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THE ROLE OF AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTION COOPERATIVES IN TRANSFORMATION OF RURAL AREAS IN CUBA IN THE 1980s

INTRODUCTION

This paper presents the summary of the results of the joint research project entitled "Cooperativisation of Cuban agriculture: the role of Agricultural Production Cooperatives in organization of rural communities and rural space", carried out by the Department of Latin America of the Faculty of Geography and Regional Studies, Warsaw University, together with the Faculty of Geography of Havana University, in 1987-1990.¹

The data and other materials used in this study were collected in about 60 Agricultural Production Cooperatives (*Cooperativas de Producción Agropecuaria, CPA*) located in various regions of Cuba during the field investigations which consisted of interviews with cooperatives authorities as well as the cooperatives members. These field studies have been unique in Cuba from the point of view of their subject-matter and spatial dimensions. Nevertheless, we were able to spend only some hours in each of the CPAs and we had no possibilities to make the interviews with the other groups of Cuban rural population, that is peasants and workers of the State Farms. These are the main reasons for limiting our report only to the presentation of the documentation collected in the CPAs. We are conscious that we present the official point of view on the collectivisation of Cuban agriculture. The very complicated socio-economic situation in Cuba since 1990 does not facilitate the formulation of the opinions on the CPA's influences on the living conditions of Cuban rural population and on the level of Cuban agriculture.

¹ Preliminary results of studies conducted in the years 1987-88 were published in 1991 in Volume 9 of the journal *Actas Latinoamericanas de Varsovia* and the final report of the results of the project was published in 1992 in Volume 13 of the same journal. The following persons from the Faculty of Geography and Regional Studies participated in the realization of the project: Andrzej Dembicz, Joaquín González, Maciej Jędrusik, Jerzy Makowski, Maria Skoczek.

Due to the financial difficulties of our university and the worsening of situation in Cuba we cannot continue the project.²

Nevertheless, the results of our investigation are the documentation of situation of a new, important sector of Cuban agriculture in the late 1980s and we hope that they will be used in the future for the analysis of changes in Cuban rural areas.

THE ORGANIZATION OF CPASs

1. The organization of Agricultural Production Cooperatives (CPAs) started in the second half of the 1970s. These new agricultural units are considered (by Cuban authorities) the superior form of production as in order to create them individual farmers pool their land and equipment and cultivate the land collectively. The majority of Cuban CPAs were established between 1978 and 1982. In the subsequent years the processes of consolidation and concentration predominated. The overall number of CPAs has remained roughly stable and the total number of their members has been reduced, mainly due to the exclusion of pensioners from the membership lists. Between 1977 and 1989 the number of CPAs grew from 125 to 1374 and their membership — from 1517 to 65 029. As of 1989 the total land area of CPAs was 881,400 hectares. i.e. some 8% of agricultural land in Cuba, while CPAs members and their families accounted for more than ten percent of total Cuban agricultural population (Table 1).

2. The formation of a CPA means the reorganization of land use and agricultural production. The cooperatives supply the export crops: sugar, tobacco and coffee as well as food for domestic consumption, mainly vegetables and animal products such as milk and meat (according to the principal activity, 30% are cane cooperatives, 20% tobacco cooperatives, followed by the vegetable, coffee and livestock ones). Generally, each cooperative is specialized in one crop, but it sets aside a proportion of land (between 5 and 30 or even more per cent) to food crops and livestock production, primarily for its members' own needs.

This system, known as "self-provision" (*autoconsumo*), is common in all CPAs and state farms, and in the case of the former it may be considered as one of the most important incentives for small farmers to join the new form of agricultural production. The products from the land dedicated to *autoconsumo* are used in the worker's canteens and sold to the cooperative members

² During the last visit of the member of our project team, Jerzy Makowski, in Cuba in February of 1992, it was impossible to carry out field investigations in CPAs due to transportation difficulties. In 1990 the French geographer Denise Douzant Rosenfeld of CNRS started the collaboration with our Cuban colleagues in the studies on rural areas. Thanks to her information (Douzant Rosenfeld 1991, 1992) we can affirm that the CPAs have strengthened the role in Cuban agriculture and first of all in the production for internal market.

at subsidised prices (entitlement to *autoconsumo* products is regulated by the CPA's highest body, the General Assembly). Part of this production which exceeds the members' needs is sold to the state and the profits from such sales constituted an important part of the total CPA's profit.

Table 1

Growth of the CPAs (1979-1989)

	1979	1982	1983	1985	1987	1989
total no. of CPAs	725	1416	1472	1378	1418	1374
total membership (thousands)	16,7	63,3	82,6	69,9	68,9	65,0
total land area (thousands ha)	104	690	938	1009	977	881
average membership	23	45	56	51	49	47
average size (ha)	144	488	637	732	689	641

Sources: Comité Estatal de Estadísticas, *Anuario estadístico de Cuba*, 1983, 1986, 1987; CEE, Dirección de Agropecuario y Silvicultura, CPA. Relación por municipios, La Habana 1990

3. The concentration of small-private farms and the establishment of Agricultural Production Cooperatives is one of the principal factors of spatial concentration of rural settlements. The liquidation of the dispersed rural dwellings (*bohios*) by grouping the cooperative members in new settlements equipped with basic technical and social infrastructure is another important goal of collectivisation of Cuban agriculture. CPAs settlements constitute presently the most numerous group of new settlement units developing in rural areas. Their number, estimated at more than 1000, is three times greater than the number of so-called "new communities" (*neuvias comunidades*) constructed primarily during the 1960s and 1970s for workers employed on State Farms.³

These new settlements are situated along the roads served by public transport: some of them are located within the peripheries of small towns, others on the outskirts or proper areas of bigger villages and there are also CPA's settlements established as independent localities. The first cooperatives received housing and infrastructural improvements free of charge from the government. Since the beginning of the 1980s the cooperative members have built houses themselves. They have enjoyed priority in buying construction supplies from the state and they received construction credits from the National Bank (typically 5,000 pesos repayable during fifteen years).

³ The analysis of the CPA settlements was presented by Maria Skoczek in one of the previous volumes of *Miscellanea Geographica* (Skoczek 1990).

REGIONAL DIFFERENCES IN THE COOPERATIVISATION PROCESS

1. The Agricultural Production Cooperatives are widely spread all over Cuba. They are located in all provinces and almost in all municipios (Table 2, Fig. 1). However, the proportion of agricultural land area incorporated in the cooperative sector varies from province to province. In 1988 CPAs accounted for 8 per cent of agricultural land in Cuba, but in provinces like Santiago de Cuba, Granma, Guantnamo — for more than 10 per cent, while in other ones, i.e. Las Tunas, Pinar del Rio, Cienfuegos only between 6 and 7 per cent of agricultural land has been concentrated in the CPAs.

The cooperatives group more than 50% of agricultural land belonging to the non-state sector only in Matanzas, Ciego de Avila and Camaguey provinces, while in traditional peasant regions like Pinar del Rio and Oriente the proportion of land incorporated to the CPAs varies from 34 to 43% (Table 2).

Table 2

The Agricultural Production Cooperatives by provinces (December 1988)

Province	No. of CPAs	Average size (ha)	Average membership	Percentage of CPA area in:	
				total land area	non-state sector
Pinar del Rio	175	415	44	6,7	34,4
La Habana	65	821	89	9,4	49,1
Cd. Habana	2	379	44	0,2	14,2
Matanzas	78	1128	84	7,1	62,3
Villa Claralis	5	719	58	9,6	46,1
Cienfuegos	51	564	38	6,9	54,6
S. Spiritus	70	789	76	8,2	43,6
C. de Avila	70	820	55	9,6	58,5
Camaguey	103	952	46	7,0	56,8
Las Tunas	64	629	44	6,0	41,2
Holguin	150	572	35	8,1	37,0
Granma	159	510	38	10,1	39,5
Santiago	144	628	41	13,9	43,2
Guantanamo	147	484	23	10,0	35,0
Isla de la Juventud	5	400	19	0,1	30,8
Cuba	1398	649	47	8,0	44,5

Sources: CEE, Dirección de Agropecuario y Silvicultura: — Balance de la tierra del país y su utilización 31,12,1988, La Habana mayo de 1989; — CPA. Relación por municipios, La Habana 1990

2. There are also some regional differences in the process of spatial concentration of rural population accompanying the establishment of agricultural production cooperatives. In municipios with domination of agricultural population dispersed in small villages or even in isolated farms, the CPA settlements account for a much greater share of cooperative members than in municipios in which farmers have been living in small towns for years.

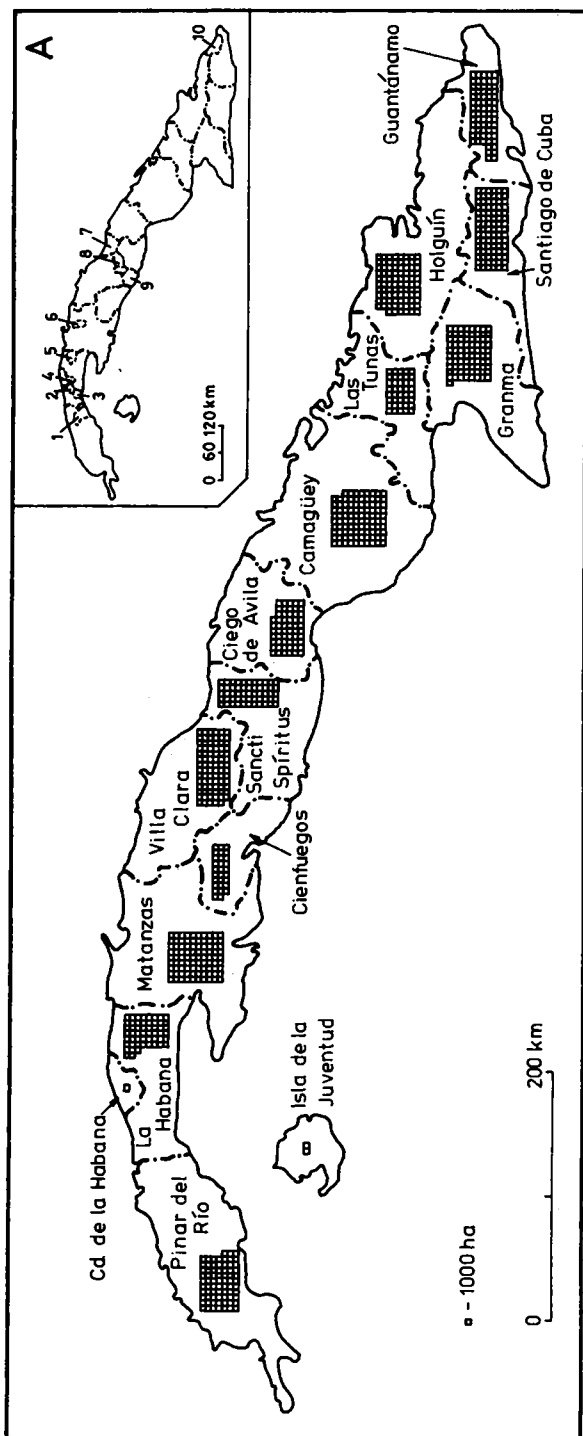


Fig. 1. Distribution of land area incorporated to CPAs by provinces

A. Localization of studied municipalities: 1 — San Cristóbal, 2 — San Antonio de los Baños, 3 — Alquizar, 4 — Bejuical, 5 — Madruga, 6 — Perico, 7 — Yaguajay, 8 — Cabaiguan, 9 — Trinidad, 10 — Baracos.

The construction of new settlements and provision of social and technical infrastructure are more advanced in the regions where traditions of cooperativisation in agriculture are the oldest and where CPA settlements form independent units (a good example is provided by the municipio of Cabaiguan, Sancti Spiritus province, where a majority of the CPA settlements group almost all members of individual cooperatives and are among better organized villages in this municipio).

3. Generally, the cooperative members enjoy better living conditions, i.e. easier access to electricity, health service, roads and some rationed goods sold in ration system, in comparison with small private farmers. Due to the *autoconsumo* system, they have more cheap food than other groups of Cuban people. These better living conditions and, especially in the case of women, the possibility of a salaried job are the major incentives for small farmers to join cooperatives.

The inhabitants of the mountain regions of Cuba have enjoyed major improvements in living conditions after the establishment of Agricultural Production Cooperatives, the so-called *cooperativas de la montaña*. It has been due to the governmental programme of the improvement of living conditions in the mountain regions, the so-called Plan Turquino.⁴

CHANGES IN SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC BEHAVIOUR OF RURAL POPULATION DUE TO THE COOPERATIVISATION PROCESS

1. The majority of cooperatives' members, especially those living in the new settlements, form local societies interested in improving their living conditions as well as in increasing the profits from agricultural production. They express this interest by participation in voluntary works in cooperative's settlements and fields as well as by the organization of excursions to plages or camping centres. They also organize some festivities in order to celebrate the completion of harvest or historical days.

The best organized cooperative societies are those which had been formed among the members of the existing credit and service cooperatives (CCSs), as they already had experience in some collective work.⁵

2. In many cooperatives visited during our field study we could observe a great interest of cooperative's management boards in the introduction of new

⁴ According to *Granma*, all the inhabitants of the mountain areas in Santiago de Cuba, Guantanamo, Holguin, Granma, Villa Clara, Sancti Spiritus, Cienfuegos and Pinar del Rio provinces enjoy the system of the family doctor service (*médico de la familia*), while the average proportion of population under this system of health services amounts to 50 percent (*Granma*, 5.03.1990).

⁵ A very interesting analysis of the different ways of incorporation of Cuban peasants in the CPAs was presented by Angelina Herrera Sorzano, member of the Cuban staff involved in the project (Herrera Sorzano 1991).

crops (like vegetables, fruits and forage crops) as well as hog, sheep and goat raising. The growth of agricultural production, especially the production of a greater variety of foods, is considered one of the most important goals, as it contributes to elimination of Cuba's dependency on food imports. From the point of view of the cooperatives' members, the increase of volume and greater variety of their products mean more food for their families and more profit from dividends distributed among them at the end of the year.

3. During our visits in Agricultural Productive Cooperatives we were informed that there were many people seeking to join CPAs, especially among the rural landless population. One can suppose that the status of CPA's member has the greater social prestige in comparison with the one of a worker on a state-owned farm.

4. The interviews with the cooperatives' members, as well as the information obtained from cooperatives' authorities, confirm that one of the CPAs functions, that is the official ideological penetration to peasant agriculture, was realized through the general membership of the cooperatives' population in various organizations, such as *Brigadas de la Defensa y Producción*, *Movimiento de Tropas Territoriales*, *Federación de Mujeres Cubanas*, *Unión de Jóvenes Comunistas*, etc.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

1. The analysis of changes in the rural areas of Cuba allows us to indicate the following important transformations due to the cooperativisation process:

— reorganization of agricultural space, i.e. introduction of new patterns of land use, new crops, livestock and modern farming into many rural areas, earlier underdeveloped and/or subutilized;

— appearance of new settlement units, which resemble villages in their architecture and outlook and are better adapted to settlement-related tastes and traditions of the Cubans in comparison with *neuvias comunidades* constructed for workers employed on state-owned farms.

— formation of rural local societies interested in improving their living and working conditions, but at the same time in conserving some traditions of peasant farming, absent on state farms.

2. Naturally, there are many smallholders who refuse to join Agricultural Production Cooperatives despite the incentives and advantages offered by this form of production. They prefer to "be their own bosses" and their refusal to join is also motivated by the problems of organizational and financial nature presented in some CPAs.

3. Nevertheless, in comparison with East European countries which tried to enforce the collectivisation of agriculture, the Cuban CPAs seemed to enjoy more successes in the process of gradual collectivisation of the

peasantry. We can affirm that the principle of voluntary membership in CPAs has been fully respected (the small farms dispersed by the areas of CPAs are the best proof of this statement) and the farmers, especially the older ones, who have joined cooperatives could and did improve their living conditions.

The other difference between the cooperativisation processes in Cuba and East European countries consists in social situation in rural areas in the period of the beginning of this process. The first CPAs in Cuba were established approximately twenty years after the first agrarian reform, when only about twenty per cent of agricultural land was in the individual farms and many small farmers were old people without inheritors interested in farming in the same conditions.

4. Last but not least, we have to remember that members of Cuban CPAs receive repayment for their land or livestock contribution, so when they leave the cooperative they cannot gain their former farm. This may be one of the most important factors of the permanence of CPAs in Cuba.

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