The challenges of a government strategy of training of local leaderships

M.A. Nunes de Barros & R. Arruda de Bloch
Escola Brasileira de Administração Pública (EBAP) / Fundação Getulio Vargas (FGV), Brazil.

Abstract

The articulation among the different dimensions of the local realities in a common and agreed development's project enlarges the community’s sustainability. Based in this idea, in July of 1999 the Brazilian government threw the “COMUNIDADE ATIVA” PROGRAM - A STRATEGY OF INDUCTION TO THE INTEGRATED AND SUSTAINABLE LOCAL DEVELOPMENT. A hundred and fifty Brazilian cities were selected for the first phase of the program. Five cities were chosen in Rio de Janeiro (Bom Jardim, Saquarema, São Fideles, Santa Maria Madalena and Arararuama). The present work is a study of the process of the Forum and the Local Management Group creation, the training of their members and the elaboration of the Integrated and Sustainable Local Development’s Plan in the city of Saquarema, in the period of October 13 to December 11, 1999. The article intends to contribute to the improvement of the program proposals through the analysis of this recent experience.

Introduction

With the objective of contributing to fight hunger in Brazil, the federal government launched in July 1999 a program called Active Community. The program is based on the concept of Integrated and Sustainable Local Development (Desenvolvimento Local Integrado e Sustentável – DLIS), a theme that has been already debated for some years, and that has been highlighted since the United Nations’ Conference on Environment and Development, which took place in Rio de Janeiro, in 1992, when the Agenda 21 was approved [1].

To discuss the proposals of the program, through the experience developed when it was implemented in the state of Rio de Janeiro, the present paper is
The Sustainable City divided into three parts: 1) the concept of integrated and sustainable local development, 2) description of the implementation of the Active Community program, and 3) analysis of the process.

1 The Concept of Integrated and Sustainable Local Development (ISLD)

The Integrated and Sustainable Local Development was defined at the eighth round of political dialogue in the Conselho da Comunidade Solidária, in Brasilia, in March 16, 1998, as a new way of fostering development, which allows the emergence of more sustainable communities, able to supply their immediate needs; discovering or utilising their local vocations and developing their specific potentialities; and promoting external interchange, taking profit of their local advantages [2].

1.1 Local dimension of development

It is important to mention the “local” dimension of the concept. The notion of “local” refers to a delimited space ambit, but has also the meaning of an abstract space of social relations that one wants to privilege, indicating movement and interaction of social groups that articulate and oppose themselves around common interests. Thus, it sends us to the study of power as a relation of forces, by means of which the alliances and confrontations between social actors are processed, as well as to the concept of delimited space and to the creation of specific identities and political practices [3].

The local scene can be considered a privileged ambit to observe the processes of generating social actors, building their abilities and potentialities in terms of initiative, managing policies at local and national levels, and also creating and innovating forms of articulation and negotiation between the public and the private spheres [4].

Local actors are all those agents that at the political, economic, social and cultural fields bring proposals that tend to better capitalize local potentialities, that is, tend to search for a better utilization of resources, highlighting the quality of the processes, in terms of natural and social balances. With a view to this, the actor shall be part of the local society and recognize himself both in its history and in its system of norms and values. The local actor is part of a history, but brings also an alternative. Given his insertion in a territorial community, he belongs to a space full of signs and codes that will feed his action, and given his character as an actor, he shall present alternative proposals in a specific social field, which aim at transforming the representation systems and triumph over conformist attitudes[5].

Local actions for development can’t occur as a monopoly of the public power, and the latter must function as an articulator and a facilitator of such actions, which will only show efficacy if they are representative of a local development project appropriated by society, in which public power is just one of the agents involved. [6].
1.2 Integrated development

Another important dimension of the concept of ISLD is that of integrated development, considering that there is inter-institutional logic, today applied in several countries of Latin America. In the face of the need to find solutions to problems that are urgent and vital to the community, local structures aggregating territorial social organizations, local entrepreneurs, local institutions, political parties and trade unions are created. This form of action tries to solve a problem by means of proposals from a set of local actors, limiting the traditional mechanisms of relation. In a work of political articulation, an institutional apparatus is built, on the basis of local development councils, inter-municipal consortia, cooperatives, community associations, etc. [7].

Thus, integration is important between governmental and non-governmental actors and actions, as well as inside the very governmental ambit, like the integration among the three government levels, the interrelation among different sectors, and also the relation among municipalities.

1.3 Sustainability

The dimension of sustainability of the concept of ISLD, for its turn, is related to keeping opportunities from a generation to the other. So, the issue of environment conservation is included, through a more rational management of environmental resources, as well as other issues, such as the social, the political and the cultural ones. That is to say that this dimension requires different patterns of social relationship, closely connected and cooperating (solidárias) community organizations based on motivations, values and common interests that make each community actively participate in the consecution of its own courses [8].

Hence, the possibility for the concept of ‘sustainable development’ to become operational can neither come just from an economics science and more adequate technologies, nor from the inclusion of environmental concerns in investment projects, but only from systematic efforts to consolidate a more stable, rational and harmonious society, based on principles of equality and justice in people’s relations. Such concept refers to the satisfaction of everyone’s basic needs, and to a continuous process, so that the perspectives of future generations do no deteriorate.

2 The Active Community Program

In Brazil, the active community program, an essential part of the federal government’s strategy to reduce poverty in a sustainable way – the Comunidade Solidária – intends to allow the emergence of more sustainable communities.

Thus, the carrying out of a new way of furthering development is searched, by means of the implementation of programs that aim at bringing in endogenous or exogenous resources for projects, as well as for actions planned in a participating way, that search for new forms of relationship among social actors, with a view
to producing sustainable development. Therefore, the very design of the programs has to be locally modified to better adjust to local particularities.

Integrated and sustainable local development supposes the involvement of the whole interested collectivity in the transformation of local reality from a condition of need into a situation of improvement of the quality of local life. So, the mobilization of several local actors necessary in the formulation of a strategy of agreed and shared action is important.

Around 150 Brazilian cities, with low rates of human development (HDR), were selected to a first phase of the program, that consists schematically of 3 fundamental steps, according to Augusto Franco [9]:
1- Training for local management;
2- Transformation of private demands into Local Society’s Public Demand; and
3- Articulating and adapting state and non-state program and action supply, by means of this Public Demand.

According to the Reference Document [10], some elements are necessary to the ISLD process:

a) Sensitizing and training agents for local management;
b) Creating a representative, participating and collegiate organ of local development agents, which can be a forum or a council;
c) Choosing a local managing team;
d) Elaborating a participating diagnosis;
e) Formulating the local development plan;
f) Negotiated choice of the local basic agenda;
g) Celebrating the local development pact;
h) Implementing the agreed programs and projects, with an effective and systematic monitoring and assessment.

The federal government, trying to implement the strategies for ISLD, selected institutions with large experience in education for management, to train collegiate organs and local managing teams for development. For the states of Rio de Janeiro, Minas Gerais and Espírito Santo, the João Pinheiro Foundation (MG), that engaged the Getulio Vargas Foundation (RJ), was selected to carry out the work in Rio de Janeiro and part of Espírito Santo. Five cities were selected in the state of Rio de Janeiro at the first phase of the program: Araruama, Bom Jardim, Santa Maria Madalena, São Fideles and Saquarema.

The experience of leadership training in the municipality of Saquarema

The general design of the training work consisted of some fundamental elements:
a) Dialogic attitude taken by trainers, identifying them with the figure of a mediator;
b) The education cycle, that alternated meetings with the forum, usually with a more deliberative character, and meetings with the local team, usually more informative and centered on the accomplishment of precise tasks of writing and formulating proposals;
c) Adoption of differentiated didactic and pedagogic strategies for training each design and scale of plenary assembly or meeting;
d) The training thematic blocks tried to satisfy the general demands of the competencies necessary to the activities determined by the project, associated to the managerial activities both of the local managing team and of the forum, as well as each locality’s specific needs;
e) The Forum was viewed as a decision space, where private stakeholders would be condensed in Public Demands;
f) Each education cycle involved at least one meeting with the forum and other meetings with the local team, as well as one or more monitoring and advice meetings, which could be either with the local managing team or with the forum.

The first activity developed by the training institution in the municipalities was the stage consisting in sensitizing local actors, creating the local forum for development and the local managing team.

The didactic and pedagogic objectives of the sensitizing, strictly speaking, included themselves in the description of the participating methodology for formulating both a diagnosis and a local plan, in the importance of the representative character of the forum, in the need to develop the managing abilities of the members of the local managing team and of the forum. The plenary assembly composed of more than 90 people, after a large discussion, deliberated for the creation of a forum with 25 members (20 effective and 5 deputy members).

Since this moment, FAMOSA (Federation of Neighbors’ Associations of Saquarema – Federação das Associações de Moradores de Saquarema), diverged from the consensus established at the plenary assembly and withdrew its member that had been designated to make up the forum.

Once composed the forum, according to the parameters established by the coordination of the Comunidade Solidária for the Active Community Program, proceeded to train both the members of the forum and those of the local managing team, chosen by consensus among the members of the forum, for the participating diagnosis.

At a first moment, by utilizing the visualization techniques, a list of needs of the locality was obtained. Such needs were put into a hierarchy through a debate among the members of the forum.

The qualified decisions made by the forum, of making its meetings public and open, not just the audience, but also the attendance by interested citizens, must be highlighted. This decision enlarged the representative character of its meetings, because members of the society that contributed both in the debates and in the decisions made attended all of them.

Instruments and strategies for collecting data and information, initially restricted to the local team, which took over the task of getting information, but then distributed that which was collected among the members of the forum, were socialized.

Once accomplished, the data collection and utilized measurement techniques for establishing consensus about the elements and topics of the diagnosis, an
approximation was sought, still at this phase, between the participating diagnosis and the potentialities’ survey carried out by SEBRAE (Brazilian Service for Support to Medium and Small Enterprises – Serviço Brasileiro de Apoio à Média e Pequena Empresa), through DATAUFF (Research Institute of the Universidade Federal Fluminense).

SEBRAE created a program, the design of which was especially directed to the ISLD processes, PRODER-ESPECIAL (Special Program for Employment and Income – Programa Especial de Emprego e Renda), as an economic sustainability vector to ISLD, and a seat was assured to the local management of PRODER-ESPECIAL in the local managing team, justifying the search for more synergy between the initiatives.

Before the elaboration of the plan, the diagnosis, its validation and the presentation of a basic structure for the writing of the plan were exposed to the forum.

The concepts of problem, objective and alternative trees, as well as that of ZOOP method were explained, and, by means of mediation, the main problems of the city were identified:

a) Low level of environmental sanitation;
b) High political and administrative centralization;
c) Low level of local employment supply; and
d) Low quality of health services.

From this point, objective trees and action alternatives were produced, in the field of local power and society, as well as the projects’ basic structure for each alternative. 23 projects that articulate different resources and actors for its accomplishment were elaborated.

3 Analysis of the program implementing process

Concerning this implementation process of the Active Community Program, the importance of such initiative for the promotion of development must be highlighted, although it is also necessary to indicate some questions that deserve being reviewed, if one wants to encourage development in all its aspects in Brazilian municipalities.

The lack of integration of this program’s actions with Agenda 21, which is quite related to the theme proposed, deserves questioning. People that were hired have no experience with Agenda 21 and aren’t even connected to it, that which would facilitate the development of the process. Besides that, no articulation of this program’s activities with those concerning Agenda 21 was foreseen.

Moreover, the need for training on the elaboration of the Plan did not come from the very leaderships. It was something suggested “from top to bottom”, and seen as a “favor” from the government. As mentioned above, local actions for development will only be efficacious if they are representative of a local development project appropriated by society, in which the public power is only one of the agents involved.

Another question that must be highlighted is the short time foreseen for the activities. The elaboration of a Plan for Integrated and Sustainable Local
Development requires time in order that leaderships mature discussions, and the members of the Forum are chosen. Specially bearing in mind that the activity did not come from society, a long work of mobilization is necessary. In the same manner, sensitizing and the choice of the members of the Forum can't be accomplished in just one day.

Finally, we must question: is the implementation of the Plan for Integrated and Sustainable Local Development possible, if the Forum is only responsible for it?

References


