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## 92.SG1 DEVELOPMENT ISSUES IN MARGINAL REGIONS.

### Geographical Research in Marginal Regions. Background and Current Scientific-Investigational Guidelines.

by Roberto González Souza<sup>1</sup>, Armando de la Colina Rodríguez<sup>2</sup>  
and Julia González Garciandía<sup>2</sup>

The current emergence in the international academic world of a scientific questioning of the center-periphery models that reproduce or tend to perpetuate underdevelopment, poverty, backwardness and environmental deterioration; the scarce knowledge of spacial dynamics and intensity of the marginality phenomenon as a universal, geographical space process, considered to be one of the main causes of global environmental changes (Fournier, 1992; Kates and Chen, 1993) show that this phenomenon is in a periphery-to-center transition.

Geographical sciences in Cuba have not been out of this trend of the growing international conceptualization of marginality problems and of marginal areas and, while experiences allusive to these areas can be found in the works by Massip and Isalgué (1942), Marrero (1957), Núñez (1959), Coscolluela (1965), and Acevedo (1980), it may be affirmed that their focalization has been recent, using -rather- terms such as fragile ecosystems, or low economic assimilation areas.

Antecedents of these may be considered to be the studies conducted in the late sixties by the Faculty of Geography of the University of Havana, on the Sierra Maestra and Sierra del Rosario mountain ecosystems, the research done on coastal and litoral geomorphology in costal and insular ecosystems as of 1965 by Zenkovich, A. S. Ionin, Y. Pavlidis y O. Avello, which had a marked physical nature, with the exception of those done in mountainous ecosystems, giving less attention to socio-economic problems.

Since the eighties, the social and economic dimension in the studies of mountainous ecosystems and wetlands gained momentum, relying basically on a Comprehensive Program for the development these areas, which catalyzed the number of comprehensive geographical research activities in those regions, with the participation of different institutions, among them the socio-geographical studies by the Center for Demographic Studies, those on mountain cooperatives by the Faculty of Geography of the University of Havana, the development schemes in those territories by the Institute for Physical Planning, the comprehensive geographical research done by the Institute of Tropical Geography.

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In the late eighties and early nineties, the most finished work is done (Sciences Academy of Cuban and the Cuban Institute of Geodesy and Cartography, 1990) on the Sabana-Camagüey and Canarreos archipelagos, which makes an assessment of all its elements for tourist purposes.

Noteworthy in this period is the making of the New National Atlas of Cuba, where for the first time ever appears a map of the country's levels of economic assimilation (Propin, 1989), reflecting that the marginality phenomenon is not an event exclusive and typical of so-called fragile ecosystems.

On ecosystems prone to desertification, some studies have been conducted (Fuentes, 1994, 1995; National Center for Soils and Fertilizers, 1994; Borroto, 1995), albeit they have not indulged in the management specifics required, inter alia, by rainfed agriculture, with special reforestation programs being implemented only on the coastal Maisí-Guantánamo strip and on the southern part of Sierra Maestra. Studies have also been conducted on soil salinization (Borroto, 1979, 1995; Stojarov and Borroto, 1982; Ortega 1986; Ortega et al, 1986; Otero et al, 1994), and a number of measures been taken in the southern strip of the Guantánamo Valley, for the purpose of recovering saline soils.

The above background proves the absence of a unified approach to the study of Cuba's marginal regions, and the hegemony of sectorial development programs that give a high priority to research on territorial sectors of fragile (mountainous, coastal, arid, semi-arid, wetlands) ecosystems.

In the wake of the academic confrontation with different schools and exponents of Latin American and world geography which fostered the recent holding in Cuba of the IGU Regional Conference and the 5th Meeting of Latin American and Caribbean Geographers, and of joint working session with Professor Roser Majoral, president of the International Geographical Union Study Group for the study of development in marginal regions, it was apparent that there was a need for a unified approach and for a common agenda to address the problems with the emergence of marginality and with the expansion of Latin American and Caribbean marginal areas as one of the main global environmental elements, an action that constitutes not only a scientific challenge but also a moral demand for the regional (Latin American) scientific community.

In keeping with the above, the perspectives of geographical research on the marginal phenomenon and Cuba's marginal areas stem from two large scenarios.

### National Scenario

Related to the promotion of new National Scientific and Technical Programs on "Sustainable Development of the Mountains" and "Global Change and the Evolution of the Cuban Environment", with research funded by international agencies such as the GEF-UNDP project "Protecting biodiversity and sustainable development of the Sabana-Camaguey ecosystem", and with the recent (1995) creation of the National Group Against Desertification and Drought and the National Network of Arid and Semi-Arid Zones, on a multidisciplinary basis. Further research will be done on wetlands, mountainous, coastal, arid, semi-arid and sub-moist territories, with the aim of establishing sustainable development patterns in fragile ecosystems from a territorial sectorial approach.

### Regional Scenario

Related to the Technical and Scientific Branch Program: "Geo-forecasts, Sustainable Development and Multinational Integration of the Caribbean Basin States", which has among its research projects one called "Regional Perception of the Processes of Marginality in the Caribbean Basin States", a new research direction is promoted that seeks to define the first conceptual, theoretical and methodological contours for paving the way for a unified and regional approach to the problem of marginality and marginal areas through a new scientific and practical discourse which -shortening the process of peripheralization of technological and social relations of dependent and polarized development- may help break the spiral or cycle of environmental marginality/degradation and foster the transition to alternative models of sustainable development.

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