Local Development Evaluation - A Methodological Proposal

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Abstract

The absence of the evaluation of local development in academic literature reflects the lack of debate at present, but also the need for analysis of evaluation proposals and models. This article aims to present the results of recent research work in this field, seeking to contribute to the debate around the evaluation of local development. Through exploratory interviews with 20 key informants with links to Animar - Portuguese Association for Local Development as the representative entity of Social Economy in Portugal, its analysis resulted in a "political-administrative space" of evaluation and the local development evaluation, a methodological proposal of an evaluation proposal with 7 dimensions of analysis and 37 indicators. It is concluded that the evaluation of local development based on the proposed model generates a set of possibilities, by contributing to a local diagnosis through the auscultation of the entities of the social economy sector.

Key Words: Local Development; Social Economy; Evaluation

1. Introduction

In a world of constant transformation and change, a world in which everything seeks to be measurable, from economic and social action to environmental impacts, international, community and national policy measures all require rigour and constant, transparent and factual evaluation. Thus, if it is necessary to evaluate and measure, to analyse the results of policies and their impacts, and if local development is established as an objective in so many community and national policy measures, it is easy to question "why" local development is absent from the spaces of evaluation. In this way, it runs the risk of becoming a phenomenon diluted in the discourse and in politics, with no room for affirmation.

The problem faced by the researchers was the lack of debate and proposals to analyse and evaluate "local development", referenced in the field of community and national policies. This need demanded a theoretical and sociological deepening in the field of development, as well as the elaboration of a proposal of an evaluation matrix for exploration, experimentation and analysis, based on the research assumptions.

Based on the premise that "it is through research that the problems born in practice are reflected upon and problematized, that the debate is raised and innovative ideas are built" (Coutinho, 2011, p. 7), for this doctoral thesis a methodological design was constructed framed by the need to respond to the starting question: "Is the exercise of evaluation of

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local development, according to the perspective that the Animar Association has been consolidating, possible to implement by listening to social economy entities? If the social economy entities have a set of principles enshrined in Article 5(f) of the Basic Law of Social Economy of 2013 of May 8th, which frame their line of action, and in which they contribute to the local development of the territories, the answer to this question allowed an analysis of whether the perception of social economy entities can evaluate local development based on the matrix that is presented as a proposal.

The first assumption had as a point of analysis to understand local development as a critical and alternative proposal to the capitalist and neo-liberal based development model, from its political value, inscribed in various documents of national and community relevance. The second assumption understood local development and the civil society entities that implement it within the framework of the social economy in Portugal, as they are covered by Article 4(f) of the Basic Law of Social Economy, previously referred to, and are thus attributed a set of principles that place them within the mission to contribute to the general interest, through "pursuing the interests of their members, users and beneficiaries, when socially relevant". The third assumption suggests that as Animar - Associação Portuguesa para o Desenvolvimento Local is the representative entity of local development within the social economy in Portugal, it would make perfect sense for the social economy entities framed by this association to naturally become the object of analysis of the research.

2. Literature Revision

Development is a phenomenon strongly studied in the field of social sciences, with a dominant discourse associated with economic growth and of capitalist nature, and of wealth generation, defended by Smith (1996), Marx (1974) and Ricardo (1982) having prevailed. However, it should be noted that other authors defend perspectives linked to organisations, the market and the economic sociology proposed by Swedberg (2003), as well as in the relationship with public institutions (Rodrik, 1999), up to the perspective of Sen (2000), by defending development associated with the dimension of freedom. Many authors have explored this concept and their concern with community changes as they are affected by development, such as Nunes (1968), by suggesting the existence of behavioural changes, a position which currently takes on greater clarity with the speed with which changes occur and behaviours change.

The idea of development associated with anthropocentrism, humanity as the dominant being of the planet's natural resources, through a selfish rationality defended by Amaro (2004), and previously pointed out by neoclassical authors, as characteristics in the face of a homo economicus resource explorer, gave rise to a wider debate of development and around the unsustainability of the dominant development model. On the other hand, the idea of sustainability associated with degrowth recovers the importance of the experience and ancestry of peoples and their cultures in their relationship with the planet from Latouche (2009).

It is this idea of conflict or opposition to the dominant development model that, between the defence of sustainable development and the actions of community development, in the search to respond to local problems, in other words, in the search for an alternative development, that directs the theoretical deepening of research to the field of common interest, or "common home", proposed by Francisco (2015) based through local communities, which are interdependent on the development of humanity understood in its entirety.

This idea of multidimensional, interdependent and singular sustainability in the face of the territory of development assigns to the local the need to envision development as a mission that must be integrated in planning, systemic in action and holistic in vision, a proposal resumed and defended in the continuity of the study.

Local is a symbolic community space, debatable and with a multiplicity of variables that poses serious obstacles to its clear and evident definition when associated with development. In this study, the option for associating it with the political and administrative dimension of action and implementation of the universe of policies (Seabra, 1993), recognises on the other hand, the necessary sense of belonging and identity (Ferreira & Guerra, 1993). The sharing of cultural references of an identity through the valorisation of endogenous resources and the capacity of the parties involved to negotiate and enhance them in favour of local development, requires a territorial and symbolic proximity between the parties involved and the governance structures. This position guided the study, in the sense of opting for low density municipalities, as territories which, due to their geographic and demographic characteristics, are favourable to the dynamics of proximity between the parties involved and the structures of governance.

It is in the understanding of Ruivo (1993) and also of the Animar Association that this option is reinforced, as it is considered that it is in the governance of the local area, as a territory of political management of the local authorities, that the rules and mechanisms are established where the conditions for local development to take place are built. It is in this broader community sphere, among different parties involved, whether at a political, social and business level, that, based on their dialogue and interests, the local development process can be strengthened (Daniel, 2002).

Thus, in the relationship between the structure of governance, rules, mechanisms, policies and the subjective dimension of the territories associated with the participation and citizenship of the people, and the inseparable relationship between development and democracy, which are privileged informants in the exploratory phase of the study, in the search for a greater understanding of the relationship between these and local development. One of the concerns that reinforces this position is the imbalance of these relations, by emptying the role of participatory democracy and social economy entities, as they are appropriated by the state and merely seen as service providers (Dias, 2011) or extensions of public administration.

Local development cannot be understood as a policy, but rather as a process of interdependent relations between influencing factors, and multidimensional that seeks integrated approaches. From this perspective, there are dimensions that are assumed to be relevant for the evaluation of development and for the exploratory phase of the study.

When proposing the evaluation of local development, the economic, social and environmental dimensions appear naturally related to the concept, as well as the cultural dimension, due to the community identity it assumes in the place where it is materialised. These are dimensions which, related to the necessary participation of the people in their communities, require a governance component which should be framed as an evaluation dimension and key for the analysis of local development. It is in this perspective that the exercise of participation and democracy is particularly relevant to favour the "process" as development.

Another dimension that was considered pivotal for exploration in the evaluation matrix refers us to the educational dimension (Fernandes, 1996), that which allows emancipation (Albino, 2004) and the development of a critical posture of the community regarding its position in the location and its role as promoter of change.

Local development emerges in the weaknesses and fears felt by the advance of the global development movement, which has given rise to serious economic, social, environmental and cultural problems of great significance for territories that do not fit into the characteristics and determinants that the neo-liberal model has capitalised on for the logics of development associated with economic growth. It is in the alternative dimension of this model that the Animar Association proposes to defend local development, as an alternative to the capitalisation of the economy, as a priority dimension of development. On the other hand, it is also the dimension of governance, or in other words, the role of the local parties involved in their community, and the cooperation between the structures of power and the exercise of citizenship, which reinforces participative democracy and the search for participative governing agendas for development (Silveira and Reis, 2003).

By insisting on citizenship and participation, the organisation of civil society and the formal structures representing its interests emerge. It is in this context that the universe of the social economy and its organisations emerge as potential listening entities for assessing local development. These, due to their characteristics and principles, prioritise people and the common interests of the communities where they operate, to the detriment of the legitimate economic interests of business entities. It is these entities that the Animar Association represents, defending new models of relationship, participation and collective decision based on partnership and collaboration dynamics, opposing the dominant and hierarchical posture of governance of the territories, proposing a community and local based development as a facilitating process of change (Amaro et. al., 2004; Albino, 2004) and of social transformation for the integral development of the territories.

3. Epistemological Framework

The methodology proposed follows the line of Alain Touraine's theory of action (1984) which suggests that collective action is the object of study of the sociologist. In this study we sought to understand the collective perception of the social economy organisations and we also proposed to deepen the perception of the social movements, considering that the researcher is not a distant observer but rather a mediator between the social movement and the militant group, understood by ideological action (Guerra, 2000). According to Fortin et al. (2009), the path of constructing the sustaining empirical design of an investigation is not complete without presenting the hypotheses sustaining the investigative procedures. The hypotheses are the indispensable means for understanding the phenomenon under analysis to the extent that they are assumed as potential suggestions for explaining the facts under study, resulting from propositions as also advocated by Pocinho (2012).

In an attempt to clarify the concept "hypothesis" Fortin et al. (2009), refer that it is a "formal statement about the anticipated relationships between variables" (p. 166). Through this definition, it is understood that the construction of research hypotheses presupposes the existence of a relationship between the independent variables and the dependent variables. They are also, and to the same extent, a proposed relationship between concepts or phenomena (Quivy and Campenhoudt, 1988) which, in the case at hand, taking the hypothetico-deductive body that underpins the present research, results in two fundamental assertions, from which the following hypothesis proposals were built for verification:

HYPOTHESIS H1 - The evaluation of local development in a territory is influenced by the type of legal nature of the social economy entity;

HYPOTHESIS H2 - evaluation of local development in a territory is influenced by certain organizational characteristics of social economy entities.

After these phases, a model/matrix was constructed to serve as an instrument for evaluating local development in a territory, requiring a geographical delimitation for subsequent experimental testing. The researchers, through theoretical assumptions and by listening to the privileged informants through interviews, opted for techniques which were capable of guaranteeing an analytical, qualitative and quantitative approach in the exploratory phase of the study, followed by the use of the questionnaire, as a quantitative approach, which allowed the study hypotheses to be evaluated and, on the other hand, verified.

After the structuring phase of the methodological design and after the construction of the theoretical and conceptual body of the study, it was understood that the interviews would be the methodological option that best met the need to listen to the experts with a view to producing knowledge, thus providing the first part of the investigative methodology with a qualitative and quantitative nature, insofar as it favours the emphasis on the representations and perceptions of the interviewees.

Thus, a theoretical-empirical framework of analysis was built which would enable the construction of a first proposal of an evaluation matrix and its assessment by privileged informants using interviews. Their results and respective interpretation are reflected in a second evaluation matrix that advanced to exploratory testing in three territories, through questionnaire surveys.

The exploratory approach started with listening the specialists already referred to, designated as privileged informants, in order to deepen their beliefs, opinions, attitudes, representations and values, regarding the phenomenon under study. Together with them, we sought to analyse the perception of a proposal for the evaluation of local development, which would simultaneously enable the redefinition of hypotheses.

In the construction of the interview, the choice was made to present five semi-directive questions, and oriented in their sequence and in the search for content, allowing the informant to respond based on "their value systems, their normative references, their interpretations of conflicting or non-conflicting situations, their readings of their own experiences, among others" (Pocinho, 2012, p.98). The interviews were conducted by sending the interview script to each of the respondents, and their answers were requested

between February and March 2020, via email in Word format or editable pdf. The interviews were directed to 30 informants, based on 5 defined profiles, seeking a balance of response by informant gender. The approach together with the informants was duly reasoned, through previous contacts, trying to increase the "good will" of the interviewee, and therefore, to create a more cooperative attitude by highlighting the importance of their expertise for the researcher (Hill & Hill, 2002). In a universe of 30 informants who were asked to respond, as shown in figure 8, a sample of 20 responses was obtained within the defined deadline, which represents a percentage of 66.6% of responses, and the same number of responses according to gender, thus creating the conditions for the research to move forward.

PRIVILEGED INFORMANTS	INVITED INFORMANTS		INFORMANTS WHO	
			RESPONDED	
INFORMANT PROFILE	Н	Μ	Н	Μ
ANIMAR MANAGER	2	4	2	2
LEADERS ANIMAR NETWORK	2	4	2	3
MAYOR/POLITICAL	4	1	2	1
RESPONSIBILITY				
ANIMAR TECHNICAL	1	4	1	4
ACADEMIC/INDIVIDUAL	7	1	3	0
ASSOCIATES				
TOTAL PER GENDER	16	14	10	10
TOTAL	30		20	

Figure ?? - Primary informants by gender and response

The type of sampling defined was chosen by convenience, identifying the privileged informant according to five defined profiles, where differentiated readings were sought, with a strategic base (leaders), political (mayors and former mayors), technical (Animar's technical team), and academic.

Once the problem, objectives and hypotheses were defined and, from a methodological point of view, the objective was to give this study a quantitative nature, which was considered preponderant for the analysis of the facts, the research design included the questionnaire survey data collection instrument, which is defined as a technique composed of a more or less large number of questions presented to participants in writing, with the purpose of knowing opinions, beliefs, feelings, interests, expectations, situations experienced, among others (Gil, 1995).

Data collection to organise the universe of social economy entities by municipality involved consulting the Social Charter database, the municipality's online portal and requesting data from local development associations in the respective municipality to collect email contacts. The universe represented 211 social economy entities in the totality of the municipality, 69 of which were considered invalid, as the contacts were returned. A valid universe of 142 entities was considered in its totality, 85 in Castelo Branco, 42 in Odemira and 15 in Montalegre. A sample of 18 (21%) entities in Castelo Branco, 13 (31%) in Odemira and 8 (53%) in Montalegre was obtained, an average of 35% of answers per municipality.

Municipality	Frequency	%
Montalegre	8	20,5
Odemira	13	33,3
Castelo Branco	18	46,2
Total	39	100

Figure 1 : Table of Frequency : Municipality



Figure 2: Methodological Design

4. Results

The analysis of the interviews allowed for the drawing of conclusions and guidelines considered fundamental for the reformulation of the evaluation matrix initially proposed. Starting from the simplification of the proposed concept, resulting from the analysis of the interviews to the first two questions, local development is understood "as a process of construction from the active and participative citizenship of a community and its resources, in the search for the resolution of problems or the leveraging of opportunities, contributing to changes that favour a greater integral development of its communities, built from the influence of structural factors and subjective dynamics associated to citizenship movements and community participation, interdependent among themselves.

The analysis of the proposed evaluation matrix resulted, essentially, in the collection of a set of indicators and reflections that enabled the review of the initial proposal, in its dimensions and indicators, allowing the presentation of the final proposal of the evaluation matrix.

ENVIRONMENTAL	CULTURAL	GOVERNANCE AND CITIZENSHIP	ECONOMIC	SOCIAL	TERRITORIAL	SOCIAL CHANGE
1.1.	2.1.	3.1.	4.1.	5.1	6.1	7.1
Environmental	Identity	Representative	Employment	Well-being	Location	Participation of children and
Quality	2.2	Democracy	opportunities	5.2	6.2	young people in school
1.2.	Material	3.2.	4.2. Opportunities	Social Cohesion	Access to Services	7.2
Biodiversity	heritage	Participatory Democracy	new enterprises	5.3	6.3	Participation of families in school
1.3.	2.3	3.3.	4.3.	Equality and	l Mobility	7.3.
Climate Change	Intangible	Decision Making	Entrepreneurship	Equity	6.4	
1.4.	Heritage	3.4.	4.4.	5.4.	Communications	Participation of children and young people in the
Environmental	2.4	Accountability	Working conditions	Gender Equality	6.5	young people in the community
Sustainability	Cultural Diversity	3.5	and remuneration	5.5	Settlement and	17.4.
2.5 Artistic	Citizen Participation 3.6.	4.5. Purchasing power	Social Justice	attraction of people	Social and business	
			5.6		innovation	
	production	Collaboration and Networking		Social Economy		7.5
		3.7.				Openness to difference and change
		Development Strategy				

Figure 3 : The methodological proposal - Summary of results

Since the need for the matrix to be flexible and adaptable to the evaluation territories was a concern and a proposal that emerged from the interviews, it was considered essential to include a question in the questionnaire that would allow the degree of importance of the dimensions to the development needs of the territory to be assessed in the "evaluation territory".

The last question allowed validating the initial proposal of testing the matrix to be implemented by municipalities as local development evaluation territories. This position is also reinforced by the relationship of influence between structural factors associated with the conditions that local power generates, and on the other hand, the action of the dynamics of participation and citizenship in that same territory. Although the definition of the territory resulted in various proposals, of which the "parishes" stand out due to their proximity to the communities, that is, with the dynamics of participation and citizenship, this possibility was discarded due to the difficulty of autonomy and governance, that is, the structural factors considered determinant for local development to take place. In this sense, it was considered to maintain the initial proposal, the municipality as fundamental, although the dimension of proximity with the communities was valued, or to propose low density municipalities as those that best meet the conditions for local development evaluation.

The application of the questionnaire survey aimed to respond to the second general research objective, to test the proposed local development evaluation matrix with social economy entities in three low density municipalities and, as a specific objective, to verify the study hypotheses. Thus, the survey was structured in 50 questions, subdivided into three parts, "characterisation of the institution", "evaluation of local development" and "observations and contacts".

In the analysis of internal consistency and after the results verified through the Cronbach's alpha value, there was evidence that the dimensions presented a good consistency, leading

the researcher to conclude that the evaluation matrix presents good conditions to evaluate local development.

Having analysed the values obtained and through the application of descriptive statistics and Kruskall-Wallis Tests, it can be seen that Hypothesis H1 - Evaluation of local development in a territory is influenced by the type of legal nature of the social economy entity - is not verified, that is, it can be seen that the type of nature has no influence on the results of the evaluation of local development. Having analysed the values obtained, it can be seen that Hypothesis H1 is not verified - it can be seen that the type of nature does not influence the results of the evaluation of local development. And the Hypothesis H2 - it is found that they are not influenced by their organizational characteristics and that Hypothesis H2 is not verified in any category.

We conclude that the matrix proposed within the scope of this study does not present any parameter of influence in relation to its legal nature or organisational characteristic, which allows us to infer that the proposed matrix of evaluation of local development enables the evaluation of local development in low density territories, through social economy entities.

5. Conclusions

The first utility of the study carried out refers to the concept of local development understood by Animar Association, based on the exploratory research carried out, we can consider local development as the starting point for a process of territorial development with the involvement of the state, the market and civil society at different levels. In the answer to the starting question "Is the evaluation of local development feasible through the perspective of social economy entities?", it is affirmative. In the absence of influence factors, we can state that social economy entities, based on their mission to seek the wellbeing of communities, allow, without significant influence of their characteristics, the evaluation of the different dimensions of analysis of local development, ensuring a useful diagnostic evaluation for the development and planning and implementation of territorial public policies.

According to the analysis carried out to the data obtained, the dimensions are all above average, reflecting the need for the methodological proposal to integrate all the proposed dimensions without exclusion, since it is verified that they are relevant in the evaluation, although, naturally, with differentiated positions per municipality according to the results. It was shown that the dimensions present internal consistency for six dimensions, and only the "Environmental" dimension has a correlation close to acceptable. It is considered that the methodological proposal fulfils the appropriate conditions for its applicability and that it allows the evaluation of local development per territory, and according to the perspective of social economy entities.

Dimensions	Ν	Cronbach's Alpha	Correlations
1. Environmental	4	0,549	0,202-0,451
2. Cultural	5	0,851	0,501-0,808
3. Governance and citizenship	8	0,963	0,722-0,919

Local Development Evaluation

Dimensions	Ν	Cronbach's Alpha	Correlations
4. Economic	5	0,817	0,536-0,709
5. Social	6	0,890	0,543-0,871
6. Territorial	5	0,693	0,328-0,607
7. Social Change	5	0,858	0,638-0,818

Figure 4 : Internal Consistency Statistics

The main result of this work is the contribution to the evaluation of local development by municipality, and through the research carried out, it becomes possible to measure, analyse, compare and identify dimensions, combining the participatory dimension with the representative one in the pursuit of the public interest. It is an instrument that can be used as a mechanism for listening to the community, creating conditions for public policies to respond to the needs and priorities of the population and their community.

In short, local development is an integrated concept (...) systemic and multidimensional (Environmental, Cultural, Governance and Citizenship, Economic, Social, Territorial and Social Change), and is built on the dichotomy between structural conditions and citizenship, and in their interdependent relationship. The methodological proposal of evaluation of local development presents appropriate conditions for its applicability and allows the evaluation of local development from the perspective of social economy organisations. Through the research carried out, it becomes possible to measure, analyse, compare, and identify dimensions. As recommendations, the research of new indicators is suggested to respond to local characteristics, so the model should be flexible and adaptable to the territory where it is located. The evaluation methodology may have an algorithm that allows measuring and assigning greater weight to the dimensions considered priority and most relevant according to the data obtained. It is essential to develop evaluation mechanisms with public and free access, allowing the promotion and strengthening of social participation, a key principle in local development.

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