

COLLABORATIVE AND PARTICIPATORY PLANNING PROCESSES AND METHODS FOR LOCAL DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract

In 2006, The University of Veracruz (UV), the State Government of Veracruz and the United Nations Program for Human Settlements (UN/Habitat) signed an agreement to promote the urban and territorial development of the Veracruz State. This event is the result of The University of Veracruz's policies on the production of knowledge for the improvement of social and economic conditions in Veracruz through the involvement of the University organization in the real problems of different groups within society. Under this agreement, the University has made a commitment to promote sustainable development in the main regions of Veracruz, firstly through the implementation of strategic regional planning using inclusive and participatory methods; and secondly, through the strengthening of state and local authorities' capacities for the development and implementation of urban and regional policies that have an effective and integral impact on the social, environmental and economic dimensions of cities. The purpose of this paper is to present the participatory exercises conducted by the multidisciplinary academic group of The University of Veracruz, under UN/Habitat-UV-Veracruz State Government agreement following the UN methodology to promote Local Economic and Territorial Development. This paper explains these participatory planning experiences, methods and the results in the context of the central urban region of Veracruz State (made up of 15 municipalities).

Keywords

Participation, collaboration, local development, planning methods, Córdoba, Veracruz México

Introduction

Veracruz is a state located in southeast Mexico with approximately 7 million inhabitants, with 60% of the population concentrated in metropolitan areas and 40% of the population living in rural areas. The majority have very low employment opportunities and therefore low living and economic conditions; moreover people in rural areas live in high isolation and dispersion with high rates of poverty and marginalization. In general, few have benefited from Mexico's entry into global economics and liberalization of markets, and therefore high polarization of the living conditions and welfare in society is becoming the most common image. In this context, urban and regional planning has been almost absent for a long time. There have been territorial policies, plans and programs which have had very little impact, due to the lack of interest from local, state and

national governments to implement them; in other cases, there has been little knowledge and expertise in planning; furthermore, the continuous separation of planning and policy making from communities and their territories has been the general practice within governance for many decades. Another issue that has also undermined development is that of how public funding and resources have often been, corruptly and discretionally spent for the benefit of some privileged groups. In this scenario a great majority of the Mexican population is suffering at the margins of economic, social and human development. Lack of adequate territorial policies, unemployment, social exclusion, insufficient social services, urban blight, precarious conditions of housing and urban infrastructure, low rural development and rural marginalization due to lack of subsidies for agriculture, the global economy and neo-liberalism are the main problems and conditions causing marginalization and in consequence the exodus of men and women to other latitudes across the northern borders in search of better opportunities for life.

In view of insufficient responses against poverty and marginalization, Mexican public universities today, play an important role in promoting human, social and economic development in urban and rural environments within their regions, through the creation of innovative and creative knowledge to find new forms and procedures aimed at long term strategies for development. In Mexico all public universities include a department or office for association with society in order to support different groups and sectors. Under these circumstances higher education, research and in this case, the University of Veracruz, have to generate

knowledge and professional expertise related to the improvement of social and economic conditions in Veracruz. For a long time, there has been great evidence of university work being closely related to the problems affecting society, the environment, natural resources, urban areas, health, education and economy, through many academic projects and programs which have had a strong impacts on many places and communities in this state. Through this work, the university organization has created a department for municipal management, which is in charge of promoting municipal and regional development. In this paper, we will discuss one of its initiatives, related to urban and regional planning under a framework of collaboration and participation. In the following paragraphs, the background to the project, the participatory planning experiences, methods and the results in the context of the central urban region of Veracruz will be presented. Finally, the strengths and weaknesses and of the UN-Participatory Methods used to research the regional situation of Cordoba and Orizaba will be discussed.

Background

In 2006, The University of Veracruz (UV), the State Government of Veracruz and the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-HABITAT) signed an agreement to promote the urban and territorial development of Veracruz. Under this agreement, the three actors have made the commitment to promote sustainable development in the main regions of the State, firstly through the implementation of strategic regional planning with inclusive and participatory methods; and secondly,

through the strengthening of state and local authorities' capacities for the development and implementation of urban and regional policies that have an effective and integral impact on the social, environmental and economic dimensions of the urban environment. In this way, the university seeks to advance in the generation of scientific knowledge finding solutions and creating alternative projects, in collaboration with the different actors involved in order to trigger local development and finally contribute to the meeting of the Millennium Development Goals established by UN-HABITAT to reduce poverty and improve the living conditions of the urban population.

The general project and agreement has been called "Territorial and Environmental Development in the State of Veracruz, through strategic planning and management" and The University of Veracruz is the leader in guiding and directing its different goals, strategies and actions. The main goals of the agreement are:

- 1) To collaborate in the definition of public environmental and territorial policies;
- 2) To implement strategic development plans based on Local Economic Development and public-private partnerships;
- 3) To define strategic projects to trigger development through Strategic Development Plans for each metropolitan area in Veracruz;

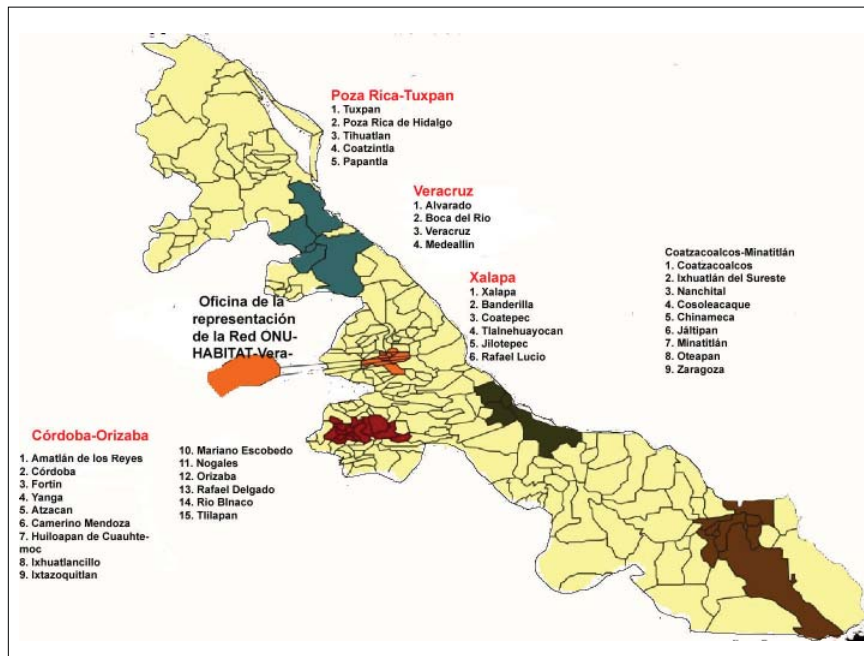


Figure 1: Metropolitan areas of Veracruz and their municipalities (Source: Author).

- 4) To create indicators to monitor and evaluate the economic impact of these plans in the main urban regions of the state;
- 5) To establish local urban observatories; and finally
- 6) To support and develop other urban programs following the needs and plans of the State Government of Veracruz, such as governance, Agenda 21, water, gender issues, public spaces and so on. In general, urban issues which are also of great interest to the United Nations for Human Settlements.

Under this extensive framework, within the University of Veracruz, multidisciplinary research groups have been set up to meet the different goals of the project in the five metropolitan regions of the state, (north, center and south): in the metropolitan area of Poza Rica-Tuxpan (north); the metropolitan area of Xalapa; in the conurbation of Córdoba- Orizaba; the conurbation of Veracruz (center); and finally, in the Coatzacoalcos-Minatitlan urban area (south).

An important aspect for the development of the scheme is that in each region, there are University campuses, which have all served as a base for the implementation of the project. At this stage, Local Urban Observatories have been founded, combining academic leaders of the University with the most important regional and urban agents, who have been working together on a regional development plan through participatory methods and techniques.

The Córdoba-Orizaba Region

The region of Córdoba-Orizaba is located in the central region of the State of Veracruz. This

zone has been called "The Mountains Region" due to the existence of high topographic elevations creating a landscape of mountains, hills and ravines. The area represents a consolidated industrial and commercial corridor located around the two major cities: Córdoba and Orizaba, which are separated by approximately 30 kilometers, these two cities are complementary to each other representing the most important urban centers of the region; Orizaba with an economy based on a consolidated manufacture industrial activity complements with the other which has focused its economy on agro-industries and a very dynamic and diverse commercial service, with great influence in the region. Both cities conform to great conurbations around them; the metropolitan area of Orizaba is made up of fifteen municipalities with a population of approximately 420, 000 inhabitants until the year 2000.

The metropolitan area of Córdoba includes five municipalities with a population of approximately 293,000 inhabitants; both cities have a significant number of urban and rural communities. Both cities have great economic, social and environmental influence in the central region of the State. Even though there is a dynamic economic context, both urban centers show the oppositions and contradictions of an unequal distribution of wealth, a great gap between the rich and poor, development and marginalization is evident. On the one hand, the two municipalities present a concentration of the population within the major urban centre presenting high levels of development, and on the other, they also present a high dispersion of rural and indigenous population in the rural areas. This panorama strongly conditions the

social and economic development of the region. Even though the area has significant potential to be competitive and productive enough to provide wealth for its population, due to its ideal location in the country for national and international trade, there is still great poverty, marginalization, and social and environmental problems which undermine the sustainable development of the region

Urban Observatory of Córdoba-Orizaba

In search to support the development of this region, the Urban Observatory of Córdoba-Orizaba was created in 2006. According to UN-HABITAT programs, local and national urban observatories are governmental agencies, research centers or educational institutions that are designated as the “workshops” where monitoring tools are developed and used for policy-making through consultative processes. A Local Urban Observatory for a city or town is the focal point for urban policy development and planning where collaboration among policy makers, technical experts and representatives of partner groups is fostered. In the case of the Cordoba-Orizaba region a multidisciplinary group was formed with staff members from the different faculties of the University’s Regional Campus. So, the urban observatory was integrated by academics from the Faculties of Architecture, Biology, Chemistry, Engineering, Medicine, Accountancy and Management, languages and the Open University system. This association meant a great opportunity to work on a project involving the generation of knowledge across disciplinary boundaries and the setting up of the foundation of new forms of academic practice within the University of Veracruz. Although contemporary tendencies within

academia and research imply interdisciplinary, transdisciplinary or multidisciplinary approaches, at Veracruz this has not been the common practice yet; therefore the constitution of the Local Urban Observatory meant taking steps towards learning about how to collaborate and participate within research projects and the generation of scientific knowledge for the benefit of society. This looking at the complex reality in a more integrative way would result in better and more adequate answers to problems promoting sustainable urban and regional development. Finally, the integration of the Urban Observatory contributed to meet the fifth goal of the UN-University and the State Government of Veracruz Agreement.

Participation and Collaboration in Planning

Participation is important because people have the right to participate in decision making which directly affects their living conditions. This means, direct public involvement in decision making processes whereby people share in social decisions that determine the quality and directions of their lives (Sanoff, 1999 pp.10). Participation is also crucial to foster social development, which can be promoted by increasing local self-reliance; moreover, since people themselves know best what they need, what they want and what they can afford, only close cooperation between project implementers and the community can lead to project effectiveness (Desai, 2001, pp.119). Participation is defined in a United Nations report (cited in Desai, 2001, pp.119) to mean ‘sharing by people in the benefits of development and involvement of people in decision making at all levels of society’. Participation implies an

engagement with the environment and with the others living in that environment. Through participation individuals identify themselves with their environment, their setting, as well as with the group they belong to. They become aware of common needs, identify with each other and eventually collaborate and take part in collective action to transform the place in which they live. Participation means collaboration among neighbors and it can provide helpful solutions to many of the challenges of accomplishing daily life (Healey, 1997).

Taking into account these arguments, the project undertaken by the University and its partners seeks to promote participation in planning in order to achieve a real involvement of the different actors, identifying problems at different levels, proposing solutions and more importantly finding ways of collaborating to implement and monitor strategies and actions to reach their vision. In these participatory and collaborative processes the different agents such as planners, citizens, locally elected officials, developers, and others invariably have different views on what a city –or a region– should be like and how to build it. In this way, the collaborative planning process within the project aimed to generate the potential for collaborative discussion of shared concerns about local environmental, social and economic changes and problems, through which people came to learn about potential impacts and possible ways of valuing and addressing them.

“The challenge is to discover what the diverse people in a place are concerned about and care about, and to work out a way forward which will work for most people without excluding too many interests and values” (Healey, 1997, pp.88).

Moreover, through participatory planning processes, proposals for change “will be holistically informed by local wisdom, attachment to place, and networks of interconnectedness and ecological thinking” (Hester, 2006, pp.10).

Therefore, the results are genuine and legitimated by the agents and actors and the society in general involved in the planning processes. People know that solutions to problems and actions for development correspond to what participants from different backgrounds and with different interests agreed. An agreement reached in a process where each participant put forward their knowledge and opinions at an equal level regardless of political power, economic or social positions. Furthermore, the project seeks to empower agents and actors, especially local people in order to carry out changes. The main point was to promote the idea of empowerment which means providing communities with the ability to be their own agents for change, taking decisions concerning their own lifestyles and environment (Roe, 2000, pp.59)

In Mexico and Veracruz, real and legitimate participatory processes in urban and regional planning have not been present. Mostly, elected authorities as well as society have very little knowledge about the benefits of participatory processes in planning and decision making for local development. In response to this situation, the University of Veracruz undertook a participatory and collaborative planning process for development in major urban areas of the state, involving various actors and institutions at local, regional, national and even international level. Since then, it has been recognized that participation is an important component

in sustainable development, this planning initiative represents a move forward in reflecting on problems collaboratively, increasing the understanding of planning and participation, building social capital, and finding real solutions and strategies for better environmental, social and economic development.

A Method for Local Development

This participatory and collaborative planning task was carried out with the assistance of the United Nations Human Settlements Program which contributed with innovative planning methodologies applied and tested in other countries. The planning workshops were carried out in the five metropolitan regions of Veracruz following the methodology created and implemented by the UN-HABITAT and the Canadian planning firm "Ecoplan International" to promote Local Economic Development (LED). The LED method is a participatory process in which local people from all sectors work together to stimulate local commercial activity, resulting in a resilient and sustainable economy. According to Ecoplan International, it is a way to help create decent jobs and improve the quality of life for everyone, including the poor and marginalized. Local economic development encourages public, private and civil sectors of society to establish partnerships and collaboratively find local solutions to common economic challenges. The LED process seeks to empower local participants to effectively utilize business enterprise, labor, capital and other local resources to achieve local priorities. The UN-Ecoplan methodology is structured in ten steps which have been called the "Ten steps to planning excellence" ordered according to the four key questions directing the planning

process and based on public participation. These methods have shown evidence of their feasibility in generating strategies for local development in many cities and regions. Figure 2: The LED methodology. Source: United Nations Human Settlements Programme (2005)

Researching the Present Conditions

In the case of the Cordoba-Orizaba Metropolitana Region, the process started with the creation of the Urban Observatory, as explained before (step 1 and 2 of the methodology, figure 2). The Local Urban observatory, following its real goal, carried out the consultative processes. Its main goals were to organize ongoing meetings for consultation about the present situation in the region. This consultation included relevant stakeholders who assessed and monitored public urban policies, and from this participatory experience, made suggestions to governmental bodies, including possible adjustments. In this way, the local urban observatory based at the University of Veracruz was the agent in charge of starting the participatory and collaborative planning process in Veracruz State. The urban observatory also had the task of collecting data and information and promoting a full objective analysis in order to coordinate stakeholders to proactively prevail over urban poverty, working closely with the Millennium Development Goals, and towards progressive implementation of the Habitat Agenda and Agenda 21. In this way, in order to continue the planning processes following the LED methodology, the Urban Observatory of Cordoba-Orizaba identified the stakeholders and participants (Step 2 in figure 2). The University through the urban observatory worked to guarantee an open and inclusive planning process; In order to establish

a real participatory process, a wide range of stakeholders were included from the public sector (local, regional, national governments, educational institutions); business sector (corporations, small business); labor organizations (trade unions, labor unions); community and non-governmental organizations; (community leaders; neighborhood groups; poor and disadvantaged groups; environmental groups) and the general public (informal leaders) as recommended by EcoPlan (Figure 3). The Urban Observatory guaranteed the creation of partnerships and networks to exchange

information and follow up actions (step 2). This actions implied hard work: visiting each actor, informing them about the urban observatory, about the UN-University of Veracruz and the State Government Agreement, and making each actor aware of the importance of their participation in the construction of knowledge about the real situation of their town and the region as a whole.

At the same time the Urban Observatory continued with step 3 to “planning excellence” of the LED methodology (figure 3) carrying out a

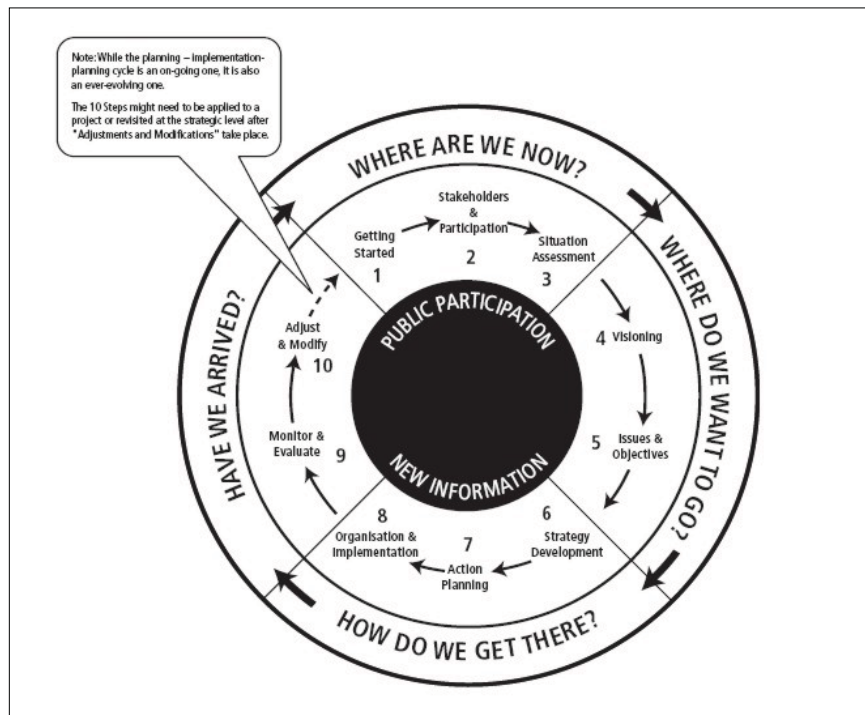


Figure 2: The LED methodology: Ten steps to planning excellence (Source: UNHS and Author).

situational assessment of the metropolitan area, through the building of a deep analysis of the social, economic and environmental situation of the region. Moreover, the research group carried out a survey in all the municipalities and with all of the different stakeholders in the region to identify concerns, ideas and projects for economic, environmental and social development. The information gathered by the Urban Observatory helped to acquire a deep understanding of the main issues that impinge and constrain the local and regional development of the area. This study represented a starting point to move on the next question.

Visualizing the Future of the Region

In order to carry out steps 4 and 5 of the LED methodology (figure 2), participatory planning workshops were organized by the Urban Observatory. As Healy (1997) argues, through these participatory exercises people come to learn about each other, to share different points of view, to build up a richer understanding and awareness of conflicts over their local environments. In this way, stakeholders constructed firstly a regional vision, goals and strategies for development; and secondly, determined collective approaches

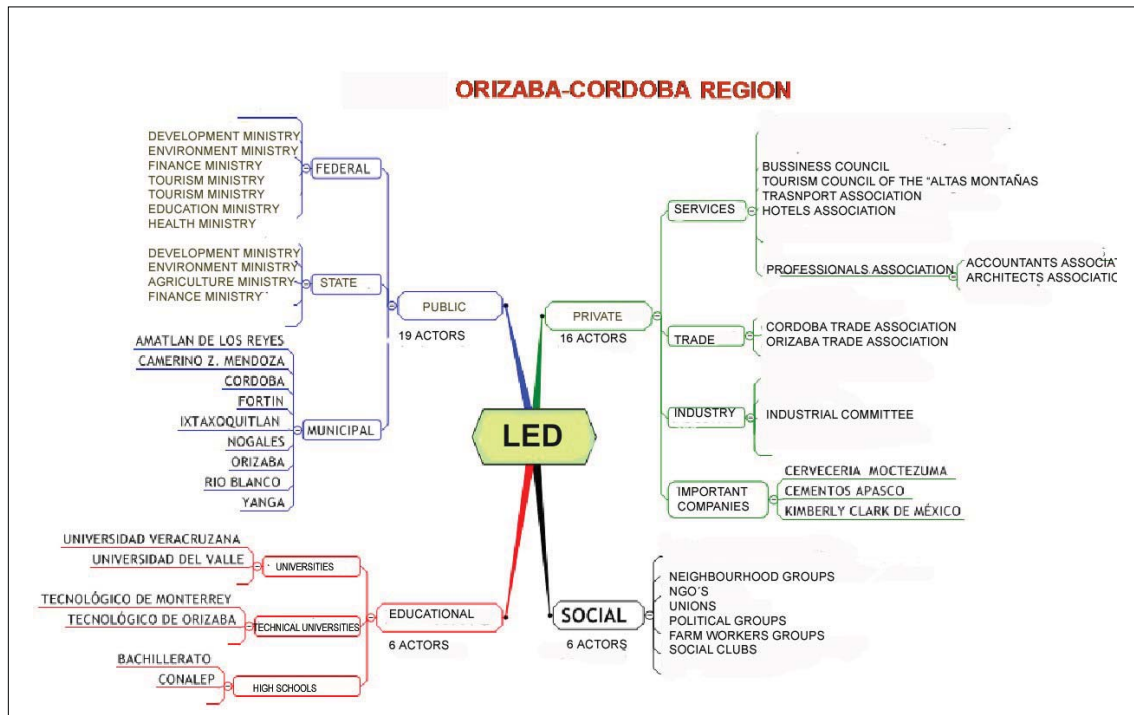


Figure 3: Stakeholders in the Cordoba-Orizaba Metropolitan Region (Source: Author).

and partnerships to reach them, establishing plans and projects which promote and activate sustainable economic urban development; all this under a strategic planning framework.

The planning workshops for local development started with a plenary session directed by the UN-Ecoplan Consultant who explained to the participants the basic principles of the LED Method. Secondly, participants were grouped in round tables to put in practice the knowledge learned in the plenary sessions, but now discussing and reflecting on the present and future of Cordoba-Orizaba development. The discussion started with the identification of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT analysis) of the region, asking ourselves who we are, where we are, what our strengths and weaknesses are, what we need to develop. Afterwards with the consensus over the strengths a regional vision was built identifying fundamental values and principles that led to the ideal future of the region, questioning where we want to be, which direction to go, what to do, how to get there, what resources to use and whom with. As a general expression of values, visioning provided an opportunity for the stakeholders of the Cordoba-Orizaba Region to think in broad terms about the future. Having the vision, the main objectives were set up to work later on the strategy towards LED. Objectives are the basis for generating and designing strategy options, from which strategies and actions unfold to overcome problems and threats and find the right way to development.

Strategies and Actions for Implementation

Having clear goals and aims, participants grouped in roundtables, analyzed the opportunities to design a regional action plan

for local strategic development (Step 6 and 7 of figure 2) with specific commitments through specific projects, which would help to meet the objectives and finally to move forward towards our regional vision. This phase is considered one of the most important steps because it is the most tangible part of the planning process. At this stage the alternatives (strategy options) leading to LED are discussed. The important themes discussed were issues about the territory, agriculture, human development, employment, economic competitiveness, connectivity, urban infrastructure and facilities, governance, and public services. The participatory process allowed discussion of a wide range of projects proposed by the participants, which later on would be arranged according to their importance and relevance to the region. They represent an action or group of actions, that, when implemented, can help reach the Cordoba-Orizaba LED vision and objectives. Here, specific actions were envisioned and those with the greatest promise were chosen.

In the Cordoba-Orizaba Region the following strategic alternatives/actions were agreed Source: LED Workshop Proceedings. February 2007. UN-University and the State Government of Veracruz Agreement.:

- 1
 - Maintenance of lagoons, rivers and streams.
 - Cleaning and revitalization of lakes, rivers, streams, canals; reforestation, and waste management.
 - Urban Plan and Land Use Program Updating in the Orizaba-Córdoba conurbation.
- 2
 - An economic program to decrease emigration.

3

- Sustainable tourism through strategic participatory planning .
- The creation of a Tourist corridor: The high mountains, linked to the environmental revitalization of the Blanco River.

4

- Sustainable Industrial Park.
- The creation of a "Centre for Productive Association " (Centro de vinculación productiva).

In another workshop, the phase related to organization and implementation (step 8) was undertaken. Four groups were organized according to the four strategic alternatives or projects. The groups were integrated according to participants' interests. Again people from different backgrounds and economic and social positions participated, but with a legitimate interest in contributing to the achievement of real goals. Within these workshops, the planning groups clarified what must be done to implement the action. The participants were grouped in committees and together achieved the formation of partnerships to promote the implementation of at least one strategic project in the short term and made the commitment to take the necessary steps to manage resources and support from different institutions. They also set up a timetable with the dates by which, the different actions would be done. And finally, they determined who would be responsible for carrying out the different activities to put the actions into effect. This process offered a chance to double check the alternative strategies to make sure that a strategy was practical and could be implemented, taking into account limitations of time, budgets, administrative

capacity, and political resources.

The phase of implementation is taking place during 2008 and 2009. During this period, various workshops are being held in order to follow up the implementation process, through monitoring and assessing the activities of those that took on the commitment to carry out the actions defined in the planning process. At this stage, according to the methodology, we should also have a written document which integrates the Local Economic Development Strategy, which has not accomplished been yet. This document should outline the commitment of the agents, accessibility to resources and establish a clear path of action. The institutionalization of the LED strategy is also an important step. It is advised that the establishment of a "Local Economic Development Agency" as an organizational resource to implement the LED strategies is an adequate action to follow up the implementation phase.

In our context, implementation presents some uncertainties due to the mainstream political and economic culture. Although there have been advances in Mexican democracy, there is still a lack of legitimate participatory processes and a long term urban planning strategy. The lack of commitment of some of the agents to legitimate strategies in the benefit of the majorities is still evident. The real impact of the participatory exercise discussed here, will depend, at some point, on the way the university conducts the project and more importantly, on the support received by the state government and the rest of the stakeholders. We have to recognize that elections and changes within municipal administrations can undermine the interest of some of the participants responsible

for the actions. It is crucial to take control of these actions and carefully monitor them, in order to achieve good results. Otherwise, all the efforts reached so far will be ineffective.

In 2008, new local authorities took control in all municipalities in the state. The University, through their urban observatories, presented the strategic projects that emerged from the LED workshops, to most elected authorities, in order to encourage them to understand the importance of the participatory planning process carried out and persuade them to include the projects, actions and strategies identified by the LED stakeholders in their new development plans. In this way, the urban observatories tried to find stronger support for implementation. It is considered that implementation could be a difficult phase because the actions of many actors and institutions have to converge. This part is still in process; the challenge is that limitations and barriers should not discourage the actor's commitment.

Evaluating Results and Impacts

Monitoring and evaluation has been done throughout the whole planning process (Step 9 and 10 in figure 2). This part of the methodology means feedback on the process; therefore, the vision, objectives, or plans, programs and projects can be redirected according to the opportunities and constraints at the moment, in order to achieve better and more suitable outcomes. Through evaluation, decisions can be made about the necessary adjustments and modifications to the whole strategic planning process. In our case, the University of Veracruz through the Local Urban Observatory is the one in charge of revising, monitoring and assessing

each step. The Urban Observatory represents an important agent to foster and empower participants, to help the implementation of partnerships and to promote capacity building to carry out a collaborative process of development. Moreover, The University's expertise and research experience represents an important asset for measuring the impacts and benefits of the different actions, this should guarantee that actions be correctly implemented with real impacts for regional development. Today, we cannot answer the question, posed at the beginning of this section. Planning is a long process and the results and impacts of planning on the territory and its society are difficult to monitor until enough time has passed after implementation and improvements and changes can be adequately assessed.

However, in the Mexican context, this phase could be difficult to assess, due to the lack of continuity and long term implementation of urban planning. The short term planning culture that prevails in Mexican cities represents a great barrier to reach development. According to the law, every three years, municipal administrations create a new development plan which has meant that many development projects and strategies have never been completed. This fact has contributed to the urban blight that reigns in Mexican urban areas. This short term planning system also represents a great disadvantage for the LED methodology because some projects could not be totally implemented. Long term development means that in spite of new elected municipal authorities, steps and actions identified within a legitimate planning process should continue in order to reach not only local economic development but also a

sustainable urban development. In this case, the Local Urban Observatory in Veracruz should also play an important role as a citizen monitoring association, in order to achieve long term planning processes with long term benefits for the people of Veracruz.

Final Comments

Through this project, the stakeholders seek to promote citizen participation in urban and regional development, promote strategic planning, and trigger the implementation of strategic projects in order to contribute to poverty reduction, foster social development and economic competitiveness, all in favor of sustainable urban and regional development in Veracruz. This strategic planning process intends to support, manage and implement strategic projects in the different metropolitan regions of the state of Veracruz. The strategic projects should be implemented by the local actors; while the staff of the University of Veracruz is supervising and assessing the projects' implementation. Afterwards, the evaluation about the impacts and benefits will be done.

The University of Veracruz pursues to increase the knowledge about urban development and human settlements in Veracruz; it also seeks to support governmental institutions in overcoming drawbacks and profound social differences in cities, metropolitan regions and marginalized areas, in order to transform them into planned, safe and habitable spaces without threatening the natural environment and in accordance with social needs. Furthermore, the UN program for Human Settlements seeks to share methodologies to go forward towards more inclusive and integral planning, at municipal,

metropolitan, regional and state level. In addition, for The Government of Veracruz towards sustainable urban development of the state. Moreover, the United Nations seeks to reach, the eleventh aim of the UN Millennium goals which seeks to substantially improve the living conditions of at least 100 million people who live in precarious settlements. In the case of Veracruz, the three main stakeholders are facing the challenge of urban poverty reduction and economic development through the promotion of social participation in urban planning and management and the creation of partnerships among agents of the public and private sector, academia, associations and the different groups of the community.

The application of Local Economic Development (LED) methodology has contributed to the beginning of a participatory planning culture for sustainable urban development. Although, it is too early to say that participation is engraved in planning, politics and society. However, in the case of the Córdoba-Orizaba region, the participatory planning exercise achieved the continuous involvement of different kinds of people with different interests, roles, status and power levels. Having joined all these participants in a democratic process, to reflect on the present and future of the region, has meant a step forward towards a deeper understanding about the importance of participation and collaboration to plan the development of cities and finally reach successful outcomes. This has been very valuable, in a context where, planning has been marginalized by obscure political practices and discretionary decision making is a common practice. In Veracruz, actors have become real stakeholders; most of them have

been very enthusiastic and interested in making commitments to carrying out the projects that lead towards the regional vision. Finally, they have become conscious of the significance of participating and doing something for the development of their communities.

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