Between Global and Local: Adult Learning and Development

António Fragoso (Portugal), Emilio Lucio-Villegas (Spain) and Ewa Kurantowicz (Poland)

if you wish to send your comments please use aalmeida@ualg.pt

Until the end of the Second World War, space and all the problems around it were relatively ignored by the majority of the researchers. The first conceptions on the importance of space emerged associated with the first concepts of planned development, within the framework of the modernisation paradigm, and influenced by its major premises. It is therefore natural that economic growth was one of the major concerns then. The only problem frequently considered was the particular forms of the projection of economic growth through spaces, which led to clear regional inequalities. So regions, for instance, were seen by the State mainly as a problem that asked for palliative policies (Benko, 1999).

However, the 50s saw the emergence of community development. Outside Europe, mainly in colonial contexts or in countries facing transitions towards independence, community development was widely promoted – and hence, an immense number of definitions were established, often by the colonial administrations, as one can see in Rodriguéz (1970). These models of community development aimed at social control and at preventing social desegregation in the hard transitions from colonial regimes to independence. It was in this climate that community development emerged – not as an attempt to promote people's emancipation or autonomy, characteristics that appeared later, in a different phase characterised by its radicalism.

As McClenaghan (1999) states, and still in the context of modernisation, in Western countries community development was mainly seen as a way of promoting social integration in the dimension of economic growth. It developed as a learning process that established relations and values which rested on the transitions from community to forms of social cohesion, characterised by individual rights and a growing labour division. Thus community development was mainly an instrument adequate to participate in the fundamental ideals of modernisation.

Until the 70's, modernisation had dictated what was development and what was not. Mainstream concepts of development not only excluded «third world countries» from a development based on (the) modern science and technology, but also contributed to the creation of a specific image of non-western countries: backwards and shameful zones of the globe. In these countries there was a major task, to escape the shame of «underdevelopment». To «help» them in their task, the pitiful system of international aid was created, with the results which we are all aware of. The premises were terribly simple, following the ideas of, for instance, Rostow (2000 [1960]), who believed that all human societies followed the same stages of evolution despite their obvious differences. Marxist authors like Paul Baran, Andre Gunder Frank or Hobsbawm reacted violently against this, as we can see, for instance, in Baran and Hobsbawm (1969). But the theories of dependency, very important to theory and to demystify the character of the claimed generosity of first world countries, was never put to practice, especially because all ended with the need for a socialist revolution to emend the already suspicious paths of development.

At this moment, however, we intend to stress that community development was never an alternative to mainstream global tendencies. On the contrary, community development, far away from every notions of liberation, participated and quietly kept to the *status quo*. This first «phase» of community development programmes arose, in summary, as particularly centralised instruments of government action, based on attempts to promote actions of development strongly characterised by its technical dimensions. In Africa, the colonial potencies were the first ones to

embrace it. In Asia, India was the first country to lead a big national plan and some years later, Afghanistan, Pakistan, China and Korea followed. According to Nogueiras (1996), similar programmes were organised in South America, with different formats following context specificities: some focused on popular participation (Colombia and Peru), some on land reform (Venezuela, Brazil, Bolivia) or still others on assisting marginalised groups (Argentina, Uruguay, Chile). Some of these projects were, therefore, very different and tried to put people and their needs in first place. So, in a certain perspective, it was already clear that community development could both be radical or conservative (Mayo, 1994): radical if improving citizen's decision-making through participation; conservative when local conditions were kept to its usual patterns of power distribution without confronting the *status quo*.

The critiques and suspicions towards some of these concepts and practices of community development increased over the years (some defended its abandoning) and it was necessary to wait for the final crisis of modernisation to set new patterns of evolution. Not only because modernisation was collapsing during the 70's, but also because this crisis represented the failures of the simplistic models of economies interpretation. But as Reis (1988) states, crises are felt predominantly at the local levels, where the specific problems are translated into human feelings, and where populations are harshly affected by mainstream development trends. The development perspectives based solely on economic dimensions, ignoring the voice of the people and abandoning numerous territories to the consequences of up-down models that deepened the gap between rich and poor and that condemned huge areas of the planet to privation, began to be harshly criticised. So, the urgency of separate economic growth from development, both in conceptual or practical terms, deeply questioned the political and technical instruments in use. Also in the decade of the 70's, the territorialist paradigm (Friedman and Weaver, 1979) appeared as an intentional means of resistance against the movements of capitalism, internationalisation and the growing dominium of corporations. This paradigm focused on peoples' needs and on the internal potentialities and resources of the territories, trying to engage people in these processes. It would represent a gradual process of emancipation structured around local problems and fundamentally based on the social learning conveyed by looking at these problems as opportunities for development. Synthesising, this was a period of clear radicalisation of discourses, policies and practices of development. From the poorer countries were born several types of social and educational alternatives to what was considered the Western economic domination. Paulo Freire, for instance, gave his valuable contributions in this sense.

The 80's brought new evolutions in the European context. In some countries, the expression "local development" began to be used, especially in France after the 1981 de-centralisation laws. In 1982 the birth of local development was being proclaimed in rural spaces (Coulmin, 1986) at the same time as when social development in urban areas was being institutionalised (Mengin and Masson, 1989). The positive experiences in France greatly influenced other southern European countries like Portugal, and in a certain sense, Spain. In other countries, however, local development has other types of connotations. There are zones where community development is still used; others where the focus remains on community regeneration, particularly in the zones where economy decay, massive unemployment, etc., marked the social scenario.

In countries with enormous differences between the coastal / in-land zones (or urban / rural zones) projects and programmes were directed to the attempts at regenerating rural areas, in most cases using territorial approaches and putting participation around learning processes at the core of the action, pointing towards the emancipation of people. These methodologies of grassroots-based work highlighted the importance of learning processes within integrated development processes, taken as a wide range concept. Learning was crucial not only at school, but also as everyday life experience, in professional training, in non-formal programmes to promote job creation, as a need to update professional competences in labour contexts, and

finally in all the types of social learning which aimed to transform people into active citizens, capable of organising, planning and imagining desirable futures for their spaces, places, neighbourhoods and so on. On a different level, learning is fundamental in Freire's terms (1987, 1997) in literacy processes taken as the capacities for interpreting the world, with the possibilities of triggering «conscientisation» processes that restore the people's ability to act and try to improve their world.

Across the 80s and 90s, globalisation played a significant role in changing development paths. Globalisation of production, particularly in the hands of big corporations, was one of the noticeable changes in these decades. Fröbel *et al.* (1980) stressed a new division of labour in which the production could disaggregate in segments that can be placed in whatever part of the world offering the most profitable combinations of capital and labour. The issue was later followed up by several authors like Beck (2000), noticing the consequences of it in terms of reduction of power of the Nation-State: the changes from a territorial State towards forms of regulation and control that now do not stand within the geographic borders of the Nations. The multiplicity of social circles and relations, communication networks or market relations, none of which are rooted in a determined space literally across a great number of Nation-States.

The annihilation of the space through time, noted and studied by a number of authors, had its impacts on local communities where space is still an important issue. As pointed out by Bauman (1998), if on the one hand, electronic communication has released elites from space, then on the other hand, space is still important in local communities, as the places of public meeting represent by nature *locus* of creation of systems of norms and values. This new asymmetry damages the abilities of such communities to question the decisions that do affect their everyday life and, ultimately, shape their destiny. All over the world, these places gradually seem to lose their autonomy, leading to the feeling that despite the reinvention of the local conveyed by globalisation itself (Robertson, 1995), global tendencies cast their webs to arrest communities in patterns of social and economic reproduction inadequate in modern times. The speed of societal transitions has deepened the tensions between tradition and modernisation. Too many places lack continuous solutions that could help people in these transitions, resulting in hybrid normative systems where both traditional and modern values and norms still function (Medeiros, 1988).

The globalisation phenomena, summarising, caused a reaction at micro-development policies level, in its agents and planners, so that local action was for a period seen as an act of resistance: against a hegemonic and unfair neo-liberalism that increasingly excluded more people; against new notions of market now emerging as the main regulation principle of societies (not as a simple instrument resulting from other economic and social factors); or against the visible fear of losing cultural identities, especially in the cases of millions of small communities from now on with little chance of regeneration. In some southern European countries, it was clear that the specific concepts and practices of micro-development were influenced by this movement of intentional resistance mixed with some crystallised positive utopias, as we can see, for instance, in Melo (1995, 1999).

Neo-liberalism printed additional changes in micro-development policies and practices. In a general climate of State retraction continuously supported in the arguments for lowering state expenses – that in the period of modernisation, when a number of countries constructed systems of Welfare, grew intensely – the former responsibilities of the State were almost literally discharged on to the citizens – whether we call it civil society or, as Santos (1990) has been defending, a kind of hidden expansion of the State. That is to say, it is very convenient for neo-liberal policies that organised citizens provide services that the State itself no longer can provide. The additional advantage is that the solutions often are cheap and do not count at all on public investment. So, local and regional activities promoted by a multitude of institutions of different

natures are welcomed, provided that there are neither demands for public financing nor demands to recognise the public interest of such activities.

It is true that some major EU programmes cropped up, like LEADER, which allowed the more deprived regions of some European countries to develop a number of projects. But even financing programmes can define or constrain from scratch the possibilities of the actions taking place. For instance, it is a fact that LEADER I was an open programme that allowed local action groups to define their projects according to people's needs and according to the diagnosis made in the field. LEADER II was much more closed, and LEADER Plus has a theme (!) and well defined quotas previously defined in Brussels, later distributed by the national offices. The action groups receive without any possibility of questioning the specific number for the specific actions that can develop in the field – regardless of the real needs of the inhabitants of the territories they work with. In such conditions, it is (to say the least) a challenge to creativity to discover ways in which to concretise development activities that truly begin by taking into account people's interests, whether we speak of small rural areas, of urban neighbourhoods or of more ambitious regional development plans.

There are also major shifts in the meanings attributed to participation. Rahnema (1999: 117-120) points out that:

1. The concept of participation is no longer conceived as a threat. In the past, there was a big potential for shaking the *status quo* through the demands for a wider participation of citizens in the life of societies. But governments and institutions have learned to control the risks of the unpredictable results of participation.

2. Participation has become a very attractive / politically correct slogan.

3. Participation is converted into an attractive proposition, even from the economic point of view. In fact, through participation and self-aid, some of the real costs of development projects can be displaced to the poorer. Even the World Bank has shown that the poor are more reliable «clients» than the rich, especially if organised in small participative contexts – and if we need examples we can look at micro-credit experiences all over the world.

4. Participation is viewed as an instrument to achieve an increased efficacy and new sources of investment. Participative projects, in fact, represent opportunities to avoid some common mistakes of the past, for several reasons: *i)* they have brought a more precise knowledge about social reality, away from the perceptions of bureaucrats and some technicians; *ii)* contributed to the construction of networks, essential to the long-term success of investments; *iii)* opened doors to organisations that cooperate in micro-contexts, giving an additional meaning to the effects of partnerships.

The fact that we fully agree that citizen's participation is fundamental for a certain struggle against the effects of hegemonic models of development, does not prevent us from looking at the contradictory meanings of participation today. First, because it is relatively easy to co-opt such concepts. Second, because the citizens' growing participation serves the interest of a shrinking, non-providing State.

But throughout the decade of the 90s we learned immensely with some of the experiences we had, not only in the realm of participation, but perhaps mainly as contributions to new forms of participative democracy. The most popular ones are indeed the participative budget of Porto Alegre (Avritzer, 2003) or the political contours for a participative democracy in Kerala, India (Heller and Isaac, 2003).

The case of Porto Alegre that began in 1989 is impressive not only for the existing structure being simultaneously complex while simple in the main principles that guide it, but also for the dissemination effects it conveyed. The participative budget brought us some new facts

and left us with much to think on. Here we can briefly mention just a few, using Santos (2003) as a major guide to put forward our own reflections: *i)* it is possible for a big population to control a budget; *ii)* it is possible to construct a participative structure on a large scale, a very important fact because in one way or another we have been repeating that only in small communities or micro-contexts is it possible to do it; *iii)* we can combine elements of representative democracy with elements of direct democracy; and *iv)* in participative structures the collective is, in fact, the fundamental unity (as Boaventura de Sousa Santos showed, it is almost impossible that an individual citizen could be elected for the several forums existing within the structure of participative budget).

Although this could seem a detour, it is undeniable that these – and other – experiences had a big influence in the field of development in its multiple scales. For years "act local, think global" meant basically that agents of development acted locally and that everybody had tremendous difficulties in whatever scales of global coordination. But if processes of change like Kerala or Porto Alegre were possible to build, maybe it's time to fight for more creative, innovative activities than can, in its multiple contexts and scales, better the quality of life of people and offer them a hope for the future.

For us, participation is a strong and central value that must be present in the development processes, whether we speak of communities, spaces, regions, etc. That was one of the reasons that led us to propose that more important than to clearly define the differences between the multiplicity of concepts in development, is to build new concepts as Participatory Development (Fragoso, 2005). Vertical models or experiences, which do not include people's participation, can be labelled as many things… but not as development.

There are, of course, a number of characteristics that can be pointed out for micro-concepts of development. Some of them would be geographical and cultural biased, we are sure of it. Our intention is to include and not to force others to accept our suggestions. That being the case, we are going to stress only a few of these characteristics:

1. *The transversal adult learning that must be present in development*. In fact, if development is to be participative, then it has to involve large social sectors around the specific problems and needs of people. In other words, community problems are taken as a departure point for action (Reszohazy, 1988), and to achieve this, organisation is fundamental. Also important is to promote a process designed in a way that citizens can really participate, and this itself is a major social learning process. The collective building of formal or informal groups that can take actions to promote the desirable future for their communities implies a social learning process. But development activities often need to change people's technical abilities or competences. Very frequently it is necessary to help people with harsh life histories: living in deprived areas, with low levels of literacy and high levels of unemployment; some belonging to minorities, politically and socially crushed in their national contexts, some used to be considered as leftovers of a society that proudly despises their knowledge or their culture. In all these cases, learning has a fundamental function. All development activities must therefore include learning processes that can be very different: concerning the institutions that provide it, the social actors who participate in it, in the cultural settings that produced it, in the levels of formality of the learning processes present, etc. Several authors have been repeatedly saying that development in its micro-scales has to be seen as educational processes, in which several forms of learning are present (Ander-Egg, 1982, Melo, 1988, Nogueiras, 1996, Nunes and Hoven, 1996, Rothes, 1998, Santos Silva, 1990, Twelvetrees (1991). In short, we can not conceive of development activities without learning processes.

2. *Social change* in development can be considered basically at two different levels of analysis. First, we cannot consider a process as development if it does not trigger changes (Amaro, 1998, Santos Silva, 2000, Taylor, 1993), which can be social and implying some type of

power re-distribution, or can also be economical, cultural, etc. In this sense, one of the main research tasks in development would be to study the several changes triggered by processes of community, local or regional development. But all micro-contexts are a part of a bigger world. That is to say, that global tendencies, mainstream paradigms of development or patterns of today's social evolution, all influence more local trends. It is very common, for instance, that through research we can «capture» the tensions between tradition and modernity. And it is possible, or even desirable, to analyse smaller social realities integrated within global patterns which can provide further interpretations to the cases we study.

3. The *endogenous dynamics* of development. Traditional views on the endogenous character of development point out that dynamics of development should start with the ones who live in a certain territory. In other words, community and local social actors should initiate or promote development processes. Both Melo (1988) and Vachon (2000) state that most of the times external initiation is necessary; the central fact will be the appropriation of the process by community or local actors (relegating to a secondary place the issue of who did initiate the process), that should control and decide its paths and evolutions. For us, it is very clear that development processes should be promoted where they are most needed. Frequently this means to focus on deprived areas, marginalised populations and so on. So it would be strange that such people would show a spontaneous drive towards social change. A substantial part of our research shows that deprived populations have lost the capacity for fighting for change through complex and long historical processes, often accompanied by an incapacity for reproducing social and cultural patterns fundamental to people's identity, usually along with severe breaks in the economic structure of regions. In this sense, we think that one of the important tasks and functions of development is to restore the people's lost capacity for acting towards change.

If we want to include, in this network to be created, the multitude of policies, concepts and practices taking place all over Europe, it is important to be sensitive to the cultural meanings to be present or to the several research trends. We should be interested then: in micro-development activities whether we call it local development, community development, community regeneration, urban or rural development, and so forth…); in regional development and regional planning; in the importance of the learning spaces; in the complex relationships between local and global tendencies; in the influences that globalisation phenomena and its impacts have on the community level; and especially, we should look at it within the frameworks of adult education and learning.

In this perspective, it seems that the network includes a number of dimensions that need to be subjected to a process of selection. That is to say, we need to establish some priorities. We suggest that the several scientific meetings can do this, pointing out more specific themes. But to close the range of interests right now seems equivalent to attending to the particular interests of some, and to condemn the network to failure. Its own future dynamics and evolutions will naturally stress some priorities…

Concluding, we think that the general mission of this network should be:

- Promote a critical amount of research on development across Europe.
- Encourage research on the several scales and context of development, including territorial/ micro-scale approaches, urban and rural studies, regenerating communities, learning places and spaces, regional development and planning, etc.
- Support research on the theory and practice of development in a critical perspective, looking at people's participation and emancipation as important values to keep.
- Analyse the central role of adult learning in the processes of development.

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