

INFORMATION ON THE CUBAN ECONOMY IN DATABASES

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During recent years, evolution in the Cuban economy has been witnessed. Reforms aimed at opening the external sector of the economy to foreign investors have been implemented gradually. In 1993 important market oriented reforms, such as the decriminalization of possession of dollars, drastically changed domestic policy as well. Recently, changes such as taxation of self employment point to a reversal of the 1993 internal opening.

As analysts, investors and the general public demand more information on the subject, reliable and timely data continues to be difficult to obtain. As is the case with any subject, no single source is adequate. In the case of the Cuban economy, however, other components such as insufficient official information render the use of diverse and at times unconventional sources particularly vital.

This paper presents an overview of primary information found in a variety of formats and bibliographic sources, and focuses on one of the most important of these sources: online databases. Intended as a tool for researchers of the Cuban economy, it analyzes the contents of a selection of relevant databases. As expected, a great deal of literature was found in business, news, and social sciences databases. Other sources—agricultural and biomedical databases—were not as obvious. The overall arrangement consists of a general discussion of information in various formats followed by a presentation of searching methods and analysis of the contents of a selection of relevant databases grouped by broad subject categories.

OVERVIEW OF PRIMARY AND BIBLIOGRAPHIC SOURCES

The volume of published literature on the Cuban economy and related topics is abundant and diverse, despite of the lack of primary sources. Information supplied by the Cuban government remains the authority for economic policy, the regime's position on issues and other factual information. Such information is published in a variety of formats ranging from serials and monographs to press releases.

Along with government reports providing statistical and other data, the most authoritative primary sources of policy are speeches to Communist Party Congresses and reports presented to the national assemblies. But precisely because of its official character, this type of information at times simply confirms what has long been evident, such as the existence of the black market. Also, many technical and policy reports, primarily published as serials, are published or distributed irregularly. The last statistical yearbook, to cite one example, was published in 1989. Data published in Cuba is supplemented by international publications based on figures provided by the Cuban government such as United Nations and UNESCO reports.

A fair amount of government furnished information, however, is presented in fragmentary fashion. Interviews granted by Cuban officials to the international press are often chosen as a venue to disseminate official announcements. Biographies of appointees give clues to economic forecasts: the nomination of hard liners or moderates to key positions is frequently an indication of the type of reform to expect.

Thorough reviews of print and broadcast media, both domestic and international, are therefore a fundamental source for timely, if not complete, financial information. News items about particular aspects of trade relations and joint venture announcements by some of Cuba's main foreign investors are only found in those countries' newspapers and wire services.

Newsletters are the format of choice for timeliness and economy of information. Some focus on such specific angles as legal or investment aspects. However, because they tend to be schematic and superficial, newsletters are a more adequate format for investors than scholars.

Symposia are also sources of current and unique information and analysis. Some foundations, law firms and think tanks sponsor conferences and symposia about the Cuban economy. While conference proceedings are selectively indexed in a number of databases, relatively few, like the Foreign Broadcast Information Service, index symposia.

ONLINE DATABASES AS INDEXING TOOLS

Given the variety of sources, databases seem the most appropriate indexing tool. They provide flexibility, efficiency and diversity of contents: every topic discussed in the preceding section was represented in at least one of the databases searched.

The basic search strategy for identifying records consisted of the root "Cuba" within five words of the following roots: "econom," "financ," "market," "trade," "trading," and "commerc." The number of "hits" found with the preliminary search was used as a guideline for selecting databases for analysis, since differences in years of coverage, frequency of updating, and overlapping affect the number of hits.

The search was then refined according to the structure and subject of each database. In some cases the search was limited to current years or most important fields such as main subjects. In most cases, it was narrowed or expanded with additional terms, such as: development, forecasting, informal sector, or foreign investments. Databases comprised exclusively of book and serial titles and general press articles were excluded because the type of coverage they provide is common knowledge. The list of general interest

newspapers which yielded the highest number of postings on business and investments in Cuba is provided as an appendix.

ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY

The following list reviews the contents of a selection of the most significant databases on the basis of the extent, uniqueness, and relevance of their contents, and highlights some distinctive and unusual characteristics of the contents. They are grouped in broad subject categories. Analysis of databases in such categories as Social Sciences, and Latin American and International materials is briefer since these are well known and often-used indexes, and researchers are familiar with the type of coverage they provide.

a) Business and Economic Databases

The criterion for inclusion in this group was that the database, or group file, deal exclusively with business and finance topics. Databases included cover a broad spectrum of business and financial information, ranging from scholarly analysis to up-to-date coverage of financial and commodity market events in newspaper articles.

ABI Inform

Provider: University Microfilms International, Ann Arbor, Michigan.

Business information from business journals worldwide, including company news and analysis, market conditions, trade and investments. Also international trade and foreign investments, business conditions, economic planning, futures market and commodity prices. Includes records on small business and entrepreneur ventures.

Business Dateline

Provider: University Microfilms International, Louisville, Kentucky.

Articles from American and Canadian business journals, newspapers and magazines about new products, manufacturing methods, market conditions, etc. Local and regional coverage, such as local industry ventures and future investment plans in Cuba.

Canadian Business and Current Affairs

Provider: Micromedia Ltd., Toronto, Ontario, Canada.

Articles from Canadian business periodicals and

newspapers and corporate filings deposited with the Ontario Securities Commission. Subjects include company, product and industry information, with abundant local coverage.

Economic Literature Index

Provider: The American Economic Association, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

Journal articles and book reviews from 260 economics journals and monographs. Corresponds to the index section of the *Journal of Economic Literature* and to the annual *Index of Economic Articles*. Scholarly, in-depth analysis of such topics as assessments of economic growth and the informal sector. Includes historical research articles.

Infomat International Business (Globalbase)

Provider: Information Access Company, Foster City, California.

English language abstracts of articles from business newspapers and journals from more than 20 countries. Topics include biotechnology, communications, financial services, construction and civil engineering.

Investext

Provider: Thomson Financial Networks, Boston, Massachusetts.

Company, industry and topical analysis; includes reports by experts on competitive analysis, evaluation of companies, market research, etc. One of the most relevant databases because of its full text coverage of reports by companies investing in Cuba. One such report produced by Sherritt Company contained field research on economic reform and forecasts, political risk and historical background.

Journal of Commerce

Provider: Journal of Commerce Inc., New York. News, columns, editorials, etc., from the world's premiere business daily and *Traffic World*, the transportation weekly, on international trade, transportation, banking, finance, etc.

Knight Ridder/Tribune Business News

Provider: Knight Ridder/Tribune Business News, Washington, D.C. and Knight Ridder Financial Information, New York.

Business and financial news from Knight Ridder newspapers plus the *Journal of Commerce*.

PREDICASTS Databases

Provider: Information Access Company, Foster City, California.

Industry information, including new technologies and products, market conditions, forecasts and projections.

- **PTS Newsletter Database.** Business and trade newsletters covering a variety of industries such as computers, electronics, etc., products, trends, etc. International economic relations and foreign investments, Cuban agricultural production, sugar industry and communications issues. Complements coverage of individual newsletters on Cuba.
- **PTS Prompt (Predicasts' Overview of markets and technology).** International coverage of products, markets, technologies, etc. in various industries. Includes investment analysis reports, corporate news releases, and other publications such as USDA Research Studies from the Department of Agriculture.
- **Trade & Industry ASAP.** Selection of text and indexing of many journals covered in Trade & Industry Index plus news releases from PR Newswire. Coverage of various industries, notably tourism and travel, metals—particularly nickel—and telecommunications.
- **Trade & Industry Index.** Trade, industry and business journals abstracted in Trade and Industry Index. Similar to above, with more newspaper, loose-leaf (such as *Facts on File*) and regional coverage.
- **PTS F&S Index.** Business and economic data including product and industry information, financial activities, government regulations, etc. News and reports of Cuban international trade relations particularly with European nations. Good coverage of the tobacco industry and grains trade.
- **PTS MARS (Marketing and Advertising Reference Service).** Coverage of multi-industry ad-

vertising, marketing, market research and new product information. Trade and tourism, health tourism and policy, reports on U.S. companies positioning themselves for post-embargo investments.

b) Databases in the Social Sciences

Mostly online versions of standard print indexes, these sources cited scholarly, materials with an emphasis on analysis of economic subjects, and their social and public affairs implications and historical background.

CIS

Provider: Congressional Information Service, Inc. Washington, D.C.

Online equivalent of the Congressional Information Service's *Index to Publications of the United States Congress*. Cites congressional working papers published by the House, Senate and Joint committees and sub-committees. Also bills and resolutions about economic and international issues, comparative country studies as they relate to Cuba and Cuban Americans, and economic implications of post-embargo investments. Most frequently discussed (in recent reports) were the downing of the Brothers to the Rescue planes and the Helms-Burton law.

Historical Abstracts

Provider: ABC-CLIO, Inc., Santa Barbara, California.

Periodical literature in history and related disciplines, excluding the U.S. and Canada. Includes economic and cultural history, international relations, social and political history, etc.

PAIS International

Provider: Public Affairs Information Service (PAIS), New York.

Index to the public policy aspects of business, economics, finance, banking, law, international relations, etc. Covers various aspects of the Cuban economic crisis, transition and reforms from the perspective of public policy, and implications on other sectors like education.

Social SciSearch

Provider: Institute for Scientific Information (ISI), Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

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Indexing from the most important social science journals worldwide; corresponds to *Social Science Citation Index*. Historical perspectives on such topics as pre-revolutionary class structure. More coverage from an American perspective than most databases, e.g. coverage of Cuban Americans and U.S. sanctions.

Sociological Abstracts

Provider: Sociological Abstracts, Inc., San Diego, California.

Covers the world literature on sociology and related disciplines. Includes reviews, monographs, conference papers, etc. Scholarly analysis of all aspects of the economy, including the informal sector and Cuba in the context of Marxist economics.

U. S. Political Science Documents

Provider: Mid-Atlantic Technology Applications Center, University of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

Abstracts and indexing from scholarly American journals in political science. Includes foreign policy, international relations, economics, law and political science theory. Emphasis on analysis of current topics like the collapsing economy, the transition to market economy, economic implications of Cuban involvement in Africa.

Agricultural, Biomedical and Technological Databases

The number of articles on economic implications or consequences of topics covered in this group was surprising, given the range of coverage: medicine, public health, genetics, agriculture, food production and environmental issues. In some, there was substantial coverage of social and public policy ramifications. Particularly important was the inclusion of Cuban, particularly regional, publications.

Agris International.

Provider: U.S. National Agricultural Library, Beltsville, Maryland.

Worldwide agricultural literature including food production, rural development, administration and legislation, etc. Corresponds in part to the United Nations' Food and Agriculture Organization's *AgrIndex*. Excellent reporting of agricultural issues, especially livestock and sugar production; best cover-

age of technical studies of such topics as rice and cassava harvesting and soil evaluation.

Agricola

Provider: U.S. National Agricultural Library, Beltsville, Maryland.

Worldwide journals and monographic literature on agriculture and related subjects such as animal studies, botany, entomology, forestry, soils, etc. Good coverage of agricultural and technological topics and their economic implications: sugar processing, food shortage, rural development and entomology; emphasis on the sugar industry.

Biosis Previews

Provider: Biosis, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

Citations from *Biological Abstracts*, *Biological Abstracts/RRM* and *BioResearch Index*. Includes reports of original research, monograph titles, and citations from media abstracts, reviews, government reports, etc. Clinical studies in virology and epidemiology topics such as the recent neuropathy epidemic, production of pharmacological products, fisheries and natural resources; one of the few databases to include information on biotechnology.

CAB Abstracts

Provider: CAB International, Farnham Royal, Slough, United Kingdom.

Agricultural and biological information from the main abstract journals published by the Commonwealth Agricultural Bureau plus additional journals, books, conference proceedings, thesis, etc. Subjects include agricultural engineering, animal breeding, dairy science, veterinary science, etc. Scholarly studies of agricultural, health and related issues with emphasis on the sugar industry and public health, and including health tourism and biotechnology.

Geobase

Provider: Elsevier Science Publishers, Norwich, United Kingdom.

Worldwide literature on geography, geology, ecology and related disciplines. Covers *Geographical Abstracts*, *International Development Abstracts*, *Geological Abstract Series*, *Mineralogical Abstracts* and *Ecological Abstracts*, plus many additional publications in related disciplines. Best coverage of Cuban ecology and cli-

matology; broad definition of economic and social geography to include articles on the impact of the dissolution of the Soviet Union and Eastern bloc on Cuba, agrarian reform studies, energy and housing policies.

Pascal

Provider: CNRS/INIST, Institut de l'Information Scientifique et Technique, Vandoeuvre-les-Nancy, France.

Index to Pascal journals including literature from international journals, thesis, reports, books, etc. on life sciences, pollution, food and agricultural science, and other subjects. Articles (some from Cuba and Eastern Europe), on public health, clinical and genetic studies, library and information studies.

Lexis-Nexis Libraries and Files

Provider: Reed-Elsevier/Lexis-Nexis, Dayton, Ohio. The Lexis-Nexis system focuses on legal and financial topics. It features a multitude of arrangements of information, from single title files to comprehensive multi-format topical files, thus allowing for customized searches focusing on specific angles of a topic. The system is updated daily, so it is the best source for current press coverage, and for focusing on an aspect or geographic area—for example, searching the Asia/Pacific Rim Library to focus on Asian investments in Cuba. What follows is a brief selection of the libraries and files that yielded the most pertinent records.

- **NEWS Library.** General press coverage from newspapers, magazines, newsletters, newswires and broadcast transcripts. Individual newspapers can be searched separately. Selected pertinent files: Current news, Non-English News, Business, Legal, Trade & Technical Group.
- **North and South America Library.** Information from and about the Americas from various sources, including newspapers, newswires, etc. Ample information on NAFTA and other trade agreements. Selected pertinent files: Current News, Latin American Newsletters. Of particular importance was the Cuba file, which allows searching information on that country only.

- **Asia/Pacific Rim Library.** Information about every country in the area from a broad variety of sources including press coverage of both Asian countries and Western Press. Selected pertinent files: Current News, Business News Analysis, Company Information.
- **Company Library.** Business and financial information, including research reports from leading banks and brokerage houses, investment banks, company annual reports, profiles and filings, etc. Yielded information on specific companies investing in Cuba. Selected pertinent files: USCO (American and Canadian) Company.
- **Markets and Industry Library.** Information from an extensive variety of sources covering advertising, marketing, market research, sales, consumer information, etc. Selected pertinent files: Current News, Marketing & Public Relations, Industry.

c) Databases of Latin American and International Materials

Databases in this group offered a different outlook. Those comprised solely of materials from or about Latin America present not only a unique perspective but subjects not covered in other databases as well. Emphasis on analysis and historical reviews (such as examinations of the economy in colonial times) rather than current issues, although the subject of economic conditions was extensively discussed in all databases.

Foreign Broadcast Information Service (FBIS)

Provider: Provider: U.S. Department of Commerce, Newsbank-Readex.

Electronic subject index to FBIS Daily Reports, which monitors and translates worldwide news commentary from foreign broadcasts, wire services, government press releases and newspapers.

The best broad picture of international press coverage; numerous articles on current events and specific trade agreements and diplomatic visits. Most complete international press coverage of all databases analyzed.

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Hispanic American Periodicals Index (HAPI)

Provider: The University of California, Los Angeles, Latin American Center.

Largest index to journal literature from and about Latin America, dealing with all issues in the social sciences and humanities, plus economic, financial and related topics.

The Handbook of Latin American Studies

Provider: The United States Library of Congress.

Selective annotated guide to publications in the social sciences, the humanities, art and music about Latin America with emphasis on Mexico and Argentina.

UNBIS-Plus

Provider: The United Nations Bibliographic Service in collaboration with Chadwick-Healy.

United Nations official records, agendas and resolutions, including voting records, speech citations and session numbers, U.N. authority and geographic files. Best coverage of human rights in Cuba and discussions on the consequences of the economic crisis.

CONCLUSION

There is no lack of well documented, scholarly literature on the subject of the Cuban economy. Yet because of the relevance of such factors as the exile community and the informal sector of the economy, as well as the incomplete and sporadic nature of Cuban government publications, well balanced coverage requires reliance on both established and unconventional sources. Online databases are one of the foremost indexing sources because they allow for efficient and flexible searching. Many also contain materials unavailable elsewhere, combine various formats on a given topic, and offer unmatched timeliness.

Although the number of "hits" yielded by a preliminary search can be used as a guideline, other factors should be considered when selecting databases. Background and historical perspective are to be gained from more extensive, in-depth analysis usually published as monographs or in scholarly articles indexed in such databases as *Economic Literature Index*, *Sociology Abstracts*, *Political Science Documents* and *Historical Abstracts*. Equally scholarly but more focused on Latin American materials are *HAPI* and the *Hand-*

book of Latin American Studies, the fundamental sources when that perspective is preferred.

Currency and timeliness are best served by monitoring databases which cover print and broadcast media. There are numerous databases offering such reporting and the Lexis-Nexis system combines them in a number of group files allowing for customized topical searches. When conciseness is as important as timeliness, newsletters are the format of choice. The contents of such databases as PTS Newsletter complement the growing number of newsletters devoted solely to the Cuban economy. Other relevant factors are regional and political balance, as well as the agenda behind profit making producers. Experience in online searching is a basic consideration. Knowledge of the system's capabilities, careful database or group file selection, and ultimately an examination the database structure can greatly influence the outcome of a search as well as its cost.

Finally, intangibles such as perspective and perception must be considered when reviewing the literature. The number of recent articles in the European and Canadian press, for instance, about the potential consequences of the Helms-Burton Law to the Cuban economy presents a disproportionate picture of its relevance.

New sources of information on the Cuban economy are continually emerging due to the timeliness and widespread interest on the subject. Those seeking balanced information about this topic, both current and historical, will find in online databases an exceptional indexing tool leading to a wide variety of sources.

Appendix. Largest Press Coverage on the Cuban Economy

Name	Total Records
Newspapers	
Miami Herald	2756
Fort Lauderdale Sun Sentinel	734
The Orlando Sentinel	485
Washington Post Online	416
Los Angeles Times	404
Palm Beach Post	369
Chicago Tribune	361
Philadelphia Inquirer	355
(New Orleans) Times Picayune	318
St. Petersburg Times	315
San Francisco Chronicle	293
Atlanta Journal/Constitution	290
San Jose Mercury	288
Newsday/New York Newsday	280
Arizona Republic/Phoenix Gazette	278
The Boston Globe	264
(Portland) The Oregonian	256
(New Jersey) The Record	236
The Seattle Times	228
St. Louis Post-Dispatch	226
Newsires	
Reuters	2388
AP News	1470
Textline Global News	1137
Newspaper and Periodical Abstracts	597
Magazine ASAP	508
AFP English Wire	412
UPI News	410
AFP International French Wire	302
National Newspaper Index	164
Federal News Service	153
Newswire ASAP (1995 only)	125
Newspaper Abstracts	89
PR Newswire	68
Time Publications	63
Japan Economic Newswire	38