

Background to the Research

This presentation is based on a three year study of 'environmental justice in Cuba' (2007-2010). The research included participant observation of social and environmental programmes in Cuba and interviews with government officials, social workers, neighbourhood groups, agricultural workers, popular power delegates, students, trade unionists and environmental activists. Cuba shows what can be achieved in a situation of degrowth. With a relatively low GDP, it has been identified as the only country in the world to have achieved sustainable development, by virtue of its low ecological footprint in conjunction with good social provision (World Wildlife Fund, 2006).

Key Sustainability Indicators	Cuba	Spain	UK	US
Life Expectancy at Birth (Years)	78.5	80.7	79.3	79.1
Adult Literacy Rate (%)	99.8	97.9	99	99
Infant Mortality Rate (per 1,000 live births)	5	4	6	8
Electricity Consumption (KWh per Capita)	1,152	6,147	6,233	13,701
CO2 Emissions (Metric Tons per Capita)	2.2	7.9	9.1	19.5
Seats in Parliament held by Women (%)	43	34	20	17
GDP Per Capita (PPP US\$)	6,876	31,560	35,130	45,592

Figure 1: Comparison of key sustainability indicators. Source: Author using data from United Nations - Human Development Report, 2009 (2007 data) and World Bank - World Development Indicators, 2009 (2007 data)

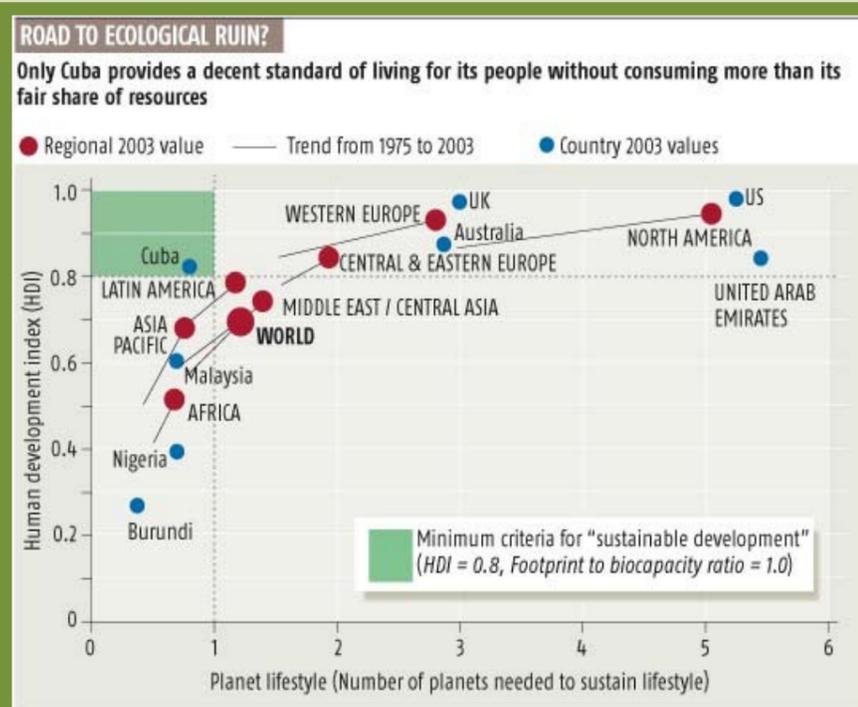


Figure 2: Global comparisons of sustainability. Source: Moran et al., 2008

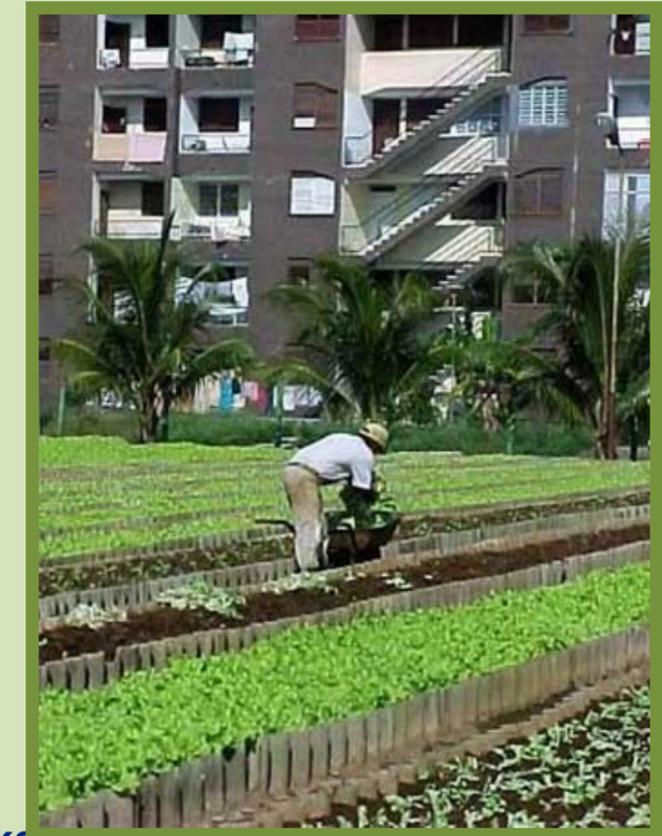
Degrowth Policies in Cuba

Cuba was involuntarily confronted with sudden degrowth in 1989, when its trading relationship with the socialist Eastern European community abruptly ended. This, combined with the United States blockade which, since 1963, has prohibited all commercial business with the island, caused a sudden 48% drop in Cuba's GDP (Díaz-Briquets & Pérez-López, 1995). In order to cushion the effect of the crisis on the population, Cuba adopted a number of policies including localised production and consumption, reduced dependence on fossil fuels and decentralised decision-making; whilst continuing to prioritise health, education and social security. Ongoing programmes include:

- La Revolución Energética (the Energy Revolution) - energy inefficient appliances replaced in all households; decentralisation of energy supply; increase in renewable sources of energy
- Programa de Agricultura Urbana (Urban Agriculture Programme) – local food production; organic methods; farmers markets; land available free through usufruct system
- Socialised transport –very cheap public transport; massive investment in new buses; restrictions on car ownership based on need; subsidised job swaps to work nearer to home
- Production to meet needs – rejuvenation, reuse and recycling of goods; shared local facilities – libraries, community centres; cultural and leisure activities available free or at very low cost
- Traditional and alternative medicine – wide range of free treatments available; choice of allopathic or holistic - both respected and resourced on an equal par
- Increasingly decentralised and participatory decision-making – accountable representation through Poder Popular (Popular Power) delegates; networks of mass organisations mobilise for consultations and enable dialogue



Figure 3: Roadside billboard promoting energy saving



Market-Based Policies in Cuba

Cuba also pursued some market-based policies in order to survive the crisis – such as opening to foreign investment and tourism; intensifying resource extraction; increasing the availability of consumer goods; and licensing more private businesses. These policies may have been necessary in order to prevent the crisis seriously harming the population. However, they have also increased consumerism, inequality, individualistic values, resource depletion and environmental degradation. Therefore, capitalist policies, whilst enabling short-term survival, have undermined Cuba's sustainability and should probably be avoided in a situation of planned, rather than imposed, degrowth.

References

Díaz-Briquets, S. and Pérez-López, J. F. (1995) 'The Special Period and the Environment' *Cuba in Transition*, Vol. 5; Proceedings of the Fifth Annual Meeting of the Association for the Study of the Cuban Economy (ASCE), University of Miami, Aug 1995

Moran, D. D., Wackernagel, M., Kitzes, J. A., Goldfinger S.H. and Boutaud, A. (2008) 'Measuring sustainable development – Nation by Nation' *Ecological Economics*, Vol. 64, Issue 3, pp.470-474

WWF (2006) World Wildlife Fund, *Living Planet Report*. Gland, Switzerland