



The first National Atlas of Cuba: Rediscovering the early 20th century country.

José Jesús Reyes Nunez

Department of Cartography and Geoinformatics, Eötvös Loránd University
Budapest, Hungary

ABSTRACT

In 1949 was published the first National Atlas of Cuba (“Atlas de Cuba”) in the Institute of Geographical Exploration at Harvard University. This atlas was edited by a Cuban geographer and cartographer, Gerardo Canet, counting with the valuable collaboration of Erwin Raisz, a Hungarian-born cartographer graduated at the Royal Polytechnicum of Budapest.

Using Canet’s words in the Introduction the atlas is “a living picture of Cuban Geography as far as possible in 64 pages”. A total of 34 themes were represented by maps and graphics, presenting the history of the country, its’ physical geographical characteristics, the more important parameters to describe the society (standard of living, health, social composition, government, etc) and the national economy.

A very special characteristic of this national atlas is the rich combination of maps with pictures, charts and text. Leafing through its pages we can see that the authors not only wanted to create an atlas for scientists and specialists in the different topics represented on the maps: their intention was to make all this information available and easily understandable for the public in general. The atlas can be considered the early multimedia result of joining two peculiar cartographic styles: the delicacy of the drawing ability of Erwin Raisz and Canet’s interest to represent the broader spectrum of data using all the graphic tools at their disposal to make the atlas more interesting and attractive. This little masterpiece constitutes an intentionally ignored gem of the Cuban cartography of mid-twentieth century.

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