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An Overview of the Linkages Between Spain's Regions and Cuba

Christian Freres

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

For Cuba, contacts with Spanish regions and non-state contacts far surpass and are more multidimensional than those it has developed with most other countries. These links reflect the strong ties of people and history between the two countries. The motives of Spanish regions for developing stronger external relations with Cuba and other countries are the need to project their identity abroad, growing pressures to compete in the international economy, and the desire to assert their autonomy vis-à-vis the central government, including developing their own external relations. For its part, Cuba has developed its relations with Spain's regions as one element in its response to the loss of its major external partner, the Soviet Union, and the ongoing efforts of the US to isolate it internationally.

Historically, Spanish regional and municipal governments' contacts with Cuba have focused on development assistance and cultural and educational exchanges. However, economic interests are playing an increasing role. From Cuba's perspective, regional and institutional ties with Spain provide political, economic and technical benefits. For the Cuban government, these alternative channels are a partial substitute for the often difficult bilateral ties. For Cuban local governments, the connection with Spanish counterparts is important as a source of additional resources, as well as a way to gain experience in modern public administration and management techniques and to develop broader international relations. There is considerable interest in Cuba in learning about the decentralization process in Spain, so links with sub-state actors — particularly at the municipal level — are also seen as a way to gain first-hand information about how this has functioned and the possible lessons it holds for Cuba. For other Cuban actors, such as universities, cooperatives and emergent NGOs, ties with Spanish sub-state and non-state actors provide key technical and managerial components that are sometimes more highly valued than economic resources.

At the macro level, regionally-based actors have probably had no impact on social, economic and political transformation in Cuba. However, the importance of their presence in Cuba is not so much a question of their direct quantitative impact. Rather, their value has more to do with a potential intangible contribution: the creation of new transnational links and the building of institutional and individual capacity that is needed to transform Cuba. In other words, Spain's non-state and sub-state actors may be sowing seeds in what may one day become a democratic Cuba which is fully integrated in the world system.



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RÉSUMÉ

Pour Cuba, les contacts avec les régions de l'Espagne et les contacts non étatiques sont beaucoup plus importants et plus multidimensionnels que ceux que le pays a développés avec la plupart des autres pays. Ces liens reflètent les attaches très solides entre ces deux pays, unis par leurs peuples et leur histoire. Les motifs qui amènent les régions de l'Espagne à nouer des relations extérieures solides avec Cuba et d'autres pays sont le besoin de projeter leur identité à l'extérieur du pays, les pressions de plus en plus fortes pour devenir concurrentielles au sein de l'économie mondiale et le désir d'affirmer leur autonomie par rapport au gouvernement central, notamment en développant leurs propres relations extérieures. Pour sa part, Cuba a développé ses relations avec les régions de l'Espagne en partie pour répondre à la perte de son principal partenaire extérieur, l'Union Soviétique, et aux efforts constants déployés par les États-Unis pour l'isoler à l'échelle internationale.

Historiquement, les contacts entre les gouvernement régionaux et municipaux espagnols et Cuba portaient principalement sur l'aide au développement et les échanges culturels et éducatifs. Toutefois, les intérêts économiques jouent un rôle de plus en plus importants. Les liens régionaux et institutionnels avec l'Espagne procurent à Cuba des avantages politiques, économiques et techniques. Pour le gouvernement central, ces voies alternatives remplacent en partie les relations bilatérales parfois difficiles. Pour les gouvernements locaux cubains, les relations avec des homologues espagnols sont une source majeure de ressources supplémentaires, ainsi qu'un moyen de se familiariser avec les techniques modernes de gestion et d'administration publique et de développer des relations internationales plus larges. Le processus de décentralisation en Espagne intéresse vivement Cuba; par conséquent, les liens avec des acteurs sous-étatiques – en particulier au niveau municipal – sont également perçus comme un moyen d'obtenir de l'information directe sur la façon dont ce processus a fonctionné et de déterminer quelles leçons Cuba pourrait éventuellement en tirer. Pour d'autres acteurs cubains, comme les universités, les coopératives et les ONG émergentes, les liens avec les acteurs sous-étatiques et non-étatiques espagnols procurent des éléments clés en matière de technique et de gestion qui ont parfois plus de valeur que les ressources économiques.

À l'échelon macroéconomique, les acteurs régionaux n'ont probablement aucun impact sur la transformation sociale, économique et politique de Cuba. Toutefois, l'importance de leur présence à Cuba ne se limite pas à leur impact quantitatif direct; leur valeur réside avant tout dans une possible contribution intangible : la création de nouveaux liens transnationaux et le renforcement des capacités institutionnelles et individuelles nécessaires pour transformer Cuba. En d'autres termes, les acteurs non-étatiques et sous-étatiques espagnols sont peut-être en train de semer les graines de ce qui pourrait devenir un Cuba démocratique totalement intégré au sein du système mondial.

RESUMEN

Para Cuba, los contactos con las regiones y entidades no estatales españolas son más amplios y multidimensionales que aquellos establecidos con muchos otros países. Estos vínculos reflejan los fuertes lazos entre los pueblos y la historia de los dos países. Los motivos de las regiones españolas para desarrollar relaciones exteriores más fuertes con Cuba y otros países son la necesidad de proyectar su identidad en el exterior, el aumento de presiones para competir en la economía internacional y el deseo de afirmar su autonomía con respecto al gobierno central, como es el fomento de sus propias relaciones exteriores. A su vez, Cuba ha desarrollado sus relaciones con las regiones españolas como parte de su respuesta a la pérdida de la Unión Soviética como principal socio extranjero, y los continuos esfuerzos de los EEUU por aislarla en el ámbito internacional.

Históricamente, los contactos de los gobiernos regionales y municipales de España con Cuba se han centrado en la asistencia al desarrollo y los intercambios culturales y educacionales. Sin embargo, los intereses económicos desempeñan un papel cada vez mayor. Desde la perspectiva cubana, los lazos regionales e institucionales con España proporcionan beneficios políticos, económicos y técnicos. Para el gobierno cubano estas vías alternativas son un sustituto parcial de los vínculos bilaterales que son a menudo complejos. Para los gobiernos locales cubanos, la relación con sus contrapartes españolas es importante como fuente de recursos adicionales, además de adquirir experiencia en la administración pública moderna y técnicas de gestión y cultivar relaciones internacionales más amplias. Hay un gran interés en Cuba por aprender sobre el proceso de descentralización en España, por lo tanto los vínculos con entes regionales, en particular al nivel municipal, se perciben como una manera de obtener información

de primera mano acerca de cómo ha funcionado y de aprender en lo posible las lecciones que puedan beneficiar a Cuba. Para otras instituciones cubanas, como las universidades, las cooperativas y las nacientes ONG, los lazos con las regiones españolas y las entidades no gubernamentales suministran componentes técnicos y gerencial clave que algunas veces son más valiosos que los recursos económicos.

Al nivel macro, los organismos regionales probablemente no han tenido un impacto transformador en lo social, económico y político en Cuba. Sin embargo, la importancia de su presencia en la isla no es tanto una cuestión de su impacto cuantitativo directo sino que su valor tiene que ver más con una contribución intangible potencial, como la creación de nuevos lazos transnacionales y la creación de la capacidad institucional e individual que se necesita para transformar a Cuba. En otras palabras, los entes españoles no gubernamentales y regionales podrían estar sembrando las semillas en lo que un día podría convertirse en una Cuba democrática integrada plenamente al sistema mundial.

Introduction

Of all the former Spanish colonies in Latin America, Cuba has arguably maintained one of the strongest and broadest historical links with the *Madre Patria* (mother country). As a result, when Spain's Autonomous Communities — the name given to the country's 17 regions — began to develop ties with Cuba in the 1980s, they were in a sense reconnecting with a “lost province.” Today, a wide variety of actors within the Spanish regions maintain development and scientific cooperation, business relations and cultural and educational exchanges with Cuban counterparts, making Cuba one of the most important in Latin America, in terms of the intensity, breadth and scope of connections. For Cuba, contacts with Spanish regions and non-state contacts far surpass and are more multidimensional than those it has developed with most other countries.

This paper analyzes in some depth the current ties between the Spanish regions and Cuba. It describes not only the official connections between regional governments and Cuban authorities, but also a wide range of links involving a host of other private, public and semi-public actors on both sides. The paper begins by describing the historical and contemporary contexts within which the relationship has developed. Following an overview of the main Cuban and Spanish players, the paper analyzes the nature and objectives of the relationship for these players. It then assesses the impact to date of the linkages that have been developed, and concludes with some reflections on the future significance of the relationship.

The Ties of People and History

Two major factors explain the special relationship that exists between Cuba and Spain. The first is the strong migratory flows between the two countries. Unlike other nations in Latin America, the steady

stream (sometimes virtual rivers) of Spaniards to Cuba continued even after the island achieved independence in 1898, until well into the twentieth century. [Roy, 1998; Hennessy, 1986: 366]

This factor is well illustrated by two key figures today, one the son of Spaniards who immigrated to the island, and the other a returnee who made his start in Cuba. The first is Fidel Castro, whose parents came to Cuba from Galicia, where he still has close family ties. As a result, his relations with the conservative president of that region, Manuel Fraga, transcend political ideology, reflecting their common heritage. The second person is Ramón Areces, founder of the vast Spanish commercial empire, *El Corte Inglés*, which started as a haberdashery and was based on the experience and capital he accumulated in Cuba.

After the Revolution of 1959, the flow of people did not stop, but simply shifted from Cuba to Spain, reflecting the deep “family” ties between the two nations. Current data on Spaniards in Cuba is incomplete (many have not maintained citizenship and a large number of the elderly may have passed away). According to voting records, at least 17,000 resided on the island in 2001 (MTAS, 2002). As for Cubans in Spain, the government reported some 40,000 legal residents in 2003 (CIDOB, 2004), although the number would be larger if naturalized citizens were accounted for. Most Cubans coming to Spain now are economic migrants seeking a better life, although a smaller number are political exiles, some of whom actively denounce the situation in their home country and try to influence Spanish and European Union (EU) policy towards the island.

These close ties relate to the second factor, which determines the special nature of Cuban-Spanish ties. This is the fact that Cuba was one of Spain's last colonies in the Americas (gaining its freedom over six decades after other Latin republics). This late de-

coupling is of significant symbolic importance for Spaniards even today (although less and less so).

Current Policy

Despite these factors, however, the attention given to Cuba within Spain often seems disproportionate, particularly when compared with the focus towards other Latin American countries where it has much greater economic and political interests. This is in part due to the fact that ties with Cuba are increasingly a subject of controversy — and thus receive considerably more media coverage — while relations with other nations in the region are broadly accepted. Indeed, Cuba has been a major political challenge for every government in Madrid (since Franco), which in one way or another has tried to influence change in this country, which does not fit within Spain's model of a democratic Ibero-American Community.

While the 1996 European Union Common Position, which conditions deeper ties with Cuba on political reforms in this country, continues to be the main framework for the Spanish central government's policy, the regional administrations generally feel less constrained by it (for instance, several Autonomous Communities sent high level officials to Cuba during the period covered by sanctions, which built on the Common Position, imposed by the EU in the aftermath of the jailing by the Cuban government in April 2003 of 75 dissidents). Spain's complex position towards Cuba was further evident in the recent decision by the socialist government of Prime Minister José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero (elected in March 2004) to pressure for the elimination of the EU sanctions imposed in 2003 in order to renew frozen relations with the island. (As a result, these sanctions were temporarily removed in early 2005, despite strong resistance from various European political parties, particularly Spain's own Partido Popular).

During the Popular Party administration (1996-2004), the government tried to reduce the institutional cooperation between Autonomous Communities and the Cuban government, with a strong focus on blocking activities of the Basque Country. The present Socialist government of José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero, however, has desisted from interfering in the activities of regional administrations in Cuba.

The Search for Autonomy: Spain's Regions and External Relations

The fact that Spain's regions, separate and distinct from the central government, have such important connections with Cuba requires some explanation. Spanish regions have a long tradition of seeking autonomy, including developing their own external relations. The Spanish constitution of 1931 opened the possibility of creating Autonomous Communities in the so-called “historical regions” (the Basque Country, Catalonia and Galicia). The process to carry this forward began in that period, only to be aborted by the Civil War (1936-1939). The Nationalists, led by General Francisco Franco, won this war, annulled the Republican Constitution, and imposed an extremely centralist dictatorship. For four decades, regional identities, languages and cultural expressions were severely repressed.

However, this oppression did not extinguish the underlying desire for regional autonomy. On the contrary, when democracy was restored in 1976, one of the most pressing demands was to decentralize the new regime. The drafters of the Constitution of 1978 had to find a balance between differing views in order to create what is now called the *Estado de las Autonomías*, the state's division into 17 Autonomous Communities.

Since then, this system has continuously evolved largely due to the Constitution's ambiguity with regards to the desired institutional model. [Heywood, 1995: 52] The regions continuously explore and enter new areas of responsibility, often leading to demands for more transfers of powers, sometimes straining their relations with Madrid.

One area which has provoked considerable challenges for the central government concerns relations outside Spain. [Freres and Sanz, 2002c] In large part, sub-national foreign affairs have been pushed forward by the need to integrate into the European Union. Spanish regions are increasingly obliged to develop their own institutional and legal frameworks, instruments and resources in order to progress in a highly competitive international economic environment. Their main interests are to promote exports and attract foreign investments, tourism and transfers of technology. To that end, many Autonomous Communities have created their own export promotion agencies and have established representational and commercial offices

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overseas. Some regions have created public corporations to carry out international projects in various parts of the world. Their external links are basically concentrated in the European Union and Latin America.

Breaking Cuba's Isolation: The Diversification of International Ties

Cuba has developed its relations with Spain's regions as one element in its response to the loss of its major external partner and the ongoing efforts of the US to isolate it internationally. The collapse of the Soviet bloc at the end of the 1980s was an enormous political and economic shock for Cuba. It forced Cuba to enter a new period of uncertainty — euphemistically called the *Período Especial* by the government — where it no longer benefited (or suffered, as was sometimes the case) from the massive aid and protection of a foreign power. In the current global system the prospect of finding another international “benefactor” is highly unlikely, so Cuba has sought to achieve its political and economic development objectives through other means. Its primary method has been to open and deepen relations with a wide number of external partners, using “consummate political skill [...] to [break] out of its isolation,” managing at the same time to “contain the power of US policies”. [Domínguez, 2001: 201]

Without renouncing the fundamental role of the state in the development of the economy, this period saw Cuba's leadership introduce a number of economic reforms intended to attract the trade and investment from other countries it needed to survive in its new international environment.

Among the ties developed by Cuba during this period, the island made a special effort to forge closer ties with the European Union, which today is a key source of investments, imports and aid. Although Cuba has not formally entered any integration scheme, it has made great efforts to develop trade and cooperation relations in the Caribbean basin. Furthermore, while

present-day ties with traditional Latin friends like Mexico are strained, Cuba has created a mutually beneficial alliance with Venezuela. Also, the new leaders in Argentina, Brazil, Panama and Uruguay resist pressures to isolate Cuba and have initiated several cooperation programs with the island in the past year. Outside the region, the Castro regime has built up ties with various countries that have developed a similar strategy of combining a relatively open economy (less so in the Cuban case) with centralized political control, such as China and Viet Nam.

Overall, with regard to Cuba's ties with the EU, and with Spain in particular, these have been “not optimal,” as one Cuban high official has noted. The problematic framework of official relations has made it difficult to develop formal links. As a result, decentralized links play an important function in maintaining more or less fluid contacts between the parties.

The Main Spanish and Cuban Players

Spanish regional and municipal governments have developed a variety of institutional links with Cuban counterparts, depending on their own capacity (weak in the case of Extremadura and strong in the Basque Country), political affinities (such as Socialist-led governments in Andalusia and leftist municipal governments around the country) and the pressures of various interest groups (particularly non-governmental organizations, but also, increasingly, private enterprises and universities). The level of consolidation of those ties varies from region to region. Overall, Andalusia, the Basque Country and Galicia seem to have the strongest links with Cuba, although other regions may have an important presence in specific areas. [See Table 1] On the one hand, there are regions such as Madrid and Catalonia, which despite being among the richest territories, take a laissez-faire approach to institutional links, leaving the initiative to private actors. At the other extreme are Andalusia and the Basque Country, where the regional governments take a direct and active role in developing all sorts of relations.

Table 1: The Most Active Autonomous Communities with Cuba

Types of Links	Institutional	Economic	Development	Immigration
Main Regions	<u>Andalusia</u> <u>Basque Country</u> <u>Canary Islands</u> Catalonia	Balearic Islands <u>Basque Country</u> Catalonia Madrid <u>Valencia</u>	<u>Andalusia</u> Basque Country <u>Canary Islands</u> Castilla-La Mancha Extremadura	Asturias Basque Country <u>Canary Islands</u> Galicia

Source: The author.

Note: Underlined communities are leaders in the particular area.

At the outset, it must be emphasized that the Cuban state plays a key role in all external ties, including those with foreign sub-state and non-state actors. The state's presence in Cuba's linkages with Spain's regions includes not only central administration ministries, provincial delegations and local governments, but also other public or quasi-public institutions, such as: the universities and other related research/intellectual institutions; the Cuban Institute for Friendship with Peoples (*Instituto Cubano de Amistad con los Pueblos/ ICAP*); cultural centers; cooperatives; companies in the tourism sector; the Cuban Communist Party; and local representatives of the Local Organs of People's Power (*Organos Locales del Poder Popular*).

A number of provincial governments in Cuba have established representative "offices" in various parts of Spain, as well as in several other countries. These come mainly from Havana province (because of its greater resources and international contacts), and work to attract and channel aid to Cuba from regional and municipal administrations (which often finance their local costs) as well as from private sources. Other Cuban provinces with relatively active international ties and relations with Spain are Santiago de Cuba and Matanzas. A large proportion of Spanish cooperation concentrates in these three zones, with relatively little attention given to the poorer provinces in the East.

It should be noted that Cuban émigrés in Spain are not a significant driving factor in the links between Autonomous Communities and Cuba. This may be because the immigrant community is relatively small and dispersed throughout Spain, with some important pockets in the Canary Islands and Madrid. The émigrés in Madrid are of quite recent origin, and have inter-married with Spanish natives, reducing the possibilities of creating a strong community spirit, unlike that found in some parts of the United States. Some Cuban immigrants have promoted the creation of small NGOs that provide humanitarian assistance to groups on the island, but these mostly function on the basis of private donations, with limited public support. The Hispano-Cuban Foundation had some lobbying influence on Spanish bilateral policy towards Cuba during the Popular Party governments, but it does not seem to play a significant role in influencing the policy of sub-state administrations.

Nature and Objectives of the Relationship for the Spanish Players

Spanish regional and municipal governments have some broad motives for developing stronger external relations, such as the need to project their identity abroad, growing pressures to compete in the international economy, and the desire to assert their autonomy vis-à-vis the central government. The latter motive is often apparent in "historical regions" as well as in regions where the ruling party is in opposition to the governing party in Madrid.

Historically, these motives and a sense of political solidarity have led to cooperative relations with Cuba in the areas of development assistance and cultural and educational exchanges. However, economic issues and interests are playing an increasing role in their activities and strategies in Cuba. Most of the Autonomous Community administrations have

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working ties with provincial and municipal governments (*Poder Popular*) and provincial delegations of national ministries, with whom they develop specific cooperation programs. Institutionally, Spain's regions have hardly any contact with Cuba's emerging civil society actors, although some may support Spanish NGOs, which do have ties with them.

More specifically, the Spanish regions have the following objectives behind their linkages with Cuba:

- To provide support to Cubans originating from the home region. Galicia is one of the clearest cases, since its Cuban "colony" is probably the largest and likeliest to maintain links with the homeland.
- To promote regional cultural heritage, often linked with local "colonies". This explains much of the aid Cuba has received for projects to preserve historical buildings and monuments.
- To assist counterparts in Cuba facing a variety of developmental challenges. Thus, Autonomous Community and local administrations help Cuban provincial and local governments, while Spanish NGOs may work with local governments and quasi-NGOs or groups affiliated with the Church.
- To advance particular economic interests. This is the primary objective of private sector actors, but

the Basque government has been quite active in promoting various joint ventures involving companies based in its territory.

Often these institutional ties are formed as a result of the “friend of Cuba” syndrome. This occurs when an individual politician or bureaucrat comes into contact with Cuba through a trip to the island, an international event or through an acquaintance; he or she then starts a relationship with a Cuban counterpart, which eventually leads to a joint project and, with time, to some sort of formal agreement. In a number of cases — particularly at lower levels of government — this informality and the personalized nature of ties are maintained for some time.

Another key element in the development of ties is the presence of *casas regionales* in Cuba. These are social and cultural centers founded by emigrants from Spain who organize according to their regions of origin. The most important *casas* represent Galician, Asturian, Catalanian and Basque immigrants, some of whom are grouped together in their own locales in various Cuban cities. As there are still a fairly significant number of Spanish natives linked with these *casas*, and given the Autonomous Communities' interest in promoting their cultural identity, they are given considerable priority in cooperation activities. Several regional governments even provide social security supplements to persons originating in their territories and living in Cuba (for example, Asturias, Galicia and Catalonia).

Spanish regional governments have various levels of institutional contacts in Cuba. Most have established some links with central government ministries — particularly those most closely involved in external relations (i.e., foreign affairs, foreign investments and cooperation) or specific sectors (i.e., higher education, social services, etc.). Other contacts include key official personalities in Spanish-Cuban relations, such as Vice President José Ramón Fernández, and Old Havana's Municipal Administrator — known as the City Historian — Eusebio Leal. For several regions, such as Andalusia and the Basque Country, these ties are quite strong and consolidated.

In recent years, particularly among municipalities and regional cooperation funds, there has been a growing trend to channel aid efforts through the Local Human Development Program, coordinated by the United

Nations Development Program (UNDP). This offers a stable and well-functioning framework, developed together with Cuban officials and present in seven provinces, allowing small donors to have a more significant and sustained impact.

Policy dialogue between Spanish regional administrations and the Cuban government is mostly limited to discussing current or future cooperation. However, on occasion, high-level Autonomous Community politicians have made public statements on Cuba's human rights situation, with the intention of influencing policies there. The condemnation of 75 dissidents to jail sentences between 6 to 28 years and the executions of 3 hijackers of a passenger boat in March and April of 2003 led several regional presidents to condemn the Castro government. Even the Galician President, Manuel Fraga, who maintains cordial relations with Fidel Castro, made a point of publicly denouncing the repression; he also stated that he regularly criticizes the human rights situation on the island in contacts with the Cuban leader.

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Visits of high-level Spanish regional officials to Cuba have increased considerably over the past decade. However, for the most part, these visits are undertaken by officials from a few Autonomous Communities (particularly Andalusia, the Basque Country, the Canary Islands and Galicia), and are often linked with internal Spanish political concerns.

Over time, economic goals have become more important on these visits, as evidenced by the increasing presence of business executives.

Besides the immediate profit motive, one of the main drivers for Spanish private sector actors is the desire to establish a position in what could eventually become a fiercely competitive market. Regional administrations provide fairly limited support to companies, mostly during the start-up period, and — particularly in the case of small and medium enterprises — when negotiations with the Cuban government may require political influence. One example was the strong lobbying the Balears Islands exerted in favour of its hotel chain *Meliá*, which established a considerable presence on the island; this support was combined with cooperation programs focused on improving the capacity of Cuba's tourism sector. Valencia and the Basque Country have

established local offices that provide a full range of services to businesses originating in those regions. Catalonia provides limited support to its companies through a semi-private entity, but without the benefits of a permanent presence (which it does have in larger Latin American economies).

A number of Spanish NGOs have been present in Cuba for a decade or so, some with permanent staff on site. Their main source of funding in the early 1990s was the European Commission. However, since the late 1990s and particularly since 2000, when the Spanish aid agency stopped co-financing NGO projects in Cuba, most of their support has come from Spanish municipal and regional governments. Indeed, in 2001 two thirds of “decentralized cooperation” (official development assistance provided by sub-state administrations) to Cuba — a total of over 5 million euros — was channeled through NGOs. Nevertheless, Spanish autonomous and municipal governments do not get involved in most of these projects beyond financing and overall supervision. For their part, NGOs are mainly linked and work with Cuban local administrations, semi-public entities such as cooperatives and, in limited cases, civil society organizations, particularly those connected with the Catholic Church.

Spanish universities, which are financed and supervised by the Autonomous Communities, have a significant presence in Cuba, with cooperation activities going back several decades in a number of cases. According to Spanish government data, universities dedicated at least 125,000 euros to diverse cooperation activities in Cuba in 2001 (this is a minimum figure, as many universities do not provide information on their external cooperation activities). These activities included student and professor exchange programs, joint training programs and Masters' degrees, material assistance and the realization of joint research projects. Universities from Catalonia and Valencia are particularly active, thanks to strong support from regional governments (with relatively little provided by the central government). The University of Valencia set up a special office at the University of Havana to promote interchanges in both directions; it also helped to found the first Cuban self-financed university centre dedicated to research and development, based on its own experience in Spain. Even newer and poorer universities like that of

Extremadura have established close links with Cuban counterparts, in this case focused on applied medical research. Most of this university cooperation is concentrated in Havana, but there are various efforts in other parts of the country, particularly Santiago de Cuba.

Nature and Objectives of the Relationship for the Cuban Players

The motives for Cuban actors in seeking regional and institutional ties with Spain are primarily political, economic and technical. For the central government, these alternative channels are a partial substitute for the often-difficult bilateral relationship with the Spanish government. The significance of these relations is highlighted by the invitations to Presidents of Spain's Autonomous Communities to visit Cuba and the high-level treatment they receive, similar to that of state visits. It is also apparent in Fidel Castro's and Vice-President Fernandez's trips to various regional capitals (given the lack of invitations from Madrid).

This political motive is less evident with Cuban local governments. For them, the connection with Spanish counterparts is important as a source of additional resources; although this goal is shared with the central government, the needs at the local level are much greater. It is also a way to gain experience in modern public administration and management techniques (gained mainly through the joint execution of projects) and to develop broader international relations.

Identity is also a key motivating factor for Cubans, probably more than it is for Spaniards. Practically all Cubans feel a strong emotional link with Spain, its people and regions. No other country comes close to bringing out these feelings of association; in fact, after close to three decades of collaboration with the Communist block in Europe, there is hardly any deep cultural impact or feeling of loss among Cubans. This sense of a special relationship explains to a large extent why initiating links at a sub-state level is relatively easy for Spanish actors.

In relation to this, there is considerable interest in Cuba in learning about Spain's experience of economic, political and administrative transformation over the last decades. One of the aspects which is most attractive to Cubans is precisely

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the decentralization process in Spain, so links with sub-state actors — particularly at the municipal level — are also seen as a way to gain first-hand information about how this has functioned and the possible lessons it holds for Cuba.

For other Cuban actors, such as universities, cooperatives and emergent NGOs, ties with Spanish sub-state and non-state actors provide key technical and managerial components that are sometimes more highly valued than economic resources. For that reason, they put special emphasis on training aspects within cooperation programs. For specific individuals, these links are useful as ways to supplement the very low incomes that most Cuban professionals earn, and because they provide access to new technologies, techniques and ideas, particularly through short stays with Spanish counterpart organizations.

Culture is one of the most important areas for regional cooperation for many Cubans. This is considered a vital national strategy, and cooperation in this area is particularly appreciated, in large part because it is often carried out “with mutual respect,” as Cubans have noted. In this sector, Spanish regions and municipalities have provided considerable support for projects aimed at preserving historical patrimony (including numerous buildings of historical value in Old Havana, Trinidad, and Santiago), contributing significantly to Cuba's tourist attractions. Many activities in this field include important training components.

Cuba has also sought ways to promote Spanish regional culture in the country, and Cuban culture in Spain's regions. In the first case, the annual “*Huella de España*” festivals are centered on individual Autonomous Communities, which normally sponsor different types of cultural activities, including music, dance, art exhibits, and typical foods. In the second case, Cuba has promoted Cuban Culture Chairs in several Spanish universities, with the goal of disseminating different cultural forms, ranging from literature to the arts.

The Impact of Cuban-Spanish Linkages

At the macro level, Spanish sub-state and non-state actors have probably had no impact on social, economic and political transformation in Cuba. However, at the micro level, the effects may be quite significant, particularly in terms of building new

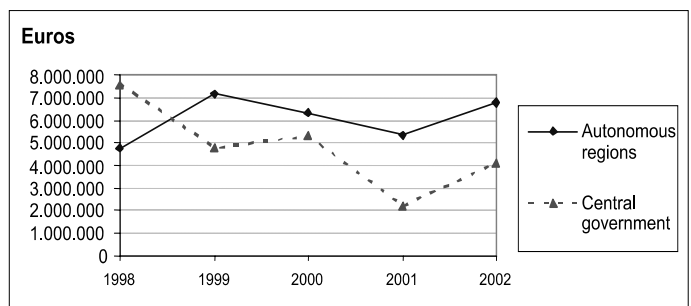
capacities in local areas. Aid is limited, but it has generated important synergies (in terms of linking actors carrying out different activities but with overlapping interests), and introduced new approaches and a new work culture that will be key for Cuba's efforts to survive in an increasingly competitive global economy.

The main limitation in terms of impact of cooperation activities by Spanish Autonomous Communities is due to the fragmented nature of these ties. A key limiting factor on the Cuban side is the excessive centralization, in terms of how it handles cooperation programs.

Since sub-state and non-state actors are not very prone to get involved in political issues, conflicts with the Spanish central government over Cuba are relatively limited, especially under the present Socialist government, which has moved away from the previous government's policy of interfering in the activities of regional administrations in Cuba.

As indicated in Graph 1, however, Spanish regional aid for Cuba began to decline slowly several years ago, although as a whole it is greater than Spanish official bilateral aid, which has fallen much more rapidly. In light of this fall in assistance, it has become important to increase the coordination of cooperation programs, whether in the framework of the UNDP, or other similar schemes.

Graph 1: Spanish Aid to Cuba, 1998-2002



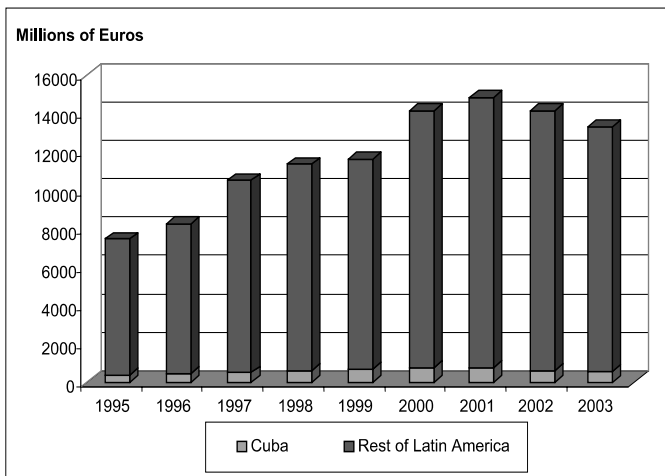
Source: Prepared by the author based on Spanish government data. [MAEC, various years]

Economic flows, particularly from Spain to Cuba are also not very dynamic, and may stagnate further as the Cuban government continues to reverse previous economic reforms. Graph 2 shows that commercial ties with Cuba have been stagnant since the mid 1990s, representing less than 5% of Spain's trade with

Latin America (with an average of less than 700 million euro in 2001-03). The failure of the Havana government to pay commercial debt is cited as one of the main factors for this trend.

Spanish direct investments in Cuba fell from a high of 768 million euro in 2000 to 15 million in 2001, and recent data confirms a slight recovery. [MICT, 2005a] In this vein, one of the most frequently cited reasons for a slowdown in investments by companies that are already present on the island is the uncertainty about rules governing the economy. In addition, bilateral political tensions are seen negatively by Spanish businesses; although this will not necessarily lead by itself to a direct decline in flows, it will probably contribute to reducing the entry of new players.

Graph 2: Spanish Trade with Latin America, 1995-2003



Source: Prepared by author based on Spanish government data. [MICT, 2005b]

The increased repression towards dissidents that began in March 2003 in Cuba will probably have the greatest impact on political and institutional ties between Spain's regions and the island. As a result of the current political situation in Cuba, it is likely that political ties will be of a lower profile. In part, this will highlight disapproval of Cuba's human rights violations. For some, but not all regions, a lower profile will serve to avoid problems with the central government in Madrid, which is trying to increase dialogue with the island's regime both bilaterally and through the European Union (although its room for maneuver is quite limited, given the EU's Common Position). In the short term this does not necessarily mean development assistance will fall dramatically, but it could contribute to limiting new initiatives,

particularly as this situation exists alongside the "normal difficulties" — bureaucratic obstacles, poor infrastructure and political interference — which donors often encounter while working in Cuba.

Nevertheless, as a result of the election in March 2004 of a Socialist government in Madrid, the political climate seems to be changing. The new Administration has repeatedly signaled its intention to lower the level of tension with Havana, although at the same time pressure for improvements in the human rights situation. For the purpose of this analysis, the most important effect of this policy shift would be a closer congruence between the central government and the regional administrations in their approach toward Cuba.

Final Reflections

In the current context of renewed political repression and economic centralization in Cuba, there is relatively little external actors can do to promote economic and social, let alone political change. Given their relatively greater access to the island, as compared to many other actors, Spanish sub-state and non-state actors present a partial exception. Presented in a spirit of mutual respect, the collaboration they offer is generally welcomed by Cubans, including the regime, which is notoriously suspicious of any foreign influence. As these actors for the most part do not seek to impose their views and their "system" on Cuba, they may be able to affect transformations, although probably only at the local level and not with any systemic impact in the short to medium term. Indeed, this is perhaps the most important lesson for similar actors in other European countries or North America wishing to influence the Cuban system over the longer term.

It should be stressed that the importance of the presence of Spanish Autonomous Communities and other regionally-based actors in Cuba is not so much a question of their direct quantitative impact. Rather, their value has more to do with a potential intangible contribution: the creation of new transnational links and the building of institutional and individual capacity that is needed to transform Cuba. In other words, Spain's non-state and sub-state actors may be sowing seeds in what may one day become a democratic Cuba which is fully integrated in the world system.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Christian Freres is Associate Researcher at the Instituto Complutense de Estudios Internacionales (ICEI) and Advisor to the Spanish Agency for International Cooperation (AECI), Madrid. This text is the result of a research project financed by a grant from the Ford Foundation while the author was working at the Asociación de Investigación y Especialización sobre Temas Iberoamericanos (AIETI), Madrid. The author led a team of Cuban and Spanish academics in research carried out throughout 2002-2003. The opinions expressed here are his exclusive responsibility and do not reflect the official opinions of AIETI, AECI or ICEI. Special thanks are due to Francesc Bayo for his suggestions on an earlier draft.

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1, rue Nicholas Street,

Suite/Bureau 720

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K1N 7B7 Canada

Tel/Tél: (613) 562-0005

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