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Local development outlines in times of uncertainty: opportunity for other types of approaches

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ARTICLE SECTION

Local development outlines in times of uncertainty: opportunity for other types of approaches

Abstract: The Covid-19 pandemic has impacted all social areas and community, social, and subjective aspects. In local and regional development, this situation has had devastating effects on which it is still too early to evaluate its effects, in such a way that it is possible to refer to a “before” and an “after”. In this unprecedented scenario and context of uncertainties and risks, it is possible to refer to contingency as a new framework for describing societies, in which the theoretical concepts of local (and social development in general) should explore new emerging concepts, such as, risk and danger, and with it, a rethinking of the logic and theories of local development, and its normative possibilities to apply it, based on the capacity for self-organization.

Key words: Self-organization, Self-orientation, Systems theory, Contingency.

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IDEAS CLAVE / HIGHLIGHTS / IDEES CLAU

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| <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Autoorganización en el desarrollo local, es la capacidad de los ámbitos que forman parte de un territorio de crear de manera endógena sus estructuras.2. Lógica circular: idea que pretende superar las limitaciones del binomio causa-efecto, o variable dependiente-independiente, por medio de un planteamiento dinámico de causas-efectos-causas.3. Gobernanza heterárquica: los ámbitos o sistemas que conforman un territorio se encuentran en una situación sin que exista una posición superior entre ellos, exceptuando el sistema político.4. Autopoiesis: capacidad de un sistema para producir sus propias estructuras y gestionar sus operaciones internas. | <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Self-organisation in local development, it is the capacity of the areas that are part of a territory to create their structures endogenously.2. Circular logic: idea that aims to overcome the limitations of the cause-effect binomial, or dependent-independent variable, by means of a dynamic cause-effect-cause approach.3. Heterarchic governance: that the areas or systems that make up a territory are in a situation where there is no superior position between them, except for the political system.4. Autopoiesis: a system's ability to produce its own structures and manage its internal operations. | <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Autoorganització en el desenvolupament local, és la capacitat dels àmbits que formen part d'un territori de crear de manera endògena les seues estructures.2. Lògica circular: idea que pretén superar les limitacions del binomi causa-efecte, o variable dependent-independent, per mitjà d'un plantejament dinàmic de causes-efectes-causes.3. Governança heteràrquica: els àmbits o sistemes que conformen un territori es troben en una situació sense que existisca una posició superior entre ells, exceptuant el sistema polític.4. Autopoiesis: capacitat d'un sistema per a produir les seues pròpies estructures i gestionar les seues operacions internes. |
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EXTENDED ABSTRACT¹

The Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) pandemic has caused impact to all social areas and to communitarian, social, and subjective aspects. This situation has had devastating effects on local (LD) and regional (RD) development, although so early to evaluate its long-term impacts, it is possible to refer to a "before" and an "after" in the economic, social, territorial, and political spheres. It should be added a rapid climate change, urgently needing more compelling and consistent measures to address these impacts. In this unprecedented scenario and context of uncertainties and risks, it is possible to refer to contingency as a new framework for describing societies, in which the theoretical concepts of local and social development in general should explore new emerging concepts such as risk and danger, rethinking the logic and LD theories and their normative possibilities to be applied, considering the capacity for self-organization.

In functionally differentiated societies, LD must face the fact that it is a highly complex process, requiring a consensus focused on efficiency, option abundance, and environmental and human sustainability. It requires a communicative effort that must overcome the principle of the contingency and risk situation, and consequent danger generated. Institutional rationality is no longer enough but understanding the contingency and the high complexity in describing LD and society is needed. The Covid-19 pandemic has been a first global wake-up call.

The perspective of systems offers a variety of concepts to understand, describe and rethink LD: (a) complexity or high complexity; (b) LD as a type of communication; (c) understanding the logic of circularity; (d) self-organization as a process; (e) self-orientation as an operation; and (f) contextual orientation.

The recognition of high complexity involves not just identifying that the functional systems do not arise and act only out of necessity, but it means to reduce complexity and its results by being highly contingent and complex, that is, they are followed by risky and insecure operations. For LD, it means recognizing the changes in the different fields or local systems. In some aspects as participation, dynamic changes are followed by contingency, therefore, risk.

Local development as a type of communication. Communication is not a type of ontological and anthropological linguistic action, nor it is a simple information exchange, but rather a symbolic process in which communication creates its own structures. It is a type of contingent event because it is a type of decision between multiple possibilities and uncertain results. The communications are configurators of social reality, since they create their own communicative codes, replacing social action theories based on the communicative consensus among the members. This type of communication operates with its own codes such as local democracy, constitutional provisions, accountability, response capacity, understood here as a type of ecological communications or communications produced by the specific system or area.

The logic of dynamic circularity surpasses the traditional cause-effect logic for another understanding, cause-effect-cause. Citizens exert influence on politics through elections. Elections and citizen participation determine political orientation, and, in turn, political orientation guides the LD, establishing its priorities, strategies, and codes. In this argumentative line, citizen participation can be limited to assuming a non-binding position on an urban project, on the destination of the projects presented by the city

¹ Traducción exclusiva de los autores / Authors' exclusive translation.

entities, or, on a broader plane, by introducing a participatory budgeting or by broad participatory consultation for LD.

Self-organization as a process. Under the concept of autoreferential systems, citizen self-organization acquires a new quality, as it deals with endogenous possibilities for creating capacities and initiatives. *Self-orientation as operation* is based on the assumption of the citizen group self-organizing capacity, and also involves accepting the capacity for self-orientation, on a larger plane, whether in a LD system (political or administrative) or in a society. If on a theoretical level this capacity appears clear, it is more complex in practices, also due to the different political-cultural contexts of each country or cultural sphere. These conceptions have had some impacts on LD proposals, highlighting the “ambivalences” of citizen participation, demanding a paradigm shift by courageous and determined citizens instead of angry citizens.

The contextual orientation developed by Helmut Willke adapts the capacity of a operating system or field and its communications and operations to the impulses in the form of demands (collective action, social movements) towards the environment. Context control appears as an appropriate form to control the system or scope with high internal and external complexity. This theoretical possibility can allow actors to influence a system. The influence possibility must occur within a framework in which the actors must establish the contextual conditions so that the system can choose its options with greater environmental sustainability. This context implies having a spatial language. In this situation, LD acquires the possibility to select actors linked to the territory, among the actors linked to development, for its performance in the type of decisions aimed at local development (economic, social, sustainable).

On the basis of the above exposed, the ideal structure outline is presented for the systemic LD. In this outline, some properties and peculiarities stand out, such as: (a) LD has a capacity to be applied in developed societies or in its development phase; (b) as a starting hypothesis, a communicative and normative consensus must be among the actors comprising the areas or systems; and (c) the political system must assume the orientation or direction of the LD. Three main assumptions support it: (a) the need to submerge the concept and the way to understand culture as an assumption to initiate an endogenous impulse directed to LD. The previous impulses existing in low-developed societies are not the same as in high-developed societies; (b) a communicative and normative consensus must be among the actors comprising the areas or systems with the functional objective to accomplish LD; and (c) the LD must count on the existent political system with the capacity to guide and direct development, that is, to issue the necessary codes or trigger abrupt situations favoring the emergence of citizen initiatives. This fact is not meaning a type of top-down, hierarchical, immovable, and non-dynamic type of leadership, but rather it must be a type of interactive and dynamic governance with the capacity to promote self-managed or self-governed dynamics coming from the actors, groups, and citizen initiatives. The internal environment of each area is composed of the related actors.

However, each of these theoretical conceptions is not free of paradoxes, as far-right populist movements also claim participation and dynamic changes in systems. In this scenario, the political sphere should maintain its guiding function of society and LD, on the basis of the existence of heterarchical democracy and a type of interactive governance.