

Scientific Paper

Learning results in the process of local development management in a Matanzas municipality

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Abstract

In order to know relevant aspects that constitute learning results in the process of local development management in the Perico municipality, Matanzas province –Cuba–, a systematization exercise was carried out in the period 2013-2016. For the analysis the variables identified in the axis of «management for development», in its productive and associative cultural dimensions, were taken as guide. The interviewed actors were identified and classified considering the objective and the functions, interests and practices; the information was processed from the divergence and recurrence analysis in order to document the experiences of most actors. Most of the interviewees acknowledged that there is a Municipal Development Program which is not always articulated with decisions, actions and interests of national organisms. They consider that for development management it is necessary to have a space where the actors converge, to construct transformation projections and check actions under execution. The Multiactoral Management Platform has favored the elaboration of a common plan managed from the Government. From the interviewees, 30 % refers that the performed work has allowed to modify the way of thinking and acting of many institutions. It is concluded that the developed experience deployed an important transformation, with the participation of municipal social actors. Likewise, it is considered that the creation of these spaces is a need to advance in the solution of development demands.

Keywords: community development, local Government, development policy

Introduction

Local development is a differentially constructed process; organizer of new forms of social organization; complex, dynamic and multidimensional; which implies social processes that go from the psycho-sociocultural, political, social, environmental and territorial, to the economic-productive aspects (Cárdenas, 2002).

Albuquerque (2007) specified that the concept of local development sometimes is exclusively understood as the development of a lower territorial level, such as that of a municipality or a district (micro-region). Some other times it is used to emphasize the type of endogenous development, which is the result of the utilization of local resources of a certain territory. On other occasions, somebody shows it as an alternative form to the prevailing type of focusing and excluding development, which is essentially based on a vertical approach («top-down») in decision-making.

In the case of Cuba, the organs governmentally in charge of promoting development at this scale are the Local Organs of People's Power. They were created in 1976 in order to decentralize the state apparatus to concentrate the administration of most economic and social activities at the municipal level, as will of decentralization of economic and service activities. The organs that constitute them lead the economic, production and service entities, and at the same time satisfy other cultural, educational and recreational needs of the community¹.

In that sense, Rojas-Morán (2006) stated that it is necessary to empower local Governments in the management of a development process from a strategic view, which implies going beyond the simple management of public services. It is about assuming a protagonist role in the promotion of integral development, which includes the revitalization of local economy; management which, from the knowledge of the context's reality,

¹«Functions of the Local Organs of People's Power». https://www.gacetaoficial.gob.cu/html/constitucion_de_la_republica.html#cap12.

coordinates with other State levels, facilitates information that allows adequate decision-making for investment, stimulates citizens' rights and promotes the generation of new capacities in the population, for the development of entrepreneurship through the capitalization on opportunities.

For that purpose, according to Farinos-i-Dasí (2016), to exercise «good governmental doing» or «governance» is required, which is related to: a) the capacity to stimulate the implementation of productive activities and projects aimed at the promotion of local food sustainability, by all the productive and service forms; b) leading the strategic planning with support on participatory processes and methods; c) management capacity to involve social actors –enterprises, institutions, civil society and citizens, in general– in the conquest of the strategic vision of territorial image, conceived through the design of the strategic plan; d) autonomy for the performance of administrative, financial and legislative governmental functions, exercising the local territorial administrative and governmental self-determination.

Territorial development requires effective alliances of all the actors. The use of available technical means and tools in organizations and institutions is not sufficient. A new theoretical framework, of new analysis and territorial prospection tools, and of new participatory planning and decision-making methods, is required (Farinos-i-Dasí and Vera, 2015).

In that sense, the objective of this paper is to introduce relevant aspects that constitute learning in the management processes of local development in the Perico municipality, Matanzas province.

Materials and Methods

The work was conducted in the Perico municipality, which has an extension of 278,3 km² and is located in the central-western region of Matanzas province. It limits with Colón, Jovellanos, Jagüey Grande, Martí and Cárdenas; and concentrates a population of 31 148 inhabitants (ONEI, 2015).

For the study the axis «management for development» and its productive and associative cultural dimensions were defined. Such selection

corresponds to the transcendence of associativity and to the interaction among actors when studying development management. On the other hand, the productive dimension was selected taking into consideration its importance as economic activity, from the number of people it employs and the bearing of this sector on the local families' culture and economy.

Key actors were interviewed, who were identified and classified taking into consideration the objective and functions, interests and practices. Care was taken to make up a representative sample attending to their affiliation or not to the Multiactoral Management Platform (MMP)² and to their integration and functions in different institutions of the Municipal Administration Council, as well as in society organizations in general.

The developed systematization process allowed to recover the principle of diversity of perspectives, which is one of the methodological foundations. Twenty actors were completed who were interviewed taking into consideration the principle which states that in qualitative studies the samples are made up gradually and depending on the research findings. Complementary information was also recovered that allowed to make the triangulation of the found elements, which was obtained using the work mechanisms established in the municipality.

The analysis started from the formulation of several questions, as recommended by Varela (2010):

- Which are the main recurrences regarding each topic of interest?, to what extent those recurrences appear inside each actor and to what extent do they transcend them?
- Which are the main divergences with regards to each topic?, how wide are those divergences among the different actors and inside each actor?, what reasons could explain the amplitude of congruencies and divergences (if any)?

Once the perspective of each involved actor with regards to the topic was obtained, the information was processed from the divergence and recurrence (Rodríguez-Sosa and Zaballos-Manzur, 2011) in order to document most actors' experiences.

² The Platform constitutes a strategic space for the coordination of the Municipal Integral Development Program, organized in programs and subprograms. In it the articulation of the sociocultural and institutional projects existing in the territory is achieved, and strategic lines that allow the development of high-impact activities, related to food and energy production and environmental protection, are identified and discussed; from which project proposals are derived for local development which are presented and approved in the Municipal Administration Council.

The workshops were carried out by the facilitator team of the experience, belonging to the line of research about Sustainable Agricultural and Local Development of the Pastures and Forages Research Station Indio Hatuey (EPPFIH).

Results and Discussion

Initial context of the experience and its contribution to local development

The EPPFIH has focused its efforts on promoting a cultural change at institutional level which would make it possible to change the conventional system of technology transference, which allowed it to encourage development in more systemic processes that would reach rural areas (Miranda *et al.*, 2012), based on innovation and the promotion of individual and collective capacities.

Valenzuela-Espinosa (2016), in a theoretical study about knowledge society, emphasized that knowledge and training-education in different modalities are increasingly placed at the center of richness generation, value creation and business opportunities in the 21st century economy; this contrasts significantly with the previous industrial period, in which the combination of production factors, such as work, capital and raw

materials, prevailed, mainly in the mass manufacturing of objects through industrial machinery.

The proposal that serves as methodological support to the work conducted in the Perico municipality is the one formulated by Ortiz-Pérez (2016), and was adapted by the work collective of the Station to shape the Local Innovation System, which assumes from this initiative the responsibility of promoting interactions among the set of organizations and institutions at local scale; so that it allows to revitalize the integral development management processes of the territory that are supported from the components on which the system is based (fig 1), in order to promote, through interactive learning, individual capacities and networking strength, a response to the demands imposed by the development process itself.

The work conducted in the Perico municipality allowed to deploy an important transformation experience, with the participation of municipal social actors. In this framework training and participatory planning were elaborated, as well as agropductive and environmental transformation projects, in which all the society sectors were involved in the management of its own development.

To define the key moments of the experience a timeline was constructed (fig. 2), which describes

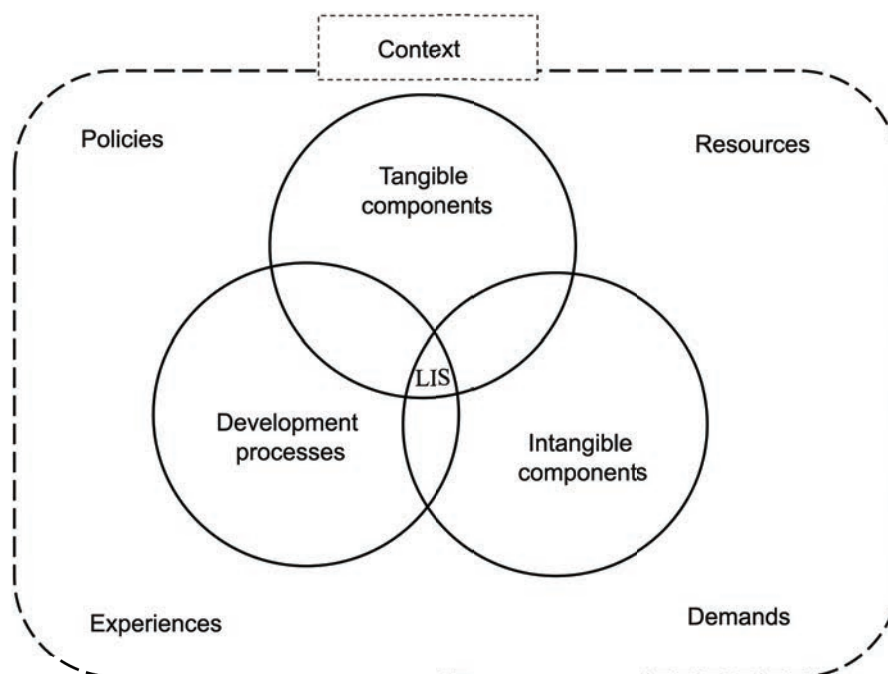


Figure 1. Elements of local innovation system (LIS).

Source: Elaborated by the authors using elements from Local Agricultural Innovation Program (PIAL for its initials in Spanish).

the trajectory traveled and the main events that determined turns in the process.

The experiences developed as precedent to this one showed that there are no evidences of the existence of a lawfully participatory and horizontal space in which the actors from the public and private sectors converge, sensitized to achieve common welfare; interests which, through collective acting, are not imposed, but negotiated. The creation of these spaces, based on the learning that has been generated from their creation processes, is a need to advance in the solution of the demands generated in them.

Variables strategic and operational management of the management axis

In the development planning at national and local scale there are disruptions, due to the different approaches and assumptions of each one; for example, national local development assumes that the territory of one economy is homogeneous, it is taken for granted that the influence of the public goods and services supplied by the Government comprises all the geographic areas of an economy; another important aspect is that the role of the participation of the different actors or development agents who live in local areas is not considered in national plans. The national economic development theories are focused on the economic foundations and on market mechanisms, the institutions and organizations, independently from the geographic areas in which they operate (Tello, 2010). For these and other aspects there are many differences between local realities and national plans.

Gregorio-Prieto (2003) states that there will always be more or less difference between the structure designed in a development plan and the one that is really developed; and calls implementation to the starting up stage, that is, the one that elapses between the design of the structure and its definitive functioning.

Regarding this approach, it was observed that 63 % of the criteria acknowledge that there is a Municipal Development Program which, sometimes, is not articulated with decisions, actions and interests of the organisms at national level; and which is unknown by ministries, such as the Agriculture Ministry, due to its marked sectorial character. This could be explained from the inexistence of an established regulatory framework that homogenizes the interpretations of all the sectors that converge at this local scale. This aspect, in the authors' opinion, allows to explain the lack of correspondence between the local and sectorial priorities.

When interviewing two officials from the municipal Government, they stated that *«there are still many legislative gaps that limit the development of diverse activities in an autonomous way»*.

In this regard, Farinos-i-Dasí (2015) reports that the adaptation of the classical forms of territorial organization to the new functional needs emerged from the global change processes also requires to adapt the old forms of elaborating and implementing public policies; it is not about imposing policies on the territories but doing policy from the territories.

The above-explained facts imply changes in the decision-making process, but also, and

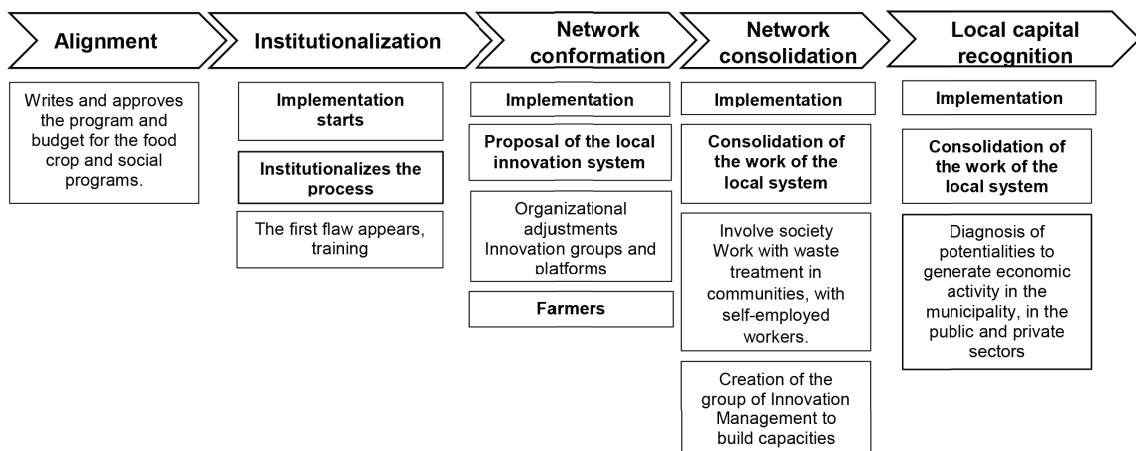


Figure 2. Timeline in the experience

consequently, in the way in which the topics enter the political agenda, the way in which the results are evaluated; that is, in the style of doing policy.

If policies are formulated in the territories, adapted to their conditions, the legislative gaps for those issues that are merely territorial can be sidestepped, which, along with the development of social capital, would facilitate the implementation of the Integral Development Plan for the municipality.

Regarding the operational management, the compiled criteria acknowledge that the platform has allowed to modify the way in which the institutions look in the territory framework, because it has favored team work and the elaboration of a common plan, which is managed from the Government with a determining participation of the University and science and technology institutions as catalysts. This has allowed to modify the styles of vertical direction by an orientation towards styles more aimed at the empowerment of local leaders.

In this regard, Gregorio-Prieto (2003) emphasizes that, frequently, administrative rigidity degenerates into a management control that gives preference to control instruments over the achievement of objectives. The audit or verification of the service provision, based on strict and *a priori* control of the task to be developed, promotes organizational culture that tends to the fulfillment of the procedure. The strategic management of organizations requires a management control based on the evaluation of the result that promotes the implication and creativity of their members. It is not only about having information, but using it to act in management improvement.

In that sense, the criteria convey that the initiatives performed jointly between projects and institutions are, to larger extent, the ones associated with the improvement of people, institutions, their organizations and their links.

Thus, a municipal official of the National Association of Small Farmers (ANAP for its initials in Spanish)) stated: *«this has been flourishing since four years ago... now farmers already have direct contact with scientific institutions and the university»*.

Most of the developed actions allowed to solve productive problems linked to the provision of diverse technical services, as well as to the introduction and implementation of technologies and good practices from academic centers. All this, along with training, has favored the increase of jobs in the agricultural

sector (fig. 3) from the diversification of richness-generating activities in the same physical spaces and their respective linkages.

The analysis and emitted criteria prove that, although the design of the established structure does not favor territorial development management, the mechanisms or tools, such as the Multiactoral Management Platform, show the need and viability of having a space where the actors, the transformation projections and the actions under execution and their systematization with territory vision and not sectorial vision converge.

Variables of the participatory management of the management axis

When studying the mobilization mechanisms and initiatives of the community, it could be observed that about 30 % of the criteria refer that the work is positive, because it has allowed to modify the way of thinking and acting of many institutions; and, although they consider that there is much left to do, they emphasize that the activities have always been supported by the Government. The fact that the mobilization mechanisms that are used are insufficient is stressed (they do not have media, such as a radio base, and all the possible spaces are not exploited), and, thus, this has not allowed to overcome the citizens's lack of trust and demotivation (fig. 4). In this regard, they indicate the Municipal Directions of Culture and Sports as innovative institutions which have been able to create different mechanisms to perform initiatives. Likewise, although they acknowledge women's outstanding role and capacity, it is appreciated that cultural problems persist which limit at family, work and public policy level women's full incorporation to active work life.

«There will not be real local development if true development is not achieved in the population... if everyone does not develop their aptitudes. What about women, they are brave... women are the ones with more capacities... spaces have to be found for them to grow. Many important institutions in Perico are led by women... there are many women who have been fundamental in the viability of this work».³

In this regard, Cavarozzi (2000) reports that the efficiency of public organizations does not depend on the exclusion of citizens, or on isolating

³ Opinion expressed by farmer Walfrido Chaple[†]. CCS Ramón Rodríguez Milián, Perico.

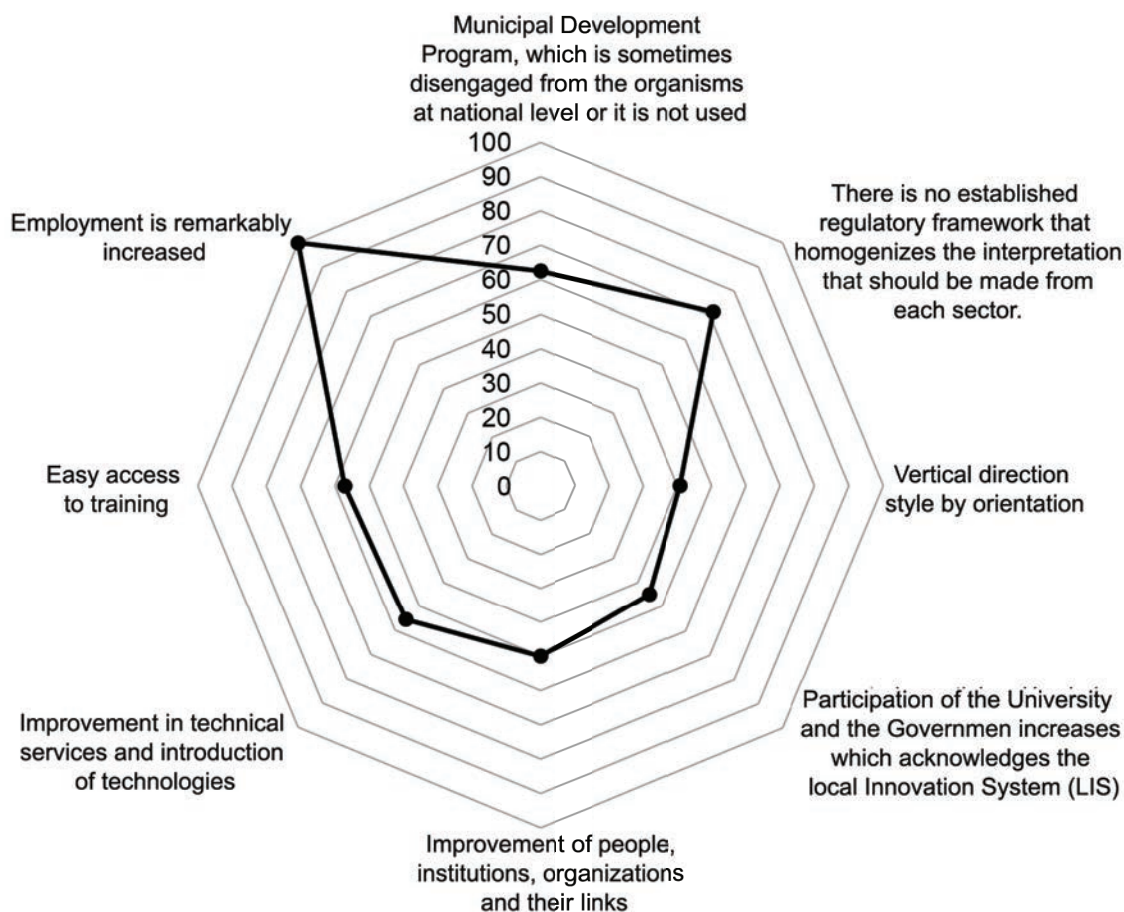


Figura 3. Response patterns in the variable productive and associative cultural dimension

organizations from their individual or sectorial expression, but on involving the community members in management. In that sense, this author states that participation is a resource for management which would allow to recover the sense of action in public spaces. Llancar-Etcheverry (2008) reaffirms that participation will allow public servants, related to the search for the common welfare, to obtain higher strength and the possibility of real validation.

Final considerations

The platform turned out to be an efficacious tool that favored team work and the elaboration of a common plan that is managed from the Government, which has allowed to modify vertical direction styles by an orientation towards styles more aimed at active and protagonist participation of local leaders and the population.

Practices were promoted to improve the role of academic institutions in the management of municipal development, which has allowed the opening of more horizontal exchange and

innovation spaces and the establishment of new planning and management mechanisms that stimulate the consolidation of alliances and links among local development-managing actors.

The developed actions have allowed to solve productive problems linked to the provision of diverse technical services, as well as to the introduction and implementation of technologies and good practices which have diversified the richness-generating activities and their respective linkages.

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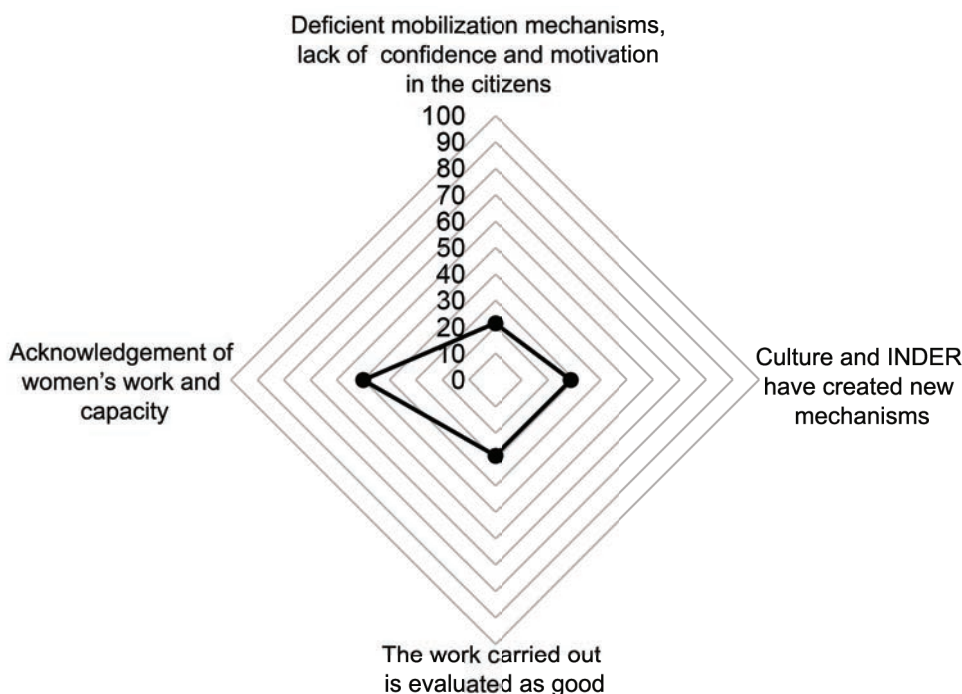


Figure 4. Response patterns. Variable participatory management, associative cultural dimension.

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