



# State and civil society in the *barrios* of Havana, Cuba: the case of Pogolotti

Ronaldo Ramirez

Ronaldo Ramirez is an honorary research fellow at the Development Planning Unit (DPU), University College London, and previously was director of DPU's masters courses on international housing studies (1987–99) and urban development planning (1980–87). Prior to joining DPU's teaching staff, he was a professor at the University of Chile, from 1967 to 1973, and visiting professor at the University of California, Berkeley, in 1974.

Address: Development Planning Unit, University College London, 9 Endsleigh Gardens, London WC1H 0ED, UK; e-mail: ronaldo.ramirez@ucl.ac.uk

## Acknowledgements

This paper is based on research entitled "Factors Affecting Success or Failure of Community Initiatives. Experiences from Havana, Cuba" carried out in 2002 and 2003 by Kosta Mathey, Reinhard Aehnelt, Octavio Tapia, Katja Buermann, Celeste Cuello, Daniel Fitzpatrick, Daphne Frank, Petra Luedike, Celeste Vargas and Ronaldo Ramirez, with contributions from Rubén Bancrofft, Tania Gutiérrez and Gina Rey from the Instituto Superior Politécnico José Antonio Echeverría, and Rosa Oliveras from GDIC. The author assumes responsibility for arguments and interpretations that might differ from those of the research project.

**SUMMARY:** This paper discusses the factors that influenced the success or failure of community projects in one low-income neighbourhood in Havana, Cuba. The scope for community initiatives increased in the late 1980s, in part because of citizens' desire to take initiatives and collective action to improve their living conditions, in response to the crisis Cuba faced with the disintegration of the communist bloc. The government also allowed civil society more scope, and offered official support to participation and civil society initiatives through Talleres, groups of professionals in the urban and social fields based in each neighbourhood. This paper examines how the people in Pogolotti used available institutions to originate and channel a range of civil society initiatives, including self-help housing construction, a dance group for teenagers, a food conservation project, a children's musical group, street lighting, forest restoration, recycling and a senior citizens' house project. It finds that both the state and civil society were positive influences in the origination of successful community projects, which contradicts the assumption that civil-society-initiated projects are more likely to succeed. The state-created Talleres seem to be creating new relationships between civil society and the state; these may be a very small part of Cuban society but they may contain the seeds of new forms of socialist organizations.

## I. INTRODUCTION

THIS PAPER EXAMINES the relationships between civil society and the state in Cuba, focusing on one *barrio*<sup>(1)</sup> (neighbourhood) in Havana. Discussions on this relationship are common in the literature dealing with urban processes in capitalist societies. This same issue, in a country that adopted and has maintained a highly centralized, top-down socialist model, raises different questions with wider theoretical implications. To carry out urban research in Havana today, it is necessary to retune preconceived ideas about development and social issues. Of course, all countries are different, but after a life devoted to the so-called "countries of the South",<sup>(2)</sup> one comes to expect certain common features, such as extreme social inequality, high urban poverty, and irresponsible or distant governance. Some of these features are present in Havana today, but accompanied by other features that express the differences between the nature of this and other social realities. There is poverty, but the results of universal programmes of education, health and social assistance mean that the poor are not ill, weak, abandoned or lacking a future. Rather, poverty seems to appear in

the contrast between the expectations of a healthy and educated community and the limitations imposed by economic and political structures that, in spite of important changes, remain rigid, and to which one must add 40 years of aggression by the USA.

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. The paper closely follows the content of the research, but it is not a summary – rather, an interpretation of some issues that the research raised. The research examined the influences of a number of factors on the success or failure of community projects, and was kept strictly within these limits. This paper explores the extent to which the interactions between the state and civil society in the field of community projects might manifest the development of new forms of socialist organization in Cuba. This exploration – which goes somewhat beyond the scope of the research – takes place in the contextual realities of Cuba during the past 15 years, principally in the everyday life of individuals and communities in Pogolotti, one of the poor Havana *barrios* included in the research.

## II. CONTEXT OF THE RESEARCH

THE CONTENT, METHODOLOGY and main lines of enquiry of the research were defined according to three contextual levels:

- the theoretical context;
- the impact on Cuba of international developments; and
- the urban conditions in Havana.

### a. Theoretical context

The theoretical basis was provided by the qualitative and participative paradigm of urban poverty. The literature today that is devoted to the qualitative analysis of urban poverty is considerable and widely debated. It has enriched the description and understanding of urban poverty, and has identified some immediate causes of specific cases; however, it has not shown an equal interest in the identification of the structural causes of poverty.<sup>(3)</sup> Nevertheless, the analytical categories defined by the qualitative paradigm constituted adequate tools for the research and for this paper. 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 Havana *barrios*. The research focused on housing conditions, however the conceptualization of these conditions is multidimensional and covers the very large and varied social canvas of residents' initiatives to improve their living conditions. The *barrio* constitutes the people's habitat. It has multiple dimensions: houses, environments, history, and mutually interacting personal and institutional relationships. 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 in political organizations, administrative bodies, and cultural, artistic and sports 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 research project was sponsored and co-financed by the Programme de Recherche Urbaine pour le Développement (PRUD) and the Fonds de Solidarité Prioritaire du Ministère des Affaires Étrangères, coordinated by GEMDEV and ISTD.

Institutional partners for the research project were the Technical University Darmstadt, TRIALOG and the Instituto Superior Politécnico José Antonio Echeverría, in Havana.

Neither the research project nor the paper would have been possible without the collaboration of many people and institutions in Cuba and in the Havana *barrios*. Many thanks to: Roberto Almaguer Guerrero, Latin American Faculty of Social Sciences, FLACSO

Raul Suarez, Martin Luther King Jr Memorial Centre Ester Perez, Martin Luther King Jr Memorial Centre Felix Yáñez, Martin Luther King Jr Memorial Centre, coordinator of housing building and street-lighting projects

Gina Rey, Instituto Politécnico José Antonio Echeverría (erstwhile director of GDIC)

Rubén Bancroff, Instituto Politécnico José Antonio Echeverría

Tania Gutierrez, Instituto Politécnico José Antonio Echeverría

David Valdez, family doctor (general practitioner) in Pogolotti

Noemí Reyes, director of Taller of Integral

Transformation of Pogolotti Mercedes Abreu, president of popular council No 5 (until 2002)

Pura Echeverría, delegate to popular council

Martha Rosa Herrera, social worker, Pogolotti Taller

Ramona Milagros, social worker, Pogolotti Taller

Berta Alfonso, engineer, Pogolotti Taller

María Caridad Gutiérrez, coordinator of community house

Mario Véliz (Marito), resident of Dust-Island and delegate to popular council

Miguel Rico, ex-resident of Pogolotti and ex-member of popular council

Ramón Silverio

(Ramoncito), director of Alafia dance group  
 José Lamas, director of food conservation project  
 Roberto Oropesa, Pogolotti resident, pensioner and local leader  
 Iluminada Magimiranda, director of recycling project  
 Manuel Antonio Perez, director of Mayanabo children's musical group.  
 Photographs by the research group.

1. The Spanish term *barrio* is used in the paper instead of "neighbourhood", its English translation.

2. "Countries from the South" is a euphemism used to avoid references to poverty and underdevelopment.

3. Ramirez, Ronaldo (2003), "Ciudad y pobreza: el paradigma cualitativo de la pobreza urbana", in Balbo, M, R Jordán and D Simioni (editors), *La Ciudad Inclusiva*, CEPAL, Santiago, pages 29–58.

4. UN-Habitat (2001), *Cities in a Globalizing World. A Global Report on Human Settlement*, Earthscan Publications, London.

## b. The impacts of international developments

The 1980s and 1990s saw the consolidation worldwide of globalization, the new world model of capital accumulation. Whatever the allegedly positive economic impacts of the new model in some regions of the world, the consequences of its policies, especially of the programmes of structural adjustment, have worsened the living conditions of the poor in the whole world.<sup>(4)</sup>

The experience of Cuba has been different from that in other countries of the South, albeit no less dramatic. The economic and political structure of the country, as well as its integration into the international bloc of communist countries, seemed initially to have protected its population from the demands of structural adjustment. The government was not forced to reduce its public expenditure in social services to satisfy international demands, however this does not mean that the population's living conditions were satisfactory. Difficult living conditions have been a fact of life in Cuba since the Revolution, although different from those in other low- and middle-income countries, especially for the poorest sectors of the population. The government had assumed responsibility for satisfying the basic needs of everybody, especially the supply of food, good education and high standards of health. The disintegration of the communist bloc abruptly changed this situation at the end of the 1980s, leaving the Cuban government without the resources to sustain the economy and supply basic goods to the population. The country entered the Special Period, with strict measures of economic austerity and several reforms to respond to the new conditions. It is not possible to describe the severity of the first stages of the Special Period without having lived it, when a single provider – the state – had nothing to provide to a population that had become used to being provided for. Individual testimonies describe a state of general paralysis. Travelling to work, for example, was an ordeal due to the lack of transport; but it was also useless because there was little to do.

The main features of the Special Period are still present in Cuba today, although the situation has improved. The improvements, as will be shown below, express the contradictory features of the current process, and significantly influence life in the *barrios*. The reforms seem to have created the necessary space for the rise and development of grassroots initiatives. Local and decentralized activities became indispensable and were stimulated by the government to support a centralized provisioning system that was not working. The emergency introduced the need for flexibility and improvisation – both relative – in the government apparatus. Initiatives that, previously, had been inconceivable became acceptable. It became legal to receive dollars from relatives in Miami, tourism was promoted, and small-scale private businesses became acceptable. Many of these initiatives are today well known internationally. However, the most important and less visible consequence was the impulse to the people to undertake initiatives, to participate and undertake collective actions to improve their living conditions. How this has affected life in the poor *barrios* of Havana is less well known. The paper examines how the people in Pogolotti responded to this situation, how they used the available institutions to originate and channel initiatives, and how this process seems to be creating new relationships between civil society and the state.

## c. The urban context of the research

**Housing.** It is difficult to avoid the impression that housing conditions in

Havana at the beginning of the twenty-first century are deplorable. Segre, Coyula and Scarpaci provided in 1997 a summary of the housing policies and practices between 1960 and the last years of the twentieth century. Their conclusion was that the socialist revolution had not been able to satisfy the housing needs of the population. Neither the heavy pre-fabrication industry nor the building Micro-brigades had reached their quantitative and qualitative targets.<sup>(5)</sup> All forms of construction declined during the 1980s and later, during the Special Period, the construction of new houses became unrealistic. This overall situation inevitably affected the housing stock. To the architect Lourdes Ortega, "...the built stock was undervalued as underdeveloped and abandoned. The result was not only the deterioration of a material basis but also the disappearance of many traditional trades."<sup>(6)</sup> Housing conditions in Havana were already serious before the Special Period, when they became grave. Fifty per cent of housing units in the capital were classified as in poor condition in 1996. There were 60 extremely poor *barrios*, and more than 60,000 families living in slums.<sup>(7)</sup>

**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* results from the integration of a community with a specific territory. It constitutes, according to Rosa Oliveras, "...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."<sup>(8)</sup>

The 1981 census identified 380 *barrios* in Havana.<sup>(9)</sup> Many had a rich physical patrimony, "...however the conditions of the housing stock (was) bad or poor in more than 50 per cent of the cases, and the conditions of the infrastructure and sanitation (were) also poor..."<sup>(10)</sup> 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. The failure of state agencies to distribute goods stimulated such local self-help efforts as urban agriculture and the rise of local *cuenta-propismo*.<sup>(11)</sup> All this led to the spontaneous reinforcement of informal networks in the *barrios*, and made them even more important in the life of their inhabitants.

**Group for the Integral Development of the Capital, GDIC.**<sup>(12)</sup> The drive towards decentralization and the importance of the *barrios* were reinforced in 1987 with 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."<sup>(13)</sup> To the architect Gina Rey, erstwhile Provincial Director of Physical Planning and the first Director of GDIC, "...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 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>(14)</sup>

**Talleres for the Integral Transformation of Barrios.**<sup>(15)</sup> The *Talleres* began to appear in Havana in 1988,<sup>(16)</sup> during the so-called "correction of mistakes" period initiated by the Third Congress of the Cuban Communist Party. Criticisms of Soviet planning methods were accompanied by attempts to motivate new social initiatives based upon community participation, which became crucially important with the advent of the Special Period. It has, overall, been a slow process. The political rigidity of the system has frustrated many efforts. Nevertheless, some initiatives managed to get estab-

5. Segre, Roberto, Mario Coyula and Joseph L Scarpaci (1997), *Havana, Two Faces of the Antillean Metropolis*, Wiley, Chichester.

6. Ortega Morales, Lourdes (1996), "Barrios céntricos de inquilinato en La Habana. El barrio de Atarés", in Harms, H, W Ludeña and P Pfeiffer (editors), *Vivir en el Centro. Vivienda e Inquilinato en los Barrios Céntricos de las Metrópolis de América Latina*, Technische Universität Hamburg-Harburg, Germany, pages 95-134.

7. See reference 6.

8. Oliveras Gómez, Rosa (1999), *Planeamiento Estratégico Comunitario. Método, Técnicas y Experiencias*, GDIC, Havana, Cuba.

9. More contemporary studies identify some 600 *barrios*.

10. See reference 8.

11. A *cuenta-propismo* is a small-scale private business.

12. The acronym GDIC is used in the paper instead of the full name.

13. Chappotin Aranguren, Susana (1998), "El Taller de transformación integral: una alternativa más de desarrollo comunitario en Cuba", in Dávalos, R (editor), *Desarrollo Local y Descentralización en el Contexto Urbano* Vol III, Universidad de La Habana, Cuba.

14. Interview with Gina Rey, Instituto Politécnico José Antonio Echeverría (erstwhile director of GDIC).

15. The Spanish terms *Taller* and *Talleres* are used in the paper instead of "workshop(s)".

16. See reference 13.

lished, and their successes legitimized the value of the participative structures. The *Talleres* are among those successful initiatives, and were the fruit of a creative development in GDIC. Gina Rey tells the story:

*"After some discussions, we knew that we had to put in place participative processes and that the starting point was the barrio... Our first idea was to move ourselves to the barrios. Then we realized that there were conditions in the barrios to organize some form of locally based agency. That was the start and the idea continued evolving. We thought that it should be a very creative agency, not another bureaucratic entity. Somebody said: 'let us call it Taller so people may see it separated from the existing administrative structures'. It needed to be seen as an open institution, collecting and processing the ideas of the community, without imposing any preconceived idea of its own. It started in this way... more or less."*

*"The first terms of reference: ...were basically working principles, that the 'integral vision' was a fundamental principle, and that the work would be multi-disciplinary 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."*

There were at least 20 *Talleres* in Havana in 2003. Most had a small staff of professionals in the urban and social fields. Their work included areas such as housing conditions, support for children and adolescents, community relationships and local economies. Some had adopted the specific interests of their local communities, such as urban agriculture. The majority had programmes to support their senior citizens and to improve the environment. Most *Talleres* produce a "Participative Diagnosis" each year, which singles out what the local communities consider are the most urgent problems, and possible ways of solving them. The Diagnoses are followed by Strategic Community Plans, where the problems are arranged according to their urgency and the feasibility of the proposed solutions. These documents provide the rationale for the work of the *Talleres*. They are used to motivate and organize local initiatives, to lobby city and municipal authorities, and to search for contributions from international aid agencies.

The position of the *Talleres* within the structure of government creates complex relationships with other public institutions. They are included in the elected structure of the state, different from the administrative one, and are subordinated to the Municipal Power, which pays their salaries and basic operational expenses. But they are under the methodological guidance of GDIC – which is a sort of quasi-autonomous public institution. They have strong links with the delegates to the Popular Councils, which are units of government formed mainly, but not exclusively, by the delegates to the Municipal Assembly, elected by the constituencies included in a *barrio* or a group of *barrios*. The Councils help the delegates to coordinate their work and to present a common view to the Municipal Assembly.<sup>(17)</sup>

The merits of the *Talleres* are recognized by many institutions in Havana, and by the residents in the *barrios*. To Gina Rey, it is great that Cuba "may afford the luxury of having these centres of creative ideas in the barrios." The research project also assigned great importance to the *Taller* as the place of intersection of community initiatives, strategically located between the social base and the higher urban authorities, and as a public institution that frequently seems to act as the advocate of civil society.

17. Almaguer Guerrero, Roberto (no date), *Democracia y Localidad en Cuba: Los Consejos Populares*, manuscript, FLACSO, Havana, Cuba.

### III. THE RESEARCH PROJECT

THE FIRST STAGES of the project showed that in three *barrios* – Balcón Arimao–Novoa, El Canal and Pogolotti – the execution of Participative Diagnoses and Strategic Community Planning had defined spaces that were broad enough for individuals, communities and organizations to propose, design and implement a variety of social projects. These experiences led the research group to formulate a general central question, namely, what factors have contributed significantly in Cuba to the success or the failure of community initiatives aimed at improving the living conditions in the *barrios*?

The criteria guiding the selection of a number of factors to be examined were strongly influenced by principles that emphasized the relative merits of civil society over the state as a general factor for the success of social projects. Without making this point formally explicit, the relationship between civil society and the state became the issue that organized the selection of factors and defined the hypotheses of the research. It also provided the ground for the analysis to transcend the strict limits of the project, reaching conclusions that hinted at possible changes taking place in Cuban society.

#### a. Factors, hypothesis and methodology

The research proposed seven factors for examination:

- origin of the initiatives;
- nature of the leaders;
- political context and assistance from public institutions;
- links with mass organizations;
- community identity; culture and religion;
- cooperation with NGOs; and
- funding sources.

In light of the principle stated above, a second question was required: have factors in which the intervention of civil society prevails resulted in successful community projects more frequently than those in which state interventions have been dominant?

The research tried to prove that, under the conditions prevailing in Cuba, the positive role of civil society was the main cause for the success of community projects. It was also open to the possibility that this was not the case. It was guided by a general hypothesis proposing that projects where civil society prevails are more frequently successful than projects designed and executed by institutions linked to the state. The hypothesis is based upon assumptions that define civil society as a principal social actor which, by including the communities, is able to legitimately express their values and interests in the design and execution of social projects, and has the capacity to call upon their resources and mobilization to achieve success. In a simplified form it is possible to say that the research could have produced four possible results, and that three of them could be linked to possible social changes:

- state intervention continues to be the only decisive cause for the success of projects (therefore nothing is changing much in Cuba);
- the intervention of civil society is decisive for their success (and some important changes might be taking place in Cuba);
- both the state and civil society share the position of being decisive factors for the success of community projects (which is of similar significance as the previous conclusion, but with much added interest); or
- neither have much to do with the success or failure of these projects, therefore the whole approach of the research might be wrong.

Attaching these meanings to the possible results of the research marks the separation between the objectives of the research and of this paper. The purpose of the paper becomes quite clearly to use the conclusions of the research to explore possible changes in Cuban society.

Given the limits assigned to this paper, the following analysis examines the influence of only one factor – origin of the initiatives – on the projects discussed in only one *barrio*, Pogolotti, guided by a specific sub-hypothesis. This proposes that community projects originated within civil society are more frequently successful than those originated in public institutions. This hypothesis is validated when (a) projects originated in civil society succeed, or (b) projects originated in public institutions fail. Conversely, the hypothesis is invalidated when (c) projects originated in civil society fail, or (d) projects originated in public institutions succeed.

The following simplified definitions were used to facilitate the analysis:

- **Origin of initiatives:** actions executed by social actors to start processes that will affect specific social conditions. Just to formulate the need for an initiative is not enough to originate it.
- **Social actors:** the diversity of real life social actors was reduced to only two generic actors, one representing civil society – the community of residents and their organizations – and another representing public institutions. There were some special cases, for example, projects initiated by public servants – doctors, teachers – who were responding in principle to the spirit of their institutions but were in fact very distant from their routines, were considered as initiated by civil society. The *Talleres* were considered public institutions.
- **Projects' success or failure:** projects on course were successful when they were achieving their defined objectives, their continuity was secured, they were recognized as being important by the communities, they were replicable, or had been replicated already. Finished projects were successful when they had achieved most of their objectives, were recognized as important, were replicable, or had been replicated. Negative answers to all or most of these conditions indicated that a project had failed.
- **The methodology** adopted to validate the hypothesis 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 focusing on the origin of the initiatives, searching for evidence to assign that origin to one of the two social actors mentioned above, and linking this information to the results of the projects.

The research was carried out in 2002 and 2003. The most substantive periods were two one-month stays by 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 organized in each *barrio*. 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 organizations, municipal representatives, ordinary residents and the whole research group. The workshops provided a unique opportunity to check the validity of the information collected, which went through three control procedures. The information was initially provided and publicly discussed in the first participative workshop. This was followed by individual interviews, which allowed the researchers to organize the information according to the investigated factors. And finally, it was all discussed again publicly in the second participative workshop.

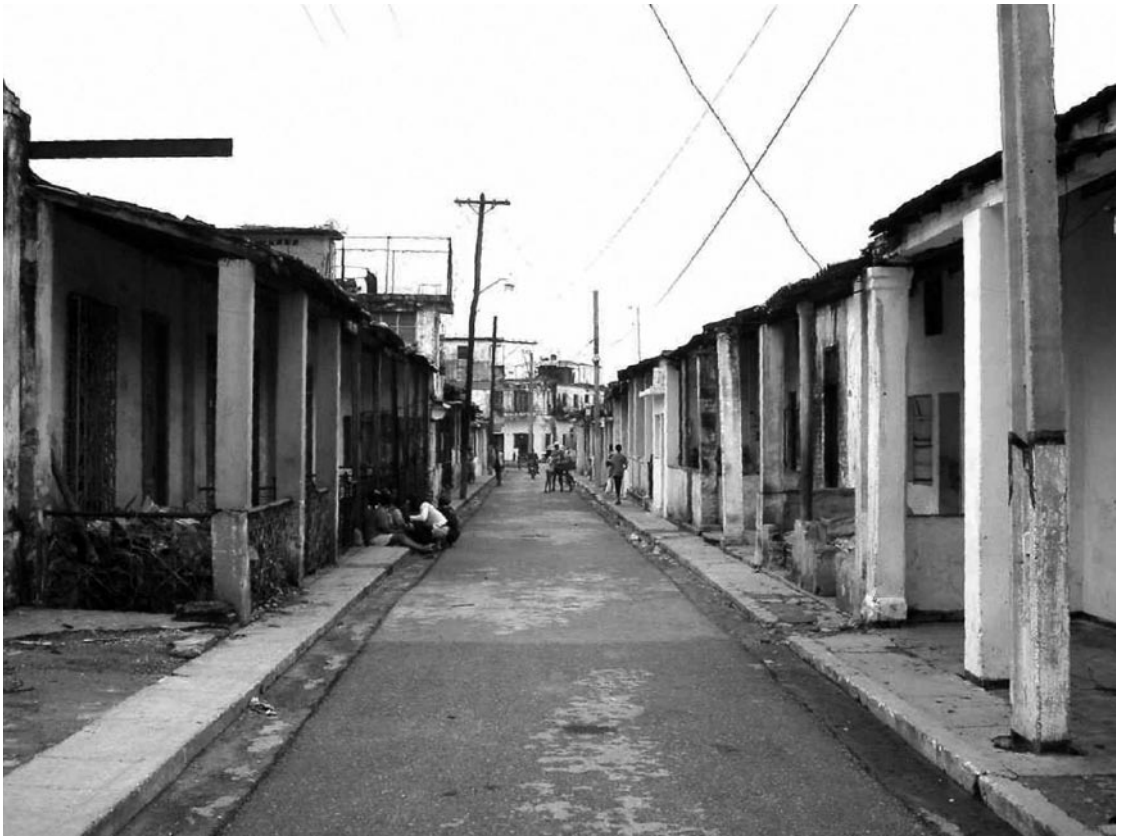


Photo 1: Passage and houses in Pogolotti in 2002; they retain the basic elements of the original design

#### IV. FIELDWORK IN *BARRIO POGOLOTTI*

##### a. A brief history of Pogolotti

POGOLOTTI WAS THE first designated worker's *barrio* in Cuba. It was built in 1910, and today covers an area of 5.28 square kilometres and has some 10,000 inhabitants. In 1910, the Cuban government assigned 650,000 pesos for the building of 1,000 modest houses in Havana. They would measure 48 square metres each, and would include a living-room, two bedrooms, kitchen and services, with masonry walls and roofed with French tiles. The houses would be distributed through raffles to families headed by manual workers, who would pay 6.25 pesos monthly for ten years, after which they would have the ownership of the houses.<sup>(18)</sup>

The design and construction of the project was publicly adjudicated to a building company, one of whose partners, Mr Dino Pogolotti, owned a suitable piece of land in the Municipality of Marianao. The urban project included streets measuring 14 metres wide and passages measuring four metres, individual plots of 120 square metres and houses grouped in terraces of 15 units, with a small front porch running along each group. This design concept is still part of the physical identity of Pogolotti (see Photo 1). The construction started in October 1910, and the project was completed by the middle of 1912.<sup>(19)</sup>

The *barrio* found it very difficult to survive prior to 1959. The facilities

18. Bay Sevilla, Luis (1941), "Por qué la barriada obrera de Pogolotti fue un fracaso", *Revista de Arquitectura*, Universidad de La Habana, January; also Calderón Frías, Vladimir (1997), *Pogolotti: Historia del Primer Barrio Obrero de La Habana*, GDIC, Havana, Cuba.

19. See reference 18, Calderón Frías (1997).





Photo 2: Dust-Island settlement

20. See reference 18, Calderón Frías (1997).

21. Interview with Mario Véliz (Marito), resident of Dust-Island and delegate to the Popular Council.

22. Symbol of the start of the country's anti-colonial struggle for independence.

23. See reference 18, Calderón Frías (1997).

and services were poor, the streets dilapidated, refuse was not collected and educational, social and cultural institutions were inefficient or non-existent.<sup>(20)</sup> Moreover, the *barrio* was devastated by two major hurricanes in 1926 and 1944. The 1953 census registered the presence of an informal settlement, called Dust-Island (Photo 2), on lands immediately adjacent to Pogolotti. There are different versions concerning its origins. Calderón Frías places its creation in 1945. According to Marito – born in Pogolotti, now living in Dust-Island – it originated together with the *barrio*. He thinks that the land was previously part of a private farm: “There was a landowner, her name was Maria. She rented out parcels of poor land to many people. They began to build their houses on that land.”<sup>(21)</sup> Today, it is a physically different entity to Pogolotti, but is considered an integral part of the *barrio*.

Pogolotti has had periods of both prosperity and misery, but all along has shown continuity in a rich cultural life that manifests the idiosyncrasy and traditions of its residents. There are religious processions expressing a great variety of cults. There are sport associations, with people participating in many competitions and collective entertainment. The most important festival remains the 24 February, when the anniversary of the *barrio*'s foundation coincides with the national celebration of “Grito de Baire”.<sup>(22)</sup> On that day, there are religious ceremonies, a street carnival, the local band plays in the main square and, at midnight, “Miss Redención” is crowned while everybody dances the rumba.<sup>(23)</sup>

The advent of the Revolution, in 1959, initiated the contemporary phase



Photo 3: Self-help building of an additional second floor

of Pogolotti's history. At the time, the *barrio* was in a state of physical decay. This situation began to change in the 1960s. New buildings were started and the population began to share in the benefits of the massive educational and public health programmes that have characterized Cuba over the past 30 years. In April 1990, the *Taller* for the Integral Transformation of Pogolotti was created.

### **b. Urban and physical characteristics of Pogolotti today**

The original 1910 settlement, with its narrow passages and terraced houses, remains the core of the current *barrio*, although it has been altered by several reconstructions. The *barrio* now covers a greater area than the original one, with the incorporation of some blocks of mansions subdivided so that each houses several families. There are also some new buildings, where local offices, doctors' surgeries and a few homes are located and, on the eastern side, there are several four-storey buildings.

The condition of the houses varies. Some show deteriorated walls or leaking roofs, but many are in a good state of repair, with some recent refurbishment, and some have been enlarged to include a second floor (Photo 3). In 2003, the *barrio's* public utilities – water, sanitation, electricity, gas, public

and private telephones – were working properly. The barrio had two primary schools, one computer club, one children's centre, one nursery, twelve medical surgeries, two pharmacies, one medical clinic, one interdisciplinary health centre, one veterinary clinic, one Salvation Army temple, one Bautista Ebenezer temple, one Church of God, one freemasons temple, two abacuas temples, the Martin Luther King Jr Memorial Centre, one children's playground and seventeen state-run facilities, including twelve units delivering and selling food, two bakeries, two restaurants and one barber shop.

### c. Social and cultural characteristics of Pogolotti

There is a public image of Pogolotti as a dilapidated slum with a violent past, a dangerous place to live in. Noemí Reyes told the first participative workshop that when she decided to come to the *barrio* her friends exclaimed: "Are you going to live in Pogolotti? Oh my God!"<sup>(24)</sup> She, and all the residents who were consulted, reject this image. To Miguel Rico, former member of the Popular Council, the stigma of violence resulted from a particular historical period:

"...there was in Pogolotti a sect, the 'ñañigos', who were very aggressive. This attracted the bullies of Havana: to be a real 'macho', you had to be a 'ñañigo'. It gave a bad name to Pogolotti. The situation today is different. My experience does not tell me that the barrio is particularly violent."<sup>(25)</sup>

Is Pogolotti a poor neighbourhood? The answer is not simple, in part due to confusing signals sent by the *barrio*, but also as a consequence of the lack of attention paid by Cuban experts to poverty as a subject matter, until a short time ago. According to Roberto Almaguer:

"...poverty has become a real subject in Cuba only in the past ten years. It was not examined before by the government, nor by the academic institutions. Today, most social scientists think that it might be necessary to define new ways to look at the relations between income and material conditions."<sup>(26)</sup>

The local answers indicate that there is poverty, although the emphases are different. For Pastor Raul Suarez, Director of the Martin Luther King Jr Memorial Centre:<sup>(27)</sup>

"The poverty of before the revolution does not exist any more but there are still some residues... There are problems, but you also find that in the locally born population there are architects, artists, engineers and doctors. Primary education is guaranteed to all children..."<sup>(28)</sup>

To Marito, this is a poor *barrio*, although his assessment seems to be based exclusively on the poor quality of the houses and "...the impossibility of improving it due to the lack of building materials."<sup>(29)</sup> David, one of Pogolotti's family doctors, also estimates that poor housing conditions and lack of basic goods define the poverty of the *barrio*. On the other hand, he considers that the local health standards are similar to those established worldwide by the WHO, and that the incidence of alcoholism and sexually transmitted diseases, including AIDS, is very low: "...out of 813 residents registered in my surgery... there is only one case of AIDS...and four cases of alcoholism."<sup>(30)</sup> A more contextual diagnosis is provided by Gina Rey: "There are barrios in Havana where income is lower than in other parts of the city, where some people neither study nor work, where many young girls get pregnant, abandon school and do not work, where the number of people with criminal records is higher than in other places...Pogolotti would be a barrio with internal pockets of this poverty."

For an outsider familiar with the conditions of poor settlements in low- and middle-income countries, the physical image of Pogolotti does not

24. Noemí Reyes, director of Taller of Integral Transformation of Pogolotti, addressing the first participative workshop in 2002.

25. Interview with Miguel Rico, ex-resident of Pogolotti and ex-member of the Popular Council.

26. Interview with Roberto Almaguer Guerrero, sociologist, Latin American Faculty of Social Sciences (FLACSO), Havana, Cuba.

27. The Martin Luther King Jr Memorial Centre is a religious institution located in Pogolotti, whose social work is particularly relevant to the local community and which has had a leading role in several local community projects. It will be referred to as the Memorial Centre in the rest of the paper.

28. Interview with Pastor Raul Suarez, director of the Martin Luther King Jr Memorial Centre.

29. See reference 21.

30. Interview with David Valdez, family doctor (general practitioner) in Pogolotti.

coincide with the picture of urban poverty universally conveyed by those settlements. In Pogolotti, the streets are surfaced, services infrastructure is similar to that in any modern city, and most houses – with the exception of those in Dust-Island – are brick and cement constructions, even if many are badly deteriorated. The physical image is modest, but not dramatic. From a social point of view, Pogolotti can be defined as a poor working-class *barrio*, with high levels of health and education, and with some serious social problems that must be defined and understood in the context of Cuban society. Precise definitions of these problems, and of the possible actions to overcome these, have been – and are today – tasks undertaken by the local *Taller*.

### d. Pogolotti's *Taller*

The *Taller* was created in 1990. It consists of an interdisciplinary team of six full-time university graduates. It was introduced to the research group by Noemí:

*"We are six women: Margarita the architect, Dayami the building expert, plus a sociologist and two social workers. I am a social worker and also the Taller's Director, in charge of the relationships with other institutions such as the GDIC, the Popular Council and the Municipality. We all live in Pogolotti."*<sup>(31)</sup>

The *Taller* promotes and legitimizes the participation of the local community in the identification of and solutions to local problems. It regularly carries out the Participative Diagnoses and Strategic Community Planning exercises indicated by GDIC, it provides technical assistance to the community, supports the work of the local delegates to the Popular Council, and seeks the assistance of the Cuban government and other organizations, such as international NGOs, to improve local conditions.

31. See reference 24.

### e. Participative Diagnoses and Strategic Community Planning in Pogolotti

The first Participative Diagnosis took place in 1997. Residents were invited by the *Taller* to participate in the identification of local problems, to discuss their causes and the capacity of the community to solve or reduce them. The procedures followed in this and further exercises included an initial visual observation to identify evident problems, such as domestic rubbish lying on the streets, followed by a number of surveys of local groups – including families – and also formal and informal meetings to discuss the findings and possible solutions. The first Participative Diagnosis defined six general objectives, which were transformed by the Strategic Community Planning exercise into specific initiatives.

Diagnoses have been carried out each year since 1997, allowing the community to update the local needs and capabilities and to monitor the progress of previous initiatives. Among the main problems identified in 2002, including those still unresolved, were, for example, poor housing conditions, antisocial behaviour on the part of children, lack of recreational programmes for children and young people, environmental deterioration, and an insufficient number of places selling or distributing groceries within the *barrio*. The Diagnosis established the strengths, the weaknesses, the opportunities and the risks or dangers that might impinge on the community initiatives. Among the identified strengths were the mobilization of the local community and the existence of the *Taller*, with specialists living locally. As weaknesses, the meetings singled out the poor diffusion of the



Photo 4: Children's dancing ensemble

initiatives and the lack of resources. The opportunities included the opening of national and international non-governmental collaboration, the contributions of the Memorial Centre, and the support provided by the Municipality and the GDIC. As far as dangers were concerned, the Diagnosis mentioned the over-centralization of decision-making at all levels, which delayed the execution of initiatives.

On the basis of those findings, the Strategic Community Plans defined the objectives of the community work, disaggregated into 14 goals and 41 projects. Nineteen of the projects were concerned with environmental improvements and recycling; five were related to urban developments such as street lighting and the building of houses; seventeen were social projects, among which were seven programmes for children, one directed to senior citizens, another for single mothers and another for children with mental disabilities. Finally, there were seven projects to develop recreational activities that might involve the whole local population.

In meetings held by the research group with the *Taller* in 2002 and 2003, it was possible to establish the fortunes of some 22 of these projects. Twelve had not been submitted to the collective information controls of the participative workshops, which left them outside of this analysis. The other ten projects had been examined in both participative workshops, and included: Building 25 Houses in Dust-Island; Building 63 Houses in Pogolotti; the Alafia Dance Group; Food Conservation; the Mayanabo Children's Dance Group; Street-lighting; Pogolotti Sacred Forest; Pogolotti Forest; Recycling; and the Community and Senior Citizens' House.

## V. ANALYSIS: INFLUENCE OF ORIGIN IN THE SUCCESS OR FAILURE OF TEN COMMUNITY PROJECTS IN POGOLOTTI

### a. Project descriptions

BUILDING 25 HOUSES in Dust-Island. Prior to the first Participative Diagnosis, the Taller organized meetings to discuss the state of the barrio with the participation of residents and local institutions. The poor housing conditions, particularly in Dust-Island, regularly emerged as one of the most urgent problems, a situation made worse in 1993 when a hurricane hit Havana, damaging a large number of houses. In the circumstances, the Memorial Centre submitted to the Taller and the Popular Council an emergency project offering to finance and build 25 new houses in Dust-Island. The project was explained to the participative workshop by the engineer Felix Yánez, from the Memorial Centre, who was in charge of this initiative:

*"The damaged houses were beyond repair. The decision was then to build new solid houses. We planned a process based on the participation of the residents in all the stages of the project, in the design, construction and in the organization of the tasks. But we were not able to execute a project of this nature, partly due to lack of experience but also due to the objective conditions at that time that made things very difficult."*<sup>(32)</sup>

There were many obstacles. Dust-Island land had been occupied illegally, and had no infrastructure nor sanitation. This made it impossible for the local authorities to extend legal building permits, which prevented the Memorial Centre from financing the project. Auto-construction was unrealistic in the absence of a retail market for building materials and tools. Moreover, it was not possible to organize residents' participation in any of the project stages:

*"...in 1993, neither the country nor the Memorial Centre had a clear concept of community work. At the beginning, the participation was spontaneous, emotional, everybody wanted to make many things at the same time. After 1993, the Memorial Centre started to think more systematically about community participation processes. Participation requires planning, organization, evaluations."*<sup>(33)</sup>

This assessment of the first experiences of participation is shared today by residents who were involved in the 1993 project: *"We were unable to organize ourselves: everybody said, 'my house first then the house of Mayito my friend'; all sorts of personal conflicts."*<sup>(34)</sup> As a consequence, the project was cancelled, to be later replaced by another, more conventional one.

**Building 63 Houses in Pogolotti.** After the failure of the previous project, the Memorial Centre and the Taller redefined a new housing initiative with the participation of the Micro-brigades, the state agency in charge of housing production in Cuba. The main features of the initial project were abandoned and, instead of 25 houses in Dust-Island, designed and built with the participation of the residents, the new project consisted of 63 conventional units, all in the more formal areas of Pogolotti, some of them single houses, others grouped in two-storey buildings. It was agreed that some of the houses would be allocated to the Dust-Island residents who had originally been selected for new housing.

The incorporation of the Micro-brigades transferred executive responsibility for the project from the community institutions to the public ones: the Municipality provided land which was already developed, and the public

32. Felix Yánez, member of the Martin Luther King Jr Memorial Centre and coordinator of housing building and street-lighting projects: interview and presentation at the participative workshop 2002.

33. Felix Yánez, member of the Martin Luther King Jr Memorial Centre and coordinator of housing building and street-lighting projects: presentation at participative workshop 2003.

34. Resident of Dust-Island: intervention at participative workshop 2003.

35. See reference 34.

utility agencies made the connections to the city networks. The Memorial Centre contributed US\$ 1,100 per house, to be expended exclusively on imported materials and equipment. Residents' participation was reduced to providing the information required to design the houses, and to help in some finishing tasks, such as painting walls. According to an old resident: *"The community did not abandon the project, but we didn't manage to get the overall participation that we dreamt of at the beginning."*<sup>(35)</sup> The project was near completion in 2003, ten years after it started.

**Alafia Dance Group.** The case of Alafia, one of Pogolotti's most important social projects, was described by Ramón Silverio Cruz – Ramoncito – its Director and a local leader:

*"I was born in Dust-Island and live in Pogolotti. Alafia sprang from the realities in the barrio in 1991. About that time, when Elda – my wife, who is teacher of dance – and I went around the barrio, we encountered groups of teenagers in the streets that did not know what to do with their time. The idea to work with them was born when we saw a group playing with improvised instruments and dancing a 'conga'.*

*We discussed several ideas with the Taller that was just starting to work, and with others in the barrio. The first initiative was to create a Youth Club to which we invited all the kids that were interested. We had some 'brain-storming' sessions, trying to decide what to do. Some wanted sport, others excursions, but the majority were in favour of music and dance. To start on this line, we got the help of some professional musicians that live in the barrio, and after a while we were able to work more or less regularly with a group of boys and girls. With them we made the first presentation in Pogolotti during the barrio's anniversary. It was a total success...it was also a collective achievement because we had had the help of the community, some had given us bedsheets to make the costumes and decorations, some had helped us with instruments and so on.*

*When we examined in detail the conditions of the kids, we found that nearly all had serious social problems, so serious, indeed, that we had to face the possibility of abandoning the project altogether at that point. Some boys had been in re-educational centres, some were delinquents, some were so poor that they slept on the floor sharing a room with ten other people... We had a meeting in the Taller with the participation of the local Communist Party Secretary, the Reverend Raul Suarez from the Memorial Centre, representatives of the Communist Youth, of the local Women's Federation, everybody. The decision was to go on, to help the kids with problems. We found practical ways to do so: for those without a bed we found beds, for those without shoes we found shoes. In all this, we had the contributions of the Memorial Centre, the Taller and the people of Pogolotti."*<sup>(36)</sup>

This project was initiated by Ramoncito and Elda. Its cultural content derives from the rich tradition of Afro-Cuban music and dancing, developed to express the religious values of the local community:

*"At the beginning the project had nothing to do with religion. It was mainly a cultural initiative. In order to provide it with content, we tried to rescue our local traditions. When we discussed this with the participants, we found that most had their cultural roots in the African religions: some were 'jorubas', some were 'lucumi' or 'abacuás'. These religions are part of our culture, and we keep them as part of our identity..."*<sup>(37)</sup>

The quality and prestige of Alafia are considerable. It has become:

*"Havana's only amateur group of national and international recognized quality. It has performed in France, Denmark and Finland and some of its artists have moved into professional groups such as the Cuban National Ensemble."*<sup>(38)</sup>

It also has problems, most of which seem to spring from its success. The programmes are more sophisticated and require more expenditure. The

36. Ramón Silverio Cruz (Ramoncito), director of Alafia Dance Group: interviews and presentations at participative workshops 2002 and 2003.

37. Ramón Silverio Cruz (Ramoncito), director of Alafia Dance Group: presentation at participative workshop 2003.

38. Interview with Ramón Silverio Cruz (Ramoncito), director of Alafia Dance Group.

members of the group are older and need to earn an income, but Alafia is officially an amateur group, whose performances are not allowed to generate income for either the group or its members. According to Ramoncito:

*"We needed to provide the members with opportunities to earn an income. With the help of some organizations, some have become bakers, others builders and teachers. Some have also moved out into the professional musical world... To be self-financed, we would have to move to the professional field, but then we would lose our authenticity as a community movement. Instead of dancing to rescue our traditions, we would be dancing to sell the show, and would have to adapt our style to compete with other groups."*

Alafia continues to be a social project to rescue young people in trouble:

*"We maintain the original objectives. The group continues accepting kids with antisocial behaviour. We currently have some former prisoners, one of them for murder. This doesn't prevent us from helping them. On the contrary, our objective is to reintegrate them as normal citizens. For this, it is necessary that they see that new and attractive opportunities are accessible to them."<sup>(39)</sup>*

**Food Conservation Project.** The engineer José Lamas and his wife, Doctor Vilda Figueroa, both retired, started planting vegetables on the roof of their house in Pogolotti in 1987. The idea was to sun-dry the plants and fruits and to conserve them by natural means, as an alternative to using chemicals, which were unavailable in Cuba. Neither of them had any knowledge about these matters when they started. This was the origin of a community project, formally established in 1996 with the foundation in Pogolotti of the Food Conservation Centre, equipped with a modest public library, an exhibition and lecture room, and some audio-visual facilities. During the past years, the Centre has been able to establish a network of people and organizations, both nationally and internationally, and has maintained an awareness campaign by means of lectures, newspaper articles, posters, brochures and a regular television programme.

The emergency during the Special Period showed the importance of producing and conserving foods using gardens, roofs and solar energy, and attracted the attention of government agencies and research institutions. Today the Centre is financed by its projects, many of which receive contributions from international NGOs. But the Centre's permanent staff, composed of the Lamas family and two other pensioners, receive neither fees nor any other income, apart from their pensions and some extra from activities such as the TV programmes. Today, they cultivate and produce some 300 different conserves on a family scale. These are exhibited in the Centre in recycled tins and jars, and are replaced regularly. It is customary that the members of the staff eat the replaced conserves, so as to test their quality and the reliability of the dates.

Although working at a national level, many of the Centre's activities take place in Pogolotti. They collaborate with the *Taller* and the other local institutions. José Lamas considers that the Centre is part of Pogolotti:

*"We are from the barrio, there is local interest in and respect for our work. Our products are planted all around the barrio and nobody destroys them. We have several joint activities and many residents have started to produce their own conserves."<sup>(40)</sup>*

**Mayanabo Children's Musical Group.** At the beginning of 2000, Manuel Antonio Pérez, a local school teacher just graduated as Art Director, approached the *Taller*, seeking support to organize a children's musical group. The context of this initiative can be found in several Participative Diagnoses in the 1990s, which identified the lack of entertainment programmes for children as a serious problem. According to Pérez: *"There*

39. See reference 38.

40. Interview with José Lamas, director of the food conservation project.



41. Manuel Antonio Perez, director of Mayanabo Children's Musical Group: presentation at participative workshop 2003.

*are many children with antisocial behaviour in Pogolotti... I was interested in working with them after finishing my training as Art Director.*"<sup>(41)</sup> The concept was to invite children between the ages of five and eleven who showed social problems to participate in a music and dance ensemble based upon the African traditions of the *barrio* (Photo 4). Although the link was not explicitly established, it is impossible to avoid identification of this idea with Alafia. If the inspiration for this project was in fact Alafia, then this would be a merit for both projects, defining a line of positive social action.

The *Taller* supported the project, and its social workers visited homes and schools to explain it. The *Taller* issued a public invitation to a meeting in the Community House and, after a musical ability test, 55 children were selected. At present, they organize the group, which rehearses regularly on premises provided by local organizations. The group has already made some public presentations, and in 2003, the project was working with the support of the *Taller*, the Municipality, and the local community.

**Street-lighting project.** In 2000, the Dutch Aid Programme to Cuba asked the Memorial Centre to identify a project of rapid impact and immediate social benefit in a *barrio* of Havana, which could be managed by the Centre and for which US\$ 60,000 was available. The Memorial Centre and the Pogolotti *Taller*, based on the findings of previous Participative Diagnoses, proposed a project to provide the *barrio* with street lighting. Given that the resources would allow it, it was decided to extend the project to other deprived areas in Popular Council No 5 (Pogolotti-Finlay-Belén).

Street lighting was non-existent in the *barrio* at the time. The conditions were described by Roberto Oropesa, a resident, as follows: "*The barrio was totally dark by night, the only light came from lamps that the neighbours placed on top of their gates.. many people were afraid to go out in the evenings.*"<sup>(42)</sup> The community considered street lighting to be among the top priorities for improving local conditions. They were also aware of the high cost and technical complexity of the task, which was well beyond the financial capacity of the local authorities and in which community participation seemed nearly impossible. The Memorial Centre's position, shared by the *Taller*, was that the opportunity offered by this project should be used to promote community participation and popular education.

Felix Yáñez, who again was in charge of this operation and was representing the Memorial Centre, described the organization of community participation thus:

*"The project would benefit some 26,000 people, so not every individual could participate. The technical installations were very specialized, so that also reduced the opportunities for the community to participate, except in very marginal jobs, helping the professionals, protecting the materials and such. We therefore designed a project that included the participation of representatives of the main local actors: the Taller, natural leaders, the Popular Council and other local organizations, in the performance of managerial activities. They formed a permanent committee that had to be trained to understand financial reports and manage participative projects. There were two initial general working meetings, operation meetings every week and an evaluation exercise at the end. We discussed collectively the strategies to follow, identified possible problems, defined some indicators to control the progress of the works and decided a timetable. The participation of the community was therefore centred on the 16 locally elected members of the Popular Council and the local leaders, who had to discuss all these matters and the whole content of the project with their respective constituents. For all of us, this was a process of education. Everything was*

42. Interview with Roberto Oropesa, Pogolotti resident, pensioner and local leader.

public: we had programmes of radio and television, a video and published 10,000 brochures. At the end, we had a big party with the whole community.

There were problems, of course. The electricity company was in charge of the technical installations and they accepted the managerial participation of the other actors. But that was a permanent battle. The engineers were not used to the 'interference' of unqualified people. There was a famous case: 24 February is the anniversary of the *barrio*, and traditionally there is a big festival. This time, the people wanted the area where the orchestras play and everybody dances and drinks rum until late in the night to have new lights, but this required a change in the agreed timetable. The area was supposed to be done later. So the people said: 'tough luck, we made a mistake, let's change the timetable!' They demanded that their representatives think again, and at the end the programme was redesigned. Participation is a difficult business and needs to be refined. The most important, anyway, was that the community became really involved throughout the project through their representatives, and asked the children not to destroy the lamps.<sup>(43)</sup>

**Pogolotti Sacred Forest project.** The southern extreme of Pogolotti overlaps with part of Havana Metropolitan Park.<sup>(44)</sup> For many years, there has been a metropolitan programme to improve the park, but progress has been slow. One of the park's forests, close to Dust-Island, has been considered traditionally as a holy place by the churches of African origin, a place where local "santeros" perform ceremonies and bury their charms. By the beginning of the 1990s, it had become a deteriorated thicket, its land had been used as a rubbish dump, and many trees had been destroyed. In 1995, a group of residents from Dust-Island, mostly male members of the Churches, received a donation from a foreign visitor and started a project to recover the forest, to revitalize the nearly extinct trees, to clean up the area and build some symbols that might reconstruct its religious character. The project was also formally linked to the improvement of the whole Metropolitan Park.

The donation allowed the participants to buy a few basic tools to do the job as volunteers. For some time, the project had the support of the *Taller* and the Popular Council, but during its execution a conflict developed between the religiously oriented participants and the public institutions. The visible manifestation of the conflict was centred – perhaps symbolically – on the use of the word "sacred" in the title of the project, and on its religious emphasis. Eventually, the majority of the Popular Council voted to eliminate the religious term from the title and to reinforce the secular and environmental character of the project, an initiative that also had the support of the *Taller* and other local organizations. This provoked the resignations of the informal leader of the project and the voluntary workers. The project, as originally defined, was abandoned, and this was deeply resented by the local religious community, as became apparent during the participative workshop discussions.

**Pogolotti Forest project.** The change in direction of the original project, manifested in the change of name, of content, leadership and workers, defined de facto a new project. The leadership was assumed by the technical team of the Havana Metropolitan Park working on the recovery of the whole park. They gave a new environmental orientation to the project, geared to providing the whole city – and the *barrio* – with a large area of social recreation and a "green lung". The work continues to be voluntary, with the participation of some 25 residents and children from the local schools.

This project was on course in 2003, with the support of the *Taller* and

43. Felix Yáñez, member of the Martin Luther King Jr Memorial Centre and coordinator of housing building and street-lighting projects: interviews and presentations at the participative workshops 2002 and 2003.

44. Almonte, Dulce Virginia and Narcisca Sánchez (1999), "Reforestación comunitaria: el bosque de Pogolotti en el parque metropolitano de La Habana", in GDIC (editor), *Comunidades que se Descubren y se Transforman*, GDIC, Havana, Cuba.

the Popular Council. Its resources were mostly provided by the Metropolitan Park project, and consequently it suffered similar limitations. It is interesting to note that while, in the previous project, the majority of voluntary workers were men, in the current project, women are the majority.

**Recycling project.** The Participative Diagnosis in 1998 placed the *barrio's* poor environmental conditions among the top problems. It defined as an objective the improvement of those conditions, with the participation of the community, and proposed four initiatives:

*"...to solve the problem created by irregular rubbish collections... to eliminate the illegal rubbish dumps in the Metropolitan Park...to educate the residents on the treatment of domestic waste through recycling techniques...and to organize the collection of this treated material by the community."*<sup>(45)</sup>

The Diagnosis was followed by meetings, which included the participation of the *Taller*, the local environmental group, the Havana Metropolitan Park and local organizations. One of the results was the Recycling project, the implementation of which was assigned to the *Taller*, supported by local workers, some as volunteers and others paid by the Metropolitan Park programme. This working group had meetings with residents to discuss their sanitary conditions and ideas about recycling. They found that most problems were caused by the irregularity of the municipal rubbish collection service, the absence of family containers and the general lack of environmental education.<sup>(46)</sup>

The project started with a pilot initiative, treating the domestic waste produced by 173 families. The waste is separated into "primary material" – tins, bottles, paper – and "organic material" – mostly food residues – and both are collected regularly, to be used productively. The selected households receive two plastic boxes each to store the materials. The recycling group collects the organic material daily and the primary material weekly. The initial idea was to process the former into compost, to be distributed to local farmers, and to sell the primary material. While the first initiative (for composting) has been on course for some time, the second has not been implemented in the expected way. The problem has been the same that has frustrated similar initiatives in other Havana *barrios*, namely the administrative obstacles faced by community groups trying to generate monetary income, open bank accounts and use these resources to improve local conditions. Finally, the recycling group transferred the collection and selling of primary material to the Committees for the Defence of the Revolution, which has the formal authority to do this, but they lost control over the generated funds.

An important component of this project has been the environmental education of the residents. There have been training workshops, informal meetings in houses and apartments, and programmes involving school children. It seems that the success of this initiative, as mentioned during the 2003 participative workshop, was to a large extent due to the charisma of Iluminada Magimiranda, the leader of the project nominated by the *Taller* and the Popular Council. Working under her leadership, children and neighbours, especially those living in the four-storey apartment buildings, have transformed many rubbish dumps into gardens. Iluminada thinks that:

*"This is because they know me, I live in one of these buildings. My neighbours know of my interest in environmental matters, they have seen me fighting with the municipal dustmen, demanding that they collect the rubbish from the streets."*<sup>(47)</sup>

The project was on course in 2003, although the number of families

45. Taller for the Integral Transformation of Pogolotti (1998), "Community planning", mimeo, Havana, Cuba.

46. De la Hoz Padilla, Ileana and Noemí Reyes (1999), "Vamos a participar en el reciclaje", in GDIC, see reference 44.

47. Interview with Iluminada Magimiranda, director of the recycling project.

involved had not been increased and the project had not been replicated in the *barrio*.

**Community and Senior Citizens' House project.** This project, already completed, satisfied two local needs. The first concerned the *Taller*. The terms of reference that define the modus operandi of all *Talleres* assign great importance to recognizable premises, a place that the community may identify as a social centre, which they can enter and where they can find people to talk to, that can be used for family celebrations, where lectures and artistic shows are frequent. It has not been easy for many *Talleres* to have such a home in Havana. The Pogolotti's *Taller* functioned for many years in unsuitable premises. The second need concerned the senior citizens living in Pogolotti. There is a national policy in Cuba to reinsert people of the "third age" into community life. There are numerous "grandparent clubs", sport and cultural centres, recreational programmes and so on, directed at men and women of an advanced age, with the contribution of well-known intellectuals, artists and sports stars. The situation in Pogolotti was similar.

In the 1990s, the *Taller* received a donation from Oxfam-Canada that made it possible to build the community and senior citizens' house. Additional donations made it possible to equip the house with furniture, a television, video and musical equipment, computers and office instruments. As far as the *Taller* is concerned, the Community House performs exactly the tasks mentioned above. As far as the grandparents are concerned, this is the centre where they meet to play *dominó*, attend lectures, watch videos, discuss politics, drink a few rums, dance the *danzón* or simply talk to each other. Roberto Oropesa, one of the programme organizers, mentioned that more than 50 per cent of the local old people participate in these activities. He described some of the activities, which included a project to open an art gallery in Pogolotti to exhibit various works, facilitated by Havana's museums and where national artists might present their work:

*"...very soon we will inaugurate the art gallery here because, it must be recognized, in our country it is not easy to go from here to museums that are in the centre of Havana. So, we will bring the museums to Pogolotti."*<sup>(48)</sup>

**b. Influence of the "origin of initiative" factor on the ten projects examined in Pogolotti**

Table 1 is a summary of the analysis of the ten projects in Pogolotti. This establishes the relationship between the origin and the result of each project, and the consequences on the hypothesis' validation. The conclusions of Table 1 are as follows:

<b>Total projects examined in Pogolotti:</b>	10
Successful projects	8
Failed projects	2
Projects originated in civil society	6
Projects originated in public institutions	4
<b>Projects that validate the hypothesis</b>	4
Projects originated in civil society that succeeded	4
Projects originated in public institutions that failed	0
<b>Projects that invalidate the hypothesis</b>	6
Projects originated in civil society that failed	2
Projects originated in public institutions that succeeded	4

48. Roberto Oropesa, Pogolotti resident, pensioner and local leader: presentation at participative workshop 2003.

<b>Table 1: Analysis of factor 'origin of initiative' - <i>barrio</i> Pogolotti</b>					
Project	Description of origin	Origin 1: civil soc. 0: public inst.	Result 1: success 0: failure	Hypothesis 1: verified 0: rejected	Comment
Building 25 Houses in Dust-Island	Memorial Centre proposed building, with international finance, 25 houses in Dust-Island, with full participation of residents.	1	0	0	Project failed. Auto-construction was impossible because of lack of building materials. Impossible to organize participation.
Building 63 Houses in Pogolotti	Failure of previous project led to different initiative: building of 63 conventional houses under the responsibility of the building Micro-brigades.	0	1	0	Project ceased to be a community-based initiative and became a conventional one. Near completion in 2003, ten years after starting.
Alafia Dance Group	Initiative of two local residents who created, with community support, a music/dance group open to youth with social problems. Rescue of cultural traditions led to expressions of African religious origin.	1	1	1	Group of amateur artists successful in three areas: recovery of young people with anti-social problems, high artistic quality internationally recognized, and raising of the <i>barrio's</i> self-respect.
Food Conservation	Initiative of a married couple, self-taught on food conservation. Seek to integrate urban agriculture and food conservation and change food culture of the country.	1	1	1	Answer to food scarcity, especially grave during the Special Period. Created a centre and a network for education and diffusion. Nationally and internationally supported.
Mayanabo Dance Group	Initiative of a local school teacher and art director, supported by the <i>Taller</i> .	1	1	1	Project dedicated to rescuing local children with anti-social behaviour. In place since 2000.
Street-lighting	International cooperation offered to finance social project and asked Memorial Centre to propose and manage one.	1	1	1	Successful installation of public lighting in Popular Council. Participation of residents and creation of identity and responsibility.
Pogolotti Sacred Forest	Initiative of local men to recover ancient religious character of existing derelict forest, part of the Metropolitan Park.	1	0	0	Project stopped by authorities objecting to its religious character. Original community withdrew and the project was replaced.
Pogolotti Forest	Decision by Popular Council, <i>Taller</i> and Metropolitan Park to continue development of forest linked to reforestation of the park and to ecological educational activities.	0	1	0	Project on course, with the participation of the local community. It has contributed to recovering and enlarging Pogolotti's sector in the Havana Metropolitan Park.
Recycling	<i>Taller's</i> initiative to solve erratic rubbish collection, to give environmentally friendly use to domestic waste and to raise environmental education of the community.	0	1	0	Project on course since 1998. Has eliminated illegal rubbish dumps and organized regular collection and recycling of domestic waste.
Community and Senior Citizens' House	Initiatives by <i>Taller</i> to implement these two tasks identified in 1997 Participative Diagnosis. Financed by Oxfam-Canada.	0	1	0	Projects were completed in 2000. Community house is today a centre for the realization of activities by the <i>Taller</i> , other local organizations, senior citizens' groups and the community in general.

## VI. FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS AND COMMENTS

ACCORDING TO TABLE 1, the majority of projects examined in Pogolotti – eight out of ten – were successful. The numerical comparisons have no statistical significance, but provide a guide to conclusions based on qualitative descriptions of these projects. Four of the successful ones originated in civil society and four in public institutions. The two failed projects originated in civil society. A more detailed examination of the four successful projects that originated in civil society shows that only two of them had a clear independent origin: the Alafia Dance Group and the Food Conservation project. The other two – the Mayanabo Children’s Musical Group and Street-lighting – although civil-society originated – show considerable intervention by the *Taller* in their first stages. Two of the four successful projects that originated in public institutions were implemented to replace the two failed projects initiated in civil society. One was the Building 63 Houses in Pogolotti project, which replaced the original participative project of Building 25 Houses in Dust-Island. The other was the Pogolotti Forest project, which replaced the Pogolotti Sacred Forest project. The other two successful projects initiated by public institutions were the Recycling project and the Community and Senior Citizens’ House project, both strongly supported by the community and the *Taller*. As far as the hypothesis is concerned, the information shows that both the state and civil society share the position of being positive influences on the origin of successful community projects in Pogolotti, invalidating the assertion that limited that influence to civil society.

Information about the influence of the factor “origin of the initiative” on projects carried out in the three *barrios* included in the participative workshops show similar results. Out of 65 projects identified in Balcón Arimao–Novoa, El Canal and Pogolotti, the research examined 29 that satisfied the information controls mentioned earlier in this paper. The analysis showed that 10 projects originated exclusively in civil society and 8 in public institutions, while in 11 cases, the origin combined intervention from both. Overall, 23 projects had been successful and 6 had failed. If the successful projects were considered as a group, only 6 appear to have originated clearly in civil society, 8 in public institutions and 9 from a combination of sources. The overall picture emerging from these figures is that successful projects that originated in civil society prevail, that in many cases their origin appears to be influenced significantly by the local *Talleres*, that there are a good number of projects of the same origin that failed, and that all the projects of public institution origin were successful. As far as the hypothesis is concerned, it is validated by 15 successful projects of civil society origin – ignoring the segregation noted above – but is also invalidated by nearly the same number, 14 projects including 8 successful projects originated in public institutions and 6 failed projects originated in civil society. As in Pogolotti, it is not possible to sustain the hypothesis that successful community projects in the three *barrios* are found more frequently among those originated in civil society; in Cuba, both the state and civil society share the position of being positive influences on the origin of successful community projects.

The conclusions of this limited part of the research – one *barrio*, one factor, a few projects – may contribute, with due caution, to an understanding of the evolving relationships between civil society and the state in Cuba – the central theme of this paper. As noted in the introduction, discussions on this relationship in capitalist societies (developed and underde-

veloped) are common in the literature dealing with urban processes, and there are many cases in which the state and civil society share positive influences. However, the same issues in a society such as Cuba raise different questions that have wider theoretical implications. There is a widely understood concept that in socialist societies under communist governments, national structures and institutions are totally occupied by the state, denying any space to civil society. This paper has shown that manifestations of such a concept are apparent in today's Cuba. Nevertheless, the very brief and schematic description of the Cuban context presented earlier in the paper described developments that have taken place during the past 18 years, characterized by a growing interlinking of state and civil society initiatives. This is consistent with the conclusions of this part of the research, indicating a similar positive role for both social actors in the origin of community projects. The eruption of civil society initiatives in the *barrios* seems to challenge the image of inertia widely associated with vertically organized societies. The content of these initiatives is universally constructive and socially supportive. Governance is neither remote nor inhibited by the drastic lack of resources, nor afraid of dynamic local leaders and communities. In fact, the state has created systems of supporting institutions that are professionally equipped to stimulate and organize the participation of the community in the definition and execution of social projects. One of these systems consists of the GDIC and the *Talleres* of Integral Transformation, established in many *barrios*. All this may still be a very small part of a Cuban society which is undoubtedly under pressure from many forces. But it includes symptomatic, complex processes that raise questions not yet formulated that might contain the seeds of new forms of socialist organization that, it seems, have not been examined from this perspective. Reflection about these social changes goes somewhat beyond the scope of the research project reported here. However, it is not possible to undertake research on housing conditions and how citizens live and work in the poor *barrios* of Havana, and on the working principles and routines of civil servants close to these citizens, without noticing that something new is developing.

