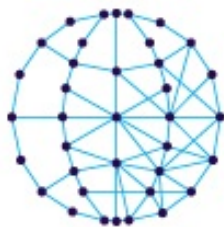


*Cooperatives' Power of Innovation*

Texts selected from the international call for papers

## SUSTAINABLE PATHS TO A JUST ECONOMY: COOPERATIVES IN THE LAND OF MARTÍ

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**QUEBEC** INTERNATIONAL  
**2014** SUMMIT  
OF COOPERATIVES

## **Abstract**

A child of Cuba's Revolutionary agrarian reforms, Cuba's cooperative roots are poised to deliver a cutting edge defense of democratic socialist principles in a world of global indifference. This paper discusses the historic role of agricultural cooperatives in Cuba post-1959, and the increasingly important role cooperatives will play in all sectors of the Cuban economy as new policy guidelines (CPC, 2011) support the transition to a people-centred, cooperative economy. It closes with a discussion of a new international cooperation project between Canada and Cuba to support cooperative training in Cuba's farm coops.

## **Résumé**

Fruit des réformes agraires de la révolution cubaine, les racines coopératives de Cuba sont sur le point de livrer une défense de pointe des principes socialistes démocratiques dans un monde d'indifférence globale. Cet article traite du rôle historique des coopératives agricoles à Cuba après 1959 et du rôle de plus en plus important que les coopératives jouent dans tous les secteurs de l'économie cubaine alors que de nouvelles politiques directrices (CPC, 2011) soutiennent une transition vers une économie coopérative et centrée sur l'humain. Il conclut en discutant d'un nouveau projet de coopération internationale entre le Canada et Cuba qui vise à soutenir la formation coopérative dans les fermes coopératives cubaines.

## **Resumen**

Fruto de las reformas agrarias revolucionarias de Cuba, las raíces cooperativas de la isla están listas para librar una defensa de avanzada de los principios del socialismo democrático en un mundo de indiferencia globalizada. Esta ponencia trata del rol histórico de las cooperativas agrícolas en Cuba después de 1959 y de la creciente importancia que las cooperativas cobrarán en todos los sectores de la economía cubana con la puesta en práctica de los nuevos Lineamientos de política económica y social aprobados en el año 2011 para transitar hacia una economía cooperativa centrada en la gestión del pueblo. Finalmente, concluye con una descripción de un nuevo proyecto de cooperación internacional entre Canadá y Cuba para apoyar el entrenamiento cooperativo en las cooperativas agrícolas cubanas.

## Overview

This paper reviews Cuba's cooperative and socialist history and explores recent policy directions adopted by the Cuban government to modernize their socialist economy. Two themes are explored:

1. **Cooperatives and Food Security:** Cuban cooperatives have been key in supporting Cuba's transition from a monoculture system to sustainable, organic agriculture in less than a decade. Victims of a punishing blockade and the collapse of the Soviet Union, cooperatives have remained front and centre in Cuba's food security strategy since the Triumph of the Revolution. Fifty-six years later, building on this strength, Cuba's socialist government is taking innovative steps to further strengthen farmer cooperatives and develop second-tier cooperatives.
2. **Cooperatives at the Root of a People-Centred Society:** Cuba's new policy guidelines (CPC, 2011) give this tiny island nation the potential to chart an exciting new course for socialism based on the cooperative model and to demonstrate the transformations required of each along the way.

In keeping with the ICA Blueprint for a Cooperative Decade (ICA, 2013), this paper closes with a discussion of a three-year international project many of us are supporting to help Cuba walk this most promising path.

## Introduction

### Cooperatives and food security

Over the past 50 years, events have conspired to gravely undermine the food security of communities.

On the agronomic side, global warming and its attendant climate effects will produce changes in temperature and rainfall in key producing regions, altering cropping options. Desertification and soil salination are degrading soil capacity. The earth's thin and precious layer of rich organic (top) soil, laid down over the millennia and fundamental to fertility, is being lost at a rapid rate due to wind and water erosion and monoculture cropping practices.

The forces of globalization have altered the way in which we produce food, transforming a sustainable food production system built on the strength of knowledgeable, independent farmers using good farm management practices to produce food for local communities in a way that nurtures and respects the land for generations into one characterized by large-scale contract integration systems dominated by short-term, bottom-line decision-making.

The "Green Revolution," synonymous with large-scale mono-cropping and high levels of pesticide and chemical use, has resulted in a loss of biodiversity, a high degree of mechanization, the depletion of soil nutrients, water erosion, a loss of domestic food security as land shifts to the production of non-food and export crops, and an alienation of peasant farmers from the land.

The introduction of trans-genetically modified seeds by Dupont/Pioneer Hi-Bred, Monsanto, Syngenta, and others are producing genetic instability and cross-contamination of genetic material (development of super weeds), the development of pesticide-resistant bugs, a reduction in biodiversity (e.g. Bt corn pollen is toxic to the monarch butterfly), potential human health effects (peas in Bangladesh and India), ecological hazards associated with terminator gene technology, and economic losses to farmers who

can no longer save seeds from one year to the next. They also raise fundamental ethical issues associated with the patenting of genetic material, the illegal extraction/expropriation of local genetic material, and the resulting lack of fair and equitable distribution of resources. Quinoa is a good example (Hamilton, 2014).

Globalization and its attendant erosion of national sovereignty through trade agreements have resulted in economic concentration in pre and post farm-gate sectors, creating powerful oligopsonies and oligopolies able to capture profits from the farm sector essential to sustainable farming methods.

Presently, there are over 120 global funds dedicated solely to the buy-up of farmland. The motives, all profit driven, range from use-conversion (e.g. development), to bio-fuel production and resource “stock-piling” by sovereign states whose food security is at risk.

Add to this rapid population growth, increasing income disparities, and emerging water shortages in many food producing regions (due to aquifer depletion, increasing surface water use by non-food sectors, and climate change) and the crisis is evident.

In order to begin to address the growing global crises of hunger, inadequate nutrition, poverty, and social marginalization, transformational changes in food production are fundamental to social resilience and sustainability. This is particularly urgent in the low- and middle-income regions of the world.

Never before have cooperatives been presented with a greater challenge and opportunity.

Cuba’s quest for food security and sustainability based on the power of cooperatives offers us a bright, new, shiny and just-in-time relevant path.

### **Cooperatives at the root of a people-centred, socialist society**

As noted by Dr. Sonja Novkovic (2013), socialism as a social movement is about ensuring human development, equity, and social justice. With attention to people’s needs at its core, the purpose of a socialist society is captured in the subordination of capital, in calls for fair income distribution, and in ensuring general access to social security and the provision of basic necessities such as food, shelter, healthcare and education, among others. Rooted in the labour theory of value (Ricardo; Marx), work is the main source of income in socialism, with labour (rather than capital) as rightful owner of the residual income, i.e. profit.

Worker cooperatives fit this model to a “T,” and Cuba could show real leadership here. According to Novkovic (personal communication), other “transition economies” in eastern Europe moved quite deliberately to outright capitalism. Selling of assets to employees was a part, albeit small, of their privatization efforts for a number of reasons, none of which were ideological. And while employee-ownership is still marginally present in some countries, none of them introduced a cooperative economy.

In this era of neo-liberal globalization, the successful implementation of Cuba’s new policy guidelines (Los Lineamientos) offers powerful evidence of the strategic relationship between cooperatives and socialism and the transformative power of the complex networks they evoke.

The international cooperative sector has a huge stake in Cuba’s success. Which is why, of course, so many of us are involved.

If, as Don Jose Maria Arizmendiarieta suggests, *all of us are responsible for everything* at the *individual* coop level, surely Principle Six suggests the international cooperative movement has a *collective* responsibility to support Cuba as she embarks on this brave new coop path.

## Historical Context

The Batista legacy of powerful latifundios and illiterate farmers put agrarian reform squarely on the agenda of Fidel's new government. By hiding and feeding Cuban revolutionaries, farmers had been key strategic partners in the underground movement leading up to the Triumph of the Revolution in 1959. In the new government, built upon the socialist ideals of Jose Marti, it was no surprise that agrarian reform and literacy topped the priority list.

Within the first year, large tracts of privately held land were expropriated with compensation and divided into state farms. Those who applied were given up to 67 acres of good-quality farmland.

ANAP (*Asociación Nacional de Agricultores Pequeños* — National Association of Small Farmers) was created by Cuba's private farmers in 1961 to represent their interests.

Thus began three decades of Cuban agriculture characterized by large state farms (>70% of national production, predominantly of sugar and livestock) and many small, private farmers.

As Cuba's population began to grow rapidly, the demand for food also increased. In the early 1970s, responding to the need to help small farmers become more efficient through shared infrastructure, training, education and support, ANAP encouraged the growth of collective farm cooperatives. To reduce transportation costs, new coops were encouraged to locate close to population centres. Where necessary, this involved ANAP-facilitated land swaps.

Two different types of private farmer cooperatives were created: Credit and Service Cooperatives (CCSs or *Cooperativas de Créditos y Servicios*) and, after 1976, Agricultural Production Cooperatives (CPAs or *Cooperativas de Producción Agrícola*):

Credit and Service Cooperatives (CCSs) are basically producer cooperatives. Members retain individual title (or usufruct<sup>2</sup> rights) to their land but cooperate on things such as transportation, farm market sales, sharing of equipment, access to government credit and services and shared infrastructure (e.g. value added facilities). The General Assembly of members, which meets monthly, approves the inclusion of new members as required to meet the needs of the cooperative.

Agricultural Production Cooperatives (CPAs) are more similar to worker cooperatives. Members pool their land, receiving payment when they join their lands, and work it collectively. As with CPAs, the General Assembly approves the inclusion of new members to meet coop needs.

During the 1980s, described by many as Cuba's "golden age," sugar produced on large state farms using Soviet-style, high input, "green revolution" methods was sold on favourable terms to the former Soviet Union in exchange for consumer and industrial goods that were plentifully available. *La Libreta* (the ration book) provided every Cuban with a basic monthly supply of food and other items at dramatically subsidized prices. A doubling of the Cuban population had sparked a rash of new housing, ensuring everyone had a home, although extended families often shared a residence. Universities existed in every province and the population was educated and employed. Access to high-quality health

care and education was (and remains) free. By the late 1980s, Cuba's farm sector had become one of the most highly industrialized in the world. By Latin American-based standard of living indices, Cuba's standard of living topped that of the US.

With the fall of the Soviet Union in the early 1990s, "*La Tubería*," the umbilicus that connected Cuba to the former Soviet Republics, collapsed, plunging Cuba's economy into darkness.

Facing the rigours of the "Special Period," Cuba's farm cooperatives rallied: in less than a decade, Cuban farmers learned how to grow food in the countryside without chemicals and pesticides and how to feed cities from within. By 1999, Cuba was recognized as a world leader in sustainable, organic farming methods and urban agriculture.

## Cuban Coops and the Transformation of the Countryside

The collapse of the former Soviet Union, Cuba's major trading partner, was the catalyst in Cuba's remarkable transformation from large-scale monoculture to sustainable farming practices. The loss of 70% of Cuba's food supply and virtually all agricultural inputs (tractors, tractor parts, petroleum, machinery, pesticides, fertilizers, seed, feed grains) meant Cuba had to quickly find new ways to produce food for her people.

With crisis as the driver and necessity the mother of invention, Cuba embarked on a remarkable journey. Large state farms were divided up into a third type of cooperative – a UBPC (*Unidad Básica de Producción Cooperativa* or Basic Unit of Cooperative Production) – and workers were given usufruct tenure to the land, the opportunity to purchase the means of production and to organize cooperatively. Uncultivated urban areas were turned into urban *organopónicos* (cooperatives, organized as UBPCs). In the countryside, retired farmers were called back to teach younger ones how to plough with oxen, and rustic micro-labs for the production of cutting-edge biological controls (CREEs) were scattered across the countryside to bring farm extension and solutions to local farmers, in their fields.

Cuba had five very important things that made this transformation from high-input monoculture to global leadership in sustainable and organic agriculture possible:

1. A food production system based on farmer cooperatives: This made it much easier for farmers to work together quickly and effectively to transform production methods in their own (and the community's) interest.
2. Scientific capacity: Beginning in the 70s and 80s, Cuban scientists started looking for alternatives to high input agriculture to make Cuba's farm sector more economically and environmentally sustainable. As a result, Cuba had the scientific knowledge and technical capacity to develop the bio-pesticides and bio-fertilizers needed to produce food in the Special Period.
3. Smart and capable farmers and a strong farm voice: Supported by a national farmers organization (ANAP) that put an emphasis on skills and knowledge, Cuba's literate farmers were well supported in their adoption of new methodologies.



4. A solid system of agricultural extension: Critically important was the full support of Cuba's Ministry of Agriculture and related networks from the university and scientific community to support the training needed to farm more sustainably.
5. Excellent soils, water and climate.

These factors, combined with the agricultural knowledge, concepts and ideas handed across generations and the persistence of the Cuban people, made the impossible possible. Just ten years after the collapse of the former Soviet Union, in a solemn session of the Swedish Parliament in December of 1999, Cuba's *Grupo de Agricultura Orgánica* was honoured over 80 other candidates from 40 countries to receive Sweden's prestigious *Right Livelihood Award* (referred to as the "Alternative Nobel Prize") for world leadership in sustainable, organic farming methods and urban agriculture (Funes, 2001).

In the words of Mavis Álvarez, founding member of ANAP:

*Sustainable technology is difficult without sustainable economic and social structures. The transition to sustainable techniques has also been easier for Cuban farmers than for those in other countries because of the security bestowed by the Cuban government: land rights, access to and ownership of equipment, availability of credit, markets, insurance and free health care and education. Cuban farmers are highly organized through the formation of cooperatives with real social and economic power, and the presence of national organizations that can represent the interests of individual farmers at the state level.... Property rights include not only land, but also the materials necessary for production, such as farming implements, ploughs, housing and other buildings as well as ownership over the harvest itself. (2001)*

## ANAP – National Association of Small Farmers

Founded in 1961, ANAP (*Asociación Nacional de Agricultores Pequeños*) represents 100% of Cuba's private farmers. ANAP is funded by dues from all of its members; has democratically elected leadership at the municipal, regional, provincial and national levels; and exists to provide organizational and productive support to Cuban cooperatives for training, promotion, marketing, international cooperation, and the preservation of Cuba's farming traditions, experiences, and culture.

For the past 53 years, ANAP has played a critical role in supporting the transition of Cuban cooperatives to sustainable farming practices through training, education and the promotion of projects that incorporate sustainable agricultural practices.

The organization is broad-based and horizontal in structure. With national headquarters in Havana, the majority of ANAP's activities are decentralized through provincial and municipal offices. Planning meetings and programs are held at regional locations appropriate to the topics discussed to ensure that meetings are comfortable, accessible and inclusive — a model of communication that has had great success in Cuba.

Through farmer-to-farmer contacts, ANAP has maintained a strong relationship with and among its members, making it highly successful in disseminating teachings from scientific and technical institutions through its national structure, reaching farmers even in the most remote areas. These include increasing the efficiency of energy utilization, making the best use of local inputs, improving

livestock nutrition and herd management, conserving biodiversity, reducing the use of chemical fertilizers, implementing low-input agricultural practices, producing quality seed, promoting the preparation and application of bio-fertilizers and bio-pesticides, rescuing traditional agricultural practices, and supporting the family farm economy (Nieto, 2001).

ANAP combines traditional knowledge and practices with new technologies in a participatory effort that enables farmers to educate each other.

When the economic crisis of the Special Period limited access to printing and publication materials, farmer-to-farmer training schools were created that have remained the crux of ANAP's outreach efforts. ANAP's successes in communication and training for rural activism earned them UNESCO's International Communications Development Program Award in 1989.

Some of ANAP's training is conducted via the media. Nationwide, ANAP hosts regular programs on more than fifty radio stations, most community-based. ANAP has created television shows specifically for farmers that reflect their lifestyle and cultural heritage and provide technical information and training. ANAP's magazine reports on the latest agricultural news and scientific knowledge, including theories and practices of agro-ecology. Promotional materials provide information on specific pests and diseases, biological pest controls, agro-ecological techniques, natural food preservation, and other topics.

Since 1993, ANAP has encouraged international cooperation with non-governmental and governmental organizations and agencies from different countries in Europe, America, and Asia. It has also promoted exchanges through the building of international networks such as the Vía Campesina, Coordinadora Latinoamericana de organizaciones del campo, Movimiento Agroecológico Latinoamericano, and Red Latinoamericana de Biodiversidad Agrícola. These collaborations have strengthened the sustainable agriculture movement by building cooperation and solidarity across borders.

Today, ANAP's primary goal is to help members strengthen the integration of cooperative principles, values and management within their cooperatives and to encourage the use of agro-ecological farming techniques to improve production capacity, thus supporting an equilibrium between "associative" (member related) and "enterprise" (coop related) needs.

Other important NGOs that support agricultural cooperation and food security in Cuba include those listed below. Together, these various actors function as a complex network to support resilience and adaptability.

*Asociación Cubana de Técnicos Agrícolas y Forestales* — ACTAF (Cuban Association of Agricultural and Forestry Technicians), an umbrella organization that coordinates the efforts of groups and professionals working in the fields of crop production and/or forestry.

*Asociación Cubana de Producción Animal* — ACPA (Cuban Animal Production Association), an umbrella organization that coordinates the efforts of groups and professionals working with animals.

*Grupo de Agricultura Orgánica* — GAO (Organic Farming Group), an organization of Cuban scientists and professors formed in 1993 (through the leadership of the Ministry of Higher Education).



*Centro de Estudios de Agricultura Sostenible* — CEAS (The Centre for the Study of Sustainable Agriculture), part of the Agrarian University of Havana (Universidad Agraria de la Habana — UNAH). Impact is multiplied through the national network of research institutions, and the farms and cooperatives that provide practical and demonstrational points of reference (Alvarez, 2001).

*Federación de Mujeres Cubanas* — FMC (Federation of Cuban Women) places a high priority on promoting the role of women in community decision-making with respect to food security.

## Agriculture in Cuba Today

Today, reversing completely the coop-to-state ratio of the 1980s, over 80% of Cuba's farm production is cooperative (CPAs, CCSs and UBPCs).

Beginning in 2008, the Cuban Government instituted a new policy of land distribution to boost food security (Decreto Ley 259 and 300). By the fall of 2011, 1.3 million hectares of land had been distributed in usufruct to 146 816 new farmers (97% of applicants), 80% of which was already in production. With 4 540 new farmers approved and "in process," a total of 151 356 new farmers were inducted. The average size of land allocated to each new farmer under this program has been 8.7 hectares. One third of these new farmers are 18–35 years old, 25% of whom were previously unemployed; and 13 percent retired.

The way land continues to be assigned under this program provides new farmers with support to ensure their success. Once a farmer is approved, the provincial soil lab in the applicant's province looks for suitable land with a good soil profile. The agricultural extension specialists from the soil lab meet with the new farmer to explain the soil capability and crop suitability of the land s/he is receiving and provide two years of direct support to make them successful.

All new farmers must be accepted by an area CCS (Credit and Service Cooperative) to provide them with further incubator support. This is also a way of screening new land applicants – acceptance by a local farmers' cooperative is a solid indicator of character and capacity.

Today, ANAP has 396 526 members organized into 3 485 farmer cooperatives (Figure 1). They farm a total of 2 894 405 hectares, 39% of Cuba's arable farmland, and produce over 60% of domestic food production (ANAP, 2013).

Of these, 2 489 are Credit and Service Cooperatives (CCSs) representing 348 080 members who farm 2 306 526 hectares of land (930,455 of which are owned, 1 302 033 farmed in usufruct, 14 768 leased and 59 269 owned collectively).

There are also 996 Agricultural Production Cooperatives (CPAs) representing a total of 48 446 members who collectively farm 587 878 hectares of land, 535 033 of which are owned and 52 845 farmed in usufruct tenure.

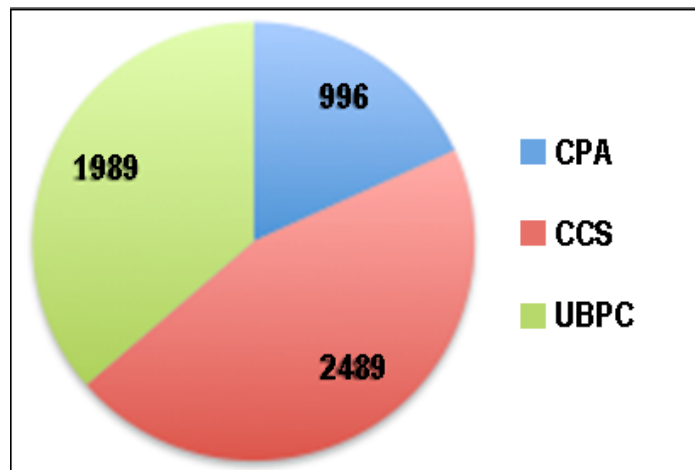
In addition to the private farmers organized under ANAP, there are also 1 989 UBPCs (organized under the Ministry of Agriculture) representing 121 481 members (Figure 2).

**Figure 1 Structure of Production, Cuba's Farmer Cooperatives, 2013**

	CPA	CCS	COMBINED ANAP (CPA + CCS)	UBPC	TOTAL
<b>Co-ops</b>	996 <sup>1</sup>	2,489 <sup>1</sup>	3,485	1,989 <sup>2</sup>	5,474 <sup>4</sup>
<b>Members</b>	48,446 <sup>1</sup>	348,080 <sup>1</sup>	396,526	121,481 <sup>2</sup>	518,007 <sup>4</sup>
<b>Hectares</b>	587,878 <sup>1</sup>	2,306,526 <sup>1</sup>	2,894,404		
<i>owned</i>	535,033 <sup>1</sup>	930,455 <sup>1</sup>			
<i>usufruct</i>	52,845 <sup>1</sup>	1,302,033 <sup>1</sup>			
<i>lease</i>		14,768 <sup>1</sup>			
<i>commons</i>		59,269 <sup>1</sup>			
<b>Percent Arable Land</b>			39% <sup>2</sup>		
<b>Percent Food Production</b>			60% <sup>3</sup>		

Sources: 1. ANAP 2013, 2. Pablo Fernandez, 2011, pers. com., 3. Alvarez, pers. com. 2014, 4. Derived

**Figure 2 Number of Cuban coops in 2013**



## Cuba's New Cooperative Path

In April 2011, after almost a year of grassroots discussions in communities across Cuba, the Sixth Congress of the Communist Party released *Los Lineamientos* (The Policy Guidelines), a set of comprehensive guidelines spread across 12 economic policy sectors:

1. Economic management policy
2. Macroeconomic policy
3. External economic policy
4. Investment policy

- 
5. Science, technology, innovation and environment policy
  6. Social policy
  7. Agro-industry policy
  8. Industry and energy policy
  9. Tourism policy
  10. Transportation policy
  11. Construction, housing and water resources policy
  12. Trade policy

Seven of these policy statements specifically widen the opportunity for cooperatives as a form of non-state enterprise, delivering the socialist objectives of human development,<sup>3</sup> equity and social justice called for by Jose Marti and embedded in the tenets of the Cuban Revolution.

Prior to being finalized, a draft of the document *Los Lineamientos* was widely distributed throughout the country to allow for grass-roots consultation with the Cuban people in the crafting of this new economic model. Neighbourhood meetings and meetings in workplaces were held over several months. A good percentage of the guidelines were amended to reflect input from the population. Changes include the following:

- Government has created new openings for close to 200 new categories of small- and medium-sized private enterprises. This fits with the pending layoff of 1.3 million government workers as Cuba rationalizes its state enterprises.
- There will also be a gradual reduction in inefficient subsidies, including food ration books, and a search for new ways to fulfill social objectives. Cooperatives are expected to play an increasingly important role in this regard.
- Regional decentralization: government has given more power to regional and municipal governments to establish their own priorities and utilize their local human and natural resources.
- Cubans now have the ability to buy and sell homes and cars.
- The government is encouraging the creation of cooperatives beyond the agriculture sector.

Plans are now underway to gradually move towards currency unification. Presently, Cuba supports both the Cuban Convertible Peso (CUC, the currency of tourism and trade) and the Cuban Peso (CUP, the subsidized national money).

According to Saint Mary's University Sobey School of Business economist Dr. Sonja Novkovic:

*The key principles include the preservation of socialism and an economic system based on the "people's socialist ownership over the fundamental means of production, governed by the socialist principle of distribution: from each according to his/her capacity, to each according to his/her contribution." Planning continues to be the allocation mechanism, but will be informed by market trends. The Cuban model will consist of diverse enterprise forms: "In addition to socialist state-run enterprises, which will be the main national economic structure, the Cuban model will also recognize and promote other modalities; namely, foreign investment forms (franchises, joint ventures, etc), cooperatives, small farming, usufruct, franchisement, self-employment and other forms that may emerge and contribute to increased labor efficiency." Also important and*

*reflected in the Guidelines is the principle of security for all citizens in the statement that “no one will be left behind.” The main thread in these general guidelines seems to be the overarching goal to achieve social development (the socialist purpose), with decentralizing economic decision-making and thereby increasing productive efficiency as a means to achieve that goal. Socialist Cuba has succeeded in reaching a high level of human development<sup>3</sup> and there is an ongoing concern and effort not to erode that achievement with economic restructuring. (2013)*

### **Collaboration between Canada and Cuba on agricultural cooperative development**

In December 2011, a series of workshops organized in Havana brought together a cohort of coop academics and practitioners from three countries for discussions with their Cuban counterparts on where Cuba is going in this widened cooperative path (Holm, 2011). The proceedings are posted at <http://www.theholmteam.ca/HAVANA.WORKSHOPS.Dec.2011.pdf>

In October 2012, pursuant to recommendations that arose from this workshop, four Cubans were invited to Quebec City to attend IMAGINE 2012/ Quebec International Summit of Cooperatives. These two conferences, marking the 2012 International Year of Cooperatives, drew over 2 800 delegates from 100 nations.

University ties are being strengthened at the academic and student level. In August 2013, the first Cuban student entered Saint Mary’s University’s Masters of Management, Cooperatives and Credit Unions Program on a full scholarship created in perpetuity by Dr. Colin Dodds, President of Saint Mary’s University.

### **International Cooperation Project**

In February 2014, a workshop was held in Cuba to begin a three-year project between Cuba’s National Association of Small Farmers (ANAP), their training school Escuela Niceto Perez, and two teams of coop leaders from Cuba, Saint Mary’s University, York University, ICA Latin America, and Scottish Agricultural Organizations Society (SAOS).

The objective is to strengthen the internalization of coop principles in Cuba’s private farmer cooperatives and contribute to the development of agricultural cooperativism through the exchange of tools, experiences and good international cooperative management practices.

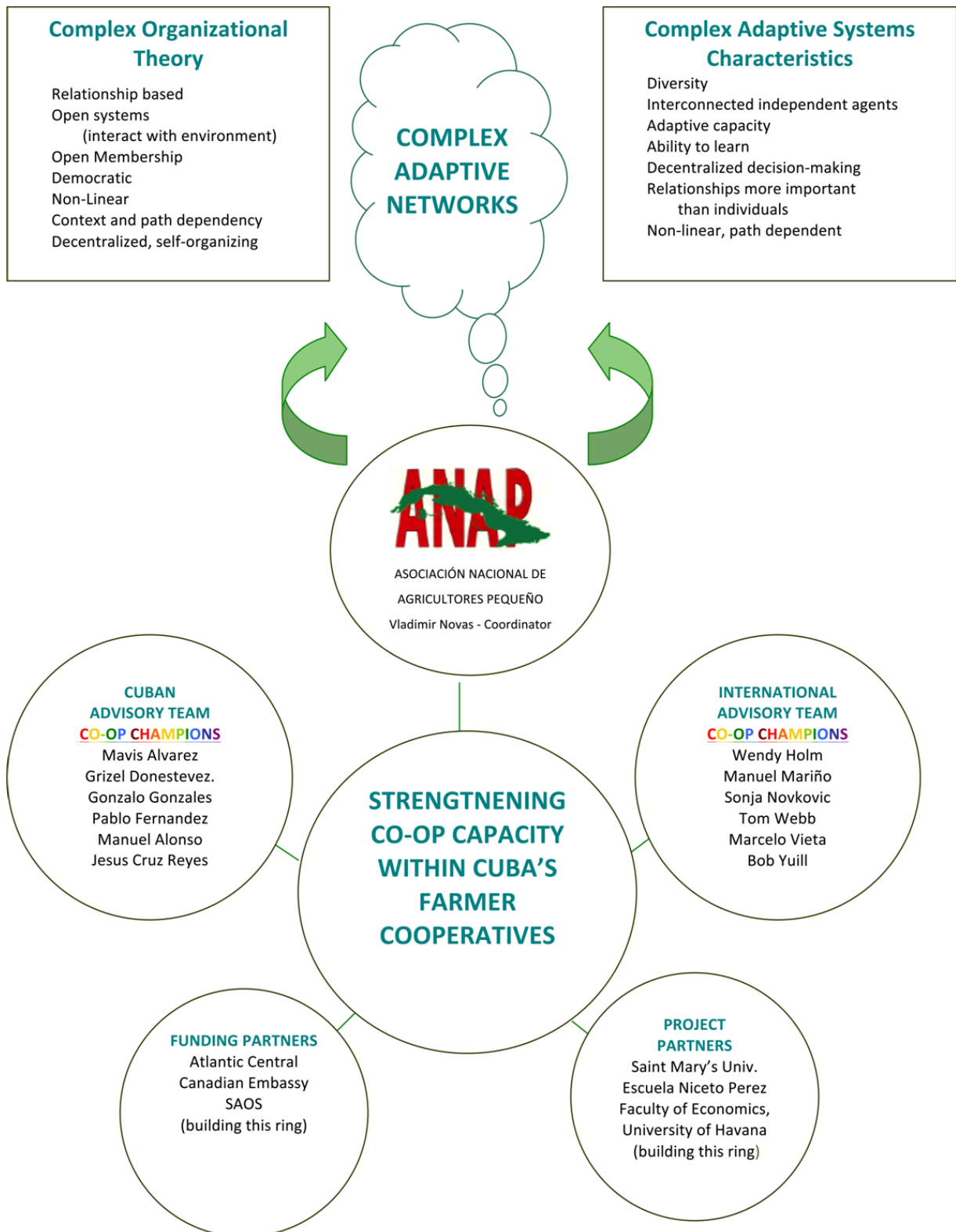
This training fills a recognized need in Cuba. In a March 27th 2014 address to ANAP members in Camaguey, Jorge Luis Tapia, member of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Cuba and first secretary in the territory, told Credit and Service cooperatives Directors that they should properly look after their members (Cuban News Agency, 2014).

Our first task is to develop a Cuba-adapted version of the Coop Index for use by Cuba’s socialist farm cooperatives. This new tool, once successfully adapted, has wide cooperative application in the non-farm sector.

### **Project Architecture**

The project architecture (Figure 1) was inspired by research done by Sonja Novkovic (Novkovic & Holm, 2012) and Linda Soots (Soots, Perry, & Cowan, 2007) on complex adaptive systems,

Figure 1 Schematic of project architecture



network theory, and innovation. Complex network theory holds that if groups of diverse, interconnected and independent agents with adaptive capacity and the ability to learn are given the opportunity to form non-linear, path-dependent networks characterized by decentralized decision-making where relationships, not individuals, are of primary importance, then the complex adaptive networks so created fuel innovation and creativity (Novkovic and Holm, 2012).

## Next Steps

Once the Coop Index is rebuilt for the Cuban context and members of the Escuela Niceto Perez are trained in its use, ANAP will identify a pilot group of cooperatives (CPAs) to work with this new version of the coop Index to strengthen cooperative identity and member/worker participation (Holm, 2014; Stocki, Prokopowicz and Novkovic, 2012).

From this will emerge a list of training needs to support the ongoing advancement of Cuban farmer cooperatives. The three-year project also envisages providing Cuba with assistance with cooperative curriculum development and providing support for cooperative training programs and visits to cooperative exemplars by the pilot farm coops.

The International Team will work to support these needs over the next three years. Some will be met by providing curriculum support, others by bringing in leaders like Scottish Agricultural Organizations Society's Bob Yuill to talk to farmers about global leadership in farmer cooperatives.

The Cuban Advisory Team's newest member, Dr. Jesus Cruz, Faculty of Economics, University of Havana, will attend the 2014 Summit of Cooperatives in Quebec City, from October 6–9 2014. Saint Mary's University's Sobey School of Business is organizing a Cuba Coop Study Tour in Feb 2015.



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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Professional Agrologist, B.Sc. (Business Administration, Long Island University, USA), M.Sc. (Agricultural Economics, University of British Columbia, Canada), MMCCU (Sobey School of Business, Saint Mary's University, Halifax, Canada).

<sup>2</sup> Essentially, the right to work the land in perpetuity. Similar to a life-long lease (unless the Government needs the land for another purpose).

<sup>3</sup> The Human Development Index consists of three components: income, health and education. HDI for Cuba was 0.78 in 2011, well ahead of economies with similar levels of income per capita. (UNDP) <http://hdr.undp.org/en/statistics/hdi/>.

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