

Empowering professionals for the use of participated methodologies in community social diagnosis and social development plans

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Abstract— This paper will present the methodology used to create an empowering program for social sciences professional working in local social networks in Minho-Lima territory, in order to promote in them the necessary skills to develop a social diagnosis and a social development plan, based in participatory methodologies. The Social Network Programme is a social development program anchored a territorialized vision of social problems and resources, presented as a committee that coordinates and efforts based on open membership by municipalities and public entities or private nonprofit organizations willing to take part on it.

Keywords— participatory methodologies, professional capacitation, empowerment, social networks

I. Framework

A. *The Social Network Programme (SNP)*

The recognition of the existence of important local solidarity networks, often at the base of the structure of Portuguese society and how it is organized to respond to individual and collective problems, led to the creation of the Social Network Programme, with the main purpose of contributing to the eradication of poverty and social exclusion and to promote local development.

The legal framework of the Social Network Programme was initially carried out by the Council of Ministers Resolution (CMR) no. 197/97 of November 18th [1] which established and implemented the Social Network Programme in 41 pilot municipalities, and now, by Decree-Law 115/2006 (DL), of June 14th [2], that after five years established a harmonization of the operation models and of the planning processes in Portugal.

Following the CMR, the DL reaffirms the importance of the social planning of local character, as well as its relationship with local planning instruments - such as the Municipal Director Plan - and national - in particular, the National Action Plan for Inclusion (PNAI) and the National Plan for Equality (PNI), among others - and with the partnership work.

In this sense, the aim of the Social Network is: "(...) to build a new type of partnership between public and private entities, acting in the same territories, based on equality between partners, respect for knowledge, identity, potentialities and intrinsic values of each, sharing, participation and collaboration, in order to reaching consensus of objectives, coordination of actions developed by the various local agents, and optimization of endogenous and exogenous resources to the territory." [2]. Based on this principles, the Social Network Programme intends to promote a more effective and efficient response to the concrete problems that arise in territories, because it presuppose and intervention more direct, and without the creation of new bodies or the increase of significant expenses.

The SNP proposes a change in the methodology of the interventions of professionals, promoting interaction between public and private institutions and between populations, between top-down and bottom-up conceptions of how society should be organized. To this end, Barabási [3] states that is "(...) increasingly recognized that nothing occurs alone. Many events and phenomena are found connected, are caused by a range of other pieces of a complex universal puzzle and interact with them. We began to realize that we live in a small world, where everything is linked together to everything. We are witnessing a revolution in the way scientists from all different disciplines discover that complexity has a strict architecture. We started to realize the importance of networks. ". In short, the network intervention is assumed as a springboard processes of local social development because it facilitates the articulation of social interventions in different areas, based on a strategic and integrated planning that intends aims to achieve consensus and co-accountable in those who participate in local actions [4].

Accordingly to Castro [5], the importance of this programme and its implementation in Portuguese municipalities rests on the fact that they constitute an innovative tool and act as facilitator of the operationalization of active social policies, to the extent that the promotion of the Social Development Plans (and Social Diagnosis) in an multidimensional and integrated territorial basis, fosters not only complementary, coordination and adaptation policies nationwide to local problems and needs, but it also promotes the mobilization and coordination of a broad partnership and participation of the target population of the programs and projects of social intervention that concern them, in a logic of empowerment.

B. The CQIMLSN Project

As we state earlier [6] it is based on these main ideas that the project “Capacitate to Qualification and Innovation in Minho-Lima Social Networks” (CQIMLSN) arises, within a logic of promoting local development that must be designed from integrated planning dynamics in the totality of Minho-Lima territory (constituted by ten territorial municipalities) and its Municipal Social Networks (MSN). The main goal of the CQIMLSN Project was (and still is) to work with the teams responsible for the municipal plans, seeking to find and establish a balance between them, promoting the exchange of experiences, dissemination of good practices, harmonization of work methods, according to a more innovative and entrepreneurial perspective, in order to create common languages that facilitate cooperation and joint work in a municipal and supra-municipal perspective.

To achieve this end, the CQIMLSN project intervention has been developed in five different actions (Fig 1.):

1) Assessment and Action Plan

The first action of the project was conducted by the application of semi-structured interviews and Focus Group to the agents of local political power and the executive nucleus (NE's) of the ten MSN, in order to obtain a more clear knowledge 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 of activities for the proper development of it, and it was the basis for the implantation of actions 2, 3 and 4.

2) Capacitation for Analysis

Based on the assessment conducted in action 1, the methodology and the contents of this activity, has been established. The next chapter of this paper presents this activity in a more developed way.

3) Capacitation for Intervention

The responsibility for this action that aims to strengthen the capacity and articulate intervention and management of local and regional institutional tissue in the social field and create and promote a regional platform for social entrepreneurship is of one of the promoters of the project (IN.CUBO)

For this, an mapping of entrepreneurial initiatives in the 3rd sector through a study conducted by the Institute for Social Entrepreneurship and is, at the present, being created a scholarship of social initiatives and support the entrepreneur.

FIGURE 1 PROJECT ACTIONS AND OBJECTIVES



4) Prospective Planning Platform

It is in development an 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).

The main idea of this action is to create synergies and constant updating of the information available 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 MSN, in regarding some supporting documentation for the construction of strategic documents.

The development and construction of this system was (and is) being carried out by the informatics department of the Polytechnic Institute of Viana do Castelo, always in partnership with the Project Team and the MSN professionals (available in www.altominhoemrede.pt).

5) Monitoring and Reporting

In order to promote the motorization of the actions and initiatives of the project and publicizing it (ie. in the media), this action is transversal and follows the entire project development. It is also accompanied by the Monitoring Committee, the Project Team and the Rapporteur Expert.

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.

As already stated, in this paper, however, we will focus in the second action (“Capacitation for Analysis”) in which was promoted the involvement of all stakeholders (from planning to the operation of the project), for the use of participatory methodologies to be applied in strategic planning documents (Social Diagnosis and Social Development Plans) based in an capacitation logic (and not consulting). Nevertheless, it must be understood that all the actions were structured in a complementarity basis.

II. Capacitation Intervention

Based on the principles of the national SNP, in the goals of this project, and in the results of the assessment action [6] this action intended to provide specific training to the social and human sciences professionals responsible for the implementation of the MSN, and consequently for the construction of the strategic documents, especially 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 that optimize their intervention and focus also on developing new approaches to social and local populations and regions.

These actions, however, were not structured in an isolated manner. Throughout the development of the project, in a recursive and dialectical relationship between theory and practice, training workshops were developed with the professionals, always complemented by collective meetings for experiences and problems sharing and effective monitoring by the project team to MSN. Fig. 2 shows, graphically, the methodology defined for the professional training of MSW

A. Participatory Strategic Planning Workshops

In order to increase knowledge, skills, and ensuring the acquisition of specific tools in participatory methodologies, were developed training workshops for the professionals on:

- Strategic and operational planning based on participatory methodologies (6 workshops);
- Collaborative work in document production network (2 workshops);
- Personal and organizational terms – coaching (3 workshops);
- Facilitation: network management processes (2 workshops)

With the accomplishment of these capacitation activities was possible to consolidate knowledge and skills in terms of strategic planning tools (problem identification, Eisenhower Model, Logical Framework Matrix and GANTT Operational Plan) as well as deconstruct the feeling of insecurity for the mobilization of joint strategic planning instruments in practical contexts.

In the course of these workshops were identified and overcome several training needs and encouraged the construction of DS and PDS simultaneously. Because of the number of professionals involved in the executive nucleus of the MSN, has been decided that the capacitation workshops

FIGURE 2 CAPACITATION METHODOLOGY



were directed to two professionals from each municipality team (focal points). These professionals, usually representatives of the City Hall and of the Social Security Institute were also the ones with more time assigned to this programme.

B. Collective Meetings

After each group of workshops stated above meetings were held to monitor and follow up the construction of the Social Diagnosis and Social Development Plan. In these meetings we proceeded to a sharing of experiences, capabilities and constraints inherent to the construction of strategic documents, in particular with regard to the implementation of participatory methodologies.

C. Individual Monitoring

In addition to the strategies mentioned above (collective meetings and workshops, the project team also developed various follow-up activities from each individual municipal team, besides also ensured the availability of a comprehensive set of information needed for the preparation of strategic documents (collection of general statistical data, for example).

These activities were aimed at the guidance on the collection of other elements specific indicators (territorial or local) in every territory, in reaching consensus on the structure and content of Diagnostics Social and Social Development Plans, and to promote awareness of local stakeholders (political, technical and local/regional entities) and the negotiation and resolution/minimization of the constraints of the professionals in relation to the work of the social network.

With these activities was also possible to meet the needs identified at assessment (action one), but also to those that took place in the training process itself, having been kept constant contact and on-going support to the MSN, according to the general plan and in response to specific requests.

III. Conclusion

The methodology used for the capacitation of the professionals has enabled a strengthening of strategies to mobilize skills in the practical context of collecting information for the creation of participatory strategic documents, and the consensual structure of these documents and their construction in strong linkage.

It was also possible predict the integration of action and diagnostic evaluation in the Social Development Plans, embodied by the proposed construction of a matrix of this document.

We also believe in the necessity of the continuity of the collective moments (inter-networks) and individual sharing, in order not only to overcome the constraints that arise from the practical application of knowledge and skills acquired in the capacitation processes, but also as a strategy for strengthening of confidence of the professionals, as well as the inter-network, must assume, even because this is based in a national basis programme with a focus on strategic planning and in order to consolidate this work culture in the MSN, the continuity in monitoring and capacitation of the professionals.

As a final note, just mention that all this work has enabled the structuring of these strategic documents in all municipalities of the territory of the Minho-Lima, with an incidence of common time, and is the basis of building a social diagnosis and a supra-municipal action plan, combining the logic of social intervention already structured in municipal level, as well as the needs that still exist at this level, will enable an integrated action at territorial level as well as better and more efficient management of existing resources, always starting from this perspective of "bottom-up" participatory planning and intervention.

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