

Cordoba Path

CityLab “Rethinking Habitability
in the World Heritage Cities of
the Caribbean”

Havana, August 19-20, 2025



OVPM . OWHC . OCPM

INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT OF THE CITYLAB

The Havana CityLab, which took place August 19–20, 2025, was held within the framework of the *Cordoba Path* program. This program guides the construction of the *New Urban Project* (NUP) and promotes historic centers as living laboratories of urban innovation. The main objective of the event was to establish a collaborative workspace among Caribbean cities to contribute to the development of the NUP based on their local contexts and experiences.

Havana hosted this event, bringing together 16 experts from six cities in the region¹ —Havana, Cienfuegos, Camagüey, and Trinidad (Cuba), Willemstad (Curaçao), and Santo Domingo (Dominican Republic)—, experts in urban management, heritage, and territorial development. The diversity of perspectives fostered a constructive and pluralistic dialogue, making a milestone: **for the first time, Caribbean cities contributed a joint vision to the NUP process.**

Preparation for the workshop included two preliminary virtual meetings (June 25 and July 9), during which each city presented its main challenges and ongoing projects. These meetings allowed for the identification of six common thematic, two of which were unanimously prioritized: basic infrastructure and services and heritage housing. These thematic served as the starting point for the CityLab. This report summarizes the work carried out and the substantial contributions of Caribbean cities to the NUP.

IDENTIFIED PROBLEMATICS

The workshop participants identified two central problematics that underscore the necessity of rethinking habitability in historic centers. First, there is, **the deterioration of infrastructure and the housing deficit, resulting from a lack of maintenance, overcrowding, and fragmented plans and investments.** Second, **there is a persistent lack of comprehensive policies and limited involvement of key actors in heritage issues,** a situation that is exacerbated by the context of vulnerable national economies, where sustaining a restoration project is already a challenge in itself.

In many Caribbean and Latin American countries, the complex distribution of resources and multiple social demands relegate heritage conservation to the political agenda as it is not considered a priority in the face of unresolved basic needs. This combination of factors accelerates the physical deterioration of buildings and the loss of cultural and environmental values.

These problematics highlight a key notion: **the fragility of habitability.** This concept refers to the difficulty of ensuring safe, resilient, and sustainable spaces that integrate heritage, housing, services, and innovation. This concept is particularly valuable because it transcends sectoral diagnoses and aligns directly with the four strategic axes of the NUP: *requalifying housing, refreshing the city, transforming mobility, and regenerating the urban context.* In the Caribbean, social vulnerabilities, tourism pressures, and climate risks further amplify this fragility.

¹ See Annex 1— Participants from OWHC member cities by team.

Although the workshop's statements reinforce concerns already shared within the NUP framework, such as vacancies, building deterioration and management deficits, its real contribution is that it has brought a range of issues together under the umbrella of habitability. This has led to **three key statements**:

- Due to their resilient nature, historic centres must integrate the improvement of housing and basic infrastructure into their overall strategy.
- The strengthening of management and comprehensive policies should be geared towards heritage-driven revitalization projects. These projects will generate new financing strategies, partnerships and public awareness so that heritage can actively contribute to the habitability of historic centres.
- The regeneration of habitability requires comprehensive, transversal action capable of overcoming institutional fragmentation and budgetary constraints by coordinating public policies, community actors and international cooperation.

It is precisely in response to this situation that the NUP seeks to propose new approaches: it is not only a matter of overcoming the scarcity of resources, but also promoting comprehensive policies that integrate heritage and development as a single objective. Strategies that address these dimensions separately are no longer fit for purpose. The NUP, on the contrary, proposes to make heritage a driver for improving living conditions, demonstrating that habitability and conservation are inseparable.

RECIPROCAL CONTRIBUTIONS BETWEEN THE CARIBBEAN AND THE NUP

The Havana CityLab provided a localized interpretation of habitability in Caribbean historic centers. This interpretation is based on the fundamental right to adequate and safe housing, including access to essential services and quality infrastructure. Unlike European reference frameworks, which focus on public space revitalization, mobility improvements, and environmental issues, **the Caribbean emphasizes ensuring decent living conditions within homes and the infrastructure that supports them**. This perspective represents Caribbean cities' specific contribution to the NUP, adapting it to their social, cultural, and climatic realities.

Although the region's urgent needs focus attention on Strategic Axes 1 (*requalifying housing*) and 4 (*regenerating the urban context*), the workshop emphasized that Caribbean cities recognize the importance of integrating all four axes. In this sense, the NUP provides a comprehensive vision capable of offering the leverage required to deploy more complete and sustainable strategies in the face of habitability challenges. However, there must be institutional support at the local level, including political will and coordination, as well as strong participatory mechanisms.

Accordingly, the workshop generated a set of **actionable initiatives** in response to these problematics, including:

- Preparing integrated infrastructure plans and adequate housing strategies.
- The development of awareness programs, technological innovation, and regulatory strengthening in heritage.

- The implementation of integrated management mechanisms for built heritage that bring together institutional dimensions (regulations and conservation), citizen participation, and the management of shared services and facilities.

These initiatives developed during the workshop constitute a first repertoire of measures that allow the strategic axes of the NUP to be mobilized in Caribbean historic centers².

Additionally, the teams identified several **enabling factors** for the viability of these initiatives:

- Mobilization of financial resources, including dedicated funds and foreign investment from the diaspora.
- Technical and community training.
- Strengthening of historical memory and sense of belonging.
- Cross-sector cooperation (public, private, and academia).

These factors are especially relevant because they demonstrate that, even in contexts with severe constraints, there are mobilizable resources that can advance a shared model of habitability (See Annex 2).

The CityLab also helped bring the six *Operational Objectives* of the NUP closer to Caribbean cities. Objective 6, which relates to securing sustainable financing for heritage projects, is particularly crucial for the region given the limited availability of resources and the need for financial instruments adapted to fragile economies and highly vulnerable territories. Objective 6 is recognized as a key condition for the viability of any proposal and for coordination among decision-makers.

CONCLUSION

The Havana CityLab showed that **habitability is the lens through which urban policies in Caribbean cities must be approached in an integrated way**, placing housing, infrastructure, and heritage at the center of the discussion. This workshop allowed us to move away from Eurocentric statements and "tropicalize" them, providing the NUP with a critical local context.

Its true value lies in the fact that it has consolidated a collective Caribbean voice within the NUP process. This voice asserts that habitability should not be considered solely from a technical standpoint, but rather as a political and social commitment that ensures the right to the city in contexts characterized by inequality, climate vulnerability and economic constraints. Rather than seeking to impose heritage conservation as an isolated priority on political agendas, the NUP aims to demonstrate that comprehensive habitability projects, which link housing, services and social cohesion to conservation, can mobilize authorities and ensure the sustainability of heritage.

By doing so, the workshop reinforces the operational nature demanded by the NUP, as emphasized in Córdoba, and confirms the role of the OWHC as a space that brings together the political and technical aspects of cities through a shared project: **heritage as a valuable resource**.

² See Annex 2— Issues, actions and collective learnings summarizing the work of the three teams.



ANNEXES

1- PARTICIPANTS FROM OWHC MEMBER CITIES BY TEAM:

Equipo 1	Equipo 2	Equipo 3
Patricia Rodríguez Alomá – Director of the Master Plan, Office of the Historian of Havana	Alex Ernesto Jorge Blanco – Senior Urban Management Specialist, Office of the Historian of Havana	Manuel de Jesús Vera Hernández – Director of Heritage and Construction, Provincial Government of Cienfuegos
Yamilka Álvarez Ramírez – Director of the Master Plan, Office of the Conservator of Trinidad and the Valley of the Sugar Mills	Eugenio Casanovas Molleda – Office of the Historian of Havana	María Isabel Carmenates Bringa – Director of the Master Plan, Office of the Historian of Camagüey
Mariëlla Olaria Maduro – Director of the Business Sector, Ministry of Economic Development of Willemstad	Juleyma Van Heydoorn – Management Officer and Minister's Advisor, Ministry of Economic Development of Curaçao	Celia García Acosta – Senior Urban Planning Specialist, Office of the Historian of Havana
Ernesto Guzmán Lastre – Senior Specialist, Master Plan, Office of the Historian of Camagüey	Radelex Vladimir Cartaya Matamoros – General Director, Office of the Conservator of Trinidad and the Valley of the Sugar Mills	Pablo Fonet Gil – Deputy Director of the Master Plan, Office of the Historian of Havana
Anselmo Bretó Vázquez – Director of Territorial Development, Government of Havana	Roxana Labairu Batista – Director of Territorial Development, Government of Havana	Yaneiry del Orbe Peña – Operational Coordinator and Support Specialist, Mayor's Office of the National District, Santo Domingo
		Ricardo Machapo Jardo – Professor, Faculty of Architecture, Technological University of Havana Profesor, Facultad de Arquitectura, Universidad Tecnológica de La Habana

2- ISSUES, ACTIONS AND COLLECTIVE LEARNINGS SUMMARIZING THE WORK OF THE THREE TEAMS:

Team	Issues	Initiatives for Action	Obstacles	Enabling Factors
1	Deterioration of infrastructure and lack of decent housing due to poor maintenance, overcrowding, and poor service management.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Integrated infrastructure plan. - Strategy for safe and decent housing with financing. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Sectoral vision without integration. - Lack of commitment. - Scarcity of technical and financial resources. - Lack of prioritization of decent housing. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Urban development funds and instruments. - Foreign and diaspora investment. - Public subsidies and support. - Training in heritage and urbanism. - Awareness campaigns.
2	Lack of knowledge and awareness about heritage; infrastructure deterioration leading to loss of heritage and environmental values.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Training and awareness. - Social technologies for conservation. - Strengthen legal framework. - Integrate conservation into sustainable planning. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Lack of consensus. - Low priority given to heritage. - Weak integral vision. - Resource shortages. - Difficulty integrating modern infrastructure without damaging heritage. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Sense of belonging. - Spaces for dialogue. - Prioritization of historical memory. - Funds and creative financing. - Low-impact technologies. - Skilled labor. - Inter-institutional coordination.
3	Lack of integrated management of buildings: residential use deteriorates housing and limits functional, social, environmental, and heritage adaptability.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Institutional: housing strategies with sustainable management and reserve funds. - Citizen: strengthen neighborhood management and capacities. - Functional: promote flexibility of buildings toward inclusive and sustainable models. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Institutional: fragmentation, lack of long-term vision, high costs. - Citizen: collective disinterest, conflicts, legal hurdles. - Functional: high costs, rigid regulations, cultural resistance, lack of innovative financing. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Institutional: tax incentives, transparency, technical training, active participation. - Citizen: clear responsibilities, digital platforms, community training, agile legal mechanisms. - Functional: public-private-academic collaboration, awareness-raising, incentives for green technologies and accessibility.

3- INITIATIVES FOR ACTION:

Team 1 – Infrastructure and Housing

- Design and implement an integrated infrastructure plan (underground, surface, and volumetric) with sustainable financing mechanisms.
- Develop a strategy for decent and safe housing that prioritizes rehabilitation, eliminates structural risks, and is supported by stable funding.

Team 2 – Heritage and Urban Infrastructure

- Launch training and awareness programs aimed at authorities, the private sector, and citizens on the value of world heritage.
- Develop and incorporate social and low-impact technologies that support the conservation of built and environmental heritage.
- Strengthen the legal and regulatory protection framework, ensuring its effective enforcement with sanctions and monitoring mechanisms.
- Integrate heritage conservation into sustainable urban planning, linking housing, services, and public space management.

Team 3 – Integrated Property Management

- Design medium- and long-term institutional housing strategies that include sustainable management systems and financial instruments such as reserve funds.
- Strengthen neighborhood management and community capacities through training, collective platforms, and shared-responsibility mechanisms.
- Promote architectural, technological, and functional flexibility of buildings to support inclusive, sustainable, and adaptable use models.

4- ENABLING FACTORS:

1. Financial and Urban Planning

- Dedicated funds for housing and infrastructure.
- Foreign and diaspora investment.
- Public subsidy programs (e.g., “Popular Housing”).
- Access to public and creative financing.
- Tax incentives and economic support mechanisms.

2. Social and Cultural

- Specialized technical training in heritage and urban planning.
- Awareness and communication campaigns.
- Strengthening of the sense of belonging and historical memory.

- Community training and neighborhood co-responsibility.
- Skilled labor and transmission of local knowledge.

3. Institutional and Technological

- Creation of inter-institutional dialogue spaces.
- Greater administrative transparency.
- Digital platforms for property management.
- Social and low-impact technologies for conservation.
- Incentives for green and accessible technologies.
- Cross-sector collaboration (public-private-academia).