“Building Better Communities: Women’s Roles, Resources and Gendered Processes of Urban Regeneration in Cayo Hueso, Havana, Cuba”

Ariadna Fernandez
School of Community and Regional Planning
University of British Columbia

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Abstract

It has long been recognized that in many Latin American countries, including Cuba, women and men play varied and different roles in community work and participate in equally diverse social networks. Women are often seen the traditional care takers and nurturers of the community. Thus, in an environment in which decision making is increasingly shifted to the community level and scarce resources limit the amount of state subsidization available, women in local communities are being called upon to address new challenges. In inner city areas, where material living conditions have deteriorated more than in other areas, the roles of women within urban regeneration programs and processes are particularly significant and demand study. In my research, I review the structure and operations of the Taller de Transformación, which is essentially a grassroots level planning body partially funded by the municipal government, in the inner city community of Cayo Hueso in Havana. Within this study I also analyze the role of women in the community and within the Taller. My paper therefore outlines these processes as well as the outcomes achieved by the Taller and community women and discusses their replicability. Reviewing the work of local planning bodies to study how they have gone about mobilizing women and women’s networks to improve living conditions at the local level is an important and useful exercise as it is not something I have seen discussed to any great length in urban regeneration or planning literature. The case of Cayo Hueso and its “Taller de Transformación” is illustrative of the serious resource scarcities that face many developing nations and the way in which women (and men) mobilize to address these shortages. It is therefore a useful case study for community planning in Latin America.