

FOR A REFORMULATION OF A LOCAL SOCIAL INTERVENTION

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Abstract:

This article presents the theoretical and practical framework of the project “Capacitate to Qualification and Innovation in Social Networks of Minho-Lima” (CQIRS in Portuguese) within the Social Network Programme, in the local context of ten municipalities. It is addressed the theoretical approaches of local development and of the programme that have been in the basis of CQIRS planning and framing. Therefore, the main purposes and actions of the project are exposed, as well as the development, operationalization and evaluation of some actions concluded, but also the stadium of the remaining actions.

Key Words: Local Development, Social Networks, Planning, Partnerships, Participation

Introduction

The contemporary world is increasingly characterized as a complex society, multifaceted and woven by the speed of change, by the significant advances in science and technology, and in particular by increased access to information. These mutations altered sociocultural patterns and increased the degree of uncertainty of individuals and organizations, but there are also significant pressures and changes in terms of social policies, resulting from the territorialization of the social policies, which makes the local action is increasingly seen as the center of the struggle against poverty and social exclusion (Carvalho: s.d.; Neves, Cruz & Silva, 2010). It is important to understand from the beginning that the local is assumed "... as a nexus of structuring social relations, meaning with this that the local activity takes place before specific social processes at the local level" (Neves, Cruz & Silva, 2010, p.21) and that local action has an impact on social initiatives strategically developed by social actors/organizations involved in social projects and initiatives on a local basis, whether formal or informal, developed independently or networked (Neves, Cruz & Silva, 2010).

Based on this framework of local action, it appears that before the problems of global causality, particularly the attempts to adjust economic globalization to socially responsible globalization, in order to mitigate situations of inequality, local development was acquiring more relevance the current social and political debate. This fact resulted in the passage of a purely quantitative model of society, based on a centralized paradigm and imposed "from above" (top-down logic) to a new development model, decentralized and imposed in a bottom-up logic, qualitative and adapted to the specificities of each territory in which the vital impulse from the development starts from the local communities (Monteiro & Ribeiro, 2008). This logic of horizontality and from below (bottom-up) underlies the organizational structure of the Social Network Programme (SNP - which will be discussed later), appearing as one of their biggest obstacles to implementation, as it collides with dominant organizational cultures strongly structured in a vertical hierarchical logic, including government agencies (Instituto da Segurança Social, 2005).

In this repositioning of local action, we witnessing the introduction of the network approach as a form of organizational analysis, which is advocated by some theorists as a new organizational

configuration, which would contribute, on the one hand, for investment cooperation, learning, dissemination of information, knowledge and innovation, and on the other hand, emerging as a strategy for public and private organizations face the current contemporary environment of turbulence and uncertainty (Andrade, 2006). To this end, the network concept can be defined as "... an organizational arrangement formed by a group of actors, which are articulated, (...), in order to perform complex objectives and unattainable in an isolated way. (...). It is a space in which it produces a shared vision of reality, articulate different types of resources and conducts themselves in cooperative actions "(Alves, Cheta & Martins, 2008, p.13).

In the context where we are witnessing the emergence of trends of decentralization and territorialization in the fight against poverty and social exclusion, based on the principles of accountability and mobilization of the whole society, and in particular, based in the developing of active local social policies by municipalities, we assist to the creation of the SNP through the Council of Ministers Resolution no. 197/97 of November 18th (Resolução do Conselho de Ministros N.º 197/97). It is assumed as a social development program anchored a territorialized vision of social problems and resources, defined "[...] as a forum for coordination and pooling of efforts and based on open membership by municipalities and public entities or private nonprofit organizations willing to take part on it" (Resolução do Conselho de Ministros N.º 197/97, p.6253). The SNP also presents itself, as an alternative based on an integrated and systemic approach of social development (promotion of social well-being) and one of the "new social policies", proposing a rupture with more traditional forms of intervention, breaking with the assistance and remedial intervention views, as with a conception of social policy focusing only on the mobilization of redistributive measures (Instituto da Segurança Social, 2005).

This reconfiguration of social policies, particularly with the SNP, implies that there is a change in the totality of local contexts, encompassing multi-level and inter-sectorial governance mechanisms, for the creation of unique responses in each territory, contributing largely to competitiveness, employment and social inclusion. It then becomes necessary to recognize the importance not only of the process of decentralization and territorialization, but also of territorial cohesion, which introduces a paradigm shift in the understanding of the relationships between societies and their respective territories and implications arising from them in the formulation of public policy. The strengthening of the territorial cohesion, with the construction of Europe under the Lisbon Treaty and the evolution of the process that led to the "European Territorial Agenda" allowed to strengthen the strategic importance assigned to the territory, especially in the context of European structural policies, placing it on the political agenda, the virtuous triangle of economic, social and territorial cohesion. Several strategic documents [Treaty of Lisbon (2007); Territorial Cohesion Green Paper (2008); Barca Report (2009)], which show as future investments issues of territorial cohesion, highlighting the following key aspects:

- i) relevance of the territorial dimension in the development and initiative and organization capacity of territorial base for the full mobilization of resources, not only on issues of economic efficiency (income and economic growth), but also for the fight against poverty and social exclusion (social inclusion);
- ii) understanding of the territorial cohesion, as a way to invest to improve cooperation between the territories, in coordination between different public policies and the extension of participation of the actors of wider scope through partnerships in a territorial basis;
- iii) link the territorial cohesion to the harmonious development and the reduction of disparities and inequalities between different regions. (Instituto da Segurança Social, 2012).

Thus, the SNP gets progressively relevance under current conditions, even in the following of the current crisis that exacerbates poverty and social exclusion, as it increasingly recognize the importance of local specificity in the problems demonstrations and resolution. To this end, it establishes a direct relationship with the new forms of local governance that facilitate the integration of territorial policies and the implementation of European perspectives for the future of territorial

cohesion, which causes it to assume as a program for social innovation in response to contemporary challenges (Instituto de Segurança Social, 2012).

In this sense, the implementation of this program intends to promote the coordination of efforts between the organizations in intervention in the social area at the local level so that each community be able to, based on local partnership, set priorities and plan, in an integrated and participated way, the assessment, the ways and strategies to meet the needs of citizens. For such are defined for this program the following objectives: promotion of integrated development through the mobilization of institutional and community resources in order to ensure greater effectiveness of local social responses; lead to a participated assessment and planning and promoting coordination of interventions in a local level (Instituto da Segurança Social, 2004). In short, the "Assessment Report of the Network in Practice Project" (2012, p.4) emphasizes that "the transversal goal of the Network is the double activation, ie activation of beneficiaries by adopting policies of inclusion, but also activation «of the contexts and response agents", ie agents' activation of beneficiaries. Following this logic, the Network is an instrument of leverage synergies and coherent actions for the development of an Active Welfare State".

From an operational point of view, and in order to accomplish the objectives outlined for the SNP, local players of each "Social Network" (SN) should assume an understanding of the local reality based on a logical and integrated and participated planning, through the production of the following strategic documents: (1) Social Diagnosis (SD), which act as support prioritization and definition of intervention strategies aimed at social development of municipalities, as defined in (2) Social Development Plan (SDP) and effected through (3) annual or biannual Action Plans (AP) (Alves, 2010). In addition to this more localized impact of the program, it is essential that the supra-municipalities platforms systematize the information produced at local level, in order to contribute to a better understanding, at the national level, of the various territorial realities and the consequent definition of policy measures more consistent with it (Atouguia, 2010).

Therefore, one of the main innovations of the SNP is to implement the strategic, territorialized and participated, planning, either as support to social interventions that intend to be, more integrated and effective, or even as inducing of social policy measures increasingly less defined by sectors and increasingly responding to the multidimensionality of the existing problems, always in a partnership logic and as a key instrument in local development processes (Carrilho, 2008; Carlos & Gonçalves, 2002). To this end, the territorial participated perspective empower the citizen and makes him/her, agents of their own change from the resources at its disposal, run by community forums in a participated and democratic way (Martins & Santos, 2002, cit by Becker, Edmund, Nunes, Bonatto & Sousa 2004).

According to Castro (2000), the importance of the SN is based on the fact that it constitute itself as an innovative and facilitating instrument to the operationalization of active social policies, to the extent that it promote the creation of multidimensional plans, integrated in a territorial basis, and not only favors complementarity, coordination and the adaptation of nationwide policies to local problems and needs, but also promotes the mobilization and coordination of a broad partnership and participation of the recipients of the programs and projects of social intervention, in a logic of empowerment.

Following the mentioned above, together with the assumptions recommended by SNP, the "Capacitate for Qualification and Innovation of the Social Networks in Minho-Lima" Project (CQISN-ML), which integrates the ten SN's of Viana do Castelo District, as the key target of the project actions. The SN have resources, conditions and distinct capabilities, and the CQISN-ML intends to establish a balance between them, promoting the exchange of experiences, dissemination of good practices, harmonization of some working methods with the ultimate goal of creating harmonized languages/practices and facilitate cooperation and joint work done by partners. This option falls in:

- the interest in developing a broader perspective on the problems identified in the Minho-Lima territory, particularly on social problems, and promoting the flow of information, problem solving, deepening of sectorial issues and harmonization of initiatives according to an more innovative and entrepreneurial optical.

- the recognition of the program as a more innovative policy measure and with greater capacity to produce positive impacts on the social intervention of the municipalities, understanding the problems as multidimensional and located in specific territories, and the development of territories always associated with the well-being of the population.

Thus, based on existing resources, potentials and concerns of each SN as local development structures, the aim of the conception of this project was to open fields of social intervention skills capacitation, valuing the diversity of points of interest in an inter-municipal scale and promote concerted supra-municipality planning that allows a better organization of intervention, monetization of resources and a balanced distribution of responses and social facilities through engagement of the Minho-Lima Supra-Municipality Platform.

Project Framework

In a logic of strategic planning, the CQISN-ML Project (promoted by the Polytechnic Institute of Viana do Castelo (IPVC) and the Association for the Incubation Center of Technology Based of Minho (IN.CUBO), in partnership with the ten municipalities of the Minho-Lima territory) was designed based on documents from an international, national and regional level, among which stand out: Europe 2020, North 2015, ON2 - Operational Programme for Northern Region Strategic Plan and Supra-Municipality Platform.

The “Europe 2020”, serves as guidelines for the project priorities established to promoting smart (knowledge and innovation), sustainable (efficient use of resources) and inclusive (ensure social and territorial cohesion) growth. It also fits in one of the seven flagship initiatives, which are expected to promote a “«European platform against poverty» so that social and territorial cohesion could ensure a wide distribution of the benefits of growth and employment and that people experiencing poverty and social exclusion can live with dignity and participate actively in society.” (Comissão Europeia, 2010, p.6). In general, the aim of this project involves the assumption of the opportunity to stimulate/sensitize local stakeholders for effective partnership inter-network work, based on assumptions and harmonized procedures, as a strategy of promoting a inclusive society and territory.

The “North 2015: Competitiveness and Development - A Strategic Vision”, fits into the “Strategic Priority III - North Equality: Promoting Social Inclusion and Territorial”, which have three main objectives: the promotion of an inclusive society and equality opportunities; improving equity in access of citizens to key public goods and services; revitalization of degraded areas of major urban centers and of the rural areas in strong population decline and valorization of the resources of the territories. Based on these purposes, it has been outlined the definition of development opportunities for each segment of the territory (Action 1 - Assessment and AP), predicting to identify and value their indigenous resources and capabilities, whether it be natural resources, natural heritage, traditional products, regional tourism offers, or technical and business expertise (Action 4 – Prospective Planning Electronics Platform).

Finally, under the “ON2 - Operational Programme in the Northern Region”, specifically the Priority Axis V - Governance and Institutional Capacitation”, where investment in strengthening Networks is a bet of local agents (IPVC; IN.CUBO and Inter-municipal Community of Alto Minho), aiming to strengthen the institutional tissue of the Alto Minho, through the creation and promotion of networks and partnerships for development, promoting economies of scale and resource efficiency in the management and implementation of structuring projects for the region.

Following the mentioned above, the project fits into the paradigm of promoting local development, with mechanisms of territorialization (local specificities) and integrated planning, not only an economic perspective, but also as a result of conflict relations, competitiveness, cooperation, negotiation, partnership and reciprocity between various actors involved. With this in mind, the project emerged in order to develop new intervention perspectives on the problems identified in the Minho-Lima territory, to promote the circulation of information, the deepening of sectorial issues and harmonization of initiatives, instruments and languages, and according to a more innovative and entrepreneurial perspective.

The focus on empowerment (capacitation) of the SN’s of the territory, while primary recipients of the actions of the Project stems from the recognition of the potential of the program

which is inherent, as more innovative policy measure and with better capacity to produce positive impacts on the landscape of social intervention organizations, regardless of their legal nature, as problems are view as multidimensional and located in specific territories, and the development of the territories always associated with the well-being of the population.

Given the above, the project aimed to invest in skills and innovation of social intervention, valuing the diversity of points of interest conjectured in a inter-municipal scale, and promoting a concerted supra-municipality planning, and promoter of a better intervention organization, monetization of resources and a balanced distribution of responses and social equipment's through the engagement of the Minho-Lima Supra-Municipality Platform. Thus, it's implementation aims at sensitizing agents of local political power for the need to establish an effective network organization so that there is social cohesion within Minho-Lima and that the community keep the trust from its members and thus achieve better results (increase of sustainability, competitiveness, development and territory uniformity), with lower costs and greater benefits.

Therefore, the CQISN-ML Project built, in a shared way, the vision that guides the developments, ie "Qualification and innovation of the Social Networks in Minho-Lima, an optical assembly of efforts oriented to the cohesive developing of the territory and resolution/minimization of priority problems". Its mission is to promote the "sustainable competitiveness of the Minho-Lima territory, in a municipal and supra-municipal way, empowering and mobilizing synergies leading to the construction and consolidation of a common understanding between the organizations of regional and local power, and living forces of the community, for the priorities of sustainable and integrated development."

Thus, consistent with the vision and mission, we defined a set of guiding principles of action: capacitation, knowledge and innovation management; articulation, participation, cooperation, transparency, integration, subsidiarity, gender equality, equity, sustainability (social, environmental and financial), and strengthening organizational and operational dynamics of SN's. Thus, from the resources, potentialities and concerns of each local SN, as a structure of local development promotion, the project aims to contribute to this in a perspective of participation, integration and articulation, as development must arise with processes with a focus on own territory, putting in contact the various views of the same reality, in order to be reached and articulated and consensual solutions, based on negotiation and compromise among all local actors, blurring centralization logic (Cunha, 2008; Goudsmit & Blackburn, 2001).

Objectives and Actions of the CQISN-ML Project

Taking into account this background, the project is structured through an innovative and coordinated intervention, assuming the existence of dynamic processes of decision and intervention, based on criteria of efficiency, effectiveness and opportunity, seeking complementarity of the choices made. To this end, we outlined a set of goals and actions based on the principles of capacitation, qualification and innovation of SN's, in order to provide all the protagonists of information (strategic planning), instruments and tools that optimize their intervention and focus in new approaches in the development of the local populations and regions.

Thus, were delineated for the project the following objectives: i) to empower and enhance the SN by harmonizing procedures (social empowerment), ii) fostering organizational and social entrepreneurship iii) Innovate on how to solve the social problems based on entrepreneurial approaches, and promote supra-municipality concerted planning. Later, it were outlined five actions, which are presented next.

Action 1 – Assessment of Social Networks of Minho-Lima

The first action of the project was mostly conducted through the application of semi-structured interviews and Focus Group, to the agents of local political power and the core executive (NE's) of the ten SN's, targeting a diagnostic assessment of the dynamics underlying the network intervention and consequent identification of needs.

This action was completed early in the project and allowed the outline of a set activities for the proper development of it [ie, training of professionals in various areas (methodologies of strategic/participated planning); awareness of local political power to the philosophy and

methodology inherent to SNP; importance of the production of documents (SD, SDP and AP) as benchmarks guiding intervention and provision of technical reports)].

Action 2 - Capacitation for Analysis

This action aims to provide specific training to local political power agents and professionals that belong to the NE's of de SN's, particularly in the area of strategic planning, seeking to optimize the existing tools and instruments. To this end, we planned a set of integrated activities, based on the principles of capacitation, qualification and innovation of SN's, in order to provide all the protagonists of information (strategic planning), instruments and tools (eg creation of an electronic platform) that optimize their intervention and focus also on developing new approaches to social and local populations and regions.

Throughout the development of the project, in a recursive and dialectical relationship between theory and practice, training workshops were developed with the technical, sensitization workshops with stakeholders in the local political power to the importance of networking, as well as support and effective monitoring by the project team to SN's.

We believe that with training in specific areas, prioritized from the needs in conjunction with the knowledge/skills arising from individual and collective interventions and from the identification of training needs. For this it is important to note that to ensure the consolidation of change, the project team draws up different strategies ranging from the organization of workshops and follow-up monitoring of the construction of SD and SPD, the organization of initiatives for reflection on the reconfiguration of the role of social networks in integrated social intervention, particularly within the SNP. Thus, we emphasize that one of the important results achieved in this action with the intervention of the project within Minho-Lima involves the construction/consolidation of inter-dynamic networks, by facilitating the construction of strategic documents for each municipality, in a participated logic and inclusive of the citizens.

Action 3 - Capacitation for Intervention

The responsibility for this action is of one of the promoters of the project (IN.CUBO) that through this operation aims to strengthen the capacity and articulate intervention and management of local and regional institutional tissue in the social field, create and promote a regional platform for social entrepreneurship, mobilize knowledge, resources and change agents in the Alto Minho. For this, it will be develop a set of activities that enables it to perform the mapping of entrepreneurial initiatives in the 3rd sector through a study conducted by the Institute for Social Entrepreneurship, the creation of a scholarship of social initiatives and support the entrepreneur.

Action 4 – Prospective Planning Platform

This action intends to create open system of cartographic nature that allows the creation of an social observatory for a territory geotagging by thematic area (health, employment, social responses, among others). It aims to create synergies and constant updating of information to decision makers about the reality of the territory, in a municipality and supra-municipality level, as well as access to consensual guidelines with the SN's, in regarding some supporting documentation for the construction of strategic documents. The development and construction of this system was carried out by the informatics department IPVC in partnership with the Project Team and the SN's professionals and is already with its base complete, loaded with information and statistical indicators, and can be accessed through the website www.altominhoemrede.pt. The maintenance/updating of this prospective platform planning requires effective coordination and, simultaneously, the assumption of autonomy/accountability on the part of each of the SN's in this process.

Action 5 - Monitoring and Reporting

Finally, this action is transversal and follows the entire project development, in order to promote actions and initiatives that publicize it (ie. in the media). It is also accompanied by the Monitoring Committee, the Project Team and the Rapporteur Expert and Rapporteur, which makes a positive assessment of this project so far.

At the present, the Project Team is concluding scientific articles, as well as the production of a final book about the methodologies and with reflections, for and about, the social intervention, integrated and innovative, practices.

Conclusion

In a logic of strategic planning, is essential that local development is promoted through processes of territorialization in the identification of the problems, solutions and resources in a participated way, enhancing the coordination of policy measures at national level (Castro, 2002). To this end, the CQISN-ML Project is based on the premise that local development gains more relevance and strength, if it starts from the territory specificities in the prioritization of needs and strengths, as well as in the progressive investment in partnerships, considering that communities must experiment new forms of joint and combined efforts, setting priorities and planning, in an integrated and participated way, strategies that meet the needs of the territories (Instituto da Segurança Social, 2004). So, the CQISN-ML Project, in an integrated and innovative method, worked with SN's, the philosophy and methodologies of participated projects, which is expected to be adopted by the SN's as common practice in networking.

Thereby, the project watched the progressive involvement of the elements of the NE's in the participated construction of the strategic planning documents, through the strengthening of inter-network dynamics, as the professionals of different SN's applied facilitation in nearby municipalities and vice-versa, working in a inter-municipality partnership. There has been a gradual transition from a situation of refusal to a situation of self-accountability of each SN's, as well as the consolidation of the process of integration and sense of belonging by stakeholders. This results, rather than indicators of candidacy, give confidence and credibility to the current process, evidenced by progressive mobilization and involvement of partners in networking.

Thus, we conclude that all the work done so far, constitutes intervention in a structured and integrated manner, in the raising of awareness for the strategic planning, harmonization of tools based on a participated planning, capacitation for a proactive intervention in organizations and the social entrepreneurship. Since this is an innovative, unique national (and international) which is based on training the various SN's that integrate the NUTS III, we welcomed the results achieved, but we are aware that the great challenge we are facing now, is focuses on ensuring continuity of developments already initiated beyond the end of the time horizon of the project.

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