

Original article

## **Procedure for the diagnosis of Integrated Community Work based on local development**



**Procedimiento para el diagnóstico del Trabajo Comunitario Integrado en función del desarrollo local**

**Procedimento para o diagnóstico do Trabalho Comunitário Integrado com base no desenvolvimento local**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Integrated Community Work is a methodological tool of significant importance for achieving processes of change in the socioeconomic reality that Cuban society is undergoing, allowing the transition to levels of development that contribute to improving the quality of life of communities. The result presented here is part of a research project that aimed to design a procedure for diagnosing Integrated Community Work in terms of local development, conceived from the perspective of social innovation, which allows it to develop capacities and skills in government managers, contributing to their improved performance. The methodological references on which this procedure is based are participatory action research and appreciative inquiry, from the perspective of Popular Education. The main results shown are aimed at demonstrating the current state of

Integrated Community Work as a starting point for devising a procedure in which community participation, inclusion, commitment, and collective responsibility are essential aspects in the formation of local development projects, which arise from community management and are oriented towards the social, economic, environmental, and cultural transformation of the community.

**Keywords:** local development; procedure; participatory community diagnosis; integrated community work; community management.

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## RESUMEN

El Trabajo Comunitario Integrado constituye una herramienta metodológica de significativa importancia para lograr procesos de cambio en la realidad socioeconómica por la que atraviesa la sociedad cubana, permitiendo el tránsito a niveles de desarrollo que tributen al mejoramiento de la calidad de vida de las comunidades. El resultado que se presenta forma parte de una investigación que ha tenido como objetivo diseñar un procedimiento para el diagnóstico del Trabajo Comunitario Integrado, en función del desarrollo local, concebido desde la perspectiva de la innovación social la cual le permite desarrollar capacidades y habilidades en directivos de gobierno contribuyendo a su mejor desempeño. Los referentes metodológicos de los que parte este procedimiento son la investigación-acción participativa y la indagación apreciativa, desde la concepción de la Educación Popular. Los principales resultados que se muestran están orientados a demostrar el estado actual del Trabajo Comunitario Integrado como punto de partida para poder concebir un procedimiento donde la participación comunitaria, la inclusión, el compromiso y la responsabilidad colectiva sean aspectos esenciales en la conformación de proyectos de desarrollo local y que estos nazcan de la gestión comunitaria y se orienten a la transformación social, económica, ambiental y cultural de la comunidad.

**Palabras clave:** desarrollo local; procedimiento; diagnóstico comunitario participativo; trabajo comunitario integrado; gestión comunitaria.

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## RESUMO

O Trabalho Comunitário Integrado é uma ferramenta metodológica de grande importância para alcançar processos de mudança na realidade socioeconômica da sociedade cubana, possibilitando a

transição para níveis de desenvolvimento que contribuam para a melhoria da qualidade de vida das comunidades. Os resultados aqui apresentados fazem parte de um projeto de pesquisa que teve como objetivo elaborar um procedimento para diagnóstico do Trabalho Comunitário Integrado em relação ao desenvolvimento local, concebido a partir da perspectiva da inovação social. Essa abordagem permite que gestores governamentais desenvolvam capacidades e habilidades, contribuindo para a melhoria de seu desempenho. Os referenciais metodológicos deste procedimento são a pesquisa-ação participativa e a investigação apreciativa, baseadas nos princípios da Educação Popular. Os principais resultados aqui apresentados visam demonstrar o estado atual do Trabalho Comunitário Integrado como ponto de partida para o desenvolvimento de um procedimento em que a participação comunitária, a inclusão, o engajamento e a responsabilidade coletiva sejam aspectos essenciais na configuração de projetos de desenvolvimento local. Esses projetos devem ter origem na gestão comunitária e estar voltados para a transformação social, econômica, ambiental e cultural da comunidade.

**Palavras-chave:** desenvolvimento local; procedimento; diagnóstico comunitário participativo; trabalho comunitário integrado; gestão comunitária.

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## INTRODUCTION

In the current Cuban context, municipalities play an essential role in the construction and consolidation of the social project, where the well-being and quality of life of the population are high-priority objectives. Faced with this challenge, it is worth asking where municipalities stand today in relation to organizational and approach changes geared toward local development as an integral and priority process for the Cuban economic and social development model (Díaz-Canel Bermúdez & Delgado Fernández, 2020).

In line with the above, Article 168 of the 2019 Constitution of the Republic of Cuba states:

The municipality is the local society, organized by law, which constitutes the primary and fundamental political-administrative unit of the national organization; it enjoys autonomy and legal personality for all legal purposes, with a territorial extension determined by the necessary neighborhood, economic, and social relations of its

population and the interests of the nation, with the purpose of achieving the satisfaction of local needs.

The above analysis leads to the understanding that the contribution of universities to the development of the territories is an imperative of the Cuban social project and requires the articulation of scientific and methodological resources that facilitate the university-society link; this is aimed at improving the performance of local governments and strengthening government management based on the science and innovation system.

Development strategies, as tools for government management at all levels, both municipal and provincial, have lacked a strategic vision from the perspective of Integrated Community Work (ICW). They do not contemplate community participation with a horizontal approach, considering the community as an active subject in the processes of social transformation, as shown in the diagnosis of the current state of Integrated Community Work in the municipality of Pinar del Río, based on the assumptions defended by the Participatory Community Diagnosis (DCP in Spanish), which is the subject of the methodological proposal presented here.

Although the different economic actors have been present in the conception of these strategies, the key actors in the community, who should ultimately be the decision-makers in the process and, therefore, part of it, with a strategic vision, do not participate in them. It is precisely this weakness in today's development strategies at all levels, with a focus on the local, that motivated the proposal, since the efficient application of the DCP provides a methodological approach that will contribute to the design of a strategy that strengthens the management of Integrated Community Work in terms of local development.

Hence, the article presented here aims to design a procedure for the diagnosis of Integrated Community Work, based on local development, conceived from the perspective of Social Innovation. This allows it to develop capacities and skills in government managers, contributing to their better performance. All of this is based on the articulation of Participatory Community Diagnosis as a method that will identify and describe the main problems in the management of Integrated Community Work in terms of local development, constituting a tool insofar as it defines the participation and involvement of all community actors in a process of problem identification and collective solution building.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

Once the DCP has been defined, it is determined as the fundamental method, as it constitutes a process of deconstruction and collective construction of knowledge, a learning process that allows for the collective growth of the actors and the development of skills for group work and the formation of values of collaboration and solidarity.

The proposal is conceived from the perspective of Social Innovation, because the community itself must propose the ideas and projects to be developed with a participatory, creative, and proactive approach, in order to solve the problems identified, developing tools and skills to conduct community management processes in a more dynamic way, and strengthening relationships of cooperation, teamwork, interpersonal and group communication.

Participatory Action Research (PAR), proposed as a methodological concept, will allow not only the different key actors to be involved, but also other indirect actors as active and committed participants in the entire research process. For the purposes of the research presented here, PAR is considered a creative process through which members of a group or community become protagonists of their own development, through a process of knowledge production for the transformation of themselves and their own reality, achieving an organic relationship between the construction of knowledge, the transformation of reality, and the formation of people committed to change. All of the above assumes that the ultimate goal of PAR is not to turn actors into "pseudo-scientists," but rather to enable social groups to understand the social reality that surrounds them in a more scientific way and to be active agents of their own transformations and changes.

Appreciative Inquiry is also used because it suggests that organization and change are processes of relational inquiry based on affirmation and appreciation, where questions and dialogue about the strengths, successes, values, and aspirations of its members promote the transformation of the subjects themselves. The very process of appreciative inquiry generates changes in the way subjects approach the phenomena studied within the organization. The collective construction that is generated in group spaces, from this reference point, involves a genuine process of organizational transformation and the possibility of generating new, more effective ways to make it sustainable.

Among the fundamental techniques used are in-depth sessions, in which the unit of analysis is the group (what it expresses and constructs), based on group dynamics. The central objective is to

analyze, through the interaction between participants, how meanings understood by the group are deconstructed and constructed in terms of individual growth and collective transformation.

These sessions are developed through the technique of Participatory Community Workshops, an instrument developed by the authors with the aim of surveying the perceived needs of the actors involved from the perspective of Integrated Community Work in terms of local development, based on a research process focused on the community, with the community, and for the community, constituting a collective learning process where education and training are oriented toward the formation of strategy and collective actions generated from the interaction between participants, the coordinator-educator, and the elements of reality that must be transformed, from the political-pedagogical conception of Popular Education.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Participatory Community Diagnosis

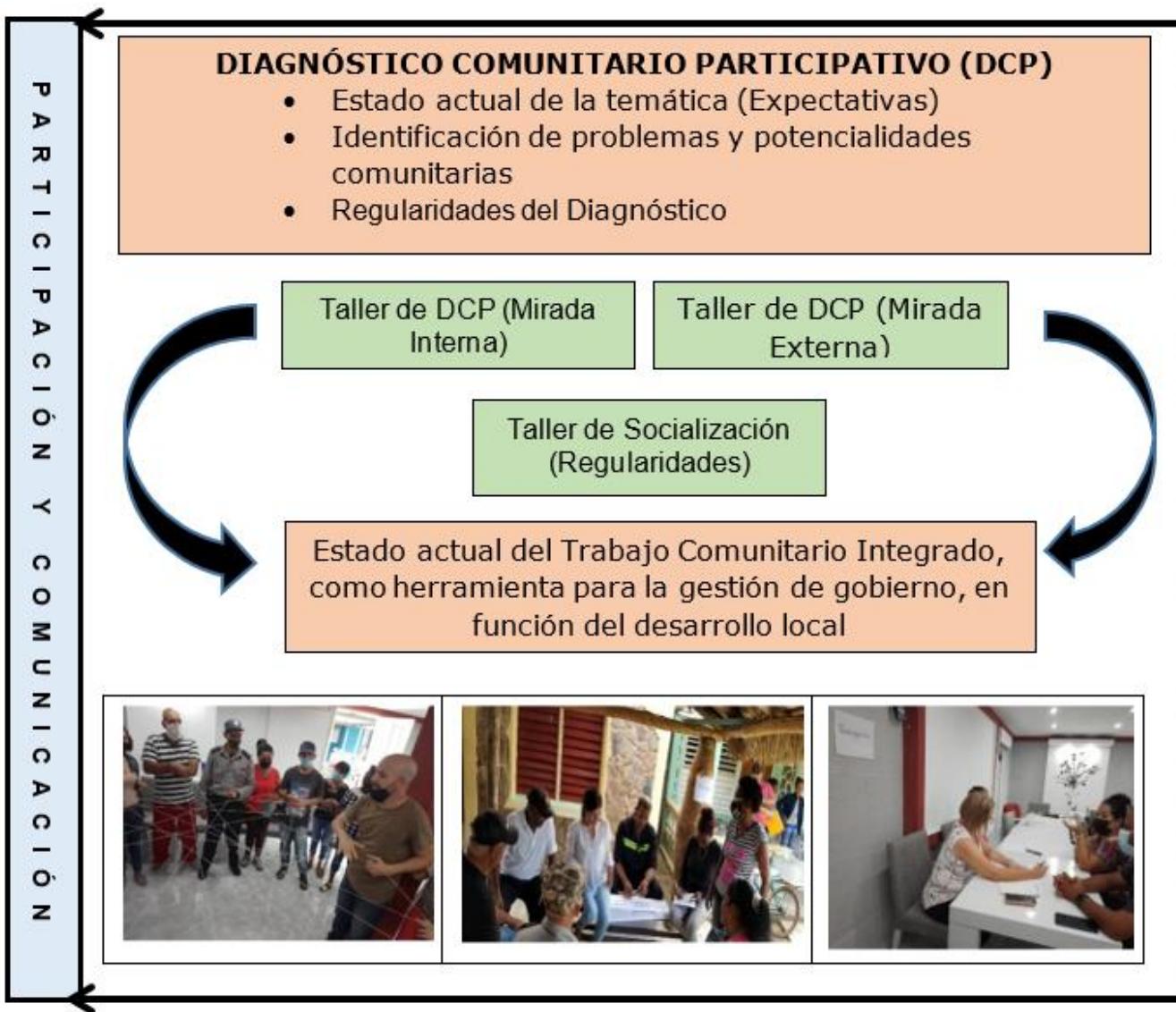
According to Bustio Ramos (2023), conceiving local development from the social community dimension focused on the subjects of change is a challenge for research with a focus on social innovation, insofar as tools are developed from, with, and for the community that facilitate the creation, development, and application of solutions, from a novel perspective, to the problems it faces.

The Participatory Community Diagnosis applied to the eighteen People's Councils of the Municipality of Pinar del Río became an educational process that strengthened the relationship between knowledge and community practice, where the community can understand itself, as Romero Sarduy and Hernández Chávez (2021) suggest, as the subject of its own actions for change.

Bustio Ramos (2004) was taken as a reference, who considers the DCP as a process of collective deconstruction and construction of knowledge, a learning process that allows for the collective growth of the actors and the development of skills for group work and the formation of values of collaboration, as well as solidarity, identifying the main problems in the area of Integrated Community Work as a tool for government management, in terms of local development.

Taking the above reflection into account, the Participatory Community Diagnosis is carried out using the technique of participatory community workshops, which are held in the eighteen People's Councils

in the municipality of Pinar del Río (González Chévez & Santana Herrera, 2020). These are designed taking into account Participatory Action Research under the premise that community members become protagonists of their own development, producing knowledge to transform their environment (Jiménez León, 2024) (Figure 1).



**Figure 1.** Procedure for Participatory Community Diagnosis

Source: Own elaboration

The proposals for action and the generation of development alternatives based on the solution to the problems identified were the result of a process of analysis of the present, projected into the future, constituting a process designed not only for the short and medium term, but also taking into account actions for the formulation of possible long-term scenarios, giving the instrument a forward-looking approach that facilitates how to make community management operational. It is the way to turn the idea into action from a proactive and innovative perspective (Reyes Hernández *et al.*, 2022).

The diagnostic process began with the identification of community expectations in relation to the ICW, in terms of development, through the implementation of three workshops in each of the People's Councils, with a high representation of formal and informal leaders. This allowed, through group dynamics, to construct meanings, analyze realities, identify needs, deconstruct perceptions, and interact collectively (Hernández Sampieri & Mendoza Torres, 2018). These actions contributed to the transformation of the environment through collective interaction and the identification of a group of key elements of Integrated Community Work as a tool for government management. Among the main elements identified are:

- The need for advancement and progress in communities
- Satisfaction of needs
- Greater community knowledge related to Integrated Community Work
- Transformation necessary for the future of the community
- Role of young people as a creative force for the common good
- Improvement in quality of life
- Unity and coordination of all actors and factors, internal and external
- Systematization of Integrated Community Work
- Networking from institutions to the community
- Group thinking
- Coordination between projects
- Participation, communication, and change as key pillars of Integrated Community Work

Despite these expectations, which to some extent reflect the communities' desire to achieve Integrated Community Work that responds to their felt needs and promotes their transformation for the common good, the current state of affairs, from the community's perspective, does not correspond to these aspirations.

## **Regularities derived from the workshop to share the results of the diagnosis**

With the aim of disseminating the results obtained from the instruments applied at the level of the People's Councils and continuing to investigate the existing gaps and potential for the management of Integrated Community Work, which facilitates and strengthens local development, a workshop was held to disseminate the results of the diagnosis. The following elements were derived from this workshop:

### Positive aspects

- Existence of a regulatory framework that allows for the development of Integrated Community Work in Cuba and, in particular, in the municipality of Pinar del Río.
- The presence of an organizational structure, unique in the world, that favors the development of ICW at the People's Council level, made up of the Committees for the Defense of the Revolution, the Federation of Cuban Women, the National Association of Small Farmers, the Zonal Nucleus of the Communist Party of Cuba, the Political Coordinator, administrative directorates, health and education institutions, as well as the Delegate of People's Power elected by the people to address community issues and respond systematically to their management.
- Existence of a social system model whose distinctive principle is the human being as the center of social attention, supported by social policies and services based on rights, social justice, equity, and the improvement of the people's quality of life.
- Presence of Integrated Community Work groups led by the delegates of the People's Power, which allow the integration of various organizations, interests, and visions in terms of community empowerment for the solution of both material and spiritual problems. This process constitutes a genuine organizational transformation (Subirana & Cooperrider, 2024), which enables the generation of more effective and relevant forms of community action, demonstrating that group participation is essential for determining solutions in the social contexts where intervention takes place.
- Recognition by community actors of the importance of Integrated Community Work as a means for community development and transformation.

## Negative aspects

- Insufficient priority given to Integrated Community Work as a working method and as a means for developing spaces for consensus and popular participation in solving community problems.
- Absence of an Integrated Community Work strategy that contributes to increasing popular participation in the transformation of the People's Council.
- Deficiencies in the quality of community diagnoses, which lack an integrative and systemic approach that allows problems to be viewed from all angles of development, with a psychosocial perspective.
- Lack of efficiency and tangible results in solving problems, which has a negative impact on the motivation and active participation of the population.
- Insufficient action by political and mass organizations, evidenced by their limited role in fulfilling their missions.
- Insufficient preparation and training of Integrated Community Work groups as an integrative structure for the community.
- Lack of integration between community actors and factors.
- Low level of community activism.
- Lack of conscious participation in the transformation and solution of community problems.

## **Main problems affecting the ICW as a tool for government management**

The results obtained throughout the DCP process, together with the triangulation of the other instruments applied -including individual interviews with officials from the Municipal Assembly of People's Power- provided relevant information for identifying the main problems affecting Integrated Community Work as a tool for government management. These results also contributed to the development of the working dimensions and essential strategic objectives for the design of the Integrated Community Work strategy as a tool for government management, based on local development.

In line with the above, the Vester Matrix was applied as a tool to identify the issues with the greatest impact on the current state of Integrated Community Work as a government management instrument (Castillo Núñez, 2022).

The application of this matrix was based on the prioritization of the problems identified in the diagnosis, which were assigned a score. This score made it possible to evaluate the magnitude of each problem, as well as the level of causality between them, using the following scale:

- Not a cause: 0
- Moderately direct cause: 1
- Direct cause: 2
- Very direct cause: 3

The problems analyzed using the Vester Matrix were as follows:

1. Integrated Community Work is not promoted as a means of popular participation in solving problems that require the intervention of the people.
2. Insufficient preparation of district delegates in relation to the ICW.
3. Insufficient political and ideological preparation of some delegates.
4. Weak functioning of the group of key actors in the constituencies.
5. Insufficient convening power for activities organized by the People's Council.
6. Lack of an adequate Integrated Community Work strategy to help increase popular participation in the community.
7. The desired level of community participation is not being achieved.
8. Insufficient coordination between different actors and community factors.
9. Integrated Community Work is perceived as isolated actions proposed by individual actors, rather than the result of collective proposals.
10. Community actions fail to transform the community.
11. Insufficient action by Integrated Community Work Groups.
12. Integrated Community Work is not incorporated into the work system of the People's Council.
13. Integrated Community Work is conceived as a community action rather than a working method.
14. Lack of a community diagnostic with comprehensive, systemic, and participatory approach.
15. Lack of a communication strategy at the community level.

Once the problems had been identified, a matrix was drawn up, with problems 1 to 15 located on the X-axis (horizontal) and the Y-axis (vertical) (Table 1). The cross-referencing of problems began

with the Y-axis; that is, Problem 1 (P1) was cross-referenced with the rest of the problems to form its X-axis, and so on with the others. No problem is cross-referenced with itself, so the result of such cross-referencing is zero. The Y-axis represents passive problems and the X-axis represents active problems.

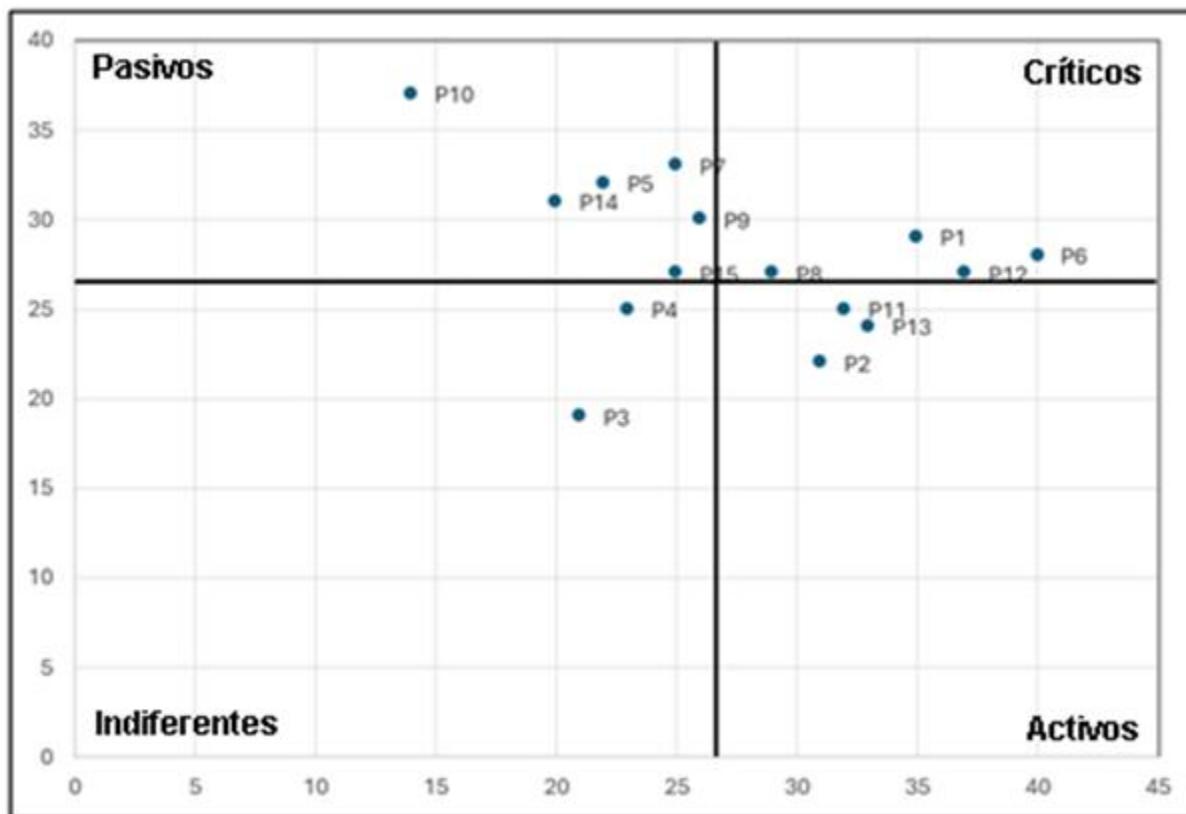
**Table 1.** Cross-impact matrix

Problems	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7	P8	P9	P10	P11	P12	P13	P14	P15	Total active X-axis
<b>P1</b>	2	2	2	2	3	3	3	2	2	3	3	3	3	3	2	35
<b>P2</b>	3		2	2	1	3	2	2	2	3	2	3	2	2	2	31
<b>P3</b>	1	1		1	1	3	2	2	2	1	2	2	1	1	1	21
<b>P4</b>	1	3	2		2	1	2	1	2	3	1	1	1	3	2	23
<b>P5</b>	1	1	1	1		1	2	1	2	3	2	2	1	2	2	22
<b>P6</b>	3	3	2	3	3		3	3	3	3	3	3	2	3	3	40
<b>P7</b>	3	3	2	1	1	1		2	3	3	1	2	1	1	1	25
<b>P8</b>	1	2	1	2	3	2	3		2	3	2	2	2	3	2	29
<b>P9</b>	3	1	1	2	3	1	3	1		3	1	1	2	2	2	26
<b>P10</b>	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1		1	1	1	1	1	1	14
<b>P11</b>	2	1	1	2	3	3	2	2	2	3		2	3	3	3	32
<b>P12</b>	3	1	1	3	3	3	3	3	3	3		3	3	2		37
<b>P13</b>	3	1	1	3	3	2	3	3	2	3	2		3	2		33
<b>P14</b>	1	1	1	1	3	3	1	1	1	1	1	2	1		2	20
<b>P15</b>	3	1	1	1	3	1	3	2	3	3	1	1	1	1		25
<b>Total passive Y-axis</b>	29	22	19	25	32	28	33	27	30	37	25	27	24	31	27	

Source: Own elaboration

Taking into account the results of the matrix, it was proceeded to its graphical representation. This graph includes the following categories of variables: critical, passive, indifferent, and active

problems. Next, the highest value of the active problems in the matrix is taken and divided by two; this result allows the corresponding value to be placed on the X-axis, from which a line parallel to the Y-axis is drawn. The same procedure is performed with the passive problems. Once these steps have been completed, all the problems can be placed according to their active and passive values (Figure 2).



**Figure 2.** Vester Matrix graph for analyzing the current status of Integrated Community Work

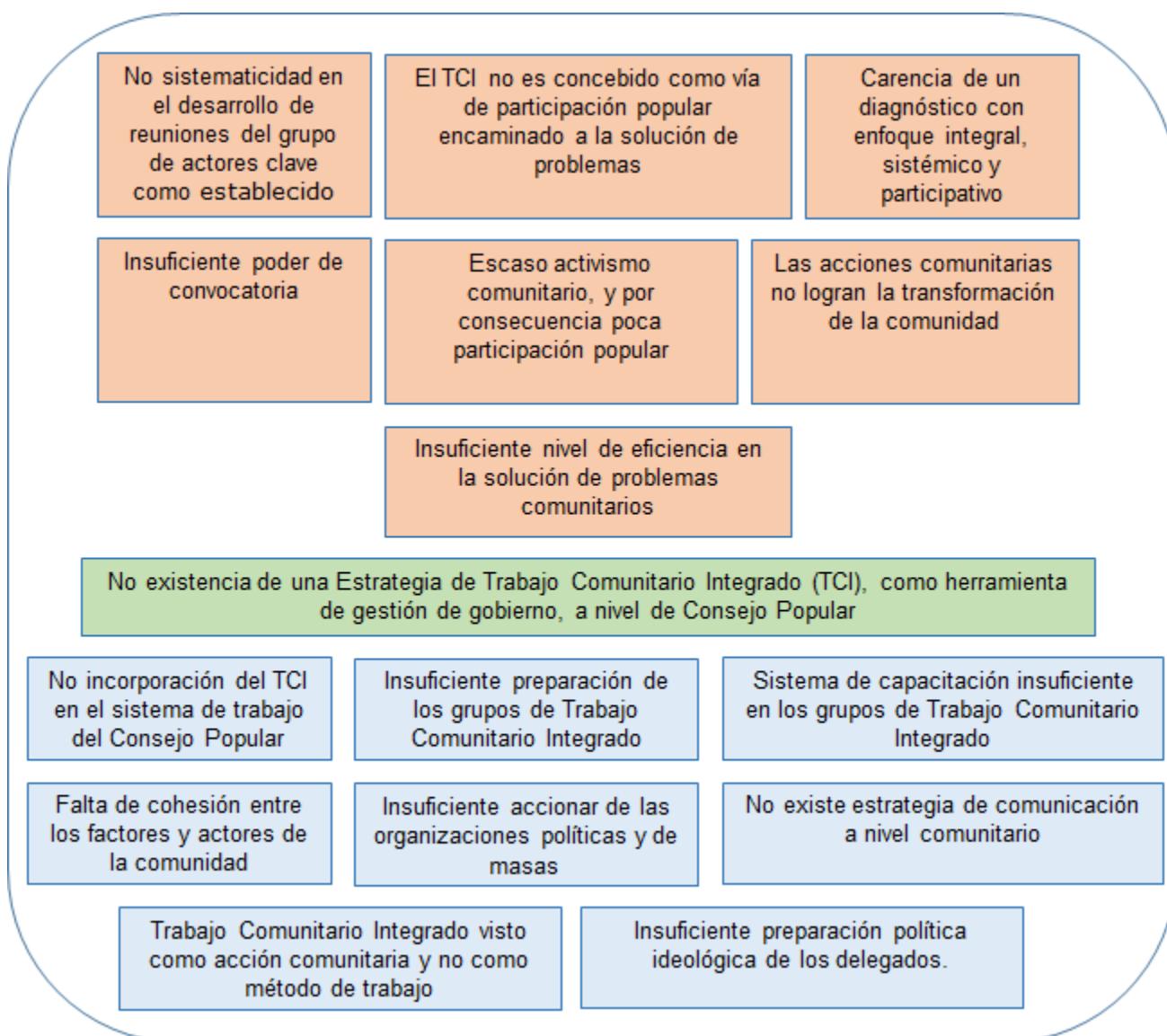
Source: Own elaboration

The application of the DCP leads to the conclusion that there is a set of problems considered critical, on which the fundamental actions contained in the proposed strategy should focus as a tool for government management, in terms of local development, in the municipality of Pinar del Río. In this regard, the most critical problems, in hierarchical order, are as follows:

1. Lack of an Integrated Community Work strategy at the People's Council level that contributes to increasing popular participation in community actions.
2. Integrated Community Work is not incorporated into the People's Council's work system as a working method.

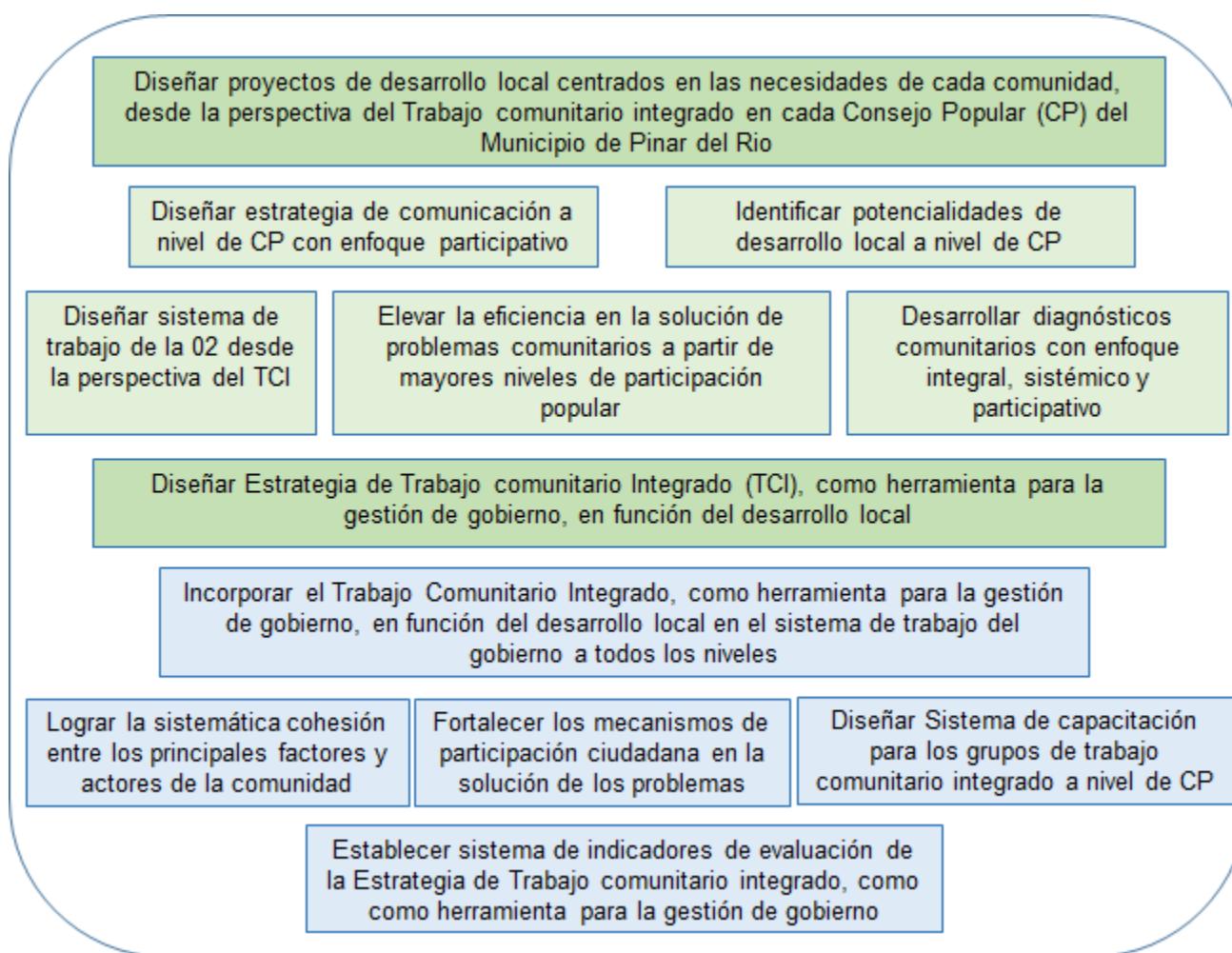
3. Integrated Community Work is conceived solely as a community action.

Once the problems have been identified in the graph, a problem tree is constructed, in which the main and most critical problems are determined; the causes are represented by the remaining critical-active problems, while the effects correspond to the passive problems (Figures 3 and 4).



**Figure 3.** Problem tree

Source: Own elaboration

**Figure 4.** Objectives tree

Source: Own elaboration

In addition to being a method for identifying community problems, the DCP is a way to facilitate community participation, commitment, and relevance in solving problems detected in the local context. Its implementation, based on community participation workshops, becomes a learning process that promotes the collective construction of knowledge and offers alternatives for actively mobilizing and incorporating all community actors and processes.

This highlights its vital importance, because even though there are democratic and inclusive government structures based on the principles of law and social justice, as well as political will at all levels aimed at improving the quality of life of communities in Cuba, the proper implementation of

the DCP is required to generate strategies that, through Integrated Community Work, can become effective tools for local development management.

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## Conflict of interest

Authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest.

## Authors' contribution

Ania Bustio Ramos and Mabel Rodríguez Poo designed the study, analyzed the data, and prepared the first draft of the article.

Anamarys Rojas Murillo was involved in data collection, analysis, and interpretation.

The three authors jointly reviewed the manuscript and approved the final version submitted.



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