

MODELS

OF ENGAGEMENT :

How Foreign Projects Work in Cuba



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INTRODUCTION

International engagement with Cuba is limited by many factors: the relatively narrow scope of projects of interest to Cuban authorities, the lack of independent Cuban organizations that can enter international partnerships on their own, Cuban centralization and bureaucracy, and the ideological gap that has for four decades separated Cuba from much of the rest of the world, accentuated earlier this year by the long-term imprisonment of dozens of pro-democracy activists and independent journalists.

Yet foreign governments and organizations have substantial involvement in Cuba. There are extensive trading relationships, about 400 joint ventures with foreign capitalist corporations in many sectors of the Cuban economy, a variety of aid and economic development projects, collaboration in law enforcement and other matters, academic and cultural exchanges, and humanitarian projects. Even Americans are involved, through humanitarian aid channeled through Cuban churches, family remittances that constitute Cuba's largest source of foreign exchange earnings, and a variety of cultural and other exchanges.

This paper examines four areas where foreign governments and organizations have established diverse projects: Canadian environmentalists helping to preserve Cuba's environment, Spanish architects helping to restore Cuba's colonial heritage, international law enforcement agencies working with Cuba to stop narcotics traffic, and UN programs that promote local economic and social development.

WORLD WILDLIFE FUND OF CANADA: STRENGTHENING CUBA'S ENVIRONMENTALLY PROTECTED AREAS

Behind a modest home on the scrubby, rural Zapata peninsula on Cuba's southern coast, pig waste and compost collect in one small tank and mix with bacteria to ferment in another, producing methane gas that is piped to a kitchen stove. The installation is new and the stove's flame is weak, but in time the pig-powered stove will easily cook three meals per day.

At first glance it is not clear how this apparatus fits into a plan designed to provide environmental benefits that reach all the way to Canada.

But the Canadian World Wildlife Fund (WWF) paid for this backyard energy operation and other projects on the Zapata peninsula for strategic reasons.

The largest wetland in the Caribbean, Zapata is one of many pristine areas in Cuba that abound in plant and animal life, with ecological significance beyond Cuba's borders. For example, Cuba is estimated to have about 350 species of birds, 21 unique to the island, and more than 500 vertebrates, many of which are endemic to Cuba. Cuba may be the last

place where the ivory-billed woodpecker, the majestic bird that once inhabited old-growth forests in the American south, still survives. WWF sees Cuba as a critical link in the "Caribbean biodiversity chain," serving as the "wintering ground for much of Canada's wildlife including birds, sea turtles, bats, monarch butterflies, and whales."

Yet Cuba's natural riches are threatened. According to one scientist, they have been "preserved partially through neglect" – and that neglect may be coming to an end as Cuba develops a tourism industry and other economic options that could affect much of its coastal environment.

The Canadian World Wildlife Fund began working in Cuba in 1987. A central part of WWF's work, supported by Canadian government funding, is to help Cuba to implement a key environmental protection initiative for sensitive areas: the National System of Protected Areas. To achieve this, WWF has closely assisted Cuba's National Center for Protected Areas (CNAP), a Havana-based organization founded in 1995 and

linked to the Ministry of Science, Technology, and the Environment.

CNAP's mission is to develop and administer the system of protected areas. A CNAP official explains that prior to 1995, there were a few areas administered by the agriculture ministry for the protection of certain flora and fauna, but there was no national policy on protected areas and no institution to oversee that task.

CNAP was instrumental in drafting the 1999 law that created the system, and it shepherds the proposal for each protected area through a long approval process that involves the interested communities and institutions. Up to 60 organizations may be part of that process – local government, national ministries, scientific professional societies, the forest ranger organization, and enterprises.

In this process, a CNAP official says that the most difficult task is usually the setting of the boundary of each protected area, and negotiating restrictions on economic activity with actors such as agriculture and forestry enterprises. "There are very few areas where human activity is banned," he explains, "it is usually a matter of changing human activity for sustainable use."

WWF's project manager in Cuba, Michael Bliemsrieder, says, "The Cuban legal framework is the best I have seen" in Latin America, and it is "very effective because it is carried out. They have no 'paper parks' here, as they call them elsewhere in Latin America, that are declared in law but not really protected."

CNAP also has a monitoring function; it keeps track of the activities of each protected area's administrator and reports regularly on the progress each area is making toward



A vast swamp separates the Zapata Peninsula from Cuba's central highway; it was first bridged by a road in the early 1960's.



achievement of its conservation plan.

WWF has assisted with advice as the law was developed, and by providing aid to help CNAP develop its institutional capabilities. It has donated computers and software that serve basic office functions and allow CNAP to perform sophisticated digital mapping tasks. It has provided training, including seminars in Canada for CNAP personnel. It provides fuel for field travel and funds that enable CNAP to publish educational literature. WWF provides no money for salaries; Bliemsrieder explains that WWF's idea is "always to strengthen what is already in place."

WWF also works in the protected areas themselves, including the Zapata Peninsula, which is designated as a biosphere reserve and includes a national park. Zapata is large, covering half the land of Matanzas province, but it is sparsely populated – its 4,520 square kilometres contain nine towns with about 9,000 inhabitants. Its economy has long depended on fishing, forestry, and charcoal production; before the 1959 revolution, it was not connected to the rest of Cuba by road, and its inhabitants and their cargo moved to other points in Cuba by boat.

Today, the peninsula retains a very quiet, rural character. It is the focus of some tourism development – hotels, bird watching areas, diving centers, and other eco-tourism activities scattered around the Bay of Pigs – that are new to the area but small in scale.



The Bay of Pigs is at the center of the protected area of the Zapata Peninsula. Its shores are almost completely undeveloped; here, a hotel's beach at the famous Playa Giron.

"Our focus is on the community," Bliemsrieder says. "It's hard just to prohibit the uses of natural resources in Cuba." As a result, WWF and local officials try to work with the area's inhabitants and the permitted activities, and to ensure that they are compatible with the environment.

And that is where the "biogas" project comes in – the installations that turn pig waste into energy. Clean, small-scale energy production provides economic benefits for local residents, reduces waste runoff, and over the long term reduces the use of local trees for fuel in a zone where deforestation risks harm to the entire ecosystem, both on and offshore.

Near the village of Palpite, sixty-something Guillermo Reyes shows off his organic garden, which Cubans call an *organopónico*. With WWF assistance, he was able to clear his half-acre of land and build rows of raised beds of organically enriched soil that grow lettuce, tomatoes, onions, carrots, peppers, beets, cucumbers, plantains, green beans, herbs, and yucca. He avoids the need for pesticides by growing a variety of crops in a small area. Like others who operate these gardens – most of which are in cities – Reyes keeps the proceeds of his sales. "We used to eat just a little tomatoes and lettuce," Reyes explains, "so for us, greens are a new culture. The family doctors tell us how important it is to eat them, and now they eat all the green beans I can grow."

In the town of Giron, near the Bay of Pigs museum, ten families carry out a small-scale project supported by WWF to restore the population of the jutia, a tree-inhabiting, raccoon-

Cuba's National System of Protected Areas

The National System of Protected Areas was instituted with Decree-Law 201 of December 23, 1999.

The law calls for conservation and "sustainable use" of the protected areas, in part to fulfill Cuba's responsibility as a signatory of the global Biodiversity Convention.

It creates eight categories of protected area. "Natural reserves" receive the strictest protection; people may only enter with approval, and with a guide. "Managed resource areas," at the other end of the spectrum, involve restrictions on economic activity.

There are 35 protected areas that cover 22% of Cuba's national territory; the most sensitive zones that receive the highest degrees of protection account for six percent of Cuba's land area. The areas include mainly the keys along Cuba's north coast, other coastal and marine environments, the Zapata peninsula, and mountains and rain forests in eastern Cuba. The areas can be located on a map at: <http://www.cuba.cu/ciencia/citma/ama/cnap/>

Proposals are pending to create 23 more protected areas.



An organopónico – an organic vegetable garden – generates employment and income and improves the local diet.

sized rodent whose numbers have declined due to deforestation and hunting, especially during the depth of Cuba's economic crisis at the beginning of the 1990's. One man has 73 jutias in his garage, converted to an outdoor pen, and 25 of these are pregnant. "The way things were going, they were going to disappear," he said. Occasionally, he gives jutias to neighbors who are sick – locals favor their lean, protein-rich meat – and he will soon reach the point where he will be able to release jutias back into the wild.

Education is another part of the effort to ensure the continued protection of Zapata's environment. As visitors enter the peninsula, they go to a small visitors center created and operated by local staff of the environment ministry. Guides and displays teach visitors how the peninsula's first residents lived, the history of the local environment, and the variety of local wildlife. Cubans pay three pesos for the tour, foreigners three dollars. In the same building, an educational center has a library and space for classes and conferences. Its small staff issues a magazine, *Humedal*, with news and literature about the peninsula, its history, and its environment. Forest rangers take seminars at the center three times each year. Once each year, local students meet there to join an ornithologist and to conduct a bird count. The center is supported by WWF funding.

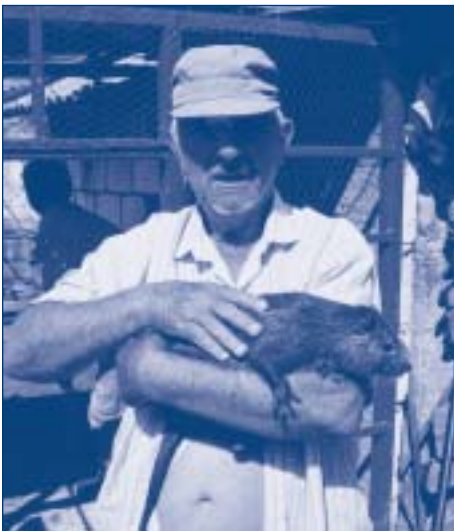
WWF's work in Zapata is a small part of its work in Cuba, and in the view of WWF officials, the Zapata conservation infrastructure is well established in terms of personnel, plans, and equipment.

WWF has spent about \$1 million since 1987 on its 19 projects in Cuba; according to the organization's report on its Cuba program, this is a "modest financial investment" that brings an "extraordinarily high conservation return" because of the commitment of the Cuban government and the capacity of its professionals.

The environment ministry's representative in Zapata, Felipe Perez Perera, is "very satisfied" with the "very strong collaboration" received from WWF. "Here, if we want people to have less impact on nature then we have to produce options, not just say you can't do this and that," he explains as he takes a visitor from his education center to a series of small-scale production projects supported by WWF. "We have won the battle in terms of awareness, now we have to help people to produce."



A backyard energy installation produces natural gas, reducing the demand for wood harvested from local forests for fuel.



In Giron, a backyard pen where the juti, a small mammal whose numbers suffered from hunting, is raised in large numbers for eventual release back to Zapata's forests.

UNITED NATIONS LOCAL DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS

The people of Cuba's small entrepreneurial sector are known for their independence, and for receiving virtually no official assistance in their work. An exception to this rule is found at the corner of Mercaderes and Obrapia streets in Old Havana, where a women's embroidery and weaving cooperative makes and sells its products, and teaches these crafts to young women from the neighbourhood, with assistance from the local government and a United Nations program.

The Local Human Development Program (LHDP), a project of the United Nations Development Program, has been active in Cuba since 1997.

LHDP promotes local economic development, decentralization of decisionmaking, generation of services, and projects for women. Cuba and the UN agreed to operate the program in three areas: Old Havana, the western province of Pinar del Rio, and Cuba's five eastern-most provinces. Cuba's objective in these areas is to reduce the pressures of internal migration caused by rural economic difficulties, to address urban problems, and to contribute to the unique efforts under way in Old Havana, where an autonomous local authority, funded by tourism income, is rehabilitating colonial architecture and housing, building tourism attractions and infrastructure, and addressing local community needs.

The program works in a "collegial" manner, according to a UN official, where LHDP representatives, Cuban officials, and foreign donors consider projects that can be supported by resources from all three parties. There are 308 projects in operation, supported by \$16 million in UN and foreign donations since 1998. The foreign partners are all European, predominantly local and regional governments from Italy, also including Spanish and Swiss donors. In Old Havana alone, 44 local governments from Europe are supporting small-scale development projects. When projects such as enterprises or cooperatives generate revenue, they receive loans from a revolving fund; those that do not generate revenue receive small grants.

LHDP's method of locally generated initiatives contributes to a "Copernican revolution" of decentralization, a UN official says, because "people here are accustomed to planning based on what the ministry wants, not what the community needs." When mayors and other local officials formulate project ideas, budgets, and management plans, "they are called to a role that their training did not prepare them for," he says.

LHDP supports health, infrastructure, and education projects in Pinar del Rio. A small cooperative farm, La Quinta, produces herbs for medicinal and food purposes; its 60 members and 15 additional independent farmers receive support from the Italian city of Reggio Emilia. LHDP supports small organic farms that function as cooperatives, producing vegetables for direct sale to local consumers. Another project has helped to rehabilitate private homes whose owners earn income by renting to tourists who visit Pinar del Rio to see its culture of tobacco cultivation and its unique geographical features.

In Cuba's eastern provinces, many projects focus on agriculture and environmental protection. A project in the Cauto River valley in Granma province has supported the creation of 20 "forestry farms," ranging in size from 12 to 20 hectares. Each family farm engages in reforestation and food production, resulting in the creation of 220 jobs and the improvement of a once-deforested environment.

In Old Havana, the overcrowded colonial core of Cuba's five-century-old capital city, LHDP supports a wide variety of social and economic projects. A geographic information system

has been created to assist municipal planners. Senior centers, mental and emergency health clinics, and schools have received equipment and aid for building rehabilitation. Public lighting and water supply infrastructure have been upgraded. The Italian city of Cuoio has supported a school for leatherworkers with training, materials, and equipment for 40 young apprentices. Similar programs have supported a wood restoration workshop where furniture and architectural elements are built and restored, and a gold and silver workshop for 20 workers.



Hand-made clothing and tablecloths on display at the store in Old Havana where the women of the weaving and embroidery cooperative sell their products. Their workshop, used for production and teaching young women, is in the same building.

According to Julio Portieles, the coordinator for international cooperation in Old Havana, the UN's program has been "one of the most important means of external support for us. In an organizational way, it has made a real impact in our way of doing business, through the joint design of projects between local and foreign agencies," he notes. "The normal way was to write a project proposal and submit it to donors. With the LHDP we form the projects together. This creates participation, not just a donor-recipient relationship, and it has the great advantage of promoting commitment on the part of the donor." Portieles' job is to help devise projects that complement local goals of social, architectural, and economic development, and he is satisfied with the results obtained so far.

One such project is the women's embroidery and weaving cooperative, the *Hermanidad de Bordadoras y Tejadoras de Belen*. Supported by grants and loans from the Italian city of Viareggio and the Swiss Embassy, 25 women aged 27 to 65 are employed and sell their products in this cooperative, and they give classes to 65 young women who will join the cooperative.

The cooperative began in May 1994. Its members were all self-employed entrepreneurs, working from their homes and selling their products mainly to tourists. According to one member, Sonia Alonso, the women were approached by the historian of Old Havana, Eusebio Leal, who directs the local rehabilitation and community development projects. Leal expressed an interest in preserving and passing on their knowledge of traditional crafts, and "he asked us all to get together," Alonso says, suggesting the idea of forming the cooperative and offering them a space in which to set up a workshop and retail store.

The women accepted the suggestion, and have worked together for nine years. They retain their legal status as individual entrepreneurs, and pay license fees and taxes accordingly. They sell their goods at stands on streets where tourists pass, and they all take turns working in the cooperative's store, where ten percent of the proceeds of each sale go to the cooperative, and the rest goes directly to the woman who made the product.

LHDP has provided donations of fabric and thread, and loans to pay for a variety of sewing machines. In addition to producing blouses and sweaters, decorative embroidery, baby clothes, tablecloths and napkins, and souvenirs for retail sale, the women produce all the tablecloths and napkins for the hotels in Old Havana. In the afternoon, one sees young women coming to the cooperative to learn and to work, and every Saturday morning there are formal classes.



The members express satisfaction with the income they generate. One woman says that her sewing income allowed her to buy her first refrigerator; others have bought televisions and other appliances. They each pay a monthly tax of \$27; in interviews, several said their monthly after-tax income ranges from \$50 to \$75 (in an economy where the average state salary is about \$10.) Another advantage of the cooperative is that the members sometimes pool their funds to pay the license fee and taxes of women who have had low sales, or who are sick and temporarily unable to work. The women also provide social service: “We assume the responsibility of making clothing for the babies of poor women in the maternal hospital, and clothing and bibs for children in the school for the disabled,” one member explains.



Another project supported by LHDP is the *Gabinete de Restauración*, a 20-year-old set of specialized workshops in a cluttered building in Old Havana that restores wood, artworks, paper, textiles, lamps, metals, clocks, marble, jewelry, and other museum-grade items. Each workshop performs restoration and trains apprentices in the specialized crafts. Italian and Swiss donors support a clock restoration shop; the Spanish region of Andalucía supports the carpenters; Córdoba supports the wood restorers and the gold and metal workers; Italian donors support the metals and lamp shops; and Florence supports the plaster and ceramic shops and the chemistry and microbiology laboratories that assist all the others. The assistance comes in the form of materials and training conducted through two-way exchanges between foreign experts and Cuban restorers. LHDP’s aid, the director explains, is simple: “to equip the technicians so they can work on their own, and so they can work better.”

A walk through the workshop leads a visitor to a young apprentice restoring a 19th century clock, a chemist devising the best substance to fill cracks in a marble statue, women restoring a 19th century embroidered handkerchief and an antique kimono for the local Museum of Colonial Art, and carpenters restoring antique furniture for the same museum.

On occasion, the workshop has been able to earn revenues by restoring items for local hotels and embassies, and for a Havana Masonic lodge.

In a restoration workshop supported by European local governments and the UN, a long line of antique clocks await repair, and women restore a delicate 19th century handkerchief and a kimono for display in an Old Havana museum.

INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION IN LAW ENFORCEMENT

“There’s a difference between observing and seeing,” says Jose Otaño, the deputy director of Cuban customs. He is referring to the difference that training by European and Canadian police has made in his customs officers’ ability to detect “mules,” persons hired to carry illegal drugs on international flights through Cuban airports, mainly from Colombia to Spain and other countries in Europe.

That training in passenger profiling, observation, and investigation has helped Cuba to arrest 252 persons in 175 attempts to carry drugs through Cuban airports between 1995 and 2002. Hundreds of Cuban customs officers have received foreign training, and many of

these have passed their knowledge on to other officers. The training extends to dog training, and x-ray techniques to detect suspected “swallowers” who ingest drugs in sealed packages to smuggle them across international borders. Otaño is not willing to discuss the traits that help identify these passengers, but says that training and knowledge make the critical difference. “The most important element is not technology but rather the man himself,” he says. “And the more you know, the more you see.”

Otaño refers to training programs provided by the United Kingdom, France, Canada, and Spain. Cuba has formal drug enforcement agreements with these and 25 other countries in Europe, Latin America, and Asia, and limited cooperation with U.S. authorities in the absence of a formal agreement.

None of the governments that collaborate with Cuba in drug enforcement see Cuba as a major source of drug production or trafficking, and they agree with Cuba’s official assessment that drug consumption on the island is low. However, they work with Cuban authorities because Cuba has opened to trade and tourism in the past decade, and its location and emergence as an international airline hub linking the Americas with Europe and Canada creates the potential that international drug traffickers could turn Cuba into an important link in their illegal cargo network.

According to Interpol official Stephen Brown, “The Caribbean has replaced Colombia, Venezuela, and Brazil as the takeoff point for distribution, mainly of cocaine, to the rest of the world.”

The U.S. State Department reported to Congress in July 2002 that an estimated 11 percent of the cocaine shipped to the United States “moves from South America through the Jamaica-Cuba-Bahamas route,” the “vast majority” of which moves from Jamaica to the Bahamas often using Cuban airspace or territorial waters. “Detected drug shipments to or through Cuban territory are low,” the report says, adding that the U.S. government has “no evidence linking senior Cuban government officials to illegal drug trafficking.”

Cuban officials say their country has a small but growing drug problem. “In the face of the inevitable increase in trade, tourism, and economic relations with other countries, our country is threatened more each day by the horrible aggression of illegal drugs, Cuba’s drug policy chief, interior ministry General Becerra, told an international drug conference in Havana in January 2003. “The incipient internal market of drug sales and consumption has registered an increasing tendency that we are obliged to confront and eradicate.”

According to officials who collaborate with Cuban law enforcement, this assessment represents a change in Cuban attitudes, a healthy recognition of reality. “A few years ago, Cubans were not inclined to discuss drugs and other problems,” one official says. “Now they are realizing that tourism is also bringing some bad things – prostitution, petty crime, street robbery, and with access to dollars there is drug consumption.”

Traffickers take advantage of Cuba’s 4,100 kilometers of shoreline and its 4,195 small keys, which create ample opportunities for smuggling operations. Traffickers use high-speed boats to bring drugs northward through Cuban waters, or they fly their cargo over Cuba and drop it at designated points off Cuba’s northern shore, where boats recover it and carry it north to the Bahamas. The bulk of Cuban drug seizures result from interruptions of these operations; of the 77.7 metric tons of drugs seized by Cuban authorities between 1991 and 2002, 69 percent was recovered from failed air-to-sea handoffs, and 25 percent was seized from traffickers at sea.

Canada. Assistant Commissioner of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police Bill Lenton told a drug conference in Havana in January 2003 that the Caribbean is a “large source of drugs entering Canada” and that Caribbean islands such as Cuba are “natural staging areas” for

that traffic. As a result, for eight years Canada has had an active police liaison with Cuba, Canadians train Cuban law enforcement officials in criminal investigation techniques for drugs and money laundering, and Canada aids Cuba's anti-drug education effort.

Canadian officials say that they discuss about one case per week with Cuban officials and receive "consistently good to excellent" cooperation. For example, "Cubans search containers very promptly when we tell them of our suspicions," one official says.

Most frequently, Canada asks Cuba to help gather information on drug traffickers who travel to Cuba to discuss operations. One official says that many Canadian traffickers come to Cuba for meetings with Colombians – "working vacations" where they discuss operations. "They come to Cuba because the Americans are not here, there is no DEA, so they feel comfortable," he says. "They may meet and plan an operation then signal each other later to carry out what they talked about in Cuba."

In 2002, a Canadian police operation, Project Oversea, broke up a Montreal-based ring that was establishing a cocaine smuggling operation using commercial airliners travelling between Mexico City and Montreal. "During the investigation, members of the criminal organization from Montreal travelled to Cuba," according to Assistant Commissioner Lenton. With "excellent cooperation" from the Cuban police, "they were quickly arrested," he said.

In another case in 2002, a Royal Canadian Mounted Police official describes how Cuba seized a sailboat in Cuban waters after Canada provided a tip that it was carrying drugs. Cuban authorities seized the boat, full of drugs. Vessel forfeiture was not covered in the Cuba-Canada anti-drug agreement, so a forfeiture provision was quickly negotiated, the vessel was sold, and the proceeds shared.

United Kingdom. British authorities say that in terms of drug traffic headed toward Britain, "Cuba is not a major threat like Jamaica." Yet they have an interest in helping Cuban authorities to develop their anti-drug capabilities. British programs take an "intelligence-driven approach," where British officers are seconded to Cuban customs for 12 weeks at a time to teach Cuban officers how to detect drugs in maritime ports and how to search ships and containers.

The British also assist Cuban authorities in combating child abuse. Responding to what one official calls the "very low-level" phenomenon of sex tourism that preys on minors, Britain has provided Cuba a video evidence suite and training in its use so that testimony can be taken from children in all kinds of child abuse cases. This equipment "protects the kids," a British official explains, "reducing the trauma of a criminal proceeding, allowing them to give good testimony without having to go to court." Britain has also sent Cuban officials to international seminars on child abuse and crimes against children to keep them apprised of current trends and law enforcement practices.

France. French officials echo other governments' assessments that Cuba is "not strategic" in terms of international drug trafficking. Still, a police attaché was posted in Havana in 1999 for the first time to handle drug and other cases. "When we need information, we get responses," a French official says.

France has provided training to Cuban police in investigative techniques; the proper collection, organization, and presentation of evidence, "so it is what the prosecutors and judges need;" detection of drug shipments in ports and airports; and laboratory training for detection of synthetic drugs. French officials say Cuban police personnel are "well trained" compared to their counterparts in the region; "effective" in operations, with continuity of personnel, and officers who are "very attentive" in seminars, asking "hard questions" of instructors.



Buildings in various stages of renovation on a typical block along the Malecon.



A few blocks inland at the corner of Crespo and Refugio streets, a new apartment building for temporary placement of residents of buildings under renovation.

SPANISH REGIONAL GOVERNMENTS: RESTORING CUBA'S ARCHITECTURAL HERITAGE

The restoration of Old Havana, the two-square-kilometer colonial core of the Cuban capital, is one of island's most ambitious and difficult public works projects, involving the rehabilitation of hundreds of centuries-old buildings ravaged by neglect and the elements. It is also unique in that it is funded by locally generated revenues. With special authority enshrined in law, the Office of the Historian of Havana and its network of enterprises manages about \$60 million in annual tourism income and plows it back

into the community, creating museums, housing, and social service centers used by tourists and residents of the old city.

The restoration project benefits from the collaboration of architects, planners, artisans, and donors from abroad. The most systematic help is provided by Spanish regional governments as part of their effort to restore Spanish colonial architecture throughout the Americas. The leading participant is the regional council of Andalusia, and the governments of the Canaries, Asturias, Extremadura, and Valencia have also participated.

Spain's effort has made a critical difference. The master plan for Old Havana was created with Spain's assistance. Spanish funds have helped to restore important buildings such as the San Francisco and Paula convents. And now Spanish resources are concentrated on the restoration of the oldest part of the Malecon, Havana's seven-kilometer seafront boulevard.

The easternmost part of the Malecon, the 1.2 kilometers that border the Centro Habana neighborhood, was built between 1902 and 1919, and now houses more than 7,000 inhabitants. After decades of exposure to the sea, its buildings are in disrepair, with decayed façades and, in many cases, degraded structural elements in spite of the fact that this is the first place in Cuba where steel-reinforced concrete was used in construction. A survey of works in progress shows many buildings where the façade will be restored and the interior structure completely rebuilt.

Andalusia and other local Spanish governments became involved in this project in 1991 and have contributed in three ways: planning, funding (\$3 million since 1991), and direct collaboration with Cuban architects. The project encompasses the Malecon and San Lazaro street behind it, with a total of 266 buildings.

Spanish architects worked with Cuban counterparts for five years to create what a Cuban architect calls "our Bible" – a set of drawings that catalogues the existing condition of each block and building. Funding from Andalusia built and outfitted the Malecon office where 30 Cuban architects, planners, and engineers work with up-to-date software.



As buildings are renovated, most façades survive, but some are in such poor structural condition that they are lost and will need to be recreated from scratch.



The joint effort does not occur in a vacuum. The Historian's office has a master plan that addresses both community needs and tourism development; as a result the Spanish architects find themselves involved in housing, parks, buildings for delivery of community services, and hotels for tourists. "Here there is no divorce between the architectural and urbanistic objectives," a Cuban planner says.

"Spain has sent dozens of very good architects who have helped us a lot," according to the planning director for Old Havana, Rafael Rojas. "They have strengthened the skills of young Cuban architects, a form of collaboration that goes beyond funding." Fifteen

Cuban architects have gone to Spain on scholarships to receive courses that last from one to nine months, and Spanish architects regularly visit Cuba to work on projects and to teach.

According to Cuban architect Maria Teresa Padron, the Spanish collaboration has made a qualitative difference. "In the city of Havana there was a lot of talk about theories of rehabilitation but there was no guide for how to do it," she says. "In these buildings, theory collided with the reality of our conditions; no one had ever confronted these problems. The Spaniards have experience in restoring this kind of architecture – they start with the history of the building, and find the original structure through all the modifications. They know how to work with the building as it is – that is how they have helped us." And, she says, the Spanish architects "don't just give us money and say, 'You do the project' – they come back every few months, at each stage of the project, to work on it."

Today, 28 buildings are completed, 64 are in the process of construction or restoration, six were destroyed, and 21 are in the planning stage. The Malecon and the rest of Old Havana are a constantly changing cityscape, the

only place in the capital where a thorough rehabilitation effort is under way.

From the Spanish perspective, according to an architect who has worked in Cuba, the most important part of the work is bringing Cuban architects up to date with information and techniques in their field. "There's a deficit of knowledge of what is happening in the world. Many older architects have emigrated, and there is limited access to magazines and other materials. But they have a strong interest in learning."

In sum, the architect says, the work in Cuba is "interesting, but Cuba is difficult. The way the system works is not like ours; there is a political element in all decisions, and there are delays. But I will never abandon the work. There is great value to it – to rehabilitate the architectural wealth and improve living conditions. And it establishes a channel of communication and understanding, which is valuable too."





A vacant lot at the corner of Malecon and Prado once destined for hotel construction, now being cleared for a park.

CONCLUSION

This paper has described a few of many projects that illustrate ways in which foreign organizations operate in Cuba. Other examples include the extensive assistance that American Catholics, through Catholic Relief Services, have provided to Caritas, the charitable arm of the Cuban Catholic church; similar projects that assist Cuban Protestant churches; U.S.-Cuba sister cities projects; community development projects carried out through the European Union; Canada's official aid, provided through Carleton University, to create university courses in economics and business administration; and food aid provided by the UN's World Food Program.

The common threads in engagement with Cuba seem to be the identification of a mutual interest and the perseverance required to deal with Cuba's bureaucracy, which often seems to represent a gulf of communication. One official with long

experience in Cuba notes that "information is tightly controlled...after a time they become more open, but still there is a culture of secrecy." Foreign officials are often vexed when Cuban officials avoid responding to proposals rather than simply decline them. Others tell of a heavy political content in decisions that would seem to be apolitical anywhere else.

In nearly all cases, whether a foreign investment project or an aid program is in play, the foreign agency must be prepared for delays in decisionmaking. One foreign official was exasperated when, after long negotiations and joint planning sessions for a development project, his Cuban counterpart announced, "The project is completely approved, all we lack is a date." From his point of view, the lack of a date meant that there was no project, because his organization's budgeting depended on a start date being approved.

And political considerations can have an impact even on forms of engagement that are designed to provide benefits not to the central government, but to families and communities. In the United States, some groups call for an end to family remittances as a means of registering disapproval of Cuba's human rights record. At the time of this writing, a dispute between Cuba and European countries is proceeding, and may yet affect projects described in this paper.

Taken together, these factors make it a safe bet that, rather than work in Cuba, many agencies would find it easier to promote community development, restore architecture, and protect sensitive environments elsewhere in Latin America.

Yet these organizations have interests in Cuba that are unique to Cuba, and that they believe are worth advancing even in the face of bureaucratic delay and profound political differences. In discreet areas, they achieve results that are beneficial to Cuba and to other countries. They transfer knowledge and ways of doing business, foster communication, and build contacts between Cubans and foreign counterparts that would not otherwise exist. While moral and strategic debates about engagement with Cuba carry on, the longevity of these organizations' Cuba programs seems to send a clear message. They judge that their time and resources are invested well, and their results outweigh the unique difficulties they encounter working in Cuba.

FURTHER READING

Website of Cuba's National Center for Protected Areas:
<http://www.cuba.cu/ciencia/citma/ama/cnap/>

Map of Cuba's protected areas: <http://www.cuba.cu/ciencia/citma/ama/cnap/>

Website of the Canadian World Wildlife Fund: <http://www.wwfcanada.org/>

Benchley, Peter, "Cuba Reefs: A Last Caribbean Refuge," *National Geographic*, February 2002.

Linden, Eugene, "The Nature of Cuba," *Smithsonian*, May 2003.

Lexington Institute studies on the restoration of Old Havana and U.S.-Cuba relations, including cooperation on drug enforcement, are found at www.lexingtoninstitute.org/cuba.



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