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## **Social Policy in Cuba: Equality and Social Mobility**

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In the last decade, the subject of social policies, including their conceptual definition, outreach, beneficiaries and stakeholders, has been one of the most intensely studied in Latin America. The increased level of interest in this subject is associated, on the one hand, with the ongoing process on a global scale that is strengthening a social model which emphasizes the concepts and dimensions proper to the interface given by research–policymaking; and, on the other hand, with the need to evaluate the concrete effects that the modifications in public policies caused by the neoliberal reforms in the region have had upon the various social problems that they proposed to address (such as poverty, unemployment, social vulnerability).

In this context, certain areas have become central to social analysis due to the convergence and clash of the most dissimilar theoretical and ideological positions which occurs in them. These areas include the role of the state and other actors in the definition and coordination of the public agenda; the connection between inequality and poverty, and the evaluation of targeted and decentralized mechanisms addressing social disadvantage (in contrast to policies that seek a more universal social integration).

This paper aims to: a) characterize in a summary form the present status of the debate within Latin America in regards to the most adequate social policy, the emergence of the equality criterion as an instrument in such policies and its nexus with the analysis of social mobility as the expression of social processes at the macro and micro levels; b) examine the achievements and shortfalls in the Cuban socialist transition and economic reforms that occurred during the 1990s as an example of how the social question may be managed on the basis of a centralized state model that places equality as both an instrument and an objective in itself; and, lastly, c) identify some of the theoretical and methodological challenges encountered today by social policy research.

### **A. Towards a Definition of Social Policy: The Central Character of Equality and Social Mobility**

A general conception of social policy that today might traverse the wide spectrum of positions and bridge the ideological differences present in their conceptualization is one that understands social policy as the set of “action programs that through organized efforts seek to address social needs whose solution lies beyond private, individual and spontaneous initiative, and which require collective decisions regulated and protected by impersonal and objective laws guaranteeing the rule of law (Pereira 1994, commented by César 2005:10 ). The term “public” which often characterizes social policy does not entail an exclusive

reference to the sphere of the state but, rather, alludes primarily to its sense as “something that belongs to everyone,” that is commonly coordinated and preserved by the state, that expresses private elections and the crystallization of a community of interests which transform themselves into a set of decisions and actions affecting the rest of society.

Under this conceptual horizon which all of us can share, differences begin to appear when one selects the set of social needs that should be part of social policy objectives, when one sets the level of satisfaction that must be reached through public action, or when one considers the extent of coordination between the state and other social actors, the groups that must be served by the public activities, the needs conferred by right of citizenship, the conflictive and contradictory character of the interests participating in the construction of the social agenda, the capacity of one group or another to impose their own priorities upon the rest, and the place given to equality as an instrument or a value of social policy.

From our perspective, what matters is that social policy is an intervention into social relations undertaken by the political power with the aim of configuring the social structure in accord with a predetermined societal model in which the interests of a particular social actor are given priority. This type of social architecture operates by stimulating or cutting certain routes that permit or impede social change at the macro and micro level; that is, at the level of general socio-structural dynamics as well as at the level of individual and group trajectories. Accepting this definition presupposes the assumption that this is an area of class-based conflicts and hegemonic construction.

The configuration of social structures is such a relevant element of social policy that the well-known typology elaborated by Esping-Andersen (1996) starts out from three basic indicators used to differentiate social policy models (social-democratic, conservative, and residual-liberal). These are: the level of de-mercantilization, the interaction among state-market-families in the production of the social well-being that is inherent of them, and the types of social stratification which are thereby generated.

Whichever theoretical definition is applied, social policy is made concrete in an operational plane that is dependent upon one’s position vis-à-vis development and the state. Thus, if the starting point is the possibility and necessity of development as a notion that orients the strategic and planned interventions for achieving social change as a political object in itself, while the legitimacy of the state is accepted as the structure best positioned to increment development, social policies will then adhere to the public intervention model for the promotion of social development, integration and inclusion. They will be comprised of policies that seek to guarantee the satisfaction of needs for the entire population by means of sectoral policies in health, employment, education, and welfare. The essential instrument for these policies will be public social expenditures through which wealth is redistributed on the basis of equality and social justice.

This extensive variant in social policy and the state denotes one of the two poles in contemporary debates. It originates from two traditions: the Welfare or Benefactor state (which include the developmental states in Latin America that have accompanied the economic model of import substitution), and the socialist experiences found in Europe and other regions of the world. Here, the state as a protagonist in social coordination is considered irreplaceable and necessary: its basis lies in the actions redistributing the

available wealth to embody an equality criterion that is the maximum expression of justice in the social sphere for a given society and historical moment.

On the other hand, at the other extreme, the other position accepts development as a forceful idea and identifies it as being determined to a greater or lesser degree by economic growth. This viewpoint accepts that the expansion of globalization has as its natural correlation the progressive loss of usefulness by the state and that this can be explained by the fact that economic processes emerge from the formation of **spaces** at the sub or supra-state level (global, regional, local) and under the influence of non-state agents (the market and civil society). In addition, this viewpoint posits that state interventionism interferes with the efficient flow of the economy and that this can be confirmed by history. The neoliberal proposal embodied by the so-called Washington Consensus has its basis upon this minimalist social policy variant. It has held a hegemonic position in the construction of reformed social agendas in Latin America. It is centered on the rehabilitation and rescuing of populations stricken by poverty through the use of targeted and selective strategies whose contents and instruments rest on the diminution of state's powers in regulating economic and redistributive mechanisms. This position favors the widening of areas subject to intervention by private actors tied to the market. It operates on the basis of efficiency – which is “the garnering at the lowest possible cost –in terms of public resources– of multiple social objectives which compete amongst each other” – as the guiding parameter.

A complementary manner to characterize these two variants from a general criterion of social policy as an instrument of equality and practical implementation of citizen rights distinguishes two models: assisted citizenship (which belongs to the conservative and neoliberal visions centered around the market and individual achievements), and emancipated citizenship (which centers around equality as an essential value which is expressed by equal opportunities for all) (Molina, 2002: 138). The priority of social policy within the overarching set of policies as well as their inclusion in the state interventionist agenda depend on the importance given to equality, on the quality of social relations, on the development model in place and on the rights of citizenship that each state assumes.

The first variant operates with a criterion for equality that is restricted to the avoidance, diminution, correction and mitigation of extreme unfavorable conditions, which are taken as externalities. As a result, poverty becomes its central focus displacing the criteria of social integration and the nurturing of development. Here, equality is a corrective instrument subordinated to economic logic. Its limit is defined by its interference with the market under the assumption that this one operates as the most efficient selector and distributor in its relationship to productive behaviors and rational decision-making by individuals. The second variant wields a criterion of equality as an objective, as a desirable quality in social relations, and as an instrument to advance towards equality itself, which is not subordinated to the economy but, rather, serves as the criterion for economic decisions and works together with social instruments geared for anticipation; that is, to design actions which attempt to build *ex ante* equal opportunities for all social groups, to break barriers to social mobility (this can be contrasted with policies geared towards correcting actions *ex post facto*).

New proposals have been developed which revolve around the complementary aspects of the interactions between the state and market and in the state's capacity to act as a political regulator in order to create favorable conditions for competitive markets and to

enlarge the presence of the most varied social sectors in society. Preserving the fundamental aspects of the neoliberal perspective (market supremacy, residual social policies), these proposals seek to adjust policies to more efficient ways to manage the social sphere. The World Bank has proposed the Efficient state, which considers the state as the builder of institutional bases for the adequate functioning of the market. It proposes that state responsibilities be lightened through individual and communal participation in obtaining collective goods; the revitalizing of public institutions and their credibility; the elimination of inefficient public monopolies; the focusing of social assistance upon vulnerable groups; the widening of private participation in the provision of social services; the elimination of corruption; and, the decentralization of administrative functions and the organized participation of civil society (World Bank, 1997). In the logic of efficiency, social risk management deems social protection as a series of public interventions to assist individuals, households and communities in their management of risk, and also to help the poorest among them.

To foster efficient mechanisms of self-protection is the horizon towards which social policy strives (World Bank, 2000). The three axis of social risk management (individual insurance, services for the poor delivered through social protection networks, and targeting), despite representing a wider extension of public intervention upon the social sphere, preserve and reinforce “a social policy strategy which basically proposes a minimal degree of public responsibility for social protection, financing of social services and private provision of social services, and insists upon a reduced regard for the principle of solidarity” (Sojo, 2001:37).

Towards the end of the 1990s, within the context of this debate between the role of the state and the scope of social policies, ECLAC (1998) called for the “New Fiscal Pact” which, differentiating itself from a diagnostic which is radically anti-statist, proposes the consensual participation by the entire society, the complementary character of collective and individual progress, and the crucial role of the state in the promotion of equality and the equality of opportunities, in the facilitation of adequate market functions, in the tax policies, in the management of the external debt, in industrialization and social investment.<sup>1</sup>

At the root of these proposals which widen the available space for social dimensions and state interventions in public policies are numerous studies in the field of poverty and its causes which, despite varying theoretical assumptions, coincide in asserting that situations of extreme disadvantage, risk and social vulnerability are conditioned by a matrix of inequality. This means that it is not possible to mitigate or eliminate these situations under circumstances of great inequality in the access to good living conditions, even when significant economic growth is achieved. The reason is that the mechanisms of unequal distribution have been crystallized and reproduce the asymmetrical absorption and capture of the available wealth, creating an “excess of inequality” (when the generated GDP would

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<sup>1</sup> Some analysts consider that thinking in ECLAC has transitioned in the 1990s towards a neo-structuralist approach and “economic growth with equity”. This is an alternative that aims to rescue relevant social dimensions from the predominant neoliberal vision and its variants. To explore further this topic, consult Osorio (2003) and ECLAC (1990).

be sufficient to carry over the poverty line all those people who had been under it) (Urani 2006).

No matter if one considers the minimizing or the maximizing versions in social policy, the subject of equality as a distributive norm ensured by public action has become central, whether as a value and an end in itself of a strategy for social development or, in more restricted conception, as an instrument to obtain higher levels of efficiency in the management of risk, vulnerability and poverty. While there exist several notions of equality, a general framework would understand it as the impartial treatment of all persons regardless of their position and social origin with respect to their opportunities to accede to better living conditions, the distribution of benefits and costs of development. This assumes the establishment of rules to ensure such impartiality. Equality and inequality refer to the way that a society distributes goods, services, political power and resources to the different sectors which comprise it, and makes possible the accession to income, capital, satisfaction of needs, participation and political freedoms. Thus, equity may be considered in a multi-dimensional way taking into consideration, on the one hand, the spheres of well-being (economic, social and political) or, on the other, the elements of social structure (gender equality, inter-generational, spatial, classist, ethnic, racial or group based).

Recognizing the social diversity inherent in contemporary societies as one of their essential qualities, there is a need for regulations to guarantee a deeper integration of the groups who are different. Equity is taken to be the contrary of exclusion. An equity criterion close to the one utilized by the UNDP understands its two-sided character: as equality in the access to opportunities and as equality of results. The latter refers to the distribution of costs and benefits, to the convergence in the achievements obtained by the different social strata, generations, territories, minority groups, among others (Martínez et al. 2000).

In practice, the fundamental nature of the problem is “how to give the concept of equality operational content so that it may be effectively incorporated into the decision-making process of public policies” (Garrido-Lecca 2005:85). Within the concept of economic development with equality, this operational content is generally defined as “a way to measure the effectiveness and efficiency of economic policy to reach those *other* objectives – different from economic growth although equally important- (...)”, “(...) to design a set of instruments to evaluate the impact of any political economy decision with regards to equality (...)”, but not as *ex post* information, useful for designing reactive programs but, rather, for the anticipation of effects (Garrido-Lecca 2005:85-86). This position is probably the most accepted. Although aiming at the necessity to place equality as an element in the strategic decisions of public policy, it restricts it as a function of the economy, as one of its effects. A more radical position places social strategy above the economy even though it also includes an *ex ante* evaluation of the effects of political economy decisions upon equality.

In the efforts to reclaim equality and its operation as an instrument of social policy, its nexus with social mobility has arisen as an important topic. Social mobility (the process of movements, individual or collective, ascending or descending, through a social hierarchy of an stratified society at a given historical moment) can be taken as an synthetic and operational expression of equality when it describes which groups (from which positions) have access to the most advantageous places within the social stratification, and for whom

these positions are prohibited or very difficult to reach, and to what degree society creates conditions for ascending mobility for the larger social sectors by way of its social policy.

Social mobility offers a dynamic perspective of equality when it discloses the movements in the social structure, inter and intra-generational, and the alterations it suffers during a predetermined period. A perspective which ties social mobility and social policy and equality is sustained by the criterion that social inequality corresponds to the presence of barriers to social mobility, the persistence of structural opportunities which reproduce situations of disadvantage and exclusion. We understand here that structural opportunities reflect the social stratification and the dynamics of social mobility in time.<sup>2</sup> Even though social mobility may be considered as “the most demanding test of the opportunities which a society affords to its people because it allows to track the individual changes before the aggregate”, and even though “the social policies interested in reducing or eliminating poverty require dynamic diagnostics that allow a determination of sustainability through time of the changed economic conditions in the family units” (Espinoza 2002:3), this area of study is undervalued for its potential to evaluate social policies and as a dimension of the social diagnostics that serve as its base. It is shadowed by the importance given in such diagnostics, so-called “social panoramas,” to poverty, precarious labor conditions and informality.

Among the multiplicity of indicators which illustrate the socio-structural placement of a family, a person or a group, and their modification (ascending or descending), and which describe social mobility, the ones that are most commonly used due to their basic and synthetic nature are: occupation (which describes the changes through the evolution of qualification, manual and intellectual expense and / or professional prestige), income and education. Combining different structural dimensions in these indicators, they reflect subjective aspects (individual, family and group expectations of mobility, feelings of social ascending and descending, scales of desired and rejected positions).

Recent studies have used a scheme which combines four operational explanations of social mobility (Espinoza 2002). They describe the micro scenario upon which the macro-structural modifications make an impact, and offer a matrix of conditions which allow making use of opportunities to ascend and skirt risks on the descent:

- a) The economic explanation centered on human capital. It explains social mobility by way of rational decisions on investment and consumption of the individual or family resources, and of the quality of the labor force, school attendance levels, age, health, sex and dependency ratios.
- b) The demographic explanation which takes the households as a unit. It correlates the school attendance levels of the parents, the family cycle, the quality of familial bonds, the conditions of the home (economic status, occupation of the parents), the insertion into the labor market with any differences between parents and children, in order to determine the existence of any barriers in the labor market.
- c) The cultural explanation which ties the possibilities of upward mobility to individual decisions expressed in the norms and values that organize the logic of social mobility.

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<sup>2</sup> For the relationship among social policy, social mobility and equality, consult Raczynski, (1994), Filgueira (2000) and Espinoza (2002).

d) The explanation based on social capital which considers that relationships among people are a fundamental factor in their social mobility by giving them access to opportunities. This explanation has an associative version (social mobility depends upon the neighborhood's heterogeneity, degree of participation, the contact in associations and the strength of the ties thereby created), and an instrumental version (which depends upon the size of the network, the socio-economic distance that it spans, the context where the contacts is made, the variety of social circles and effects of economic exclusion).

The four explanations indicate the effects of bootstrapping and constriction, the actions of opening and shutting down, which the structural constraints, whether acting historically or in the present time, maintain upon individual trajectories. Considering social mobility in the description of social circumstance and in the diagnosis of social policy impacts does not presuppose substituting the macro-structural change indicators by those tracking changes in the individual trajectories plane. Instead, it proposes a double or, rather, an interconnected reading of the changes and the actions to promote them. Despite the ample spectrum of competing perspectives, to think about social policies today means to stake a position in regards to the place of equality in each of them, the joining of dimensions of macro-social character (the change in the economic and social structures), and the individual and collective trajectories which make their way in the world of daily micro-practices (such as social mobility).

## **B) The Cuban case**

- 1) Aspects of social policy in the socialist transition and its effects upon equality and social mobility

When we analyze how social policy in the Cuban socialist transition has been designed and put into practice, this transition may arguably be labeled as a sub-model constructed on the basis of peripheral socialism and the magnitude of the social tasks that had to be confronted. This sub-model of peripheral socialism applied in Cuba includes such characteristics as: central position of equity and the promotion of equality as a value and end of social policy; a classist perspective on inequality which implies the placement of social policy pillars in the modification of the property matrix over the means of production, and in the elimination of the structural positions that generate the possibility of exclusive appropriation of well-being by some groups over the others; social policy with a universal character and coverage, centralized, unitary and planned; the state as an absolute coordinator and manager of social policy and development; the fulfillment of basic necessities (work, health services, social security and universal education) granted as a right of citizenship; macroeconomic priorities which give priority to social investment; low (almost nil) presence of the market as a distribution mechanism.

While socialism is the general model, what is peculiar in the Cuban sub-model is the accelerated, radical and extensive manner in which state property was implanted and the near absolute levels to which it became the social property formula, as well as the new social structures that were configured and the unitary and universal social services that were constructed.

One must start from the perspective that equality and social justice are not a function of income distribution at the individual or household scale. That is to say that this monetary factor is not decisive to ensuring them as they depend directly of the state's distributive actions through social expenditures with an emphasis on the transfers for services promoting development and social security through "spaces of equality."<sup>3</sup>

Taking social expenditure as the concentrated expression of the intervention strategies upon social change, and analyzing it from a dynamic perspective, we can observe that social policy in Cuba has been characterized since the start of the socialist experience in the early 1960s as giving a high macroeconomic priority to the social sphere. This indicates the central placement given to social equity (see tables 1 and 2). Moreover, even during the crisis conditions and economic reforms of the 1990s, the proportion of public expenditures for social services in relationship to GNP was kept above 20%,<sup>4</sup> which can only be compared to the situation of Uruguay and Brazil in Latin America.<sup>5</sup>

**Table 1. Dynamics of social consumption in Cuba: 1975-1986 (selected years)**

*Millions of pesos, current prices*

Year	Total	% variation (with respect to previous year)
1975	817,5	-
1978	1.398,5	30,2
1981	2.010,2	22,3
1986	2.762,0	3,0

Source: Author's calculations based upon Comité Estatal de Estadísticas (1987)

**Table 2. Dynamic of Social Expenditures in Cuba: 1989-2000 (selected years)**

Years	Expenditures in social services	% variation (with respect to previous year)
1989	3,750.1	-
1991	3,743.0	-1.9
1992	3,811.2	1.8
1993	4,008.0	5.1

<sup>3</sup> Equality space defines a distributional mechanism operating through social consumption funds which is universal, massive, free and easy to access. It is characterized by its condition as a legally furnished right, its public character centralized in its design and in the guarantee to access it, social participation, preponderance of collective solutions over individual ones, homogeneity, increasing quality, option for social integration under conditions of equality for all social sectors independent of their income, and desire for equality in results. In the case of Cuba, the state is the only one, or at least the hegemonic and decisive protagonist, who controls the distributive spaces by means of an extensive public network. There are no other alternatives (private or outside the state) to gain access to the service being distributed in whichever space. To the extent that they exist, they will keep a very low profile and cannot compete with the state option (Espina 2005).

<sup>4</sup> See Togo (2003a).

<sup>5</sup> ECLAC (1994) classifies countries according to the macroeconomic priority which they give to public expenditures for social services, as follows: a) High social expenditure countries (more than 10 percent of GDP); b) Medium social expenditure countries (between 5 and 10 percent of GDP); c) Low social expenditure countries (below 5 percent of GDP).

<b>1994</b>	4,021.6	0.3
<b>1995</b>	4,179.7	3.9
<b>1996</b>	4,439.0	6.2
<b>1999</b>	6,279.1	32.8
<b>2000</b>	6,363.9	1.3

Source: Togores (2003 b)

This strategy of social architecture has been stable in its general expenditures and the structure of priorities, weighted heavily on social investments (health and education) and on subsidies, emphasizing the role of social consumption in the distribution above and beyond individual or household incomes (see tables 3 and 4).

**Table 3. Structure of social consumption in selected areas in Cuba: 1975-1986**

*percent*

<b>Year</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Education</b>	<b>Personal and communal Services</b>	<b>Culture and Art</b>	<b>Health, Social Security, Sports and Tourism</b>	<b>Science and Technology</b>
<b>1975</b>	100	46.56	18.18	7.94	24.90	2.42
<b>1976</b>	100	47.12	18.87	7.34	24.22	2.45
<b>1977</b>	100	46.83	18.04	8.12	24.39	2.62
<b>1978</b>	100	46.32	18.77	7.41	24.80	2.69
<b>1979</b>	100	47.13	17.14	7.89	25.02	2.82
<b>1980</b>	100	47.09	20.37	8.14	22.45	1.93
<b>1981</b>	100	43.73	23.95	7.46	21.98	2.88
<b>1982</b>	100	42.65	24.47	8.36	21.48	2.77
<b>1983</b>	100	40.98	26.49	9.37	20.08	3.08
<b>1984</b>	100	39.43	28.02	9.03	20.16	3.36
<b>1985</b>	100	38.64	28.19	8.73	20.94	3.50
<b>1986</b>	100	37.76	26.89	8.07	23.19	4.09

Source: Author's calculations based upon Comité Estatal de Estadísticas

**Table 4. Structure of social expenditures by areas:1998-2001**

*(percent)*

<b>Expenditures</b>	<b>1998</b>	<b>1999</b>	<b>2000</b>	<b>2001</b>
<b>Total</b>	100	100	100	100
<b>Education</b>	21.50	22.17	22.59	24.63
<b>Culture and Art</b>	2.40	2.31	2.52	3.23
<b>Public Health</b>	19.15	18.82	18.16	18.24
<b>Science and technology</b>	1.48	1.55	1.66	1.7
<b>Sports</b>	1.79	1.70	1.73	1.69
<b>Social Security</b>	24.28	21.64	19.26	19.45
<b>Social Assistance</b>	2.07	1.94	1.92	2.23

<b>Housing and Communal services</b>	8.05	8.29	8.23	9.07
<b>Price Subsidies</b>	19.28	21.58	23.93	19.76

Source: Author's calculations based upon Oficina Nacional de Estadística (2001).

Towards the latter part of the 1990s and beginning of the 2000s, average expenditures in social investment were above 47% of the total. This number seals the nature of the Cuban social policy, its orientation towards development, its emphasis on prevention and the relevance of equality and social consumption vis-à-vis the market and autonomous individual consumption. This structure in social expenditures also shows how housing, which is such a relevant element to familial well-being, has been systematically left behind with respect to other spheres tended to by public interventions.

Let us look at some data referred to as “the keys to social mobility” in different moments of the socialist transition in Cuba. For instance, as table 5 shows there have been some significant changes to income distribution with a tendency towards less concentration and strong advances in equality as a result of the effects of the implementation of two decades of universal social policy.

**Table 5. Annual per capita income growth by strata**  
(1980 dollars)

Year	Per capita GDP	Of poorest 40 %		Of richest 5%	
	USD	USD	%	USD	%
<b>1958</b>	866	182	6.5	5,947	26.5
<b>1978</b>	1,395	865	24.8	3,068	11.0
<b>Annual growth rate (%)</b>					
<b>1958-62</b>	0.5	18.3	-	-24.4	-
<b>1973-78</b>	6.7	10.7	-	9.7	-
<b>Gini Coefficient : 0,24</b>					

Source: Brundenius (1984)

In terms of social mobility these tendencies may be interpreted as a strong ascending trend for the groups with lower socio-economic status through the transformation of their income sources towards salaried and state employment, changes related to the modification of the structure of employment.

Data from the Census of Population and Housing of 1981 indicates that between 1953 and 1970 a very strong modification in the occupational structure was produced according to property sectors and sources of income which caused for state workers to increase from 9% a to 88%, and the salaried workers in the private sector from 53% to 1%. If one considers these transformations in the structure by occupational categories as an indicator of the changes in the employment sphere, an increasing trend exists in the non-physical occupations and the qualification requirements. This results from the growth of employment requiring technical expertise and the decrease in less specialized employment.

Social mobility during this period was characterized by a radical change in the structural constraints, by a high degree of fluidity, intensity and reach into the intra and inter-generational sphere as a consequence of a process of social de-stratification.<sup>6</sup>

**Table 6. Distribution of the workforce by occupational categories in Cuba**  
(percent)

	<b>1975</b>	<b>1988</b>	<b>1996</b>	<b>2000</b>
<b>Total</b>	100	100	100	100
<b>Workers</b>	57	51.4	42.0	50.2
<b>Services</b>	14	13.4	17.8	16.8
<b>Administrative</b>	6	6.9	5.0	4.0
<b>Technical</b>	14	21.4	25.9	21.0
<b>Executives</b>	9	6.9	9.3	8.0

Source: ONE, Anuario Estadístico de Cuba 1975, 1988, 1996 and 2000

The contribution of education to ascending social mobility has been constant and can be seen in the data presented in Table 7.

**Table 7. Selected indicators in education in Cuba**

<b>Indicators</b>	<b>1980</b>	<b>1990</b>	<b>1997</b>
<b>Absolute parity- female male (adult literacy rate).</b>	-	-	(1995) 99.1
<b>School Attendance rate:</b>			
<b>from 6 to 11 years</b>	98.8	100.0	99.4
<b>from 6 to 14 years</b>	91.7	98.1	97.4

Source: Martínez et al. (2000)

**Table 8. Cuba. Structure of the educational level of the workforce in select years**  
(percent)

	<b>1978</b>	<b>1986</b>	<b>2000</b>
<b>Total</b>	100	100	100
<b>Primary</b>	54.0	24.0	16.0
<b>Secondary</b>	26.0	38.0	30.0
<b>Superior (technical professional and pre-university)</b>	16.0	29.0	40.0
<b>University</b>	4.0	9.0	14.0

Sources: Anuarios Estadísticos de Cuba de 1979, 1986, 1996 and 2000

<sup>6</sup> A detailed analysis of the social mobility which has accompanied the Cuban socialist transition may be found in Espina (2002).

In terms of the management of the social dimensions of development and the promotion of equity in a peripheral society we can say that the Cuban experience shows that the universalizing of citizenship social rights through a wide ranging intervention and regulation by the state is an efficient formula to rapidly provide social integration to the majorities and to prioritize the social agenda of the popular sectors, improving their well-being even during conditions of low economic growth. Returning to the typology of Esping-Andersen, we would need to include a socialist model of social policy, characterized by low levels of market involvement, a state as an exclusive protagonist in the production of social well-being, and the generation of a type of social stratification that eliminates extreme differences, distributes income and shortens social distance.

Nonetheless, this successful formula to take care of the poor and improve the social dimensions of development has limitations associated with the persistence or generation of equity gaps and obstacles to ascending social mobility for certain social groups.

Studies on this topic highlight some of these limitations:

- weak economic sustainability;
- weak return on social investment towards the economy (which is reflected in a low rate of increase in education and qualifications on productivity levels and technological innovation);
- low consistency between the results obtained from work and access to well-being;
- predominance of sectoral strategies which render more difficult an integrative conception of social development;
- excessive emphasis on social consumption regulated by the state in detriment of the autonomous sphere of electing satisfiers of needs;
- rendering of the state as an absolute entity, excessive centralization and technobureaucratization in the formulation of development strategies, something which decrements the possibility of participation in decision-making by the local actors (state or non-state) and the consideration of territorial and group diversity existing in the needs and their satisfiers;
- Universalism identified as distributive homogeneity, something which minimizes the role of structural and cultural diversity in the expression of needs and in the election of satisfiers;
- Flaws in targeting and little use of affirmative action policies, something which reproduces the disadvantages of groups historically lagging behind that cannot make use from a position of parity of the favorable economic conditions generated (for instance, black, women, old people, communities in territories lagging behind in relative terms);
- Utilizing a limited perspective in popular participation, centered on consultations and mobilization, but lacking a presence in the strategic design of the social agenda.
- Unbalanced allocations of social expenditures for different dimensions which have generated an accumulation of deficits in relevant areas associated with the situation

of the household (fundamentally, access to an adequate home and habitat and jobs with sufficient income).<sup>7</sup>

## 2) The 1990s: Crisis, Reform and Changes in Social Policy

It is well known that the changes in the global scene at the beginning of the 1990s (the disappearance of the European socialism, the end of bipolarity, the rise of the United States as the only major world power) deprived the Cuban economy of its commercial ties and external supports under conditions of an exacerbated economic blockade pushed by the United States. Tied to all this was the exhaustion of the economic development model pursued by Cuban socialism (extensive use of the import substitution model)<sup>8</sup> which generated an economic crisis in the country of considerable magnitude<sup>9</sup> and, consequently, forced the instauration of reforms in an attempt to manage it.

Crisis and reform unleashed a process of deconstruction of massively ineffective practices that had been established and crystallized historically in order to maintain a standard of living and satisfy basic needs. This resulted in a reconfiguration of social structure and the widening of inequalities. For instance, the Gini coefficient reached 0.38 during the second half of the 1990s (Añé 2000) and urban poverty encompassed 20% of the population (Ferriol 2002). Those employed in the public sector of the economy reached 77% of the total population in 2001, albeit with a movement towards the private sector (which reached 15% in the same year, compared to 4.2 % in 1988). Work alone lost its capacity to generate adequate income to satisfy basic necessities.

Social mobility as an expression of the restratification currents acquired a selectivity based on the options opened by the reforms toward certain priority sectors, which favor those groups with better starting positions to insert themselves into a virtual labor market, and which excludes or hinders the opportunities for advancement of historically disadvantaged groups (Espina 2002). To understand the reconfiguring effects of the reform upon the social structure, it is necessary to characterize a few basic elements. Even if centered on economic dimensions, many other spheres are involved:<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> An analysis of the limitations in the Cuban social policy is included in Espina (2005).

<sup>8</sup> See Monreal (2002)

<sup>9</sup> Among the indicators that demonstrate the acuteness of the recession we can mention: the loss of mercantile relations and preferential prices for sugar; the fall of exports of goods to 33.5 % of their value in 1990; the loss of preferential supply of oil, other sources of energy and fundamental industrial inputs (a drop of an annual supply of 13 million tons of oil to only 6 million, approximately); the drop in the GDP by more than 40% and by 43.1% when calculated in per capita terms; the reduction by 30% of industry's productive capacity; the loss of import capacity of the national economy estimated to be 80% between 1989 and 1992; the reduction in the total consumption by an accumulated rate of 28.2% and in gross domestic investment by more than 25%; accelerated expansion of the monetary liquidity (in 1991 the money in circulation without the backing of products reached 6,125 millions of pesos); the decrease in the gross coefficient of accumulation of the national economy reaching 5.4%; accumulated decrease in labor productivity of more than 39%; decrease in the social consumption (between 1985 and 1991, it decreased by 980 million of pesos); the decrease in personal consumption (between 1989 and 1990, in decreased by 15%, concentrated in foodstuffs, transport, industrial goods and domestic fuel). For further reading, see Carranza (1995), ECLAC (2000) and García et al. (2003).

<sup>10</sup> Analysis of the reforms may be found in Carranza (1995) and García et al. (2003).

Sphere of property relations: The economy was opened to foreign capital and the joint venture sector (joint ownership of firms by Cuban state and foreign private capital) was expanded. Land tenure was reorganized through the conversion of state enterprises into cooperatives and the delivery of parcels so households could produce on the usufructed property. Independent work, such as self-employment and micro-enterprises, primarily family-based, in selected and delimited activities (restaurant services and room rentals, for instance) was expanded.

Sphere of the market: The interconnection with the external market was reconfigured. An enterprise and commercial sector which operates directly with foreign reserves was created. Commercial credit for agents of state enterprises and other economic actors was expanded. The external debt was renegotiated and internal markets in foreign reserves were created. Tariffs were reduced, tax-free trade zones were created and real estate businesses and foreign bank branches were opened. Markets for agriculture and cattle farmers to sell surpluses at prices set by demand and supply were created, as were markets for crafts and industrial products at freely set prices. Currency exchange and savings accounts denominated in foreign exchange were introduced and foreign and national money were permitted to circulate.

Sphere of state economic coordination: The state's monopoly over foreign trade was cancelled. Direct foreign trade by national enterprises was expanded and a tax system for state and non-state agents was created. Decision-making with respect to specific budgetary aspects, its use and strategic design was decentralized. A progressive movement by state enterprises towards a self-regulated financing of foreign exchange was established and there was a restructuring and reduction of the state's administrative dependencies. There was also a shift towards planning by objectives and from physical to financial planning.

Sphere of economic strategy: The development model given by export growth and import substitution was reinforced and key sectors garnering foreign exchange and resolution of strategic problems (such as tourism, biotechnology, pharmaceutical industry, oil exploitation and metallurgy) were prioritized. The weight of sugar production in the national economy was reduced and the sugar industry's agro-industrial sector was restructured. Energy with renewable and non-renewable resources were developed.

Judicial Sphere: Constitutional reform were enacted including the suppressing notions that hold the dictatorship of the proletariat and the classist character of the state; the granting of juridical personality to popular provincial and municipal powers; the redefinition of the socialist property scheme, the limiting of its exercise to the fundamental means of production; the reversal of the irreversibility previously granted to the socialist property sector.

In the sphere of social policies, we can appreciate two moments during the reform. The first one is the creation of conditions to reinvigorate the economy and the softening of the social costs. This period encompasses actions such as the reducing of the supply of labor at state enterprises and the expanding self-employment opportunities and other private options, the implementation of mechanisms that can deepen the connection between the results of individual and collective production and wages; the implementation of a foreign exchange system to pay salaries in selected activities and occupations; the

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increasing salaries for selected activities which generate foreign exchange or for those having a critical social role (personnel in health services, education, science and policing); the introduction of protection guarantees to workers in economic activities which have been closed or restructured; the legalizing the receipt of wire transfers from abroad (remittances) and decriminalizing the holding of foreign exchange; the creation of a public network of subsidized meals for low-income people; and the prioritization of education and health relative to the remaining social services as a way to optimize available resources.

From the end of the 1990s to the start of the 2000s, a second phase attempts to recover the proactive efforts by the state in social investment, in the role of equity and the spaces of equality. New social programs were implemented to promote the modernization and the saving of public services, particularly in health and education<sup>11</sup>, the ensuring of the protagonist role of local communities as part of the social policy. (e.g. Program of Integrated Communal Work, which was created by an extensive movement of social workers at the community scale), to mass produce culture, to give targeted attention to the special needs of vulnerable sectors, to increase retirement fund payments and salaries in general,<sup>12</sup> and, in selected occupations, to amplify the capacity to construct housing through either the state or familial efforts.

Even though the crisis during the 1990s affected the public services' quality and possibilities as satisfiers of needs, and several of the economic readjustment measures implied the transfer to the market of a large portion of a family's consumption, their coverage has not decreased while the social expenditures have tended towards recovery. For this reason, it is possible to speak about an economic reform with an opening towards the market and certain degrees of decentralization where an ample social policy with

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<sup>11</sup> In this new phase of social policy, the role of education as a determining factor in social mobility and as instrument to break down the chains reproducing social disadvantages has been enhanced. Numerous reform programs have been established, such as: a program to enhance attention given to primary school pupils (one of its objectives is to reach classrooms with 20 or less pupils per teacher); a program to prepare new primary school teachers (to cover the increasing demands at that level for qualified personnel); an audiovisual program (through televised classes, education is improved and its homogeneity is guaranteed for all students); a program to extend universally the teaching of computer skills; Program to train art teachers (to capture artistic talent and artistic education at the primary and secondary school levels); courses for integral youth training (to reintegrate unemployed and unschooled youths back into the school system, giving them opportunities to reach upper education); a municipal program for superior education (creating university networks throughout the municipal bodies where numerous career options are offered through distance education methods). The last two programs create the conditions for massive enrollment without meritocratic prerequisites. To gain more information on this topic, consult Pérez (2004).

<sup>12</sup> According to data offered by Oficina Nacional de Estadísticas towards 2005 the mean monthly salary for workers was 398 pesos (from 203 in 1996, or from 282 in 2004), the minimum salary reached 225 pesos in that year, the minimal retirement payments reached from 65 to 164 pesos while social security reached from 62 to 122 pesos. These significant increases in income were limited in real terms by the high prices in essential products. A basic consumption basket of 2,400 kilocalories, calculated per the average nutritional recommendations of the Instituto de Nutrición e Higiene de los Alimentos (INHA) reached in 2004 a cost of 203.60 pesos, considering necessary access to the different market segments (regulated, social consumption and supply and demand markets).

equity, unity and universalism has been preserved and where the state retains maximum responsibility.

Data is lacking to evaluate the effects of the new moment in social policy with respect to social mobility and the recovery of equity. It may be surmised, however, that the decided emphasis on the massive superior education of youths and the geographic widening of this effort will be the most dynamic factor impacting social mobility. This investment in higher education promises to generate ascending trends that will be reinforced by the outsourcing process underway in the Cuban economy, where specialized services demanding high skills, are experiencing a surge, primarily those related to health, tourism, and information technology. We can also anticipate that the expected ascending effects of these policies will be limited by the reiteration of old problems such as the insufficient synergy between the economic and social development spheres, the real capacity inherent in the Cuban economy today to provide sustainability for those plans, the degree to which territorial and group based differences are effectively incorporated in implementation or whether the centralized and homogenous visions are reinforced, the tendency to reinforce areas that already have adequate coverage in detriment of those areas which have the most accumulated of unmet or underserved needs and which are directly associated to the generation of vulnerability and poverty.

### 3) Inequality gaps

One of the difficulties in evaluating the effects of Cuban social policy on equality of opportunities in terms of group-based parity is that statistics rarely register events differentiated in terms of social groups. As a result, the specific impacts of wide-ranging advances cannot be judged for specific disadvantaged socio-economic groups. Nonetheless, several studies have documented three equity gaps that seem to be the most extended and resistant to be removed through public intervention:

#### Gender gap

It cannot be denied that the differences in gender and the disadvantages affecting women have been addressed in a focused and high-priority manner within the Cuban socialist transition. Social policy has included explicitly and through numerous programs a differential treatment for the female gender.<sup>13</sup> Among the indicators which denote the progress made in the social situation of women we find, among others, that Cuban women are 42.5% of the state's civil labor force; 64% of technical and professional workers; and, 30% of the leaders directing the national economy (Álvarez, 2000). To these advances we may add the elevated incorporation of women into education (which is comparable to men's), and into the health services which favor them directly (programs for pregnant women and pre-natal healthcare, early detection programs for female diseases such as breast cancer). All these advances are manifested directly in the Gender Development

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<sup>13</sup> For instance, family law expresses the equality between man and woman while maintaining a permanent Commission in the parliament on Children, Youth, and the Equality of Women's Rights.

Index (GDI) which in Cuba approaches that of the Human Development Index and indicates the narrowing of the gender gap for several significant indicators (Martínez et al. 2000).

Nevertheless, the gender gap is expressed in the socio-structural placement of women in two realms. Women are over-represented among the proportion of the population living in poverty and under-represented in executive and highly skilled positions in the labor force. According to quantitative and qualitative studies, poverty tends to be associated with women who are mothers at an early age, female-headed households, and unmarried mothers. These circumstances are combined with difficulties related to the abandonment of education and the lack of work opportunities to generate sufficient income.<sup>14</sup> Although social studies on reform have not touched upon the precarious nature of female employment, its influence may be inferred from the expansion of the informal sector where it is empirically possible to see women, often as unsalaried helpers, performing functions that are generally domestic in nature, where the work hours are not strictly defined and the conditions are minimal.

Women only represent 30% of executives at different levels in all those occupations tied in directing the national economy and, approximately, 28% of the members of congress and 14% of the members of the Council of State (Álvarez 2000). This corresponds to a diminution in the participatory weight of women as the executive hierarchy is ascended; the asymmetric distribution of power in the productive processes also denotes the exclusion of women from executive positions (Echevarria, 2004). Another example is tourism, a sector that is highly demanded as a source of employment due to the material advantages that it provides. Here, only 36.6% of the labor force is feminine, mostly concentrated in the least skilled occupations (Alvarez, 2000). We may infer the presence of barriers in their ascending social mobility. Even though certain positions related to high-level strategic decision-making in the enterprise or the economies are reserved for them, the social division of labor operates in such a manner that certain levels of exclusion and closed off options remain.

### Racial gap

In the logic of the typical social policy of the socialist transition in Cuba, the racial gap was managed as a variant of social integration with very few instruments of affirmative action because it was understood that if blacks and mestizos were the majority in the popular sectors, any measures to help them would also have a direct and equivalent effect to the one expected over other groups. Race equality has very long roots in Cuba going all the way back to slavery during the colonial era. By avoiding targeted strategies, the policy also was trying to prevent or deepen the stigma based on skin color, and to maintain as a supreme political value unity over differences.

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<sup>14</sup> For more information on the topic, see Ferriol (2002), Zabala (2002 and 2003), Espina (2005), Rodríguez et al. (2004).

Despite the empirically observable positive impacts that this social policy had over racial inequalities, certain socio-economic disadvantages have been reproduced among groups of different skin color which have as their basis the asymmetry in the initial conditions to make use of the equality of opportunities and turn them into equality of results. To the contrary of the stated political intentions, this translates into a persistence and amplification of racial inequalities that are structural (economic inequalities that have been rendered racially based) and symbolic (survival of stereotypes, prejudices and discriminatory attitudes) which affect the non-white groups and accentuate the link of class and race.

Given that this topic is addressed in another paper that will be discussed in this workshop, we will only mention that the barriers to social mobility are expressed in this variable by virtue of the over-representation of blacks and mestizos in the lower income strata including those in poverty, while white are over-represented among the higher income strata above the poverty line. The disadvantages of income and well-being seem to be related, among other elements, to the increased presence of white workers in positions that are economically advantageous and, by implication, to the predominance of blacks and mestizos in industrial activities and the traditional sector; the greater presence of whites among the high-skilled occupations fostered by the reform; the increase in the number of white leaders as the executive hierarchy is climbed; the concentration of wire transfers from abroad among the white population; the over-representation of blacks and mestizos in the worst housing conditions (Espina and Rodríguez, 2003).

Another angle of the racial inequality lies in the over-representation of whites in superior education. Towards the end of the 1980s, a greater proportion of black students would finish ninth grade and mestizo students had a strong presence in the technical schools, while whites were over-represented among university students and in the mid-level schools of better quality and greater prerequisites for entry (Domínguez and Díaz, 1997). We can infer that the presence of human and social capital as well as tangible and intangible capital which is less competitive among black and mestizo groups, and the preservation in an indeterminate proportion of the inter-generational mechanisms which reproduce these shortcomings. These groups are thus put at a disadvantage when facing the distributional instruments of the market, which strengthen the initial conditions of each social group as they access conditions of well-being in an unequal manner, all of which is intertwined and reinforced by the persistence of racial prejudices.

### Territorial gap

The socialist transition in Cuba inherited a strong territorial inequality in terms of economic development and opportunities for well-being, which remain concentrated in the capital of the country and a few other regions connected to the global productive and mercantile chains, particularly those linking to the North American economy. Such inequality is also expressed in the differences between rural-city, in detriment of the rural and agrarian regions. This inheritance was managed from the beginning with socio-economic policies oriented towards dislocating economic investment and infrastructure using territorial equity a criterion for allocation. The result has been social policies which have universal and unitary coverage, including an excellent amount of social services in

rural zones whose impacts are seen by the similar results in social indicators attained by the different provinces.<sup>15</sup>

Nonetheless, the weight of historical factors upon the initial conditions surfaces once more. Numerous studies completed during the 1990s confirmed the territorial differences and the strengthening of territorial selectivity and the ties between place and inequality generated by the crisis and the economic reform. An integrated vision of the ties between space and inequality is offered by a study which identifies the six most powerful factors associated with the notion of geographical place as an “unequalizing regulator” of opportunities, to wit: the expansion of non-traditional property forms (mixed, foreign), the territorial presence of distribution mechanisms of the market, the building of a hierarchy among economic sectors and activities (tourism, mining, metallurgy, energy, industry based on agricultural products besides the sugar cane), the priority of agricultural production, and the strengthening of cooperative or individual property, and the activities by individuals and families to foster an intense formal and informal market (Iñiguez et al., 1997).

To illustrate the spatial differences present in Cuba, the Territorial Human Development Index (THDI) is very useful. It was calculated from the provincial achievements made in selected indicators over a period 15 years long between 1985 and 2001 (Méndez and Lloret 2005). The shortcomings of each territory (province) in six basic variables (infant mortality, employment index, volume of investments, school attendance rate, average salaries, mothers’ mortality rate) are shown in a classification scale which takes values from 1 to 0. All provinces in Cuba were grouped into three levels of THDI:

- High level (at 0.600 or more): Havana City and Cienfuegos.
- Medium level (between 0.462 and 0.599): La Habana, Matanzas, Villa Clara, Sancti Spíritus, Ciego de Ávila, Isla de la Juventud.
- Low level (inferior to 0.462): Pinar del Río, Camagüey, Las Tunas, Holguín, Granma, Santiago de Cuba and Guantánamo.

The results are noteworthy for the low presence of provinces reaching the high THDI level, the greater concentration of provinces in the lowest THDI level, the weight of economic factors even after strong social policies are implemented, the preferential configuration of disadvantages in provinces that were historically disadvantaged (which shows the difficulty of overcoming inherited situations and unequal starting conditions).

### **C) Concluding Remarks: Theoretical and methodological challenges related to the study of social policies and equity promotion**

Within social thought in Latin America, a variant that could be called an *alternative critical perspective* may be constructed by observing the persistence of poverty and exclusion after two decades of “modernizing” reforms in the state and in social policy instruments. From it we may infer the existence of at least six limitations which would need to be overcome in order to obtain superior results in terms of equity and disappearance of poverty and which, simultaneously, denote the essential methodological aspects which

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<sup>15</sup> The behavior of the indicators utilized in the calculation of THDI may be explored in Martínez et al. (1997).

social research should emphasize to renovate its conceptual arsenal and capacity to make proposals, in dialogue with those who design policies and with their possible beneficiaries.

The first limitation and methodological challenge is the “minimalist discourse on basic necessities and the thresholds of citizenship” (Alvarez 2005). It posits that the notion of a human being and the conception of well-being which are subsumed in the definition of poverty (the notion of basic necessities as well as the standard of living in its more ample version) and the political suppositions of equity deal with a subject that might be confined to satisfying only elemental necessities of a very low level, especially when considering the greater complexity of both needs and their satisfiers which has arisen in contemporary society. To quit being poor, it might be sufficient if one could garner a bit more income and gain access to health and education, even if one remains excluded almost completely from the majority of the complex material and spiritual goods produced by modern societies, which are reserved to other social strata. This is a matter of subsistence, typical of the assistance philosophy. The central hypothesis is that minimalism, instead of overcoming poverty and inequality, reproduces them (Alvarez 2005). Social research must deepen its comprehension of the subject and the contemporary human necessities, taking up the challenge of diversity and the configuration of development actors.

A second limitation is found in the characteristic dichotomy found in the decisions on social policy and poverty which appear as opposing instruments (universalism and targeting, state and non-state, social and individual consumption, social assistance and development, macro or micro social scale) as if one should be forced to choose between one of the poles because each inevitably excludes the other without any room for being complementary. To face the poverty and equity gaps demands that the phenomenon be considered in all its multi-dimensional dynamics (micro-macro, social-individual, historical and cultural, structural and symbolic), its differences in expression found in industrialized and peripheral countries, in the small and large economies and, consequently, in the multiple management options which should not exclude the possibilities of state intervention.

A third limitation, which is contained in the previous one, also deals with yet another dichotomy: state and non-state. It seems that no argument can be made to select one option as the exclusive one. Although the deepening globalization in the economic and social relations, the increasing social differentiation and the relative density of actors in the contemporary processes making societies ever more complex are clamoring for a social coordination with a plural basis, cooperation among heterogeneous socio-economic actors demands the intervention of the state, as the owner to the present day of unalienable resources, in another level of coordination: judicial implementation of contracts, international treaties, financial resources, systematized information, management of the systemic interdependence (Lechner 1997:14-15). An absolute statist model, which does not consider other places and actors in the economy and in the construction of social agendas, which limits the exercise of participatory democracy, and which does not project its actions upon the extra-national, national and local is out of date.

A fourth limitation is given from the perspective of the world system. It deems that most conceptions on poverty and inequality, their causes and the policies to manage them, and on development are centered around endogenous factors, internal, at the limits of state-nation, undervaluing the role of the elements arising from the global logic of the capitalist

system and reducing and simplifying the causal analysis and conceptualization. It endeavors to recover a posture that recognizes the existence of “an integrated global totality with a legal framework which nurtures development and underdevelopment” (Osorio, 2003:142). The implication of this perspective is the insufficiency of social policy agendas trapped within national frontiers and the necessity to configure strategies for simultaneous and cooperative action (but also visualizing and confronting geopolitical conflicts) on a multi-level logic (local, national, regional, planetary). The fifth limitation is derived from a holistic perspective for which the main weakness in the social strategies lies in their implicit assumption of an erroneous assumption when it considers particular social objects (poverty, vulnerability, inequality, for instance) torn away from the social-technological-environmental system they belong to, as if they possessed their own internal causality while forgetting that it is the total synergy of a system, with its interactions and causalities, which determines the dynamics of the constituent parts (Trputec, 2001: 12).

The sixth and final limitation is given by comprehending the complexity in social processes and the ecology of action (Morin 1997), which presupposes the understanding that all undertaken actions (social policies, for example) escape their pre-established intentions once put into concrete practice, upon entering a universe of interactions and being absorbed by the surroundings, once they become intertwined with uncomfortable facts, indeterminate decisions and emerging processes. Under such conditions, strategy must reign over the program. “The program establishes a sequencing order which is necessary to execute without variations in a stable surrounding. The strategy elaborates a plan of action that examines the certainties and uncertainties of the situation, the probabilities and the improbabilities” (Morin 1997).

Observing the Cuban experience in light of these limitations, the way in which it has handled and altered them, it is obvious that it has highlighted the existing potentialities, especially for peripheral countries and small economies, of responsible and inclusive action by the state, of a universal and unitary social policy centered around equity as an objective, of the radical alteration in the distributive relations of well-being and of considering human being as subjects with historically expanded rights. On the other hand, observing the social gaps that have been more difficult for this model to close, it is possible to propose an exercise reinforcing its instruments for building up equity and impelling social mobility. Recovering a type of statism that exercises its hegemony over the implementation and control of the social agenda with better quality than that offered by non-state actors is the starting point of the proposal. This considers that the obstacles and social mobility barriers associated with excessive centralization, the distributional homogeneousness, the low level of sensibility with respect to diversity and the recognition of each group’s needs and advantages could be debilitated. Besides, this statism might contribute to the search of solutions for social policy sustainability and a style of policy planning and implementation that can manage uncertainty, unforeseen events and effects resulting from its application.<sup>16</sup>

From my own viewpoint, one of the most promising avenues for fostering gap-breaching social mobility may be found in what is called an affirmative policy with territorial or spatial basis. It visualizes the most significant ties between place-equity and

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<sup>16</sup> To elaborate here on the topic of economic policy would render this text too lengthy. For further reading on this topic, see Carranza et al. (1997), Monreal and Carranza (2000), Monreal (2002), and García et al. (2003).

social mobility as a hologram, a micro-world where the gaps and obstacles are intertwined, and where the barriers and channels of social mobility acquire peculiar expressions, which social policy must understand in a complex perspective connecting the whole with the part.

Acting over depressed places has effects upon the rest of the equity gaps because they usually maintain a territorial concentration. This considers that the occupation of place is also differentiated from a socio-structural viewpoint and depends upon the capacity to make use of the opportunities. From the territory, though, other specific affirmative actions spread out (gender, race, generational). It is not a question of closing off the instruments of universalism, but of complementing them with a type of targeting that is integrated territorially. So long as the territorial perspective is not taken to be a micro copy of the national strategy and as an encapsulating operation of the local actors in order to constrain them, the advantage lies in the greater possibility of giving context to the situations for change, of participating in and comprehending diversity, and in generating in the local actors a strategic capacity. Continuing social research in Cuba can document the equity policies with a greater scope and depth than the one reached until today, laying out the differentiated socio-structural impacts deriving from social policies and the regression or progression of their effects.

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