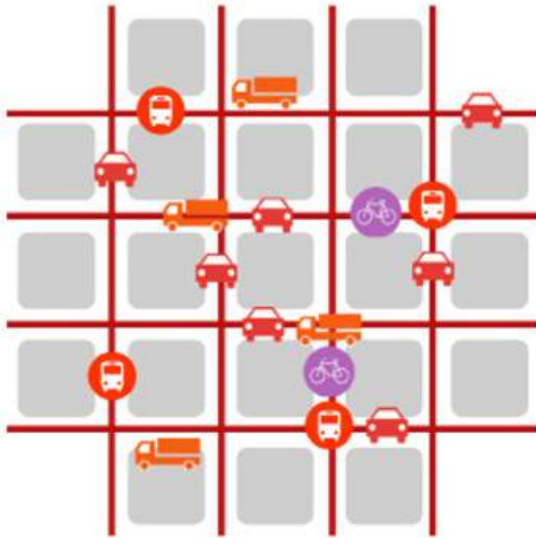
an active pedestrian life, in which streets are utilized for leisure and mobility. It is reported that over half of Cuban's daily trips are currently done on foot, yet pedestrian conditions are often undesirable and unsafe as a result of dangerous buildings, cracked sidewalks and potholed streets, excessive speeds enabled by low traffic volumes and poor air quality. Additionally, the lack of green spaces and refuges are seen as a deterrent to the pedestrian experience.



10 **Figure 1.1 Superblock proposal for Los Sitos. Based on the SP19 studio grid, inset for reference | Source: Havana SP19**



## Current Model



## Superblocks Model



**Figure 1.2 Barcelona Super Block Model** | Source: *The Conversation*, 2019

The superblock model presents Los Sitios with a way to thoughtfully improve the pedestrian experience, while preparing for a future that may involve an increase in auto usage. The superblock model promotes several of the key principles Guggler and Spoerl (2008) propose for transport planners in Havana to follow: “Keep the streets as living room for citizens, favour pedestrians, minimise the effects of private traffic”. To plan for a future that will protect and improve Havana’s lively pedestrian life, the country must prioritize pedestrian, bicycle and public transit mobility. These pilot superblocks will ultimately serve as an example of what can happen throughout Havana.

New street typologies and public spaces will be designated using paint and cheap or found materials to explore different iterations of the superblock before formalizing changes. By designating spaces that were formerly dominated by automobiles to pedestrians through visual cues such as painted pavement and the addition of seating, these spaces become safe places for pedestrians to gather, utilize, and interact with the space without fear of vehicles. Parents can feel comfortable allowing their children to play with friends in the streets, students can meet friends for leisurely walks, workers can find a seat to take a break and read a book or eat lunch. The inclusion of targeted hubs for alternative transit allow for the spaces to operate as connectors in addition to being places to stay. On weekends the spaces can be utilized for markets or festivals, becoming lively plazas between the buildings, spaces to dance or observe a musical performance, to mingle with

friends and strangers. These spaces are flexible, they may change with time and use, however they will remain for people. The process of deciding what works for each superblock and neighborhood gives residents the opportunity to have ownership over the process of change and evaluate the effect on local life. The Los Sitios superblock pilot will serve as an opportunity to see how residents will interact with superblocks.



12 **Figure 1.3 Tactical Solutions used in Barcelona's Pilot Superblocks** | Source: New York Times, 2016 (left), Twitter, 2019 (right)









## Mobility

Los Sitios is outlined by three main arterial roads that connect the neighborhood to the greater city of Havana. Reina, Belascoáin, and Monte all act as gateways to Los Sitios, with heavy commercial activity and various bus lines running along each road. These arterial roads are currently dominated by vehicle traffic, with congestion that doesn't lend itself to efficient and reliable bus service. The streetscapes span 12.1 to 13.6 meters wide, with two lanes of vehicular traffic moving in both directions. There are currently no designated bus lanes, leaving the bus service mixed in with vehicular traffic. The only clearly designated spaces for pedestrian mobility are covered walkways under the arcades that run along the sides of all three of the arterial roads. Streets all throughout Havana are used for multiple purposes and provide space for the residents of the city. This should also hold true with these arterial roads by providing improved access and efficiency for buses and not just vehicular traffic.





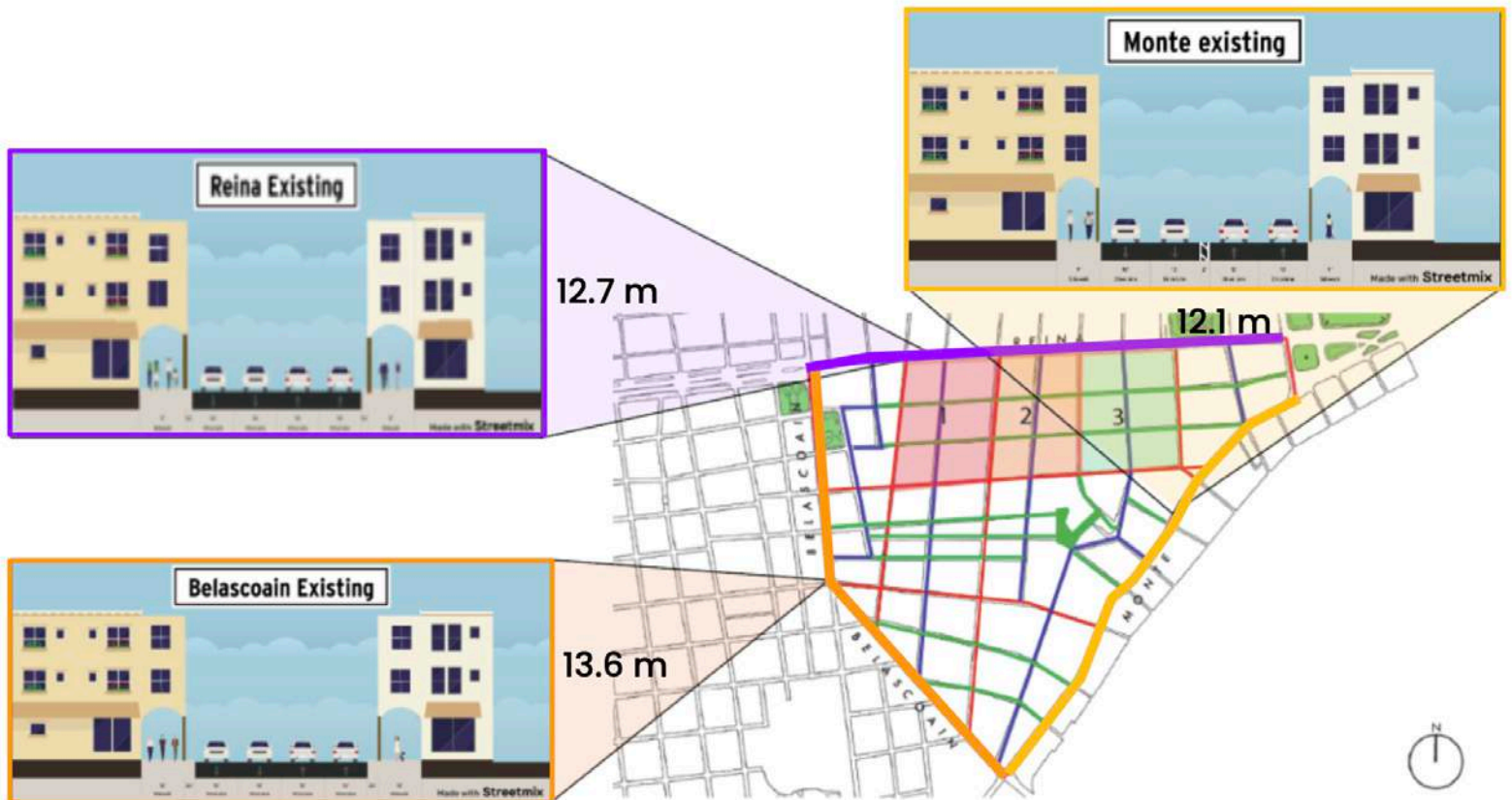
Source: Havana SP18 Studio

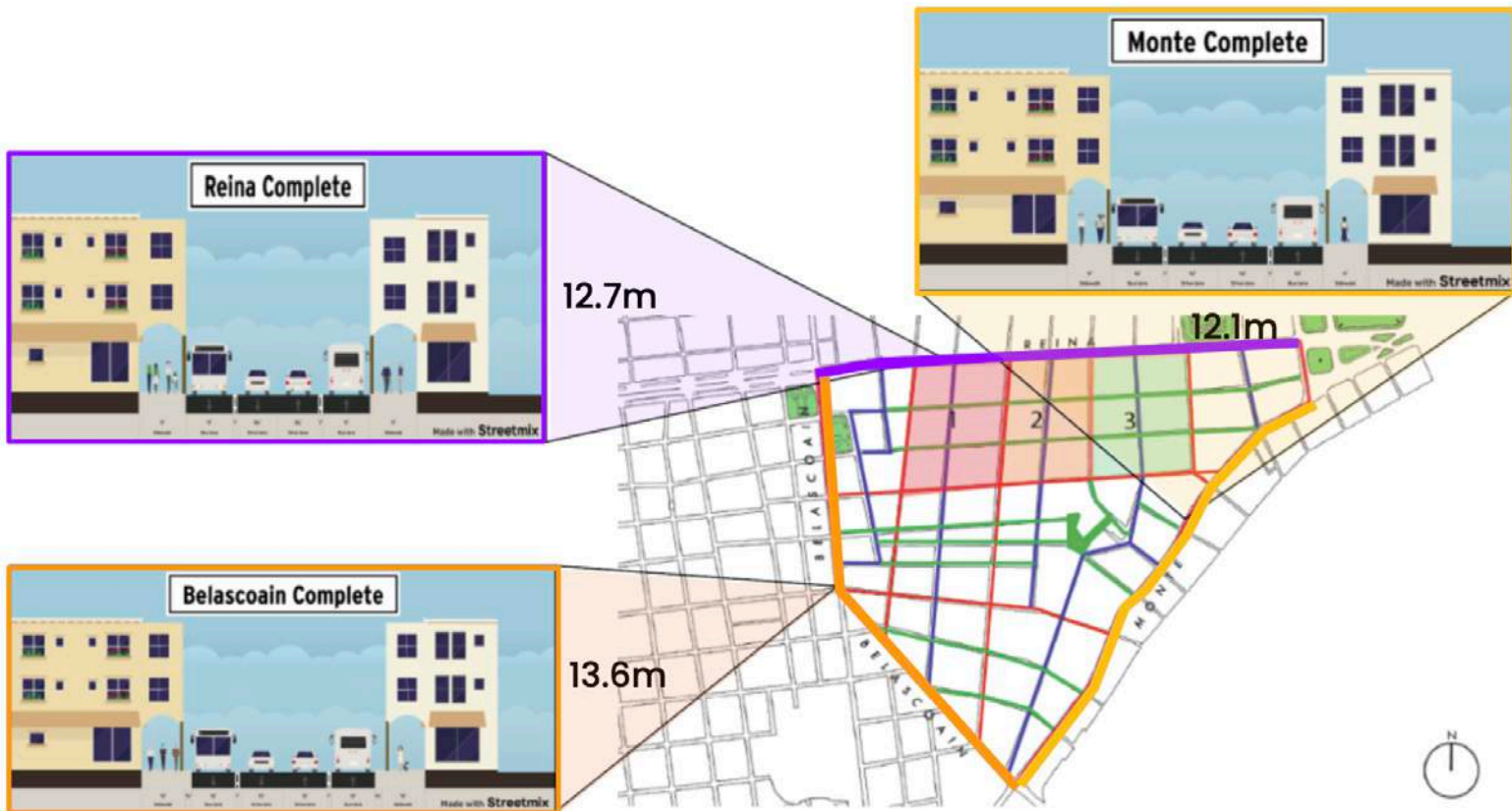
We propose Complete Street designs for the arterial roads of Reina, Belascoaín, and Monte, in order to provide equal space for both buses and cars to better provide for Los Sitios and the entire city of Havana. The Complete Street redesign of these roads provides a designated bus lane in both directions. This allows bus routes to move independently from vehicle lanes, improving efficiency and reliability – two key factors impacting mass transit service. These lanes separated by painted buffers along the road, clearly mark the bus-only lanes within the streetscape. On Reina, Belascoaín, and Monte, there is the potential for streetscape improvements to further delineate space for pedestrians and bus service. A transit hub at Cuatro Caminos, the corner of Belascoaín and Monte, could also be implemented to further provide space that promotes efficiency and improved access to the existing bus routes. This transit hub proposal will be developed further in the plaza 3 recommendation later on in this report.



Although Havana is well known for its many classic American cars from the 1950s and the Lada from the former Soviet Union, the most common modes of transportation are public bus and the for-hire bicycle taxi or bicitaxi. Getting around Havana using a bicitaxi is a common occurrence for many Cubans due to its lower cost and the ability for the bicitaxi to get through traffic much quicker. Despite the ease of access to them, they are limited to getting a person around Centro Havana which potentially could create some frustration for riders. By creating a better regulated system with set routes, designated pickup/drop-off points and in the future expanding the system may help create a sense of order and place, as well as further strengthen the network.

Additionally, other modes of alternative transportation such as bike-sharing programs and electric tricycles (using renewable energy), which have begun to be launched in Old Havana and Central Havana, can further encourage residents and visitors to get around using more environmentally efficient means. The Ha'Bici program in Old Havana is just one example for how programs could be expanded to Los Sitios creating a renewed interest in cycling for locals (Martinez Armas, 2019).





**Figure 1.5 Complete Street Redesign**

In order to implement the superblock proposal successfully, one must not ignore the need for last mile deliveries. While large vehicles can drop off along the wider arterial roadways of Monte, Reina and Belascoaín, they cannot travel down the narrower streets today, nor would they be able to in the future if roads are closed off to major traffic. Using a cargo bike model (mechanical or electric), bikes could be converted into smaller capacity delivery vehicles allowing for navigation down the inner streets of Los Sitios. This further reduces the need for the recipient to have to carry many heavy items a longer distance to their home or business. Cuba has already been assembling and selling electric cargo tricycles motorcycles for a number of years (Ruenes César, 2016).



**Figure 5.4 Electric Bici Taxi**  
Source: On Cuba News







CHAPTER 03

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**STORMWATER+WASTE MANAGEMENT**  
***and VACANT LOTS***

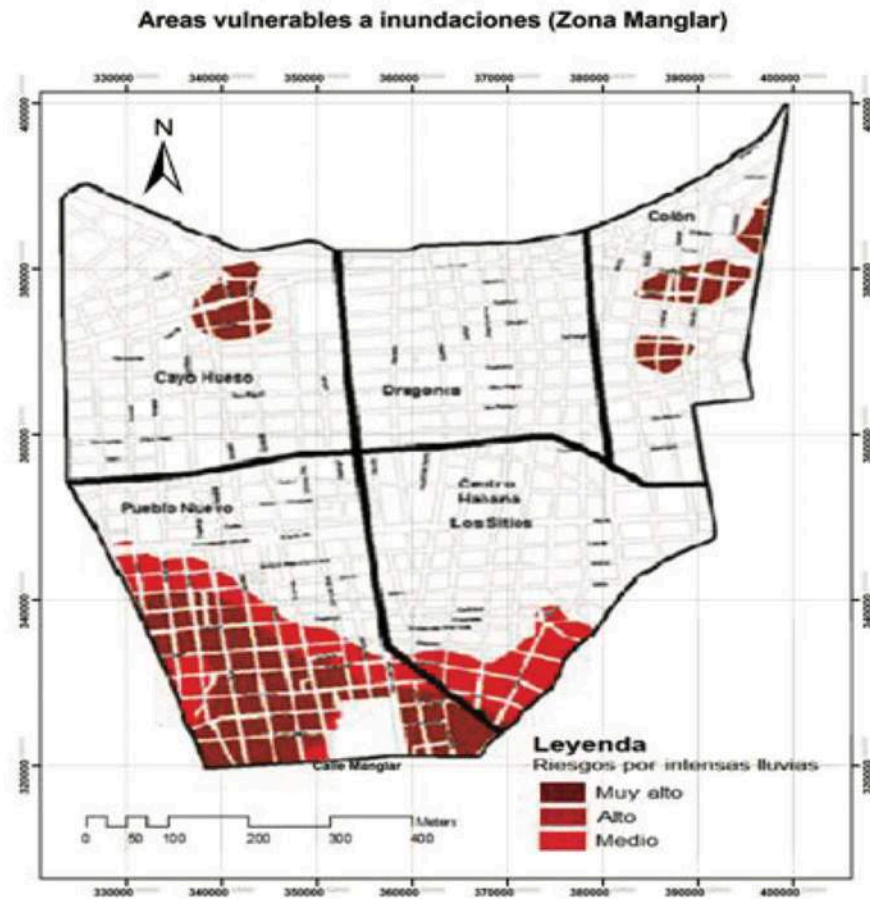




## Stormwater

Currently storm water is managed through a series of gutters and pipes integrated into the streetscape. Havana has a separate sewer system: wastewater and stormwater are carried in separate pipe networks and treated independently. This system was built in the early 1900s and while it may have functioned well in its heyday, today it is in need of a comprehensive review. Over the years, many buildings have had unpermitted renovations with some properties discharging their waste directly into the stormwater system. There is recurrent flooding to the south of Los Sitios, where the topography is lower and shifts towards the bay. All of these factors culminate into a need to lessen the amount of stormwater runoff in this system by retaining water where it falls – in the streets of Los Sitios.

Our proposal attempts to view stormwater as both a neighborhood network and as fine-grained site interventions. Figure 2.1 shows the concept at the neighborhood level. The different colors represent three street typologies as they relate to stormwater. They have different physical cross sections that complement the mobility goals discussed earlier and reinforce the superblock concept.



**Figure 2.1** Vulnerable Areas to Floods | Source: CUJAE

Enhancing the topography where possible, these roads will be pitched towards the interior of the superblocks and the limited access roadways. This will reduce the water flowing into the main vehicle roads that bound each superblock. This proposal is similar in many respects to one proposed by CUJAE architecture students Daniela Friedman and Le My Quoc (2018a: 13-21; 2018b: 20-15) for various parts of Centro Habana.

Plazas and vacant lots will offer water storage and sites for infiltration into the water table.



Standard roadways (shown in red) are the roadways that form the boundaries of the superblocks. These are receiving no stormwater modifications as they will remain streets with unimpeded two directional traffic and pedestrian sidewalks.

Collector roads (Figure 2.3), shown in blue in Figure 2.2, are the “limited access” roadways. These roads span the interiors of the superblocks, generally running north/south and are slightly pitched with the topography to transport water out of the superblocks or into “wet” plazas and vacant lots. As discussed in the mobility section below, these roads are shared streets, providing limited vehicular access to the interior of the superblocks for emergency access and deliveries. The water collector roadways collect their runoff into these roads. These roads are reimagined as shared streets. Sidewalks remain and the interior of the roadbed is filled in with a slight pitch towards

the roadway center line. This profile allows water to collect in the roadway rather than at the doorsteps of adjacent buildings. This street network is intended to use the topography to collect excess stormwater in water capture plazas and vacant lots (to be further explained below) or to allow it to flow following the natural topography.

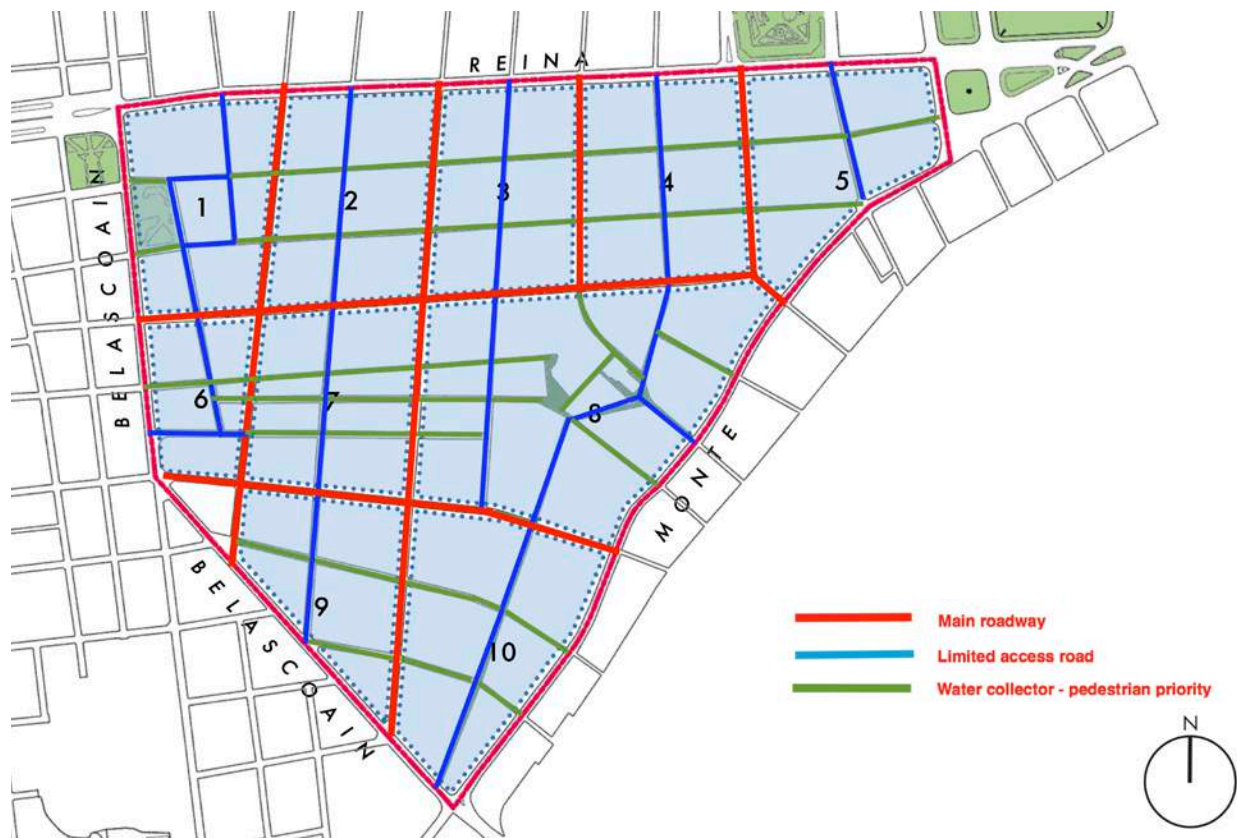


Figure 2.2 Proposed Stormwater Management Plan

Roads shown in green in Figure 2.2 are the “water collector” roadways (Figure 2.4). These roads are primarily pedestrian roadways, redesigned to facilitate community use. This is a rendering of the water collector roadway. These typologies are based on the typical road profile of a 15-foot building-to-building right of way. There is a raised three-foot sidewalk on both sides of a 10-foot roadbed. The water collector roadways generally run east/west in the interiors of each superblock. To enhance pedestrian mobility while improving stormwater collection, the three-foot sidewalk is extended into the roadbed by seven feet to create a 10-foot wide promenade and a three-foot recessed gutter. The gutter floor could be planted to provide a greener streetscape (with the drawback of increased maintenance) or paved with a pervious material to allow rainwater to access the soil below.

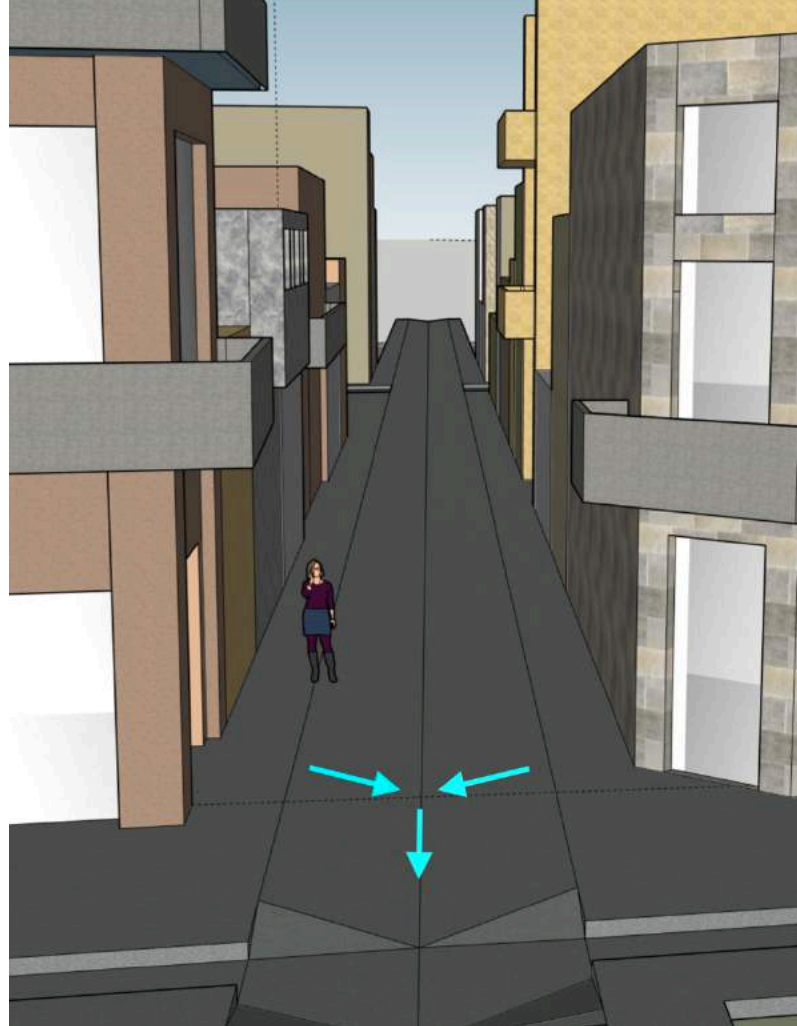


Figure 2.3 “Limited access” Road Diagram



Figure 2.4 “Collector” Road Diagram





## Waste Management

Waste management practices in Havana vary by neighborhood. Areas that attract tourists, like Old Havana, are well-managed and kept clean (Figure 3.1). In neighborhoods that draw fewer tourists, there is less reliability and accountability for collecting trash. Because of this, waste spills sometimes into public spaces, negatively affecting quality of life and public health (“In Havana 48 New Garbage Trucks,” 2019). This is certainly the case in Los Sitios, where plastic bins break easily and overflow (Figure 3.2). The city agency responsible for collecting the garbage, the Communal Hygiene and Services Company, cites lack of fuel and functioning trucks as the reason for their inability to pick up trash (Cano, 2016). Residents of Los Sitios also contribute to the issue when they continue to dispose of waste in bins that are full. Luckily, the neighborhood is well-positioned to mitigate the issue within the proposed framework of the pilot superblocks.

## Current Challenges

According to the United Nations Industrial Development Organization’s (2017) Waste Management Outlook for Latin America and the Caribbean, there are universal problems throughout the region including but not limited to: increased waste generation, irregular and unreliable waste collection and incoherent and ineffective management. In Los Sitios, the irregular collection and ineffective governance models directly result in overflow in public space.

**Figure 3.1 Waste Bins in Old Havana illustrate the inequitable distribution of resources in Havana neighborhoods**  
Source: Vangel Inc.





**Figure 3.2 Trash Overflow from Bins Obstructs the Sidewalk in Los Sitios** | Source: Havana SP18 Studio

## **Solutions**

Some of the problems facing Los Sitios are practical and can be overcome by improvement in management. Others will require long-term investments in public education and community development. Thanks to existing cultural norms around reuse, a strong public education system and a history of community development, Cubans are in a good position to succeed with improved management. With all this in mind, this report proposes a hybrid community-based and municipal system. In this model, residents are responsible for source sorting their waste. This means that residents sort their waste at the time of creation, rather than disposal. For example, after using a canned food, the resident cleans the can and puts it in a bin or bag for tin-only. When full, that bin or bag is then taken to the superblock's Zero Waste Center (ZWC), which will be discussed in the next section. This takes the strain off the system at the macro level.



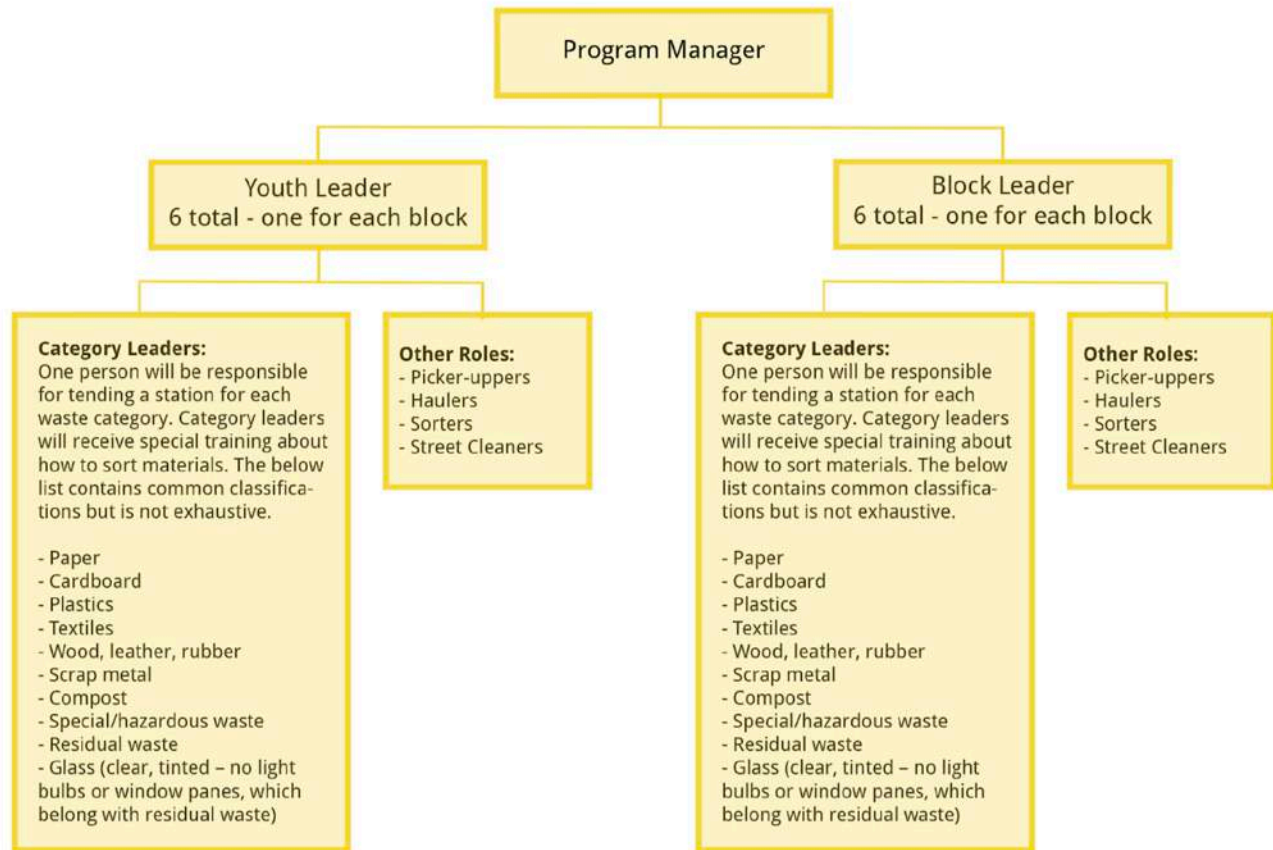
**Figure 3.4 Old Beer Bottles Make Great Glasses in Bayamo**  
Source: Escaping NY



While some of these solutions, such as an improved municipal waste management system, are beyond the scope of our work as public space researchers, they should be considered as aspects of a holistic solution. This report will focus on specific management proposals at the superblock level and considerations for a community-based waste management system. Building on the recommendations of previous studios, our proposal includes both community action and policy implementation at the superblock level. Thanks to the small scale of the pilot, program leaders can respond nimbly to recommendations and pivot based on local priorities and challenges.

There is a history of block organizations coming together for neighborhood cleanups. While they have much less active in recent years, the precedent and cultural expectation of collective action does exist. The superblock framework creates easily-managed and scalable “mini-neighborhoods” within Los Sitios that can be organized on a block-by-block level. This micro-management creates an opportunity for more residents to get involved and importantly, hold leadership positions. This will hopefully create ownership over the process and lead to deeper emotional investment on the part of those involved.





## Comprehensive Management Plan

A comprehensive management plan for implementing neighborhood clean-up during phase one of the superbloc waste management program. One program manager will organize and oversee the clean-up day(s) with two goals: (1) Clean up, categorize and dispose of all accumulated waste in public spaces within the superbloc and (2) Bring together as many residents and community members to speed up the process, use the program as an educational opportunity and build capacity for long-term investment in the success of the new system.

### Program Manager (PM)

Responsible for organizing and overseeing the entire clean-up process, recruiting volunteers, obtaining resources and fulfilling program obligations. As this project requires extensive planning and preparation, best if the role is filled by someone with experience managing projects and people. This would be a full-time, paid position responsible for the entire rollout of the new WM system over 1-2 years.

### Block Leader (BL)

This role is best fulfilled by a volunteer, someone with a personal vested interest or passion in the project to ensure enthusiasm and follow-through. If necessary, can be recruited by PM. Their role is to organize their block to (1) come out in support of the event and (2) ensure all positions are filled.



### Youth Leader (YL)

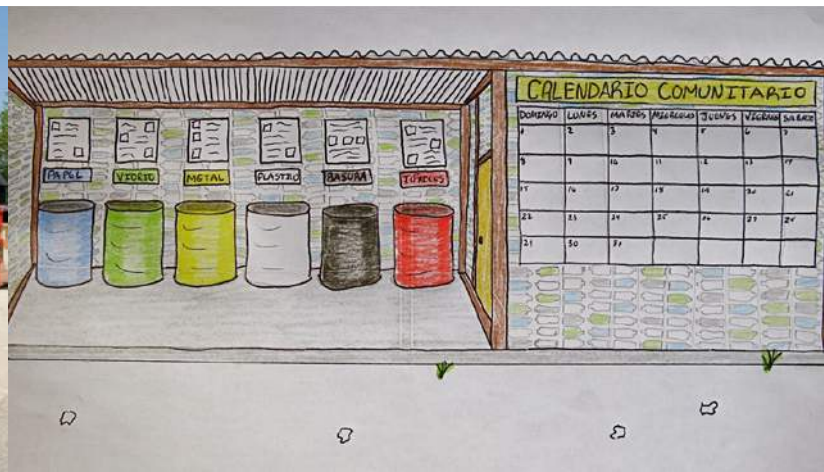
The Youth Leader is responsible for organizing neighborhood youth. This role is a good opportunity to teach civic engagement, improve leadership and teamwork skills. Best if filled on a volunteer basis or nominated by a teacher or other respected adult. They will oversee youth category leaders that match the adult category leaders.

Last year Cuba received a donation of more than 100 new garbage trucks from Japan, Austria and China. Most were deployed for general residential pick up, and at least 10 for waste from hospitals and other large work centers. Some of the remaining trucks should be redeployed to neighborhoods to resolve the issue of garbage overflowing into public space. Within the superblock framework, this means that the trucks, some of which are small enough to navigate Los Sitios' narrow streets (see Figure 3.5), would pick up waste from the Zero Waste Centers regularly. Curbside pick-up for residents would not be an available option, as all household waste would be collected at the Zero Waste Centers.





**Figure 3.6** A recycling center near Middlebury, Indiana  
Source: Alamy.com



**Figure 3.7** Sketch of a Community Recycling Center in Panama  
Source: Lorax in Panama, 2014



**Figure 3.8** Canadian Recycling Center  
Source: Encorp Atlantic



**Figure 3.9** Shipping Container Recycling Center in United Arab Emirates  
Source: ContainersUAE.com

Collection centers, known as Zero Waste Centers (ZWC), could be built at low, medium, or high cost, depending on available resources (see figures 3.6-3.9). Communities around the world utilize similar models in which residents are responsible for bringing their household waste to collection sites, often referred to as transfer sites. Each superblock would have one collection site built on an existing vacant lot. It's important that the collection site be permanent to encourage routine and reliability from residents. Proposed ZWC designs are presented below, beginning with the lowest cost option and ending with a high cost option. Improvements could be made over time as capital becomes available and the act of bringing household waste to the ZWC becomes normalized.





## ***Vacant Lots***

Vacant lots in Los Sitios have various potential uses. For example, vacant lots serve as spaces for many neighborhood children to play soccer and other games. The vacant lots act informally as a neighborhood's playground for children and as a gathering site for outdoor markets and parking lots. Vacant lots in Los Sitios have a unique way of being used as a public resource.



Figure 4.0 Vacant Lots, 2017

## Solutions

There are numerous vacant lots in Los Sitios, many of which are already used as public spaces, especially for sports or play. There is an opportunity to improve the quality of already utilized areas into more formalized public spaces. Lots can be designated for different recreational uses. For example, the hollow shell of a building on the corner of Calles Peñalver and Chávez is regularly occupied by soccer games (studio 2018 report).

A simple clean-up project could significantly improve the conditions of the lot, providing an appropriate space for active play. Creating this area just for soccer/football games will relocate this activity from other public spaces where sports might not be an appropriate activity. In the future, this site holds enormous potential to host many different sports or other physical activities.





## Community Garden

We propose to transform vacant lots into community gardens and improve the quality of the vacant lots used for parking by adding permeable surfaces and bioswales.

As an island nation, Cuba faces real challenges in providing a variety of goods to its citizens and some form of the urban farm will be required to increase the quality of life. Developing unused vacant lots into temporary community gardens meets the needs of the residents while also providing further accessibility to healthy foods and green space. The temporary community gardens not only beautify the community by growing vegetables on vacant lots but also create a friendly environment for community engagement and participation.

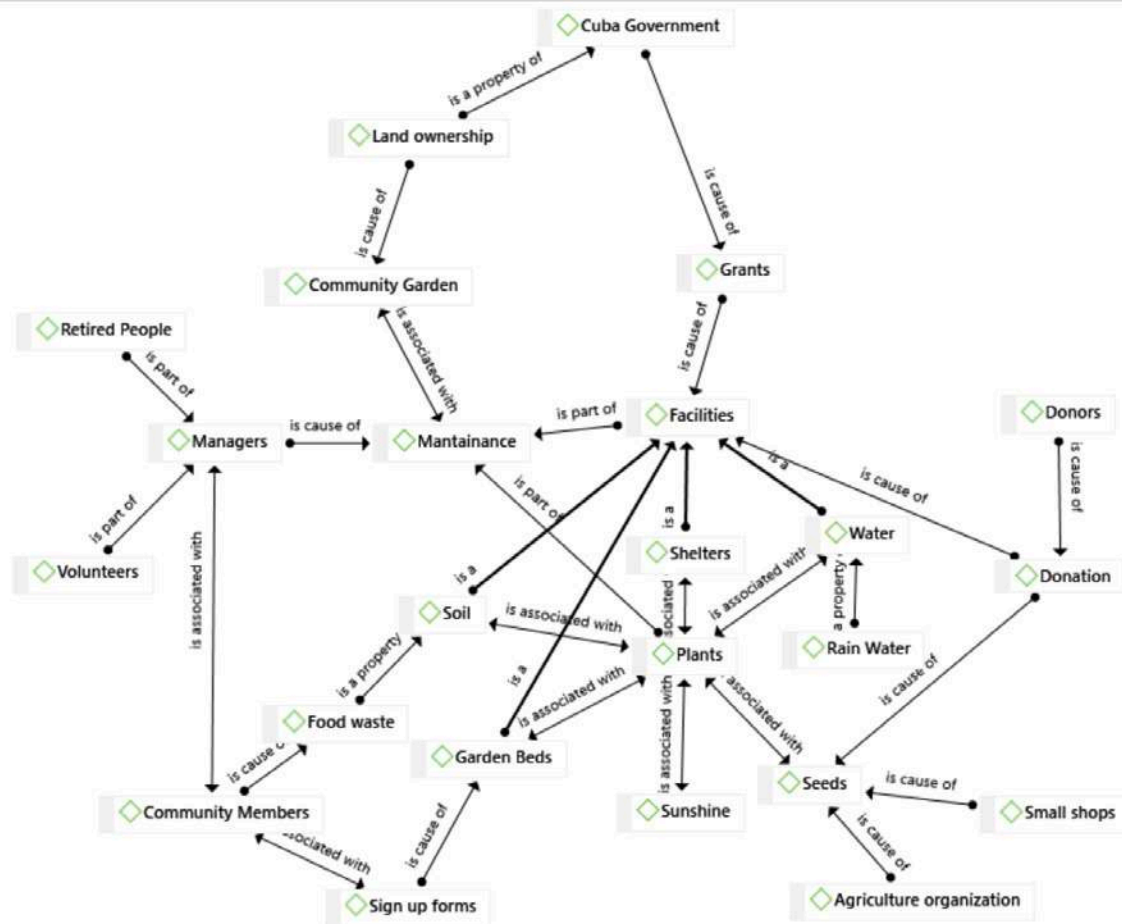


Figure 4.3 Stakeholder Diagram

The diagram analyzes the roles of different stakeholders in creating and maintaining the temporary community garden.

### Government

In Cuba, the government has ownership of those vacant lots, so getting permission from the government is the priority to develop the vacant lots into community gardens. Obtaining governmental grants would be a key step in the process.

### Agriculture Organizations

Cuba Agriculture Organizations have the experts and resources, so it plays a vital role in providing seeds and guidance to raise vegetables and fruits in community gardens.

### Donors

Apart from government agencies, some nonprofit organizations and individual donors might provide donations such as facilities, seeds and funds.

### Small shops

People living in the community can buy the seeds they need from small shops as well.

### Community Members

If someone in the neighborhood is interested in growing food in the community garden, they can sign up for a contract to get one of the community beds. They would then have the responsibility to collect their food waste for composting uses. Furthermore, it is an opportunity to cooperate with the waste management part to gather waste food and compost to fertilize plants.

### Garden Managers

Community gardens will need maintenance for both the food and facilities. Thus, it is a necessity to recruit garden managers and the community can recruit volunteers for retired people as managers. Considering the limit of funds, the community can collect a little amount of money for those managers and receive food as payback.





Source: Havana SP18 Studio

## **Parking Lots**

Some vacant lots are used for temporary parking, indicating the need for parking for residents. Thus, we suggest transforming those vacant lots into parking places. Given the fact that there are storms, it is better to add permeable pavement and bioswales in the temporary parking place so this can help detain and retain stormwater while beautifying the neighborhood by increasing the amount of green plants. Furthermore, it is an opportunity to collect the rainwater as an exceptional water resource for watering the plants in the community gardens.









## CHAPTER 04

# **PLAZAS**

This Plaza section aims to showcase various options at differing scales of open space. Our goal is to provide a menu of options that can be replicated as needed within Los Sitios and show that these placemaking-style interventions can be achieved with existing or recycled materials and community input. We have tailored the programming and design features as best we could, given the limited scope of information we were able to obtain from a distance. The four interventions discussed are examples of how public space can be enhanced or activated with the right process behind it.



# Methodology

Ordinarily, placemakers would rely heavily on community engagement, observations, neighborhood audits and other in-field tools. Sadly, we were unable to visit Cuba in person to make these observations. To make up for this handicap, we dug into the research conducted by previous studios as well as information provided by our partner CUJAE. Additionally, we relied on past experience in similar cities to Havana for appropriate precedents and strategies.

To begin our approach, we made a map of Los Sitios and color coded the street grid based on width and orientation. Figure 5.1 here depicts streets that are more than six meters wide (building façade to building façade) in orange, streets that are less than five meters wide in yellow, and streets with irregular orientation and varying width in green.

From the map, we were able to see places where the grid intersects at odd angles as well as places where the neighborhood grid

breaks from the greater street grid. These places were noted due to their irregular lot sizing which creates natural plazas within the grid network. Some of these places were already being utilized as communal space. It is here where we focused our interventions towards organizing and boosting already active spaces. Other places did not have a lot of activity and therefore showed potential for activation scenarios that included some more prominent design interventions.

We decided on four sites for plaza interventions located at various points around the neighborhood. They were chosen to show the diversity of planning interventions that can be done at various scales and areas around the neighborhood. We do not think these are the only places with potential for plazas, only an example of what is possible. Lastly, the following recommendations are based solely on the limited information gathered through our resources here and would most likely change if we had been given the opportunity to visit in person.



Figure 5.1 Street Grid



Source: Havana SP18 Studio

## ***Plaza 1: Iglesia de San Judas y San Nicolás***

The area of Focus for Plaza 1 is the area around the local church, Iglesia de San Judas y San Nicolás, as well as the local market taking root in the vacant lot opposite the church. The aim for this intervention is to boost existing activity using recycled materials and to increase the density of the market to support a green farm or some form of urban agriculture/place for growing fresh produce.





**Figure 5.2 Plaza 1 Existing Conditions**

The focus on the market is because it is an important resource for the community that already exists and serves an important function for the neighborhood. These local markets, called agro-mercados, are important resources because there are few wholesale markets in Cuba, meaning that those operating local businesses must also buy from the same markets and compete with ordinary consumers for things like produce. With that in mind, we wanted to expand the ability of the market in its existing form by recommending a structure made of shipping containers that could serve as an urban farm as well as a place to sell produce.



**Figure 5.3 Plaza 1 Proposal**

There is ample room in the plaza for cyclical programming as well. These activities could take place during the weekends or days of the week and would occur in regular intervals. We imagine these activities to take the form of expanded farmer's markets (in addition to the agro-mercado), handmade goods fairs where local artisans could peddle their wares and cultural festivals that showcase the area's diverse musical history or various local cuisine.





Figure 5.4 Plaza 1 Existing Conditions and Proposal





Something we noticed about Los Sitios is that the Intimacy Gradient, or transition between private and public life, was small to non-existent. We wanted to address this in our design so that local residents feel a sense of increased ownership over the plaza. This plaza is not supposed to act as a destination plaza but rather an extension of space for the local residences. We tried to increase sense of ownership by recommending that each of the homeowners living in the area immediately around the plaza receive an umbrella. These umbrellas would act as: flexible furniture, help to create micro spaces within public space and serve as a way for residents to feel a part of the plaza.





Source: Havana SP18 Studio

## Plaza 2: **Condesa and Reunion**

Plaza 2 is located just to the west of Plaza 1 and is the site of several previous Interventions in the past. The most recent iteration was met with several community objections due to placement of the benches very close to houses, with people gathering late making noise into the late evening, and fear concerning the placement of trees and lampposts (Mi Sitio en Los Sitios, 2017: 48-51).

We wanted to approach this plaza with a phasing strategy because we are assuming that residents might have concerns about any new interventions at this site. We wanted to continue the theme of extending the residences' living spaces by staging programming infrequently such as quarterly and annually and limiting active interventions to local activities such as local playtime and brief pop-up exhibitions. Our phasing structure would be as follows: Buy-in, Play, Quarterly Programming, Poupups and Long-term (Annual) programming.





Figure 5.5 Plaza 2 Proposal

### Community Buy-in

We aimed to increase community buy-in by fostering local resident interest through various workshops and access to plants for their homes and community tool-sets for various local needs. The community workshops would include do-it-yourself furniture design, gardening or other subjects of interest that can be performed in the public space. Also included would be access to some scrap materials to build things with.



Figure 5.6 Plaza 2 Street Sports and Games Proposal

### Play

Judging from past reports, photos and second-hand information we are aware that local children use this plaza to play games such as soccer and a form of baseball. We wanted to address this activity since it is something that makes the area unique and children would make a large section of the user group for the plaza.

We made a mock-up of what temporary play field markings could look like. We also oriented the baseball markings in the opposite direction to where they are now because currently the children are hitting the ball towards many building façades which could result in broken windows and unhappy residents. Play is a very important aspect to the street life of Los Sitios and Havana as a whole and we would be remiss not to have addressed it.

### Quarterly Programing

Quarterly programming would be a nice fit for Plaza 2 because it brings people to the neighborhood while also remaining infrequent enough to provide adequate private time for just residents. We imagine this programming taking place roughly four times a year and could take the form of: music performances, parades, art fairs, chalk art exhibitions or similar contests. For precedents we took inspiration from cities similar to Havana such as San Juan, Puerto Rico, and Manilla, Philippines given their shared colonial past and civic DNA.



Figure 5.7 Plaza 2 Quarterly Programming Proposal

### Pop-Ups

Pop-up programming is another way to inject activity in a limited way. Pop-up activities and exhibitions could be voted upon by local groups and could be rotated throughout the neighborhood or city in general. These could take the form of temporary pop-up library carts, temporary interactive and food carts or temporary food stalls with some seating and lighting elements. Similarly, the community can come together to create their own such as this example above from a Manilla neighborhood (see Figure 5.8).



Figure 5.8 Plaza 2 Pop-up Proposal



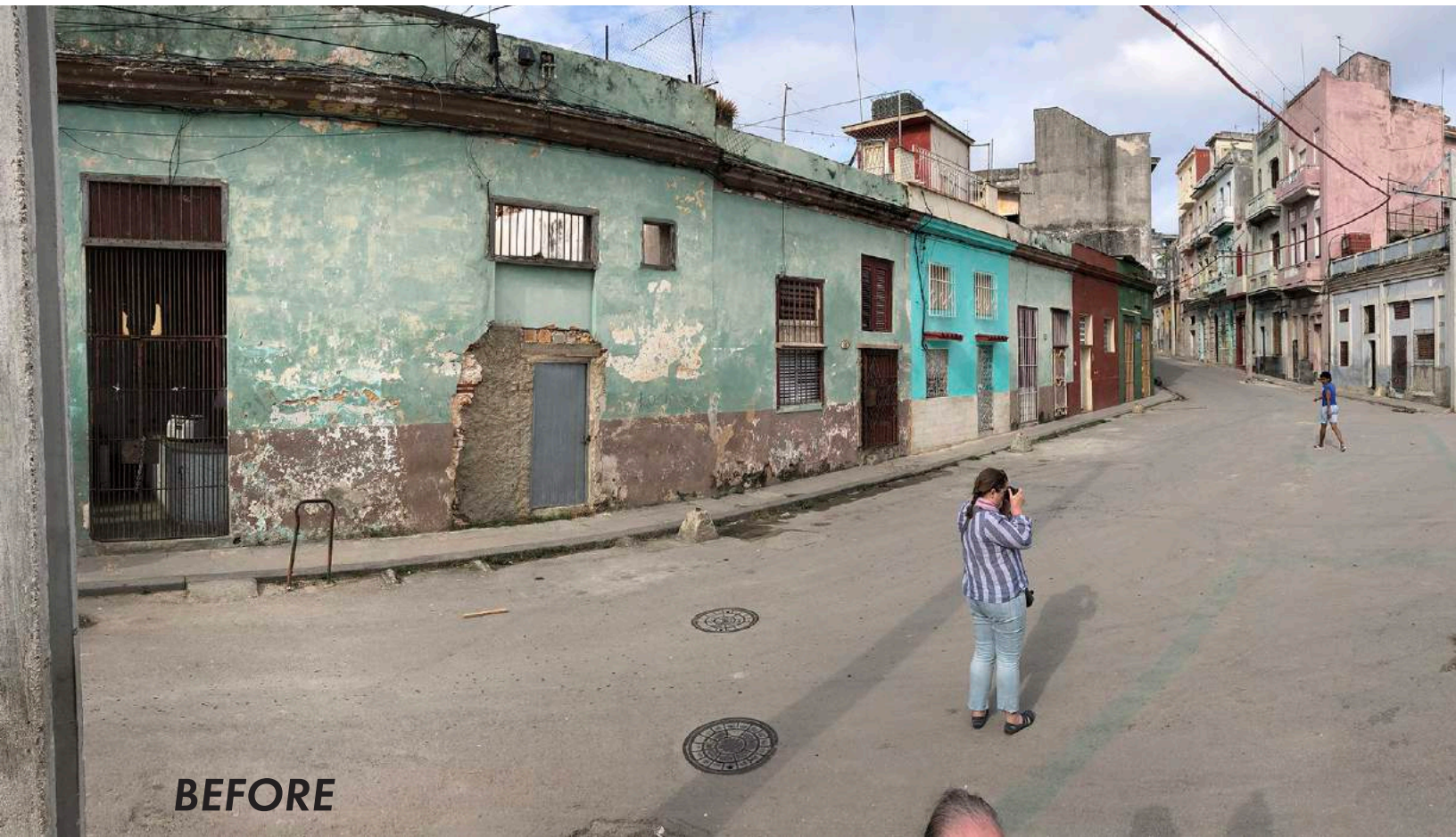










Figure 5.9 Plaza 2 Long Term Recurring Programming

### Long Term recurring programming

Long-term programming is distinct from quarterly programming as these interventions would be larger in scale, bring more people to the neighborhood and occur approximately once a year. These interventions could take the form of a large-scale weekend market, hand-made goods fair, and food and music festivals that showcase the rich flavors of Los Sitios. Similar things take place in many neighborhoods in Manilla. In San Juan, plazas are transformed into dining spaces like the one above in Lote. These long-term interventions could balance the activity in the neighborhood while maintaining the neighborhood's identity and authenticity.





Source: Havana SP18 Studio

## Plaza 3: **"Cuatro Caminos"** – Monte and Belascoaín

The existing area for Plaza 3 is already a public space located at the southern edge of the neighborhood. This area is flood-prone due to poor drainage and seasonal rains but plays an important role in bridging Los Sitios with the rest of the city. It is in an area colloquially termed "Cuatro Caminos" or four ways/paths. Currently, there is a large water feature that takes up much of the space within the plaza.



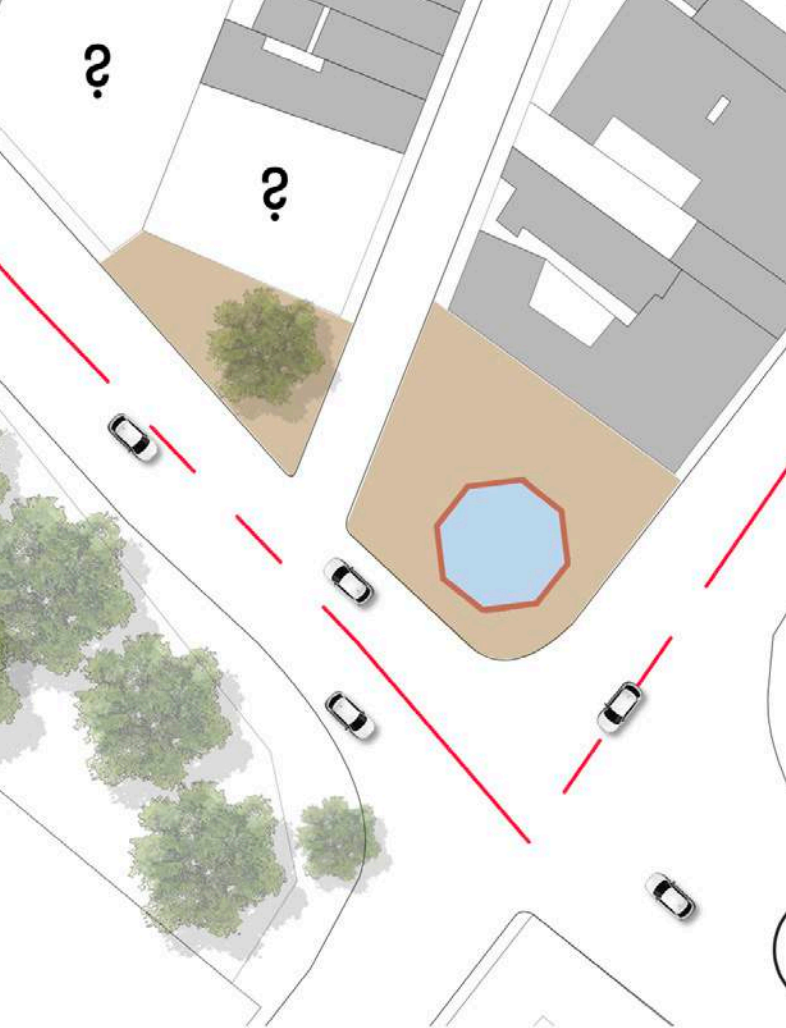


Figure 5.10 Plaza 3 Existing Conditions

Our design aims to transform the water feature's rim into a seating area, its basin into a rain garden with enough clearance to address the flooding issues present in Los Sitios. We imagine another structure here that could be made of recycled materials such as stacked shipping containers or corrugated metal. This structure could operate as a place for storage and organization for alternative modes of transportation such as bicitaxis and cargo-bikes. This re-imagining of the plaza is also complete with solar sails for added shade in the public realm while people wait for their transit options.



Figure 5.11 Plaza 3 Proposal



Source: Picassa, 2017

## Plaza 4: *Belascoaín and Chamorro*

Plaza 4 is located on the western edge of Los Sitios and stands to be an example of what is possible in these small spaces where the local grid breaks with the larger street grid. This break in the grid is sometimes seen as weakness due to the creation of awkward and irregularly shaped lots. This attribute is ideal for small-scale interventions.

We envision Plaza 4 to be the site of a small-scale intervention that is sometimes referred to as a pocket plaza or pocket park. These miniature public spaces can bring a much-needed amenity to an area that has little access to public space. The aim of this intervention is to prove that with a few resources, small public spaces can be turned into a major destination that can become a transitional zone where the neighborhood can meet and mix with the city as a whole.

With just a few resources such as small cafeteria kiosks, potted plants, lights, paint and moveable tables and chairs we can truly transform a space and serve the community with a significant asset.



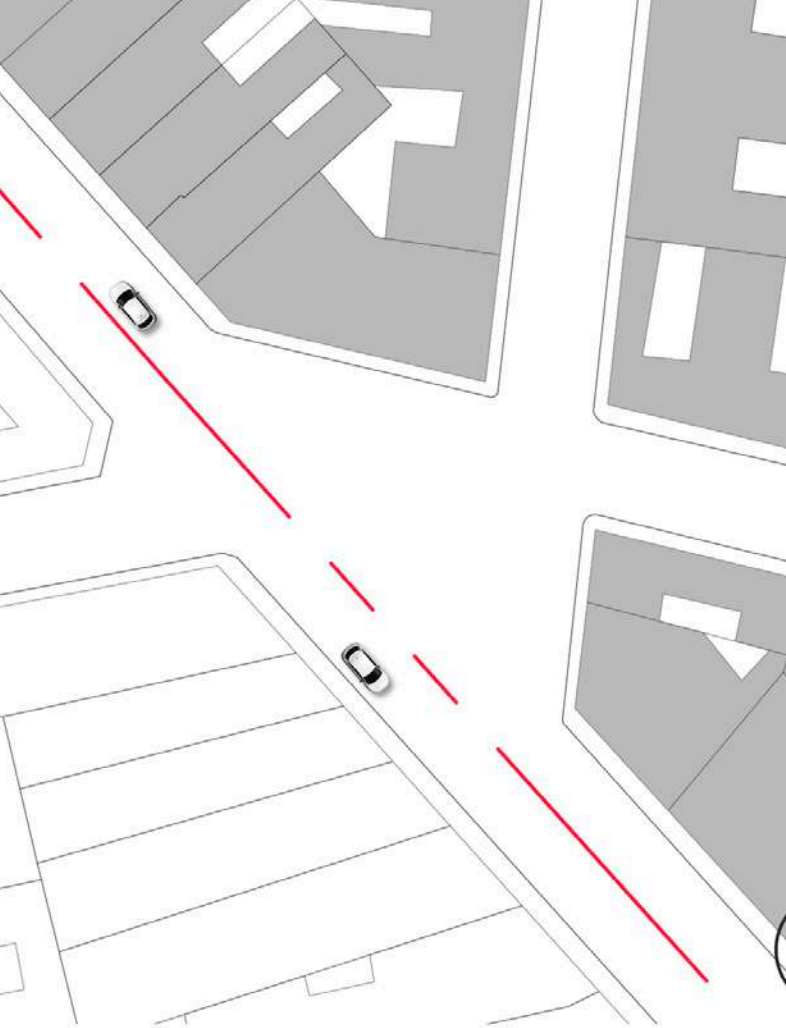


Figure 5.12 Plaza 4 Existing Conditions

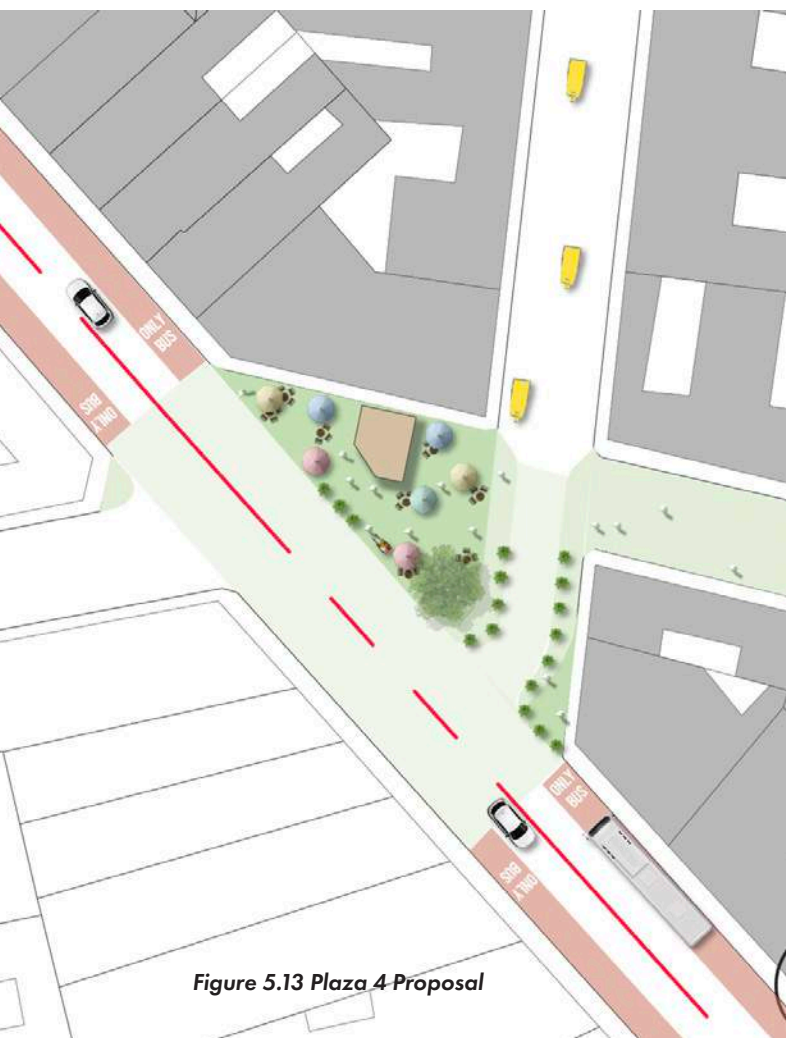


Figure 5.13 Plaza 4 Proposal

## Governance and Management

While a superblock model and local interventions will restructure traffic flow and designate streets as pedestrian spaces, the implementation and management process can serve as a community-strengthening tool that promotes local conversations about mobility and public space maintenance. As identified by Warren et al. (2015), "Cuba's history of extensive public participation ... bodes well for using local focus groups to refine neighbourhood needs and desires with respect to transport." In that spirit, we propose a local leadership structure for the implementation and management of our proposed local solutions.

Our proposed model includes the establishment of a Superblock Committee of community members with representatives from each of the three superblock, which would cooperate with the Consejo Popular. These representatives will act as Superblock Leaders one from each of the three blocks. Captains work together throughout the process, in addition to leading committees focused on: mobility, water, waste and programming of vacant lots and plazas. Throughout the process, captains would host public forums and events in the superblock's public spaces and arterial plazas. These events will serve to create community conversation and involvement in the pilots while giving community members the opportunity to make suggestions and changes.



**AFTER**







## CHAPTER 05

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# RECOMMENDATIONS

This semester has been a momentous time to study public space, as cities around the world work to provide safe public spaces for people during a pandemic. The COVID-19 crisis has reinforced the importance of public space for mental and physical health, as well as social connection. It has also reinforced the need for community-based planning, which includes working with and talking to residents.

We were challenged by how difficult it is to plan for a community without being physically present. We turned to best practices from our lived experiences in cities around the world to create a toolkit of proposals that can be implemented directly. We were inspired by Los Sitios' use of streets as public spaces, their creativity in plaza activations, and their community-based solutions. We hope that our proposals can be easily integrated into the existing framework and make residents feel empowered to make decisions about what their public spaces look like and feel like.

Furthermore, many of our proposals could potentially be taken into consideration and integrated into a general master plan which would first be launched as a pilot in Los Sitios, expanded outward into the rest of Centro Havana, and then citywide. This is an opportunity to demonstrate the creativity and ingenuity of the Cuban people, as well as to emphasize the mixed-use character which is already found in Havana. By preserving the heritage of Havana's past, and taking from current ideas and suggestions from the community, the future can be what the people make it.





If we have learned anything from this period of physical distancing, it's the universality of overcoming challenges and the need to work together to find creative solutions to the problems that our societies face. There are significant cultural, political and economic differences between Cuba and the United States, but we experience many of the same problems in our cities and hope that by studying solutions in other countries, we can adopt best practices to our circumstances. The greatest take away for the students this semester was the importance of small interventions and an ability to adapt to a rapidly changing world.







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Photography by Carlos Rodriguez Estevez