

Tiago Neves¹, Isabel Cruz², Rosário Silva³

1. Introduction

This paper presents and discusses the conceptual framework, the methodological approach and some results of a research project called "Local Action in the Fight against Poverty and Social Exclusion". This project, financed by the Instituto de Segurança Social, is being currently carried out by CIE, a research centre based at the Faculdade de Psicologia e de Ciências da Educação of the Universidade do Porto.

From January 2010 to September 2010, this project gathers and analyses data from 12 municipalities in continental Portugal. Those 12 municipalities we selected on the basis of 3 previous studies: the typology of social exclusion in Portugal, elaborated by the Instituto de Segurança Social (2005); a report on municipal purchase power (INE, 2007); and a study on the quality of life in different municipalities (Manso and Simões, 2007). Our own research is grounded mostly on interviews with local actors such as municipal authorities, not-for-profit associations, NGO's, local development agencies, community groups, etc. The aim is to produce a rich, significant characterization of the main features of local action in the fight against poverty and social

exclusion, with a special emphasis on the issues of governance, participation, evaluation, and the future of local action.

2. Conceptual framework

2.1. The birth of the social

The *social question* emerged in Europe in the mid-nineteenth century (Rosanvallon, 1995: 7). It referred to a situation in which accelerated processes of industrialization and urbanization, together with the establishment of new social relations of production, produced a generalized pauperization of the working classes. Castel argues that «This was an essential moment, when the divorce first appeared between a juridico-political order founded on the recognition of the rights of citizens and an economic order that carried with it widespread misery and demoralization» (2003: xx).

According to Castel, it was in this split between the political system and the economical organization that the social found its way to emerge as a bridge between the political and the economical (2003: xx). In a sense, then, this was the moment of the birth of the *social*⁴. For Castel, «The "social" consists of systems of non-market regulations brought to bear to try to fill this chasm. The social question becomes thus in this context the question of the place to be occupied by the most desocialized fringes of workers in an industrial society» (Castel, 2003: xx). For several decades, the integration of these desocialized fringes

¹ Assistant Professor at FPCE-UP. Researcher at CIEE. Project Coordinator.

² Researcher at CIE.

³ Researcher at CIE.

⁴ It is not mere coincidence that the so-called "fathers" of Sociology – Durkheim, Marx and Weber – were born in the period between 1818 and 1864.

constituted the core of social policies. In this context, the crucial problem was the distribution of wealth. Therefore, issues like social justice, political legitimacy and economical inequality were brought to the fore of debate and intervention. Moreover, civic and political rights were expanded to include social rights, that is, rights about employment, income, education, health and housing (Marshall, 1992).

The apex of these concerns was a kind of social formation commonly named Welfare State, which is grounded on a tripartite regulation between the Nation-State, capital and labour (Santos, 1990: 194; Johnstone, 2003: 24). Ramesh argues that the ideal ingredients of the Welfare State are «full employment, a set of universal or quasi-universal services oriented to the satisfaction of basic needs, and a pledge to maintain a national minimum standard of living conditions» (1995: xi).

It should be stressed, in line with Rosanvallon, that the key to the strength of the Welfare-State lays in the very creation of the Nation-States, which since their beginning take on the role of protective States. From the end of the nineteenth century until the 1970's, the problem of social protection was solved, with varying degrees of sophistication and efficiency, through the concession of strong protection to work and to the workers. Work was organized into jobs, and most of the population gains access to citizenship through the labourer status: this is how the salaried society operates (Castel, 2005: 32-35).

2. 2. The rise of the local.

With regard to the concept of development, from the 1930's onwards, and as a result of the overproduction crisis, Fordist regulation, anchored on Keynesian methods and national economic strategies, becomes the standard principle. In Klein's words, «Fordism as a mode of regulation represents the triumph of the national whole over the specificity of the local. (...) The State becomes the centre of government » (Klein, 2005: 27-28). This means that the national territory emerges as the central spatial unit in terms of development. Here, development is first and foremost a strategy aimed at reducing differences between regions, and promoting equity in the territorial distribution of wealth.

From the 1970's onwards, however, the stability of the inclusive society, grounded on a strong and protective Nation-State, begins to erode. The oil crisis of 1973, the changes in production modes and relationships (the passage from a Fordist to a post-Fordist regime), as well as the cultural changes that had been taking place since the sixties (namely the rise of individualism) are amongst the main causes for this transformation (Rosanvallon, 1995; Young, 1999).

In this changing context, the social question undergoes a metamorphosis and, with it, the role and situation of the local are also transformed. The core of the *new social question* lays in the degradation of the condition and the status of the salaried worker – and of the salaried society (Castel, 2003: 368). Indeed, work, the main integration instrument in the inclusive society, suffers three processes that transform its status:

a) a progressive destabilization of previously stable segments of the working class and of the lower strata of the middle class;

b) a descent into precariousness of significant portions of the population, as result of the increase of unemployment and temporary employment;

c) a shortage of occupiable places, generating masses of virtually unemployable supernumeraries (Castel, 2003: 387-389).

Paugam puts forward the notion of *social disqualification* to characterize this new poverty. «When employment no longer carries out its integrative role with regard to a growing share of the population, policies focused on fighting poverty concentrate above all on recreating the social bond, and in mobilizing again, collectively, individuals and families, while simultaneously conceiving socialization instruments located outside the realm of professional relationships in order to compensate for the growing unemployment and the “dessacralization” of major institutions – the Church, political parties, trade unions, etc. (Paugam, 2003: 172). Work loses its status and function as the *great social integrator*.

The new social question consists in rationalizing the presence of these socially disqualified actors in the post-industrial society, in dissipating them through social policies aimed at activation and insertion. Here, social exclusion is the central problem to deal with (Castel, 2003: xxii). Social policies now tend to dissolve a universal criterion of justice, based on the notion of equal justice for all, and pave the way for differentiated, local criteria, produced and applied in a

range of social and economical exchanges circuits. The State loses its role as sole regulator.

Therefore, the *social* as we knew it is undergoing deep mutations (Rose, 1996). Such mutations have different origins: economical (in the context of globalization and other territorial interdependencies, the centrality of national economies is put into question); political (criticism of excessive expenditure and inefficiency of the Welfare State; reconfiguration of the obligation relationship between citizen and society, as mediated by the State, into a relationship of active responsibility on the part of the citizen for those who are closer to him/her – him/herself, his/her family, his/her community) (Rose, 1996: 330-331).

Hamzaoui (2005) refers to this process as the *territorialization of the social*, which is accompanied by a globalization – and deterritorialization – of the economy. This process has important consequences for social policies and for social intervention, namely in terms of the fight against poverty and social exclusion. For instance, while in the inclusive society model social policies had an essentially redistributive, solidary, universal, and deterritorialized nature, they now tend to be based on the principles of risk management and individual responsibility, promoting the responsabilization, implication and activation of the beneficiaries. This entails changes in the notions of territory and territorial intervention: the local is discovered as the locus for development (Klein, 2005).

It is in this framework that public policies progressively take on a bottom-up approach, as opposed the traditional top-down approach (Ruivo, 2002; Ferreira, 2008). This change is frequently described as the passage from a government to a governance model (Peter, 2001; Geddes, 2005). According to Geddes, this move involves three associated processes: «a widespread adoption of new public management and public-private partnerships; [the] involvement of organised local associations, interest groups and private actors in policy partnerships; and the introduction of new forms of citizen involvement» (2005: 361).

Let us summarize the main differences between government and governance. In Peter's words, *government* refers to «formal procedures and institutions societies have created to express their interests, to resolve disputes and to implement public choices. The idea is that political systems have rules about political behaviour and mechanisms to protect the rights of minorities and to ensure that the supply of public and other goods and services reflects the preferences of citizens» (Peter, 2001: 6). In local terms, government usually translated into the election of local representatives of national political parties.

In its turn, *governance* consists of «a flexible pattern of public decision-making based on loose networks of individuals. The concept conveys the idea that public decisions rest less within hierarchically organized bureaucracies, but take place more in long-term relationships between key individuals located in a diverse set of organizations located at various territorial levels» (Peter, 2001: 9). The governance

model implies a reconfiguration of the relationships between the State, the market and civil society, in general aimed at the establishment of networks and partnerships based on a growing participation of civil society agents. «The new problematic of governance emerges thus from a double will: to criticize the ineptitude of traditional policies and to bring management devices closer to the speed and flexibility demanded by the adjustment processes» (Guerra, 2006: 16).

The local acquires value as the vital arena for the structuring of social relationships, and national territories are no longer the scale for regulation processes. In this context, *local action* emerges as a possible response not only to social and economical problems, but also as a form of resistance to the degradation of the conditions in which some social rights are enjoyed (Rodrigues and Stoer, 1994: 175-182). Thus, local action requires local actor's participation. As Menezes argues, «Participation in decision-making, the feeling of control and autonomy, the exercise of leadership and influence are central features of change oriented intervention» (2007: 111). Community groups, social movements, and local associations are the main actors of local action, but also companies, the Church and public institutions.

2.3. Local action in the fight against poverty and social exclusion

2.3.1. Poverty and social exclusion

It is reasonable to expect that, for the local to be mobilized in the fight against poverty and social exclusion, these two concepts need to

be clarified. To be sure, there is quite a lot of debate about each of them and, in addition, the borders between them are often unclear, namely as they are regarded either as alternative or complementary concepts (cf. Alcock, 2006; Byrne, 2005; Costa *et al*, 2008; Paugam, 1996; Spicker, 2007; Stoer, Rodrigues and Magalhães, 2003). Our intent here is not so much to make the case for a given approach but simply to make a very brief presentation of important current debates in the literature on poverty and social exclusion. The ultimate goal of this task is to design an analytical framework for the interpretation of data, particularly for the interpretation of local actors' own notions of poverty and social exclusion. It should be stressed that, however conflicting the views on poverty and social exclusion, they do share a common ground: both poverty and social exclusion are regarded as a problem that needs to be addressed.

The definition of concepts such as poverty and social exclusion is made both at an abstract and at a concrete, operational level. What takes place at the operational level does not necessarily follow closely what takes place at the more abstract level. This happens for at least two reasons: some of the abstract dimensions are difficult to render operational (for example, understanding poverty as a moral problem – cf. Spicker, 2007); the definitions of poverty and social exclusion are played simultaneously at the academic and political fields, each of which has its own dynamics and agenda (even if they are frequently articulated). Therefore, though poverty is most commonly associated

with deprivation resulting from a lack of resources, there are plenty of ways of looking at it, of defining it (Costa *et al*, 2008: 26).

An important distinction to be made is between objectivist and subjectivist approaches to poverty: while the former prescribe definitions, the latter search for a democratic, social consensus (Costa *et al*, 2008: 49-50). Within the objectivist approach there is a crucial distinction between the absolute and the relative definitions of poverty. The notion of absolute poverty, often associated with the work developed by Rowntree in the first half of the twentieth century, seeks to identify the minimum standards necessary for the satisfaction of basic human needs, and as such it is very much based on a notion of normatively defined subsistence (Alcock, 2006: 64). To be sure, because they are defined according to the current state-of-the-art in a number of scientific disciplines, these minimum standards vary over time and place. It is also important to stress that such minimum standards currently tend to include more items than mere physiological needs.

In contrast to this absolute or normative concept of poverty, Townsend puts forward a relative concept of poverty. To be fair, given that the absolute concept of poverty admits changes in basic needs over time and space, it is not completely insensitive to a relativistic dimension. The crucial difference is that Townsend's approach argues that «the standard for defining needs and evaluating how these are met, or not, is given exclusively by *social context*: what is usual, or at least largely encouraged and approved in society» (Costa *et al*, 2008: 41).

Townsend's less organicist, more cultural approach, typically involves the use of a constellation of deprivation indicators that may be seen as eventually pointing to the very notion of social exclusion. Finally, it should be mentioned that Townsend' approach to poverty that may lead to regarding poverty itself as a relative concept.

The subjectivist approach to poverty, on the other hand, seeks to define poverty on the basis of public opinion, that is, on the basis of what is understood as poverty at a given time and place by a set of social actors (Costa *et al*, 2008: 49). As such, it is a radically relativistic line of thought that allows for the co-existence of a wide range of definitions of poverty in a given society – it all depends on who are the defining agents. Though it is not our goal to discuss that topic at this point, it is clear that different definitions of poverty legitimize and justify different approaches to social policy.

While approaches to poverty tend to be greatly focused on the material (income) dimension, social exclusion is, at its core, a multidimensional phenomenon (Byrne, 2005: 3). The multidimensional character of social exclusion refers not only to the diversity of its causes, but also to the plurality of its consequences and to policy implications. Quite important, too, is the fact that social exclusion is seen as part and parcel of a unifying concept that also integrates social inclusion. The inclusion/exclusion pair can be regarded according to a Foucauldian *problematic of knowledge* or an *equity problematic* approach (Stoer, Rodrigues and Magalhães, 2003: 24-26). In the view of the *equity problematic*, social exclusion and social inclusion are two

distinct entities, and the more social inclusion there is, the less social exclusion one has to deal with. Both the State and the individuals are responsible for social change, which is considered to result from the rational action of social actors. The Foucauldian *problematic of knowledge* approach presents a rather different view on this subject given that inclusion and exclusion are not conceived separately. Indeed, it is the very notion of inclusion that produces exclusion: for some to be included, others have to be excluded by the system of reason that produces social change and the rules for ascribing identities. Understandably, the *equity problematic* and the *problematic of knowledge* involve different approaches to policy: while the first stresses the politics of redistribution, the latter emphasizes cultural politics and the politics of difference and identity.

Despite attempts by policy-makers in the late 80's and early 90's to substitute the term *social exclusion for poverty*, thus promoting the vision of the concept of social exclusion as an alternative to the concept of poverty, the fact remains that social exclusion calls for a wider perspective than poverty. While the notion of poverty focuses for the most part on scarcity of resources and on how it impacts on people, the notion of social exclusion brings into play more analytical dimensions and emphasizes relational issues (Rodrigues *et al*, 1999). Exclusion is thus both material and social (symbolic, related to identity). Therefore, if poverty can be seen as a more objective condition, easier to identify by an external observer resorting to external criteria, exclusion requires a clearer reference to people's experience of their own condition, and

also a greater focus on life trajectories, people's agency and social relationships⁵. Poverty also appears to be a more static notion in comparison with social exclusion, which is more dynamic (Byrne, 2009). As such, exclusion demands a systemic approach that considers causes and consequences (even if sometimes it is not easy to tell one from the other). Furthermore, because the notion of exclusion encompasses a diversity of dimensions of vulnerability (housing, health, education, political participation, the body, sexual orientation, ethnicity, age, income, the territory, etc.), one can speak of cultural, economic and political (amongst other) exclusions (Alcock, 2006: 121-129). To summarize, social exclusion refers to an accumulation and/or intensification of handicaps in one or more of those dimensions, eventually leading to the dissolution of the social bond and a deficit of social citizenship and social integration. If a kind of metaphor is permitted, poverty may be caught on photo, but social exclusion requires film.

Therefore, as Costa *et al* argue, «*poverty represents a form of social exclusion, that is, there is no poverty without social exclusion. The opposite, however, is not true. In fact, there are forms of social exclusion that do not involve poverty*» (2008: 63). This understanding of poverty and social exclusion as complementary concepts appears to be the mainstream approach in the European Union, which declared 2010 as the European Year for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion.

⁵ To be sure, there is also a culturalist approach to the study of poverty. See, for example, the works of William Foote Whyte, Richard Hoggart and, of course, Oscar Lewis.

Thus, it is noteworthy that the concept of poverty – whether absolute or relative – appears to be regaining some of its previous centrality at the European level.

2.3.2. Local action

Following Ruivo, local action is seen here as the strategic performance of a range of social actors involved in locally-based projects and initiatives, either more formal or more informal, either more isolated or as part of networks (2002b: 14). Local initiatives can also be understood as the local application of public policy, irrespective of whether that application is closer or more distant to the framework provided by the central State, irrespective of whether local agents are more active or more passive.

This is a time in which social policies are undergoing significant pressures and changes, namely the aforementioned processes of territorialization of the social and social policy, which bring local action to the core of the fight against social exclusion and poverty. This entails a great emphasis on focusing resources on targeted territories and individuals, aiming at helping them escape from poverty and social exclusion not so much through alleviation strategies but essentially through individualization, responsabilization, activation, contractualization, and subsidiarization policies (Berthet, 2007: 43-51).

The history of the spatialization of the war on poverty dates back to the 1960's, in the USA and England (the notion of social exclusion only emerged later, but came also to be integrated in this

spatial approach). To be sure, there is a significant difference between those early experiences and the current status of spatialized action against poverty and social exclusion: whereas the former were largely grounded on central government, the later are increasingly dependant on local government (and governance), and participation (Alcock, 2006: 232). It should be noted that territorialization processes are currently being applied to a wide range of social spheres: higher education, the judicial system, the environment, transportation, etc.

Partnerships between public, private, community and voluntary organizations are a crucial element of participation and play a major role in these processes, to the extent that it could be argued that they constitute new forms of local social governance (Geddes and Benington, 2001). There is a number of ways through which local partnerships reinforce the capacity of local governance in the fight against poverty and social exclusion. Namely, they enable the production of common knowledge about poverty and exclusion; they promote multidimensional, holistic responses to social problems; they promote political innovation; they make use of existing resources and further synergies (Geddes, 2000: 790-793). To be sure, for the Portuguese case, Rodrigues and Stoer have indicated that the existence of such partnerships «is heavily dependent on State support – a fact that raises doubts about the real autonomy and identity of some “other” interests represented in partnerships» (Rodrigues and Stoer, 2001: 143). A more generalized trouble with local action in the fight against poverty and social exclusion is the difficulty in evaluating and adequately

determining the nature and amount of added value it produces (Geddes, 2000).

3. The relevance of this study.

Carried out in the European Year for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion, this study is focused on the ways in which local action is developed and organized to fight poverty and social exclusion. In the context of the aforementioned decline of the Welfare State and the rise of the local and territorialized social policies, we analyse the ways in which, in 12 municipalities of continental Portugal, local actors organize themselves and take action in combating poverty and social exclusion. The orienting question of the study is: “How do you do what you do?” The focus is in four areas: governance (strategies and methodologies; financing sources and resources; goal definition and work organization; leadership processes; relationship with central State), participation (who participates and how; the establishment of partnerships and networks), evaluation (how is it done), and the future of local action.

The study aims at enabling a better, close-up understanding of the workings of local action in contemporary Portugal.

4. Methodology

The 12 municipalities mentioned above were selected on the basis of 3 previous studies: the typology of social exclusion in Portugal, elaborated by the Instituto de Segurança Social (2005); a report on

municipal purchase power (INE, 2007); and a study on the quality of life in different municipalities (Manso and Simões, 2007). The organizing principle to select the 12 municipalities was the typology elaborated by the Instituto de Segurança Social. All six types of social exclusion identified in that typology are included in this study. The studies on municipal purchase power and quality of life were of assistance in identifying the most and the least favoured municipalities in each of the six types. It was also our concern to include in the sample municipalities from the five regions considered: North, Centre, Lisbon, Alentejo, and Algarve. This was the general principle which organized most of the constitution of this theoretical sample. The exceptions to this were the inclusion of Porto (to ensure the participation of the second largest town in the country), and Penamacor (to ensure some equity in the representation of the five different regions). The full list of municipalities included in the study is the following: Vila Nova de Famalicão, Vinhais, Terras de Bouro, Porto, Mortágua, Penamacor, Lisboa, Campo Maior, Évora, Fronteira, Albufeira and São Brás de Alportel.

The local actors to be interviewed include the municipal authorities, Juntas de Freguesia, Rede Social, and a range of local institutions working in the fields of poverty and social exclusion, such as not-for-profit associations, NGO's, local development agencies, community groups, etc. They were selected on the basis of documents such as the Carta Social, local social diagnoses, and documents produced by themselves as part of their work; the Rede Social is also a

source of relevant information for this selection process. The study also includes interviews with some central level institutions such as REAPN, CNIS, ANMP, ANAFRE, União das Misericórdias, and trade-unions.

Semi-directive interviews are carried out focusing on governance, participation, evaluation, and the future of local action (which implies, of course, the analysis of the very notion of local action).

Content analysis is the method for analysing the collected data.

5. Characterization of local action initiatives - preliminary results

The purpose of the analysis focused on the interviews made with different institutions (Not-for-profit associations, NGO's, Foundations, Schools, local development agencies, etc.) in the 12 selected municipalities, totalling 56 interviews, is to emphasize the diversity of local initiatives identified from the empirical work. The results, though preliminary, seem to be relevant to characterize local action initiatives in contemporary Portugal, as the central interview theme is to know "how they do what they do".

As mentioned above, content analysis was used for handling the collected information. Based on the theoretical framework to characterize local action initiatives, we defined two broad categories: i) social care and ii) community development.

Social care refers to direct support (cash and/or essential goods and services) to individuals at social risk. We refer to the strengthening

of predominantly traditional local initiatives in Portugal, which however do not reject innovative practices in response to new social risks (new social responses). Social problems present new (re)configurations as a result of globalization phenomena, among others, and organizations develop other strategies and responses to them in a more or less permeable way. Thus, the taking on of a more traditional intervention is not contradictory with the implementation of innovative elements.

Community Development emphasizes a range of different activities in the social intervention arena. On the one hand, this complicates the targeting of interventions, but on the other it seeks to outline practices that take communities as a starting point in, for and with local initiatives. It stresses participatory strategies for individuals' involvement and renders visible the institutions' objective of promoting autonomy/empowerment. It should be noted that within this line of intervention - the community in its unique and heterogeneous sense - the enhancement of the individual dimension (individual empowerment) is also possible. This perspective assumes that organizations, consciously (process of awareness) accept risk, creativity and innovation as a condition for their communities' sustainable development.

Though anchored in these two broad intervention categories, because we are conducting a study on local action in the fight against poverty and social exclusion, we focus on and emphasize the work of organizations that meets the needs of socially vulnerable people. This

implies that social problems are characterized as multiproblematic and multidimensional. Thus, we cannot affirm that local action initiatives are pure forms of either "social care" or "community development".

Among the practices framed in the category "social care", we noted the assistance provided by various institutions (religious institutions, schools, associations) in what constitutes a response to emergency situations and/or basic needs (food, personal hygiene, clothes, prescribed drugs, etc.).

"I mean, we are open to all people who need our help. Whoever. People who need food appearing from nothing, we respond to anything they ask."

"The Food Bank Against Hunger and Support Program for Disadvantaged (...) are two ways to assist the neediest populations."

"Neediest students (grade A) in addition to lunch and books, are now also qualified for breakfast and lunch at school."

It was possible to identify strategies developed in partnership with the aim of detecting, through cross-checking data in order to manage scarce resources, whether individuals at risk are benefiting from help from various institutions are at the same time.

"(...) There is a computer program linked to the Social Security System and institution has to know, for each family process, the Social Security identification numbers. Introducing these data into the program, this immediately gives us a warning that the person is placed in another institution. This system is great, we know to what extent people are only being supported by an institution. Because we also have to distinguish between serious people and the less serious"

This kind of assistance, in cash and/or goods, is currently also available in "social shops". The fact they are places frequented both by those who offer goods and the beneficiaries is referred to as an element that protects privacy. Another strategy mentioned is that they are discreetly located. However, there does not seem to exist a consensus about "social shops". Some institutions regarded them as stigmatizing places.

"Some people make that social support through "social shops" but this is not an answer because people are psychologically defeated or because they are unemployed or because they had a problem in life and they are not going to expose themselves in a store like that to pick up food because they have their own esteem, etc."

Home visits are a frequent practice and are considered relevant to achieve an outreach work that allows knowing the actual extent of the problems. They are considered central to develop prevention work, avoiding extreme situations (example: the need to go to a nursing home).

"And sometimes we also have to go and visit the homes to see the conditions, because sometimes speaking only is not enough."

Indeed, a kind of proximity intervention is favoured that aims at characterizing the person's situation. This intervention is carried out through social offices, house calls, inter-institutional partnerships for exchanging data and producing reports on the families.

Social offices, where assistance is performed, aim at playing an important role in disseminating information about rights and duties, supporting people at social risk by referring them to other institutions, and helping in completing the forms to obtain social support (Social Integration Income, Supplement for Aged People, among others).

We also noted some changes in terms of these offices' location. They are physically present in segregated places (neighbourhood) serving a dual role: calling for greater proximity; avoiding their stigmatization by forcing people to frequent these spaces.

"A very important factor that I also wanted to mention is that these offices rather than being concentrated in the centre are concentrated here, in this community building. What happens? Outsiders also have to enter the building, and it helps people to get involved in this housing estate, to lose their prejudice and thus there is a link between this neighbourhood and the community and surrounding areas. "

Finally, it is important to stress that many organizations refer that the current social and economic crisis has made it necessary to reinforce the "social care" approach.

With regard to the practices framed in the category "community development", we want to focus on local action initiatives in areas such as community animation, development and local development, that adopt strategies of revitalization in order to promote entrepreneurship, innovation and participation of the people in the local community.

"(...) It is a strategy based on community revitalization, because we see a territory marked by these characteristics... it is essential that we create a favourable climate for entrepreneurship and innovation. And animation is a help in that propose."

Local action initiatives are developed in partnership, networking and interaction across platforms, trying to combine the potential of the territories and to mobilize them for development. The inter-institutional interaction promotes the division of tasks and responsibilities among the various partner institutions.

The approach proposed by the LEADER Program, promoter of the Community initiative, is described as very important. It stresses development issues, viewed as integral, plural, focusing on autonomy, initiative, innovation and partnership (national and transnational).

"It began in an experimental way as a communitarian initiative, the LIDER community initiative defends a way of making local development that is based on a set of characteristics, and these characteristics lead us to look at development in an integrated form, in a plural form, in partnership, with great autonomy. We claim a broad autonomy with respect to central government for our processes."

The strengthening of civil society, citizenship and social cohesion are considered key areas as they enable thinking through the ways of carrying out community development.

"Within the urban community development program and the education and childhood development program, finding bridges to encourage

inter-generational and to work with people, with seniors. But let's admit there is not an action plan or a very specific purpose... there are small trials, pilot projects. (...) But this is clearly an area where we think it makes sense to have local action initiatives (...) through the establishment of inter-generational dynamics."

The investment in individual work, customized in order to train and to empower people, is reported as work that is done in an integrated logic within community initiatives. In this context, the New Opportunities Centers are sometimes mentioned, emphasizing the fact that some are itinerant.

"Training is one of the most important aspects that we have. It is also consistent with third sector, or people we try to improve their qualifications, either through training or through the New Opportunities Centers... then you can also open doors for work."

"Looking at the whole person, considering all aspects of your life"

"Create real autonomy"

Local support offices are also mentioned as examples of proximity initiatives within local development. These are said to play an important role in developing applications for different programs in social, tourism and agriculture areas.

"We have these local offices support to carry out all QREN programs, from the social area up to, you know, agriculture, thus covering all areas."

"We have a project that is called the Eco-museum, Eco-village, which has several strands, and one of them would be to create an operating company of organic farming, where people would work (...). For our part, and above all, to create a living space for those people who at this moment are temporarily homeless because they can not pay their loans to the banks. Bottom-line, we would create a temporary living space for the families. (...) This is an American concept, community, community life, where people enjoy the homes but would be working on these initiatives. Or they would have to have training or work in biological agriculture, in the village maintenance ..."

We also want to stress that volunteering practices are present both in "social care" and "community development". Donations may take different forms, from goods supply (food, clothing, furniture, money, etc...) to unpaid work at different roles (administration, management, and implementation) in many different institutions. We also found examples of associations that emerged from volunteering practices and play a significant role in community development.

"Everyone has given a donation to found the association ... each one gave what he could, money was needed to found the association. (...) Here's all "for the love of the shirt" ... We have gymnastics for the ladies, we're waiting for school now, it only opened this year, to have a teacher to give lessons to the illiterate. We run tours through all the country."

6. Main (and yet preliminary) findings⁶

There is a hiatus between the discourse found in the written documents and the oral speech in the interviews. This hiatus is particularly clear in what refers to the methodologies guiding local action, and it is reinforced when local institutions are dependant on external consultants.

There is a gap between the kind of participation mentioned in the conceptualization of social intervention and the actual participation of the beneficiaries.

There is a deficit in the articulation between institutions involved in partnerships. Partnerships are established, for the most part, as a result of demands imposed by funding programmes, and by the dynamism of some Redes Sociais. Informal, personal relationships also play an important role in this process, even if sometimes they generate fragile partnerships because they are too dependant on personal and/or politicized relationships.

Local actors tend to regard the regulatory role of the Central Administration as rigid, bureaucratic, and distant from local reality and intervention procedures.

The provision of services is a form of assistance that may be implemented both by "social care" and "community development". In this sense, social offices and the local support offices are examples narrated above.

⁶ The time frame of this research project naturally imposes some limitations on the results we are able to present at the moment of writing this text.

Evaluation processes are often a result of demands imposed by funding programmes. There is the acknowledgement of some difficulties in integrating evaluation procedures involving systematic record of data and analysis of the intervention developed. Sometimes, higher education institutions take part in the evaluation processes. Concerns with evaluation procedures are also associated with quality certification.

There is an important financial dependence of local action initiatives on the central State and on local public administration (municipal authorities).

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