

# FACTORS AFFECTING THE SUCCESS OR FAILURE OF COMMUNITY INITIATIVES. Experiences from Havana, Cuba

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This document is a brief report of the research carried out under the same name in 2002 and 2003 by Kosta Mathey, Ronaldo Ramirez, Reinhard Aehnelt, Octavio Tapia, Katja Buermann, Celeste Cuello, Daniel Fitzpatrick, Daphne Frank, Petra Luedike and Celeste Vargas. The research had the contribution of Rubén Bancrofft, Tania Gutierrez and Gina Rey, from the Instituto Superior Politécnico José Antonio Echeverría, and Rosa Oliveras from GDIC. Institutional partners of the research project were the Technical University Darmstadt, TRIALOG and the Instituto Suoerior Politécnico José Antonio Echeverría, in Havana.

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## INTRODUCTION

This paper is based on a research project carried out by an international group of academics in a few *barrios* of Havana in 2002 and 2003 to examine the influences of a number of factors in the success or failure of community projects. The research examined, within a limited scope, the relationships between civil society and the state in Cuba under an implicit but central assumption that emphasised the relative merits of civil society over the state as a general factor of legitimisation and success of community projects. This exploration took place in the contextual realities of Cuba during the past fifteen years, but principally in the everyday life of individual residents and communities in the poor Havana's *barrios*.<sup>1</sup>

Cuba had to face a serious crisis during the last decade of the 20th Century. Prior to the 1990s the central government was in charge of satisfying the basic needs of the population. The collapse of the international bloc of communist countries left the Cuban government without resources to sustain the economy and the consumption of the population. Cuba entered the so-called *Special Period*, with strict measures of economic austerity and several reforms to respond to the new conditions. Although the conditions have improved, the main features of the *Special Period* remain in place today. On the other hand, the reforms seem to have created the space required for the rise and development of grass-roots initiatives. Local and decentralised initiatives became indispensable and were stimulated by the government as the replacement of a centralised provisioning system that was not working. The research examined how the people in the *barrios* responded to this situation and how they used the available institutions to originate and channel new initiatives.

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<sup>1</sup> The Spanish term “barrio” is used in the whole paper instead of “neighbourhood”, its English translation

## CONTEXT OF THE RESEARCH

The theoretical basis was provided by the qualitative and participative paradigm of urban poverty. The categories of multidimensionality, heterogeneity, participation and integration, although not explicitly mentioned, were the conceptual guides used to understand numerous social projects carried out in the *barrios*. The *barrio* constitutes the people's habitat. It has multiple dimensions: houses, environments, history, personal and institutional relationships mutually inter-acting. The *barrio's* population is heterogeneous: people of different ages, genders, political and religious principles, interests and powers. *Barrio* residents, especially in Havana, are not isolated individuals but active participants, with varied degrees of commitment, into political organisations, administrative bodies, cultural, artistic and sport societies. The initiatives in the *barrios* are not isolated activities. The basis for their integration at municipal and city level is provided by the *Group for the Integral Development of the Capital (GDIC)* and the "*Talleres*" for the Integral Transformation of *Barrios*.

The Cuban *barrio* is an urban area identifiable sometimes by its geographical limits but most frequently by peculiar physical attributes and by its history and culture. It is not an administrative entity. The *barrio* constitutes, according to Rosa Oliveras, from GDIC: "*a system of interpersonal relationships that carried traditions, history and identity...manifested in the sense of belonging and of common interests that make the group that shared this space different from others*" (Oliveras, 1999). The 1981 Census identified 380 *barrios* in Havana.<sup>2</sup> Many of them have a rich physical patrimony, "*however the conditions of the housing stock (is) bad or regular in more than fifty percent of the cases and the conditions of the infrastructure and sanitation (are) also poor...*" (Oliveras. Ibid). The importance of the *barrio* in the everyday life of the communities increased as a consequence of the Special Period. Severe disruption of urban transport reduced the area of individual mobility. State agencies failure to distribute goods stimulated the development of local self-help such as urban agriculture and the rise of local "cuenta-propismo."<sup>3</sup> All these led to the spontaneous reinforcement of informal networks and made the *barrios* even more important institutions in the life of their inhabitants.

### **The Group for the Integral Development of the Capital, GDIC.<sup>4</sup>**

The drive towards decentralisation and the importance of the *barrios* were reinforced in 1987 by the creation of GDIC, one of whose central objectives was to promote "*new forms of governance so as to increase the direct participation of the population in the solution of the problems that they think are the most urgent..*" (Chappotin. 1998). The architect Gina Rey was the first Director of GDIC, after years of being the Provincial Director of Physical Planning in Havana. For her "*the mission of GDIC was to define a strategic vision and a commitment to improve the urban living conditions of the population.... and we clearly understood that this*

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<sup>2</sup> More contemporary studies identify some 600 *barrios*.

<sup>3</sup> Small-scale private businesses

<sup>4</sup> The acronym GDIC is used in the paper instead of the full name.

*improvement had to be done with the participation of the people in the barrios, from the bottom-up... linking the planning of the city to the initiatives that were coming from the barrios.*"<sup>5</sup>

### **Talleres for the Integral Transformation of Barrios.**<sup>6</sup>

The *Talleres* began to appear in Havana in 1988 (Chappotin. Ibid). Criticisms to excessively centralised planning were accompanied by attempts to motivate new social initiatives based upon community participation. Although these orientations developed rather slowly - many of them were frustrated by the political rigidity of the system - some initiatives managed to get established and their successes legitimised the value of participative structures. The *Talleres* are amongst those successful initiatives.

The first terms of reference for the *Talleres*, according to Gina Rey, were basically working guidelines: *that the "integral vision" was a fundamental principle, that the work would be multidisciplinary involving physical, environmental and social dimensions, that the staff should preferably live in the barrio and be part of the community, that the taller should be in the barrio and have premises that will identify it as local, that those premises should be centres of community activity, avoiding the image of a formal office with opening hours, etc... it took five difficult years of education and training to incorporate all these principles into the system.*"<sup>7</sup>

Today there are at least twenty *Talleres* in Havana. Most have a small staff of professionals in urban and social fields. Their work include areas such as housing conditions, children and adolescent support, community relationships and local economies. Some have adopted the specific interests of their local communities, such as urban agriculture. The majority have programmes to support their senior citizens and to improve the environment. Most *Talleres* produce annually a "Participative Diagnosis" that singles out what the local communities consider the most urgent problems and the possible ways to solve them. The Diagnoses are followed by "Strategic Community Plans" where the problems are arranged according to their urgency and how realistic are the proposed solutions. These documents are used to motivate and organise local initiatives, to lobby city and municipal authorities and to search for contributions of international aid agencies.

The merits of the *Talleres* are recognised by many institutions in Havana and by the residents in the barrios. This research project also assigned a great importance to the *Taller* as the place of intersection of community initiatives, strategically located between the social base and the higher urban authorities.

## **THE RESEARCH PROJECT**

The objective of the research was to identify factors that influence the success or failure of community projects in Havana's barrios and to explain the reasons for such results. The first stages of the project showed that in three barrios: Balcón Arimao-Novoa, El Canal and Pogolotti,

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<sup>5</sup> Gina Rey. Interview

<sup>6</sup> The Spanish terms *Taller* and *Talleres* are used in the paper instead of "workshop (s)".

<sup>7</sup> Gina Rey. Interview

the execution of Participative Diagnoses and Strategic Community Planning had defined spaces ample enough for individuals, communities and organisations to propose, design and implement a variety of social projects. The criteria that guided the research group to select a number of factors was strongly influenced by the principles of the qualitative paradigm on urban poverty and a central importance was given to the idea that in many circumstances the population might be in a better position than the public institutions to achieve socially adequate solutions to their problems on the grounds of their intimate knowledge of the local needs and potentials. In a general sense, the relationship between civil society and the state became the issue that organised not only the selection of factors but also the main questions of the research.

### **Factors and research question**

The research formulated a central question to guide the examination of the relative influences of civil society and state interventions in the success or failure of community projects, and proposed seven factors that seemed to embody those interventions. The factors were: **origin of the initiative; the nature of the leaders; assistance from public institutions; links with mass organisations; coordination through an intermediate organisation; community identity, culture and religion; and source of funding.** The central question was worded as: **which factors have contributed significantly to the success or the failure of community initiatives aimed to improve the living conditions in the *barrios*?**

The research examined the influence of the seven mentioned factors on about fifty community projects in Havana. Thirty of these projects had been executed or were on course in the three *barrios* that became the core of the field-work: Balcón Arimao-Novoa in the municipality La Lisa, El Canal in the municipality El Cerro, and Pogolotti in the municipality of Marianao. Additional cases were incorporated from the small township Santa Fé, the *barrios* San Isidro in Old Havana and Cayo Hueso and the Chinese Quarter, also in Havana Centre.

The research was carried out in 2002 and 2003. The most substantive periods were two one-month stays of the research group in Havana when the researchers participated continuously in the life of the selected *barrios*, interviewed residents and attended regular events. The highlights of these periods were two Participative Workshops organised in each one of the three core *barrios*. These were attended by the whole staff of the local *Taller*, leaders of community projects, local activists, members of the Popular Councils and of mass organisations, municipal representatives, ordinary residents and the whole research group. The workshops provided a unique opportunity to check the validity of the information collected from individual sources.

The methodology adopted to test the relative influences of the different factors in the success or failure of the projects consisted first in the reconstruction of the narrative of each project based upon the private and public testimonies of their protagonists – authors, managers, activists, supporters, beneficiaries and others. This was followed by analyses focused on the role of individual factors searching for evidence linking this information to the results of the initiatives as previously defined.

## ANALYSES AND PRINCIPAL FINDINGS

### Origin of an initiative

The first factor that was considered critical for the success or failure of a project was the process that originates the initiative and the nature and motivation of the social actors involved. This part of the analysis was supported by a number of definitions:

By *origin of initiatives* it was understood the actions executed by social actors to start processes that would affect specific social conditions. To originate a project involves actions to bring it about, just to formulate its need is not enough to originate it. The definition of the *social actors* was influenced by the alleged dichotomy between the state and civil society. On this basis, the complexity resulting from the numerous social actors that exist in real life was simplified by reducing them to only two: one generic actor, individual or collective, that constitutes the *civil society* – individual local leaders, the community of residents, their organisations independent from the state institutions - and another generic actor, individual or collective, constituted by the *public institution* – national or local state agencies, individual representatives or members of the state or designated by the state to carry out specific tasks. Projects initiated by public servants – for example by doctors, teachers or elected delegates to state institutions - that responded in principle to the objectives of their institutions but were in fact very distant from their routines, were considered as initiated by civil society. The *Talleres* were defined as public institutions. Initiatives were considered as *successful* when they had achieved their initially defined objectives or were in their way to achieve them. Also when their continuity was secured, they were recognised as important by the communities and were considered to be replicable or have been replicated already. Negative answers to all or most of these conditions indicated that an initiative had failed.

The analysis of the influence of the “*origin of the initiative*” factor was guided by a working hypothesis that tested the relative importance of civil society and public institutions by affirming that community initiatives originated in civil society were more frequently successful than those originated in public institutions. Twenty nine community initiatives were discussed in the Participative Workshops in the *barrios* Balcón Arimao-Novoa, El Canal and Pogolotti. The analysis showed that twenty three of these projects had been successful and that six had failed. The crude information was that a large proportion of projects had originated in civil society, twenty one out of twenty nine. However a more detailed examination showed that public institutions, particular the local *Talleres*, had participated in the origin of more than half of them, eleven out of twenty one, and that this proportion was higher, nine out of fifteen, amongst the successful initiatives of civil society origin. For example, of the four successful projects originated in civil society in Pogolotti only two had a clear independent origin: the *Alafia Dance Group* and the *Food Conservation* projects. The first, a very successful art group supported by the local community, was initiated by two young residents professionally linked to cultural activities. The second, an initiative that had become of national relevance, was initiated by a local married couple. The other two – *Mayanabo Children Musical Group* and *Street-Lighting* projects - though civil society originated showed considerable intervention of the *Taller* in their first stages. If all the twenty nine community initiatives in the three *barrios* were included, it was

possible to see that only ten had originated exclusively in civil society and eight in public institutions, while in eleven cases the origin showed a combined intervention of both. If exclusively the successful initiatives were considered, only six appeared originated clearly in civil society, eight in public institutions and nine from a combination of sources. As far as the working hypothesis was concerned, the crude information showed that it was validated by fifteen successful initiatives of civil society origin –ignoring the segregation noted above – but also invalidated by nearly the same number, fourteen. The latter included eight successful projects originated in public institutions and six failed projects originated in civil society.

The overall picture coming from this information was that initiatives originated in civil society prevailed, that in many cases their origins appeared significantly influenced by the local *Talleres*, that while the vast majority of them were successful there was still a good number that failed and that all the initiatives originated by public institution had been successful. It was therefore not possible to sustain that successful community initiatives in the three barrios were more frequently found amongst those originated in civil society, as postulated by the hypothesis, but that in Cuba both the state and civil society shared the position of being positive influences in the origin of successful community initiatives.

### **Existence of a promoter or natural leader**

Community initiatives normally incorporate neighbours who are motivated by the overall objectives of the project and whose involvement are varied in terms of time and commitments. In many cases some of these neighbours become natural leaders, men and women that grasp the significance of the project, who encourage the participation of other residents, who are able to take initiatives, to provide guidance and to represent the group publicly. On the basis of these observations the research proposed a working hypothesis that identified the presence of a natural leader as a central factor for the success of a community initiative.

The examination of thirty seven initiatives in the three core *barrios* plus the ones incorporated in Old and Centre Havana, showed thirteen cases amongst the twenty most successful projects in which the strongest factor for their growth and development had been the capacity of its leader. The need to test to what extent the presence of a strong leader created conditions of dependence that might jeopardise the success of a project once he or she withdrew led to give special attention to cases when a successful leader had ceased to act. However, the information provided by these cases indicated that the risk of a project stagnating because of this cause was not significant: ten projects had had to close amongst the examined initiatives but only in one case, the *Recreation Centre Miguelito Cuni* in the *barrio* Balcón Arimao, the departure of the leader was reported to have been the main problem. In the other closed projects, leader leaving was at most one out of several causes for the termination.

A number of interesting observations were provided by the information related to this factor. One concerned the apparent lack of significance of the origin of the leader - either in the civil society or in a public institution – for the successful execution of his or her functions. Many leaders of flourishing projects had arisen from the community, but others were officials in or had

been appointed by public institutions. For example the leader of the Pogolotti's Recycling Project, a resident in the *barrio* designated to that position by the local *Taller* and the Popular Council, was a woman of recognised charisma and a major factor in the success of the initiative. On a different level, it was also interesting to observe that the role of the leader was particularly important in projects of a cultural or economic nature but not so in projects of social assistance. The overall conclusion suggested by the analysis of all the cases was that the presence of one or various natural leaders constituted a very important factor for the success of a community initiative in the *barrios*.

### **Assistance from public institutions**

As repeatedly mentioned, the relationships between civil society and public institutions in the present circumstances of the Cuban society constituted a background theme of the research project. Discussions of this relationship are familiar in the international literature dealing with urban processes but the same issues in a country characterised by a highly centralised, top-down model of socialism having to confront the restrictions of the Special Period raise different questions. A full in-depth examination of these issues was well beyond the scope of the research, however the analyses of the different factors gave importance to this theme. In the case of this particular factor the research tried to identify whether there were cases of co-operation between civil society and state agencies such as, for example, the Secretary of Culture or offices controlling the use of foreign contributions and how this affected the outcome of the community projects. The *Talleres* were not included here amongst the public institutions, given that its role was examined as a particular factor.

An analysis of the thirty seven projects examined above showed twenty one cases in which the relationships between public institutions and the local communities had been significant. In five cases the support of the state had been a main factor for the flourishing of the civil initiatives, particularly when these coincided or were parts of an overall state programme. But in thirteen cases the intervention of public institutions was identified as a factor holding back the initiatives. In three cases the state intervention had neither supported nor slowed down the initiatives. However, even amongst the initiatives that reported difficulties with public institutions, a significant number had managed to develop successfully and only very few had eventually failed.

### **Links with mass organization**

In Cuba there are a good number of *mass organisations*, institutions created by the state to canalise the interests and the activities of particular and large social groups. There are, for example, the Committees for the Defence of the Revolution (CDR) – neighbourhood unions in each street block - or the Women's' Federation, to which the majority of women subscribe. Most *mass organisations* have specific attributes, such as the capacity to mobilise the voluntary work of the *barrio* residents or to bring local initiatives to the attention of the Municipal Assembly, that may contribute to the success of community projects. Conversely, their interferences might become obstacles to the development of such initiatives

The examination of the thirty seven community projects showed that in more than half of them *mass organisations* had provided assistance in one way or the other. However, if only the successful initiatives were considered this factor did not appear as a significant contributor to that result. Moreover, there were a few cases in which the initiatives had clashed with the *mass organisations* existent in their particular *barrio*. One such a case was the discotheque *CIMA 73*, in the *barrio* Novoa: in the worse period of the crisis, when public transport was unavailable, a widely respected CDR leader used the local market premises to organise a disco in the evenings, thus providing some entertainment to the local youth and creating some jobs. However, because of a small entrance fee charged to cover expenses some members argued that the CDR should not engage in ‘commercial’ activities and managed to shut down the venture. Another similar case but with a different outcome was the *Callejón de Hamel*, a cultural initiative in a street in Centre Havana, that although opposed by the president of the local CDR had managed to continue developing successfully.

### **Coordination through intermediate organisations**

The intermediate organisation considered for this analysis was the *Taller for the Integral Transformation of Barrios*. As previously said, a regular and central contribution of the *Talleres* to the organisation of local initiatives has been the Participative Diagnoses and Strategic Community Plans with their identification of local needs and priorities. Apart from these, the research received many testimonies that illustrated the assistance offered by the *Talleres* to the smooth functioning of community initiatives. This support mostly appeared in the forms of organising, promoting, coordinating and providing technical assistance to community projects. The *Talleres* frequently organised some of the activities of a project when the community group lacked the experience or the necessary equipment to carry them out. For example, in support of various initiatives around the *Ceiba Square*, the local *Taller* used to organise special events, parties, children’s games, and others. The *Talleres* also promoted some initiatives, for example by helping their members to recruit and integrate new participants: in Pogolotti the *Taller* invited children of difficult behaviour, their parents, and the representatives of the *Mayanabo Children Group* of music and dance to meet so as to motivate the kids into becoming members of the Group. An example of the *Talleres* as coordinators and mediators was the initiative of the *Community Garden and Environmental Information Centre* in El Canal. This project developed as a result of the Participative Diagnosis carried out by the local *Taller*, which later on helped them to establish contacts with other initiatives and authorities, to obtain formal permit for their activities, materials and publicity. Moreover, the *Talleres* frequently provided technical assistance to initiatives in their area, particularly in the form of capacity building.

The evidence obtained by the research project showed that the *Talleres* had made great contributions towards the advancement of community initiatives within their *barrios*. In many cases these contributions appeared obscured by the informal involvement of the *Talleres* in the origin and development of many initiatives. Amongst thirty seven initiatives examined by the research project the majority of the successful ones identified the *Taller* as one of the most important factors of their success. In nine cases they singled out the *Taller* as THE most important factor in that result.. There was only one initiative that had failed in spite of having strong links with, and support from the local *Taller*: this was the rather old project to build twenty five houses in “*Dust-Island*”, a precarious settlement part of Pogolotti. On the other hand there were cases when the *Taller* had constrained or being indifferent to the development of a project. Amongst the firsts was one of the oldest and very successful

initiatives, the *Alafia* Afro-Cuban cultural group in Pogolotti, which experienced the loss of support by the *Taller* following a change of *Taller* co-ordinator and suffered considerably from this fact. Amongst the seconds was the outstanding case of the *Callejón de Hamel*, which had become a tourist site and local cultural centre in Centre Havana, flourishing without any clear link to the *Taller* whose premises are only a few blocks away. It can be concluded that although the *Talleres* cannot guarantee the success of an initiative, it is certain that many initiatives – especially the weaker ones - would not exist today if they did not have benefited from the support of a *Taller*.

### **Community identity, culture and religious context**

More than one third of the examined initiatives showed strong links with cultural or specific religious themes. The culture factor had been included in the research project right from the beginning on the assumption that in neighbourhoods with many physical and social problems strengthening local identities could be a means to stimulate interest in the improvement of urban conditions. However, the information obtained by the research showed that religious and cultural aspects had their own dynamics, not always linked to urban improvements. The information permitted to identify initiatives focussed on cultural or on religious themes on their own right, and others in which both appeared jointly reinforcing each other. In several cases the religion seemed to have the effect of binding the participants together though the focus of the initiative might have been of a cultural or ecological nature.

The number of initiatives with interest in both culture and religion was surprisingly high. Amongst them there were the Afro-Cuban dance groups mentioned before, such as *Alafia* and other such as *Haralaya*, *Fantasy* and *Odan Ocara*, the activities around the Ceiba, a sacred tree in the barrio Balcón Arimao, the weekly street parties celebrated in *Callejón de Hamel* and the *Group of Religious Studies*, where religion provided the central common link that gave continuity to what has also been a study of local history. The links between specific initiatives of this character and the whole *barrio's* population appeared to be highly effective: the project of the sacred forest of Pogolotti was clearly flourishing at the time when its religious connotation was accepted, and it lost most community support when the focus on religion was abandoned by a top-down administrative decision. Similarly, the culture and the local traditions were identified as stabilizing elements in the case of the *Alacrán* in *barrio El Canal*, as well as in the street *carnivals* in *Pogolotti* and other *barrios*.

Attempts to explain this situation were mostly speculative. One was that in the field of culture many activities could be carried out with relatively little money, especially in comparison with projects like the construction or improvement of housing. Other explanations pointed to the contribution of cultural values to strengthening the self-esteem of communities in situations of economic crisis. With respect just to religion, the interest developed by part of the civil society seemed a logical move where the state is absent from the religious field. In any case the evident influence of religion and culture in defining community initiatives constituted one of the surprising findings of the research project.

### **Source of funding**

The need of funds to support even the most modest initiatives is a common tension that accompanies most community projects world-wide, and this is also the case in Cuba,

aggravated by her peculiar conditions. Amongst the initiatives examined in Havana there were several – mainly amongst requiring capital goods, like housing and infrastructure projects - financed by international aid. In Pogolotti, for example, the *Taller's* Participative Diagnosis identified the lack of street-lighting to be a major social problem, which then stimulated the community to seek funds which they eventually obtained through an NGO, allowing the rapid completion of a street-lighting project. In *Espada Street 411, Cayo Hueso*, Centre Havana, another foreign aid financed project succeeded in improving a series of slum dwellings that were found to be in miserable conditions. But both – and others of similar character - were one-off cases, never repeated elsewhere in spite of similar needs, which exposed some of the limitations of international aid: lack of continuity, “seed-money” projects that rarely take into account local limitations, short time span and others. The case of the *Horticulture Clubs* in *Santa Fé* also showed the negative impact of generous international funding which might reduce the resident's own efforts for more modest investments since these could never compete with the efficiency of an internationally promoted demonstration project.

In the absence of, and lack of access to international funds the second option would be to go for national funding agencies, but those sources are extremely limited in Cuba under her present economic situation. Nevertheless, the contributions of the national and the municipal governments were not totally absent, manifesting themselves in the numerous specialists supporting community projects while maintaining their positions and salaries as staffers in the public institutions. Several initiatives had gone a different way, seeking to survive on their own resources. They had done so either consciously, by relying on voluntary labour and donations from members and communities, or simply for lack of alternatives. In a few isolated cases, the initiatives had fetch funds through some income generating economic activity like the film projections in the *Taller* in *Cayo Hueso*. The advantage of such an approach was that these initiatives could maintain their independence vis-à-vis funding agencies and from the conjuncture of short-term foreign co-operation projects. Significantly, several of the most successful initiatives, like *Barrio Chino* and *Callejón de Hamel* generated their own funds and even created employment for their neighbours at the same time. Nevertheless, it is also true that such initiatives often benefited from unique circumstances, such as being central to a tourist zone or being supported by a very active ethnic minority and were, for such reasons, very hard to replicate.

The community projects examined by the research did not support the hypothesis that an initial injection of foreign funds contributed to the sustainability of community initiatives. On the contrary, they confirmed that the most successful and durable initiatives had survived from local and own resources, however scarce they might had been. Many of the examined projects, like the Food Conservation in Pogolotti, the Group of Religious Studies in Balcón Arimao, or the cultural initiative *Okan Oddara* in San Isidro, had existed for a very long time and had achieved their stability in spite of the financial difficulties they had always faced. In most cases the contributions in time, work, goods and small sums of money from the local residents in the *barrios* had been crucial for their developments.

## Conclusions

The large variety of community initiatives examined in the Havana's *barrios* showed that their success, stagnation or failure depended of a combination of factors. Amongst the projects analysed there was no one whose fate - either positive or negative - could be explained as being caused by a single factor. At the same time, the examination also showed

that some factors seemed to have been more influential than others in such developments – and some of them came as a surprise.

If only the successful initiatives are considered, the *role of the leader* turned out to be by far the most important factor in the advance of the projects. Amongst the twenty cases considered successful in the short term the role of the leader was considered as the most important factor in sixteen. The same happened in six of the nine cases classified as successful in the long run and also amongst the projects considered replicable. Although the figures have no statistical significance, the sheer presence of the leader as an important factor of success in so many projects validates the conclusion noted above.

Following the role of the leader the *Talleres of Integral Transformation of Barrios* appeared as significant factors for the success of community projects and for the multiplicity of local initiatives, even though some of the strongest ones did not maintain any links with a *Taller*. The information showed the presence of the *Talleres* as a helping hand in a large number of cases, that the assistance provided by them had helped many initiatives to proceed and progress and that many of the smaller initiatives were only possible thanks to the assistance offered by the *Taller*.

Although initially it had seemed that the contributions of *mass organisations* to the success of community initiatives had been significant, this assertion was not supported by the latter's examination. The cases showing positive contributions of *mass organisations* were as many as those exposing them as negative. The same can be said about the *assistance of public institutions*, which sometimes helped the development of community initiatives - particularly when these coincided with central government programmes - and sometimes proved to be obstacles.

As far as the financial sources was concerned the examined cases showed that while international aid played a positive role in facilitating the rapid execution of community projects that required capital goods, the short term and lack of continuity of those contributions limited their overall impacts particularly on cases that required modest but long term financial support. By contrast, in cases where the projects sought to survive self-financed – mostly on modest amounts – it was possible to observe a greater stability and durability in their work.

The greatest surprise in these analyses of community initiatives in the Havana *barrios* was to find the strong positive influence of the *religion* factor. It was present in almost all the cultural initiatives with reference to Afro-Cuban roots, and above all in projects where dance and music were involved, appearing as a theme that agglutinated the project participants.

A still tentative overall conclusion of these analyses seems to indicate that the role of natural leaders, the daily work of the *Talleres* and the influence of religion and cultural identity constitute the master keys to the success of local community initiatives in the *barrios* of Havana. As far as the relationship between civil society and public institutions is concerned, the research seems to show that in Cuba the influences of both do not produce significantly different results.

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