

Editorial

## **Integrated Community Work and its impact on local development**

### **El Trabajo Comunitario Integrado y su incidencia en el desarrollo local**

### **Trabalho Comunitário Integrado e seu impacto no desenvolvimento local**

**Ania Bustio Ramos**<sup>1</sup>  0000-0002-1605-6717  [ania.bustio@upr.edu.cu](mailto:ania.bustio@upr.edu.cu)

<sup>1</sup> PhD in Geographic Sciences. Full Professor at the University of Pinar del Río "Hermanos Saíz Montes de Oca". Faculty of Economic Sciences. Center of Studies for Management, Local Development, Tourism and Cooperativism. Pinar del Río, Cuba.



**T**he reality of the current world panorama and its incidence in the Cuban context place Integrated Community Work as a methodological tool of significant importance to achieve processes of change that allow the transit towards levels of development that contribute to the improvement of the quality of life of the communities, which translates into the strengthening of the bases that sustain the project of law and social justice that is being built in today's Cuba.

#### **The community as a subject of action**

In order to understand the impact of Integrated Community Work on local development, it is necessary to start from the term community, widely spread in academic circles, due to its importance, taking into account the maxim raised during the Earth Summit held in Brazil, Rio de Janeiro 1992 "think globally and act locally". Many sociologists since Auguste Comte, at the beginning of the 19th century, have approached this concept starting from philosophical conceptions, such as those raised by Plato, who characterized the community by an implicit bond that relates one person to another, as if it were a large family united by common values, affection, mutual respect, dependence.

For Marchioni (2002), the term "community" refers to the set of population linked to a given territory; Bustio Ramos (2004) assumes the term as "awareness of recognizing itself historically in its own environment and exists to the degree that allows conscious identification with those values and

objects that distinguish it from other territories and nations (...) it is an expression of the unique and the diverse"; Avella Bernal (2004) distinguishes it as a set of representations in the structural, symbolic, communicational and physical; for Romero Sarduy and Muñoz Campos (2014), it is a form of social relationship that implies symmetry, equity, inclusion, participation, cooperation and collective project; Casado Tribaldos (2018) considers the community as the social structure of a group, from the study of its institutions, the problems of roles, *status* and social classes that occur within it; on the other hand, the Methodology for the development of Integrated Community Work from the districts approved by the Council of State of the Republic of Cuba (2023) defines it as a human group living in a given territory, with common objectives and interests, where people interact with each other, with a sense of belonging, history, forms of expressions and traditions that form the basis of an identity.

According to the author, the term community is identified not only as the well-defined physical space where several people live together, but also as the relationships that are established between people based on the interaction between them as subjects of action and from whose interaction a certain community identity is born, defining the common features that distinguish one community from another, highlighting the leading character of knowledge and community knowledge that emerges from community practices, as a scenario for the management of development.

It is precisely in the relationship (knowledge- community practice), where the terms community and community management find their maximum connection, where the community can be understood as Romero Sarduy and Hernández Chávez (2021) propose, as the subject of its own actions for change and community management as the participation of local communities in the whole process of community development, as a process of continuous construction of its autonomy and self-development, as the way in which the community organizes itself, defines needs, formulates plans and implements activities that lead it to raise its standard of living with a focus on sustainability.

Padilla Ospina and Ospina Holguín (2020) consider that community management is highly related to community development approaches and community organizations, taking into account the role of the participation of community members in the solution of problems or the search for strategies to improve the social welfare of the community. From this point of view, the community constitutes the fundamental space for the consolidation of community management processes with a self-management approach, oriented to local development, where participation becomes an essential variable and transversal axis.

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Achieving the conscious participation of the community in the processes of community self-management as a function of local development implies being protagonist subjects of the transformations that take place, both individually and collectively, implies participating actively as a subject of change in the identification of needs and in the proposal of alternatives for their satisfaction, in the decision making and control of these, which will allow developing a sense of belonging and commitment to the necessary processes of transformation required by the current Cuban society from the horizon of Socialism.

From this point of view, participation is considered as a fundamental way to promote Integrated Community Work, as it is an active process aimed at transforming reality, giving greater protagonism to the subjects who develop it, by getting involved in decision-making (Council of State, 2023). It means becoming aware, taking part, getting involved, deciding, planning, executing, controlling and evaluating the planned actions, as well as the systematic updating of community action in a committed manner.

### **Local development from an Integrated Community Work perspective**

Conceiving local development from a community social dimension focused on the subjects of change is a challenge for research with a social innovation approach, to the extent that tools are developed from, with and for the community, which facilitate it the creation, development and application of solutions, from a novel perspective, to solve the problems it faces.

In this sense, Integrated Community Work as a working method for government management at all levels is a methodological tool of significant importance to achieve processes of change that allow the transition to sustainable development levels that contribute to the improvement of the quality of life of the communities with a multidimensional character and a multilevel approach.

In line with the above, the Council of State of the Republic of Cuba (2023) establishes that Integrated Community Work is oriented, among other aspects, to organize and mobilize the community, encourage its participation in the identification of problems, decision making, elaboration and execution of solutions to problems and responses to such problems and needs of the community itself, the improvement of the quality of life, its own progress and that of society in general, based on its own material, human and spiritual resources.

Although Integrated Community Work is a priority in national programmatic platforms and policies, it has not yet been effectively incorporated into government management systems as a working method for local development. Among the main gaps are the following:

1. There is no Integrated Community Work strategy at the level of Popular Councils that contributes to increase popular participation in community transformation actions for local development.
2. Integrated Community Work is not incorporated into the work system of the People's Council as a work method.
3. Integrated Community Work is seen as isolated community action lacking a systemic and integrative approach.
4. It is not possible to visualize the interconnection between Integrated Community Work as a methodological tool, oriented to the achievement of local development objectives in a given territory.

According to the Internal Operation Manual of the Local Assemblies of People's Power (2017), community work has to be reflected in that there is more quality of life, in that there is more culture and integral preparation, in that there is more food, in that our people are more decent, in indicators of health, education, in that people can fully develop their intellectual, emotional and physical capacities and that is the fundamental contribution we can make.... for that community to be socialist, to be sustainable and to be prosperous.

All of the above indicates that, if Integrated Community Work can be incorporated as a methodological tool in government management systems for local development, focused on permanent popular participation, it will then be possible to develop transformational actions through local development projects aimed at the prosperity and sustainability of the communities.

This implies designing local development projects based on increasingly participatory, proactive and innovative community management processes, understood as the set of procedures for the use, management and administration of community resources, focused on the search for strategies for social welfare that arise from the felt needs of the community and that provide answers to them, using the tools provided by Integrated Community Work. In this sense, Arroyo Wong (2017) emphasizes the impact of development projects that are born from the heart of the communities and

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how this approach allows them to become a tool that can help inject dynamism into the local economy, encouraging citizen participation in the transformation actions.

In this way, community management becomes an instrument for self-management of the production and reproduction of community goods, which also allows for social transformation. In essence, local development seen from the perspective of Integrated Community Work constitutes an effective strategy for the empowerment of communities in order to achieve sustainable development in the medium and long term.

Conceiving local development from a community social vision implies strengthening the protagonism of local actors in the search for solutions to their own problems, in order to improve their quality of life based on the valorization of endogenous resources and the potential of each community, develop capacities and leadership among community members, strengthen community social responsibility, promote multidimensional development strategies at the community level that are sustainable, equitable, inclusive, innovative and proactive, preserve the socio-cultural and environmental heritage of the communities, all in function of a self-managed development that contributes to the improvement of the quality of life and well-being of the population on the basis of autonomy and community self-development.

The above analysis corresponds to the definition of local development put forward by Torres Paez et al. (2018), who point out that it is a "process of social construction and structural change that, from a territorial innovative environment, develops local capacities to manage public policies, strategies, programs and projects aimed at taking advantage of endogenous and exogenous resources and harmoniously articulating national, sectoral and territorial interests, promoting economic, social, natural and political-institutional transformations in the localities on sustainable bases and with active and protagonist citizen participation, in function of raising the quality of life of the population".

### **Development strategies and their articulation with community work**

Local development management must take into account the interrelation of centralized approaches with the use and management of the internal capacities of the territories to generate development processes. From the micro social point of view, community work constitutes the scenario where the protagonism of local actors must be achieved in the search for solutions to their own problems, based on the valorization of the endogenous resources of each community. At the macro level, it constitutes an essential element of the nation's policy because the social development of the community has to

be planned, materially supported and in correspondence with the nation's socioeconomic development strategies.

In this sense, achieving a harmonious interrelation between local, national and sectoral interests is one of the essential elements of any local development management process, where strategies, as a tool for government management at all levels, become a facilitating instrument for the search for solutions to the problems faced and establish the main ways, based on the active participation of the communities in coordination with local governments, to manage development with a self-management approach that allows for the autonomy of the territories.

However, development strategies, as a tool for government management at all levels, both at the provincial and municipal levels, have lacked a strategic vision from the perspective of community work. They have not always contemplated in a systemic way community participation with a horizontal approach, considering the community as the subject of change. Even when the different economic actors have been present in their conception, the key actors of the community, who should ultimately be the decision-makers of the process and who, therefore, should be part of the whole process, with a strategic vision, do not participate. It is precisely this weakness that development strategies at all levels present today, with a view focused on local participation, constitutes the macro need that underlies the incorporation of the community social vision in local development strategies, which will make it possible to promote and contribute to the development and consolidation of municipal autonomy, as a challenge of the Cuban social project.

In conclusion, it is committed to a community management process for local development that manages to articulate all the factors and actors interested in change, based on a model oriented horizontally, which makes it possible to optimize the efforts and resources necessary to achieve the levels of sustainable development that community spaces require today in order to improve their well-being.

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