

Editorial



Public management of quality of life at the municipal level as a key tool for identifying gaps in well-being

La gestión pública de la calidad de vida a escala municipal como herramienta fundamental para identificar brechas de bienestar

Gestão pública da qualidade de vida em nível municipal como ferramenta fundamental para identificar lacunas de bem-estar

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Public management of quality of life at the municipal level constitutes one of the fundamental pillars of contemporary territorial development, as local governments emerge as strategic actors in the identification, planning, and implementation of policies aimed at the well-being of the population. In the current context, characterized by increasingly complex economic, social, and environmental transformations, local public administration faces the challenge of designing management strategies that integrate economic, social, cultural, and environmental dimensions, with the aim of raising levels of well-being and meeting citizens' needs (Mirabal Sarria & Torres Paez, 2018; OECD, 2020).

Several recent studies have indicated that the quality of local governance is a determining factor in the population's perception of well-being, as it directly influences the efficiency of public services, institutional transparency, and citizen trust in institutions. In this regard, local governments play a key role in promoting public policies that contribute to improving the living conditions of the population and strengthening social cohesion within their territories.

The concept of quality of life has been widely associated with economic and social development, becoming a central analytical category for assessing the well-being of contemporary societies (Covas et al., 2017; Osorio, 2016; Tonon, 2010). However, recent research has delved into its multidimensional nature, noting that quality of life depends on the interaction between economic, social, environmental, and institutional factors that influence people's overall well-being (Brodny et al., 2024; Stiglitz et al., 2018).

Despite the various approaches developed around this concept, there is growing skepticism regarding traditional development models that prioritize economic growth as the central indicator of social progress. These models, consolidated throughout the 20th century, have generated negative environmental impacts, persistent social inequalities, and processes of exclusion in numerous contexts, limiting access to adequate conditions of well-being for large segments of the population (Sachs et al., 2023; UNDP, 2022).

Starting in the 1940s, issues related to social progress or development gained greater prominence on governments' public agendas, particularly in Latin America, making it possible to compare the achievements of different countries in areas such as employment, productivity, and the effects of economic crises. In this context, indicators such as Gross National Product were introduced to measure the value of wealth generated by a nation over a given period, subsequently promoting the development of social and economic indicators designed to estimate levels of growth and development.

As the concept of development evolved, the strategic role of local spaces in processes of economic and social transformation began to be recognized. Consequently, development strategies began to be contextualized according to the territorial characteristics of the areas where they are implemented (Pike et al., 2020). From this perspective, territories are conceived as spaces where economic, social, cultural, and institutional dynamics converge, shaping development opportunities and the well-being of the population.

Quality of life is thus conceived as an expression of human development. This vision has been endorsed by various international organizations, including the United Nations, which in the 2000 Millennium Declaration established the well-being of the population as a fundamental priority of the international development agenda (Naciones Unidas, 2000). Currently, the 2030 Agenda and the

Sustainable Development Goals reinforce this approach by promoting development models centered on people, sustainability, and the reduction of inequalities (Sachs et al., 2023).

Across various disciplines, quality of life has been analyzed by considering both objective and subjective factors that influence the population's perception of well-being. In this regard, recent studies emphasize that the assessment of quality of life must integrate socioeconomic indicators, access to public services, environmental conditions, safety, civic participation, and subjective perceptions of well-being (Dobrowolska & Kopczewska, 2024; Dorling, 2013).

The public approach to quality of life is rooted in the multidimensional conception that must be adopted by government management. Within this framework, the public administration must develop mechanisms that allow for the ongoing identification of the population's needs and the evaluation of the effectiveness of implemented policies.

In line with this perspective, various authors agree that public administration cannot assume it fully understands social needs, given that these are constantly evolving. Therefore, it is essential to incorporate participatory mechanisms that allow for gathering the public's perceptions and strengthening public decision-making processes (Fung, 2015).

Citizen participation is also an essential component of local governance, as it facilitates dialogue between citizens and public institutions, strengthens the legitimacy of government decisions, and contributes to improving the quality of public services (Aquiye Loayza et al., 2021).

In this sense, quality of life should not be analyzed solely as the result of comparing statistical indicators, but rather as the center of a public management process aimed at improving the well-being of the population in a given territory.

One of the most discussed elements in the scientific literature on local development is the notion of territory, understood as a space possessing relatively homogeneous economic, social, cultural, and environmental characteristics, where social, productive, and identity-related relationships are produced and reproduced (Torres Paez, 2016). In this context, municipal governments become key actors in the coordination of public policies that reduce territorial inequalities and promote inclusive development processes (OECD, 2020; Pike et al., 2020).

In summary, public management of quality of life at the municipal level is a strategic process for promoting sustainable territorial development and the well-being of the population. The theoretical review conducted shows that quality of life is a multidimensional phenomenon that integrates economic, social, cultural, environmental, and subjective factors, the improvement of which depends, to a large extent, on the capacity of local governments to design and implement contextualized and participatory public policies. In this regard, public management must be oriented toward comprehensive approaches that integrate strategic and operational planning with mechanisms for citizen participation, inter-sectoral coordination, and ongoing evaluation of results. In this way, Public Management of Quality of Life is established as a fundamental tool for identifying gaps in well-being, guiding decision-making, and strengthening local governance, contributing to the achievement of more equitable, inclusive, and sustainable communities.

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