Hidden Narratives

Diego Becerra

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Hidden Narratives
Diego Becerra
Francisco Sanin, Yutaka Sho, Abingo Wu, Joseph Godlewski
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Syracuse University School of Architecture
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**HIDDEN NARRATIVES**

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I’m interested in the active interventions that affect isolated towns through new economic developments. And I’m focused in the use of architecture as a leverage to transform the city in a way that empowers their local community, by adapting the architecture to handle the economic, infrastructure and density change, by working with the existing building interventions. So it maintains its character but it also becomes its tool for social and economic cohesion that empowers the community.

I’ve chosen to work specifically in the State of Yucatan with the town of Tecoh located in the southeast region of Mexico. What brings my attention in this area is the towns that have been isolated for years if not decades, Tecoh being one example of them. And now recently, there are forces coming its way that will change it – this being infrastructure transformation, city densification and currently tourism.

And so I would like to study what the dynamics are by which the town can transform. By empowering the inhabitants to take control of their own property and their own culture.
As a response to this, I catalogued a research of the town’s current conditions. So that by learning from that, I’m looking into developing a manual that would serve as a guide and allow the locals to be able to control the way that they adapt to the change. Letting the town now transform by a different method.
The ‘Love Army México’ initiative was created to make donations in favor of the victims of the earthquake of September 19 in Mexico City’s surrounding rural communities. The idea was simple, to generate housing using easy to access local material only and local talent only in order to generate jobs as well as an affordable project. Many junior and senior architects joined the initiative and worked closely with the families in order to design a house that tailored their needs.

The idea of investing in historical architecture in rural communities, this is done at a larger scale and it goes beyond historical restoration. It works along the idea of returning an abandoned or neglected identity to a community. As history plays an important role in indigenous communities.

PREVI project was a competition that started due to the rapid growth of informal housing happening in the periurban areas of Lima. The goal was to create a project of housing that grows progressively in a lot. In response to the informal housing happening. The results were an organic, informal growth of spaces.

Communal architects curated a manual guide for indigenous families in villages in Oaxaca. The goal was to transmit the inhabitants with the skill of design through a simplistic illustrated step by step manual. This allowed locals to build from scratch using easy to access local materials.
In the global south there is this pattern discontinuity between urban conditions and rural villages. My case study is Mexico, and this condition is referred to as centralism: When the basic needs in communities aren’t easily accessible and therefore people are only left off with commuting to their closest urban node. Streaming in both their labor and commerce into the city rather than their local network.

Tecoh is the head of municipality covering 10 other pueblos under it’s “county” Because of this, the municipality receives direct funding from the government and hosts the municipality headquarters such as:

—Security forces
—City hall
Some of the reasonings behind this unbalance: I looked over the towns demographics, we notice a lack of educational at graduate level, leaving the locals with less chances for sustainable work opportunities in the area and therefore reaching for different opportunities on their closest urban center.  
45% of the town's population are currently economically active, working mostly in the industry is livestock, agriculture and manufacture.
Recently there’s been a focus of government support in the peninsula as it has become a spotlight for “tourism potential” due to its rich history and natural heritage.

Since 2019, the government emphasized the needs for development in the south east region of Mexico. This was included as a infrastructure priority in the “National Plan of Development”

This has brought more investment and focus in the Peninsula and I want this revivalization to reach villages surrounding the major urban centers such as Tecoh.

“The regional projects are aimed at increasing the economic income of Yucatan’s tourism, creating jobs and promoting sustainable development.”

Some of the plans for development in the peninsula include:

- The addition of a rail system that targets an investment in the cultural heritage from the mayan territory.
- Thus an increment of exposure in the small towns.
- Tourism is expected to grow x5 times it’s current traffic.
- Funding directed to infrastructure and housing development on the towns influenced by the railroad.
- Funding on food self-sufficiency and field rescue in the agricultural sector.
Learning from the town’s history, the architecture was instrumented in the erasure of the Mayan culture and currently its been instrumented in the intervention of historical character. This interventions can be showcased at 4 scales:
**CITY SCALE**

**ARCHITECTURE AS AN INSTRUMENT FOR INTERVENTION**

**Mayan**
- Fluid settlement, doesn’t follow a pattern.
- There is a pre-Hispanic settlement center where you can find the largest Mayan structures, surrounded by smaller size Mayan platforms.
- We see forms of dwelling but no hard boundaries for private vs public.
- Streets came after the “City blocks”.

**Colonial**
- Gridded settlement, the Spaniards bring in the “Law of Indies”. Streets now dictate the blocks of the city.
- The larger colonial constructions overlap and are mostly located on top of the pre-Hispanic platforms.
- Mayan structures and pyramids become houses with accommodation for friars and Spanish families.
- We begin to see densification in the center of the city.

**Now**
- Municipality boundary is introduced.
- Streets begin to develop hierarchy based on transit:
  - 2 main streets connect the town to the highway.
- Town adapts and repeats forms of public spaces:
  - Green spaces - Now are parks
  - Preserved churches - New churches are built
  - Markets are preserved and reused.
There wasn’t a system of “blocks”. Instead we see “Clusters” of dwellings.
- No clear pattern on the street layout.
- Streets behaved more like pivot connectors.
- Streets came after the “city blocks”.

The “Law of Indies” introduced a repetitive modular block structure.
- Allowed flexibility on the use of space.
- There is a relationship between the blocks at street level
  - Together it forms a grid
- Blocks are only dense on the outer edges, leaving the center block open.

The square system continued and expanded.
- Streets now have a hierarchy with a direct reaction to the block
  - The block density is now guided by the street’s traffic.
  - Houses start to densify towards the center of the block
ARCHITECTURE AS AN INSTRUMENT FOR INTERVENTION

PARCEL SCALE

Early forms of Mayan dwelling and pre-Hispanic infrastructure:
- Unclosed & uncovered spaces.
- Mayan partition structures.
- Irregular prehispanic plataforms.

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<th>Now</th>
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- Hard-edge private property is introduced.
  - The parcel property was divided in extended rectangles.
  - A structured wall system is introduced.
  - Dwelling is now fully enclosed and facing the street.

- The parcel is now used at its full advantage, as it's open to further expansion on the back of the lot.
- The parcel has the space to host any further development the inhabitant may need.
ARCHITECTURE AS AN INSTRUMENT FOR INTERVENTION

BUILDING SCALE

Mayan
- Mayan Temple
- Mayan Family’s Dwelling
- Casique’s Dwelling

Colonial
- Catholic Church
- Spaniard Family Housing
- Friar’s Housing

Now
- Towns like these mostly preserve the public architecture:
  - Church
  - Townhall
  - Ruins of Mayan temples
  - Market
  - Plaza
PRESERVED ARCHITECTURE
TECOH CITY CENTER

- Church
- Colonial Housing
- Plaza
- Townhall
- Market
LEVELS OF INTERVENTION
CURRENT CONDITIONS

**Light Intervention**
- Interventions on the exterior skin
- Painting over the facade advertisement
- Using color scheme foreign to the vernacular

**Hard Intervention**
- Changes on minor but important physical features.
- New perforations and physical additions on walls.

**Full Intervention**
- Complete intervention on the architecture form.
- A brand new construction, foreign to the local character.
CATALOGUE
FORMS OF INTERVENTION

There is evidence where the locals intervene in THEIR architecture at building level, based on their economic needs for development. Everyone is using their living space now as a shared space to host their source of income.
CATALOGUE: Downward Expansion

FORMS OF INTERVENTION
CATALOGUE: Upwards

FORMS OF INTERVENTION

UPWARDS

Floor Expansion
CATALOGUE: Frontal Expansion

FORMS OF INTERVENTION

Frontal

Corner Store

Restaurant

Shoe Shop

Front Yard

Pizza Restaurant

Bike Shop

Front Porch

Tortilla Shop

Restaurant

Restaurant

Front yard

Garage
CATALOGUE: Half Division

FORMS OF INTERVENTION

Half Division

Chicken Rostisserie

Building Material

Tailor Shop

Gift Shop

Finance Consultant

Corner Store

Restaurant

Tortilla Shop

Extra Space
CATALOGUE: Complete Intervention

FORMS OF INTERVENTION

- Complete
- Grocery Store
- Chain
- House
- Foreign to the character
- Modern
- Farmacy
- Chain
- Hardware Store
- CocaCola Distributor
- Bank Branch
NEED - BASE INTERVENTION
Growth & Adaptation Evidence Through It’s Architecture
The walls are built with cane sticks filled with stucco (red dirt mixed with grass). The exterior layer is clay, utilized for insulation.

The shell of the roof is held together with cane sticks and wooden beams (Zapote). The roof of “Guano” palm leaves protects from rain while at the same time letting kitchen smoke filter through.

The soil and rock of the region in their natural states are utilized for masonry. The door is typically located in the center on both of the sides, allowing air flow.
Walls are filled with adobe brick, stucco mud and Mayan temple debris. Thick walls ideally situated for a hot environment.

Thick wooden beams support the roof with an exterior layer of “Chucum” paint as form of insulation. Ceiling height was double ideally for a hot environment.

Ornamentation on these informal homes was often limited to arches on entrance-ways, principal windows and cross passageways.
Typically the walls are built with CMU blocks and reinforced concrete.

The roof is conformed with I beams, CMU blocks, rebars and poured over concrete.

The exterior layer is a white-colored insulation in response to the hot weather.

There really isn't a specific "character" on contemporary facades.

It does range from a variety of styles.
What is the Need?
- Room expansion
- Restaurant Space
- 2nd Floor
- Store Front
- Mechanic Shop
- Office Space

What is the Typology?
- Mayan Typology
- Colonial Typology
- Mixed

What are the Resources?
- Materials
- Workforce
- Machinery
- Constrains

Tailored Manual
The results provides the user with a tailored manual guide that optimizes solutions for building structure recognizing what you have.
So instead of allowing a third form of intervention (tourism) on their architecture’s memory/character, be able to visualize the inhabitants as subjects of the action and not as objects of intervention.
By offering a framework that optimizes solutions for building structure and adaptation, acknowledging their local needs and constrains while celebrating their building character. Using the instrument of architecture now as a leverage to adapt the city in a way that empowers the community.

**WHAT WE ACHIEVE**

**ARCHITECTURE AS A LEVERAGE**

**Components**
- Needs
  - Air Bnb
  - Office Space
  - Restaurant
  - Extra Room
- Typology
  - Pre-Hispanic
  - Colonial
  - Mixed
- Resources
  - Materials
  - Workforce
  - Machinery
  - Constrains

**Current Conditions**
- Independent control of the inhabitants' project, and a clear visual of the potential in hand.

**Conditions After Framework**
- Results in an organized possible outcome that celebrates the inhabitants' narrative.


