

Shantytowns of Havana and *proyectos comunitarios* – marginalisation and grassroots strategies of overcoming it in contemporary Cuba

The aim of this project is to propose a reflection on informal settlements in Havana and investigate the role of *proyectos comunitarios* – community projects aimed at helping the inhabitants of such neighbourhoods. Through collaborative research and extended stay in the community in combination with participant observation, as well as in-depth interviews with elements of life stories I intend to investigate daily lives, needs and social relations within informal settlements and informal economic practices. This will allow to reflect on the dynamics of marginalisation and grassroots strategies aimed at overcoming it.

The main case study will concern a marginalised community inhabiting peripheral districts of Havana that is composed both by people who have lived there for several generations and whose ancestors came to the capital in hopes of improving their life conditions before the triumph of the Cuban revolution of 1959, as well as migrants coming from ruralised Eastern provinces of Cuba whose arrival in Havana is usually motivated by the long-term consequences of the economic crisis of the 1990s. Due to its informal character, the inhabitants of the shantytown have difficult access to the socialist system of provisions and some of them find themselves in the situation of extreme poverty. The community is composed mostly of Afro-Cubans and is renowned for a strong presence of Afro-Cuban syncretic religious cults. It is also the place where one of the *proyectos comunitarios* operates with the aim of improving life quality of the community.

The reason for taking on this topic is the intention to propose a different angle for investigating socio-economic transformations in contemporary Cuba – instead of taking the point of view of tourism, it aims to gather information on poverty, social exclusion and strategies of overcoming it, by adopting an intersectional approach, looking into class, race and gender in the places that elude the tourist gaze. At the same time, the project will allow to gather in-depth data on the role of informal economies as strategies of everyday survival in Cuba thanks to a strong base on the literature on development projects and shantytowns in Latin America, as well as rich reflection on post-socialist transformations in the Eastern Europe.