The Cuban revolution with its socialist economy has demonstrated unprecedented resilience in the face of enormous political obstacles and challenges. It successfully defied a US-orchestrated invasion, naval blockade, hundreds of terrorist attacks and a long-standing and continuing boycott (Morley, 1987). Cuba was able to withstand the system-threatening fallout from the collapse of the USSR and the Eastern European ‘socialist’ regimes, and it has managed to adjust to the new world order—and China and Indo-China’s transit to capitalism—without abandoning its socialist path to national development.

As many scholars and political leaders—including adversaries—have noted, Cuba has developed a very advanced and well functioning social welfare program characterized by free, universal, quality health coverage and education from kindergarten through advanced university education, and delivering a high level of human development on a very limited economic base. In its foreign as well as domestic policies Cuba has successfully developed economic and diplomatic relations with countries across the world despite a comprehensive US embargo and political pressures. On issues of national and personal security Cuba is a world leader. Crime rates are low and violent offenses are rare. Terrorist threats and acts (emanating from the US and its Cuban exile proxies), have declined and are less a danger to the Cuban population than to the US or Europe.

But it is precisely the successes of the Cuban Revolution, and its ability to withstand external threats that would have brought down most governments, that have now created a series of major challenges that require urgent attention if the Revolution as we know it is to advance further into the 21st century. These challenges are a result of persisting external constraints as well as internal developments. Some are the inevitable consequences of emergency measures and structural reforms introduced in the ‘special period’ but that are now pressing for immediate solution if not radical change. This chapter will elaborate on the human development dynamics and implications of these
challenges to the Cuban Revolution in the current conjuncture of worldwide forces and conditions of change.

*Holding the Line on Socialism*

After a decade and near the official end of Cuba’s Special Period in Time of Peace, Menno Vellinga published an essay based on a review of two retrospective studies on the thinking of Che Guevara, and three book-length studies of the dynamics of change and continuity within the Cuban Revolution. Each of these studies in its own way addressed questions that have animated Cuba watchers and scholars over the past two decades: How to understand developments in Cuba over this period? How it changed in adjusting to the forces released by the process of capitalist development in the latest phase of neoliberal globalization (conditions and the responses to which were discussed in the previous chapter)? How did the Revolution survive as a system against overwhelming odds? And how has it been able to continue to generate considerable support among the Cuban population despite the sacrifices and austerity that Cubans have had to bear for so long?

On these questions Antoni Kapcia, in his *Island of Dreams* (2000) offers a perspective based on a review of the entire revolutionary process, with a focus on developments in the realm of ideology. He traces the emergence of the ideological complex of *cubanía*, which includes the construction of a politico-historical mythology of a heroic past, which took Kapcia back to the origins of the Revolution (la ‘consciencia’) and the fundamental contributions of Che Guevara, described by García and Sola and explored in more theoretical terms by Casteñeda. However, in seeking to establish a link from Cuba’s heroic past to a projected socialist future, Kapcia raised questions that he was unable to answer—in terms of conditions that prevailed at the time and the strategic and tactical responses to these conditions. One of the aims of this chapter is to return to these questions, with reference to developments that have unfolded in the subsequent decade, and in the context of advancing the thesis of this study.

Marifeli Pérez-Stable (1999) in her study of the Cuban Revolution also raised questions about the efficacy of the ideological complex constructed over these years, and the impact of the Special Period on this ideology, embedded in what we have viewed as a ‘revolutionary consciousness’. We have argued that this ‘consciencia’—reflected in a commitment to the principles and values of equality, freedom and