



University of Gothenburg  
Department of Social Work

# The Cuban dream

– A different way to welfare?

*A study of poverty, disadvantaged groups and inequality in Cuba*

**Bachelor thesis in Social work**

Authors: Andrea Pettersson and Ida Lang

Supervisor: Peter Dellgran, Associate Professor in Social Work, University of Gothenburg

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# 1. Introduction

Cuba! The country that is sometimes called “the pearl of the Caribbean” is a special country in many ways. It is a beautiful island with a fascinating history. Since its discovery by Columbus in 1498 Cuba has captured the interest of people all over the world. After the European discovery of the island, much of the indigenous population of Cuba succumbed to disease. Ever since Cuba’s history has been fraught with abuse and corruption, which has created great difficulties for the natives<sup>1</sup>.

The island nation’s desire to be free of oppression led to its well known socialist revolution in 1959. At that time Fidel Castro succeeded, through violence, to take power. The journey there, however, was long. Fidel Castro initially failure, with an attack to Moncada Barracks in Santiago July 26, 1953 (Sheehan 1995). Fidel’s speech in defence of this incident gave birth to one of the world's most famous sentences; “The history will absolve me.” (Alvarez Delgado 2007). He was sentenced to prison and upon release he left Cuba for Mexico where he met the Argentinean doctor Che Guevara. Together they organized a plan for revolution (Sheehan 1995). The dream came to life in 1956, when they returned to Cuba on a boat named Granma. On the 1st of January 1959, after three years of intense struggle, they finally secured victory. After the revolution the new government invested heavily in the five areas: education, health, sanitary, living conditions and culture. They managed sizable improvements and succeeded in reducing both extreme poverty and illiteracy. Even today Cuba still has a very good reputation for their health care (Erikson et al. 2002). But despite the visible improvements in the past the welfare today remains in question.

It is because of these remaining welfare questions that we have chosen to research Cuba. Cuba plays an interesting part in the poverty discussion, which contains many unresolved questions; such as the definition and measurement of poverty or how to institute effective reduction measures. As we already have mentioned Cuba has made measurable improvements in a number of areas since the revolution. But Cuba is a country where the opinions tend to differ with regards to poverty. Some people question the Cuba’s welfare claims. This is despite the fact that Cuba has scored high in international poverty indexes, such as the United Nations’ the Human Poverty Index where they consider components like human capital<sup>2</sup>. Cuba’s placement in poverty scales is often based on indicators, however, as evidenced by World Bank measurements which place the nation low on the scale by using a poverty indicator that equates all people earning less than 1, 25 dollar/day as living below the poverty line<sup>3</sup>. By this standard those Cubans with a month salary of 12-15 dollars should be considered poor. This shows how important it is to look at the overall picture and not only focus on specific indicators, which can differ greatly between case and region. We believe that Cuba is a special case where the scales do not correlate though it is likely not the only case featuring this sort of disagreement between the poverty and welfare scales.

Another reason why we have chosen to focus on Cuba was our shared interest in the effects of the economic crisis of the 1990s on the nation. Cuba has since the revolution tried

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<sup>1</sup> [www.ne.se/cuba](http://www.ne.se/cuba)

<sup>2</sup> <http://hdr.undp.org/en/reports/global/hdr2009/>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.worldbank.org/>

to go its “own way”. Spurred on by the dream of socialist equality they have tried to avoid dependence on nations that do not share their view of society. The discussion regarding Cuba’s welfare claims heightened during the world wide economic crisis that began in the early 1990s. This crisis had a severe affect on the Cuban economy most notably after the fall of the Soviet Union. Cuba’s dependence on Soviet trade and the subsequent failure of the Soviet state led to a very deep crisis in Cuba forcing the country to face incredibly hard times (Sweig 2009). It became even more difficult when the United States redoubled their blockade efforts against the country limiting Cuba’s access to trade and thereby stiling their economic recovery. As a result the crisis is still affecting Cuba today forcing them to face difficult questions with regards to their claims of welfare.

## **1.2 Purpose and research**

The key aim of our thesis is to generally research the complexity of poverty in Cuba by focusing directly on poverty, disadvantaged groups and social politics, and within this latter area to address social work in Cuba. In so doing we attempt to identify some key norms in terms of perspectives, values, opinions and thoughts with which Cubans must deal. We intend to address this with regards to the economic crisis during the 1990s and what that has meant for Cuba.

To achieve the best results, towards these ends, we have chosen different methods. First we have used relevant literature within the chosen subjects, to get an overall understanding of how the situation looks today. Secondly we opted to travel to Cuba for two months of direct research and observation to compare and relate to the literature. Third we conducted a number of interviews with professional Cubans, who had expertise or experience in our chosen research area. Our respondents were chosen based on their expertise in the relevant research areas. The majority of those respondents chosen for interviews had deeper knowledge/expertise in one or more of the subject areas. Through these interviews we gathered important information regarding their thoughts and values.

During the interviews we concentrated on three main issues; definitions of poverty, thoughts and ideas regarding poverty in Cuba and in the world, we also included questions of poverty measurements, as they relate to the case of Cuba. The second issue was about the nature of disadvantaged groups in Cuba; do they exist and who are they. This included questions regarding how they are defined as groups, as well as how the respondents are working with them. The third main issue we addressed in the interviews was the subject social politics in Cuba. We used questions such as how do politics look, how they are working with prevention and social work and have politics changed over the years. Each key issue area contained questions related to the crisis in the 1990s.

### **1.2.2 Pre-comprehension**

We have both been to Latin America before, visiting countries such as Costa Rica, Mexico, Panama and Nicaragua. However, this was the first time either of us had visited Cuba. We were quite curious about this Caribbean country that was so strongly connected to the revolution of Fidel Castro and Che Guevara. The picture we had when we left for Cuba was

that of a country full of culture and history. We tried to get to know the country in advance through our literature review, which increased our interest in the debates about poverty and human rights, among other things. Our knowledge about Cuba before visiting the country was very narrow. We only knew about the country from the information in tourist books, in which salsa and beautiful beaches factored quite heavily. We also tried to read relevant books about the development of the country after the revolution. But many times we discovered that the information differed across sources, and thus felt it was necessary to go there ourselves to get a better insight in the society. We felt very much divided when we came to Cuba. Partially we had the baggage of expecting Cuba to be a country without poverty but instead with beautiful beaches and happy salsa dancing people. And partially we felt critical against this country with regards to their record on human rights and the dictatorial regime headed by Fidel Castro. Our picture of poverty and societies in Latin America came from the other countries we had visited, so we were prepared to be open minded to see what it is that makes Cuba unique.

## **2. Poverty**

There are many different thoughts coming to ones mind when the word poverty is mentioned. One image contains starving children without access to food neither to education. Children with swollen abdomens and with glassy eyes, without capacity to change the awful situation from which they are suffering. This is actually people living in 'extreme poverty'. They live without access to satisfy basic needs.

In the world today there are more or less 1.7 billion people living in extreme poverty. This number corresponds to 28 % of the world's population (Sachs, 2005). 87 % of these people live in Asia and Africa. There have been frightening figures showing that almost 50 % of the population in the Sub-Saharan zone is living in below inhuman conditions (Ferriol et al. 2004). There are figures from UNICEF claiming that there are 24,000 children dying because of poverty every day<sup>4</sup>.

These numbers are awful, and give an incomprehensible picture of poverty. But if we are turning the focus to other parts of the world, where the extreme poverty does not exist, does this signify that those societies have no poverty at all? No, the poverty question is still on the agenda in those countries. They are aware that this is another kind of poverty; by including other components such as the culture and the existing social norm in the society.

### **2.1 History of poverty in social science**

It is important to have knowledge about the history of poverty to understand its definitions and measurements of today and also to be able to get a deeper insight into the different directions this debate has taken. We will therefore inform about the historical aspects and also show some of the different directions of the poverty debate from the past till today.

The discussion of poverty definitions and measurements started in United Kingdom almost

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<sup>4</sup> <http://www.globalissues.org/article/715/today-over-24000-children-died-around-the-world>



200 years ago. Important pioneers have from then till today influenced the poverty debate. One can say that it started in the time of the industrialization with the attention on poverty coming from the increasing social anxiety in the society. This anxiety was the answer to the ongoing changes in the society. The industrialization led to a large concentration of people in the cities and therefore the growing importance of work salaries. The increased load on the poverty system in United Kingdom led to the "new poor law" in 1834<sup>5</sup>. This law showed that focus now had been turned to the poverty in the society.

Engel published a book ten years after the "new poor law" was introduced. The book included a new perspective on poverty. He claimed that poverty is not a permanent condition for the lower class and that it is possible to see a relationship between the economic system and poverty. This is an economic system which is generating both poverty and wealth<sup>6</sup>.

Booth reacted on the high poverty it was claiming existed within the working class in the United Kingdom. He conducted a study called *Labour and Life of the People*, which was published in 1889<sup>7</sup>. He defined in the study a poverty line, only including the component income. He defined people as poor if they had an income of 18-20 shilling/week. If the income was lower they had to be considered as very poor. Booth was the first person who led the poverty definition into the area of economic resources. Poverty had been defined on the basis of direct observations before him. Now with the economic view it became an indirect observation of poverty, meaning not including the real living situation of the people, but instead how people on the basis of their economic situation are poor or not (Halleröd 1991).

After Booth's investigation, the famous pioneer Seebohm Rowntree made his entrance in the poverty debate. He investigated in 1899 the poverty in York, England. He divided the poverty into two different views, primary and secondary poverty. The primary was an indirect method which used the income to measure who was to be considered poor and who is not (Halleröd 1991).

Rowntree took the poverty line a step further by investigating the cheapest possible way of living without being affected fiscally, meaning that he presented a list of food that contained the necessary nourishment (Dixon & Macarov 1998). This trend to measure poverty as an absolute economic poverty line became widely accepted. Molly Orshansky, in the United States, created in relation to the American president Johnsons' "war against poverty" in 1964, the official poverty line in United States (Fischer 1997).

Back in the beginning of the 20th century, Rowntree did already realise that an indirect measurement would not give the best overall picture of poverty. There would still be people who earned more than the minimum income, but still lived in poverty and misery. This was the reason for his other view of poverty, the secondary poverty. This was a direct observation poverty line, including how the people were living in reality. Rowntree described after his last study in 1950<sup>8</sup>, that poverty was disappearing and the death blow would be the extension of the welfare state. Some of the reasons to Rowntree's conclusion according to Halleröd (1991) were the increasing welfare and the general rise in living standards for this epoch.

Another man who has left a great footprint in the perspective of how to define and measure

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<sup>5</sup> <http://www.oxfordreference.com> search for new poor law amendment 1834

<sup>6</sup> Jonathan Engel's *Doctors and Reformers: Discussion and Debate over Health Polic., 1925-1950* (2002)

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/PHbooth.htm>

<sup>8</sup> Further information: Rowntree's study of York's poverty 1951 title: [Poverty and the Welfare State](#)

poverty is Peter Townsend. He also realised the defiance and raised criticisms towards absolute and indirect poverty measurements. He saw poverty as a social phenomenon that has to be understood in its existing social context. He hereby shifted from an economic to a sociologic perspective in the poverty question. He talked about multiple social deprivations in his definition, meaning exclusion from the existing consumption and general norms in a society (Dixon & Macarov, 1998). Townsend is still relevant in the modern poverty research by his studies, which show that poverty still exists even if we are living in a society related to abundance (Halleröd 1991). Today a well-known name in the poverty discussion is Amartya Sen who also defines poverty in relation to the social context. In Amartya Sen's definition of poverty he points out the always existing absolute seed which can be seen in the term primary poverty, where the aim is to define a minimum existence, to drag a line between life and death. Sen's thinking about poverty, according to Halleröd (1991), is that everyone who cannot satisfy their basic needs is poor. But he remarks the importance of considering the possibility of choice in the definition of poverty. He looks at poverty as a question of no choices, also making a distinction between resources and needs. Sen means first of all that there has to be a possibility for people to satisfy their needs. Secondary they have to fulfil the social norm sufficient for not feeling shame. According to the social context he refers to, it has to be remembered that necessary resources to satisfy different needs can look different depending upon the country. For example education for children in some parts of the world only requires paper and pencils, whereas in other parts the need can only be covered with for example computers etc. There is also poverty in a society when the individuals cannot turn the existing resources into reality for some reason. To resume his view of poverty according to Halleröd (1991) is that he is including components such as; how the resources of the individual values, how the capacity is to turn the resources into the practise, that the real basic needs can be measured and the question between free choice and constraint.

To resume the history and the modern poverty debate we can draw the conclusion that economic measurements and absolute definitions have been and are still in use. But that new perspective and knowledge has a growing influence in the poverty debate. The modern view includes components such as welfare, the social context and the existing norm.

## 2.2 Poverty measurements and welfare index

**“The Welfare index is hypothetical and in broad only outlines summaries over big data material which will give an overview, but has to be followed up by detail studies of indicators, differences and trends. The welfare index purpose is to give a wider attention to aspects of welfare in debates, media and social policies”**  
(Vogel & Wolf 2004).

Vogel and Wolf (2004) inform about the big changes there have been in the view of poverty in the last few decades. This change has been visible both in the definition, the measurements of poverty and also how to reduce it. Many times in the poverty discussion the welfare subject is highlighted. Three main views make up the basic idea of welfare index according to Vogel and Wolf's article (2004): the general perspective (including components such as education,

health, social network, free time, democracy, legal security fellowship and inequality between different classes, gender, ethnicities and regions etc.), the micro-perspective (when the focus is turned to the individuals in the society) and the division perspective (focus on the living standard for the most vulnerable groups and that the social exclusion and poverty has a big influence in the compilation of the total population's living standard in the welfare index).

### **2.2.1 Absolute and relative poverty**

Some important terms in the poverty debate are absolute and relative poverty. To measure poverty as something absolute means that there is a laid down norm, which doesn't change according to country, culture or the history. Absolute poverty measures are only looking at the individual's power to consume and it is independent of any changes in income distribution. An absolute definition is often used in strict economical measurements. The absolute perspective has received criticism and people claim that it does not give the best picture of poverty because it does not include components such as the history, culture and norm in the compilation. So by that it can be found that absolute measurements are often in contrast to a relative poverty measurement<sup>9</sup>.

Relative measurement doesn't agree on only classifying individuals or families as "poor" by comparing them to a fixed poverty line. This means this perspective can be different depending on the context and the temporary view of welfare. Therefore this definition can differ depending on the politician's view of welfare and countries' varying development levels. Also the existing growth rate in a society can affect the relative definition. The definition normally includes and is used by the countries we know as the developed countries.

### **2.2.2 Different poverty/welfare measurements**

There are different definitions of poverty and there are also plenty ways of how to measure it. As we have understood a measurement can look very different when compared to another. A measurement can be absolute and indirect which does not consider the reality of the people. An example is the World Bank, which considers everyone earning less than 1.25 dollar each day as poor. But today many measurements are referring to poverty as something relative, and that requires the trend to within the used measurements to be aware of the social context and changes in the society. This trend is also seen in many of the currently used poverty lines to include awareness in the cost of living and the structure of the household.

Townsend was the man who started this change by adding the term 'social deprivation' into the poverty question and defining poverty as the suffering from multiple deprivations. Social deprivations are often used in relative measurement (Halleröd 1991). To bring out an example in measurements including social deprivation; there is in United Kingdom a measurement where they included 60 different indicators of life style. Of those 60 it was 12 chosen out to be included in a deprivations index. They are touching three different areas; social relations, equipment of the residence, consumption intended for a good food diet (Halleröd 1991).

Still today there exists a general measurement of poverty in the world relating to the

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<sup>9</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Absolute\\_poverty#Absolute\\_poverty](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Absolute_poverty#Absolute_poverty)

percentage share of the population that has less than the median or average of the disposable income in the country. This way of measure is often constructed by a relative definition made by each country. It is important to keep in mind that this disadvantaged rich countries in comparisons against poorer countries (Vogel & Wolf 2004). But poverty lines and the average income are indirect methods of measuring poverty and to a critic towards this it can be said that the informal economic is hard to catch, it doesn't affirm if the living standard is low because of high expenses and it doesn't affirm how individuals are using their assets as well as ignoring the human dependency on their surroundings to experience existential welfare (Vogel & Wolf 2004).

Another measurement we want to point out is the Gross domestic product (GDP), which measures a country's total economic output. It reports the value of all services and final goods, which have been done within the country's border in a year. It is important to be aware that the attempts which been made to by the GDP to measure welfare/poverty in a country has received strong criticism. This is because GDP mainly measures the country's production instead of the existing welfare<sup>10</sup>.

Another popular measurement that puts the focus on the income division in a country is the Gini coefficient, which indicates how the incomes are distributed between the populations in the country. If the Gini coefficient is low, that indicates a more equal distribution, the lowest number possible to receive is zero and a complete inequality gets the number one<sup>11</sup>.

The before mentioned trend of not only including economical measurements is visible also on the global level. There it has become more and more common to create measurements, which include components such as human development, human capital, peace, corruption and income division. Those components are to be seen as connected to today's widely accepted view of poverty as something multidimensional (St. Clair 2004), there have been attempts to create measurements to include different perspectives such as the economic and the sociologic perspective.

One to mention is the Human Poverty Index (HPI-2). This is used by United Nations Human Development program (UNDP). The Human Poverty Index considers four indicators. The probability not to survive 60 years, adults without functional reading knowledge, percentage share of the population which has less than half of the country's disposable income median and percentage share of long term unemployment (at least 12 months) (Voghon Hernández 2009). A positive thing about this way of measure is that it includes two of the main perspectives in a good welfare index. They are including the general perspective because they include both economic and non-economic aspects. And on the micro level, they are including statistics, which concern individuals. Another advantage is that the general welfare components are included, for example education, health, employment and income are presented (Vogel & Wolf 2004).

Another very new measurement created by the Institute for Economics and Peace in May 2007 is the Global Peace Index (GPI). This is a measure of the relative position of countries according to their peacefulness. This measurement is a product from cooperation and consultation from an international panel of experts in the peace question, later on the data is analysed by the Economist Intelligence Unit. Some factors that are considered in this

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<sup>10</sup> <http://www.ekonomifakta.se>

<sup>11</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gini\\_coefficient](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gini_coefficient)

measurement are such internal factors as the level of violence and crime, and also factors in a country's external relations as for example military and wars<sup>12</sup>.

The last measurement to consider was created in 1995 by the Transparency International. The name is Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI), which is ordering the countries in a rank according to the degree of corruption among public officials and politicians<sup>13</sup>.

## **2.3 Poverty and globalisation**

Globalisation opens up a debate on the meaning of the different expressions of poverty, poverty reduction and social policies. The science we are using today makes it easier for information to be shared in subjects like for example poverty. And besides the advanced science and increased interest in the last decade, today there exist several attempts of worldwide cooperation's in those areas.

### **2.3.1 Worldwide organizations and perspectives**

In the decade after the Second World War the world got a taste for worldwide cooperation.

After the Second World War, there were a lot of changes. Many organizations were established with the aim of working together towards goals such as international development, peace and poverty reduction. The leading organisation in this is the United Nations (UN) that was established the 24th October in 1945. It was an agreement of 54 countries that today has increased to 191 countries and Cuba is among those<sup>14</sup>.

According to St. Clair (2004) there are several organizations connected to the United Nations as for example United Nations Development Program (UNDP), the World Bank and the International Monetary Found (IMF), to mention a few. All those organisations are brought together with the aim of international cooperation to improve the life for people, through processing poverty reduction. Further in the thesis they are informing about the change during the decades within those organizations and the perspective about poverty and its causes. They bring out for example that the first leader of the World Bank had the idea that economic growth was the key factor for eradicating poverty. If an economic growth develops in a country, this automatically leads to the way out of poverty. This was a perspective, which became widely accepted, concluding that the common view was that welfare policies were unnecessary as long as economic growth was established. The World Bank had a big influence on this perspective (St. Clair 2004). In the same discussion they are pointing out how many of the organization's aims have changed during the decades, by informing that Keynes and many other did not see the World Bank at the time as an instrument to define and promote development as it partly does today, seeing it instead as an instrument to stabilize the international monetary order, open trades and capital flows. Keynes' idea was connected to the mind of modernization and industrialization in the less developed countries (St. Clair 2004). But when the desired result did not come, there became a change in the view of

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<sup>12</sup>Further information please see; <http://www.visionofhumanity.org/gpi/home.php>

<sup>13</sup> Further information please see; [http://www.transparency.org/policy\\_research/surveys\\_indices/cpi/2009](http://www.transparency.org/policy_research/surveys_indices/cpi/2009)

<sup>14</sup> <http://www.un.org/en/members/>

poverty. That took especially form in the 1960s and 1970s, when it started to create ideas about the context of the use of international poverty reduction strategies, and this came as a part of the focus on poverty policy of multilaterals (St. Clair 2004).

United Nations is using a perspective of poverty as multidimensional, which started to grow already before the 1990<sup>s</sup> but during this decade its importance grew (St. Clair 2004). And those world's leading organisations are in the actual debates considering the importance of education to encourage underdevelopment economies and societies (Voghon Hernández 2009).

Voghon Hernández (2009) mentioned Amartya Sen as a person whose perspective regarding poverty has influenced the ongoing debate of the measurement of poverty. And his influence has turned into a need in the stocks and in the annual publications from the United Nations.

The conclusion that can be drawn from this is that on a global level within the organizations there has been a change from the economic perspective towards including components such as human capital. The knowledge received regarding the multidimensionality of poverty, which has to be considered both in measurements as well in poverty reduction strategies, to be able to get the best overall picture and improvement.

### **2.3.2 Latin America's organizations and perspectives**

In the continent of Latin America the United Nations have created an organisation named "Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean" (ECLAC). The headquarter lays in Santiago in Chile and is one of five commissions of the United Nations. The organisation was established by the Economic and Social Council resolution in 1948 and in 1984 it changed name to Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean due to its inclusion of some Caribbean countries. The purpose of the organisation was to contribute to the economical development in Latin America. Some actions are for example to reinforce economical bounds between countries in the continent as well as in countries from other parts of the world. Later the organisation has decided to manage the promotion of the region's social development as one of its primary objectives. Cuba is a member of the organization since its establishment in 1948<sup>15</sup>.

Another organization worth mentioning is the Latin America School of Social Sciences (FLACSO). By an initiative from UNESCO the organization was established in 1957. The organization was created as an international, inter-governmental, regional and autonomous department and contains several countries in Latin America and in the Caribbean. Cuba is among those countries. The main purpose of the organization is to bring out post-graduate programs, enabling the new generations to practice in different fields within social sciences in Latin America. Two of the main objectives are to; promote critical research of problems related to the continent's social reality and to carry out all academic activity related to social science which will lead to social development and integration among the countries in the region of Latin America. FLACSO's Academic Branch is located in Argentina and was founded in 1974 and has from that time till today showed their work by the publication of

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<sup>15</sup> <http://www.eclac.org>

more than 800 books and work papers<sup>16</sup>.

One final organisation to mention is Latin American Council of Social Science (CLASCO), which conduct studies over poverty with an international network. CLASCO works with the problems of poverty, the process of discrimination, inequality and social injustice<sup>17</sup>. They have cooperation with the Comparative Research Programme on Poverty (CROP), this is a programme made of International Social Science Council (ISSC). ISSC is located in Norway in the University of Bergen<sup>18</sup>.

The 1960s and 1970s decades became special because of the triumph of the revolution in Cuba, and because of its peak in the “left” Latin America. In this the focus is on criticizing sociologies and theories about the dependencies created. The 1970s and in the beginning of the 1980s a transformation showed in the concepts of development, as in the new focus they talked about the importance to incorporate the reflection as a social and cultural nature. This makes the problematization of poverty matching up with the increasing dominance within the poverty and poverty reduction question, which was purchased by the World Bank and the related organisations. By this time, the new perspective was to start to give a bigger attention to components such as human capital. And now in the debate they no longer focused only on the financial changes, but even to components like health and education (Voghon Hernández 2009).

This is also still the subject in the ongoing debate of poverty in Latin America, meaning that the knowledge and conceptions have been affected by the existing consideration of components like the Human Development. This also has caused the appearances and the peaks in different trends in the critic tradition of the social minds in the continent. The emergence of alternative perspectives allowed components to capture the historical view and to relate poverty as a result of the socio-history, the influence for the public institutions and their proposal of solutions which do not achieve the depth in the different conditions which generate poverty in the continent (Voghon Hernández 2009).

### **2.3.3 Advanced science and the trend of statistics in the 1990s**

Today an agreement exists in the modern debate concerning the multidimensional welfare term, which influences the result on the general welfare index (Vogel & Wolf 2004). In the 1960s the social indicators movement started to influence the debate strongly. This led to improvements both on a national and an international level. During this time there was also an increase in the need of an overview of the data material. The focus and improvement of the aim of the statistics system started in the 1990s. Also in this decade many of the countries and international organizations started to give out different yearbooks of welfare statistics (Vogel & Wolf 2004).

This led to an overwhelming statistic system in the developed countries. And as a step further in this process, a few years after opinions about planning and international statistics were formed, it was also necessary to consider organizations such as United Nation, OECD and The European Union (Vogel & Wolf 2004). The reason for this trend in statistics is based

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<sup>16</sup> <http://www.flacso.org.ar/english/>

<sup>17</sup> <http://www.clacso.org.ar/>

<sup>18</sup> <http://www.crop.org/>

on the more advanced science, which was carried out and the improved possibility of world spread communication in the 1990s. In the beginning the influences in the statistic were still very obviously related to the national economic perspectives. For example they used the comprehensive index called GDP. The statistics of GDP are collected and put together by the organizations OECD and Eurostat (Vogel & Wolf 2004). This process that started to speed up in the 1990s was still slow and had still many adversities. Although the improvement of science in the 1990<sup>s</sup> and that it also became better attached in the underdeveloped countries is apparent, according to Vogel and Wolf (2004) there are still problems to overcome. Because this statistic was still difficult to view from an overall picture and was difficult to ascertain, it relied heavily on publications and many incoherent social statistics.

A problem today is that there are only a few developed countries that have access to solid and reliable data on the micro level. For those developed countries there exists a possibility to create national indexes to better accomplish the three above mentioned main perspectives for a good welfare index, the general, micro and the division perspective. But the limitations of other countries lead to difficulties in introducing the international welfare index for comparing countries. Many indexes on an international level are excluding components like social deprivation, and are instead including only a few strategy indicators which measure exclusion as for example the quota for poverty, income division, average lifetime and infant mortality etc. (Vogel & Wolf 2004 ). The conclusion of this is, that even if there is better science, communication and statistics around the world, there is still a character of simpler indicators used in poverty and welfare measurements. The reason for this is the varying development levels and different levels of access to science in different countries, which generates a limitation for many countries to create and use a widely dependable measurement. (Dixon & Macarov 1998).

## **2.4 Poverty reduction**

The drive towards measurements, which assess the welfare/poverty, is often connected to the social policy in the society; what should be the strategies to most efficiently improve welfare or reduce poverty in a society? (Vogel & Wolf 2004). According to Midgley (2009) poverty reduction and social security have historically had a close connection. Social security has been outlined in different forms so to address the poverty problem in different ways (Midgley 2009).

### **2.4.1 Social Policy and poverty reduction**

According to the Oxford English dictionary online the concept "policy" means "the art, study, or practice of government or administration; the conduct of public affairs". We, as the authors of this essay, refer to social policy as the practice of government's social programmes for the social sector (World economic and social survey 2008). Within this concept we include distribution of tax money, social benefits, social security, social justice etc. With this we mean for example employment, unemployment measures, housing policies, education and health care.

An important part of the social policy for a state is the social security system. "A state-run



system providing financial support for people who are unemployed, sick, retired, or otherwise in need”<sup>19</sup>. The above mentioned themes such as social benefits etc., are also connected to social inclusion. That is who, what groups within a society, has the possibility to use these benefits. One can for example refer to families, older citizens, youth, single parents etc. In an ideal world these social programmes are made for every citizen to take part in, but when private operators offer an alternative it somehow undermines the thought of social solidarity (Rogne 2009). World economic and social survey (2008) remarks that when building a reliable social security system social protection, instead of a shattered one, it must be made as a system that is intended for all citizens.

When investigating social security we find it interesting to look into how the system is built and what groups in the society are included in the social security benefits. This shows how the state makes its priorities and which areas the state finds it worth investing in (Rogne 2009).

The intention of social security system is to ensure that individuals will be able to maintain a good standard of living when the income fails due to the factors mentioned above; unemployment, sickness, retiring or as a result of other income failures (Rogne 2009). From investigations it has shown that being able to maintain a supplement for income loss, such as the social security, contributes to poverty reduction (Midgley 2009).

The social security system and social policies do not have the same organisation in different countries (World economic and social survey 2008). This has to do with historical, economical, social and national factors. In some countries the social sector is more developed than in others as a result of how the state invests. One could say that it is an economical safety net for people in need. But even if they have a different composition in different countries the foundation for social programmes shares two characteristics;

”1. They are government-sponsored insurance programs that protect citizens from predetermined outcomes that negatively impact their ability to participate in society and  
2. They have a communal orientation that considers the entire population, rather than just the individual.” (Rogne 2009:Introduction XXVI)

It has been claimed by neoliberals such as IMF (International Monetary Fund) and the World Bank, that social security harms poverty reduction efforts and ”contributes to a decline in living standards” (Midgley 2009:16). They support instead the idea of an investment in the free-market, and during the 1980s, with their influence many social security programs in different countries were either privatized or had to manage with less financial support. Even if these ideas were launched and implemented for a while, it has to some level changed today, and nowadays it is more argued that social security helps reduce poverty. According to Midgley (2009:17) social security can ”contribute most effectively to the goal of poverty eradication when integrated with a range of antipoverty policies and programs” and he also writes that it’s a fact that social security has helped reducing poverty in the Western countries.

When speaking about social programs one refers for example to social assistance and social insurance. Critics have urged that social security has not been introduced because governments want to reduce poverty, but because of egotistic electoral, political and economic reasons. It is also said that social security measurements have failed to reduce poverty since there are still a large number of people living in poverty. Midgley (2009) claims

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<sup>19</sup>[http://dictionary.oed.com.ezproxy.ub.gu.se/cgi/entry/50229749?single=1&query\\_type=word&queryword=social+security&first=1&max\\_to\\_show=10](http://dictionary.oed.com.ezproxy.ub.gu.se/cgi/entry/50229749?single=1&query_type=word&queryword=social+security&first=1&max_to_show=10)

that these statements come from the fact that some social policies have not been made to fit the context in which they are settled, and the fact that most social security doesn't cover the population as a whole but mostly only a small proportion. In the developing countries the lack of social security is widespread and less than half of the world's population has access to social security protection. This lack of coverage is a contributing factor for social security not significantly being able to reduce poverty in these places (Midgley 2009).

### 3. Development in Cuba

#### 3.1 Cuba, a general picture

Cuba is the largest island in the Caribbean and the world's seventh largest island. Cuba has a population of 11 million people. The capital name is Havana and has a population of 2.35 millions. The second largest city is Santiago de Cuba.

The mainland is mostly made up of flatlands and rolling plains, but there is also some mountains, for example the highest peak is Pico Turquino (1995) and the largest mountain range goes under the name Sierra Maestra. Cuba is covered by 20 % of forest and wood, so there is a tremendous assortment of trees and flowers (Sheehan 1995).

It is important to know the history of Cuba. Columbus discovered the country in 1498, which led to a miserable time for the native population. The leadership in Cuba had the characteristics of corruption and the dissatisfaction because of this led to several revolts and in 1898 the American-Spanish war broke out. Cuba's independency in 1902 was the result of the war. But corruption and abuse of power remained characteristically of the leadership. This was the reason of the revolution 1959 lead by Fidel Castro and Che Guevara<sup>20</sup>. After Castro had won the leadership over Cuba, he introduced several improvements in the society as for example they carried out the famous "Year of Education" in Cuba in 1961. During this year they succeed to increase the literacy rate of Cuba from 76 % to 96 %<sup>21</sup>. They improved the education system and made it free and obligated/mandatory to all children. In the years after the revolution another big quality change was to introduce free health care for everyone. They also made big changes in the agriculture, by two agrarian Reform laws, in 1959 and 1963, where they set limitations in privately owned farms and made the government owner of all land in Cuba (Sheehan 1995).

Cuba is famous for its climate, which is temperate and semitropical. This makes the island a popular tourist destination. Before the revolution the tourism was the second biggest source of revenue. In the past under Batista's leadership the tourism was centred on a lot of casinos and a dubious nightlife for mainly US citizens. After the revolution the hotels and casinos were closed and US citizens could no longer visit Cuba. But the tourism was rediscovered in the mid-1970s when Canadians, Latin Americans and Europeans got attracted of the exotic island and its low prices. Today the tourism is a big part of the economic of the country (Sheehan 1995). Cubans are a mixture of races and the country has a big part of creoles,

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<sup>20</sup> [www.ne.se/cuba](http://www.ne.se/cuba)

<sup>21</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cuban\\_Literacy\\_Campaign](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cuban_Literacy_Campaign)

mulattos and black people. This has its origin in the history of Cuba, with colonization by the Spaniards 1511 and the big slavery immigration from West Africa in 18th century. Even if racism is not official accepted anymore in the Cuban society, it is still noticeable in the tourism sector, where the white Cubans are more likely to be employed as waiters and tourist guides, meanwhile black Cubans more often get employed as for example cleaners of hotels room (Sheehan 1995).

Cuba has a tense relationship with the United States because of several reasons. The relation got really bad after Fidel Castro succeeded with the revolution, and he decided to build up a society based on socialism. In January 1961 the diplomatic relations between the two countries were formally destroyed. After this the relationship got tenser in relation to the Cold War 1962 that made the world hold its breath, when the United States discovered that Cuba let the Soviet Union have places for bomb making including nuclear bombs. Luckily the threat of nuclear war never became reality (Sheehan 1995). The United States has also inserted the famous economic blockade against Cuba. They imposed the first restriction 1960. This had a big impact on their economic and they started a long-lasting cooperation with the Soviet Union. That got destroyed by the fall of the Soviet Union during the 1990s which affected Cuba through the blockade from the United States, made their opportunity of economical recovering harder (Sheehan 1995). Today Cuba has still not recovered from the period in the 1990s.

A deeper insight into the areas of economic development, the special period, social policy, poverty and social work follows below.

### **3.2 Economy development in Cuba**

Cuba suffered many different problems during the years, many often with a direct connection to the existing economic development in the country. Sugar has always had a central role in the economic of Cuba. The importance of sugar was created already by the Spaniards. When the Spaniards left Cuba the Cubans started the road towards regaining independency of the sugar farms ownership, but after the Spaniards US corporations came to Cuba. These corporations took over near-bankrupt farms in the 1920s at the best moment when the sugar price was exceptionally low. By the 1930s the United States had become the owners of  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the sugar production in Cuba (Sheehan 1995).

Another big source of revenue for Cuba has been the tourist sector. Tourism was before the revolution 1959 the second biggest source of revenue. This sector, which gave such an important income for the country, had a dark side, because tourism gave Cuba an infamous reputation. This was a consequence of all the different casinos and hotels built to create a vacation spot for wealthy North Americans. To close all tourist hotels and casinos was one of the first changes introduced by Castro after the triumph of the revolution. As a response to this the United States prohibited their citizens to visit Cuba (Sheehan 1995). Another change in the economic history was done due to the two agrarian reforms laws in 1959 and 1963. The first law created a limitation in the size of farms from 3,333 acres to 1,000 acres<sup>22</sup>. Those laws settled limitations to private owned farms and made the government as the main part owner.

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<sup>22</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Agrarian\\_Reform\\_Laws\\_of\\_Cuba](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Agrarian_Reform_Laws_of_Cuba)

Following the revolution the entire industrial and manufacturing base sector was nationalized.

Another big impact on Cuba and its economy has been and still is the well-known blockade from the United States. The blockade got introduced in July 1960 and its cause is to be seen as a response from the United States against Cuba's new revolutionary government. The introduced blockade content reduced the Cuban import quota of brown sugar by 700,000 tons, and by 1963 the United States had prohibited all dollar transaction with Cuba<sup>23</sup>.

But still it was not enough; in October 1992 a further restriction was made, in purpose to tighten economic sanctions against Cuba. The new restriction received strong critics; people claimed that the new restriction had to be seen as a transparent attempt to make Castro weaker in purpose to get a faster government failure in Cuba. The condition to release this tight grip as the new restrictions meant, was explained in the words *"When the Cuban government has been elected through free and fair elections under supervision"* (Sheehan 1995).

The raised critic came for example by Canada and Mexico who were insisting on their right to trade with Cuba. Cuba also got their appeals against the US action approved by an overwhelming majority in the United Nations General Assembly (Sheehan 1995). But even if the last restrictions were prevented, the US blockade of Cuba is still in place. A way to survive beside the blockade has been Cuba's long-lasting cooperation with the Soviet Union. Cuba had much help, economical and social, from the Soviet Union. This especially after the US embargo was introduced in October 1960 (Kirby 2003). As the previously mentioned important role of sugar in Cuba, and until 1991 the exportation of the sugar to Soviet Union and Eastern Europe accounted for over 75% of the nation's revenue from the trade. When the trade with the Soviet Union failed, Cuba experienced a great loss of products, like oil, chemicals, machinery and food, which badly affected the Cubans both on a national and individual level (Sheehan 1995).

To survive and in an attempt to economical recovery Cuba by the year 1993 permitted private citizens to hold and spend US dollars. Following this Cuba also opened up to foreign investments. Many joint venture contracts were signed mainly in the tourist sector. Another impact of the new legalisation was also followed for a greater private participation in agriculture and an increased number of farms run by individuals. It is important to mention that all those changes were designed within the framework of a centrally controlled economy (Cabezas 2009).

The economy of Cuba today is still dependent on sugar, which is the main crop. The dependency on sugar is problematic and Cuba has tried to decrease the dependency. Cuba realised the dark sides of being such a dependent of sugar production for many reasons, for example the effect of drought and fluctuation around the world about the price of the sugar. Another disadvantage was the effect of bad weather on the sugarcane harvest.

The second largest crop for export is the coffee. Around 80 % of the total area in Cuba is farmland, so this country is primarily agricultural. Still today the government owns the main part of the farmland, around 70 %. An important part is also the world-famous Cuban cigars. But it seems like this product has declined much in the economic importance in Cuba, it only occupies around 1 % of cultivated land. Other parts are livestock production, not to forget to mention vegetable products. Cuba turns out to be the world fourth largest producer of nickel.

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<sup>23</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United\\_States\\_embargo\\_against\\_Cuba](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States_embargo_against_Cuba)

So this means nickel is the second largest export for the Cubans after the sugar (Sheehan 1995).

Today the tourism sector has a great impact for the economic situation in Cuba and the Cubans have built up a street market focused on handicrafts such as dolls, woodcarving, jewels and leather goods (Sheehan 1995).

### **3.2.1 Consequences from the Special Period**

Through the cooperation Cuba had with Soviet Union they received discounted oil, food, weapons etc. Soviet also bought Cuban sugar. This aid, including 4\$ to 6\$ billion per year as subsidy, assisted the country towards a more stable economy. All the above mentioned helped making possible the social programmes (Sweig 2009). But the Cuban revolutionary society's foundation started to tremble by the end of the 1980s when the Soviet Union saw an end of its era. Soviet decided to withdraw all financial help. A real profound hard time started for Cuba. This period, 1990-1996, is called the Special Period (Sweig 2009) and "social observers consider Cuba's downward spiral to be worse than the Great Depression in the 1930s in the United States" (Cabezas 2009:60). Without financial help Cuba was left on its own devices.

During the Special Period there were harsh consequences such as cuts in all social programmes, decrease of the daily conveniences made possible by the revolution, food and electricity were of short supply. The state could no longer provide rations at the same level as before and all abundance disappeared. Consequences of this food shortage made Cubans malnourished (Sweig 2009). The shortage of food supplies led to a bad diet and lack of protein, vitamins and minerals (Cabezas 2009).

The legalisation of the dollar in 1993 and the opening up to foreign investors made the inequalities increase fast. This was an attempt to easier meet the new economical situation. Cabezas (2009) states that the reforms were quite similar to the neoliberal economic reforms made by the IMF but that they were made with consideration on the Cuban social welfare.

Also Sweig (2009) mentions the profound consequences for Cuba that the introduction of the US dollar meant. This made it possible for people to receive remittances from people living abroad. The Cuban citizens were still paid in the Cuban peso, and if you had access to the dollar this meant you had access to privileges (Sheehan 1995). The monthly salary was very low, about 10 USD per month (Cabezas 2009), but the legalization made it possible to have an income on the side. With the dollar legalisation there were installed dollar stores where "western consumer goods" were sold (Sweig 2009:132), where it was not possible to pay with the Cuban peso.

The dollar was worth a lot more than the Cuban peso and people therefore more wanted to get hold of dollars. Increasingly people wanted to get hold of US dollars. This developed a search for being paid in dollars. Highly educated people opted to leave their jobs and instead try to make a living within self-employment, hustling or prostitution. They saw an opportunity to earn a lot more than working for the state. Many senior citizens also saw an opportunity to earn money in addition to their retirement (Ferriol 2004). This two currency system led to a class segregation in the society, between those who could get hold of dollars and those who were "stuck" with the Cuban peso. But to meet the daily basic expenses one could hardly survive only using pesos (Cabezas 2009). In 1994 the dollar was replaced by the

CUC (Cuban convertible peso). This other currency is valued at the same exchange level as the dollar.

One of the foundations of the Cuban society after the revolution is the health care system. But during the harsh years in the beginning of the 1990s a decrease even within this service could be noticed. People from other parts of Latin America travelled to the island to take part of their famous health care. These patients could afford to pay in dollar and therefore got access to the best facilities and resources. When paying in Cuban pesos it became harder to find medicine because of the shortage supply. According to Ballard (2005) people started to talk about health care apartheid. Even the top leaders of the communist party had access to this higher level of health care.

### **3.3 Poverty in Cuba**

Before the crisis during the 1990s the Gini coefficient (0.22-0.25) showed that Cuba measured up as one of the most equal societies in the region, and according to Ferriol Muruage (2004) poverty as a phenomenon was obliterated by the measurements taken by the state after the revolution. But it came back to the country because of the crisis during the 1990s. Furthermore Ferriol Muruage (2004) claims that it was not until within the 1990s that some people out of the population had insufficient salaries. Even though they would have an insufficient salary they all are included within the social security providing the basic necessities such as education, health-care and social assistance.

Instead of talking about poverty and poor people the official concept is now population at risk (Ferriol Muruage 2004). One considers that these persons are those of the population that for some reason cannot satisfy their daily and basic nutrition needs with their salary. But they can use all the benefits from the government's social programmes and therefore they are not considered poor (Ferriol Muruage 2004). During the instable economical years in the beginning of the 1990s the population at risk more than doubled (Ferriol Muruage 2004).

To calculate the proportion of the population living at risk of poverty a special measurement was used, according to Ferriol Muruage (2004). It was decided to use the method of evaluating income levels, adapting it to the characteristics of Cuban society with the following main aspects taken into consideration:

1. The existence of segmented markets, with different levels of prices and access.
2. The legal circulation of two currencies in the country and the presence of families' monetary incomes in both currencies.
3. The functioning of two exchange rates: one official and one non-official rate, none of which reflects the purchasing power of the local currency in the entire market for consumer goods and services.
4. The presence of an informal market of products, services and currency with a certain importance.

Infant mortality lays at 5,3 deaths per 1000 births, this is a lower figure than in any other Latin American country and life expectancy is 78 years (Kirby 2003). The age growing population is the most significant demographic change in the Cuban population (Ferriol Muruage 2004).

If looking at the poverty spread over the whole country the poverty rates are higher in the

eastern part of the country compared to the national average. The unemployment is also higher there and the general living standard is lower than in other parts of the country (Cabezas 2009). In the less favourable eastern part of the country around 22 % of the population had difficulties satisfying their basic needs, and there has been an increase of people living at risk of poverty in Havana. In 1999 it was estimated that 20 % of the population lived at risk of poverty (Ferriol Muruage 2004).

Many people tend to move to Havana with hope to earn CUC but interior migration is now prohibited and those who are caught are sent back from where they came if they do not have papers showing legal stay in Havana. People moving to Havana cannot take part of the ration book there since they are there illegally (Cabezas 2009). Even if the percentage of the population in poverty has increased it is still to be considered low by LA standards (Kirby 2003).

Unemployment is a great factor to living in risk. Those who have a salary in families at risk are low-income workers (Ferriol Muruage 2004). The differences between lowest and highest salary was 4,5 times during the 1980's and during that time the state was the largest employer with 95 % of the workforce. Cuba was a society of minimum consumption since it was based on the idea that the states provide the basic necessities for the inhabitants. Goods one could buy with an income were not of big importance (Ferriol Muruage 2004).

Racism still exists in Cuba even though much effort has been done to try to "lower" it. The Afro-Cubans is a disadvantaged group and they were affected worse than the white population during the crisis (Sweig 2009).

To end this part concerning poverty in Cuba information from some statistics and an overview of the ration book are seen below.

**Table 1:** *Statistics about Cuba from year 2007* (Human Development Report 2009)

<b>Human and income poverty</b>	
	<b>Cuba</b>
Human poverty index Rank/Value (%)	17/4,6
Probability of not surviving to age 40 (% of cohort) 2005-2010	2,6
Adult illiteracy (% aged 15 and above) 1999-2007	0,2
Population not using an improved water source (%) 2006	9
Children under weight for age (% aged under 5) 2000-2006	4

**Table 2:** *The ration in Cuba per month per person (Sydsvenska Dagbladet 2010)*

White rice	1 bag à 460 g	0,90 pesos
Brown rice	1 bag à 460 g	0,25 pesos
White sugar	1 bag à 460 g	0,15 pesos
Brown sugar	1 bag à 460 g	0,10 pesos
Yellow beans	1 bag à 460 g	0,10 pesos
Coffee	1 package à 116 g	5,00 pesos
Cooking oil	1 bottle à 460 g	0,10 pesos
Soap	1	0,25 pesos
Industrial soap	1	0,25 pesos
Spaghetti	400 g	0,80 pesos
Matches	1 package	0,20 pesos

The following groceries are as well included in the ration (Sydsvenska Dagbladet 2010):

In the bakery (every day): One bread per person

In the meat market (every month): 10 eggs, ¼ chicken and a package of minced meat or sausage when they have.

According to Sydsvenska Dagbladet (2010) 25 Cuban pesos are equal to 1 CUC and the minimum wage in Cuba is 250 Cuban pesos (10 CUC). During our time in Cuba 1 CUC was equal to 1 USD.

### **3.3.1 Poverty in Latin America**

In Latin America approximately 200 million people live in poverty (Adams 2009). In total there live 569 million people. Throughout the continent famine is not common (Adams 2009) even though figures tell that almost 40 % of the rural households live in extreme poverty (Kay 2005). 120 million people lack access to clean drinking water and 60 million people suffer from malnutrition. This is a common factor due to poverty. Due to the malnutrition ten per cent of the children in the region suffer from underweight and 100 million do not have the supplies to meet their minimal caloric requirements on a daily basis. Bad nutrition means bad health and one can clearly see this connection in Latin America (Kay 2005).

The health insurance system is poorly developed in the region and if one needs health care this has to be paid from one's own pocket and the private clinics are expensive. The poor community turns to the public clinics where the sanitary conditions are bad (Adams 2009). The gaps are huge and tens of millions of people do not have access to hospital care etc. (Adams 2009).

In Latin America the inequalities are more pronounced than in any other region of the



world. One can see this more clearly by the following numbers: Ten per cent of the top receives 40 % of the total income and the poorest 20 % of the population receives only about three per cent of the income according to Adams (2009). This shows a big gap between high-income and low-income. There is clearly an unequal distribution of the wealth throughout the continent. There are many factors that contribute to this inequality of life. And also many factors increasing the probability of being poor like for example to live in a larger household, with a younger or female head; having less education; and living in a household in which both the household head and the spouse are unemployed (Fay 2005). Rural poverty is always more severe than urban poverty. This because poor people often have more opportunities to earn cash in urban areas. The social service is also more accessible at least in theory. Still the poor in urban areas suffer from insufficient social services (Fay 2005).

According to (Adams 2009) the average living standard is low in Latin America and this pattern continues even if there has been some progress. Ballard (2005) even claims that many Latin Americans would choose to live in authoritarian regimes if that ensured them a better income and job opportunities. The governments in the different countries have not been able to come to an end with this problem because of for example unwillingness and corruption. There have not been many governments that have made an effort to promote and stake social progress. The poor community has instead been ignored (Adams 2009). A very big percentage of the “Latin Americans believe that their countries are ”governed for the benefit of a few powerful interests” and not for the ”good of everyone” ” (Ballard 2005:63).

The socioeconomic conditions for the poor community have not been improved and still today there is a lot that could be improved. The class structure is strongly rooted in the society. Since a big part of the poor community works within the informal sector, they do not get the chance to take part of the regular wages, social benefits and job security (Adams 2009). What contributes to the fact that poor people often get these informal jobs are insufficient skills, difficulties to get to work (example no child care or transport) and as well the social issues connected to being poor (example the area where they live) (Fay 2005).

In every discussion about poverty in Latin America it is important to bring up the historical factors. Latin America has been exploited for a long period and this has contributed to the economical situation of today. Economical supplies marked for the public sector have not seen the light due to corruption. And economical supplies that could help the social progress have instead been used to pay off the foreign debt (Adams 2009).

### **3.3.2 A general comparison: Poverty in Latin America in relation to Cuba**

To take in consideration the previous parts it is clear that poverty is different in Cuba compared to the Latin American context. But there are also some similarities, as for example the big informal sector according to money income. This sector exists in Cuba as well but has to be seen in a different manner compared to Latin America. Because in Latin America the informal sector are related to people with worse living conditions because of less social security while they are trying to earn some extra income. In Cuba the informal sector has a more positive touch and are connected to people whom have income from remittances and also from illegal ways (as informal taxi drivers for tourist for example). So this is to keep in mind that the informal sector in Cuba are different comparing to Latin America, just because

the non existing relation to vulnerable groups, and it's relation to raise the living standard for the people.

Also the extreme gap between the social classes is lower in Cuba as we can see by the mentioned Gini coefficient in the previous chapter. This means that the gap between the rich and poor is less visible, and further better health care is not so closely related to the need to have money. Although to take in consideration the tighter resources and the effect the crisis had. Even though the new problem related to the Special Period Cuba is facing, they can still provide free healthcare to all citizens.

In Cuba there has been a greater insert in the different areas as education, health and universal politics than in the rest of the region. There is a notable difference between Cuba and Latin America, as you can tell from the table below.

**Table 3:** *Comparative development statistics between Cuba & Latin America* (Human Development Report 2009)

<b>Human Development Index 2007 and its components</b>	<b>Cuba</b>	<b>Latin America</b>
Development Index Value	0.863	0,82
Life expectancy at birth	78,5	73,4
Adult literacy rate (% aged 15 and above)	99,8	91,2
Combined gross enrolment ratio in education (%)	100,8	83,4
GDP per capita (PPP US\$) GDP index	6,88	10,08
Life expectancy index	0,98	0,81
Education index	0,99	0,89
GDP index	0,71	0,77

### **3.4 Social Policy in Cuba**

In Cuba the state "is exclusively responsible for developing, implementing and financing all aspects of social service delivery" (Erikson et al. 2002:4). This means that there are no private service options "there are no fee-for-service arrangements allowed in the system" (Erikson et al. 2002:4). The Cuban revolution brought with it different social programs which were established to try to come to an end with the unequal living standards for the people in the country. The government introduced, in 1963, law No 1100. This law "set up the first complete social security system in Cuba based on principles of solidarity, universality, comprehensiveness and integrity" (Ramos 2004:192). With universality one mean that the social security entails 100 % coverage, with solidarity one mean "this principle of solidarity between generations means that active workers finance the pensions of previous generations.

Solidarity within the same generation suggests that those workers with distinct salaries guarantee a high level of protection for those with low salaries” (Ramos 2004:192), with comprehensiveness one means that the coverage is all embracing for the workers. It protects them if there would be an accident, illness, pregnancy etc., and finally with integrity one means ”that the amount of a pension is proportional to the labour of a worker, quantified by the time worked and the level of salary earned” (Ramos 2004:192). In 1980 the government expanded this law (social security law no 24) with the intention to even more protect the workers and families by including those who are unable to meet essential needs (Ramos 2004).

The social programmes were directed towards the poor community and were part of a social justice agenda that was set up. To finance the revolutionary socioeconomically changes all private owned businesses were nationalised, this was made to try to benefit all the population instead of a few rich ones. This led to many changes of the everyday life for the Cubans; reduced rents, electricity and other utilities were made cheaper due to nationalization. The changes were not only on paper (Sweig 2009). Castro thought the time had come to make sure that all citizens would live ”with a degree of material and social dignity” (Sweig 2009:50). To make sure there was housing for all citizens the construction of housing took off, both in rural and urban areas. It was not the best quality constructions but in fact two-third of all rural housing was built after the revolution (Kirby 2003).

The famous social programmes contributed to real changes for the people. There were literacy campaigns, universal education (with guaranteed schooling through out 9th grade) and health care for everyone (Sweig 2009). The Cuban government has shown a capacity for organising the population in different community campaigns ”in order to achieve its social objectives” (Erikson et al. 2002:5). Community work and volunteer participation is of an important role within the Cuban society for carrying out the social services provided by the state (Erikson et al. 2002).

As result of the huge investment in health care the life expectancy rose and the infant mortality declined. A significant part of the national budget was used for the health care. Cuba spends about 43 % of the national budget on health care (Kirby 2003).

To make sure the Cubans had a possibility to stay healthy the ration book was introduced. That was a rationing system so that all Cubans had access to food supply. One could access the supplies in state distribution centres (Sweig 2009).

To make sure people had a salary to live on the government made full employment possible. Sweig (2009) states that even if that was a fact that did not mean that it was a productive employment.

Cuba was during the Special Period a society in transition. Something had to be changed so to make the lives dreadful again for the Cuban population. The government allowed some changes; improved investment climate, foreign joint ventures to legally own property (even though the state still had to own a majority share) and introduced the possibility to self-employment within about 200 different categories (Sweig 2009), those were made in an attempt to easier meet the new economical situation. Cabezas (2009) states that the reforms were quite similar to the neoliberal economic reforms made by the IMF but that they were made with consideration on the Cuban social welfare. Kirkby (2003:137) writes that these economical changes ”eroded the fundamental values on which the state's legitimacy had

rested, such as equality, and the ability of the revolution to provide first-class social services”.

Even though there was a decrease the health care during the Special Period it still remains on a high level. To mention an example: ”Cuba's records on immunizations for children and maternal health are among the best in the under developing world and are virtually on par with (and sometimes superior to) many countries within the developed world” (Sweig 2009:146). And it can be worth to mention that the President of the World Bank, James Wolfensohn stated by the end of the 1990s that ”Cuba’s social welfare indicators were better than those of the World Bank's own client states” (Cabezas 2009:83).

There have been introduced many social assistance programmes directed towards vulnerable groups of the population such as senior citizens (a growing group), single mothers, socially disadvantaged children and disabled (Ferriol 2004). In absolute terms, senior citizen pensioners continue to represent the highest number of all recipients of social security benefits. They represent 55 % of all beneficiaries in 2002, and the average pension that very same year was 108 Cuban pesos.

Even though changes were made during the hard years of the 90s the original principle of universality was maintained with the goal to cover all the population. The main changes were made so to start offering personalized attention. There were as well organizational changes to try to make the system more efficient, by for example decentralize the different services (Ferriol 2004). But the system is still top conducted with little possibility for the citizens to influence the processes (Erikson et al. 2002). According to Ramos (2004:197) in 2002 “the social security and social assistance system was protecting 1,616,101 people, representing 14.5 % of the total population.”

### **3.4.1 Social Policy in Latin America**

According to Midgley (2009) the Latin American countries, after Europe, were among the first ones to develop social insurance. Despite these early introductions to social policy the social security programmes remain poorly developed and are mostly directed to the urban population. It is a fact that these programs are poorly funded, have inefficient administration, an uneven and as well inadequate coverage. Corruption is as well a problem that is hard to come to an end with. Due to these different factors the social programmes set out for helping people have not reached those who have needed them the most. The inefficiency has been a fact (Midgley 2009). There has been said that the social security was introduced in the region because of demands from organized groups and not because of the will to address the poverty problems (Midgley 2009). One can mention that the first commercially managed retirement savings accounts were introduced by General Pinochet's military regime in Chile 1981. These accounts were quite big in Latin America since it was said that they would be better than public saving accounts. There has been little evidence for this. In fact they have not a bigger coverage and low-income employees have a hard time to accumulate adequate retirement funding from their salaries (Midgley 2009). As an effect of this some governments have been more or less forced to actually introduce a minimum pension and as well make available social assistance for those ”disadvantaged by the privatization” (Midgley 2009:30).

But some positive things can actually be said about social policy in the region. Latin American countries have had a leading role in promoting social assistance conditional cash

transfers. It is as mentioned conditional which means that to take part of the programs the families need to pass certain demands such as school attendance by the children and other conditions. These programmes have been quite successful and made it possible for some poor families to increase their incomes since they are intended for poor families with children (Midgley 2009). In general these programmes have been shown to reduce poverty and as well being good for human capital and social development. But it is a fact that it is difficult to reach poor families in rural areas and as well difficult for them to fulfil the promise of school attendance. Some benefits have instead reached families not in need of them, this because of corruption. In some countries there has also been an investment in social assistance as a help for elderly in economical difficult situations who might not have enough savings or might not be fully covered by social insurance. Brazil is an example where social assistance has been a tool to reach needy groups particularly in rural areas (Midgley 2009).

More improvements to mention are for example the educational system in the Latin America. Two good examples are the literacy rate that is now at 86 % and the average schooling is 7 years. But despite these high-lights the school system still has its weaknesses. 40 % of the pupils do not complete secondary school (Fay 2005). It can also be mentioned that the average life expectancy has increased and is now 73 years (Adams 2009).

### **3.4.2 A general comparison: Social Policy in Latin America in relation to Cuba**

From the previous information some conclusions can be drawn in the differences concerning social policy between Cuba and the continent Latin America. The normal feature from the continent Latin America is that the wealthy population has access to good health care, good educational options and good living standards. All this while the poor community in Latin America can see itself enclosed from these options. This is the big notable difference between Latin America and Cuba.

In Cuba there exists a wide universal politics that gives the population no matter the income/situation access to education, health and food. This feature is what differ Cuba from many other Latin American countries. The exclusion of the poor population from the rest of the society and high income gaps between the inhabitants are also features that separate Cuba from the other Latin American countries. If you are wealthy you are able to pay for different social services with good quality in Latin America. This means that there is a connection between money and access to social security in Latin America. As for example access to good healthcare does generally only the wealthy population takes part of.

One can here see the contrary to Cuba where everyone are included in the system and have rights to the basic need already from birth. There it is not a question about money. But there were changes during the crisis in the 1990s towards a less equal system. There has been a publication saying that in comparison to Latin America the access and quality was still notable high during the crisis (Erikson et al. 2002).

The mayor difference between Cuba and Latin America is the success Cuba shows concerning the insert of universal politics directed for the people in the strongest need. This has led to that the Cuban society has been able to avoid the exclusion that is common in other Latin American countries. An exclusion that is created from the existing shortages of universal social politics in Latin America. A reason for this shortage is the strong feature of

corruption within the political system in Latin America. As a result social politics in many Latin American countries sometimes tend to forget to act in the best interest for the population and instead leave behind the poor and the ones in the strongest need. The educational system in Cuba is free of charge and it is compulsory for children to go to school. There are conspicuous notes about that the illiteracy rate in Cuba is much lower than in the rest of Latin America. It is possible to notice a bigger insert to the higher education as university studies in Cuba in comparisons to Latin America.

The Cuban government spends today about 43 % of the national budget on education, health and social security (Sweig 2009). The result of this is clear; according to the 2002 World Development Indicators both Latin America and the Caribbean are outranked by Cuba when it comes to education, health and sanitation. There are seen attempts in the social politics in some Latin American countries to invest in different poverty reduction strategies as for example education. Although there is still a notable difference between Latin America and Cuba as we have informed by the table in the previous part.

### **3.5 Social work in Cuba**

Today there is a big change in the context of social work. It starts to be more connected with a profession with an academic education and jobs with salaries. The overall picture of social work has left the image of being volunteer work to instead become a qualified profession. This change is mentioned by Muños and Barroso (Månsson & Proveyer 2005), as something that also has reached Cuba. They mean that the background of social work is similar in Cuba as in any other part of the world.

During the 1930s there did exist the slogan “creating a school for social services” founded by the Social Service Council in 1938. This was an initiative of Lyceum Society, a charity and cultural association. Related to the constitution 40 there was for the first time focus put towards the states’ responsibility for social security and services. Support from the University of Havana made it possible to open the school of social service 5th of May in 1943. This school closed in 1956 as a result of the political climate in the country. The school re-opened after the revolution in 1959, but then only to the students that were continuing their studies (Månsson & Proveyer 2005)

From a history perspective the main organizations that took social work into consideration after the revolution were the Federation of Cuban women and the ministry of Public services. In the university reform that occurred in 1962 the priority was attached to technical degree courses, which were expected to generate results within the socio-economic development in the country. The focus did still not point towards the profession of social work. The organizations and different work within the social work area were continuing to be volunteering, but still they had an important role in the country, which was to carry out the existing social policies (Månsson & Proveyer 2005).

In 1971 the Ministry of Public health got the task to recreate a school for systematic social work education and the first school was opened in Camaguey (Månsson & Proveyer 2005).

It was during the 1990s social work made strategies and outlined training. In the end of the 1990s by the initiative of Castro the process of social work was going to be continued. The Cuban state made cooperation with the university through the youth organization, and

they created together several social programs for young people (Månsson & Proveyer 2005).

One step on the “professionalization of social work” was made in 1992 during the workshop that they called “Professional Identity of the Social worker” (Månsson & Proveyer 2005:67), this by other things led to a reopening of university studies, and year 1998-99 there was created a course of degree in sociologic aimed at social work. As we already have mentioned is the heightened focus on social work a result from the crisis and led to the new developments in the social work profession.

In Cuba the social worker is working directed to men and women in their daily living conditions. The task is to meet the needs both on an individual level as on a group level. The needs can be both primary and secondary. With secondary meaning connected to problems in the more private sphere (Månsson & Proveyer 2005).

An important thing to understand with the social work is that they should not only deal with social problems of today, but they should also try to prevent and solve future problems (Månsson & Proveyer 2005).

Muñoz and Barroso (Månsson & Proveyer 2005) are mentioning a few problems related to the development of social work in Cuba. There are still many questions to be answered, for example they mention the need of clarification related to the development of the profession of social work in Cuba. They think the professionalization of social work in Cuba was undergoing a process of consolidation (Månsson & Proveyer 2005).

## **4. Method**

### **4.1 Research methodology and interview guide**

We chose a qualitative method for our investigation. This is because we did not see any reason to work on the basis of a quantitative method. A quantitative method is based on figures, tables etc. while a qualitative method is based on interviews and supplementary literature and also observations. We found that doing a qualitative study would better bring out what we were looking for in the investigation. Interviews would give us a more profound picture of the subjects and a better understanding of the perspective of Cuban experts.

We started off with a very wide concentration mostly aware of that we wanted to highlight the areas poverty, disadvantaged groups and social politics in Cuba. We were not sure of what we specifically wanted to investigate from the beginning. We have therefore not worked from a deductive perspective since that means that the investigator has a clear idea of what to investigate from the start (Larsson 2005).

However we consider that we have neither worked inductive which means that the investigator starts the study without any predetermined hypothesis and perspectives (Larsson 2005). We were from the beginning interested in illustrating poverty, disadvantaged groups and social politics. We had thoughts about carrying out a study within our study fields and to focus only on the official perspective in the country through the planned interviews. We have had an abductive perspective which means that we only to a certain point have followed predetermined perspectives and concentrations but have at the same time been open to new approaches (Larsson 2005). Therefore have our study’s focus and perspective been growing during the time of study. This development concerning the chosen focus arises from

our trip to Cuba where we achieved greater knowledge about the Cuban conditions and therefore could make more interesting and more relevant choices on what to put the focus on in our study related to our study fields.

Our interviews were structured; we used a fixed interview guide with questions. We divided the questions into three themes: poverty, disadvantaged groups and social politics, with the intention to work through them one by one. For us it would be easier to follow an interview guide since we conducted the interviewees in Spanish. Structured interviews following the guideline made the language limitations fewer. The interviews were nevertheless open, referring to the fact that the interviewees felt comfortable to present their knowledge and thoughts openly. Some of the interviewees talked freely on the basis of the themes and questions. They did not fully follow the guideline in order but talked about all the themes anyway.

Our interview guide was made based on our first draft. We made this draft ourselves first in English and then we made a translation into Spanish when we knew that the interviews would be done in Spanish. The draft was given to our Cuban contacts that checked it and made some changes both concerning the language and the content. We considered it important to be culturally sensitive. We thought it would be a good idea with a check since they had a better insight into the culture and therefore knew how to better formulate questions in order to get as much relevant information as possible. We decided to keep their proposal when we felt that it was much better formulated and that it would help to give us a better and more profound knowledge about the Cuban society.

We chose to start the interview guideline with the theme poverty when we felt that this was the best way to open up the talk with a subject that is broad and wide. After that theme we decided to focus more and more on the country itself. Since we felt that poverty in many aspects is connected to disadvantaged groups we saw it as a good corollary to choose this subject as theme number two. The last theme, number three, was social policies. We motivated this choice with the explanation that, within theme number one and two, we had talked about the problem. Now we felt the need to continue a discussion of the solutions and here we had theme number three, social policy.

## **4.2 Data collection**

We were both in Cuba a few weeks before we started to conduct interviews. This was because of needed time for preparations and to stable the different interview contacts.

It took a bit longer than we thought to start with the interviews but we consider that as something positive. That extra time gave us the possibility to get an insight into the Cuban society and daily life. Our hope during this time was to integrate with Cuban people and culture, and we tried to be open-minded. It seems like Cubans are very friendly and after only two weeks we had experienced salsa, Malecón (the sea walk in Habana), domino, private home parties and Santería ceremonies (a common religion in Cuba). Our new social network gladly showed us good and bad parts of the Cuban daily life. We felt more prepared because of this background when it finally was time to start conduct the interviews.

Our interviews were held in different locations. We conducted most of the interviews at the Department of sociology at the University of Havana. We had access to a small classroom



that often was crowded by other people at the very same time we were conducting the interviews. Noises from the street could also be heard. Some interviews were held on the respondents working places. This meant very different locals and situations. We sat one time on a terrace next to a road with traffic noise. We sat also twice in rooms with privacy but were still often interrupted by other persons.

The circumstances during the interviews were probably affecting us more than the respondents, since we are used to more organisations and as well silence during formal meetings. We got the impression that they were not themselves of the same tradition.

The time of the interviews did vary. They could last from 40 minutes to 3 hours. The longest interview was actually split into two meetings.

We were allowed to record all the interviews. We asked for permission before the interview and the recorder was visible during the interviews. One respondent was notably uncomfortable because of the recorder, but did yet allow us to use it.

All the interviews were held in Spanish, though we had support from one native speaking Spanish person during each interview except for one. All of the responders were prepared for the different subjects the interviews were going to treat. The main part had not seen the questions before the interview but we printed out one copy for them and one for us. They could therefore read the questions, which made it easier for them if they had difficulties with our Spanish accent.

Some of the interviews were easier to conduct than others like when a responder followed the questions one by one than when they had a more narrative way that is they included the information of all questions and subjects in a mix meanwhile they were talking.

We made the decision not to change the interview guide between the different interviews. Even if it did contain many questions and as well “double questions”, it helped us to smoothly open up the dialogue and gave us more relevant information on the subjects.

We collected our data from firstly interviews, secondly supplementary literature and documents and thirdly observations. The interviews were made with persons who had relevant education and experience to be able to give us interesting data. We include books, documents and essays within literature. The observations are our own personal ones made when being in Cuba and also some related to our knowledge and experience made in other Latin American countries.

### **4.3 Interviews with professionals**

We used purposive sampling since our purpose with the survey was to investigate how people with a professional background related to some area of our purpose perceive our survey subjects. Therefore it was important for us to get in contact with people matching that description. Our Cuban contacts gave us our interview contacts. A contact in Costa Rica also gave us one of the contacts.

It is important to point out here that we have not gotten the perception from the everyday Cuban citizen. It is the official perception of poverty that has been the focus. It is important to keep in mind that these kinds of studies are tricky because there are always two sides of the coin. We are here referring to the possibility that even if it is an official opinion, more than one opinion can exist. These opinions may differ and there may be opinions that are

sometimes unreachable.

In total we conducted seven interviews. Four of the interviewees were related to the University of Havana through their work at the Department of Sociology. They were professors, graduates etc. A fifth interviewee was a psychologist working actively in the field of poverty research. Another respondent made some studies cooperating with CLASCO. One interviewee differed a bit from the others since she had a stronger connection to practical work. We have used all these interviews in our results.

### **4.3.1 Transcribing**

We first started to transcribe the interviews by ourselves, but realized after a time that we would need help from native Spanish-speaking people, because of the fact that we were not able to catch all the words and expressions. This happened partly because of noise in the background and as well because of our language limitation. Therefore, we asked for help from people we knew as they spoke Spanish as their native language. We translated all interviews after finishing the transcriptions and then began to analyze the material.

## **4.4 Comprehensive literature**

To begin, we researched about the country including food, culture, history and politics. We read a book about social work in Cuba and in Sweden made partly by our supervisor Peter Dellgran in cooperation with Cuba in 2004. This gave a good insight in different areas such as disadvantaged groups and social policy connected to social work.

Sometimes we found it difficult to find relevant literature that only treated Cuba in our subjects. The literature that we found specific to treating Cuba was, in many cases, outdated. Sometimes the material was from the 1960s, before the crisis, or during the crisis in the 1990s. Also, the subjects we had chosen led to many studies and books about Latin America as a continent. This was problematic because Cuba was not the main focus in those books, and at times was not even mentioned. This is probably, as we understand it, because Cuba does not characterize the general poverty in the Latin American continent.

Another difficulty was to find neutral literature. In our Internet search there was massive material which was biased of different opinions, sometimes with the focus of the politic system in Cuba. Finally, on location in Cuba, we received some advice and we were able to read relevant literature made in the present time. All relevant information from the literature is presented in our chapters "Poverty" and "Development in Cuba". That is information which improves the understanding of our thesis and that we as well have used in our drawn conclusions.

## **4.5 Analysis and interpretation of data**

### **4.5.1 Analysis**

When we had all the transcribed interviews written out, we read them through several times, and then highlighted the most relevant information and comments related to our subjects and

our purpose of study. We double-checked the information and our understanding of the context discussing it and the comments with a native Spanish-speaking person. Our aim was to secure the validity in our presented words in our result part. When the results were written we let a native English-speaking person go through the material, to prevent a misunderstanding related to the English text.

#### **4.5.2. Limitations, reliability, validity and generalization**

We were prepared that we would come across some limitations, as this was the first time for both of us in Cuba. With less than two months in the country, there was insufficient time to get to know the society completely. Though we were prepared for such limitations, they proved to be more difficult than anticipated. We had expected that many of the interviews would be held in English and we were placed at somewhat of a disadvantage when they had to be conducted in Spanish. Both of us have enough knowledge in Spanish to make an interview with a fixed outline. But we felt that it was difficult to move outside this framework. We therefore did not work as much with resulting questions as we would have done if we had possessed a greater command of the language. However, we tried to clarify some of the interviewed material during the interviews partly to confirm that we actually had understood correctly and also partly for the interviewees to confirm what they had said.

We did not have the opportunity to find people ourselves for the interviews and had to rely on our Cuban contacts to select our sample. We regard this as another limitation worth mentioning.

We have tried to reflect on our western approach that is, to our way of thinking and to our understanding of what is going on in the society around us. For example, this affects our way of seeing the Cuban society, how to write interview questions, and how to understand the Cuban way of thinking.

Another limitation we considered is that our only interviewees were professionals and experts. The result could have looked different if we had conducted real interviews with others, such as the average Cuban or higher or lower officials.

Since the Cuban “ideology” has such a strong foothold within the society and characterizes everything going on in the country we realized that we had to be vigilant that there could be an ideological aspect influencing the interviews. That made it somewhat hard to know if what the interviewees said was reality or if it was the ideology speaking.

One should also keep in mind the aspect of what the respondents felt they could discuss and bring into light since it was a formal meeting, that it was recorded, and that the respondents we had were employed under the government or under official circumstances, for example through the University. This could affect the attitudes and opinions in a certain direction. For instance an image could exist which they could not destroy or defect by speaking completely outside the “rules” and outside underlying contextual values concerning that organization. Especially, with this kind of invisible image, we are referring to official organizations, which have some kind of reputation by which rules of behavior/education and opinions function to maintain it. This is nothing specific for Cuba because it is a fact in many other countries and situations. Expression of some opinions is limited because of the image of the organization to which you belong.

Reliability measures to what extent research give the same results when being repeated once again or multiple times. This measures, therefore, the precision of the study (Bloor 2006). What can be tricky is our own observations and experience. This is difficult to count as reliable in the context of a research study, when it can be easy to question its objectivity. We consider that our observation can be counted as relatively reliable, although we were aware of our pre-comprehension and all the time reflected around this. The reliability in our study was augmented because we could relate all received data material (interviews, literature and observation) to our conclusions.

So to the background of the previous mentioned limitations we think that our thesis has relative reliability.

Validity measures to what extent research gives "an accurate version of the world" (Bloor 2006):147). Therefore, this measures the degree of reality a certain study shows (Bloor 2006). We think that our study shows the reality in Cuba. We have used different sources of information, that have been used in our conclusions and we have been able to relate it to previous data. All these components together make us believe that the study has a high degree of accuracy, which increases both reliability and validity.

Generalization measures to what extent the research is possible to apply on "a wider population" (Bloor 2006:93). Therefore, this measures if the results of a study can be used more generally than just for that certain study (Bloor 2006). It can be difficult to say whether our study can be considered to measure generalization, in terms of how other researchers would have described the collected data.

## 4.6 Ethical issues

Specific ethical directions to take into consideration concerning research in social science are to find. We found some stated ethical guidelines, which are emphasized by different professional science organizations<sup>24</sup>.

Some of the ethical guidelines they mention are: The importance for a research related to social science to never damage the chosen subject, the informant should never feel distressed, and to write the truth and not lies, that the participants in the study should be voluntary, and to ensure the participants their disclosed identity. With other words anonymity and confidentiality have to be remained during the research and as well in the finished results.

All those parts have been fulfilled and taking into consideration during our study. We have been collecting the data without being in conflict with the interviewees' integrity during the conducted interviews. There are also some ethical obligations regarding a research treating human subjects. Some of those obligations are filled out by Kvale (1997) as following; *Informed consent*: We fulfilled this by informing each respondent of the conditions of the study as well what subjects the study was going to treat. We did this through an informational e-mail and as well through our Cuban supervisors. And the respondents gave us their consent. *Confidentiality/anonymity*: We did guarantee to not mention anyone by name. We also decided to take it one step further by not relate to which respondent said what in our presented results, because of the risk of recognition, and therefore secure their anonymity the best way.

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<sup>24</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ethical\\_research\\_in\\_social\\_science](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ethical_research_in_social_science)

## **5. RESULT: poverty, disadvantaged groups and social politics; through the eyes of Cuban experts**

### **5.1 Poverty in Cuba**

Any concern that poverty was a sensitive subject did not seem to be apparent during the interviews. Six of the seven respondents considered that it existed in Cuba, and all of them had many opinions and reflections concerning the subject. Here below we will point out the most important results.

#### **5.1.1 Characteristics of poverty**

The existence of poverty in Cuba did not seem to be difficult to recognize for most of the respondents. Many times related to the subject they mentioned that the characteristic of poverty in Cuba was special. They meant that poverty had to be understood in its context and the development in the society. Many were referring and informing about the big changes and social transformations, which had been carried out after the revolution. As a comment to explain why poverty in Cuba is a bit special was the following: *“There are rights established in our constitution of the republic. Everything to be human is to be born with social rights that are established in the constitution. Right to health care, education, family, a series of rights that the Cuban has. And there is the social security; it is established in the constitution”*. They meant that even the poor people in Cuba had access to basic needs such as education, health and social services because that was a right they were born with.

Another characteristic of why poverty in Cuba is special is the relation to the income, not the fact that the persons who suffer from insufficient income are poor, more that the characteristics of those persons can differ much. For example one told us: *“And then, or to say it is a subject about resources, the money is very complicated here in Cuba. I am a professional and I can be more poor economically than someone that stays in the house and rents out rooms, that’s why I say it is very complicated”*.

We have said that many of the respondents often relate to the big improvements which had been seen since the revolution, some of them also added deeper reflection such as; *“I think that Cuba is a poor country, but they have done very profound social transformations. They eliminated illiteracy, and made transformations in education, health and sports. Those transformations are only idealistic, and they do not alone eliminate the circumstances that make a society homogeneous. There are always different social groups and not everyone reaches equal conditions”*.

Another character of the poverty in Cuba was made by one respondent who connected it with underdevelopment. The words used were: *“Firstly I think poverty exists in Cuba because Cuba is an underdeveloped country and therefore the structure is underdeveloped and this determinates Cuba”*. This responder also remarked that the kind of poverty that mainly exists in Cuba was the material poverty by saying: *“I say that Cuba in what has been permanent is the material poverty, there is a permanent poverty because it has to be seen of what I have told you, there is an underdeveloped economic structure which forms a lot of shortages in many important material”*.

We also became informed that the characteristic of the poverty in the country was different depending on the province. One of the responders was explaining that Cuba is divided into 15 provinces but pointed out that in the poverty context and measurement between all of the provinces, they are not equal. Another responder followed the same opinion about the differences between the provinces and also added that one characteristic in Cuba was to move closer to Havana, because of the greater possibilities to make money: *“The less favourable provinces from the economical view they immigrate to the capital, they can’t directly immigrate but they are located around the capital. Well, I don’t want to say that the poverty is just concentrated in these areas”*.

The majority of the respondents during the interviews referred to both poor and vulnerable groups in the same context and for them the characteristic of poverty was many times seen in the disadvantaged groups, one said; *“Well in Cuba there exists a profile of poverty which are talking about what is the general subject to be part of the poverty, with more frequently they are poor, it is the elderly, big families, the single mothers, the persons who are working in the state sector, the persons which have a lower education, the black persons, then when they are a part of one or more of this variables, they are more vulnerable and poor and general each time you have one or two variables the risk are raising. By this those are the most important and the most characterized profiles we have here in Cuba”*.

### **5.1.2 Characteristics that make Cuba special, in a global context**

Some of the responders also remarked upon the big notable difference of the poverty in Cuba in comparison to the world. They considered that poverty in Cuba did not mean social exclusion as it meant in many other parts of the world. One responder said: *“At the world level there is not health, education has a very low level of schooling, and there is no access. Now with the differences and similarities that can be established in the definitions at a global level, what I could tell you in Cuba, with the information and the knowledge is precisely at a global level there is poverty for the big marginalization that exists within these excluded groups that don’t have access to education, don’t have access to health care, don’t have access to rights or to social rights, and this is what differs from the Cuban approach, these things in the world that you have to associate with poverty; here they don’t exist because these needs are covered”*.

This also got clarified in a similar way by another responder: *“I would say that a big difference with Cuba and other context is that the poverty in Cuba doesn’t lead to social exclusion like it does in other places, could be that there exist determinate politics, it’s in general for all the population, so instead of being excluded they try to integrate more in the society”*.

The same responder followed up with the reflection related to the health care, which existed in Cuba but not in Latin America, the different strategies in the healthcare, the high quantity of doctors, which existed in Cuba, in all neighbourhoods, places, and towns, which was not the case in Latin America.

And regarding to the basic need context another stated: *“In Cuba everyone eats, one or two times in the day, not four or five times, the subject is the amount and the quality, but in Latin America there are people who do not eat every day, in Cuba we like to eat much but the*

*problem is the income entrance”.*

This responder also made a reflection between differences in Cuba and other parts of the world, mainly referring to the capitalistic cities. A character for this respondent was the mixture in the neighbourhoods; *“Because the Cuban case is not so clear like other capitalistic cities there is a zone for the poor, a zone for the rich, a zone for the immigrant, in Havana is it very difficult to define areas like this, Havana is like if you are making a liquor, you put on the tap and you turned it up and down and you mix everything. It is very difficult to say that here are poor neighbourhoods, it’s very difficult, and here you find a big house and then a bad house”.*

Another comment from the same respondent made this clearer: *“It is more complicated because they don’t realize the local territorial variable in the place, it is not so clear defined as in other cities in Latin America or in Europe, this is the one for the black, this is the one for the Chinese, this is the zone for the Arabs, this is the zone for the rich, this is the zone for the medium class, this is the zone for the poor, here it is very complicated , there is a lot of mixture”.*

Also one responder reflected about the differences between Cuba and the world, through the perspective security. He said that in Latin America there were a lot of delinquencies and it was impossible to walk alone at night, but this was not the case in Cuba where the people were living with greater calmness.

### **5.1.3 Opinions and definitions**

All of the responders were accepting the existence of poverty in Cuba except for one. The responder who did not agree on this point had a definition of extreme poverty in the mind. Referring to that everyone had the basic needs satisfied in Cuba and therefore did not exist in poverty, she said: *“According to the few elements that I have about poverty, poverty exists when the basic needs aren’t covered. This means, I wouldn’t call it poverty, I would call it disadvantaged social or shortage of social needs, this like social disadvantage. I told you, here poverty doesn’t exist because they are covering the basic needs of health, education, the salaries etc. Because of this I consider that poverty doesn’t exist”.*

This respondent also said concerning the question about the disadvantaged groups in Cuba: *“Just that, that they are - vulnerable, that they are persons that are favourable to be presented in risk - like you say is vulnerable in any social situation, because of this they are, but they are not considered poor, just like vulnerable that can be presented in social disadvantage”.*

All responders did refer to that the basic needs were satisfied in Cuba related to the extreme poverty features, as starvation did not exist in Cuba. But after this the opinions and definitions about the poverty was pointed out, and then they related to poverty as something relative.

Many were of the same opinion that poverty in Cuba has to be considered a bit special. Generally they used terms like ‘disadvantaged groups’, ‘vulnerable groups’ and ‘population in risk’ in the poverty discussion.

The seven responders clarified that the varied definitions of poverty have a great impact on whether to classify people as poor.

They reflected that other components had to be considered as the lack of possibility to

satisfy needs, or have to consider a culture and social context in the definition. One of the responders defined poverty as a question about shortage in the resources as well as in the access to them: *“It is also a shortage of culture resources, families resources, shortages of many type of resources which some in the society can get a hold of and that the poor children don’t succeed to access to, they don’t get hold of it, they cannot have it even if it does exist, they cannot access”*.

Another responder explained his point of definition about poverty as:

*“The poverty is not only fiscal, it goes beyond the fiscal and like tangible thing you can touch it stands incorporated in the manner of living, the manner to see the world, the culture, but it always has a territorial expression, there exists a place in a neighbourhood, there exists a place in a city, there exists a place in a region, there exists a place in a country, more or less visible. It is to say the poverty is now not only an expression of material and territorial, geographic but a process in the culture and this requires an educational process”*.

One of the responders told us about the poverty and definitions in Cuba: *“I think that it is a thematic line in the case of Cuba, what is going on with the poverty like a expression of the territorial, for example in Cuba they say a neighbourhood is in salutory, it is very difficult in the concept of a poor neighbourhood. You will not hear in Cuba”I am poor, this is a poor neighbourhood”*. The concept of what people are using is neighbourhood precarious in the life, for example in salutory and also the subject about vulnerability and the concept of the groups. But it is a very interesting concept, the thematic lines of how to understand and how to conceptualize the problem in Cuba. There are some sociologists who are talking of assisted poverty, here the politicians are saying, in Cuba there is no one forgotten, there exists basic services because they have the rights even if you are poor or not, the education, the health and the culture doesn’t matter if you are poor or not, this is not the case in other countries, like it is called worthy poverty, assisted poverty”. After this statement he made the conclusion and said: *“I called it an assisted poverty or a worthy poverty how it is managed in Cuba”*.

Later the same responder defined another kind of poverty including components as in the social context as isolation, loneliness and lack of solidarity, his reflection is: *“And if you change the life conditions in a neighbourhood or the best neighbour he gets isolated in his house. To see much television and to know more about dinosaurs than about your own neighbour, many movies about animals or about Michael Jackson who died, than about your neighbour, that maybe is sick, this is poverty as well, this is not a problem about resources, I think this is how to understand the subject of poverty. Like solidarity in the neighbourhood. To transform the neighbourhoods we will still leave them to be poor because our life conditions are changing, also because our way to relate to each other is changing, or us say we will continue to be poor because we will be more isolated”*.

Many of the responders also defined the poverty as related to inequality. Then they thought about the increased inequality from the dollar industry.

So the overall picture we were given through the different interviews where that six of the seven respondents had a wide definition on poverty. And the definitions were including different components in addition to material and basic needs.



#### 5.1.4 Poverty measurements

After the interviews we have got some information of both former made studies and current measurements and studies in the social field. First of all many respondents referred to a qualitative calculation, which had been made in Havana, of the poverty in the urban population. A study made by the economical department. We were informed that this institute used the method with poverty lines, which was calculated related to the minimum needed income of the household to be able to satisfy the basic needs. The respondent informed us that to establish this poverty line, they used an international method, which is also widely used in Latin America. The respondent informed us that this method gives each certain society a level of comparison. Results had been found pointing to a number of 20 % of the urban populations as poor.

To talk about measurements, some of the respondents said that the subject of poverty was kind of new in the Cuban investigations. This was related to the past when the general opinion of the poverty's elimination in Cuba. This statement they informed us about was a result of a book named "The eradication of poverty in Cuba" which was published during the 80s. But the main part of the responders was critical of this statement. Some mentioned an investigation made by Espina Prieto that they referred to as proving that the poverty was not at all eliminated in this decade, it had just declined and there was less inequality. One formulated this by saying: *"To see there is a investigation in the top of the 80s which said that Cuba had eliminated the poverty from this it seems like the poverty started from the decade of the 90s with the crisis, but scientist approximations like Espina have confirmed that the poverty had not been eliminated in the 80s, it had declined, like the inequality, there was less inequality"*.

Another respondent who had done their own investigations about the poverty question was saying that in studies from the 1980s the minimum salary could cover the basic need quite well, but today according this respondent a empiric calculation of the 1990s gives a picture of a changed reality. The results showed that in the 1990s and still today the minimum salary does not cover the basic needs. The respondent pointed out that the ration book does cover the basic needs such as food, maybe for 15 days. One respondent was also telling us that the average income in Cuba is not the lowest in the international measurement but still the income is impossible to live on.

In Cuba there exist undernourished children and because of this there have been a study to find those children. They also said that after this study the state made a program trying to solve this problem.

Regarding to the subject of child poverty, two of the responders mentioned a newly done study that used a wider definition of poverty, this study they referred to as the first and only done with this kind of definition. The definition used in this study came from the organization UNICEF that defined poverty as a matter of shortage in resource not only economic and material, but as well cultural. Participation and access to the existing resources was also taken in consideration.

Many of the respondents thought that the economical perspective and measurement had the strongest influence today in Cuba. One respondent said about the existing perspective in the measurements; *"There are different ways for the entrance, the main way is the*

*economical, the economical view of poverty in the state, the National Institute with economical investigations”.*

Another respondent thought the economical and the sociologic perspective still was the most frequently used, but added also; *“In the end it seems for me to be the perspective which has acquired most relevance is the economic and the sociologic in Cuba, but anyway there exists an important investigation which also was made by the institution of the Anthropology which has to be seen as one of the neighbourhood studies and with the neighbourhoods of “cardboard and wood” also this investigation is anthropological and has been pretty relevant but anyway I think that the predomination has been the sociology and the economic”.*

Some shortages mentioned in the discussion of the poverty measurement in Cuba was the infantile poverty and measurements including both the individual and family’s aspects.

And one respondent said about the poverty discussion according to measurements and integration between the different disciplines; *“that the debate is in standby, - like it does not produce anything new, it is like it has stopped.”* and *”It can also be that in Cuba there have been isolated attempts. I feel that the subject has once again fallen back to the pot hole.”*

### **5.1.5 Money generated inequality**

During the interviews the subject of inequality was often brought up and then related to the two existing currencies in the country.

The respondents often related the two currencies as one of the main reason to the existing big inequality, referring this inequality that this money system created difficulties for the Cubans in their daily life. One said; *“Because the function of the two currencies of the country creates many difficulties for the function of the economy and for the persons solving the problems with the everyday life because there are many aspects that one has to solve about the currency”.*

And another problem with the two currencies is that many products are only accessible through CUC. One respondent compared the past with the current existing situation concerning the money system by the words: *“Before they also for example with children tried to guarantee toys and clothes, there was the ration book, which had coupons. In this way all children had access to toys which was not regulated of the income but now you need to have CUC for buying in a store”.*

Many of the respondents explained for us that the Cubans had developed different solutions to get hold of the CUC currency. One was the increased desire to work within the tourist sector. Some respondents said that it could be professionals such as teachers, doctors, and engineers, which worked in hotels for the tips, because this gave them a salary much higher than a national salary in Cuban pesos. Some of the other solutions to receive CUC were renting out rooms to foreigners or to receive remittances from a relative or friend living abroad. As well to act as Spanish teachers for foreign students was a solution to receive some extra CUC. The respondents often talked about the raised difficulties of satisfy the daily basic needs without access to CUC. One respondent took it one step further by the statement; *“that it was impossible to satisfy the basic needs of the daily life without any income of CUC”.*

### 5.1.6 Poverty and the crisis in the 1990s

When they talked about the crisis, there was no doubt that all of them were referring to the 1990s as a hard time. The resources declined, and some of them mentioned that the effects from this period are still visible in the Cuban society.

Some of the respondents reflected about the previous picture of welfare that Cuba had before the crisis. Then they reflected both to the better material resources, and to the lost focus relating to the image of the eliminated poverty; one said; *"The loss of interest to keep it as a subject, it is important that we thought that the poverty has disappeared and that we had enough capacity, we were fantastic, we the Cubans thought that we were good in everything, we were the best dancers in the world, we were the best musicians in the world, we were the best baseball players, that was the culture. And then we thought that the poverty was eliminated or that it could be eliminated, and because the effect of not putting it into light in the politics in the 90s made us see that it is not a phenomenon that can be disappearing fast, it is a deficit that we have and have to manage because the social sciences in Cuba in the investigations of the 80s the subject almost disappeared"*.

But as one respondent said, this came to light again during the crisis and because problems such as poverty and low material resources are connected to this period.

According to many of the responders there was a connection between the previous better situation when the incomes from the salaries were better incorporated in the reality and social context. The change about the salaries was also mentioned very clearly by another respondent: *"I don't want to create the idea that there were no problems during the 80s. But to compare one period with another is level of sharpness of the problems during the 80s, one must not see them with those of now, and during the 80s there was a major connection between the salary and the money access and there was a capacity between the social politics and the employment politics to permit that included in the salaries there was the minimum access of pesos that covered the basic needs. The 80s wasn't a perfect society but the level of the basic need better covered than now, it was a very very different society"*.

Another similar opinion also relating to the changed reality was the access to different products: *"What is going on is that the ration book of supplies which regulated the alimentations which provides a basic level, a very basic level which you should complement with the access of other products, which before the decade 90s were easy to access for them, the person could generally access those, but now it is only a worker, if you are intellectual or if you are a leader or if you are a military, everyone general is accessing to everything, but now the part to complement the ration book of supplies is depending on the income, and because of that there are persons which cannot do this and then they cannot satisfy the alimentation from the ration book of supplies"*.

One respondent said: *"the reproduction of poverty, in the end the families of the black race, families which have lower education, they are those that the 90s has left. Also before there was less inequality and questions of the income salaries being less regulated to the resources, now they have a bigger impact and because of that they are less able to satisfy their needs and to access the opportunities"*.

## 5.2 Disadvantaged groups in Cuba

### 5.2.1 The definition of disadvantaged groups

The disadvantaged groups in Cuba are often also mentioned under the terms vulnerable groups or population in risk. One respondent defined social disadvantaged groups and persons as people suffering from some kind of shortage in their basic needs. She continued saying that this state of need occurs when there is insufficient of some social resource. In Cuba one speaks rather about social disadvantaged than vulnerability one respondent said. Even if the term "*in social disadvantage*" is more used one respondent talked about vulnerability as well. She said that there are persons that are favourable to be presented in risk but they are not considered poor.

### 5.2.2 The disadvantaged groups

On the question of which were the disadvantaged groups in Cuba all the responders answered very coherent. The most vulnerable group they mentioned were the elderly, especially the lonely elderly, those living on the pension and those who do not receive remittances. This was a connection to the demographic change existing in the Cuban society; the population was living longer and by this the increased number of elderly. One respondent said that "*the society had not prepared itself for this ageing*".

Other disadvantaged groups were big numbered families, single parents (especially single mothers) and therefore as a consequence also the children to those groups had a higher risk of vulnerability. Other groups that could be considered as disadvantaged were women, persons with low education, people working in the state sector, black persons and disabled persons. The respondent that mentioned disabled persons remarked that it is important to see what social environment the person is living in. The black population and as well persons of mixed race, so called mestizos, were mentioned during some of the interviews. A reason to this was because some of the respondents informed us of the fact that the non-white population is always represented in the groups with less income, the worst housing conditions and the place with the less life conditions. They mentioned the raised risk of being or becoming disadvantaged if a person is exposed to one or more of these variables.

Those above mentioned profiles are the most characterized the disadvantaged groups have today in Cuba to resume the coherent opinion from the respondents.

Concerning the vulnerability for the women the explanation some respondents gave us was the woman's new role in the society. Before they were at home and could therefore take care of the elderly. Nowadays this has been changing, but one of the responders was also talking about the generation "*sandwich*", referring to the middle generation who has both children and elderly to take care of.

It does not necessarily mean that children living in a one head household belong to the disadvantaged groups in Cuba one respondent explained. One of the explanations this respondent gave us were the many cases of remittances from abroad. Another explanation could also be that the lonely parent had a good income.

The disadvantaged groups have full access to the universal social politics, but there can still

be shortage of resources explained one respondent. Related to this she also remarks the housing problems the country is struggling with. *“The housing situation problem doesn't mean that they don't have housing, but that many generations live in one house.”* She continued saying that *“it doesn't exist persons without a roof. But what happens is that with the economical situation of the country one can't advance more to reach more spaciousness”*.

Concerning the risk of vulnerability a low income and elderly constitute. One respondent told us that if they don't solve the problems that are affecting the group of people having elderly in the family then they can't get to the poverty and they can't satisfy their fundamental needs: *“The persons that have low incomes, they have elderly in the family, there is population in risk because if they don't solve the problems that are affecting this core/group, they can't get to the poverty, they can't satisfy their fundamental needs”*.

To resume one can say that the disadvantaged groups are not absolute in Cuba, but still the respondents could coherently stake out what part of the population, which had a higher per cent in the overall picture of disadvantaged in Cuba. Those were especially related to the elderly population and as well to insufficient/low income.

### **5.2.3 Disadvantaged groups and the crisis in the 1990s**

The 1990s was as mentioned before a hard period for the Cuban population. The period did also affect the disadvantaged groups. During the crisis and this period there was a shortage of almost everything in society. According to some respondents the crisis worsened the life conditions. The problem with the elderly and the youth got worse by the crisis. And as a consequence there was a reduction in the university registrations and this reduced the possibility to climb socially. One of the respondents explained that the higher education during the time of the crisis turned into an education elitist. The universities only received students with a bachelor degree, and left outside two thirds of the students. And those two thirds were parts of poor families, which one respondent said was also proofed from investigations. The result was that only children coming from intellectual families accessed the university, which excluded the black population and the lower classes.

Also one difficulty related to the different social classes, related to the students coming from the lower classes need to work extra during the days. This made it hard to participate in the studies during the days because of schedule from the work. But this has changed one respondent said, by informing us that nowadays is it possible for students to do both study and work.

But one respondent clarified that the expectations about a better future especially within the young generation got affected by the crisis. Many youth abandoned the studies and they decided to devote themselves to illicit activities which raised the amount penalized Cubans. As one respondent put it: *“The perspectives that provide the country from this moment got affected, it was something traumatic...”*

The same respondent continued to talk about the Cuban woman and said that in the case of the woman, the housework got more difficult. The increased work in the home and the reduced opportunities to nursery and the centres of attention for the senior citizen, complicated the life for the woman.

Another declined resource related to the crisis we got explained to us was the less

economical conditions that the state could provide and support the population with. An example one of the respondents brought up was the housing situation; *“Before the crisis there was a place where you could go and could buy material for housing projects and repair your house. This has changed; nowadays occasionally the economical situation and the lack of materials make it impossible for the states to provide this”*.

But even with the difficulties the crisis meant for the disadvantaged groups there were still, according to the respondents, actions directed to take care of the disadvantaged groups: *“During the 90s in Cuba part of the coordination for actions which implicated general social aims started to complement with actions in a more preventative and personal character. There were features directed towards more specific groups”*.

## **5.3 Social policy in Cuba**

### **5.3.1 Social policy**

The respondents talked about the fundamental idea of social policy in Cuba that was applied after the revolution. The idea signifies that the social security etc. should be universal and free for its citizens. The universal politics in Cuba are favouring everyone, but despite this one respondent mentioned that there exist a gap related to equality among the Cubans, he meant that there are always those who are in better conditions, always are ahead with a little more. One of the respondents mentioned that *“when the revolution triumphed they identified the five biggest problems that the country had and those were: poverty, unemployment, illiteracy, agricultural problems and the need of industrialisation”*. She continued saying that during the years from the revolution and until today Cuba has done profound social transformations. Illiteracy was eliminated and there were transformations in the educational system and the health-care system.

One respondent said that there are rights established in the Cuban constitution of the republic and there is as well the social security established in the constitution. She also said that this security protects persons in social disadvantage and there are established programs and projects in specific cases for groups in social disadvantage. The respondent continued and said that all Cubans are covered by the social security and have rights to the social and economical assistance.

One respondent talked about that there have been outlined many social politic strategies by the government referring to education, health and to improve schooling, improve the situation for persons being separated from studies, work etc.

One responder made it clear that a big part of the Cuban social politics is preventative in the sense of health-care and education, an important feature in the social politic in Cuba is to stake out the persons in need and get them back on track again; by help them receive employments they try to always generate a person’s own resources when there is a possibility. Another respondent mentioned as well that the social politics were preventive. They are not based to be carried out on a short perspective, they have a long perspective for how to overcome poverty and in this sense it contains a preventive character because of its universal character and its try to be homogeneous. One said that as preventative work there has been placed out key informants in the neighbourhoods who receive a overall picture of the social

and economical situation in the neighbourhood. The respondent who mentioned this said that it is easier to identify persons with difficulties with this system but that there doesn't exist a standard template to identify these different kind of people in need; *"It is not necessarily the person who earns less than 100 pesos, it could be a child that has problems in school"*.

The government gives economical assistance that is directed to the disadvantage groups. They can receive permanent economical assistance; groups in need for this kind of help are for example, lonely persons that don't have anyone to look after them and no kind of income. The economic assistance is like a monthly salary, according to the responder around 147-200 Cuban pesos. All the workers in Cuba are included in social security. Since 1963 there is the law 1011 in which the state is made responsible for the social security. *"So there are persons that need help from the state to satisfy their needs or for orientate their needs. The help from the state is given through the social assistance where the persons that have shortage go directly to the office of the work because on the municipality level there are the work offices and there the problems are showed. There are always some problems but in the end everyone who is in social disadvantage receives this help of the social assistance and the persons that have a shortage and need, while they have this shortage they have social assistance, well, if the person that have shortage starts to receive remittances, he doesn't need social assistance"*.

Some of the respondents mentioned the ration book. One respondent said that *"There is a ration book around for the whole country. Everyone has their food, if it's not enough what they give you, they give you food so that you can cook, but if it's enough you have to buy more with your salary. With the salary not all needs are covered, because in fact the level of life is very high. But here the people are not left without eating, here you don't see people dying from hunger in the streets and here you don't see anyone without shoes, the one that walks without shoes does it because he wants to..."* Everyone gets what they need: *"Look there was a program that I talked with you about, one of the strategies for undernourished kids, the state gave them a diet, a package, an extra basket to this group, to the undernourished kids, to the pregnant it's given a diet, the people with cancer has an established diet"*.

One responder mentioned the "rational needs" criteria. She said this is a concept used in socialist countries to face consumerism: *"There is a criterion of underlying welfare which is based on one concept, which isn't used anymore but back in the 80s was used frequently, and is "The Rational needs". This is a typical conception of the socialist countries confronting consumerism, which is based in the socialist politics and the social distribution which in their turn is based on the conception of the human being as an entity of social and cultural orientation and that his needs are from very wide natures, and all of them are subject of politics because all of them are part of his welfare. It is not enough with satisfying hunger, there should also be access to culture and other needs. All of that with a focus on rational needs, which is understood as those needs which implies satisfaction of the basic requirements in order to a human being to reproduce himself and live a worthy life, and according to others' needs and the reproduction, today we will say sustainable, of the system itself. It is a need that is not lost for a growing consumerism. I think that this will be the underlying conception of welfare, which has crossed the socialist politics since the revolution till today. To this I will attach the term equality. Welfare implies a certain degree of equality, so it is not enough to say that even the poorest groups have capacities to satisfy these rational*

*needs, and that the richest groups could do it in an inproportional way. We need a state of equality and solidarity, and very specially a state in which there are no exploitation situations. It means, that one's welfare should not be linked to someone elses exploitation, basic concept of the welfare concept”.*

Concerning the politics for the health system in Cuba one respondent gave us an example of what Cuban citizens are guaranteed; *“a person, a child with cancer has guaranteed treatment. His medicines, whenever he needs them, the state has them. It's the same with persons with AIDS, there are established programs on municipality level and on community level, where there is a tracking for people with AIDS, these people are not excluded, they are given a serie of benefits”.*

When asking about rights and obligations for receiving social security benefits in the country one respondent said that she didn't know so much about that. She said it also depends on the type of benefits one needs from the social security, and there are different requirements which one have to accomplish to get access to those.

We were informed that women are authorized maternity leave for one year and during this year they preserve their job position.

One respondent said *“Firstly, a period when the social politics were- really they didn't exist- there was the pre-revolution period. The social politics were established to permit everything in social development, [...], that from the triumph of the revolution along the history there have been different changes, analysis in the politics, in the structure of the government etc.”* A comment that once again informs us of the big change which has occurred during the revolution. One respondent discussed strategically planes and social policy to try to solve the existing problematic situations and achieve the welfare and social development in detail. That responder brought up both education and health as examples; in education the educational revolution occurred with a view in the change of educational methods, across the audiovisual media, the preparation of teachers, to have only 20 students in the classroom. In the health-care area the same, referring as well to a community level approach. There were services established to help the community. Together with these services and with time they have revolted many organisations with these politics. *“Little by little”* as one respondent put it.

### **5.3.2 An international view**

There was also some reflection about the social politics in Cuba in a global context, during the interviews. Some of the respondents had, despite showed shortages in the politics, a very positive attitude to the Cuban politics. Those respondents also wanted to point out some disadvantages that could be related to the successful social politics that the developed countries have. They meant that even in those politics in those countries there exists kind of shortage and a need of reflection. One respondent said that there exist several models of social welfare in the developed countries, like Europe and the United States. The respondent said he didn't know what inspires the models but that they are based in how to harmonize tradition and the modernity. He goes on saying that *“if you see the western model which has been a model of high consumption. Has this brought happiness to the people? The western model has a greater conflict today, the people are not happy and as a consequence of this model there is*



*the loneliness, the people are lonely. I am talking about societies like Sweden, Switzerland and Germany, the people have more anxiety to consume more and in the end the people have a lot but they are not happy, there it exists a conflict in the index of suicidal, there is reconsideration.”*

As an advantage of the Cuban system is the design for the rights and that those are even recognized by Cuban law, which protects the social policies and makes it easily accessible. And as another comparison in the global context mainly referring to the western countries, for example a person in need have to fill out 50 forms which the person doesn't even understand to be able to apply for social services. He meant that this does not happen in Cuba, since the application process is quicker, simpler and more flexible, one respondent said.

One responder also mentioned that there are other countries where the persons in needs cannot get help from the society since, because in these countries there are a lot of obligations to be able to take part of the social system. And then in some circumstances they are also rejected by the society, but he compared Cuba with this by *“Here no, here there is a strategy very punctual for attention for these persons”*. Also some other of the respondents were of the same opinion that in Cuba the social politics doesn't work with the so-called “conditional transfers”. The Cuban politics does not require the client to do anything in exchange for the assistance receiving. *“The social politics don't work with the so called conditionals transfers. These support systems, as the Brazilian and Mexican, give you a monthly payment in order to send your children to school, in the Cuban system the benefits don't exert any obligation on the beneficiary. I think is possible, that in the moment I am predicting it to be inaugurated, to make a way of bearing the demand, as well as setting obligations on the beneficiaries.”* The respondent continued saying that education is free and mandatory until the ninth grade. And there are even laws against parents who do not secure this for their children.

One of the respondents was talking very positive about the social politics and the economical crisis. He meant that even though Cuba has a hard economical situation the responder claimed that everyone in Cuba has a job and it did not exist unemployment: *“The workers have their salary every month, the students have their studies”* and when they finish at university the state, with its educational politics, finds them a job. This means that they don't have to go out and look by themselves.

In some of the interviews opinions more related to Cuba in comparison to the continent Latin America. One responder told us that in Latin America the politics doesn't have an answer to guarantee or to discover the needs in general of the persons in the strongest need, which he concludes is not the case of the politics in Cuba.

### **5.3.3 Criticism**

One respondent remarked that even if all social transformations have been made they *“...not alone eliminate the circumstances that make a society homogeneous. There are always different social groups and not everyone reach to equal conditions”*. The same respondent claimed that *“People don't want to work, because they don't have any incentive and because it is practically hard to be productive and efficient, and there it should be a change”*.

In terms of social politics the priorities of social spending had to be modified. The respondent believed health and education should continue to be the basic elements of the

social politics and the resources should be redistributed. Family and community life, housing improvement, income production and employment should be addressed as well.

One respondent made the statement that something had to be done concerning the employment, but also remarked the need of keeping the socialistic spirit, to not give in for the capitalism in the search for new politics in the aim of development in the country. She said: *“I don’t think [...] that the State has the capacity of taking care of the employment with enough income for everyone. I believe the approach should be [...]ways of organizing the production with cooperatives, with neither private forms, as to not regenerating the capitalism, nor forms of exploitation, but using the socialist production approach, opened to other actors/players in order to energize the sources of employment and create many other options.”*

One respondent told us that there are differences between one area in the city and another area of the city, and continued saying that the universal politics does not always note this specification. The performed politics is executed because the government has to secure the social service politics and secure the universal in the human objects.

Another comment related to the social politics in the country was: *“And the politic that we have that creates the services, they improve the services but they stabilize a hierarchy/ranking in the services and this ranking, it is not in all the places they have the same problematic and the services that you rank will not be the most important. What I want to say is that in the case of Cuba at bottom for the services health, education, culture, sports it is at bottom assigned, it is sure that there is a level of decentralisation, you are using what you are being told, to say in a community that there are more deeper problems within the health but in another it is not the health but at bottom it is not possible to use”.*

But our respondent had noticed that when the politics reach the concrete reality in the community, neighbourhoods, one can note that they can be chocked of the reality of interests that are not related to what they are saying, and you have to see how they transform the poverty. For example not everyone can understand why they should start with the living and not with the capacity, which we can connect with another respondent’s opinion of the importance to get the population to participate in the changes of the social politics.

One respondent said that Cuba's social politics have a technical bureaucratic agenda, with lots of specialists who know a lot about human needs but don’t achieve involvements from the individuals in needs when they do the strategically planning for the population. The constructive participation has a very low profile. She was of the opinion that the participation must take a more extensive role, even in the strategically planning. Its role should be object of discussion and that it’s necessary to open up.

#### **5.3.4 Criticism related to shortage of economical resources**

One of the respondents said that one of the most burning problems that the Cuban society has to confront today is how to advance the social development over the economical possibilities. The respondent said that there exists an education system that does not respond to the economical system, and that neither the health-care system responds to the economical system. She said that they in Cuba understand social development as a different thing from the economical system. She thought the social development has exceeded the economical development and this has become a contradiction to the country.

And according to one respondent *“the economical situation of the country is so difficult, that it puts this social politic of extended coverage in crisis. And my point of view is that our social politics never have been economical sustainable. It has been excellent, it has many positive components but it has always been on the verge of collapse”*.

The responder thought that a new reform in economic terms should be produced which allows Cuba to make the mechanisms within social policy more flexible, *“In respect to the social policies there is a lot to do. One part has to do with overcoming the homogeneity, assuming that the needs are the same but the level of satisfaction is not, our social policy makes everyone artificial the same. It operates as if everyone needs the same. That changes when there’s a lack of resources, not because the devising itself changed when working with the concept of rational needs. The individuals and the collective/community are very diverse and the policies must be true to this diversity, but it hasn’t; everyone gets the same, some gain and some lose”*, the respondent says.

One respondent summarized by saying that *“Cuba has the challenge that with few resources be very efficient in the social area to give attention to the vulnerable groups”*.

### **5.3.5 Social policy and the crisis in the 1990s**

One respondent said that during the years of the 1990s the problems in society started to be visualised as social problems and not only as economical problems.

A characteristic feature already mentioned for the Cuban social policy is that it is universal politics without discrimination. According to one respondent they preserved this universal politics during the 1990s but there was a change due to fewer resources. There was a selection between applications for aid, for example they did not succeed to eliminate the race discrimination.

The 1990s was a hard period, said one respondent phrasing it as following: *“The period was a hard period, where it had a shortage of nourishment, shoes, clothes, from an unpleasant moment and above all, for the persons at this time from my period - that we didn’t live the years before, the older persons, those born before the revolution had the experience to live in the time before the revolution, but well, all this was a very hard time for us, with a very hard impact - but well we passed it - a time of much shortage. But they say that the bad passes fast, I know that it started, if my mind doesn’t fail me, in the 90s until like 10 years ago. We got it better from 2000; we got it a bit better. I think it lasted like 10 years”*.

The statement, as the previous comment made about that the crisis does not exist anymore, the main part of the other respondents are disagreeing with. One respondent said the following concerning impact from the crisis related to welfare in the country: *“We don’t work with the welfare category. I think that it’s a political prejudice to differentiate socialist governments, but for the economic conditions of Cuba, speaking of welfare is too ambitious. There are basic needs that aren’t guaranteed which is why I prefer to speak of raising life conditions, or raising quality of life of the people. It is too ambitious in a country that has a steep economical crisis; welfare is something unreachable, which is why efforts are made to raise conditions of life”*. This respondent mean that in Cuba, the economical crisis’s effects on Cuba is the reason why you today don’t talk about to raise the welfare, because there exist basic needs which do not get satisfied. And then it has to be seen as an aim to raise the living

conditions and basic quality for the people first of all, not to raise the welfare.

Another respondent also talked about welfare saying that *“The welfare is based on criteria’s of less economical character and instead more social character, now in Cuba [...] the subject about social values, this is the subjects about the welfare”*.

One of the respondents said that she had not found any definition of welfare in Cuba, but this fact rose from that she was planning to make a study of welfare. She pointed out that maybe it exists but that she still had not found out.

Another respondent was of the opinion that the poverty problem of the 1990s has not been covered to the fullest, and also said that it is a theme that changes with time and the current situation of the country.

Some other comments about the difficulties the social politics in Cuba have had are the comments some of the respondents did regarding the new situation in Cuba today. They meant that even if there exist outlined plans related to the promised minimum standard according to the lowest income and ration book, it was today harder for the social politic to adapt it into the reality in the society. They bring up the changed reality in relation to the existing CUC currency which made it hard for the Cubans to complement the ration book.

One respondent explained the point of view presented in her book where she talked about a change from social policy based on social homogeneity to policies based on the equality of diversity. This entails what our group has called a socialist norm of unequal distribution which deals with/works with the diversity and the productive drawbacks/impediments.

## **5.4 Social work in Cuba**

### **5.4.1 The role of social work and some problems**

After the interviews we understood the important role the social worker had in the Cuban society, one respondent said: *“Today [...] all the citizens are objects to the social worker. They are not only considering people who are poor or incapacitated. Everyone, in one way or another, needs assistance from a social worker. They are setting up objects that lift up the conditions of life for the population”*. Another respondent also informed us of the important role of social worker in Cuba when the respondent informed us that social workers exist in every municipality. They have an office where they gather and the people can go.

One also informed us that in 2007 there was a preoccupation about how to change the forms of strategy that social workers were using in their work. They were at that time organised on the community level. Last year an organisation started on neighbourhood’s level, with a more integrated conception in how to perform social work. The respondent gave us an example of this new form of working; *“If there in a home is a sick person with let’s say problem of high blood pressure, there can be other causes within the family that make them vulnerable. That can be overload by work, domestic violence etc.”*.

The role of the profession social work one respondent thought as *“...the function of the social work is to help the politics to understand the diversion of the [poverty] problem like a universal phenomenon, like a particular phenomenon and like a singular phenomena”*. Because, according to him, *“...social work has three areas of intervention: social intervention, social intervention in communities and groups and individual intervention”*.

One respondent said that *“the social work now focus on the preventative work. The Cuban society has not overcome the crisis, yet the concept of social workers is paternalistic. This is a process where you need resources, but the situation of the country seems to be a limitation”*.

Also another of the respondents made the statement that the principal task for social workers is preventative work and she can also see this change in practice.

Another respondent mentioned that the police have a boss in each sector of a neighbourhood. This person knows who is working and who is not working. In general it is this boss who talks with for example boys without jobs and tries to integrate them in the work system, also this is related to form a part of the prevention work.

One respondent also said a similar example by the words; *“they know that this kind of “mercy politics” that is a characteristics for Cuba always generates many groups who have the idea that “they pay me and for that I don’t work”. The social workers have to find ways and have real evaluations about who can generate their own incomes and who really can’t. One has to find a way to eliminate these situations and to get out a higher number of unstable situations possible”*.

We were told that social workers carried out their work in different areas in a society. Two mentioned places were schools and prisons. One respondent mentioned that right now there are social workers in every prison, who are working with the community, visiting the prisoners and visits the families. She said that at least there exists something that did not exist before.

They care for the family and work in this prevention way that was mentioned above. One respondent said that many organisations have social activities and particularly “La Federación de la Mujer Cubana” (The federation of the Cuban woman).

There is also a social prevention commission that works on neighbourhood level. They analyse future problems that could exist. Social work is often carried out from the communities, small neighbourhoods, with the deficit identification and the needs aren’t satisfied. The social work is therefore working from its direct connection with these realities. They work of course with the rules of the social assistance, one respondent said, that have a criteria of (which he didn’t know) the minimum requirements for asking for social assistance benefits. With help from the key informants in the neighbourhoods the social workers are capable to detect problems but, according to the respondent, do they not know how to interfere and act when it comes to social problems. This seemed to be a problem according the social work in Cuba. Because many of the respondents remarked that Cuba does not have the tradition of social work and one said that many times social workers are used for tasks not always related to the profession social work, he said: *“that the social workers are a force that have used the revolution for specific tasks that not necessarily are tasks for social work but they have still been necessary to use for the urgent problems of the country linked with reasons of society change because of the revolution”*.

One of the respondents thought that there are being developed new types of strategies, but that the social work in Cuba is still missing a lot; *“There are cases for example where the social work is volunteering, it is bad rewarded and it does not exist a career in the university not even a tactic”*. Related to this subject the opinion could differ much and for example another respondent claimed that there are much specified written concepts about how to work

with the social work in different organisations, for example, social assistance and social security have very specified concept with how they operate with the social disadvantage.

According to one respondent another problem of social work programmes are that even if they know what they would like to perform, they do not succeed to do it. The reason for this according to the respondent is the lack of training in social work; they need to be creative and independent. The respondent suggested that they should be joined between the different organizations and institutions that are acting in the community.

Another reflection a respondent made according the social work in Cuba was that the profession has not always been clear. He said that sociology is a very strong subject and psychologists have a very strong tradition in the community areas. The social work has always stayed marginalized, forgotten.

This was also mentioned by another respondent who talked about the role of professionalism in Cuba and social work. Meaning that they know that they have had difficulties in what role the social work has to assume in the process. He said that they didn't know the functions which need to be carried out by a social worker, because the social worker was created in a capitalistic society and not in a socialistic.

#### **5.4.2 Social work in practice**

Several respondents mentioned examples of how social work could look in practice. Sometimes they also reflected on that the practical work for social workers is not always directly in relation to the profession but this is something they all the time try to incorporate in Cuba. As one of the success in the practice field of social work, one respondent mentioned that there are several programmes which have helped more than 200 000 youths to study or work.

The education levels in Cuba are elementary school, high school (secondary education), college preparatory high school and university. A big number of the students don't sign in for the college preparatory high school. Therefore when they reach the age for work, those youth are excluded from the labour market. This program, that the respondent mentioned, is giving a continuation and demand in the education. They help those who are not registered and give them another option to try to make them do something else.

One respondent talked about how social work has made several very interesting actions possible, one of which has to do with identifying the desirable living conditions. A study about elderly people, especially those living alone, was conducted three years ago, to identify their degree of well-being and their current and future needs. According to the already mentioned conducted study to stake out undernourished children one respondent explained the situation a bit deeper and said; *“These children have free basic products programmes, organized at community-level, to which parents can go to. Since many of these are children from dysfunctional families, with scarce access to information, they need follow-up. These families often ignore that they have free access to products for their children, so the families are given the information they need to improve their children's development and a systematic evaluation”*.

One respondent also said that the social work identifies the disadvantaged groups and mentioned a successful special case according this; *“For example, today there is a not very*

*known sickness named "Children from the moon" which are children that cannot eat by themselves. Very few have this sickness. Before they knew that there were two cases out of every 10 000 children, anyhow today they know who the two are and what the treatment is. They give them a programme in the evening where those children can go. This is the result of actions made of social workers".*

We got explained to us that the structure of the education and health level was created after such an all-encompassing design, which meant that they were not expected to overlook all problems. But of course after a while they found different kind of problems concerning the individuals who were taking part of their services. Sometimes it can be difficulties because they are not able to help some of them, as an example a respondent said; the underestimated individuals which they were not able to help or treat, and in those situations the decision and the hope to change the persons reality was left to the families and because of this the persons were not always protected.

In Cuba, one respondent said also relating to this, the whole country is covered by the detection of disabilities. The health system should be able to detect them. All deliveries are institutionalised. It is nonetheless a very effective system. But people with certain disabilities are sometimes not assisted, since they required proactive action from their families. Though the health system could detect them and could have treated them, it was the families who in the end were to make the decision.

There were mentioned some actions which guaranteed food for adults in precarious conditions by getting them in touch with companies and sources of employment which provided them with subsidized food. One respondent also explained that these adults daily went to an eating hall. But related to the changed reality of today, he said that the eating halls for those have disappeared, and that a new kind of structure would have to be created in the communities.

One respondent mentioned one case of institution where there is a social worker to be found; *"There's always a social worker in the polyclinics. If you don't have any money and need to go to a clinic, you turn to the social worker and won't have to submit a lot of paperwork. You will have to prove that you don't have any income, and either she or her assistance will visit your home and ask your neighbours, but it's a relatively uncomplicated and quick process. This means the way institutionalism is designed, allow individuals to gain direct access to their rights without requiring much from them. The way to prove it is based on community mechanisms, in the community knowledge about this case. Major obligations are committing to providing access to the assistance, if your conditions change committing to inform about it."*

One respondent described a social worker's work. She said that they take one case at a time and once you become her case so to speak she starts building up a file and analyzing what kind of service/provision/ assistance you can get and what options she can provide the client with. But her function as a social worker does not end there; she also has to have a follow-up to check how that specific case evolves. She said that normally the case evolves, but when it comes to elderly people there is not much chances that it will positively evolve since the problems have worsens and requires new actions. When the old person still can take care of himself/herself, the solution is based on economic factors. Otherwise, he/she will need to be put in a home or provided with a person who can accompany him. *"The objective [of*

*social work] is always to help the individual and the family out of their assisted condition into a more proactive one, as long as this is doable. In the case for elderly or for disabled it is very difficult that the case evolves positively”.*

One said that on the professional level that a social worker is managed in Cuba is not the same as for example in Sweden. Until year 2000, they create social workers with big deficits in their formation. This created a social worker with the assistant character. After year 2000, they started to emerge from the formation for social work that they had for a year and they changed subjects. Instead they studied university careers that did not relate to social work, affecting the task to determinate the disadvantaged groups.

## **6. Some observations and discussion**

In this study we have made a data collection through own experiences and observations during our time on Cuba. During all the observations we have tried to have as wide perspective as possible and been aware of possible prejudices. But still this is our experiences and as well our thoughts and reflections. The main reason of the decision to relate those observations to our study was to open up a deeper discussion by also touching opinions and situations from Cubans in the daily life.

### **6.1 The Cuban dream**

A good social security should be able to provide help to people in need and raise their living conditions. This is something that is a main part of what many countries are trying to achieve with their social politics. But many times today the discussion related to the question social security has had a main focus on economical components such as if good social public security can really be affordable.

When looking at the Cuban example we realize that maybe it is not only a question of the economical resources, maybe additional components such as will and solidarity as well can contribute to make good social security to work. This seems to be the difference, when making comparisons with other developing countries. It is the will and solidarity that makes Cuba special. The dream and starting point of the Cuban revolution signifies that another way to welfare could be possible.

We choose to call this “*the Cuban way and the Cuban dream*”. We read the Cuban constitution and we felt that according to this constitution Cuba really is a dream society, where people are equal and have the same opportunities and rights. According to the constitution the Cuban state takes a social responsibility for its citizens and does not see them as charity cases but as people deserving to live a worthy life.

A worthy life! This is what felt to be the true purpose of the constitution of Cuba, this was what they wanted to achieve in practice. A worthy life with equal conditions was what Castro and the Cubans were fighting for in the revolution. We got the impression that the armed revolution was not only a war with weapons and misery; it was a fight from the heart for an equal society.

We believe that Castro tried his best to change an unequal society in which everyone, young, old, woman, man, disabled etc. could be a part of, with equal conditions and live a



worthy life.

The Cuban society has chosen a path where social development, equality and people's well-being has a value in itself and as we thought it seemed to be a great deal....in theory. But it seems like the people are starting to wake up from the dream, realizing it was just.....a dream.

## **6.2 Social Politics**

Many of our interviewees strongly pointed out the factors of the success in the universal politics and that Cuba certainly cares about its people. But we never really heard this being mentioned when speaking with other Cubans in more unofficial discussions. Now we are generalizing from our own experiences, impressions and discussions with various Cubans, and should be noted that these were on many times with young people. But the overall picture we got was an obvious lack of respect and positive comments concerning the universal politics. The pride of these universal social politics didn't seem to exist amongst many of the Cubans. They seemed to have forgotten about the reasons for the revolution and what actually has happened after.

Another reflection we make about the social politics in Cuba comes from the example of when Andrea had to go to the hospital in Havana. We thought that well, Cuba is world-known for its good health-care so this should not be a problem. Our house was located just in front of an official hospital but there was no thought that she could go there to get medical care. Instead we were sent to the hospital for foreigners. There was nothing to complain about the medical care there, but when we asked our Cuban friends if it wouldn't be more convenient to visit the local hospital they just shook their heads and said no, that's nothing for tourists, implying that the medical care wouldn't be as good as in the tourist hospital.

We think that people who are not living in poverty can have the strength to actually contribute to a positive development of their country; both economical and social. This could be the case in Cuba but the whole country has a widespread feeling of listlessness. Since you can't really "get anywhere" upwards in the society than just above the poverty line it feels like people give up and have no motivation to try to do something with their lives except leaving the country. They almost claim that unemployment doesn't exist, but one really starts to wonder and when we walked in the centre of Havana during a weekday, it was full of people just doing nothing at all. Everyone was just hanging around. One day Andrea wanted to rent a scooter. When she arrived to the scooter place the guy working there had left and no one knew when he was coming back, but "this was normal" we learnt. That people just don't care about their work since they have no motivation with the extremely low salary they get from it, and a salary that is indispensable in many cases to satisfy the daily basic needs and also did not give them access to welfare.

## **6.3 The complicated poverty in Cuba**

Something we think is important to reflect on is the shortage of advanced technology and communication in the Cuban's society. Cell phones are very expensive and not used in Cuba so the contact is made through landlines. Even though this is cheap and the majority of the

people have access to a telephone in their own house or through the neighbour, this still makes the communication inefficient. Because communication mainly by phones cannot compete with the efficient communication such as computers and Internet are giving. And in Cuba there exists a lack of access to computers and Internet. The Cubans barely have any chances to use the Internet, one of the options is the computer with internet which some of the hotels in Habana have, but to a cost of 8-10 CUC/hour. In the university for example, there was one computer room, which contained around ten computers, and this was for the teachers. But you were often forced to stand in line before you could get access and in the end the internet speed was slow. What for the developed part of the world might be very natural in the context of possibility to spread out knowledge through Internet is impossible in Cuba.

According to us, the new face of poverty in Cuba is the lack of access to CUC. We consider that the features of not having access to the CUC are the exclusion to welfare and also to basic needs. It was possible to sit in a restaurant and suddenly a man or a woman came up to you begging for CUC. Still it was much less direct begging compared to the other Latin American countries we have been in, but it was there anyhow. The more common kind of begging as we authors refer to as "discrete begging" was the case in Cuba. The term "discrete begging" we explain with the existing fact that a large amount of Cubans looked for different ways to take advantage of a tourist, with the aim of get hold of CUC. It could be some kindly offered favors as showing you a good bar, or telling you a bit of the history, and in the end asking for some CUC for the appeal. An important notice in this context is not to generalize all Cubans in the hunt for CUC, but the majority especially around the centre of Habana had this purpose. This discrete begging was widely used in Cuba but there were also more obvious cases of so-called "jineteros" and "jineteras". To explain what jineteros and jineteras are, one can say that it is Cubans of all ages, but often younger boys and girls hanging out with tourists and it is also not uncommon with a sexual relationship with the favor in order to get paid in CUC. Sadly the conclusion to draw out of this is that the jineteros and jineteras did not have to ask for much, even little was much under their circumstances. For them a nice drink on a CUC place could be enough, and keep in mind that even 1-2 dollars are for them plenty of money or in other words a double daily salary, when they in their currency are paid 12-15 dollars per month.

We can mention that many times for the purpose of starting a conversation, for example with taxi drivers, we always used to explain that we were students. Then they seemed to look at us with more respect than when they thought we were "normal" tourists. When we further explained that we were doing a study about the subjects poverty, disadvantaged groups and social policy in Cuba the drivers many times changed their attitude and got a kind of scornful smile. Some of them made comments containing an obvious ironic tone and often with a laugh: For example one deeply ironic said; *"Well, here in Cuba poverty doesn't exist! We have everything we need. Why would we want more than what Fidel gives us?"*. Many times the comments from example taxi drivers were followed by the conclusion, *"That those things are a bit special here in Cuba"*. We reflected on these comments afterwards, and we understood that yes, they seem to agree that the Cubans have access to many social services that other poor people in the world don't access. But what we also reflected on was the often obvious ironic tone which we suspect is related to frustration over the existing situation in Cuba. Like as we resume it; *yes, we have the basic service but in addition to this? What do we*

*have then?*

Through others of our observations we could once again note the ambivalent relation to the poverty in Cuba when we talked and integrated with Cubans. Many of the Cubans we asked during our visit in Cuba referred to themselves as poor. We could many times feel that there was a shade of frustration related to the lack of access to both CUC and various things, and the existing situation in the country, which was the cause to why they referred to themselves as poor.

#### **6.4 The wall of inequality**

As a foreigner you always have this weird feeling of being different. This is, according to us, related to the already mentioned money system, which exists in the country. This money system makes it hard to interact with Cubans on equal conditions. For example if we wanted to go out and dance and drink, the main majority of places only accepted CUC. And to go to a restaurant that serves food in CUC is impossible for a Cuban since one meal would probably cost like one monthly salary or more. The difficulty in accessing entertainment and activities was also referred to and highlighted by our Cuban neighbour, who was around 25 years old. He clarified this by telling us that he was bored all the time since he could not afford to have fun.

But still to hang out and interact with Cubans was very interesting and fun. When they invited us over for dinner, they served us products that were included in the ration book and some vegetables they could access through markets in Cuban pesos. So even if a table could look very nice with rice, beans, tomatoes and yucca it was hard to get hold of anything in addition to this, for example meat. And many Cubans were talking about tuna as a delicacy. They told us for example that Cubans living abroad when coming back to visit the relatives often brought products like tuna and other kind of food. It was also a popular request to bring different kind of electronic products. All those products did exist in Cuba but were impossible to get a hold on for the locals. An acquaintance from Costa Rica had friends from Cuba and when he went to Cuba for vacation they asked him to bring an electronic mouthpiece for a shower. Unfortunately not always easy to bring this through the custom service, and as a result of this he could not give them the mouthpiece because it got confiscated.

That there exists a great shortage in different products is very notable during a visit in Cuba, especially if you try to live in Cuba within the conditions of the inhabitants meaning to live on the accessible products paid with the Cuban pesos. This lack in the diverse variation of food was very visible, often people had access to rice, beans and coffee and sugar, and if they were lucky they had even access to eggs, but not always. For example we ate breakfast at a Cuban place for students every day. It was a place in an ordinary house and they served white bread, cheese and eggs. But they were only able to serve us eggs two weeks, after this there was a lack of this product and we got served only white bread and cheese. To have something in addition to this menu was impossible, for the Cubans with the simple explanation that there was no access to the products because these products came from the market of CUC products. It is worth while mentioning that the lady, who served us breakfast, one day took us a bit aside to tell us that it was possible for us to come in later when the Cuban students not were there. Then we could get a bigger breakfast, with CUC products, if we paid in CUC of course.

For our breakfast we paid two Cuban pesos and as you can see it is more or less free for us, but for the Cubans, who only have the income in the Cuban pesos this, is still an amount. So there was a feeling of having some kind of existing wall between the Cubans and us. Even if all Cubans are very friendly and welcoming it was not possible to feel that they as Cubans had the same possibilities and access to products as we had. We literalize this difference to a wall made of inequalities, a wall which has its origin and is kept through the introduced system of CUC. A wall we as tourists or at least foreigners could experience because of our access to CUC which made us rich. The wall was “visible” every day. There are two different worlds in Cuba, one world with access to everything referring to the world for the tourists and the other world for the Cubans, with a life quite hard, because the need of CUC in the structure of the society.

You know that they are aware of the fact that you have money. That is, you have something that they don't have. When we left Habana people we had met during our stay asked us to leave things for them that we might not need anymore. Like toothpaste, lotion etc., things that you can buy in Cuba as well but only if you have enough CUC. It is important to remember that one of our respondents said that it is impossible to make ends meet in everyday life without receiving CUC. The feeling of the wall of inequalities was following one during the entire visit in Cuba.

### **6.5 The frustration and dilemma of “Viva la Revolución!”**

Another thing that was visualized after spending some time in the Cuban society and after integrating with Cubans of all ages, were the differences between the old and the young generation. This was also something we were told in some of the interviews; the young generation was more restless and impatient with the Cuban society. They have never seen it as it was before the revolution, and cannot compare the situation with anything apart from the situation they have had during their lifetime. This means that many of them only had the 1990s to compare with, and as we are aware of in the 1990s the crisis affected Cuba a lot concerning access to material, the welfare and the living standard. The solution the government had as an answer to survive the fall of Soviet and the straightening blockade from the States was to open up the trade with the dollar, and introduce the dollar as a parallel currency. The result we consider most noticeable is the today growing similarity to the past when Cuba was used as an entertainment island. Today it seems to head in the same direction; an island, which is considered as a lovely paradise for the tourists but with a worse situation for the inhabitants.

An impression we got after discussions and comments from Cubans belonging to the younger generation is that they seemed to be very frustrated over the existing situation. This is stronger expressed from the young generation. We believe the reason for this is as we mentioned before that this generation cannot compare the existing situation from the past, which brings them frustration when they see the different world that exists for the tourists but that they are excluded from. Features of how they anyhow try to adept them to the other world are seen as for example in how many younger people in Cuba are wearing fake brand clothes and shoes. They are trying their best to look fashionable and in this there does exist a certain level of consumerism.

But despite the attempts to fit in the frustration remains and the younger generation finds other ways to gain access to the other world. The longing for access and the frustration of the exclusion are probably the main reasons to why Cubans are moving abroad after finally receiving an invitation letter (which is the requirement to leave Cuba) by friends or by a partner abroad who has fallen in love.

In comparison to the younger generation's frustration we consider that the older generation instead is facing a dilemma of another kind. It is a fact that many times the older generation talks more sensitive and positive about the revolution and the existing situation in Cuba today. They all know the good things that have happened to them since the revolution. They know the corruption from Batista and how Fidel Castro did insert universal politics with the aim of an equal society. They saw the illiteracy disappear and good education and health care established in the country. They got a country to be proud of and to love. They know the big change in the society and because of this they still have a desire to trust and believe in the revolution, even if the reality back then does not seem to exist anymore.

A conclusion we make according to the above mentioned is that the new dilemma is much more related to the crisis. They want to continue to believe in the good of the revolution and the Cuban society despite the more obvious cases of how they by themselves suddenly stand in the shadow of the welfare in the country, how they, the ones who helped to build up Cuba, suddenly find themselves left out. A good example to bring out in relation to our drawn reflections and opinions considering this dilemma, is when we got invited to a family containing an older black man married to a white woman. The man had been fighting with Fidel Castro in the revolution and the woman was also a true revolutionary. They welcomed us by saying "Viva la Revolución". They were proud of their country, but after a while into the night they asked us to buy some rum, some real Cuban rum that they could not buy by themselves because it was a CUC product. It felt strange for us to see them so proud and true revolutionaries, yet to ask foreigners like us for access to rum. So a conclusion to make is that there is an undoubtedly contradiction in the Cuban everyday life. Cuba is historically famous for their comprehensive welfare, but to what extent does it exist today?

## **6.6 Hidden values and "light" apartheid**

The black population in Cuba has been mentioned during some interviews as a disadvantaged group, but any deeper explanation was never given. In Cuba this seems at times to be a sensitive subject to talk about. Because of the fact that Cuba is a very mixed country and contains a large number of black people, who is often something that Cubans are proud of. We reflect that this might be the reason why it sometimes is difficult to bring up the subject and completely bring it to the surface.

But we got the impression that there are hidden values, which seemed to exist under "the surface". It felt for us like it exists some kind of unspeakable racism against black people in Cuba. We can describe a scenario from one party we were invited to with Cuban people in the neighborhood "Old Havana", a party full of hospitality and salsa dancing and rum of course. The hosts were the previous mentioned couple, which had the welcoming phrase "Viva la Revolución". Our situation about the case of hidden values and racism came from a statement the woman in the couple suddenly confessed to us. She leaned towards us and whispered, "I

know I married a black man, but still he is a good man and I love him". This for us visualizes the suspicions we had had of hidden values and racism towards the black.

We will refer to another experience we had concerning this subject of black people and hidden values that happened in our own Casa particular (the system of renting rooms in the house of a Cuban family). To invite Latin American friends or Europeans was no problem, but to invite our black friends was not accepted at all at first. After some weeks when we had been forced to stand outside the gates to the house with our friends without being able to invite them, we took up the subject for discussion again, and then we could negotiate to the conditions, that we could invite them, but had to inform the house owners at least three days before. The explanation they gave us to this was that they had to be able to present on papers who had been in the house just in case there would be some control from the government. But there was a situation, two weeks after our black Cuban friends had been invited for the first time, when one of them showed up a bit earlier than expected with his two-year-old daughter. We were still not ready, and as a habit he waited outside the gates to the house, even if the gates were wide opened. But then one of the owners of the house told him that he was allowed to enter if he wanted. This time it was not necessary for any reports three days before. We can suspect that even if there are a lot of controls of Casas particulares from the government's side (to avoid illegal renting out), it is probably many times a question of hidden values, and also values against certain people.

We make the statement referring to the mentioned cases of hidden values that the Cuban society is on the edge of a light apartheid system. Worth mentioning as background to our strong statement were our contacts with the police and the security. As a background it is important to know that the security in Cuba especially around the centre of Habana where the main part tourists are, is quite high, meaning there are a lot of policemen. The situation we were reacting strongly to was when we were walking on the streets hanging out with two of our black Cuban friends; the police could stop us several times each night. They made them show their identification card and answer questions. This procedure could take over 15 minutes, and it did not help even if we told the policeman in Spanish that it was alright because they were our friends. The police kept on doing the same procedure every time. And when you finally were released it could be another police around the next corner and the procedure was repeated.

We cannot generalize and draw any conclusion out of this, but it can give us an idea of what is going on in Cuba concerning values, racism and also the frustration over the circumstances. To relate to those situations about the policemen and the controls only to the stated existing invisible racism in the country, is from our friends' statements that the controls only happened to them because they are black. We reflect that this sadly does have some shade of truth because in the situations when we walked with other Cubans or Latin Americans who were more a mix toward the white skin, they did not stop us.

## **6.7 The rights...**

We will now make some observations on human rights, which is a particularly sensitive topic in Cuba. The treatment of human rights presents some interesting contradictions. On the one hand, certain human rights are much better fulfilled in Cuba than in other countries at a

similar level of development. This is evidenced by the relative absence of starvation, misery and homeless children.

On the other hand, Cuba's commendable achievements in this area are not matched by human rights in other areas, in particular the freedom to choose. That freedom entails free choice of where to live, where to walk and where to travel. Our observations reveal that Cubans face significant restrictions with respect to these freedoms. For example, we were informed that it is very difficult to move within the country without agreement from the state. This causes problems because people move illegally to, for example, Havana. As a result, those people are left out of the ration book and the social security system. This is an unresolved problem in Cuba, and we argue that this amounts to a restriction on the freedom to choose. A related problem is that Cubans have a lack of choice when it comes to travel abroad. This is impossible without receiving an invitation letter from someone abroad. As we have already discussed, this creates cases of young people establishing romantic relations with foreigners for the purpose of receiving such a letter.

The last reflection we will make about this very sensitive subject is an example from some observations we made. We have already described the scenario with the security controls of our friends. The reasons for those procedures and controls our Cuban friends explained to us was because of the problem of the integration between the tourists and Cubans which could sometimes have the intentions of being in the hunt for CUC, so it was a safety measure to raise the security for the tourists, not for the Cubans. It still felt weird to stand beside while our friends were treated quite unrespectable by many of the policemen. It also gave us, as we are used to the system in Sweden, where everyone can walk freely on the streets no matter with whom, and we tried to image this scenario in Sweden and came to the conclusion that this was way over the limits for respect and would have lead to great difficulties to defend those actions against the Human rights. And yes, also our Cuban friends reacted strongly on this trespassing of their privacy and rights and always said dejected comments such as, "*Cuba is not for the Cubans, is for the tourists*". And when we tried to continue the conversation about how they felt in comparison related to their circumstances and situation compared to ours, they often said, "*in Cuba you don't think on those kind of things too long or too much, because that will drive you crazy*".

## **7. Some important Conclusions**

### **7.1 Poverty in Cuba**

#### **7.1.1 Conclusion: The regained focus, trends and measurements**

One conclusion we as authors make concerning the subject of poverty is that it certainly has regained focus on the social agenda in Cuba after the crisis in the 1990s. By this we can also conclude that poverty is an accepted term in Cuba. These conclusions are made in relation to what we were told in the interviews and what we read in literature. Another conclusion we can make through the interviews is that poverty can be considered as something relatively new in the measurements, which has its causes in the lost interest of the subject during the 1980s. Although the subject is relatively new on the agenda in Cuba, we as authors state that

it seems like Cuba is well aware of the complexity of poverty.

We have, through the interviews gathered knowledge that clarifies that the expertise in Cuba within this area has caught up with the trends; to define poverty as something multidimensional related to the cultural and social contexts. This was also seen when the respondents gave us a picture of the more and more common use of different components, both economical but also related to a more social context in the measurements of the definitions of poverty. There are different studies and some of them are containing more economical components such as income and a food basket. But we make the conclusion after been told of other measurements or example the mentioned newly made conception from UNICEF. The conclusion we may draw here is that also in Cuba, there seems to exist the world trend of incorporating social components in addition to economical components. This conclusion is mainly based on the respondents' knowledge and answers through the interviews.

### **7.1.2 Conclusion: The different character of poverty**

As we already have concluded poverty exists in Cuba and this also got confirmed by six of the seven respondents. About the characteristic of the poverty in Cuba it doesn't take long before you start to agree with the statement to consider poverty in Cuba as special. Therefore we remark the need to understand and have some knowledge of the poverty's complexity, to better understand the character of poverty in Cuba. We state that poverty in Cuba has to be considered from a wider perspective, when extreme poverty with the question of survival does not exist. We could be fast in drawing this conclusion from the information we received during our interviews, observations and also when we compare it to our knowledge of the poverty in Latin America. We agree that poverty in Cuba is different when compared to many other countries and had different characteristic. We could notice a higher inclusion and equality when it came to standards of basic needs, for example health, education and food. Which are the features of the universal social politics that exists in Cuba, which made exclusion lighter in relation to social services. Also we could note the better access to health care in Cuba. Those are the characteristics, which define the poverty in Cuba in comparison to other countries.

### **7.1.3 Conclusion: The characteristic of poverty, which got reinforced in the crisis**

We can first of all make the statement that Cuba got very affected by the crisis, and this is also seen in the changed characteristics of the poverty in the country. We state that the reality in Cuba changed dramatically by the introduction of the new money system. A money system, which we state to be the main reason for the declined living standard, as well as the raised exclusion to welfare in Cuba. We make the statement through information from the interviews, the literature and as well our observations of the Cuban reality. It is seen that the money system has increased difficulties for the Cubans to satisfy their daily needs. This means that there is a need of accessing CUC to get hold of products and reach welfare. For example the increased difficulties in satisfying the daily needs are seen in the comments made during the interviews concerning the ration book did not cover the entire month. And the



problem with the ration book was the need to complement it by other products that today only could be bought by CUC.

This new need for CUC leads us to two other reinforced characteristics of poverty we conclude that the crisis has meant. The first is the person who carries out a kind of “discrete begging”, which is often seen in Cuba, and the other character is the more obvious cases of so called “jineteros” and “jineteras”. We can conclude that the later groups are the strongest feature of the prostitution, which exists in Cuba, which got confirmed in the interviews and as well in the literature. The causes of those characteristics that were reinforced during the crisis are the changed living situations and the new money system. The new money system, which we already have clarified, creates a big amount of difficulties to satisfy the daily needs and this, along with the exclusion from welfare that lack of CUC means to Cuba, is forcing some Cubans into “discrete begging” and as well into prostitution.

## **7.2. Disadvantaged groups**

### **7.2.1 Conclusion: Groups with a higher risk of vulnerability**

One conclusion we make about characteristics of disadvantaged groups and as well the characteristics of those who are exposed to higher vulnerability is that those are especially the elderly, whom are living by themselves and have no one taking care of them. This occurs because of the demographic change that Cuba is suffering from. Other groups they consider are more likely to live in social disadvantage are big families, single mothers, persons working in the state sector, persons with a low level of education and disabled persons. Those characteristics as we have concluded are mainly related to the data material from the interviews. Some of the respondents and the literature we have read referred as well to the black people being more vulnerable. The literature could use strong terms such as an existing racism. The Cubans did not use this term but some of them were aware of the different conditions regarding the color of the skin.

We make the statement that black persons are vulnerably in the Cuban society today. A statement we do both from comments of the interview, what we have read in the literature and as well from our own experience. Some of the respondents include the black people in their answer of which were the disadvantaged groups today in Cuba, but a much deeper explanation was never received, and because of this many of our following conclusions which are made in this part are from our own observations and experience, but also some literature. There were a shade of “invisible” racism that was not able to be shown clearly. Some of our observations made it possible to visualize the shade we already possessed from the interviews, concerning the suspicions of hidden values and racism towards the black. And a conclusion we make is that hidden values do exist in relation to racism in Cuba, but it was at times a sensitive subject.

### **7.2.2 Conclusion: Inequality which creates vulnerability**

That “money makes the world go around” is a well-known and famous saying, and yes, money is important in the world we live in. This is unarguable. Cuba is no exception. A conclusion we make is that a gap does exist between people in Cuba and so by that inequality. This gap and inequality originates from the two existing currencies in the country. Cubans can be divided into two groups, the group who has access to CUC and the other group who does not enjoy this access. The group without access has a tough time since they seem desperate to get hold of CUC, a desperation that can be visualized by the Cubans trying to get a breadcrumb of what the tourists spend without concern when on vacation in Cuba. This conclusion is made from the respondents talking about the complexity of the problem concerning the CUC currency and the need to get hold of CUC to satisfy the daily needs. We could also see this through observations and literature, which mentioned the complication the money meant for the Cubans. So we state that shortage of access to CUC raises the vulnerability and the groups without access should be considered as disadvantaged groups.

## **7.3 Social politics in Cuba**

### **7.3.1 Conclusion: Some credits to the Cuban society**

The Cuban society has been characteristic for their success in social development which has been invested in and preferred before economical or technical development. The very base of the revolution was to change the society into an equal one, and much can be said about Cuba and their political system but one has to admit that they have to get credit for the money spent on social development. They have tried to cover the basic needs for their citizens and outranks as mentioned the rest of the continent when it comes to education, health and sanitation. The idea of solidarity, universality, comprehensiveness and integrity is that all basic needs should be accessible for the people, and this has been carried out as a promise since the revolution. People don't starve, they don't walk without clothes and they can enjoy the services that the state guarantees through the constitution. So on the basis of this we made some conclusions concerning social politics in Cuba. We mentioned firstly that Cuba has through the application of a universal and free social policy made possible a social development never seen before in an underdeveloped country. They have lifted the people out of extreme poverty. We can conclude through the interviews and the read literature that the state has a monopoly on all social services, and all this is for free. One can compare this to other countries where the social security only is offered to them who can afford to pay, and the people in the strongest need are left behind. But in Cuba the state has, despite few resources through the chosen investments in the social programs and a widespread social policy, managed to lift the Cubans out of extreme poverty and the investments have as well helped in preventing them to fall back into extreme poverty.

### **7.3.2 Conclusion: The cracks in the politic facade related to the crisis in the 1990s.**

What before seemed to be the characteristic of the universal social politics in the country has started to weaken is our conclusion. We relate this from interviews, literature and observations, where the information is often pointing out some kind of good will and purpose the Cuban state have in many sentences, but this seems today, as it is not enough. The respondents explained that the situation today is something that has lost the stability compared to how it was before. Many times this is connected to the crisis during the 90s and the new economical challenges. The statement we draw from the information we regained was that it seems that the social politics in the country does not succeed to overcome the new situation. One respondent said *“there exists an education system that do not respond to the economical system, and that neither the health-care system respond to the economical system”* The social politics has been excellent and has had many good components, but has all the time been fighting in a headwind, and all the time on the verge of collapse.

Another example we include in the statement of the weakened social policies was the new problem to adopt the calculated measurements of the lowest income into the reality for the Cubans. This meant that there was a shortage of the guaranteed basic need supplies from being provided by the state. Even if the ration book which is the main character of the support from the state concerning the daily basic needs, is supposed to be a complement, the structure in the Cuban society did stop the Cubans from getting hold of on the supplements in reality therefore created difficulties for the Cuban to get their needs satisfied. The conclusions we make for the different reasons for cracks in the social policies in Cuba are to be found into the history, and especially related to the crisis in the 1990s, when the fall of Soviet occurred, the introduction of the CUC and the tightened blockade from the United States.

All those factors meant a limitation for the social politics in Cuba to recover after the crisis. And the statement we make in our study is; the success of the social policies in Cuba is impressing, but today there still exist cracks in the politics and they are growing. Cuba does not seem to be able to adopt their policy into the reality because of the changed circumstances.

### **7.3.3 Conclusion: The need and the problem of social work**

We make a few conclusions concerning social work in Cuba since it was a subject that was brought up for discussion during the interviews. We can make the conclusion that social work does not possess a strong tradition in Cuba, nor is it a strong feature to be found in the country's education. It seems for us that related to this, something was on the way to develop back in year 2004, when it regained more focus both in practice and as a university subject. This we can state through literature as well as from some respondents. But a second statement we can make is that the existing situation today has signs of development that has declined and almost stopped, so a conclusion is that the social work related to the profession instead of evolving, has gone backwards again. What we can also state is that despite those conclusions, the social work continues to have a central role as the out carrier of the social politics in Cuba. And there is an increasing need for social work, a lot due to the crisis during

the 1990s. And this need is still growing. Today social work still exists in practice. There have been many different actions taken by social workers to increase the living conditions for people. But as we can conclude there is a lack of education and professionalism of social workers, which makes it difficult for them to know how to deal with the social problems that occur. Another problem is that you as a social worker have to be creative and independent and this doesn't seem to be the case in Cuba today.

#### **7.4 The Special Period's impact on Cuba**

A conclusion we make which is done after all the different data collections is that the effects from the crisis did have a great impact on the Cuban both on the individual and the society. Before the crisis during the 1980s people had better living conditions and the life was not as difficult, looking from an economical and material perspective, those difficulties became more visible during the 1990s. With the loss of the subsidies from Soviet and the world economical crisis Cuba was standing alone and this had a deep negative impact on the country and still is visualized today. This can be seen in the fact that we felt that the class society that was tried to be exterminated by the revolution has come back to Cuba. The reforms that the government carried out didn't really work out as planned; as for example the reform of introduction of the two-currency system has been a kind of disaster for the society. As we have informed in the previous conclusions the main part of them are related to the crisis. By this as we have concluded before with help of the literature, the interviews and the observations is that Cuba got affected by the crisis in many bad ways. We have stated the new face of poverty referring to exclusion of products and welfare for the Cubans, which has its connection to the new money system that was introduced in the 1990s. We have concluded that this solution unfortunately had not showed the best results, by the creation of a different begging and desperation after the currency CUC. Which also are the features of the prostitution in Cuba, which has its causes in the hunt and need for CUC. Even if the government tries to measure the minimum income to succeed to satisfy the basic need, we have stated cracks in those calculations to adapt to the reality, which means vulnerable groups don't have the same security from the Universals politics today, which they had before. Also another impact from the crisis is that professionals are more often seen working in the tourism sector because of the tipping in CUC. We make the conclusion that the impact that the crisis had in Cuba are obvious and that the cracks in the society are growing. In Cuba there exists a shortage of access to welfare and products, which has started to create a strong frustration, which shows in the society in a destructive way. We draw the conclusion that the crisis impact has been more merciless in Cuba than in many other parts in the world. And the impacts by the crisis remain obvious but unresolved.

#### **7.5 Suggestions for additional studies**

There is need for further studies within the previously treated fields. Cuba has always been interesting to study because its policies have been so revolutionary, especially with regards to their success with universal policies in spite of the country's relative underdevelopment. There have been many studies related to the revolution. But we experience a shortage of studies

looking at the new circumstances in the country that is the new situation resulting from the currency system in Cuba. There is a strong need of deeper studies in this field and its impact on the population, as well as about the lack of the compilation of remittances and the "black market" this currency system has caused. This also poses the question of what future developments will look like, as for example young people will not bother getting an education as there are no benefits. In the long-term, this could lead to an entirely new socio-economical situation in Cuba.

## **8. Summary**

### **8.1 Motivation**

This research is the result of our curiosity about Cuba that was related to our interest in the poverty question. We have both been interested in the complexity of poverty and already had some previous knowledge about the subject. The fact that some measurements place Cuba in line with developed countries while others placed Cuba among developing countries raised our interest. As we did not have any own experiences of visiting Cuba, there were plenty of question marks to be answered.

### **8.2 Purpose**

The purpose of our research was first of all to look at the complexity of poverty in Cuba. Poverty has to be analyzed in relation to disadvantaged groups and social politics. This is the reason of our study's three main topics: poverty, disadvantaged groups and social politics. Concerning the subject poverty, our aim was to get a good overall picture of both how the experts reasoned and defined poverty in Cuba, we also wanted to broaden our study by trying to catch the unofficial view of poverty, as perceived by local people.

During the entire extent of the study, our aim and purpose were to understand these topics in relation to the history of the country, with the main focus being on the 90s. We wanted to see how the conditions might have changed during the years, so that we in the end would be able to raise a discussion about our observations. A second aim was to tie together some important facts from all the data collection and reach conclusions about the relation between poverty, disadvantaged groups and social politics in Cuba.

### **8.3 Data collection**

To perform the study we decided to visit Cuba ourselves to collect data material related to our chosen subjects; poverty, disadvantaged groups and social policies in Cuba. The data, consisting of interviews, observations and literature, was collected during two months in the autumn 2009.

We conducted seven interviews with Cubans who had expert knowledge in our chosen subjects. Each interview started with questions about poverty. After treating that subject, it felt natural to change the focus towards the disadvantaged groups in Cuba. Then we tried to stake

out what characterizes disadvantaged groups, and understand how this topic is defined in Cuba. To get the best overall picture of issues as complex as poverty and disadvantaged groups, we raised the issue of social politics in Cuba. We tried to gain information about how the social politics were constructed in the country. We tried to be open-minded and also include questions about the country's history and culture, as well as questions related to the 90s on all three subjects.

The interviews were held in Spanish. We considered this to be the best option for receiving information since this gave the interviewees the possibility to express themselves without a language barrier.

Both of us have good knowledge of the Spanish language since we had been living in Latin American countries such as Costa Rica and Mexico. We considered our Spanish to be good enough to hold the interviews in Spanish. There were still limitations in the language, but we were aware of them and did our best to minimize their effect. During the interviews we gave the respondents an interview guide with questions, which helped reduce misunderstandings.

The additional data collections were sources in literature and observations. Those observations were made during our time in Cuba, and were mainly related to situations which occurred to us when we interacted with Cubans. We were able to use most of our observations in our analysis of our three topics.

## **8.4 Method**

In the data collection with the interviews we chose a qualitative research method. We found that a qualitative method was better suited for our purpose, which was to receive precise information about the study's subjects. This was best achieved through our chosen method, as this gave the respondents the possibility to formulate information and their opinions in their own words. The information we received from the qualitative interviews gave us reliable information to analyze and use for our conclusions.

Our interview guide helped us to open up the dialog. It was important to succeed with this dialogue since the aim was to receive relevant information from the subjects.

To increase the reliability of our interviews we chose to record them, which we then transcribed. For the transcriptions we used help from native Spanish speakers who could understand every word and expressions used. This gave us the best and most reliable material to work with.

To use private observations in a research study can be difficult because it can be hard for the researchers to remain objective and ensure their reliability. We dealt with this by being as open-minded as possible and by all the time reflect about the observations with as wide a perspective as possible. Our aim with these observations was to be able to gain further knowledge by hearing opinions from local people, which would give us a wider and deeper basis for the discussion at the end of our thesis.

## **8.5 Results**

### **8.5.1 Poverty**

All the respondents except for one agreed on the fact that poverty exists in Cuba. Six of the respondents had a wide perspective concerning how to define and reason about poverty. They used aspects such as culture, social context and social deprivation when defining poverty. The respondents often connected poverty to shortage of resources and to the economic situation in the country. Several of the respondents brought up the fact that even with salaries from the government it is very difficult to satisfy daily basic needs.

The respondents referred to the poverty in Cuba as something special; to understand it, it is necessary to have knowledge about the history of the country as well as about the complexity of poverty.

They often made comparisons to other Latin American countries and remarked that the characteristics of poverty in Latin America were exclusion and extreme poverty, which was not the case in Cuba, largely due to the inclusive social politics in Cuba which gave everyone access to health, education and food.

Some of the respondents were of the opinion that one of the causes of the crisis was the inadequate perception of the cost of living upon which social politics in the 1990s was based, with an incorrect calculation of minimum income and ration book. The calculated amount was not adapted to real life conditions. The main reason for this difficulty is related to the introduction of the CUC currency during the mid 1990s. One of the consequences is that, still today, a monthly salary from the government is paid in Cuban pesos. But this does not give access to all products, as there is a big market where payment could only be made with CUC.

The main measures of poverty that relate to our subjects are primarily concerned with economic and sociological metrics. The respondents with knowledge in these subjects also said that additional measures are available that include other components, such as access to existing resources.

Some respondents stated that an integrated dialogue has not been established between the different perspectives and disciplines within the poverty measurements in Cuba. One said that there may have been isolated attempts, but nothing that is integrated with the overall picture.

### **8.5.2 Disadvantaged groups**

The definition of a socially disadvantaged person in Cuba is someone who is unable to satisfy basic needs. From our investigation we can draw the conclusion that the groups considered to be in higher risk to become socially disadvantaged in Cuba today are: elderly people, large families, single mothers, the black population as well as other minorities not considered as white, people working in the public sector, people with a low level of education and disabled people.

The most vulnerable of these groups are the elderly, especially old people without families living alone. The risk of belonging to the disadvantaged groups increases if you are part of one or more of the above mentioned variables. These groups have full access to social security benefits just as any other Cuban citizen but their needs cannot be fulfilled sometimes

because of short resources. The crisis during the 1990s worsened the living standards of the population and this also greatly affected the already disadvantaged groups.

### **8.5.3 Social policy**

The interviewees mentioned the Cuban social politics as something good and pointed out the fact that it is universal, free and accessible for everyone in the country.

We received the information that ever since the revolution there has been a lot of efforts in carrying out social programs (concerning for example health care and education) throughout the whole country and a lot of profound social transformations were made which gave the poor the possibility to benefit from several new advantages. One respondent mentioned that social rights and social security for everyone are established within the constitution of Cuba.

Some respondents said that the social benefits are unconditional. There were also some respondents saying the opposite, but when asked, they were unable to give us the stated rules for receiving the benefits.

According to one respondent the main purpose of social politics is to work preventively with the aim to find the population at risk before their situation gets any worse.

The subject of welfare was discussed. Some respondents said that welfare is a common expression, but that speaking of welfare in Cuba was to be too ambitious. They said that it would be better to use terms like “raising life conditions” or “raising the quality of life”. Another respondent was of the opinion that welfare in Cuba is of a more social character than purely of an economical character.

When the respondents compared the Cuban social policy internationally they made it clear that they found the Cuban way better. One respondent said that in Cuba everyone is included but in other countries there is a big level of exclusion when it comes to the poor population.

Yet even with these improvements in social development, criticism towards the system was voiced during our interviews. One respondent said that societies are heterogeneous and that even if the social programs carried out are meant for everyone there will always be some people worse off than others.

It was also mentioned that the government's social politics can't always note the difference in needs, for example between two cities, when having to provide everyone equally.

One respondent thought that public social spending should be modified and that for example employment should be opened up and take new forms. In his opinion, the current system of the state as the main employer is not working, as the state can't provide everyone with a sufficient income.

All respondents mentioned that the 1990s was a hard time for everyone. However, even if there was a shortage of resources the government tried to maintain the idea of the universal social politics, though a change towards harsher selection of applications receiving social help was noticeable.

What was brought up concerning social policy and economical shortages was that the situation of Cuba today is not sustainable. According to one respondent the economic growth of the country is not keeping up with the spending on social development. They considered both social and economic reforms to be necessary.



## **8.6 Discussion/Conclusions**

### **8.6.1 The complicated poverty**

The poverty question is very complex, and to be able to understand poverty in Cuba knowledge is needed about the subject's complexity as well as about the history of Cuba. This is our first conclusion. Our second conclusion is that poverty in Cuba, as opposed to many other countries, is not about survival but about access to basic consumer goods.

The poverty question is a burning topic in Cuba and regained importance on the social agenda after the crisis in the 1990s. Based on information gathered from citizens we talked to, the interview respondents and as well as from what we could read in the literature, we can conclude that the general situation of the country and the living standard were better during the 1980s. These then declined during the crisis, which still affects Cubans today.

We also noticed that the subject poverty was difficult, even for the people we met every day. We discussed the ambivalent attitude the Cubans seemed to have concerning poverty. Even if they did not starve and had many advantages in comparison to poor people in other countries, they were not satisfied and still referred to themselves as poor.

The majority of the respondents took a broad perspective when defining poverty. They often used relative definitions that included the culture and social context. These factors are sometimes observed in poverty measurements even if, like other countries, they use strictly economic measurements such as the food basket and minimum salary. Measurements that include a wider definition, including the social context, are starting to be created. Nonetheless, the disciplines seem to work independently of one another and cooperation has still not been introduced.

### **8.6.2 Disadvantaged groups/inequality**

We could draw two conclusions concerning the disadvantaged groups in the Cuban society. The first one was that the most vulnerable groups are the elderly. Other groups were big families, single mothers, and persons working in the state sector, persons with a low level of education, disabled persons and the non-white population.

We brought up the subject about the black population living in disadvantage in our discussion because of our own observations and some comments during the interviews concerning this subject. In the discussion part we are discussing the possibility of existing hidden values against certain people, especially black people. According to us this can also sometimes be related to an invisible racism and almost to a light apartheid, which we relate to in some of our own observations.

Another clear statement we make in our discussion and as well in our conclusion part is that inequality in Cuba does exist. This inequality originates mostly from the dual currency system. We claim that the Cuban population can be divided into two groups; those in privilege having access to CUC and those finding themselves in a weaker situation only having access to Cuban pesos. And the impact it means not to have access to CUC is the basis for our statement to consider this group as disadvantaged.

### 8.6.3 The Cuban dream/Social politics

Our conclusion incorporates the literature we read on the topic as well as our observations during our stay in Cuba. The discussion and conclusions we reached included several different social political themes, which we had identified during our research. We started the discussion with a reflection of the Cuban dream. The Cuban dream was initially a dream about a society where everyone would live on equal conditions and a society, which would be built upon the concept of solidarity between citizens irrespective of wealth. We analyzed the Cuban dream, which is indeed good, but still seems unreachable. The government in Cuba wishes to continue to follow its own ideology and get the respect of the international community, despite their disagreement with capitalistic ideas. This desire and fight is still present in Cuba today, and is impossible not to notice while being there. You always get reminded of the country's fascinating revolutionary history, both through eye-catching graffiti representing Castro, Che and Cienfuegos and slogans containing messages such as “Viva la revolución” or “Patria o muerte”.

We give credit to the Cuban government for its attempts to improve social development, especially when comparing to the situation in other poor countries and the Latin American context. Cuba has through the introduction of a universal and free social policy made possible a social development never seen before in the Latin American region. Through these reforms, the Cuban government has lifted the people out of absolute poverty.

On the other hand, our observations, interviews and the literature we read show that the generous social politics in Cuba seems to have been weakened by the hard economical situation which occurred in the country since the 1990s. This has resulted in the social development of the country not being as stable as before the crisis and some respondents saw this situation as unsustainable. In our conclusion we therefore state that social politics in Cuba after the hard time in the 1990s has started to show cracks in its façade.

An example of this is the increasingly obvious difficulty to satisfy basic needs with a state salary. Even if the government made an effort to determine an adequate minimum wage, and having taken the ration book into account, shortages in public budget have made it impossible to adopt a minimum wage, which provided citizens with basic consumer goods.

This problem is usually considered as having its roots in the introduction of the second currency in Cuba. Cubans need to get hold of CUCs, which has led to more and well-educated professionals working as waiters in the tourist sector to get tips in CUC. Alternative sources of procurement are prostitution, begging, renting out houses, moving abroad and remittances, to mention only a few.

All through our research, we could note a growing frustration among young people with less and less positive opinions about the existing social politics in Cuba.

All this is something that everyone is aware of but no official changes have yet been announced. The situation remains obvious but unresolved.

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