



El Puerto Rico que queremos, el que tenemos y el que tememos

Hace varios años, el movimiento obrero quiso plasmar en un documento su visión de lo que debe ser el Puerto Rico del futuro. El producto de ese ejercicio, en el que tuvo una participación destacada el economista Francisco Catalá, fue una especie de manifiesto titulado “El Puerto Rico que queremos”. El título sugiere un paradójico doble sentido, porque el Puerto Rico que queremos, en el sentido de amar, es el que siempre hemos tenido, con sus virtudes y defectos; pero el que queremos, en el sentido de aspirar a él, es otra cosa. En muchos aspectos –y el económico es sólo uno de ellos—nos sentimos insatisfechos con el Puerto Rico que tenemos.

En la cara opuesta de una visión positiva está el Puerto Rico que tememos; el escenario de deterioro económico, político y social persistente en el que podrían desembocar las tendencias que hemos vivido desde hace por lo menos dos décadas. El trinomio adverso que describió también Catalá de una economía formal languideciente, una economía del crimen floreciente y una economía de la dependencia creciente, nos podría conducir, en el peor de los casos, a lo que podría llamarse una “narcoeconomía dependiente”. Pero aún sin llegar a escenarios tan terribles, las tendencias actuales apuntan a la decadencia o el empantanamiento.

No sorprende, por lo tanto, que los estudios sobre el futuro de Puerto Rico estén a la orden del día. Actualmente están en marcha por lo menos tres: el estudio del Comité 2025, un grupo convocado por la Gobernadora Sila María Calderón; el de la Comisión Económica para la América Latina y el Caribe (CEPAL); y el que realiza la Brookings Institution para el Centro Para la Nueva Economía. El lector interesado en estos temas tendrá a su disposición dentro de pocos meses una cosecha excepcionalmente abundante.

Esta edición del Boletín de Economía se dedica a dos trabajos relacionados con la actualidad y el futuro económico de Puerto Rico. En primer lugar se presenta una reseña, redactada por el Profesor Arthur Macwean de la Universidad de Massachussets, del libro *Puerto Rico: Negotiating Development and Change* de James L. Dietz. En segundo lugar, se incluye un resumen de los trabajos realizados hasta el presente por el Comité 2025, que trata de definir una visión de consenso para la sociedad puertorriqueña de las próximas dos décadas. Esperamos que estas lecturas inviten a la reflexión necesaria sobre cómo alcanzar el futuro que queremos.

En este número:

El Puerto Rico que queremos, el que tenemos y el que tememos.....	1
Puerto Rico: Negotiating Development and Change.....	2
Visión 2025.....	8

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Puerto Rico: Negotiating Development and Change
by James Dietz*

Arthur MacEwan**

There is a certain irony, as James Dietz points out, in the English name given to the Puerto Rican economic development program that was established in the late 1940s. "Operation Bootstrap" did not depend on Puerto Ricans 'pulling themselves up by their own bootstraps,' developing their economy in a self-reliant manner, as the name implies. Instead the program relied on U.S. investments and U.S. entrepreneurs to finance and organize economic growth in Puerto Rico.

In *Puerto Rico: Organizing Development and Change*, Dietz argues that this dependence on U.S. firms, which became entrenched in the "Operation Bootstrap" era, has been a continuing problem for the Puerto Rican economy. His analysis leads him to advocate the need for a new economic strategy, one that would focus on the island's own human and financial resources as a foundation for "development and change." Although Dietz's analysis focuses on economic problems, it also raises important political questions, questions that bear on Puerto Rico's on-going struggle over the issue of 'status.'

Dependent Development

Economic development is fundamentally a social process, a process in which people transform themselves and their relations with one another. Where successful development has been achieved – whether in Western Europe and the United States during the 19th century or in East Asia during the 20th century – it has been organized by local business people, a local capitalist class. Also, while foreign investment has often played a large role, local finance has always been very significant and of growing importance. When local business people are playing central organizational and financial roles, they can, along with the state, support a general process of social change: extending the communication and transport systems, building the legal framework, expanding education and training, and, most important, pushing forward with technological advances. These steps, in turn, help transform the labor force, enlarging the supply of skilled labor.

* James L. Dietz, *Puerto Rico: Negotiating Development and Change*, Lynne Rienner Publishers, Boulder and London, 2003. 221 pages. Index. Hard cover, ISBN:1-58826-122-0 HC \$49.95; Paperback, ISBN: 1-58826-147-6 PB \$19.95.

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Successful economic development is not always a pleasant process, often involving considerable social dislocation and a high degree of inequality, but it is always a process highly reliant on internal forces.¹

Thus Dietz explains the problems of the Puerto Rican economy: "...Puerto Rico's strategy of development lacked a focus on the systematic support or fostering of local entrepreneurs and local sources of finance." (p. 79) As a consequence "the central role of domestic entrepreneurs, skilled workers and technological progress that underlies sustained economic progress" (p. 79) has been weaker in Puerto Rico than in countries where sustained economic progress has proceeded more rapidly.

To be sure, Puerto Rico has made important and substantial economic gains over the last several decades. The island today is a very different place than it was in 1950, and no one would deny the significance of the change – certainly not Dietz, who is also the author of the important *Economic History of Puerto Rico*.² Yet the pace of change has slackened. In the early post-World War II period, rapid economic growth raised incomes in Puerto Rico towards levels in the United States. Things changed in the mid-1970s, and the convergence towards the United States largely ceased. Between 1950 and 1970, Puerto Rico's per capita Gross National Product (GNP) grew at the respectable annual rate of 5%, but between 1970 and 2000 the annual rate of growth was only 1.6%. The slowdown was partially masked by the more rapid expansion of Gross Domestic Product (GDP). GDP, however, includes the very large profits of foreign – mainly U.S. – firms operating in Puerto Rico and thus provides a poor measure of the well-being of the Puerto Rican people or of the pace of economic development. Puerto Rico's experience, then, exhibits the classic features of 'dependent development,' a situation marked by economic growth and change, but also characterized by extensive periods of weak growth, instability, and a limited foundation for self-sustaining economic expansion.³

¹ This general description leaves aside the issue of non-capitalist economic development. One might argue that experience in some Socialist countries provides an alternative path to development. This path, however, would be at least as reliant on internal forces of change as the path followed in capitalist countries.

² Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1986.

³ The classic analysis of 'dependent development' is Peter Evans, *Dependent Development: The Alliance of Multinational, State and Local Capital in Brazil*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1979.

Puerto Rico's economic dependence originated in its colonial position. And, as Dietz notes, "There are very few who still fail to admit that [Puerto Rico's relation to the United States] is a colonial bond and one that has changed very little, in substantive terms, since 1898." (p. 21) This does not mean, however, that there is nothing that Puerto Rican's can do about their economic situation. While recognizing that the colonial tie "has considerable economic and social implications and imposes constraints on actions by Puerto Rican decision makers," Dietz maintains that this "is not the whole, nor even the majority, of the story explaining the stalled economic progress after the 1970s." (p. 21) Even within the colonial binds, he argues, there has been and continues to be room for Puerto Ricans to chart a different course of economic development.

Successful and Unsuccessful Experiences

In order to see how things might have been, and might be, different in Puerto Rico, Dietz devotes attention to a comparative analysis of experiences in Latin America and East Asia. While many others have examined these two sets of experiences, Dietz brings out useful points, points that are especially relevant to understanding the Puerto Rican economy.

In general, in Latin America and East Asia, development commenced with a phase of "easy" import substitution, the production for the domestic market of relatively simple, non-durable consumer goods – clothes, processed foods, furniture, toys – to replace imports of these same goods. This phase of economic change depended on protective tariffs that allowed the import substituting industries to establish themselves – an application of the 'infant industries' argument. While they shared this common early phase of development, East Asian and Latin American countries used this phase rather differently and moved from it in rather different ways.

On the one hand, in East Asia, governments from the outset gave support to the development of locally based business, and the role of foreign firms was relatively limited. Moreover, these governments focused attention on policies that would promote technological change and the growth of a skilled labor force – for example, through the substantial expansion of schooling. These policies set the stage for the governments to progressively remove tariffs, forcing firms to become more efficient or die. More efficient national firms were then in a position to compete both in the domestic and world markets with more technologically advanced consumer and capital goods

– everything from microwave ovens and cameras to computers and construction equipment.

On the other hand, in Latin America, governments from the outset relied heavily on foreign firms to organize and finance import substituting industrialization. Also, they did little to encourage greater efficiency, neither progressively removing protective tariffs nor supporting technological progress; schooling, in particular, was not given the same priority as in East Asia. As a result, when Latin American countries moved beyond “easy” import substitution into a period of “difficult import substitution,” they were forced to deepen their dependency on foreign firms, and they continued to rely on protection of the domestic market. As far as the international competition was concerned, they were generally unable to break into the markets for more technologically advanced goods.

From his discussion of the East Asian and Latin American experiences, Dietz develops a picture of the interconnected role of government policies, technological progress, and social formation in the development process. It is a picture in which a high degree of *reliance on domestic firms* plays a central role in bringing about economic success. While Puerto Rico’s experience departs in important ways from both the East Asian and Latin American patterns of development, in certain crucial respects – especially with regard to dependence on foreign firms – it has more in common with the rest of Latin America.

Puerto Rico’s early era of import substitution – an era beginning in the 1930s and stretching on to the late 1940s – did not involve the “easy” import substitution of either East Asia or the other regions of Latin America. Instead, “Puerto Rico’s efforts to promote industry primarily were directed toward producing intermediate inputs for the existing rum factories and inputs to an expanding local construction industry... Different, too, from the initiatives characteristic of the East Asian industrialization path was the fact that these intermediate ISI [import substituting industrial] firms were not only promoted by the Puerto Rican state, but also they were owned and operated as state enterprises.” (p. 42) Although at least some Puerto Rican policy makers, according to Dietz, recognized the desirability of shaping industrialization so as to stimulate the formation of a local entrepreneurial class, there was little progress in this direction. Ultimately, “this first stage of development cum industrialization failed to create either a domestic entrepreneurial class of any

significant size or a central core of workers with modern industrial-arts skills.” (p. 44)

With the adoption of “Operation Bootstrap” in the late 1940s, Puerto Rican efforts at import substitution came to an end. The government shifted towards the promotion of industry that was oriented towards exports. *Most important, it shifted towards the promotion of industry in which foreign (i.e., U.S.) firms played the central organizational and financial roles.* In choosing this path, Puerto Rico largely abandoned efforts that would have led it along a path similar to that of the successful East Asian economies.

After the original success of “Operation Bootstrap” waned in the 1970s, efforts to promote industrial activity in Puerto Rico led to an even greater reliance on foreign firms. The complex set of regulations embodied in the tax incentives designed to attract foreign firms did have the impact of generating an expansion of financial activity in Puerto Rico. Also, substantial progress in the expansion of schooling (about which more below) in Puerto Rico contributed both to this expansion of financial activity and to some movement into high technology. While these developments were important, their impact was limited. Comparing the experience in Puerto Rico with that elsewhere in Latin America, Dietz sums up: “In Puerto Rico, the domestic class of entrepreneurs has operated in a more limited fashion since the 1950s, and there is more work to be done to foment and deepen the core of entrepreneurs, scientists, and skilled workers in both industry and services that can move Puerto Rico down a path of more independent and sustainable growth and development, a path that calls for less economic dependence on the United States.” (p. 65)

Denationalization in the Late 20th Century

Dietz provides a very useful discussion of the nature of ownership and control of the Puerto Rican economy. In doing so, he rightly focuses attention on Section 936 (and related adjustments) of the U.S. tax code. In the name of promoting employment and development, tax incentives distorted the structure of the Puerto Rican economy, promoting limited employment, undermining internal linkages, relying excessively on capital-intensive manufacturing, and pre-empting more effective development strategies.

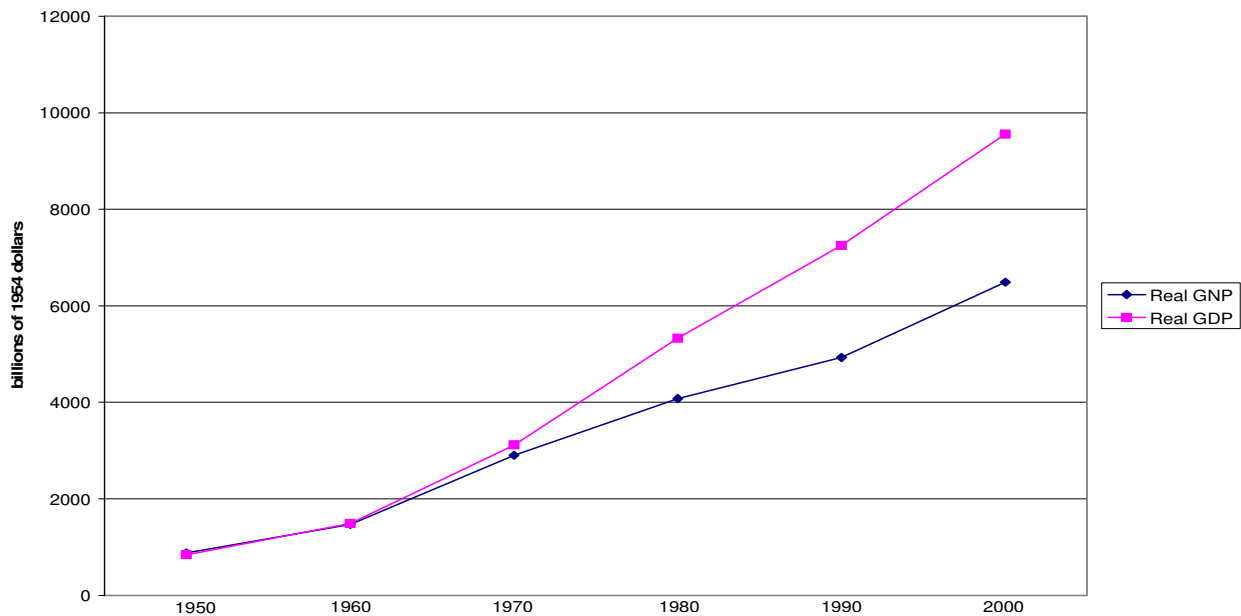
In addition to the many insightful details provided by Dietz, we also have a useful aggregate measure of the degree of Puerto Rico’s external dependence in the gap between Gross Domestic

Product (GDP) and Gross National Product (GNP). While GDP is the amount of production that takes place within a country (or region), GNP is the amount of production that is attributable to the nationals of a country (or region). In Puerto Rico, the gap – the extent to which GDP exceeds GNP – is largely accounted for by the profits that flow to foreign owned (mainly U.S.) firms. In this sense, the gap is a measure of the *denationalization* of the Puerto Rican economy, the extent to which economic activity is externally owned and controlled.

The chart below illustrates what happened over the second half of the 20th century. Whereas in 1950 GNP was slightly larger than GDP and in 1960

the two figures were about the same, by 2000 GNP was only two-thirds as large as GDP⁴. No other aggregate figure could as well provide the quantitative backdrop to the social phenomenon that, as Dietz continually emphasizes, lies behind Puerto Rico’s development problems. (To put the Puerto Rican figures in some perspective: for 1992, data are available for 128 countries and the territory of Puerto Rico. Puerto Rico is at the bottom of the list. For 119 of these 128 countries, the GNP-GDP gap was less than 10% of GDP – and of course for some of the countries the gap was in the other direction, with GNP greater than GDP. Eight countries had gaps of between 10% and 20%, and one, Guyana, had a gap of 30.6%. For Puerto Rico in 1992, the gap was 34.6%.⁵)

**DENATIONALIZATION OF THE PUERTO RICAN ECONOMY
THE PUERTO RICAN GDP-GNP GAP**



⁴ The chart is based on 1950-1980 data from James Dietz, *Economic History of Puerto Rico*, *ibid.*, Table 5.1, and 1990-2000 data from Planning Board of Puerto Rico *Economic Report to the Governor 2001*, San Juan, 2002. Real GDP has been calculated on the assumption that the deflator is the same as that for GNP.

⁵These data are from the Penn World Tables, <http://datacentre2.chass.utoronto.ca/cgi-bin/pwt/getrank?b=1992&s=RGNP>.

So What To Do?

The thrust of Dietz's analysis is that Puerto Rico's "development experience has been suboptimal and full of missed opportunities, at least some of which were within Puerto Rico's grasp." (p. 175) Yet he is also clear that his various criticisms "cannot negate the obvious improvements in the standard of living of the great majority of Puerto Ricans since the 1950s." (p. 175) Moreover, he points out that along with the improvements in the standard of living, various changes pave the way for a more effective Puerto Rican development strategy: a highly educated labor force (but see below), an expanded service sector with a large financial segment, and the emergence of new strategies to promote Puerto Rican business as Section 936 has been eliminated.

Building on these sorts of changes, Dietz argues for a new economic strategy that would focus on the encouragement of locally based business and take advantage of the island's relatively well educated work force. He notes, for example: "It is not unreasonable or farfetched to imagine Puerto Rico as the 'Singapore of the Caribbean,' acting as a financial, consulting, and travel hub for the other smaller and still poorer economies of the region." (p. 186) Movement in this direction is already taking place, and Dietz pushes for various steps that will move things further in this direction. For example, he points to the Puerto Rico Private Equity Market Development Strategy, designed to provide funds to "promising local firms." (p. 187) Also, Dietz argues that "public and private universities can and must plan an important and complementary role in creating entrepreneurs too. Training in modern financial, accounting, managerial, and information systems should be as important as teaching of philosophy and history within the mission of the university system." (pp. 187-88)

Most innovative, Dietz pushes for an alternative program of federal assistance for the Puerto Rican economy. With the increased tax revenues that should arise from the removal of special tax status for U.S. firms operating in Puerto Rico, Dietz suggests: "This money could be funneled to an appropriate agency of the Puerto Rican government – like its development bank – to be used exclusively for the expansion of locally owned business projects and for investments in badly needed infrastructure or other predetermined and earmarked purposes as part of a reorientation of the local economy that would strengthen its base...Any subsidies should be tied to well-defined performance

criteria as was done by the East Asian economies." (p. 190).

There are, Dietz makes clear, many steps that can be taken to both overcome the weaknesses of the economy and build on its successes. The sorts of steps he is proposing hold out the promise of overcoming the dependence that has limited the economic expansion of Puerto Rico.

Status and Related Issues

Puerto Rico: Negotiating Development and Change is really a first rate book. The analysis provides important insights not only on the Puerto Rican experience but on broader issues of economic development. The analysis also establishes a basis on which to formulate more effective policies, and Dietz does a good job of giving initial direction to such formulation. Also, the book is clearly written and the points are well argued.

But even a first rate book cannot do everything. One of the things that this book does not do is clearly connect the analysis of Puerto Rican economic issues to the island's central political controversy over status. Indeed, Dietz explicitly avoids dealing with the status issue because he wants to argue that economic change should not be postponed while Puerto Ricans wait for the status issue to be resolved. And he is certainly correct that positive steps can be taken regardless of the island's political status.

Ultimately, however, Puerto Rico's political status affects both the analysis of what has happened in the past and what might happen in the future. For example, in describing Puerto Rico's development path in comparison to the paths followed elsewhere in Latin America and in East Asia, Dietz poses the question: "Why did Puerto Rico's development path follow such an unconventional trajectory in which foreign firms would play such a large role and import substitution such a small part?" (p. 49) His answer focuses primarily on "the personalities, interests, and ideological dispositions of those who very early on became responsible for promoting industrialization." (p. 49) But what of the fact that Puerto Rico was a U.S. colony when these trajectory was being established? As with any colony, the first place to look for an explanation of economic policy should be in the interests of the colonial power. Wherever import substitution policies were implemented, they were based on some form of protection. Yet it was not conceivable that the Puerto Rican colony would be protected from domination by U.S. firms.

Likewise, other policies that would have favored independent Puerto Rican development would have been, and generally were, ruled out by the island's colonial status – even when that colonial status was given another name.

Also, when one examines the foundations for a new direction of development, there are weaknesses that can best be explained in terms of Puerto Rico's political status. For example, while it is true that Puerto Rico has a relatively highly educated work force, it is also true that the school system in Puerto Rico has some serious shortcomings. For example, there is a highly unequal distribution of educational accomplishments among the population. In 2000, 18.3% of Puerto Ricans 25 or older had attained a college degree (or more), while in the United States the comparable figure was 24.4%; certainly, for its level of income, by this measure Puerto Rico has a highly educated labor force, a good foundation for high technology activity. Yet, at the same time, 25.4% of the 25 and over population had less than nine grades of schooling and an additional 14.6% had not attained a high school diploma; the comparable figures for the United States are 7.5% and 12.1%. Also and related, Puerto Rico's school system suffers an extremely high drop-out rate, and available data suggest that as many as 15% of Puerto Rican students are dropping out before high school.⁶ These figures suggest that the Puerto Rican labor force may not provide as firm a foundation for high technology activity as Dietz suggests. Equally important, such weaknesses in Puerto Rico's school system might be explained as a consequence of the island's continuing colonial status.

Educational policy is only one example – albeit an important example – of the possible connection between political status and the problems of Puerto Rican economic development. More generally, under Puerto Rico's current status it is hard to imagine the forceful implementation of some of the policies that Dietz advocates. In particular, the alternative program of federal assistance that he proposes is unlikely to be implemented if the current status is maintained – or, if implemented, unlikely to be implemented in a way that is most beneficial for Puerto Rican interests.

A colonial entity, no matter how well treated, has limited powers – probably insufficient

powers to guide its economic development in the most effective manner. Of course many formally independent nations lack the power to guide their own development. Also, statehood, although it would come with certain new powers for Puerto Rico, would not come with guarantees of economic success (nor, for that matter, is there any guarantee that the federal government would grant statehood even were Puerto Ricans to express a clear preference for this new status). Yet, while Dietz stops short of drawing conclusions about status, his argument strongly implies that continuation of the current political status of Puerto Rico would mean that economic policy would continue to be “suboptimal” at best.

The term “Operation Bootstrap” was a very misleading title for the development strategy that was adopted in Puerto Rico some fifty-plus years ago. Indeed, it is probably not possible for a people to ‘pull themselves up by their own bootstraps’ while they remain in colonial status.

Nonetheless, inside the concept of the term “Operation Bootstrap” is the kernel of what James Dietz has identified as successful economic development strategy. Economic development depends upon creating the social structures and the political and economic relationships that allow a people to do things for themselves. Outside investment might play important roles, but ultimately it is the people of Puerto Rico – acting as the organizers of business, as skilled workers, as policy formulators – who need to shape their own economic success. *Puerto Rico: Negotiating Development and Change* is extremely effective in establishing this central point.

⁶ The figures here come from the *Digest of Educational Statistics*, U.S. Department of Education, various years, and *Statistical Abstract of the United States*, U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2002.

Visión 2025

Juan Lara*

Hace alrededor de un año la Gobernadora Sila María Calderón convocó a un grupo de personalidades del gobierno, la empresa privada, el movimiento obrero y organizaciones académicas y comunitarias para constituir un grupo de estudio sobre el Puerto Rico deseado en el año 2025. A ese grupo se le vino a conocer por el nombre de Comité 2025, y su encomienda principal fue definir la visión del Puerto Rico deseado al cierre del primer cuarto del siglo.

Para realizar los trabajos técnicos de la investigación, el Departamento de Desarrollo Económico y Comercio contrató a AT Kearney, una empresa internacional dedicada a la asesoría en economía y planificación, entre otras especialidades. Se estipuló desde el principio que no se trataba de hacer un estudio para el gobierno, y menos aún para el partido político en el gobierno. Más bien, se quería activar un grupo de estudio —al estilo de los *think tanks* estadounidenses— que definiera una visión de consenso con independencia del gobierno y los procesos políticos. Para ampliar el apoyo técnico de la empresa AT Kearney, se contrató también a una empresa de consultoría local (H. Calero Consulting Group). Unos meses más tarde, se puso al frente del proyecto, en calidad de coordinador general, al economista José J. Villamil.

En casi un año de reuniones y discusiones, el Comité ha realizado una evaluación pormenorizada de la realidad puertorriqueña en tres dimensiones fundamentales: desarrollo económico, desarrollo social y ambiente e infraestructura. Se ha definido también una visión abarcadora del Puerto Rico del futuro. Falta por hacer la parte difícil, que es definir un plan de acción viable y útil, capaz de vencer el inmovilismo y romper las tendencias perniciosas que arrastra la sociedad puertorriqueña. En los trabajos del Comité participaron 18 grupos de consulta y se le dió énfasis a la construcción de una visión de consenso. Se contó también con la participación de expertos renombrados del exterior, como los economistas William Baumol y Sebastián Edwards, aunque su injerencia en el proceso fue limitada.

Las preguntas iniciales

La reflexión del grupo arrancó con un conjunto de preguntas en cada una de las tres dimensiones básicas mencionadas anteriormente, las cuales se reproducen a continuación.

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Desarrollo económico

¿Cuáles son las industrias y sectores que impulsarán el crecimiento económico futuro?

¿Cuáles son los principales competidores de Puerto Rico, y cómo evolucionarán en el futuro?

¿En qué industrias residen las principales ventajas comparativas de Puerto Rico?

¿Qué medidas son necesarias para el desarrollo de esas industrias y sectores?

Desarrollo social

¿Cuáles son los principales bienes sociales que desean todos los puertorriqueños (en las áreas de salud, educación, vivienda, ley y orden, armonía cívica, familia, etc.)?

¿Cuáles son las debilidades actuales y los retos potenciales en cada una de esas áreas?

¿Qué acciones se requieren para enfrentar esos retos y satisfacer las necesidades sociales de los puertorriqueños?

Ambiente e infraestructura

¿Cuál es la infraestructura necesaria para apoyar el desarrollo económico y social deseado y a la vez conservar y mejorar los recursos naturales y la calidad del medioambiente?

¿Cuáles son las debilidades actuales y los retos potenciales en materia de infraestructura y ambiente?

¿Qué acciones son necesarias para enfrentar estos retos y crear un medioambiente sano para todos los puertorriqueños?

Con estas preguntas por punto de partida, los miembros del Comité y otros especialistas consultados sesionaron por separado —en grupos por especialidad temática— y en asamblea general para hacer un diagnóstico y aventurar una visión.

El diagnóstico

No hay mucha originalidad en el diagnóstico del Comité, ni era razonable esperar que la hubiera. El catálogo de retos a los que se enfrenta la sociedad puertorriqueña es bastante conocido, pero no está de más reiterarlo. Con la característica preferencia de los consultores internacionales por la expresión sucinta, hecha a la medida del *powerpoint*, los consultores de AT Kearney resumen el sentir del grupo de esta manera:

“En principio, Puerto Rico tiene muchos de los activos necesarios para tener éxito en la economía global del conocimiento—el vaso está más que medio lleno—pero no le está sacando provecho a esos

activos. Hay riesgo de que Puerto Rico sea una víctima y no un beneficiario del cambio global.”

¿Cuáles son esos activos con los que contamos, según el grupo? Se agrupan en seis conceptos; a saber:

- Un alto grado de apertura al comercio internacional y la inversión externa.
- Una posición fuerte en industrias clave de la economía del conocimiento, como farmacéuticas, servicios financieros y cuidado de la salud.
- Un acervo rico de capital humano, tanto por la educación superior como por la adquisición de destrezas especializadas en la industria.
- Una infraestructura física que supera a la de cualquier otro país caribeño.
- Estabilidad macroeconómica y política.
- Una posición geográfica y cultural ventajosa entre Estados Unidos y América Latina.

Por otra parte, la evidencia de que no estamos aprovechando dichos activos se revela en los problemas siguientes:

- Un ritmo declinante de crecimiento económico.
- La persistencia del desempleo y la pobreza.
- Los limitados eslabonamientos entre la economía local y el sector exportador.
- La alta dependencia de las transferencias gubernamentales y federales, la economía informal y el gasto de consumo.
- Un sistema de regulación gubernamental y una estructura impositiva que imponen una carga a la economía.
- El limitado desarrollo de la clase empresarial local.
- Los bajos niveles de inversión de capital de riesgo, de innovación y de la investigación y desarrollo tecnológico.
- La erosión de las ventajas comparativas.

La lista anterior se concentra en los problemas económicos; el grupo hizo también un listado de problemas sociales y ambientales. Las señales de que la sociedad puertorriqueña está sujeta a presiones peligrosas se concentran en cinco áreas, como se indica a continuación.

En la **educación**, se presenta un aumento en la deserción escolar, un deterioro de la calidad y una carga excesiva de costos administrativos.

En la **salud**, el envejecimiento de la población agrava la ya elevada tasa de dependencia.

La **juventud** se enfrenta a niveles altos de desempleo y una alta incidencia de pobreza, con la consecuente tensión social.

Aumenta la incidencia del embarazo precoz, con la consecuente disfuncionalidad de la **familia**.

La tasa de homicidios es alarmante.

El uso de **drogas** es alto y va en aumento.

Por último, en el tema del medioambiente y la infraestructura se identificaron los siguientes retos:

- La alta densidad poblacional con niveles de consumo en aumento.
- La falta de áreas protegidas.
- La inexistencia de un plan abarcador de uso de terrenos y la poca inclinación de las autoridades a hacer cumplir una política de uso de suelos.
- La excesiva generación de desperdicios y la poca práctica del reciclaje.
- La ineficiencia y poca confiabilidad de los servicios de agua y electricidad.
- El uso limitado del transporte público.
- La alta densidad del tráfico y los problemas de congestión vehicular.
- La ineficiencia del sistema de puertos, agravada por la creciente competencia a la que se enfrenta por parte de los puertos de otros países.

Sin duda se pueden agregar muchas cosas a estas listas, y no faltará quien quiera eliminar algunas de las cosas mencionadas, pero en general se trata de una evaluación con muchos lugares comunes. El lector típico reconocería este retrato de Puerto Rico, aún cuando no estuviera totalmente de acuerdo en todos los puntos.

Lo deseado

La receta para esta lista de males, por lo menos en lo general, está implícita en el diagnóstico. Para encauzar nuevamente el desarrollo, nos dice el Comité por voz de AT Kearney, Puerto Rico necesita un nuevo modelo económico que se aleje de la dependencia, un nuevo modelo social que subraye la

responsabilidad individual y el apoderamiento de la familia y las comunidades, y un nuevo modelo de manejo de recursos enfocado en el desarrollo sustentable. Estos son los tres ejes de la visión para el 2025.

Se puede escoger una manera diferente de decirlo, pero más allá de las preferencias semánticas, puede afirmarse que casi todo el mundo estaría más o menos de acuerdo con esta visión. El problema que tiene es que resulta muy general; el verdadero valor de este ejercicio estará en el plan de acción específico que propongan los integrantes del grupo.

En Puerto Rico, como en casi todas partes, siempre ha sido más difícil lograr consensos cuando se baja de la visión al nivel de los planes detallados de acción. En estos momentos el Comité 2025 se encuentra en esa fase difícil del estudio. ¿Cómo convencer a los desarrolladores de viviendas y centros comerciales de la necesidad de preservar ciertos espacios rústicos o agrícolas? En cuanto al

tema de la creación de empleos, ¿se podrá lograr un consenso entre obreros y patronos sobre posibles cambios en la legislación del trabajo? ¿Puede nuestro sistema de partidos políticos llegar a un consenso sobre cómo racionalizar los programas de beneficencia pública para que sean una vía a la autosuficiencia y no una trampa de dependencia? ¿Y qué decir de un consenso sobre el disenso más grande todos: el estatus político? ¿Podemos pensar en el Puerto Rico del 2025 sin cambios en el estatus?

En pocos meses se dará a conocer el plan de acción propuesto por el Comité 2025. En la actualidad, los coordinadores del proyecto están poniendo a prueba una lista de acciones propuestas para evaluar su deseabilidad y viabilidad. Este proceso supone varias rondas de discusión con representantes de diversos sectores y especialistas en varias materias. Ese es el filtro que determinará si al final sale un guiso con sustancia o solamente un caldo ralo.

