

The Training of Activists in Local Development

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For days of intensive work in Cuba we have concentrated on the critique of capitalist globalization and on the evaluation of ways out of it, we have done this with concepts that are cultural, political, social, economic.

What follows are thoughts on building power from below in Cuba. They occur in the context of what we are living through—a crisis of global capitalist civilization. The crisis is both social and ecological. And in it a renovation of the socialist ideal is taking place, to the tune of a critical analysis of the history we have lived through and of the new realities of world social development.

To some the renovation of the socialist ideal may seem irrelevant and inopportune. Wrong: it is neither secondary nor tangential to our country. It is essential for the final socialist construction of society. It is not a theme derived from the conjunctural crisis we have lived through during the last few years. (Of course that crisis has made it both topical and unavoidable.) Traditional socialist thought could not find a solution to it in the experiences of the twentieth century. Today we must confront it. There is no way around it—we must solve it! What does this mean? It demands breaking with inertial modes of thinking. It means learning new ways of doing. It means quaffing a dose of civic responsibility.

It is one of the ways of finding a revolutionary solution for the internal contradictions of social development shaped by history. On both the national and local level it confronts the globalizing processes that hit us in a world stamped by capitalism. And it challenges the hegemonic imperial policy of the North American government.

That is the dimension that the problem takes on when we speak of building power from below in socialist Cuba in the present historical circumstances. It does not mean replacing the mode of people's participation shaped by history in the early stages of the Revolution. No, it means enriching that participation and completing it with new forms. It means taking into account the potentialities contained in the historical work of 45 years of revolutionary transformations. It means taking into account the new conjunctures of the global context.

Since the fall of socialism in Eastern Europe and the USSR, Cuba has been placed in an economic crisis with social, political and cultural repercussions. This international conjuncture suddenly threw Cuban society onto the stage of neoliberal capitalist globalization and created conditions that helped the hegemonic power to increase the mechanisms of the blockade and the external pressure on our country.

These conjunctural external circumstances conditioned the need to emphasize the centralized management of scarce strategic resources. They also conditioned the role of the local level in the survival of the country in its latest development. (This meant discovering new reserves of production and productivity, the supply of elementary conditions that could guarantee strategies of personal and collective survival, the maintenance of the basic premises of the quality of life achieved during years of socialist construction.) They also related to aspects of the security of the country in its cultural, social, political and economic totality. They related to its integration and capacity to resist aggression.

The crisis has sharpened one of the demands that the building of socialism has been formulating as a

necessity since the second half of the 1980s and that the socialist model forged by the eastern European and soviet experience could not meet. Up to the present time promising experiments have taken place in mountainous municipalities of the province of Santiago de Cuba, in Pinar del Rio, in the central region of Sancti Spiritus, in the municipalities of Yaguajay and Jatibonico, and in other localities in the center and the west of the country. We have not yet achieved the theoretical generalization of these experiments. We are not yet able to work up a model that would be acceptable for all of them.

I mean a way for making compatible the visions and procedures in order to contribute to the macro local development. This is considered from the standpoint of participation in decision-making in order to manage available resources for sustainable development based on social justice. It is considered from the angle of emancipatory, de-alienating, dignifying transformations on the level of personality, of interpersonal relations, of subjective premises. None of us fails to recognize the subtle, essential connection between one and another process. Only our future discussions can find a convergent point in this debate.

The kind of local development promoted in Cuba is to be distinguished from the predominant formulas in the world, for it is not directed toward the privatization of resources, the fragmentation of the popular sectors, the reestablishment of capitalist accumulation.

These activities that Cuban social science is involved in occur in the context of 70 national projects that have led social policy to a new qualitative state of development and that demand ever more territorialization.

Here are some basic characteristics:

1. The experiments in local development are incorporated as an element of global national strategy and are structured in an integral way, in other words, in cultural, social, political and economic dimensions.
2. They are based on different forms of social property of the means of production as the organizing axis of the social relations and aim to strengthen that property. They also help to integrate all the economic sectors of the community into the socialist way of life. The productive forms used include state, types of agricultural cooperation, and independent producers.
3. They are based on an increase in communitarian popular participation in an ever more interested and qualified manner in the exercise of political power, because it takes off from the ideological and constitutional premise that the essential political agency is the popular masses. They are experiments constructed by and from the working people, the “poor” as Martí used to say.
4. They are not privatizing.
5. They expand the possibilities of employment in the socialist sector of the economy and increase the production of goods and services for the population. Also they generate resources that promote local social projects.
6. They pursue sustainable development, they harmonize with the environment, they increase the quality of life.
7. They qualify the actors of the locality for confronting globalization as a territorially localized process from the cultural, political, social and economic standpoint.

8. They generate productive projects that encourage other social projects oriented toward increasing the quality of life.

9. In the Battle of Ideas they count on a fundamental premise: a high integral general culture. Without this it is impossible to have an equitable and sustainable local development.

The local development we are stimulating conflicts with the mode of popular participation that was historically implemented in the country as a result of the early stages of the Revolution. None of the previous socialist experiences has surpassed these historical limitations, on one hand conditioned by the initial tasks of the social Revolution, and on the other, by starting from the subjective factor formed under capitalism.

A Marxist understanding of history and society enables us to see that this mode of popular participation throws up a dilemma that had already matured in Cuba since the second half of the 1980s. (Its first signs had appeared even earlier.)

It is directed ideologically toward the overcoming of all forms of social and personal alienation, toward the growing participation of the masses in decision-making and in all spheres of social life, but the structures created, the styles of leadership and the patterns of historically shaped ideality in the initial stages of the process condition a mode of participation that is centralist, verticalist and mobilizing. And that is fixed in juridical and political norms, in structures and styles of leadership and in ideological guidelines.

This mode of participation is apt for guaranteeing the destruction of the old regime, defending the premises of the new society against imperialism and against natural disasters, but it is insufficient for promoting in a systematic way the ever growing constructive tasks of daily life.

So the initiatives of local development count on strengths that make them function in our society. They also confront obstacles that must be overcome in:

a. organizational state structures

b. political and legal norms

c. preferred styles of leadership customarily established

d. dominant mentalities concerning decision-making and popular participation

e. the structure of the predominant personality, which has been socialized into the established mode of participation, but which as a result of revolutionary work is individualized, qualified due to the level of education, and demanding of social finality.

The promotion of local development must contain a training content. It must be based in a planned and conscious manner on the conceptual arsenal of the Cuban Revolution , especially on the terrain of the relation directors-directed. If we don't forge this link in the chain it will be hard to avoid dead points in the process.

The implementation of the training of the actors in local development should take into account the following:

1. the diversity of the agents of local development. They must be integrated into socialist accumulation. And there is no formula to be equally applied in different territories and under different conditions. This is true even though we must agree on a basic mode of structuring the process of learning-transformation.
2. the basic needs for enabling the taking of decisions at different times in order to participate in policy in a socialist manner. This presupposes de-codifying daily life in order to discover the contradictions of development and to unveil the different sources of power from the standpoint of the really existing inequalities in the communities.
3. intensive preparation of social, political and state cadres on the municipal level. They must learn to promote local sustainable development and to administer socialist property at this level. They must link the political and economic content of socialist property in state management.
4. The training of social actors should be oriented to strengthening the moral and political values that characterize revolutionary consciousness and behavior as a premise for building power from below:

- a. revolutionary work, independent, socially emancipatory and personally dignifying
- b. capacity for daily sacrifice and for dedication to work
- c. ability for independent thinking
- d. energy for confronting bad work
- e. honesty in public administration

5. the overcoming of impediments on the level of personality structure for democratic and creative citizen participation, for respecting legitimate differences, for living together in peace and for constructive overcoming of daily problems. This means the use of work techniques that are micro and individualized (the practical experiences of a theoretical and methodological character elaborated by the Center of Communitarian Development of the Central University.)

6. the radical change in the relation between communities and the centers of research and of scientific and technical information. There should be a system of managing knowledge by means of information networks that place the mentioned centers as part of the context that generates inputs for local development.

What kind of local development are we promoting?

1. Our conception of local development is governed by the ideology of the Cuban Revolution. This ideology criticizes the fundamentals of capitalist modernity and proposes a conception of development centered on the person as a concrete cultural totality, the person with relations of solidarity with others and in harmony with the environment. It is human development on the basis of social justice, it is development that strives for harmony with nature.
2. Local development leads toward greater levels of sustainability. It also points toward more equality. It aims to better the material conditions of life by increasing income. It aims to attain the heights of social equity in gender and race. Its ultimate aim is to lift up the quality of life: the fulfillment and enrichment of individuality—of spirituality.
3. We are instrumentalizing local development as a continuous and institutionalized process.

4. This development requires the participation of all the actors involved, a participation ever more trained and interested, it demands the participation of all those persons and collectivities whose interests are affected by the development, it demands their re-education, the re-directing of their attitudes, the catalyzing of their enthusiasm.

5. The development must be implemented autonomously in the framework of a national strategy. It must not be constructed looking for financing and assistance. It must take off from the notion of a project, of concrete ideas about development actions. We don't center it in possible problems to be understood. We center it in the discovery of the resources and potentialities for development within reach of the community: infrastructure, cultural, social, economic, health organizations and enterprises, directing cadres and trained personnel, local raw materials, crops, and soils, market opportunities.

6. It is a development promoted through agreement, discussion and compromise by the social actors of the state organizations.

7. It tends to discover and empower the potentialities of women for sustainable social change. It is emancipatory, it dignifies the life conditions in cultural, political, familial, and labor spheres.

8. It favors restoring the environment damaged over the years.

9. It empowers the use, enjoyment and availability ever more efficiently, sustainable and just, of the territorial resources. It favors citizen political participation and growing spiritual enrichment of each and everyone. It is integrated organically into a strategy for the whole country. It enriches the strategy in its execution and sustains it in the institutional framework

10. It implies the process of forming the territorial social actors in order to make each one better at sustainable development from the standpoint of knowledge, experience, habits and abilities, also from the angle of the relations that they establish between themselves and their surroundings. It is a development that implies modifications in the productive forces and the ecological medium. It also implies modifications in the producers themselves in their spiritual enrichment and in the institutional relations between them.

11. Construction takes place taking off from the local culture as an organic part of the material culture of the country. It bases itself on the traditions and potentialities for the improvement of the quality of life of the population of the territory. It is a development that takes into account the cultural and historical dimensions as well as the spatial and temporal of the territory. Therefore it needs an interdisciplinary focus from these coordinates.

12. It is based on an apprenticeship of the actors for a transforming activity in a geographical context and with a social, political, cultural, and economic history. It implies empowering local capacities for generating innovation, creativity, and enterprising activity in the social agents. It implies technical solvency and integral management of human resources on the basis of a greater organizational capacity and articulation with the institutional context and the market subject to national planning.

13. This is linked to the increase of popular participation with greater efficiency in the territorial political dialog and the optimization of linkage to leadership.

How is local development to be implemented from the point of view of the participation of the social sciences and the humanities? How can we approach it methodologically?

14. The social sciences correctly organized are able to serve as a unifier of the interface between the

sciences and the needs of social practice on the level of local development. Therefore work groups with an interdisciplinary focus are needed, centered on social problems defined by participation. These problems must be solved integrally and using the technologies and sciences necessary.

15. Promotion of local development demands: a. training human resources b. connecting the system of education and the training of the social actors with the productive profile of each territory c. access to financing d. access to information on markets, technologies and lines of communication.

16. Local development requires designs of management systems (coordination of decision-taking with the execution of tasks and the measurement of impacts) on the provincial and municipal level. These levels must realize the productive potentials of the territories in order to sustain projects of cultural and social development.

This type of design can only be realized based on professional scientific activity, incorporating it into the daily life of the communities. A key to this is training local actors by scientists with humanitarian and social knowledge.

It is necessary to supply them with the knowledge, habits and abilities to lead the processes and networks of communication in the local area, in order to determine the potentialities of development within the true and non-apparent limitations of the territory, in order to formulate and manage policies, in order to measure the results, in order to stimulate habits, needs and abilities of self-improvement, in order to discover and implement channels of participation in behalf of local development, and in order to form competencies, in order to generate and administer material, human and financial resources, in order to modify the attitude toward the scientific context and the knowledge that is part of it.

The methods of work to be stimulated are those that encourage the community to propose its own developmental aims based on its potentialities, culture, traditional knowledge and its own forms of living together.

17. The application of the humanistic and social sciences to local development imply that they should not be applied episodically. They should do the following:

a. mobilize the social actors to elaborate diagnoses, strategies and projects for local development, b . promote innovative capacity, the quality of the productions and services realized, the improvement of territorial technological infrastructure, aiming to better the aggregate value of the productions and services (this demands linking ever more culture and education with production and networks of communication), c. make effective resources of the territories, d. bring knowledge of ways of financing and how to get access to them, e. stimulate linkage between the actors in local development, f. encourage citizen participation, g. create a climate of social innovation able to lead to a sustainable development ever more equitable. This last point is a real challenge for the social sciences and contemporary Cuban policy.

What kind of citizen participation must be constructed to further local development?

18. The participation of citizens in local development means involving them in decision-making that leads to it. This implies their taking part in the definition of the political agenda of local development considered in itself, in other words, the definition of the matters that make up the central priorities of development, taking into account the construction of the corresponding diagnosis; in the implementation of the designed policies by means of the elaborated projects, which implies the distribution of the financial, communicational, human and material resources in order to realize social innovation pursued according to the spheres that are taken into account; in the results of the applied

policies as receptors and beneficiaries; and in the control of the results and effects in the short, medium, and long run in order to carry out the necessary corrections to the process of local development.

19. Promotion of local development presupposes a new mode of participation from below, from the base, but it requires a new kind of citizen, a new feeling of responsibility toward the community, for they are the ones who make the decisions and are the main beneficiaries of the successes and are the losers from the failures.