

Understanding Regionalism

The Creation of Place in the Spanish Colonies

“For me, architecture is the art of building beautifully and of building appropriately—thus, regionalism is a key factor because it is about the task of designing appropriately...We have often argued against our best traditions, saying, “Oh, they weren’t ours. Spanish Colonial—that’s just Spanish misunderstood...” But we have brought these things here as part of our cultural baggage, and we have adapted them to our present circumstances throughout the history of this country. And we have made them ours and added to the ongoing tradition that they represent.”

Regionalism and the Continuity of Tradition, Robert A.M. Stern

To mend a growing problem in Latin American colonies, guidelines were given to the colonists and planners by the kings of Spain. Lack of planning and regulation coupled with rapid growth had left many Latin American colonies haphazardly developed and indigenous populations devastated. King Ferdinand II sought to create order in the New World and established **Las Leyes de Indias** (Law of the Indies), a set of rules to govern the treatment of the indigenous people and direct the creation of pueblas (towns) and presidios (military bases). Ferdinand and his advisors had studied Vitruvius and *The Ten Books on Architecture*, and selected a modified Roman castrum to be the form of new cities. The Law of the Indies mandated the first two structures to be erected in each new town be the **cabildo** (town hall) and the **iglesia** (church). The first diagram illustrates the prominent position these two structures were given in each town; the visual manifestation of God and Country

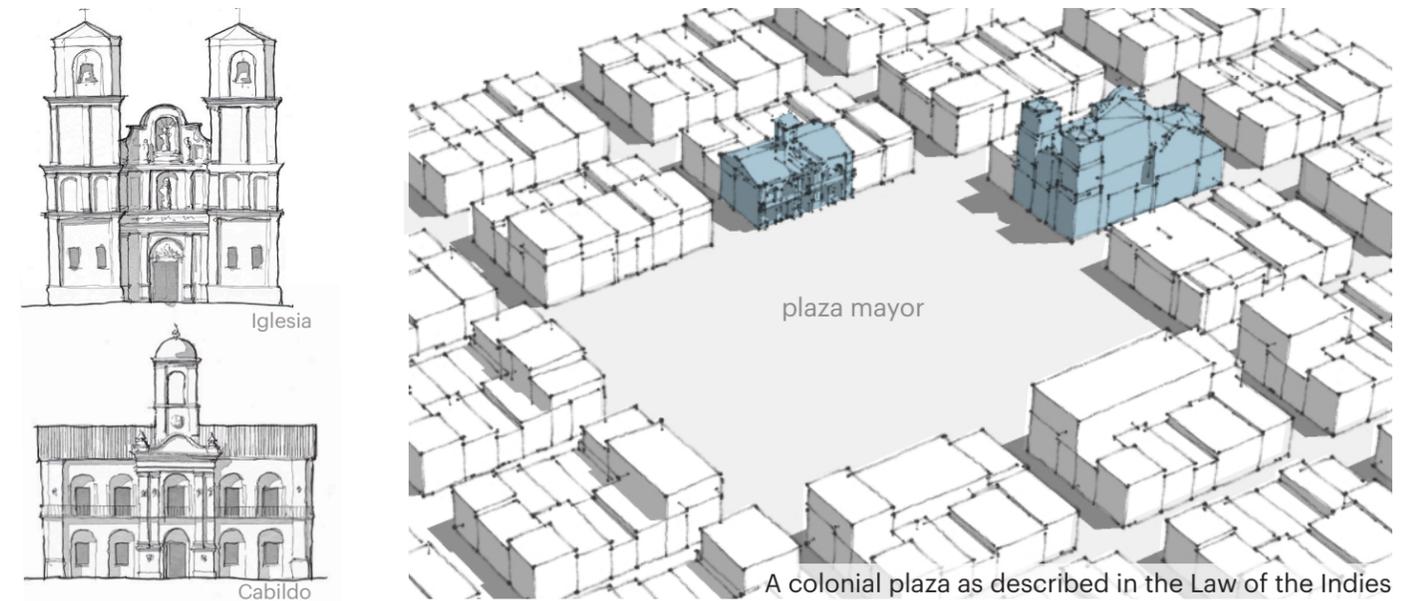
The Law of Indies left provisions for town planners to deviate from the plans as they saw fit, but a coherent architectural character for the town should be sought. The stylistic unity would demonstrate superiority and influence of the crown. Changes were made in the adopted traditions of Spanish architecture to reflect new climates, seismic conditions, local materials, and the new people in each town. Early planners and architects were able to create distinct

regional variations and set the tone for the city’s subsequent buildings. The two photos to the right illustrate the architectural marriage between the two institutions; one secular and one religious.

Our research will take us to several of these towns to document the architectural character of these buildings and compare them to their Spanish counterparts. We’ll focus on cities in central Mexico (the governing hub of New Spain) and port cities in the Caribbean and Central America that represent some of the best preserved cities for Spanish Colonial architecture. We’ve selected each location for their unique climates, local materials, and regional differences. We hope to study how these unique sets of “stimuli” created new variations in Spanish architectural character across New Spain.

We will use a variety of tools; sketching, photography, video, and watercolor to produce a series of drawings comparing and analyzing the two building typologies in their urban context at each unique setting to better understand the various themes and variations.

Budget (for 2 travelers):
 Flights: \$2,400
 Ferries: \$180
 Buses: \$300
 Hotels: \$1,500
 Food: \$650
 = \$5,000



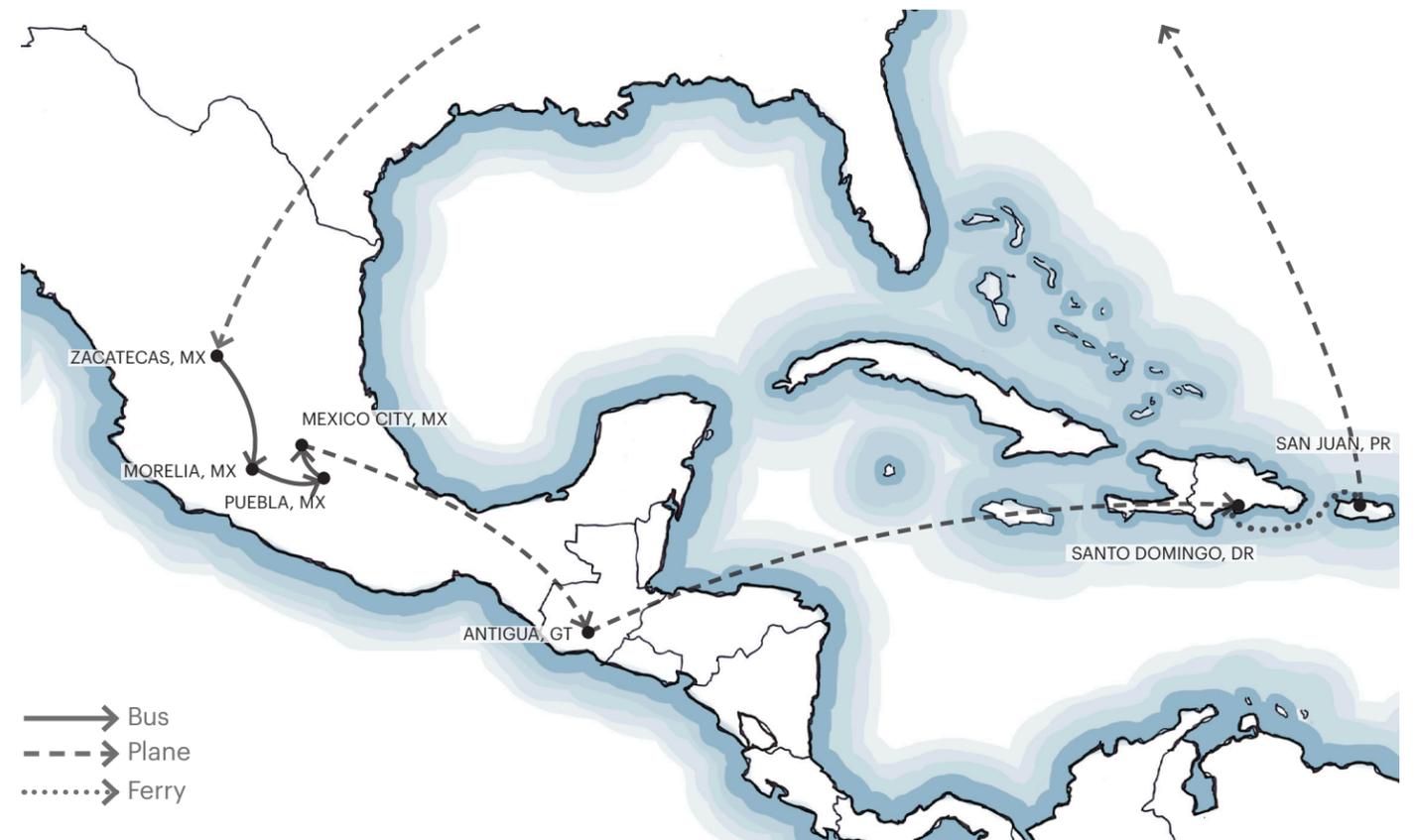
A colonial plaza as described in the Law of the Indies



Morelia



Antigua



- > Bus
- - -> Plane
-> Ferry