

ASCE AT 30: Past, Present and Future*

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June 2020

- An email exchange with John Debereux provide a critical stimulus in writing this paper. Jorge Sanguinety commented on a preliminary draft. I claim sole responsibility for the views expressed, and especially for any errors and/or omissions.

While the physical destruction of the Berlin Wall took place in 1991, the intangible one started on November 9 of 1989 when the East Berlin Communist Party announced citizens were free to cross borders after midnight on that same day. This set-off a profound and extensive set of changes liberating Eastern Europe from Soviet control, and generating the eventual dissolution of the Soviet Union, German unification and the Europe that exists today which includes the Baltic countries. More generally, it altered intellectual thinking in the West in profound manners, allowing new spaces for ideas that previously would end on the fringes of intellectual and academic discourse. For instance, it became feasible without much controversy to consider the idea that communist regimes could lose power or the end of history as the triumph of western style liberal democracy (Fukuyama 1989)¹.

At the personal level, this new tolerance liberated me from the view that working on Cuba was an unproductive professional activity unless you wanted to be a Cuba specialist or had an inclination to engage in primarily ideological discussions. Neither one of these alternatives appealed to me as a professional activity. Hence, I had intentionally stayed away from working on Cuba at the professional level for 20 years, since arriving as an Assistant Professor at the University of Maryland in 1969 as a freshly minted Ph. D. The events associated with the intangible destruction of the Berlin Wall in 1989 altered my view on the possibility of doing professionally attractive work relying on the modern tools being developed in the economics profession, emphasizing incentives and the new institutional economics.

In contrast to many, however, I was very dubious that there was any real possibility of change towards a market economy and democracy in Cuba. My simple reasoning was that an important factor in the acceptance of communism in Eastern Europe was the exogenous power of the Russian military boot under the guise of the Soviet Union and its rejection was due in part to a substantial revival of the nationalism that existed in these countries prior to the Soviet arrival. In Cuba, on the other hand, communism was an endogenous phenomenon imposed on

¹ A more recent and pessimistic view of liberal democracy, at least with respect to the U.S., is available from the same author (Fukuyama 2011).

society by the Castro regime's clever manipulation of Cubans' long-standing nationalistic feelings and aspirations.

These conflicting views between an increased feasibility of doing professionally attractive work for an economist who did not want to specialize on Cuba or ideological debates and the absence of an increased probability of regime change played a role in the origins of ASCE as a professional organization. While the likely absence of regime change was not a widely shared view at that time, since many expected Cuba to follow a similar path to Eastern Europe within a reasonably short time- period, it was a very inclusive view under which to organize. Those who disagreed could wait until a more propitious time to organize along a narrower focus after the appearance of solid signs in that direction. On the other hand, those holding the broader view would have found it difficult to participate with enthusiasm under the narrow view. Both camps included very successful professionals, mainly economists, who had established themselves in the U.S. In economic parlance, they had very high opportunity costs to their time due to being in peak age cohorts of professional careers, namely 35-55. Support for the more inclusive approach became overwhelming once the two alternatives became clear in the late spring of 1990.

In an essay on ASCE's origins before 'Recorded History', I included as an Appendix a marked-up copy of the Association of Indian Economic Studies 1990 constitution used as the basis for ASCE's first constitution (Betancourt 2009) in the late spring of 1990. It contained as its objectives: " a) to promote interest in the study of Indian economics in its broadest sense, b) to encourage enquiry into, and analysis , the problems and issue of the Indian economy, and c)to facilitate communication and discussion among scholars working towards the above two objectives." I essentially adopted these objectives of the AIES constitution as ASCE's objectives by substituting the word Cuban for the word Indian in the two places where it appears.

ASCE's website includes a 'Recorded History' of the association, namely after it officially started by incorporating itself in Delaware, written by J. Pujol and L. Perez (2009). This history describes ASCE's original purpose based on the articles of incorporation written in the late summer of 1990. "The articles of incorporation indicate that the main purpose of the

organization would be 'to encourage professional, high quality scholarship on economic issues by Cuban-Americans of all political persuasions'; and 'to promote professional high quality scholarship on economic issues of interest to the Cuban society by anyone willing and able to contribute to such scholarship.' They also indicate that the organization would not take partisan attitudes, nor would it commit its members to any particular position on economic questions." In addition to a constitution, articles of incorporation were legally required for ASCE to become a member of the American Economic Association system of Allied Social Sciences Association, which happened December of 1990.

In neither one of these statements does one find any explicit mention of transition to a free market economy and democratic society. Interestingly, the intellectual tension at the beginning of ASCE's existence between these two views has continued in unspoken fashion since then. For instance, if one looks at the Association's current mission statement on ASCE's website (www.ascecuba.org) one finds that it reads as follows. *Our mission is to promote research, publications, and scholarly discussion on the Cuban economy in its broadest sense, [including on the social, economic, legal, and environmental aspects of a transition to a free market economy and a democratic society in Cuba.] ASCE is committed to a civil discussion of all points of view.* The potentially controversial part is the phrase I have placed in square brackets.

Does it matter? Yes and No, depending on interpretation of the statement. The statement does not exclude the study of other topics including, for example, the study of all aspects of the Cuban economy as they evolve under any economic regime or any form of government. In a sense the statement within brackets represents the wishes or hopes of many members, perhaps most. Nevertheless, it is not a requirement for participation nor should it be, in my opinion, for a wide variety of reasons.

For instance, the notion of scholarship implies one's willingness to study a subject not to limit its range of possible outcomes. Furthermore, the notion of high quality is contrary to an insistence on studying only or mainly an outcome that has not materialized in 30 years. At a more practical level, insisting on this view as a requirement for participation would raise the

issue of what variant of a free market economy or a democratic society one wants to adopt. The latter could lead to unattractive debates, which many would not want to engage in hypothetically. Similarly, it would prevent ASCE from attracting participants from Cuba, other than openly declared dissidents, or expose them to unacceptable risks to their well-being. In either case, it would lower diversity of views and information available to the organization. Finally, under some admittedly unusual circumstances, it could jeopardize our legal status as a tax-exempt organization. The latter proscribes advocacy of policy views.

I. ASCE's Accomplishments in the Past 30 years.

With that out of the way, we can turn to consider ASCE's main accomplishments over the last thirty years and their relationship to its mission broadly defined. ASCE can claim a number of accomplishments directly tied to its mission discussed in detail below. Nonetheless, indirect evidence of its success is worth mentioning briefly. First, its recognition as a source of useful information on Cuba by US government agencies that cite its publications throughout five different administrations. Second, similar recognition by friends and foes of the Cuban government who also rely on its publications or on those of its members. This recognition stems from our success in promoting high quality scholarship on the Cuban economy.² It arises from the persistent efforts of our membership over the last 30 years, which also lead to the direct accomplishments identified below.

First, and perhaps foremost, ASCE holds an annual conference **in Miami** every year. At this conference, individuals present papers relevant to the understanding of the Cuban economy in some or many of the broad aspects mentioned explicitly or implied in its mission. ASCE publishes the conference program and the papers meeting editorial guidelines and deadlines for final revisions as the *Annual Papers & Proceedings* in a series titled **Cuba in Transition**.³

² John Devereux pointed out to me recently that the criticisms of Bernie Sanders by the American liberal press for his positive comments on Fidel Castro were indirectly an acknowledgement of the impact of ASCE's work on the Cuban economy.

³ While I suspect many if not most members would interpret the title as transition to a 'free market economy and democratic society', it can also be interpreted as transition to an uncertain future which, thus far, is far more descriptively accurate.

These volumes, indexed by REPEC since 2018⁴, are available at no charge online at www.ascecuba.org as well as in print for a fee several months after the conference. Both the creation of the conference program and the editorial process have taken place under the supervision of a highly regarded Cuban scholar, Jorge Pérez-López, after the third volume. Currently there are 29 volumes available. Ironically, many of these articles discuss elements of a transition to a market economy or democracy often emphasizing the enormous distance needed to get to reasonable versions of those two outcomes in terms of incentives, institutions and accomplishments.

The structure and topic contents of the conference have varied over the years but some broad features remain the same. An inaugural plenary session stressing recent developments in Cuba from an economic, social and political perspective is its most consistent feature. Providing time for comments from assigned discussants and/or the audience is also a typical feature. Participation in the conference as a presenter is open to anyone who pays the conference fee and does not require membership.⁵ Members enjoy a discount with respect to the conference fee. A members' business meeting that takes place at the end of the second day and a reception for everyone at the end of the first day have become traditions. A luncheon (with a separate fee) that includes a keynote speaker on the second day has also become a tradition. Members who are not academicians often would be reluctant to write papers but can have expertise relevant for a topic, e.g., lawyers and business representatives. Thus, round tables on a topic consisting of professionals with expertise on the topic but with different perspectives have been included at many of the annual meetings. Usually there are two concurrent sessions throughout the conference to accommodate the diversity of professional interests among our members.⁶

⁴ REPEC is an economic research service started in the 1990's that allows worldwide searches of working paper series, journals, papers and proceedings, and even chapters in books via the Internet provided they are indexed according to their format.

⁵ For a brief period, an attempt to restrict participation of members and non-members differentially by requiring non-members to submit full papers, while members needed only abstracts, was in place but, fortunately, it disappeared quickly through a wise practice of non-enforcement by the organizer of the conference.

⁶ While originally started by economists, the association was open to other professions, including demographers, sociologists and political scientists as well as lawyers, engineers and business professionals, from its very beginnings. We sought independence from interest groups from inception. In this context, the membership fee

Second, the association provides two services emphasizing the provision of current high quality information and/or opinions on Cuba or Cuba related issues. One is an email service (ASCE's Newscippings) exclusively for members with news and analyses approximately every two weeks. Ernesto Betancourt, its first editor, started this service in 2001 and it has continued with Joaquín Pujol as editor since 2007. Each issue has an attachment containing informational material that can be up to 100 pages in length. The attachment has two noteworthy features. One is the inclusion of a very wide variety of sources reporting news on Cuba. These sources include official and non-official ones both inside the island and worldwide. The other feature is inclusion of analyses that can be lengthier than newspaper editorials or traditional news items. Another service providing timely quality information on Cuba related issues is a blog, started in 2013, added to the ASCE website to accommodate postings of current interest to members. From inception, the editors of the blog are two economists who have been long-time members of the Association, Luis R. Luis and Ernesto Hernández Catá. The blog is also available at no charge at www.ascecuba.org.

Third, the association provides several services that are of interest to narrower sets of members or focus on promoting the association to different audiences or in different ways. For instance, since 1992 every year ASCE has sponsored a session jointly with the annual American Economic Association Meetings as one of the Allied Social Science Associations. Usually the sessions consist of three authors presenting papers on a wide variety of aspects relevant for the Cuban Economy and three discussants, sometimes including the Chair as a discussant. The primary organizer of these sessions has been Luis Locay, a University of Miami economics professor and a regular attendee at these meetings. Nonetheless, in some years other academically oriented economists in the association have taken over the task. The topics and participants in each session up to 2008 are available in Notes on ASCE's History on the ASCE website. Since 2009, the session topics and participants are available in the annual program of

was an important mechanism to achieve this objective. It was also clear that there might not be enough economists to generate revenues for this purpose and that there were other professionals interested and able to contribute to the broad mission. Hence, our choice of professional diversity was both altruistic in terms of valuing it for its potential content and self-interested in terms of valuing it for its potential revenues.

the Allied social Science Associations at the AEA website,
<https://www.aeaweb.org/conference/past-annual-meetings>.

Among other innovations with this narrower focus, the American Bar Association officially accredits some of the legal panels organized for ASCE's annual meetings. Similarly, the Lecture Series honoring Carlos Diaz Alejandro, who is probably the most distinguished Cuban-American economist of the generation that started ASCE, takes place with some regularity at different venues. The 11th one took place in 2018 in Miami as part of the annual meeting. Details on his contributions, series speakers and topics are available at <https://www.ascecuba.org/carlos-f-diaz-alejandro-lecture-series/>. In the last decade, Carlos Seiglie, who is a professor of economics at Rutgers University, has played a prominent role in organizing the series. Throughout its history, ASCE has held a number of events in addition to the annual meetings with the aim of reaching different audiences or addressing especially important topics. These events have taken place in Washington, New York, Puerto Rico and Spain. ASCE's website history provides an overview of the extent of these efforts. During Helena Solo-Gabriele's Presidency (2016-2018), ASCE introduced a webinar series, managed by Jorge Luis Romeu, to make available free of charge current research on Cuba by ASCE members to a virtual audience. Finally, during this same biennial period, one of the Board members, Michael Strauss, started a new feature in the annual program that allows a selected group of students to participate in a virtual session at the annual conference. Both features continue to prosper under the presidency of Silvia Pedraza (2018-2020).

ASCE started in the Washington DC area. This is not surprising, since this metropolitan area may have the highest concentration of economists anywhere. Moreover, the number of Cuban-American economists with U.S. training in the area at that time was larger than in any other location (at least 20 who have participated at various levels of intensity in ASCE come-up just from memory)⁷. Yet, we were aware that our major audiences were elsewhere. In particular, in the city with the greatest concentration of Cuban-Americans in the U.S. and, thus, we chose to

⁷ A. Aizcorbe, J. Alonso, J. Belt, R. Betancourt, J.J. Buttari, R. Castañeda, O. Echevarria, Raul Fernández, A. Gayoso, E. Hernández Catá, A. Lago, A. Linde, P. Montalván, R. Morán, J. Pérez-López, L. Pérez, J. Pujol, C. Quijano, N. Rivero, J. Sanguinety.

have the annual conference there for this reason. Even then, however, we were concerned about the future. At our first business meeting in 1991, one of our members, Freddie Sanchez, suggested a student prize to stimulate younger generations' interest in the topic.

Implementation of the above suggestion was enthusiastic and persistent. We have had both undergraduate and graduate student prizes financed by ASCE and awarded almost every year mainly under the supervision of Enrique Pumar, who is a sociology professor at Santa Clara University. Currently, awarding of the prizes takes place under the supervision of Mario González-Corzo, an economics professor at CUNY's Lehman College. The top awardees can present their papers at a student session at the annual meetings with their travel expenses financed by ASCE. Up to 2008, mention of the student papers awardees is available in the History entry on ASCE's website. Since 2009, they are available in the program of the papers and proceedings in each volume at the ASCE website.⁸

ASCE has strived for inclusion, independence, and widespread active participation by members in our activities through financing and governance. For instance, we have funded our activities mainly from membership fees and we have sought donations that do not require us to take particular stands or to come up with specific conclusions. Similarly, from inception Presidents serve for two years and stay on as ex-officio for another two years to provide continuity. No one has served as President more than once. Members of the Board can only serve two terms consecutively. Many Presidents continue to support ASCE informally and sometimes formally by becoming involved in a variety of activities upon request. Most Presidents have been economists, but with a wide variety of professional experiences. Several have been international civil servants; several have been entrepreneurs (usually principals in private consulting firms); a couple have been US civil servants and a couple have been academicians. From other professions, we have had a demographer, an educational administrator/corporate executive, two sociologists, and a civil/environmental engineer. We have encouraged and obtained participation of professionals from Cuba by raising external

⁸ A noteworthy fact is that the first place awardee in 2002, Ted Henken, became ASCE's President during the 2012-2014 biennial period.

funds for their travel to the annual conference. The institutionalization of this practice took place during the presidency of Rafael Romeu (2010-2012) and it enjoyed the enthusiastic support of every subsequent president.

Summing up, we should be proud that ASCE has been able to attain its objectives to an extent no one could have imagined in 1990.

II. ASCE's Present and Future as an Organization.

ASCE's mission as defined in its current mission statement, with or without the statement in brackets, is never ending for a simple reason. The task of promoting research, publications and scholarship on a phenomenon as complex and dynamic as an economy is never finished. Both because the object of interest is continually evolving and the subjects perceiving this evolving reality are quite heterogeneous in terms of education, experiences and other characteristics. Nevertheless, organizations are not infinitely lived. Hence, this raises a relevant and critical question -- Is it feasible for ASCE to pursue this mission as an organization at present and in the future?

At the start of her presidency S. Pedraza (2018-2020), drawing on her professional expertise, made an insightful but incomplete judgement about ASCE. "Thus, the most important task to which ASCE has to devote itself is to grow its membership, both with mid-level professionals devoted to the study of Cuba's economy and society, and with young scholars that aspire to also contribute to that study in the near future." (Annual Report 2018, p. 4). There is no doubt about the diagnostic, i.e., the need to grow ASCE's membership. If the solution is limited to mid-level professionals devoted to the study of the Cuban economy and society or to young scholars aspiring to focus on Cuba, however, it is likely to fail for the simple reason that there are unlikely to be enough of them to sustain the association either in the present or in the future.

In most disciplines and professions, including economics, sociology, political science, as well as the legal and business professions, the number of individuals devoted mainly to the study of the Cuban economy and society is rather limited. Indeed, ASCE's membership has never consisted of a majority of individuals having Cuba as their main or one of their two main

specialties. For instance, among the 20 economists named in footnote 7, all of whom have been members of ASCE and most of whom have been major contributors to ASCE's success, only two or three would fall in that category. Furthermore, most individuals respond to incentives, both economic and non-economic ones, in their choice of professions. On the economic incentives side, the demand for Cuba specialists is rather limited and this has been the case for a long time. Hence, the economic incentives for specializing on Cuba have not been very strong in the past and are likely to remain weak in the future.

On the non-economic incentives side, the ties that bind immigrants and their descendants to their country of origin weaken over time in all migrant communities after years of residence in the host country. While they decrease faster for some communities than for others, the decreasing trend affects all communities, including the Cuban one. For instance, the October 2018 FIU Poll (Grenier and Gladwin 2018) places Cuban migrants into three cohorts by arrival date: 1959-1979; 1980-1994; post 1995-2018. Attitudes toward Obama's normalization policy differ between cohorts and with respect to the native-born children of immigrants. For instance, 63 % of the pre 1980 migrants agree with the termination of the wet foot/dry foot policy by Obama on January of 2017, 30 % disagree and 7% are not sure. For the other three groups 47 % agree with termination, 45% disagree and the rest are not sure.

Since there were around 1000 participants in the poll, these differences are substantial in economic as well as statistical terms. An unusual but perhaps powerful way to make this point is the following. If you were to take a sample of the same size as the Cuba poll a 1000 times, the true proportion of pre 1980 migrants agreeing with termination would be expected to be between .60 and .66 in at least 999 of the samples! The same experiment for the views of the other three groups combined yields that the true proportion of them agreeing with termination would be expected to be between .444 and .496 in at least 999 times of the samples. The proportions are at least .10 away from each other at least 999 times out of a 1,000 times a sample of 1000 observations is drawn. If we use this policy as a positive indicator of the weakening of the ties that bind with distance from time of arrival in the US and first or second generation status, there is no doubt about a substantial weakening.

In sum, ASCE membership appeals need to attract a variety of members with diverse interests and reasons for their participation. The activities provided by ASCE need to allow the satisfaction of these varieties of interests at different levels of intensity for ASCE to continue to exist and prosper as an organization. As suggested earlier in a May 15 2020 post on exit and participation in the ASCE blog (Betancourt 2020)(<https://www.ascecuba.org/category/asce-cuba-blog-post/>), there are at least three different types of members in ASCE. Since the posting was an attempt to address the issue of declining membership in small organizations using ASCE as an example, it is useful to rephrase here the nature of the types.

Indeed some members, but far from a majority, are mainly devoted to the study of the Cuban economy and society. Many if not most others, however, are devoted to the study of some aspect of economy and society in their discipline or profession. Cuba is or becomes of substantial interest when some aspects of their specialties or skills during some period of time overlaps with Cuba for a variety of idiosyncratic reasons associated with either their profession or discipline, characteristics of Cuba or their personal interests. Finally, some individuals may not have a professional interest in ASCE but are interested in Cuba's economy and society for personal reasons. Yet, they are knowledgeable enough as professionals to want information provided at a high level of quality from a reliable source and/or skilled enough to want to offer a service to ASCE that the other member types are unwilling or unable to provide. All three types have been indispensable in the success of the organization and likely to remain so in the future. Adding a variety of virtual activities such as the ones under consideration by the committee chaired by Larry Catá-Backer, for example, provides potential mechanisms for attracting all three types of members.

As an organization, ASCE's main concern at present and in the immediate future needs to be stabilizing and increasing its membership. A significant step in that direction undertaken by the current President, Silvia Pedraza (2018-2020), and supported by the Board, is the move of the annual conference to FIU. Ironically, ASCE started by having its first three annual meetings at FIU. One attractive reason then, which is still valid now, is that it is the second largest Cuban University in the world after the University of Havana in terms of number of students of Cuban

ancestry. This could eventually help us in stabilizing and increasing our membership for two reasons.

First, FIU has become a broader and deeper research University in the last 30 years. Our presence through the annual meetings might find a very receptive audience in a venue with more potential members than any other place in the US. Second, its departments, economics for example, as well as research centers specializing on Cuba have few, if any, economists (and specialists in other disciplines) currently working on many issues relevant to Cuba. Our presence on campus with the annual meetings might generate fruitful collaborations and/or stimulate interest on the topic of the Cuban economy and its improvement as long as we maintain the quality of our offerings. Unfortunately, the move is not feasible this year due to the pandemic, which forced us to cancel the in person meeting, but plans for it to take place at FIU, supported by the incoming president Gary Maybarduk (2020-2022), are already in the works.

To conclude on a future oriented substantive vein, the need for serious analyses of the Cuban economy and society as well as on how to improve their current situation are more necessary now than ever before for at least three reasons. First, there is little doubt that Cuba faces a difficult economic situation in the short-term due to a dramatic deterioration in its living standard over the last 60 years. Second, the reforms officially announced in 2011 have failed to stop this deterioration. Finally, the COVID-19 pandemic highlights the interactions between the material aspects of an economy and the other dimensions of well-being stressed by many advocates of the capabilities approach. Generally, these include health and education as well as notions of freedom and individual rights in addition to material well-being.⁹ Cuba has been and is a controversial outlier in terms of these issues.

⁹ Conceptually, articulation of all four aspects (material, education, health and freedom) impact on well-being is well-established (Sen 1985; Dasgupta 1993). Empirically, measurement of the first three dimensions and their combination into one index is also well-established, e.g., the Human Development Index developed by the United Nations. Measurement of the last aspect is also well-established, e.g., Freedom House's indexes of political rights and civil liberties (Piano and Puddington 2006).

Evidence of the need for analyses based on the first two reasons is available from a variety of papers presented at ASCE's annual meetings. Considering first the economic decline over the last 60 years, an illustration is available in some of the papers presented at the most recent annual meeting, which is accessible in **Cuba in Transition**, Volume 29, at the ASCE website. For example, "The Descent of Cuba" (Devereux 2019a) addresses this issue directly at the macroeconomic level from a comparative historical perspective. It discusses Cuba's relative decline over the last century in terms of income per capita. It went from 80% of Western Europe's per capita income in 1920 to 20% of Western Europe's per capita income in 2020. This relative decline accelerated during the 60 years of the revolution, when Cuba's average annual growth rate of GDP per capita calculated using the Maddison Project data falls in the bottom 20% of 145 countries. Other papers in this volume document other aspects of this sixty-year period. Two of them also focus on the economy as a whole, giving more statistical detail using what is available in Cuban statistics of the period (Mesa-Lago 2019) or conceptually without specific data but discussing a broad variety of issues relevant to the period's evaluation (Sanguinetti 2019). Several other papers evaluate specific sectors or issues during this sixty-year period: Sugar (Pérez-López 2019); demography (Díaz-Briquets 2019); mineral fertilizer usage (Messina and Royce 2019); and international economic relations associated with trade, debt and aid (Luis 2019).

Evidence of the need for analyses of the 2011 reforms is also available in the above volume as well as in earlier ones. For instance, Betancourt (2019) evaluates the nine reforms labelled structural by Mesa-Lago and Pérez-López (2013). He discusses in detail why they are missed opportunities due to their timidity or their complete lack of implementation. Pérez Villanueva (2018) highlights a similar view of some of the ones responsible for slow growth when articulating the challenges at the start of the Díaz-Canel administration. He mentions several of them but his most telling point is the conclusion that seven years between 2011 and 2018 are more than sufficient to agree that the reforms have not met expectations in terms of generating economic growth. Other papers in these volumes evaluate in more detail some of the specific reforms at a point in time. For instance, González-Corzo (2019) does so in the agricultural sector by looking at the role of usufruct in explaining an increase in land

productivity accompanied by a fall in cultivated acreage. Nova González (2018) does so by raising the importance of potential increases in agricultural output due to usufruct in reducing imports of food. In addition, he stresses the need of several other factors for their continued realization. Among the latter are availability of complementary inputs, introduction of managerial methods that take into account the variety of risk factors in agriculture, the incorporation of innovations and cooperation between different organizational forms in agriculture.

New evidence and interpretations of Cuba's role as an outlier in terms of the interactions between all four dimensions of well-being is available in in Volume 29. In "Cuban Living Standards, Broadly Defined, Before and After the Revolution", this point is clearly made (Devereux 2019b). For instance, he states (p.162) "...Cuban education and health care require a unique set of institutions which, in turn, depend for their existence on the coercive power of the Cuban state." Similarly, in the same volume, an earlier cited contribution (Betancourt 2019, p. 138) concludes as follows. "After sixty years, it is impossible to generate the material resources for the continued existence of these benefits¹⁰ without rapid economic growth." COVID- 19 highlights these interactions and Cuba's role as an outlier rather dramatically. Because of Cuba's failure to be successful in significantly improving the material well-being of its population after sixty years, its accomplishments in terms of health and education stand out as an outlier. This situation makes Cuba an outlier even in contrast to other communist countries such as China and Vietnam. While they also relied on the coercive power of the state to accomplish goals in these two areas, they were able to have success in the material progress one.

Questions on these interactions are beginning to arise with respect to Cuba's ability to deal with the pandemic, i.e., Cuba's ability to control its negative health effects while limiting its negative economic effects. This is the case not only in comparisons involving China, Vietnam and North Korea but also in comparisons involving countries with other systems of government in the Caribbean, Central America and South America. For example, Cuba is lumped with Haiti

¹⁰ Health and education

and Honduras among the countries in danger of widespread hunger or famines due to the pandemic by the World Food Program (<https://insight.wfp.org/covid-19-puts-14-million-people-at-risk-of-missing-meals-in-latin-america-and-the-caribbean-a54e42789153>).

Similarly, the role of the pandemic in bringing out underlying long term issues in most countries such as racial inequalities in the US and suppression of religious minorities in China will also affect Cuba. For instance, ignoring racial inequalities during the Revolution through definition has not eliminated them although it has eliminated the ability to talk about them freely. This is similar to the failure of France's elimination of gathering race and religious data in their statistics to eliminate white privilege or racism from their society. New ones specific to Cuba have already arisen in that the recent dollarization and slow death of the CUC is being viewed by common citizens as reintroducing the apartheid of the early 1990's, i.e., between those with relatives and friends abroad or access to foreign currency at home and those without either access mechanism to foreign currency. Ironically, the latter was one reason for introducing the CUC.

In sum, these issues and related ones will keep research on Cuba active, useful and necessary both in the near and the long term future. Thus, ASCE's role as an organization continues to exist but its ability to perform it, however, will depend on the success of efforts to stabilize and grow the membership.

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