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## INTERNATIONAL TOURISM AND URBAN TRANSFORMATION IN OLD HAVANA

NIKLAS VÖLKENING, ANDREAS BENZ and MATTHIAS SCHMIDT

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**Summary:** Cuba is currently experiencing an unprecedented boom in international tourism, and the Cuban state has actively supported tourism expansion as a strategic means to increase greatly needed foreign currency income, in order to sustain its socialist system. In Havana, Cuba's gateway city for international tourists and – with its colonial old town bestowed with UNESCO world heritage status – one of its touristic hotspots, this tourism boom is felt most profoundly. The old town has been subject to far-reaching processes of urban restructuring, driven by state-run urban renewal projects, thereby increasing touristic influx and the gradual displacement of dwellers and resident-oriented urban functions by tourism-oriented ventures. This article provides an analysis of the recent spatio-structural urban transformation processes in Habana Vieja, highlighting particularly its interrelations with international tourism, the role of the Cuban government as a major tourism facilitator and the state-run old town restoration programme. Our analysis shows that in the context of old town restructuring in Havana, the Cuban government often favours touristic needs over those of local dwellers, albeit some of them may indeed profit from increasing touristification. Meanwhile, the government is willing to accept, at least in controlled settings, market-based developments otherwise strongly opposed by official state ideology.

**Zusammenfassung:** Kuba erlebt derzeit einen beispiellosen Boom des internationalen Tourismus. Die Ausweitung des touristischen Angebots wurde und wird aktiv und gezielt von staatlicher Seite vorangetrieben, um das sozialistische System mit den erwirtschafteten und dringend benötigten Devisen zu stützen. In Havanna, das den primären Ankunftsort für internationale Touristen und mit seiner zum UNESCO-Weltkulturerbe ernannten Altstadt einen touristischen Hotspot in Kuba darstellt, wird dieser Boom am deutlichsten. Habana Vieja, die Altstadt von Havanna, unterliegt hierbei weitreichenden urbanen Transformationsprozessen. Getrieben werden diese durch staatliche Sanierungsprojekte, den stetig wachsenden Zustrom an Touristen und die damit verbundene Verdrängung von lokaler Bevölkerung und Versorgungsinfrastrukturen zugunsten touristischer Nutzungen. Dieser Beitrag analysiert die jüngeren Prozesse räumlich-struktureller Transformation in Habana Vieja unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der Auswirkungen des internationalen Tourismus, die Rolle der kubanischen Regierung als maßgeblicher Förderer des Tourismus und die staatlichen Programme zur Altstadtsanierung. Unsere Analyse verdeutlicht, dass die kubanische Regierung im Zuge der Altstadtsanierung vielfach touristische Bedürfnisse über die der lokalen Bevölkerung stellt, auch wenn Teile dieser von der zunehmenden ‚Touristifizierung‘ profitieren können. Die Regierung ist indessen bereit, marktwirtschaftliche Entwicklungen, zumindest in einem kontrollierten Rahmen, zuzulassen.

**Keywords:** international tourism, transformation, urban development, Cuba, Havana

### 1 Introduction

Adorned with beautiful Caribbean beaches, picturesque old towns and vintage cars, a fascinating culture and world-famous cigars, rum, music and a romanticised ‘revolutionary’ flair, Cuba has huge touristic potential. No surprise, therefore, that international tourism on the island has experienced extremely high growth rates during the last three decades. Annual tourist arrivals have multiplied more than twelve-fold since 1990, and they currently stand at 4.2 million (ONEI 2017a), yielding more than 3 billion US\$ annually (SALINAS et al. 2018, 10). Nevertheless, the island's general economic devel-

opment is weak as a consequence of a severe and long-lasting economic crisis since the early 1990s. Furthermore, its per capita GDP of 7,524 PPP\$ ranks 117 out of 189 countries worldwide, just slightly above India, Angola and D.R. Congo (UNDP 2018). Pervasive resource scarcity, decaying infrastructure and an overall insufficient supply situation – from food items to fuel and construction materials – hamper economic activities and burden people's day-to-day lives. As a consequence, tourists (and locals alike) are confronted with stark contrasts between smartened up, touristified old town centres and beach resorts, on the one hand, and crumbling, ramshackle buildings with occasional collapses and dilapidated

public infrastructure on the other. *Habana Vieja*, the old town of Havana, nestled within the limits of the former colonial fortified city, is a case in point where such contrasts materialise in urban space. *Habana Vieja* is the hotspot for city tourism in Cuba and serves as a gateway for most arriving tourists. Nonetheless, despite its UNESCO world heritage status, it is in some quarters still a striking example of severe infrastructural decay, overcrowded housing and extremely poor living conditions, albeit at the same time it forms a model region for large-scale, state-run old town restoration. Large sections have been renovated under the auspices of the office of the city historian (*Oficina de la Historiador de la Ciudad*; OHC) and transformed into tourism zones. Similar processes of what may be termed “intensified touristification” in historical centres (SEQUERA and NOFRE 2018) can be observed in other cities of former socialist states, particularly in Central Eastern Europe, with far-reaching implications for urban restructuring (DUMBROVSKÁ 2017; PIXOVÁ and SLÁDEK 2017; ROELOFSEN 2018; SMITH et al. 2018). Whilst in these places tourist-induced urban transformation, conversions of use, the concentration of touristic offerings and the production of beneficiaries and marginalised populations are the result of highly unregulated private market forces, Havana constitutes an interesting counterpoint, as it is firmly embedded in Cuba’s socialist system and highly state-run and state-controlled economy.

The objective of this paper is to provide an analysis and better understanding of the recent spatio-structural urban transformation processes in *Habana Vieja*, particularly aiming at establishing its interrelations with international tourism as a vital foreign currency-earning sector, the role of the Cuban government as a major tourism supporter and facilitator and the state-run old town restoration programme and its embedding in overall economic reform measures in times of persistent crisis. This includes changes in land use, built-up structures, building conditions and utilisation. For this purpose, we compare the results from our recent field mapping with a baseline mapping done by WEHRHAHN and WIDDERICH (2000) twenty years ago. We argue that the state’s measures and programmes aim predominantly at fostering tourism as a vital source of foreign currency income: spatial structures, such as those found in *Habana Vieja*, and economic structures, i.e. allowances for *casas particulares* (private guesthouses), *paladares* (private restaurants) and private guides, are transformed by the state to best serve this purpose, while other objectives, for instance improving living conditions for

*Habaneros* and protecting tenants and the residential milieu, rank a long-distant second. Whilst this paper seeks primarily to identify (empirically) recent trends in urban transformation in *Habana Vieja*, questions surrounding the socio-spatial consequences of the new tourism-induced urban dynamics, leading to questions about citizenship and the right to the city (LEFEBVRE 1996), serve as a theoretical background. The particularities of the (post-) socialist or mixed and transition economy of Cuba, outlined in the following chapter, offer an especially interesting perspective in this regard.

## 2 Economic crisis and political economic reforms

Cuba is the only former Comecon (Council for Mutual Economic Assistance) or Eastern Bloc country in which socialism has survived since the collapse of the Soviet Union and the subsequent political economic transformations towards a market economy and liberal capitalism. This has been accomplished against the backdrop of an existential economic crisis unfolding in the early 1990s, which at the time led many observers to expect Cuban socialism to collapse as the last dinosaur of a crumbling international socialist system (ZEUSKE 2016, 208). Instead, the island has maintained its socialist one-party system up to the present day, even though economic crisis still rages onward. Through a number of economic and political reforms, partly allowing the intrusion of private and market economy elements into certain economic niches, aligned with the massive promotion of hard currency earning sectors – particularly tourism – the Cuban leadership has managed to stabilise the system and maintain a number of seminal elements of socialism.

Before 1990, the Cuban economy relied heavily on international trade conducted on preferential terms with the Soviet Union and its allies, accounting for 85% of the nation’s external trade volume (ZEUSKE 2016, 206). With the dissolution of Comecon, entailing the sudden loss of export markets and the abrupt end of subsidised imports from the then collapsing Soviet Union, Cuba entered a severe and existence-threatening economic crisis in the early 1990s, which resulted in an almost complete breakdown of the economy, the collapse of domestic production, serious energy and food shortages and a dire general supply situation (HOFFMANN 2009, 104; STRICKER 2010, 185). Between 1989 and 1993, Cuba’s GDP dropped by 35%, and its imports plummeted by nearly 80%

(BOROWY 2013, 18; MORRIS 2014, 15; SUÁREZ et al. 2012, 2727). Moreover, domestic output almost stalled in many sectors, with 80 % of the domestic production capacity falling idle (ZEUSKE 2016, 207), and due to the drop in food imports (accounting for 55 % of calories consumed in Cuba by 1989) and a lack of imported fuels, pesticides, fertilisers and other farm inputs, food production and distribution crumpled, severely threatening food security, with the per-capita kilocalorie consumption dropping from 2,899 in 1989 to 1,863 in 1993 (BOROWY 2013, 18, 21; MURPHY 1999, 8-9). Subsequently, the country de-industrialised, productivity decreased and infrastructure decayed even further, making Cuba even more dependent on imported food (HOFFMANN 2011, 4), rising to a share of 70-80 % in the 1990s (HOFFMANN 2011, 8).

In urgent need of foreign hard currency revenues to sustain this vital flow of inbound goods, the Cuban government announced in 1990 the so-called *Período especial en tiempo de paz* (Special Period in Time of Peace) and launched a strategy to expand and develop strongly a number of income-generating sectors, such as mineral resource extraction, pharmaceutical and bio-technological products and, most importantly, international tourism. For this purpose, the government undertook a number of economic reforms introducing capitalistic and market-oriented elements in the hitherto socialist system, meaning the “most far-reaching process of economic reforms for more than five decades” and “a historic change in the Cuban socio-economic model” (TORRES 2016, 1683). This is particularly true for those reforms introduced after Raúl Castro took over the presidency in 2008 (SCHMIEG 2017).

The administration partly legalised and facilitated private land-ownership (2007), private entrepreneurship, non-agricultural cooperatives and self-employment (*trabajo por cuenta propia*) (1993, 2010), *casas particulares* and private employment (1997), *paladares* (1995), bank loans for private businesses (2011) and foreign investment and joint ventures (1995, 2014); furthermore, it reduced restrictions on private remittances and commodity imports (2015) and strongly supported the tourism sector to attract hard currency into the state coffers (BOROWY 2013, 19; HOFFMANN 2010; ROLAND 2010, 15; TORRES 2016, 1688-1695). A parallel system involving Cuban Pesos (CUP) for internal payments and Convertible Pesos (CUC) tied to the US-Dollar in fixed exchange rates was introduced, in order to safeguard revenues from the emerging economic sectors, particularly tourism, with VAT rates of up to 250 % (KULKE 2011, 93; RITTER and HENKEN 2014, 190).

One of the essential factors for the dynamics described herein was the legalisation in 1993 of private businesses and self-employment for 117 occupations, a move that was extended to more than 200 occupations in 2010 (SIMONI 2017, 4). In 2016, 1.14 million Cubans, representing a share of 24.8 % of the total workforce, were already engaged in the private sector (ONEI 2017b, 11) – an unprecedented figure for more than 50 years (TORRES 2016, 1688).

These economic reforms allowed Cuba to maintain its socialist welfare state model along with only moderate signs of quality deterioration in the education and health sectors (BOROWY 2013). However, economic growth rates are still low (in average 2.1 % p.a. from 2009-2016), and they recently slipped off into recession with a -0.9 % GDP decline in 2016 (UNSD 2018, own calculations). In addition, economists claim that the official GDP figures provided by the Cuban government overestimate more than two-fold the real figures (DE MIRANDA-PARRONDO 2013, 42; VIDAL ALEJANDRO 2017; SCHMIEG 2017, 6), and the country continues to be highly dependent on imports of commodities, consumer goods, fuels and food. The state of public infrastructure, and in particular the condition of the housing stock, has deteriorated since the 1990s (TORRES 2016, 1684). Today, Cubans suffer from a widespread investment bottleneck, since state investment aims heavily at social sectors like education and public health, at the expense of public infrastructure and maintenance (TORRES 2016, 1684). Residential buildings, mobility infrastructure, public transport, public gas and water supply facilities, sewage systems and information and communication technology lack public investment. The decaying of entire housing blocks and quarters, increasing numbers of inhabitable buildings, many in danger of collapsing, and insufficient investments in the construction of new residential buildings have led to an acute housing shortage in the cities, resulting in overcrowded flats and postponed family formation. These insufficiencies mean extreme hardships for Cubans' everyday lives and feed a growing underbelly of dissatisfaction, particularly among the younger generations who did not benefit from the blessings of the urban reforms of the 1960s or the “relatively good years of the 1970s and 1980s” (LEOGRANDE 2015, 379-380) but grew up instead under the tough conditions of the *Período especial* in a state of incessant crisis (ZEUSKE 2010, 28).

Since the decline in built infrastructure in old colonial towns of potential touristic interest was contradictory to the government's tourism expansion strategy, the state increasingly got involved in

old town restoration projects and allocated resources to upgrading programmes, with the ongoing restoration programme in *Habana Vieja* being the most extensive and prominent example in this regard.

### 3 Characteristics and dynamics of Cuba's tourism boom

Tourism is expected to become a leading sector of the global economy in the 21<sup>st</sup> century (OPASCHOWSKI et al. 2006; STEINECKE 2014, 17), but in Cuba, this vision has already materialised, with related revenues forming the most important source of foreign currency income (MARTÍNEZ HERNANDES and PUIG MENESES 2018). The island has a long history in tourism, with a first boom taking place in the late 1940s and 1950s, when up to 272,265 tourists per annum, predominantly from the USA, visited, making it at that time the most popular Caribbean destination (SALINAS et al. 2018, 4). Following on from the Cuban Revolution in 1959, this influx of visitors came to an abrupt halt (SALINAS et al. 2018, 11) and international tourist arrivals dropped sharply to just 1,600 in 1970 (WEHRHAHN and WIDDERICH 2000, 95). Since the end of the Cold War and the easing of travel restrictions in the 1990s, the nation experi-

enced an unprecedented and long-lasting tourism boom, which strongly exceeded pre-revolutionary tourism volume. International tourist arrivals have risen steadily, from about 289,000 in 1989, to currently more than 4.2 million (Fig. 1) (ECHTLINGER 2000, 82; ONEI 2017a, 11-12; ONEI 2012). In addition, the number of foreign overnight stays rose in the same period, from 2.5 million to 22 million per year (ONEI 2017a, 11-12; ONEI 2012). The Cuban government aimed at diversifying the tourism sector beyond the classic offerings of beach and cultural tourism and heavily promoted cruise and nautical tourism, health and nature tourism as well as international congresses and fairs (SALINAS et al. 2018, 12). The number of cruise passengers has soared from officially 1,883 in 2013 to 397,520 in 2017, and it is expected to reach up to 700,000 in 2018, with half a million shore leaves in Havana alone (BOOBBYER 2018; ONEI 2017a, 8). Moreover, Havana's cruise port is to be expanded from its currently two to six berths by 2024 (GRANMA 2018).

The economic upturn in the new millennium, as a result of which Cuba realised GDP growth rates of 6.3 % per annum on average between 1999 and 2007 (WORLD BANK 2018), has been attributed mainly to the expansion of the tourism sector (SUÁREZ et al. 2012, 2727). Additionally, tourist expenditure in the

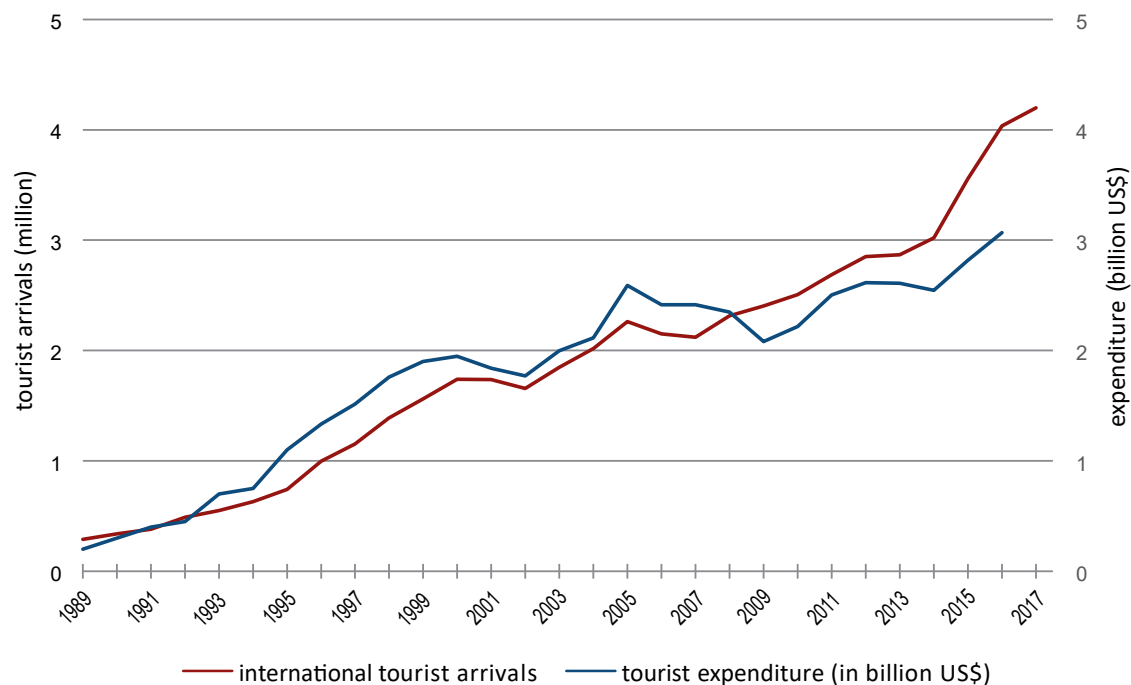


Fig. 1: International tourist arrivals and tourist expenditure in Cuba (at 2010 prices, in billion US\$)  
Data sources: ECHTLINGER 2000, 82; ONEI 2017a; UNSD 2018; SALINAS et al. 2018, 10; UNWTO 2018; WEHRHAHN and WIDDERICH 2000, 94.



country made up 4.2 % of the island's GDP in 2016 (own calculations, based on WORLD BANK 2018) and 19 % of its foreign exchange earnings (own calculations, based on UNSD 2018).

This tourism surge is due not only to a changed geopolitical situation and the growing curiosity of Western tourists to experience real-life socialism in its last reserve, but also to an outcome of the Cuban government's strategy. As early as 1989, the then Cuban president FIDEL CASTRO (1989) considered international tourism as having the potential to "become a kind of gold mine through which the country can obtain foreign exchange". The economic reforms of the government aimed particularly at the tourism sector, triggering highly stimulating effects: international joint ventures allowed foreign hotel chains and tourism enterprises to invest in the Cuban market; for instance, the legalisation of private entrepreneurship allowed for private restaurants (1,700 *paladares* in 2015), private souvenir shops, private guest rooms (17,000 *casas particulares* in 2015) and private tourism-related services such as taxi drivers and tour guides (SALINAS et al. 2018, 2, 7-8). In addition, the Cuban government intensified state investment in tourism, and the dual monetary system made it a particularly attractive field of newly permitted private occupation, investment and business, as it enabled access to the highly sought-after CUC. Since it was no longer possible to make a living only on CUP salaries paid in government jobs (on average 740 CUP per month, equivalent to 29 US\$), people were pushed into formal as well as informal CUC-earning activities, particularly tourism, resulting in the severe brain drain of highly-skilled professionals from the health and education sectors, industry and public administration into low-skilled tourism roles such as taxi drivers or waiters (HOFFMANN 2011, 4-5; NAU 2016, 13-14; TORRES 2016, 1687; WEHRHAHN and WIDDERICH 2000, 105). The high importance of and highly unequal access to CUC income opportunities led to a profound restratification of Cuban society and a widening gap between winners and losers, which entailed spatial consequences. As real estate and housing sales were legalised in 2011, social groups with higher incomes began to separate spatially from groups with lower incomes, the latter of whom were often shifted to the edges of cities, which in turn are less interesting for tourists and therefore limit the ability to gain any income from tourism (NAU 2016, 16).

The Cuban tourism boom is driven exclusively by international tourists, mostly from Western countries, with the bulk of them coming (in 2016) from Canada (30 %), the United States (7 %), Germany

(6 %) and the international Cuban diaspora (11 %) (ONEI 2017a, 9). Domestic tourism, in contrast, is a marginalised and stagnating segment and accounted for only 21 % of all overnight stays in 2016 (Fig. 2). Particularly the more expensive, CUC-based four and five star hotels are the exclusive realm of international tourists, while domestic tourists are confined to low-budget establishments (Fig. 3).

The growing demand for high standards of hotel accommodation soon surpassed limited capacity and has thus triggered an unprecedented increase in construction, whereby huge hotel complexes and new holiday resorts are now being established in city centres and along the beachfront with the help of investments from international joint ventures and hotel chains (GONZÁLES-PÉREZ et al. 2016; RUIZ GUTIÉRREZ 2015). Havana is one of the hotspots of this growth, with construction works ongoing throughout the city centre, thereby profoundly changing the urban landscape. However, besides the construction of large new hotel complexes, another less apparent development is taking place: hundreds of new *casas particulares* have been established, particularly in *Habana Vieja*, where small-scale structures, lack of free building plots and obligations to preserve historical artefacts prevent the establishment of huge hotel developments. This in turn provides new opportunities for local resident *Habaneros* to participate in the tourism boom. Despite this perspective on personal economic advancement by obtaining foreign currency (which has doubtlessly improved the living conditions of many *Habaneros* engaging in tourism), large-scale restorations of buildings and public infrastructure in *Habana Vieja* are related closely to and dependent on further foreign currency revenues – which ultimately means more tourism.

#### 4 Havana – in the eye of the touristic hurricane

When the promotion of international tourism was first declared a major development strategy in the Second Five Year Plan (1981-85), *Habana Vieja* – besides the beaches of Varadero – was prioritised as a top destination and the major entry point for arriving international tourists (COLANTONIO and POTTER 2006, 109). The city offers picturesque colonial heritage, close proximity to tropical beaches, an international airport and well-established connections to other destinations in Cuba (TAYLOR and MCGLYNN 2009, 408). Furthermore, the area has benefitted sub-

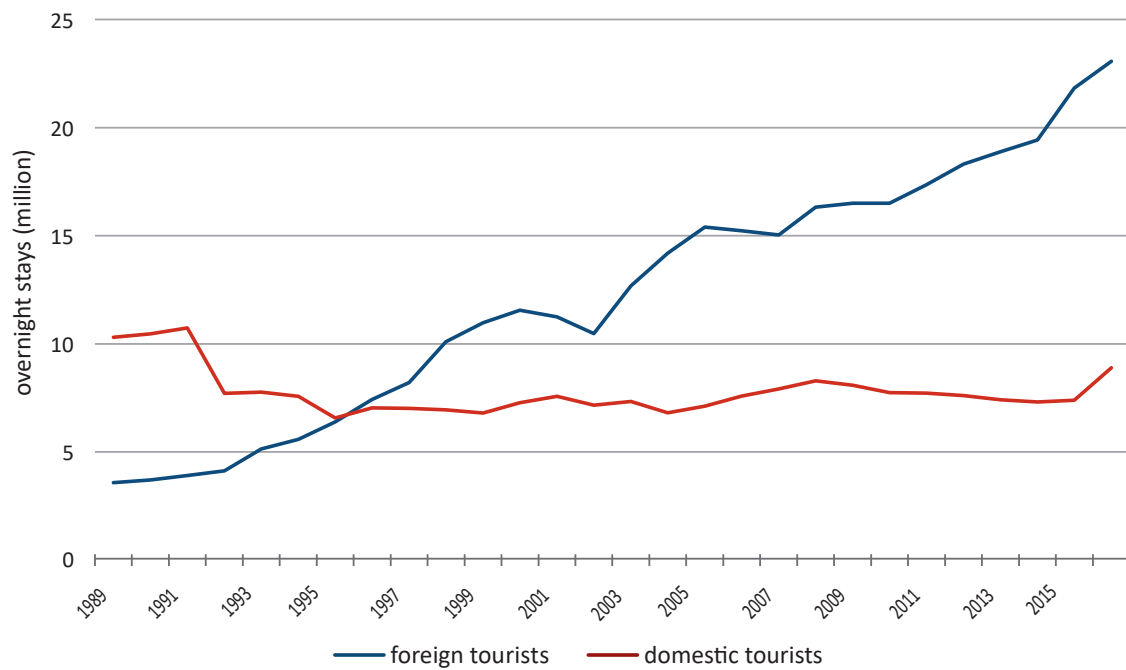


Fig. 2: Overnight stays, domestic and foreign tourists. Data sources: ONEI 2012; ONEI 2017a, 11-12.

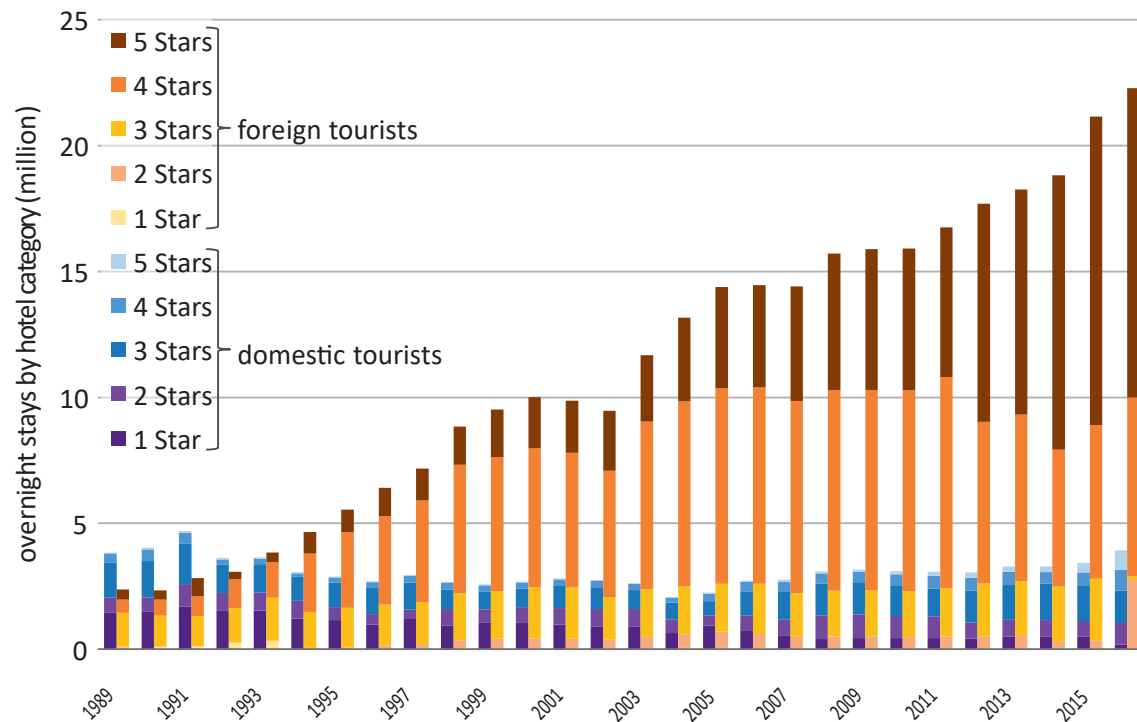


Fig. 3: Overnight stays by hotel category. Data sources: ONEI 2012; ONEI 2017a, 11-12.

stantially from its recognition as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1982 (UNESCO 1982, 7), justified by the fact that about 90 % of its buildings are consid-

ered of high historical or architectural value (PETERS 2001, 5). This recognition gave rise to increasing touristic interest in *Habana Vieja* and has served as a

catalyst for the creation of a distinctive public image, among others via a high-profile tourism campaign. BAILEY (2008, 1083) traces the touristic potential of *Habana Vieja* back to its diversity in terms of architecture and history, due to a state unspoiled by “successive waves of demolition and redevelopment”, which has otherwise destroyed huge parts of the historical architecture in European, American and Asian cities. The state has fostered tourism development in Havana heavily, with every fourth hotel for international tourists located in the city (ONEI 2017a, 15).

In the decades following the Cuban Revolution in 1959, the maintenance – not to speak of development – of *Habana Vieja* was neglected, which today turns out paradoxically to be a seminal aspect of its touristic potential. The Cuban government concentrated on large housing projects and industrial facilities on the fringes of Havana (FOSTER 2003, 788), which, in combination with a scarcity of construction materials, resulted in structural decay and eventually in frequent collapses of buildings all over *Habana Vieja*. In 2008, about 60 % of the buildings in the area were in bad condition, and 420 buildings collapsed during that year (CHINEA et al 2008, 12). The first heritage protection laws in 1977 laid the ground for assessing the historic centre and restoring individual buildings. The *Oficina del Historiador de la Ciudad* passed the first Five Year Restoration Plan for *Habana Vieja* (1981–1985), which was funded with 11 million pesos by the state and comprised the restoration of 30 buildings in the surroundings of Plaza Vieja (FORNET GIL 2011, 304–305).

Although an action plan and restoration guidelines were developed, the whole project was temporarily stopped at the dawn of the crisis in 1990 (FORNET GIL 2011, 305). In the wake of the reorganisation of the OHC via *Decreto-Ley Número 143* (1993), a priority zone for restoration within *Habana Vieja* was determined and included in a comprehensive city development plan (*Plan Maestro*) presented in 1994, which is updated regularly, most recently in 2016 (OHC 2016). Accordingly, the first stages of the restoration process concentrated in and around plaza areas in the northeastern parts of *Habana Vieja* (OHC 2016, 187; SCARPACI 2000, 728).

The restoration initiative proved to be a huge economic success, with revenues from tourism in *Habana Vieja* increasing from about 11 million US\$ in 1995 (WEHRHAHN and WIDDERICH 2000, 101) to almost 202 million US\$ in 2015, 197 million US\$ of which originated from foreign tourists (ONEI 2016, 61). WEHRHAHN and WIDDERICH (2000, 103) noted that the commencing touristic upsurge of the 1990s,

and the refurbishment under the aegis of the OHC, caused seminal changes in the use patterns in *Habana Vieja*. They also highlighted potential fields of conflict between the inhabitants of *Habana Vieja* and the OHC, which they called the “most powerful organization” in *Habana Vieja* (2000, 102). As the OHC is subordinate directly to the Council of State and might negotiate with foreign investors without regard to the municipality or the Ministry of Foreign Investment (BAILEY 2008, 1087), it plays a central and mainly independent role in the transformation of *Habana Vieja*. For instance, it is allowed to raise a 10 % tax on all economic activities and runs its own corporate network – which includes, among others, Habanaguex (hotels, restaurants, historic preservation), San Cristóbal (travel agency) and Aurea (real estate) (SCARPACI 2012, 73) – applying de facto capitalistic principles. However, the creation of jobs and the restoration of housing were also goals pursued by the OHC. Despite the successes in restoring parts of *Habana Vieja*, corruption and self-enrichment within the OHC’s corporate network led to its absorption by the military-controlled Grupo de Administración Empresarial S.A. (GAESA), thus raising concerns about an increase in commercialisation (PENTÓN and ESCOBAR 2016).

## 5 Analysis of spatio-structural transformations

The general dynamics of Cuba’s persistent economic crisis, the government’s crisis management and economic reform measures, particularly in the tourism sector, become manifest and are condensed in tangible spatio-structural transformations in the ongoing urban restructuring processes currently prevailing in *Habana Vieja*. Employing this case study site, we analyse the dynamics and characteristics of structural transformations in light of the recent tourism boom and related public policy strategies and measures since the 1990s. The methodological approach in this study is based mainly on empirical field mapping, observations and a series of 14 qualitative interviews conducted in February, March and August 2017 with residents of *Habana Vieja*. Furthermore, official data, reports and scientific publications are used to estimate and analyse the development and consequences of touristic penetration. Urban transformation trends in the area were identified by a comparative analysis of results from our field mapping conducted in 2017 (with the help of students from the University of Augsburg) aligned with WEHRHAHN and WIDDERICH’s (2000)



mapping of the same area in 1997, thereby allowing for a 20-year comparison and the identification of emerging trends and new patterns of urban restructuring. From this analysis, changes in land use, built-up structures, building conditions and building utilisation in *Habana Vieja* have been identified.

In our mapping, we mainly applied the same categories as those used by WEHRHAHN and WIDDERICH (2000) to secure comparability, adjusting them where necessary. After the replacement of the US Dollar by CUC in 2003 as the official means of payment in Cuba, and the equal acceptance of CUC and CUP at a fixed rate of 1:24 in all shops, some categories, such as 'Dollar shops' and 'Peso shops', are no longer applicable. The only exceptions are those basic supply shops (*bodegas*), which offer subsidised basic food-stuffs against ration cards (*libreta de abastecimiento*), for which we have added a respective category. The categories of Dollar restaurants (*paladar*) and Peso restaurants are replaced by the distinction between 'restaurant' (high prices, mainly tourist customers) and 'snack-bar' (low prices, mainly local customers). We added a new category for private *casas particulares*, which were legalised only shortly after WEHRHAHN and WIDDERICH's (2000) mapping.

## 6 Tourism and spatial transformations in *Habana Vieja*

Changes in usage patterns and infrastructure have accelerated over the last 20 years through touristic expansion. Figure 4 shows the increase in touristic offers in *Habana Vieja* compared to 1994 and 1997. Particularly, the number of CUC-earning ventures has multiplied, such as shops serving mainly touristic demands (more than quintupled from 66 in 1997 to 341 in 2017), gastronomic offerings (from 44 to 214) and hotels (from 7 to 21). This expansion in tourist-oriented offerings thrives mostly at the expense of shops supplying the local population, whose number dropped from 117 in 1997 to only 13 in 2017.

However, these changes were not spread evenly across *Habana Vieja* and instead led to spatially heterogeneous use patterns (see Supplement 1 and 2). Following *Acuerdo No. 2951* and the OHC's development plan, tourism development areas in the last two decades have been concentrated around the four plazas, which were restored and partially rededicated to new use and functions in a top-down approach. *Plaza Vieja* especially experienced a radical change: while

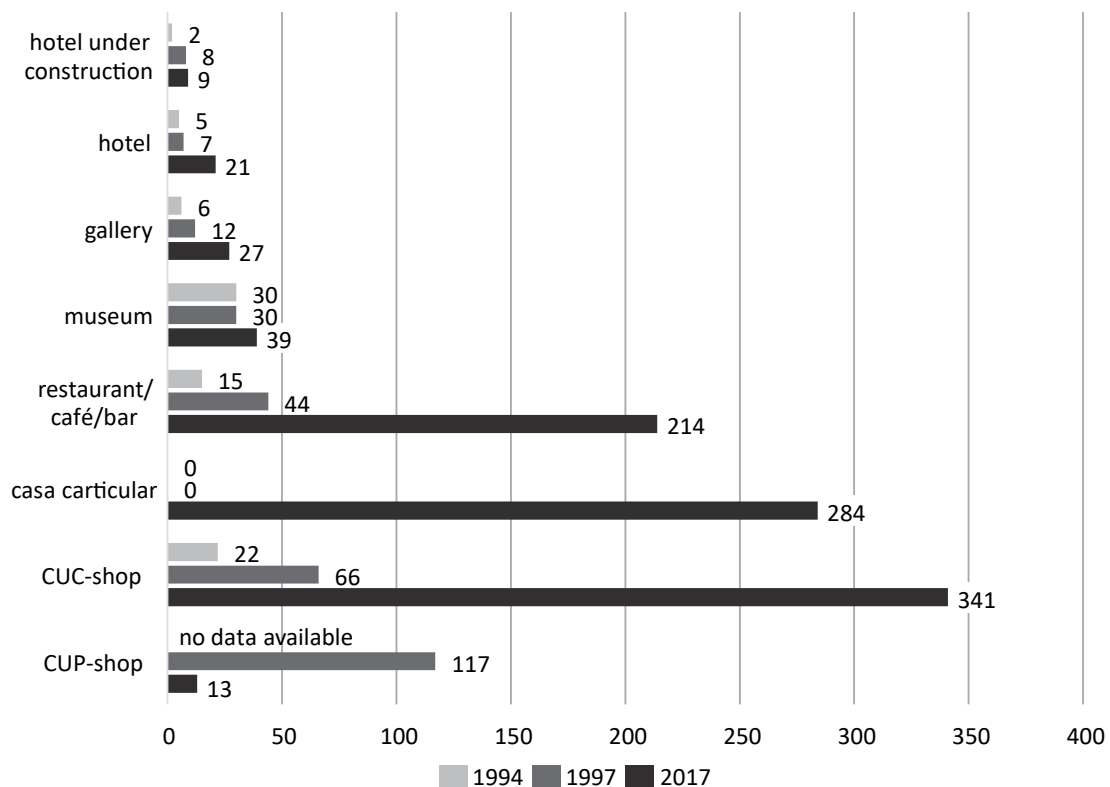


Fig. 4: Increase in touristic offerings (1994-2017). Data source: WEHRHAHN and WIDDERICH 2000, 104 and own field mapping data.

in 1997, very few buildings were used for touristic purposes, the development measures actioned by the OHC have completely transformed the appearance of the plaza and turned it into a hotspot for cafés, restaurants and galleries (see Fig. 5 and Fig. 6). *Plaza de San Francisco* underwent a similar evolution, due mainly to the steadily increasing number of cruise ship passengers arriving at *Terminal Sierra Maestra*.

Additionally, *Parque Central* and the surrounding blocks (especially along *Prado* heading to the famous *Malecón*), as well as *Calle Obispo*, which is the main connection between the plazas and *Parque Central* and is characterised by an abundance of souvenir shops, bars and restaurants, have undergone significant changes. *Parque Central* profits significantly from its touristic sights (i.e. *Capitolio* and *Gran Teatro*) and the opening and continuous construction of multiple high-cost joint venture hotels in spacious colonial buildings, increasingly along *Prado* (e.g. *Hotel Parque Central* and *Hotel Manzana*).

Furthermore, areas of ‘secondary’ touristic interest are increasing their touristic and therefore economic potential. We identified four new locations in *Habana Vieja* in this regard: the *Museo de la Revolución* and the adjacent *Plazuela del Santo Angel Custodio*, around *Parque Cespedes* in northern *Habana Vieja* (where single-day visitors from Varadero arrive at bus parking lots), *Plaza del Cristo* and an area covering a few blocks north of *Convento de Belén*. The latter two areas are distinguished by an interesting feature, in that although they have a fair concentration of *casas particulares*, cafés, bars, restaurants and art galleries, at first glance they lack touristic ‘highlights’ (e.g. museums and other sights, or outstanding examples of colonial architecture) and are not situated in a zone designated for top-down development under the aegis of the OHC. Instead, the broadening of touristic offerings here may constitute an act of agency by *Habaneros* who, in a bottom-up attempt, are seeking to improve their livelihoods



Fig. 5: Plaza Vieja and its surroundings in 1997. Source: WEHRHAHN and WIDDERICH 2000.

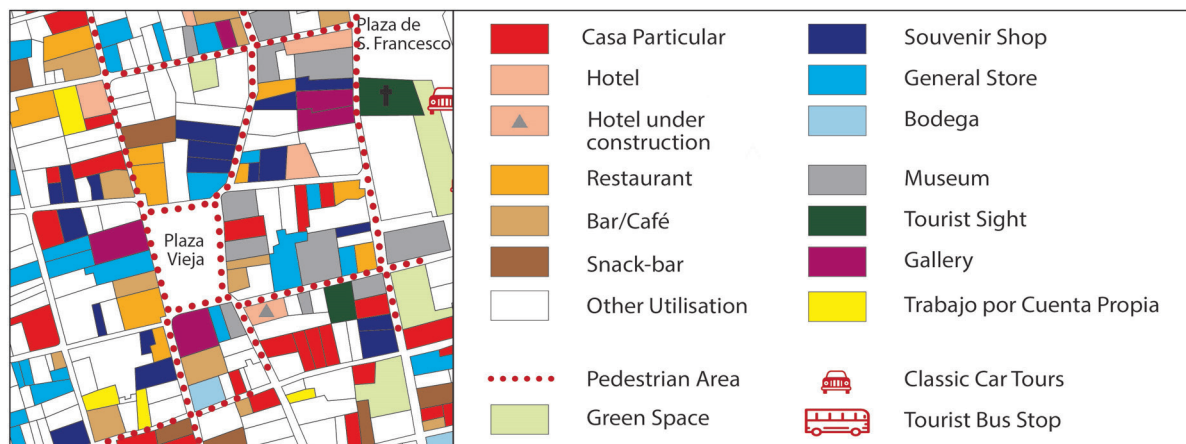


Fig. 6: Plaza Vieja and its surroundings in 2017. Source: own illustration.

within the tight limitations set by governmental regulations and trying to have a share in tourism prosperity.

Indeed, also in areas developed in a top-down manner, *Habana Vieja* residents can participate in and profit economically from tourism. The relatively high numbers of *casas particulares* around the four main plazas, *Calle Obispo* and *Prado*, as well as the multitude of private shops in these areas, hint at spillover effects caused by government-controlled restoration.

Principally, touristic development in *Habana Vieja* seems to occur primarily along imaginary lines spanning from the four main plazas to the more distant touristic hotspots mentioned above and the tourists' main arrival points at the edge of *Habana Vieja*, which are the bus parking lots around *Parque Céspedes*, the cruise ship terminal and *Parque Central* (see Fig. 7). The prevalence of souvenir shops and offerings of round trips through Havana in stereotypical vintage American cars appears to be a good indicator of high touristic penetration in an area, as they exist almost only along these imaginary lines and at the very fringes of *Habana Vieja* (see Supplement 1). Interestingly, in those areas deeply influenced by tourism, *trabajo por cuenta propia*, rife throughout central and northern *Habana Vieja* in 1997, was largely replaced by CUC-oriented touristic ventures, mostly *casas particulares*, shops and art galleries. These altered patterns of utilisation are associated strongly with the development of *Habana Vieja* as a destination for international tourism.

Despite the 'touristification frontier' continuing to expand to western and southern parts of *Habana Vieja*, which were mainly unaffected by tourism in 1997, there still exist some areas showing little evidence of touristic activities. Most palpable in this regard is the southern part of *Habana Vieja*, especially south of *Acosta Road*, where a few scattered *casas particulares* and other touristic facilities are located. The low touristic penetration of this part of *Habana Vieja* might be explained through the relatively great distance away from the main attractions – and the local absence of the same. Nevertheless, with tourist arrivals and room rates in Havana increasing further, the progression of the 'touristification frontier' to the southernmost edge of *Habana Vieja* is highly likely.

A dichotomy between southern and northern *Habana Vieja* is also discernible with respect to building conditions. Those neighborhoods in which a comparatively high proportion of the building stock was graded as "refurbished" or "under refurbishment", feature a disproportionally high density

of touristic offerings (compare Supplement 1 and 2). Especially the eastern and northern areas around the four main plazas, *Parque Céspedes* and the *Museo de la Revolución* present a unique and dense example of refurbished and restored buildings. Furthermore, the areas around *Calle Obispo* and *Parque Central* as well as *Prado* show high restoration efforts in the past years. In contrast, the southern part of *Habana Vieja* is characterised widely by continuing urban decay and empty sites.

The different building conditions in these areas are based presumably on an ostensibly simple connection: as a result of the higher potential for touristic marketisation of an area (due to outstanding historic buildings, museums, etc. located at attractive plazas or a connecting axis), the utilisation for touristic purposes will prevail, and so the OHC is likely to push refurbishment processes to increase the marketisation of such areas. An economically virtuous circle of touristic potential, increasing income from tourism, construction improvements and a further increase in touristic attractiveness has been put in motion. However, benefits related to the socioeconomic and housing-related situation of this process seem not to have reached all inhabitants in parts of *Habana Vieja*.

## 7 Conclusion

Urban space and the atmosphere of colonial heritage, fuelled by imaginations of 'Cubanness', are increasingly turned into commodities by the OHC – with the consent of the Cuban government. This commodification, however, fosters inequalities as well as the suppression and marginalisation of *Habaneros* and has spatial, social and economic consequences that violate their right to the city.

*Spatial consequences:* The resettlement of local inhabitants, as a consequence of reassigning former residential buildings to touristic use, may happen on a voluntary or an involuntary basis. Since 2006, the indigenous population of *Habana Vieja* has decreased by more than 6,000 persons to 86,000 in 2015 (own calculation, based on ONEI 2016, 20). Moreover, certain areas of *Habana Vieja* do not allow for informal occupations in tourism, thus preventing many *Habaneros* from earning additional CUC income. The "right not to be thrown out of society" (LEFEBVRE 1973, 35) of certain parts of the population in *Habana Vieja* is under threat due to increasing touristification, as decreasing numbers of housing spaces and increasing costs of living put pressure on their *modus vivendi*.

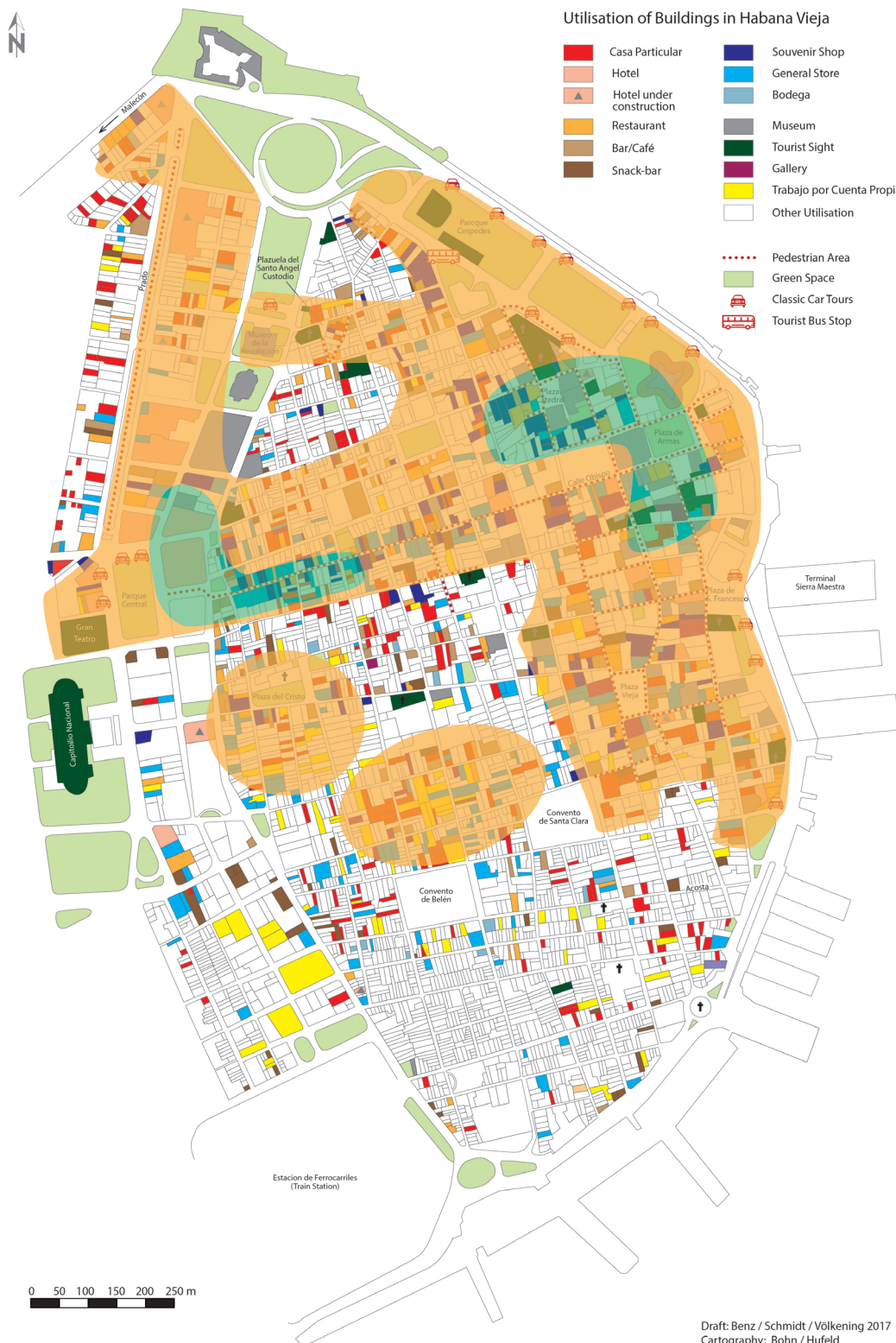


Fig. 7: Areas reshaped by tourism in 1997 (blue) and in 2017 (orange) in *Habana Vieja*. Source: own illustration.



*Social consequences:* The infrastructure in *Habana Vieja* is geared substantially toward tourists' needs. Therefore, the social and cultural appropriation of public space may only occur within tight limits that do not interfere with the interests of tourist businesses. This practice of often favouring tourists and their needs over those of local Cubans establishes neocolonial relations and perspectives among both tourists and the populace (ROLAND 2010, 14). Furthermore, the revival of touristic vices such as prostitution reminds one of the pre-revolutionary conditions the socialist government sought – and continues – to redress (SIMONI 2014, 168–169).

*Economic consequences:* Participating in tourism usually requires relatively high levels of investment (renovating rooms, paying for licences, etc.), and so it often depends on personal wealth or on relatives sending remittances from abroad. Nevertheless, most Cubans acknowledge the potentially positive effects of tourism on their personal economic situation and display confidence in it as a source of hard currency (LÁTKOVÁ et al. 2017, 359).

Similar consequences have been identified in other touristified city centres in former Comecon countries, particularly in Central Eastern Europe, including the displacement of local residents and population decline (DUMBROVSKÁ 2017, 279; SMITH et al. 2018, 543; PIXOVÁ and SLÁDEK 2017), frequent shifts in land use and building utilisation from residential to touristic use, the deterioration of remaining residents' quality of life and the transformation of certain city quarters into "tourist ghettos" (DUMBROVSKÁ 2017, 275) or "party districts" (SMITH et al. 2018, 539). Usually, only a small proportion of residents, mostly from socio-economically privileged sections of society, benefit from involvement in tourism (ROELOFSON 2018), and in many cases, the interests of the tourist economy have been given priority over those of residents (SMITH et al. 2018, 538). Interestingly, quite similar developments and transformations occurred in Havana and in cities of former socialist states despite diametrically opposed political and economic contexts. In Central Eastern Europe, privatisation, liberalisation and deregulation – often combined with weak urban planning – gave way to the free play of market forces restructuring tourist cities. Simultaneously, the Cuban state has maintained a highly controlled, centrally planned economy under the label of 'socialism', with only a few and highly regulated pockets of private business. However, these measures have led to comparable results. A possible explanation for similar developments into "tourist cities" (COLOMB and CLAIRE 2017) may be found in the shared objective to develop

tourism as a major source of income, aligned with efforts to render it competitive in the international tourism market as soon as possible.

Ironically, Fidel Castro and his revolutionaries once harshly criticised these very socioeconomic conditions (marginalisation, racism, inequality, pursuit of profit, foreign dependency, etc.) that are now at least tolerated, if not tacitly supported, by the Cuban leadership in a bid to sustain the socialist system of contemporary Cuba. Moving on from these findings about spatial and structural transformation in *Habana Vieja*, additional research is necessary to explore the power relations, dependencies, intentions and (discursive) strategies of the various actors.

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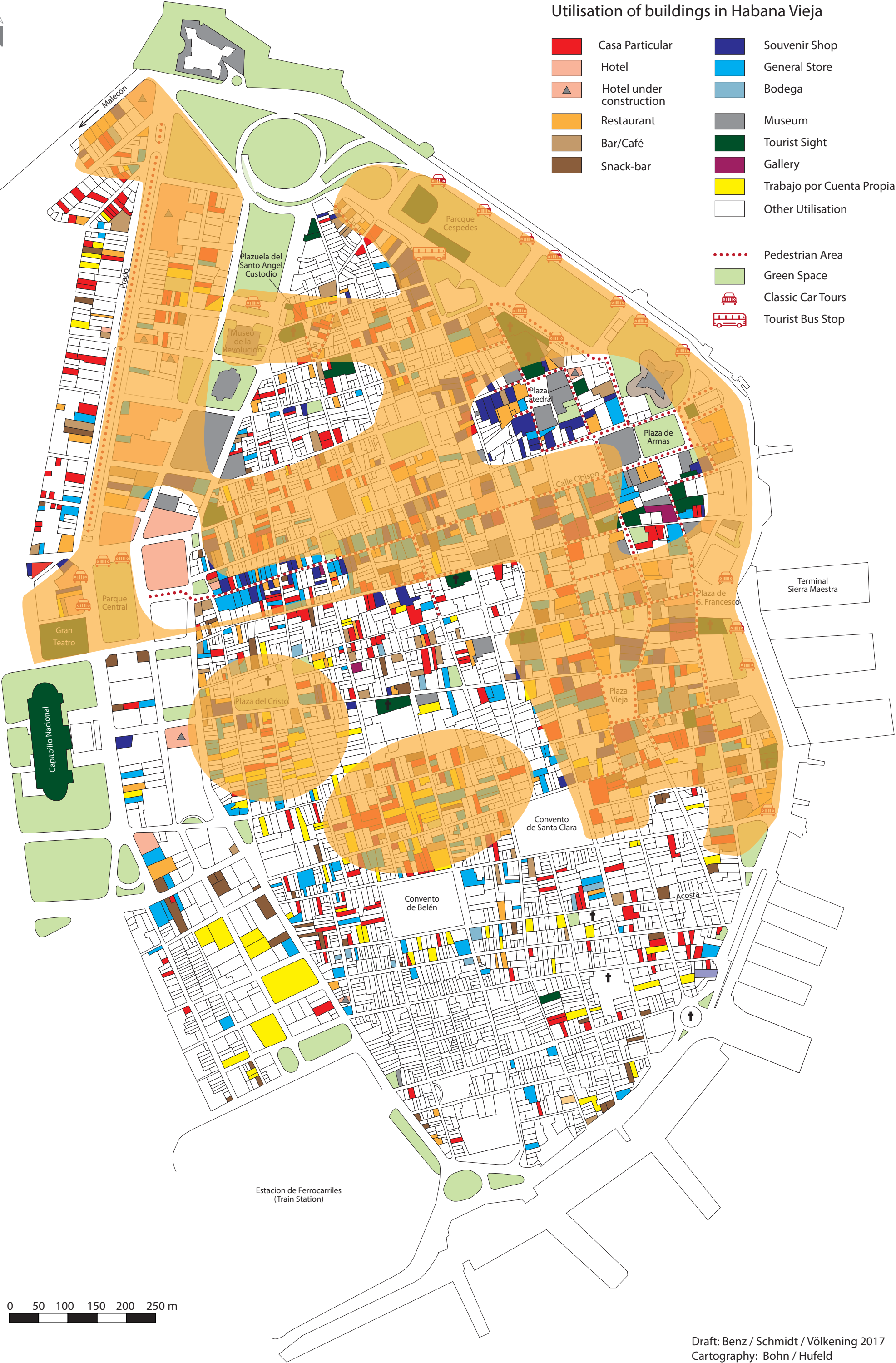
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Utilisation of buildings in Habana Vieja

- |  |                          |  |                           |
|--|--------------------------|--|---------------------------|
|  | Casa Particular          |  | Souvenir Shop             |
|  | Hotel                    |  | General Store             |
|  | Hotel under construction |  | Bodega                    |
|  | Restaurant               |  | Museum                    |
|  | Bar/Café                 |  | Tourist Sight             |
|  | Snack-bar                |  | Gallery                   |
|  |                          |  | Trabajo por Cuenta Propia |
|  |                          |  | Other Utilisation         |
|  |                          |  | Pedestrian Area           |
|  |                          |  | Green Space               |
|  |                          |  | Classic Car Tours         |
|  |                          |  | Tourist Bus Stop          |



0 50 100 150 200 250 m





Conditions of Buildings in Habana Vieja

- ruinous, unutilised
- non refurbished, utilised
- refurbished, good condition
- under construction/refurbishment
- empty site

