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**CHANGING THE CLIMATE ON CUBA**

We are a group of passionate, action-oriented young people from all over the world. We design fun, practical research projects to learn about the experience of other young people. Our aim is to connect with ourselves, each other, and the world around us.

Cuba intrigued us because we sensed that young Cubans were… a lot of things. So we created a little word game about it. It all started with a lot of serendipity.

*Select a leaf to navigate between the chapters*

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**Chapter 1: Trip**

Recrear went to Cuba to learn about young people's attitudes towards climate change and what they wanted to do about it.

We went back to the drawing table and designed a participatory action research project to explore how youth engage with climate action in Cuba. So off Gioel, Kirsten and Desirae went.

Gioel is the Director of Research at Recrear. The Cuba project was born in large part because of her friendship with a Cuban activist named Handy.

Desirae is a youth specialist who interned with Recrear during the Cuba project; lending her awesome skills in research and writing.

Kirsten is Recrear’s resident community caretaker. She has spent several years playing with experiential education and youth-friendly techniques.

In our first exploratory visit, we came face to face with incredible ‘youth leaders’ in Cuba’s environmental sector. The problem is they are scattered all over the country so working together is hard. It doesn’t help that communication and transportation kind of suck.

**Our Methodology**

Training: We selected a group of Cuban youth leaders from each region to train in action research.

12 workshops: We ran a series of participatory action research workshops with about 75 young people, aged 18-35 in the cities of Havana, Santa Clara and Santiago de Cuba.

Mid-Term Review: We made a point of the situation. We started digesting what we had learned so far.

Internships: Our Cuban researchers began their internships which involved running interviews with more than 30 experts, institutions and community organizations.

Final Review Workshop: We got our group of Cuban researchers back together in the same place to assess what we had collectively learned.

Sharing: We agreed on our lessons learned and shared them via blogs, a photo book of recommendations and in international conferences.

So we wanted to create a space for young leaders to connect with each other, and create synergies.

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**Chapter 2: Researchers**

We spent 7 months in Cuba working with 10 young researchers, and 75 young people from 3 cities

**Santa Clara**

**Jose Ernesto**

Hi, my name is Jose Ernesto, I am 23 and I am a journalist. As a young person and as a Cuban, I take interest in trying to understand the world around me. My great passion is literature; I’ve been writing since I was little. I like having good conversations with friends, listening to good music, and taking long walks along the beach. I believe that things start to change when we decide to change them. For this reason, I’ve never liked standing with my arms crossed.

**Roberto**

I love simplicity. Being born in Cuba has converted me into a ‘revolutionary’ and solidal young person. This year, I will graduate in agrarian engineering from the Central University ‘de las Villas’ in Santa Clara. As a good Cuban, I love partying but, despite the stereotypes, I really can’t dance.

**Saily**

I am you, I am him, I am us, I am you all and I am them. I am here and I want to be there. I am Cuban, I have many stories to tell, and many more still to live. I have dreams to share, and many things to tell. I have friends, a brother and a beautiful city. Sometimes I don’t know what to do with everything that I have. This time though I do; I am going to present you my Cuba.

**Santiago de Cuba**

**Roxana**

If I had to describe myself in three lines I would say happy, free, living at the limits, intense, sensual, sensible, from time to time cheesy, a realist, and finally ‘santiaguera’… Hello everyone, I am Roxana. I love writing, photography, sharing a good coffee with friends and my mother’s kiss.

**Dailenis**

My name is Dailenis and biology is my passion. I am 27, I love enjoying nature, sports, and, most importantly, my daughter.

**Adriel**

A cuban through and through, I love music and dancing. My passions are literature, movies and all the random opportunities that life brings along. I constantly try to understand and answer the many questions that are endlessly running through my head. Here, you’ll have the opportunity to learn about some of them.

**\*Alejandro**

**Habana**

**Roydes**

I am roydes. I am 24 and I study law at the university of Habana. I consider myself a curious person. Even if I am a bit serious, when I am with my friends I am able to release these cosmic energies that I tend to keep closeted because of my academic profile. I can be your best friend, but if you do or say something that I don’t like - be careful! Sometimes I say things without thinking.

**Liliet**

My name is Liliet, but everyone calls me Lilo, because I look like the protagonist of Lilo and stitch. I’m in my 3rd year of law school and law is my passion. I spend a lot of time focused on my studies, but I actually love dancing and making jokes. I love movies and theatricals plays. My friends say that I’m a tornado. I like authenticity and can’t stand the fake people.

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**Chapter 3: Formula**

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**Chapter 4: “Chinito”**

*“(…)The ‘chinito’ (little chinese), as he was warmly nicknamed, showed me that subconsciously nature helps us, is our friend, yet we barely give it our time. I reflected about it and I started spending a bit more time in the little garden so important to Chinito, who could have easily been my grandfather.” –Laritza-*

Read full history Listen to audio

Near my dorm there is a little garden. I never really paid attention to it. As I would go and come back from class, assuming a busy life, the garden would say hi to me every day. Absorbed in my own world, I barely even noticed. It is incredible that when I did finally start paying attention to it, it was because of a sad event. One of the gardeners became ill. It saddened me because he is a sweet, old man who always looks after us in the dorm. I was surprised when, between tears, he was complaining that we would not be able to take care of the garden which had given so much joy to his long life.

He explained how this small place had allowed him to maintain a strong relationship with nature and its fruits. That space took him back to his hometown, to the countryside where he grew up. I realized that there are people that have a much more powerful relationship with nature than I do. The ‘chinito’ (little chinese), as he was warmly nicknamed, showed me that subconsciously nature helps us, is our friend, yet we barely give it our time. I reflected about it and I started spending a bit more time in the little garden so important to Chinito, who could have easily been my grandfather.

Suddenly, everything around me completely changed. I surrounded myself with all types of medicinal and aromatic plants. I even learned about a banana tree that started waving at me a little branch full of fruit that nobody could touch without the consent from the guardians of the garden. I felt somewhat responsible and yet comforted by this space which had been transformed, by the hands of Chinito and the other custodians, into a productive space. Chinito proudly explained to me everything that, being lost in my daily hustle, I had never come close enough to see. I was lost between the smells of oregano, tilo (a medicinal plant) and mint. I discovered that some of these spices are used to make the food we eat every day in the cafeteria.

I left the garden understanding exactly why Chinito was feeling so down, and I think I am even a bit sad now, writing about this. The love and dedication that has given to this garden is incomparable – and the willingness to live of this sweet old man, as I tell him, is contained in the garden which he took care of for so long. I believe that now, this garden will never go unnoticed to me. Maybe I won’t take care of it every day, but I will start giving it a little bit of my time, even if just to say hi.

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**Chapter 1: Debate**

**Everything in nature has a role, even when it seems ‘bad’**

A Conversation Between Liliet and a Permaculturalist (Havana, Cuba).

**The Permaculturallist:** Liliet, what do you know about the marabou plant?

**Liliet:** Why, everyone knows that the useless marabou weed is basically one of the greatest threats to our island!

**The Permaculturalist:** What else do you know about it?

**Liliet:** It is impossible to get rid of the damned thickets!

This makes it hard to clear out more land to grow more food crops domestically.

**The Permaculturalist:** Well, actually, this is all wrong.

If you do away with the marabou, what happens?

Well, you expose the soil to direct sunlight, stripping it of moisture and nutrients essential for supporting plant and animal life.

The Marabou, with its deep roots, helps to reintroduce nitrogen and prevent soil erosion.

And this is just the beginning.

The plant is also food for many animals. Dead marabou fertilizes the soil, not to mention that the wood is a valuable source of fuel for cooking and heating.

The marabou is a central element of the ecosystem in which you happen to find it growing.

It is integrated into this natural system that relies precisely upon the interconnectedness and interdependence between the elements: the specific combination and variety of vegetation, animal life, soil, water, and climate conditions.

If you remove the marabou, well, you completely disturb this natural balance and disrupt the biological cycle.

**Liliet:** ah, interesting. So why do we all hate the marabou?

**The Permaculturalist:** Well, once large-scale agroindustrial sugarcane production declined some two decades ago in Cuba, the land that had been used to grow the sugarcane was abandoned.

Sugarcane farming left behind unproductive land that was then invaded with the marabou.

The dominant view is that the marabou prevents people from using these idle lands and making them cultivable. Ironically enough, the “weed” has actually helped to rejuvenate the land and biodiversity.

**Liliet:** I see… but the marabou is really hard to get rid of when you want to start farming again!

**The Permaculturalist:** Well, the marabou is there precisely because you are not farming.

The challenge is to realize that everything in nature has a role, even when it seems ‘bad’.

The challenge is to grow food sustainably in a way that will maintain and reinforce this natural ecosystem.

The philosophy in permaculture is to start by observing all the elements in a specific place (the climate, soil composition, water vegetation, animal life, etc.).

Then you try to design a system accounting for and reinforcing the interconnection between all of these elements involved in that particular ecosystem.

So what I am saying is that we need to be creative- and make the most of the marabou

*The above conversation is based on an interview that we had with Silvio. Silvio and his family have designed an urban family farm (Finca Mambí) based on the principles of permaculture.*

**Is more economic growth in Cuba going to be good for the environment?**

In Havana, we facilitated a debate with a group of 25 young people. We divided them in three groups. One group was asking questions, one group was answering, and a few people were observing. Participants were asked to put themselves in the shoes of a different character: a journalist from Granma, an environmentalist, a taxi driver, a housewife, a young musician. The idea was to reflect over how different people relate to the problem of climate change in Cuba.

**Geography student:** How do you feel about all the pollution in Havana?

**Taxista:** Well the problem is that we can’t afford a new car. The cars we have are from the 50s, of course they pollute a lot! If we were able to afford new cars, things would be better. We could introduce a law to limit cars from producing too much pollution, but without a better economy it simply won’t work.

**‘Environmental specialist’:** Without any doubt, strengthening the economy is essential; we need technology to protect the environment.

**Observer:** Who says that with more economic growth we will have less pollution? We might have better cars, but if we have three times more cars, there will be more pollution and a more crowded city. Plus, the problem is that new cars are designed to have a shorter life span. Yes, we still use cars from the 50s, but how often would we have to change our cars if we could afford a new one? And what kind of environmental damage would be caused by increased consumerism?

**Observer 2:** Well, I agree. Interestingly enough, developed countries contribute more to the degradation of the environment, despite having better technologies.

*The social and economic development requires more creativity. The problem is not a simple question of economic development. The real, huge problems are the models of economic growth.*

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**Chapter 1: Treasure Hunt**

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**Learning**