

Institution: University of Reading		
Unit of Assessment: 26 Modern Languages and Linguistics		
Title of case study: Enabling and empowering marginalised Cuban communities to define and develop their cultural identity		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2014-2020		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s):	Role(s) (e.g. job title):	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:
Par Kumaraswami	Associate Professor Professor	1 September 2014 – 30 June 2020
Period when the claimed impact occurred: 2014-2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? N		
<p>1. Summary of the impact</p> <p>The municipalities of Bayamo (population 222,118), Manzanillo (population 130,789) and Bartolomé Masó (population 53,024) in the Granma province of eastern Cuba (population 836,000) are diverse, geographically isolated and have historically been disempowered with acute disinterest shown to the area by Cuba's central government. Par Kumaraswami's research and activities in eastern Cuba have led to the cohesion of these three very different municipalities, who previously had very little or no contact with each other, which has enabled them to work together to reinforce their distinctive cultural identities, engage better with tourists, make visible their heritage and encourage new and increased international tourism in an often-neglected area. The central ethos of co-creation and collaborative engagement behind Kumaraswami's research has enabled the communities to validate their own experiences and cultures. Professor Kumaraswami's work is leading to social, cultural and socio-economic development with the potential to reach the whole province and beyond.</p>		
<p>2. Underpinning research</p> <p>Kumaraswami's research focusses on Cuba's unique literary culture since the Revolution of 1959. Her research has given her access to the Cuban literary community, first in Havana and now in Granma province, and, through a collaborative process, has had a profound impact on under-represented communities in eastern Cuba.</p> <p>Kumaraswami's first major research project examined the interaction between literature and politics in revolutionary Cuba between 1959 and 2006. Kumaraswami's evaluation of this first project, and its focus on a common propensity to regard Havana as synonymous with Cuba, led her to consider literary culture in other parts of Cuba, leading to the project "Beyond Havana, Beyond the Nation? Peripheral Identities and Literary Culture in Cuba" (funded by the Leverhulme Trust 2014-19) which examined how personal and social identities have been constructed through participation in literary culture in the eastern province of Granma, Cuba. Granma is a region which is symbolically rich (the birthplace of independence; the <i>himno nacional</i>; the battleground for the wars of independence of the late 19th-century; the landing of the Granma yacht in 1956; the insurrection in the <i>Sierra Maestra</i>) but which is geographically isolated. The region is under-developed in terms of resources and infrastructure and largely peripheral to the mass tourism which other parts of Cuba are experiencing.</p> <p>Kumaraswami's research questions focused on the importance of the concept of nation and how regional, national and global identities are built through literary participation (outputs 1–3). Kumaraswami chose three very different locations to investigate these research questions: Bayamo, the capital city of the province and the administrative centre; Manzanillo, a port city with considerable literary prestige but little political power; and Bartolomé Masó, a small sugar town</p>		

in the foothills of the Sierra Maestra. Her co-researcher (Antoni Kapcia, University of Nottingham) studied the province's historiography and how it contributes to a sense of "Cubanness".



To address the research questions, focus groups were held twice a year for three years in each of the three municipalities. From initially large and disparate groups of people, a core of around 20 people developed in each location, whose questions ranged from "What do you (and we) mean by 'literature'?" to "Are we the subjects or objects of the research project?". Thus began the co-creative nature of the research project. A series of events in year four of the project involved the three core community groups. An initial conference in Havana in 2018 highlighted to the Granma communities that they needed to unite and galvanise their common interests. This led to subsequent workshops instigated by each of the community groups in Granma Province – first in Bartolomé Masó and Bayamo in October 2018, and then in Manzanillo in April 2019.

As a result, more than 60 participants and two new researchers who joined the project, worked closely together to co-author and co-create several impact initiatives and outputs, detailed in Section 4.

3. References to the research

Kumaraswami's research meets the 2* quality threshold as it resulted from a competitive, peer-reviewed funding application, has become a point of reference for discussions on marginalised Cuban communities and the formation of their cultural identities and has been published in peer-reviewed volumes with established academic presses.

1. Kumaraswami, P. (2018) 'Black skin, red masks? Decolonisation and literature in 1970s Cuba'. In: Kirk, E. J., Clayfield, A. and Story, I. (eds.) *Cuba's forgotten decade: how the 1970s shaped the Revolution*. Lexington Studies on Cuba. Lexington Books, Washington, pp. 163-178. ISBN 1498568734.

2. Kumaraswami, P. (2018) 'The periphery of the periphery: socialisation and circuits of power in Cuban literary culture, in: Gallardo-Saborido, E. J., Gómez-de-Tejada, J. and Puñales-Alpizar, D. (eds.) *Asedios al caimán letrado: Literatura y poder en la Revolución cubana*. Ibero-Americana Pragensia Supplementum (49). Editorial Karolinum, Universidad Carolina, Prague, pp. 83-96. ISBN 9788024638911.
3. Kumaraswami, P. (2016) *The Social Life of Literature in Revolutionary Cuba: Narrative, Identity, and Well-being*. Palgrave Macmillan, New York. ISBN 978-1-137-56963-9.

4. Details of the impact

The three east Cuban municipalities of Bayamo, Manzanillo and Bartolomé Masó have historically been disparate and disempowered with little attention shown to them by Cuba's central government. In January 2018, Kumaraswami's project held a conference/workshop in Havana, facilitating the participation of 40 delegates from all three municipalities who, without this support, would have been unable to attend. The conference included academic papers, a round table discussion forum and, crucially, a workshop opportunity for the three Granma groups to meet each other for the first time away from their usual environments. (E1, E2).

The workshop exemplified the problems faced by these three communities: although 40 delegates attended from the different municipalities, which were historically wary of each other as a result of rivalries and hierarchies, not one member from the Ministries of Tourism, Culture and Information attended, despite receiving invitations from Kumaraswami and being based in Havana. This left the delegates feeling that once again, the provinces had been abandoned and dismissed. This snub resulted in the three communities deciding to join forces against the perceived "common enemy", working together to show pride in their province and develop its culture.

This initial workshop acted as a catalyst for a variety of activities and projects which were developed by the three municipalities to celebrate their individual distinctive cultures and to make their unique heritage more visible. They requested workshops to be held in places of historical and cultural importance to the three municipalities, again underlining each municipality's distinctive contribution to the province and the nation and creating a vital "feelgood factor".



The next stage of meetings, in October 2018, was shared between the rural municipality of [Bartolomé Masó](#) (E2, E3) and the province's urban capital [Bayamo](#) (attracting local newspaper and radio coverage; E2, E4). This meeting was spectacularly effective in exposing urban participants to rural ways of being both "Cuban" and "Granmense" (from Granma province) through literature, including performances by local children, writers and actors. Indeed, the entire mountain community of Providencia turned out to show off their local cultures, including food, games and music. A third event was organised in Manzanillo in April 2019 to develop plans through co-creation, with provincial representatives of the relevant Ministries attending a follow-up meeting in Bayamo. The resulting social cohesion has had a profound effect on Granma province. Kumaraswami has created a strong network of around 60 colleagues in the province; together they work to making significant changes for the good of all.

A. Bringing sustainable heritage tourism to the Granma province, Cuba:

The most significant change achieved through this research is the region's foray into sustainable heritage tourism. Granma province includes the iconic Sierra Maestra, the highest mountain range in Cuba, but has virtually no tourism industry despite having 42% of Cuba's official historic sites. Granma province is rural, and without good roads, developed beach resorts or airports. Traditionally it has attracted only a few adventurous day-trippers, but not their money. By taking tourism into their own hands the communities have realised the potential that their own enterprise can achieve in bringing much needed economic benefits to the area.

The delegates, along with the wider community, identified in the 2019 workshops in Manzanillo and Bayamo, the value and resources available in each location. With Kumaraswami, they developed "La Cuba Profunda" (E5) – a cultural historical tour approved by provincial officials from the Ministry of Tourism. International tourists are guided through the east of Cuba, visiting little-known cultural and historical sites alongside natural beaches, local gastronomy and local accommodation. A pilot tour in July 2019 was very successful: one participant commented:

"I feel like I got a much better idea of what Cuba is really like ... there is so much more out there to see and experience! ... I'm so glad that I got to see part of a country that I never would have done otherwise. ... it was also a reminder of my values and how resourceful people are and what's actually possible when people come together." (E6).

The first official tour was scheduled for April 2020. While it has been postponed as a result of the global pandemic, it is still being promoted as a non-profit enterprise and will run as soon as it is safe to do so. Through co-creation of the itinerary and activities, it enables local communities to devise and develop their own resources (food, natural resources, culture) in a way that is sustainable, maintains their cultural integrity, and is attractive to international tourists seeking an alternative to 'sun, sea and sand' tourism or the attractions of Havana. An annual influx of hard currency will be the first step towards developing a sustained and sustainable cultural heritage profile. In anticipation of the tour, several cultural institutions on the itinerary have already started to improve their premises and develop gifts and other services for tourists (E7).

B. Cultural changes within three Cuban municipalities:

During the conference and initial workshops, the groups were encouraged to "brainstorm" positive and negative aspects of Granma Province, and what could be done by both groups and individuals to improve awareness of its assets. The ideas generated through the workshops led a local historian to create a digital "cultural encyclopaedia" of Manzanillo, constantly updating it and inviting contributions from others (E8). He suggested creating similar encyclopaedias for Bayamo, and Bartolomé Masó. He is now responsible for the digital platform, using content provided by the inhabitants of the other two municipalities. The implementation of 4G WIFI in the region and the rapid advancement of smartphones means the potential of these digital encyclopaedias can be realised. The platform will help the entire population of the province to benefit from the process of self-recognition, increased confidence and increased personal and community investment in preserving their identity (E9).

As a result of this project that is helping inhabitants recognise their cultural and historical wealth, the group is now renovating the former house of one of Cuba's best-known writers, Manuel Navarro Luna, in Manzanillo into a cultural landmark, the Centro de Promoción Literaria Navarro Luna. As a result of the project there is now a new annual celebration in the cultural calendar of Bartolomé Masó: "The Day of Oral Literature", 28th March, has been created as a tribute to the contribution of Kumaraswami and Kapcia, highlighting how Kumaraswami's research has acted as a catalyst for activity in the region. The organiser of this new initiative, the Director of the Municipal Library in Bartolome Masó, said: "It is my dream to be able to dedicate an event to you both in the future for having been protagonists in the rehabilitation of traditions in our municipality." (E10).

Spin-offs are spreading the project's ideas and co-operation throughout the province. These will eventually include an interactive digital map of the province, with photographs, video information, points of interest and links to websites (E10). This, along with a research project exploring the structures needed to incentivise and develop sustainable and sustained local tourism, co-created with academics in local development at the CEDDEL, University of Granma will act as a model for other municipalities and perhaps other provinces.

These three communities in Granma province have been profoundly impacted by Kumaraswami's research to define their cultural identity, develop as a united community and raise their profile, through underlining their distinctive and invaluable contribution to Cuban national identity. Kumaraswami's work has influenced how the communities work with each other, how they develop their own resources, and how they present these resources to the outside world, whether visitors from Havana or international visitors.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

- [E1] Film of Havana round table event 2018: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AudXqXUJav94>
- [E2] Evaluation questionnaires from events in: a) Havana 2018; b) Bartolomé Masó 2018; c) Manzanillo 2018
- [E3] Film of Bartolomé Masó event 2018: <https://youtu.be/tqO8NHWRjM>
- [E4] Film of Bayamo event 2018: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KaGEoAuNFSM>
- [E5] La Cuba Profunda 2019 itinerary
- [E6] Testimonials from tourist for 2019
- [E7] Testimonial from Provincial Tourism Director
- [E8] Enciclopedia Cultural de Manzanillo (provided as a PDF).
- [E9] Testimonial from Bartolomé Masó Municipal Librería
- [E10] Testimonial from Manzanillo historian