

ABSTRACT

Title of Thesis: HABANA VIEJA: REINFORCING CURRENT
PRESERVATION PHILOSOPHIES AND
PROGRAMS TO ENDURE POTENTIAL
CHALLENGES THAT WILL ARISE IN
TRANSITIONAL CUBA

Degree Candidate: Leigh Ann Hutchinson

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Thesis Directed by: Scott Gerloff
Center for Graduate and Continuing Studies
Goucher College

Current preservation initiatives within Old Havana, Cuba, were reviewed as to their effectiveness to protect the globally-significant resources of the World Heritage Site. The impact of the country's economic crisis on the manner with which preservation is approached and implemented has been significant. The growth of heritage tourism economics continues to play an important role in the implementation of the Master Plan for the Integrated Revitalization of Old Havana. Although the impending transition of Cuba to a post-Castro system of government has had limited impact to date, changes are occurring within the country.

Preliminary investigation of published materials lead to the initial hypothesis that Cuba was not handling the preservation of Old Havana in an appropriate manner. Initial opinions were that it was focusing too heavily on revenue generation and not enough on the integrity and authenticity of the historical and cultural resources, as well as allowing foreign investors and influences to overrun the neighborhood. However after an on site visit, conducted in January 2000, it was determined that these presumptions were for the most part incorrect.

Old Havana does not appear to be infested with non-traditional businesses, such as foreign retail chains and boutiques. Structures are being rehabilitated through the efforts of professionals and newly trained resident craftsmen and laborers. Needed revenues are being generated. Funds are distributed for social projects as well as reinvested into other preservation and revenue-generating ventures, resulting in a sustainable approach to preservation and revitalization of Old Havana.

Since efforts thus far have been effective, it is in the country's best interest to strengthen current approaches and programs in preparation for the impending transition and growth of the tourism industry. If current laws, policies and procedures are reviewed and reinforced, rehabilitation work in Old Havana will likely continue through the transition and withstand tourism-related pressures. Foreign investment, real estate development and property distribution methods should be a first priority.