

Las organizaciones sociales y comunitarias: estrategia para recomponer el tejido social, caso comuna 11, Bello-Antioquia

Social and community organizations, as a strategy to rebuild the social fabric, case of commune 11, municipality of Bello-Antioquia

Organizações sociais e comunitárias, como estratégia para reconstruir o tecido social, caso da comuna 11, município de Bello-Antioquia

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RESUMEN

Este artículo presenta los resultados de una investigación cuyo propósito fue comprender los procesos organizativos y participativos de las organizaciones sociales y comunitarias de la Comuna 11 del municipio de Bello-Antioquia y la relación con las redes de organizaciones sociales. Desde el paradigma histórico hermenéutico con enfoque etnográfico, se realizó mapeo, revisión documental y grupos focales con las organizaciones. La muestra final está conformada por 14 organizaciones. Se concluye, que estas a partir de las distintas formas organizativas contribuyen al desarrollo y generación de redes, sin embargo, hay una débil articulación con otras instituciones, precaria participación en programas municipales y territoriales. Dado las observaciones anteriores se hace necesario el fortalecimiento de la organización comunitaria en formación política, trabajo en red, empoderamiento en objetivos y metas comunes para elevar su capacidad de participación e incidencia en los asuntos públicos.

Palabras clave: planificación social, organización, medios sociales, estructura social, desarrollo humano.

ABSTRACT

This article presents the results of a research whose purpose was to understand the organizational and participatory processes of social and community organizations in Commune 11 of the municipality of Bello-Antioquia and the relationship with the networks of social organizations. From the historical hermeneutic paradigm with ethnographic approach, mapping, documentary review and focus groups with the organizations were carried out. The final sample is made up of 14 organizations. It is concluded that the organizations, based on the different organizational forms, contribute to the development and generation of networks; however, there is weak articulation with other institutions and precarious participation in municipal and territorial programs. Given the above observations, it is necessary to strengthen the community organization in political training, networking, empowerment in community objectives and goals, and the development of a community network.

Key words: social planning, Organization, social media, social structure, Human development.

RESUMO

Este artigo apresenta os resultados de um projeto de investigação cujo objetivo foi compreender os processos organizativos e participativos das organizações sociais e comunitárias da Comuna 11 do município de Bello-Antioquia e a sua relação com as redes de organizações sociais. A partir do paradigma hermenéutico histórico com uma abordagem etnográfica, realizou-se um mapeamento, uma revisão documental e grupos focais com as organizações. A amostra final é composta por 14 organizações. Conclui-se que as organizações contribuem para o desenvolvimento e geração de redes através de suas diferentes formas organizativas; no entanto, há uma fraca articulação com outras instituições e uma precária participação em programas municipais e territoriais. Tendo em conta as observações anteriores, é necessário reforçar a organização comunitária na formação política, na criação de redes, no empoderamento dos objectivos e metas da comunidade e no desenvolvimento da participação comunitária.

Palavras-chave: planejamento social, Organização, Mídia social, Estrutura social, Desenvolvimento humano.

Background

The situation of poverty, exclusion, and inequality that Latin America has experienced in recent decades has been exacerbated by neoliberal policies (Álvarez et al. 2010, Martínez-Gómez et al. 2021, Rodríguez, 2020). These policies sought significant economic growth as the main strategy for consumption-based development, without imagining that it would increase the cost of living and decrease the quality of life for the inhabitants.

The neoliberal development model prevailing in Latin America perpetuates the inequality gap, as shown by Escobar (2005), Álvarez et al. (2010), and Múnera (2007), and regional development records (ECLAC, 2017a, 2017b). The inequality gap is growing, as more and more people are becoming wealthy, and the poorest population is increasing. This situation limits people's potential to satisfactorily and freely meet their basic needs, as Sen (1999) would say, which is why this development model has led to severe political and social crises on the continent (Stezano, 2020).

This situation is particularly acute in Colombia, because it goes hand in hand with armed conflicts, which swell the impoverished outskirts of cities, while generating rural displacement and exacerbating intra-urban displacement (Duriez, 2019) due to public order situations, which increases marginalization, unemployment, exclusion, and learned helplessness among the population (Sotelsek, 2007; Rivera-González, 2011; ECLAC, 2017a, ECLAC, 2017b). The socio-political and economic outlook for Latin America becomes even bleaker when we consider the inability of cities to generate comprehensive development for their populations, as evidenced by unemployment rates, health and education coverage, and access to public services such as electricity, sanitation, and drinking water, despite the constant pursuit of modernization.

In this sense, violence, inequality, and displacement are factors that have forced citizens to seek mechanisms for integration and access to work through different means, to find well-being or improve their quality of life. One of these is the creation of social organizations, which aim to mitigate these problems and restore citizens' rights in some way. This is the view put forward by Ramos et al. (2019).

Community organization is the structured means by which the community identifies its needs and objectives, orders or prioritizes them, develops the confidence and desire to do something together, seeks the resources to do so, takes action, and develops the necessary attitudes and practices of cooperation and collaboration. (p.6)

“ In this sense, violence, inequality, and displacement are factors that have forced citizens to seek mechanisms for integration and access to work through different means, in order to find well-being or improve their quality of life. ”

“ The basis for the creation of organizations, as Kadushin (2012) states, is cooperation between individuals, common goals and objectives, shared ideologies and interests to jointly resolve a difficulty; the desire to acquire knowledge, the struggles to access new possibilities for development, or the demands to restore and guarantee rights, knowledge, the struggles to access new possibilities for development, or the demands to restore and guarantee rights. ”

According to Chadi (2007), three types of social networks have emerged from community organizations. Primary networks are made up of the closest, most meaningful, and most intimate relationships of each individual, where we interact with family, friends, and neighbors. Secondary social networks are made up of recreational groups, community organizations, religious or youth groups, labor groups such as unions, and educational groups. Finally, there are institutional networks, which include schools, the judicial system, the health system, among others. They are characterized by reflecting social, cultural, and political norms, as they have an organized and hierarchical structure where social norms and roles are clearly defined.

In Colombia, since the 1991 Constitution, social organization networks have become fundamental because, through different community organizations, social transformations are achieved and political participation by communities is encouraged. Through social organization networks, people try to meet unmet basic needs, and citizens find opportunities for participation that encourage individual and collective initiative. This takes different organizational forms, such as decision-making for the common good and rebuilding and strengthening the social fabric, which impacts social integration (Jiménez-Minive, et al, 2022; Rodríguez and Zapata, 2020).

The basis for the creation of organizations, as Kadushin (2012) states, is cooperation between individuals, common goals and objectives, shared ideologies and interests to jointly resolve a difficulty; the desire to acquire knowledge, the struggles to access new development opportunities, or the demands to restore and guarantee rights are motivators that bring together different human beings with diverse characteristics and conditions to be part of a social organization. Finding ourselves in one of these scenarios and formalizing the encounter strengthens the sense of belonging and consolidates social organizations (Corona, 2020). It also allows people to solve specific problems of specific groups of people to achieve the proposed goals that bring them together. These people organize themselves into different types of community organizations according to certain objectives and generate a functional structure. (Arango and López 2021)

These organizations have the potential to increase their management capacity by building relationships with other networks. They are “structures made up of individuals who interact through relationships based on emotional and material exchange through which social support is offered” (Ávila-Toscano, 2009, p.65).

This issue is fundamental to the social sciences, given that these organizations have been formed to create spaces for citizen participation and community building in order to achieve their goals and carry out their purposes, but at the same time they build and restore the social fabric and consolidate transformations in their environment. The basis for the configuration of organizations is, as Kadushin (2012) says, cooperation between individuals. All of the above serves as a preamble to the study that gives rise to this article, which focuses on Commune 11 of the municipality of Bello (Antioquia), made up of seven neighborhoods (Zamora, La Gabriela, Belvedere, Acevedo, Alpes del Norte, Santa Rita, and Industrial Zone No. 7). It has 22,958 inhabitants, of whom 15.03% are displaced persons (Municipality of Bello, 2012). It is also home to populations from rural areas whose inhabitants have been victims of the armed conflict and are therefore part of the displaced population.

The socioeconomic situation in the municipality of Bello is alarming, as the Unsatisfied Basic Needs Index (NBI) shows that, in the rural area of the municipality of Bello, 10.58% of the population lives in poverty and 1.99% in

extreme poverty. This figure is very similar in the urban area, where 9.46% live in poverty and 1.58% in extreme poverty (Government of Antioquia, 2013). Figures from the System for Identifying Potential Beneficiaries of Social Programs (SISBEN) report that 0.06% of the population lives in stratum 0, 42.12% in stratum 1, and 45.57% in stratum 2, confirming that this municipality has a large population with characteristics of vulnerability and exclusion, with little possibility of accessing the formal labor market and few opportunities to develop their potential, as they are in a situation of poverty or extreme poverty (Municipality of Bello, 2016).

Methodology

This research was guided by the historical hermeneutic paradigm, with an emphasis on ethnography, since it:

breaks down culture into more specific objects, such as the characterization and interpretation of socialization patterns, the construction of values, the development and expressions of cultural competence, and the development and understanding of rules of interaction, among others (Sandoval, 2002, p. 61).

Ethnography allows us to understand and interpret reality from the perspective of the subject. In this study, it is the members of each of the social and community organizations in Comuna 11 of Bello who, through their experiences, relationships, and social interactions, have enabled us to recognize the reality they have built. The objective of the study was to understand the organizational and participatory processes of social and community organizations and their relationship with social networks in Comuna 11 of the municipality of Bello, department of Antioquia, Colombia.

Three phases were proposed for the research: an ethnographic approach, the compilation of participation experiences, and the analysis of the information. In the first phase, an ethnographic survey was conducted, since “this technique takes as its concern and basic axis of articulation the analysis of the cultural dimensions (symbolic and material) of the human reality under investigation” (Sandoval, 2002, p.138). This process gathered essential information to continue with the second phase of the project, which aimed to delve deeper into the experience of social and community organizations. As Spradley (1978) states, these techniques provide “an inventory of cultural topics that, when beginning fieldwork, allows for a complete sweep of these dimensions within the human group under study.” (As cited in Sandoval, 2002, p.138).

As Sandoval (2002) reaffirms,

In the case of micro-ethnography, the ethnographic survey aims to identify some basic cultural themes that will facilitate the work of mapping situations and inventorying actors. This, in turn, will serve as support for the subsequent process of collecting information in a focused or selective manner (Sandoval, 2002, p. 139).

This is why a survey was used to collect information that would serve as a basis for mapping and then sampling the social and community organizations in the sector. The survey consisted of six generic or thematic questions that explored the importance of networking for them, the types of networks they are involved in, and a description of the spaces in which they participate.

The other technique used in gathering information for the project was a documentary analysis of the reports on the Development Plans of the municipality of Bello (2016); Antioquia Governor’s Office (2013) and UNIMINUTO (2017), since “Through them it is possible to capture very valuable information” (Sandoval, 2002, p. 137) on the socioeconomic and political context of the sector and of the Social and Community Organizations themselves.

The sampling that was part of the ethnographic approach was carried out using the “snowball” strategy in order to locate organizations that would gradually lead to others, in order to contact “key informants” who were members of these organizations (Galeano, 2004, Montes de Oca, 2021).

The mapping allowed for the identification of 27 social organizations and contacted 14 of them. Key informants were identified within these organizations to interact with them through information gathering tools. Focus

groups were held with these 14 organizations, which constituted the second phase of the research, to reveal and recover these experiences of participation in the community from the voices of the members of these organizations.

Finally, the third phase involves analyzing the results, which formed the basis of this article, establishing the following categories: solidarity, the configuration of community organizations as political actors, networks and alliances, the relationship between individuals and groups, and the social fabric, in order to understand how the people involved, based on their organizational logic, seek local and community development within their commune.

Results

One of the first results of the initial phase of the research is the mapping of social and community organizations, which showed that despite the social and economic conditions of Comuna 11, the leaders of the sector, specifically in the Zamora neighborhood, have initiated a process of reconstructing historical memory and recognizing the territory, presenting a vision of the geographical space as stipulated by the governing bodies, and adding the location of leaders and social and community organizations that enable coordination and networking.

Twenty-seven organizations were identified, grouped according to their type of social, religious, or religious outreach purpose, grassroots organization, school outreach, youth organization, social outreach, and minority outreach. This is defined by the social purpose of each organization (see Table 1).

Table 1. Organizations identified in the initial mapping.

Types	Organizations
Religious social outreach	Sisters of Christian Social Providence, San Luis Gonzaga Home headquarters. Brother Francisco Cultural Center (Capuchin Brothers) Cumbeland Presbyterian Church John Wesley Church San Roberto Belarmino Parish
Grassroots organization	Acevedo Community Action Board Zamora Community Action Board Santa Rita Community Action Board JAC la Gabriela Local Administrative Board, Commune 11
School social outreach	Gato con Botas Children's Home Frutos de Amor (Compassion) Comprehensive Development Center San Nicolás School La Gabriela Educational Institution ATANA Eco Club Unámonos Foundation ISA (Santa Rita School)
Youth Organizations	Alcalá Scout Group Dejando Huella Youth Group Youth Network Youth Group Youth and Culture for the Neighborhood
Social protection	Alcalá Senior Citizens Group UNBOUND Foundation Casa Be hania Center for Integration and Cultural Development Caminos Unidos Corporation Golden Years Senior Citizens Group The Chosen Ones: A Voice of Hope
Minorities	LGTBI Platform

Note: Prepared internally in 2019.

To select the 14 social and community organizations listed in Table 2, aspects such as social purpose, length of time in existence, beneficiary community, among others, were considered. A vital aspect for the research was that the organizations had the time to apply the research techniques, since several organizations selected within the package were unable to provide the time for the activity. The organizations in which the ethnographic survey was implemented were as follows:

Table 2. Organizations surveyed

Tipos	Organizaciones
Social outreach	Hermanos Capuchinos Cultural Center Cumbeland Presbyterian Church Juan Wesley Church
Grassroots organization	Acevedo Community Action Board Zamora Community Action Board Gabriela Community Action Board
School social outreach	Gato con Botas Children's Home Frutos de Amor Comprehensive Development Center
Youth organizations	Alcalá Scout Group Youth Network Youth
Social Protection	Alcalá Senior Citizens Group Bethania House Center for Cultural Integration and Development Caminos Unidos Corporation Golden Years Senior Citizens Group

Note: Prepared internally in 2019.

Although it was not possible to contact all 27 organizations identified, the 14 that responded to the research call reveal a community that, in terms of social and community organization, understood that these strategies can be used to manage social development. The following results were obtained from the responses to the ethnographic survey:

Grafh 1. Frequency of responses from 14 key informantss

Social Networks in the 11th district of Bello	Response option	
	YES	NO
Guiding question from the semi-structured ethnographic survey		
Q.1. Do you consider working with networks to be important?	13	1
P.2. Participates in local and municipal spaces.	12	2
P.3. Get to know organizations with similar projects in the community.	12	2
Q.4. Belong to local, regional, and national networks, unions, and associations.	6	8
P.5. Seeks to work with organizations that share the same interests.	12	2
P.6. Partnership with community organizations for actions that benefit the	11	3

Note: Q.1 = Question one. Source: Own work, 2019

Discussion

Based on the results obtained in the ethnographic survey and focus groups, it is evident that most of these organizations take advantage of the different spaces for collective meeting and empowerment in the community and participate in local and municipal consultation spaces, working together for the benefit of the community. In this way, as Barbero and Cortés (2007) say, circles of solidarity are created, reflecting the collective nature of community development and the need for relationships, encounters, and sharing to build long-term processes.

“ Based on the results obtained in the ethnographic survey and focus groups, it is evident that most of these organizations take advantage of the different spaces for collective meeting and empowerment in the community. ”

Respondents acknowledged the importance of networking (P.1), with 13 respondents answering yes and 1 answering no. However, when it comes to belonging to different networks, unions, and associations, it can be observed that there are a significant number of organizations that work individually and have no political influence (P.4). Six respondents said they do work in networks, while eight of the 14 respondents said they do not. Networking is an important element for “achieving the necessary power for a new negotiation of citizenship and participation rights” (Vecinas and Ballester, 2012, p. 407).

In this regard, organizations establish different social networks with entities such as associations, cultural centers, Christian and Catholic churches, the Ministry of Health, the Network of Children’s Homes, and the Early Childhood Roundtable, demonstrating their interest and contribution to creating and rebuilding the social fabric in the face of the different problems facing the community (Ruiz, 2016; Juárez, 2020; Gómez, et al., 2020).

It is important to mention that most social organizations in Bello’s 11th district have relationships with similar organizations (P.5). Twelve out of 14 organizations seek to work with other organizations in the district that share the same interests, and 11 of the 14 join forces with other organizations to carry out actions that benefit the community (P.6), including the Betania House of Culture, which hosts several organizations such as the Zamora Community Action Board (hereinafter JAC), the Acevedo JAC, Unbount, among others, establishing exchanges of information and resources.

They consider it valuable to join forces with others, even if they do not have them, in order to promote local development. “They come together in a solid alliance to design, implement, and evaluate solutions” (Sanabria, 2001, p. 91), since they have projects in common. An example of this is the environmental project for the recovery of streams, which was initiated by the Zamora Community Action Board (JAC for its acronym in Spanish). Other social organizations in the community have since joined this project, and this has even enabled them to present a new project for the recovery of streams to the Bello municipal administration (Uribe, 2016). In other words, it is important for social organizations to establish social networks (P.1), as 13 of the 14 respondents stated, understanding social networks as “a group of people, family members, neighbors, friends, and others who are able to provide real and lasting help and support to an individual or family” (Chadi, 2007, p. 27).

Furthermore, Marchioni (1999) states that “this means that the process is open, so that it can incorporate, and flexible, so that it can adapt to people’s real conditions and enable them to participate from their particular circumstances” (p. 73). This relationship constitutes a clear expression of the university’s social outreach, through which it seeks and develops relationships that aim to contribute to the social environment within its sphere of influence.

We cannot fail to mention the commitment made by social and community organizations to social development, understood as “processes of social transformation that seek to improve the living conditions of people living in a given territory (neighborhood, district, municipality) through their empowerment” (Rubio, 2006, p. 288).

The organizations present in the commune are constantly searching for entities that develop similar projects, as can be seen in the responses to question 3 (Q.3), where 12 of the 14 report having knowledge of organizations that develop projects like theirs. This demonstrates their knowledge of the organizations in the area, fostering a sense of belonging in the commune, supported by the projects they have that benefit the community.

When reviewing whether social organizations participate in local and municipal consultation forums, a high percentage of participation was identified (P.2), as 12 of the 14 organizations are present and participate in these spaces. As Rubio (2006) states, "it is the people who inhabit that territory, their community, who are the protagonists of their own development process, actively participating in it and in decisions about which path to follow and what to do at each moment" (p. 288).

This generates sources of employment such as community mothers in kindergartens, who say that thanks to their work they can provide a decent life for their children (Palacio, 2016; Barrios, 2019). Not to mention the importance of older adults in building social networks in the community, as evidenced by the formation of senior citizen groups where they can engage in different activities that allow them to understand that they too are important to the community when it comes to strengthening these circles of solidarity (Mazo, 2016).

The spaces in which they participate are: the Network of Children's Homes, the Secretariat of Culture and the Environment, the Bello Municipal Administration, conciliation groups, UNIMINUTO training programs such as diploma courses, seminars, forums, and programs such as Buen Comienzo (Mazo, 2016), resulting in participatory relationships, knowledge of the entities with which they interact, and the different projects they carry out together.

It has been confirmed that for most social and community organizations in Comuna 11 of the municipality of Bello, working with different social networks is important. These networks undertake actions that restore the social fabric and increase the possibilities of achieving better living conditions within the commune and community development. In this way, the Community Organization forms networks, acts locally, identifies what the territory needs, is democratic, generates development, creates new proposals, promotes leadership, and is based on values (González-Romero, 2020).

Other Characteristics

In terms of implementing the organizational structure of social organizations, they establish membership criteria, which range from age, resume, religious beliefs, length of residence in the neighborhood, education, and Sisbén level, all of which are easy to meet and accessible to interested individuals (Rueda, 2016). In addition, people who want to join one of these organizations must freely and voluntarily submit their application, which ensures that there is no pressure and that they genuinely want to join.

Likewise, organizations in general emphasize that their members must be committed to community work. Organizations establish two specific requirements for maintaining their structure: first, that people want to be part of it, and second, that they feel and live their community work. If these two requirements are met, the other criteria for membership are easy to fulfill, and there is a good chance that the person will join and remain in the organization.

When it comes to decision-making, community organizations are aware of what community means, which is why decisions are made through various participatory forms: board, assembly, meeting, committee, whatever the name, all are consistent in affirming that decision-making is a democratic and participatory activity (Moreno, 2019; Carozzo, 2020). In this regard, when asked how the organization's positions are selected, the response also pointed to the use of consensus and voting.

For information management, 12 of the 14 organizations keep records in minutes, which means that they attach importance to the history of the organization and knowledge management, a vital aspect of the processes they carry out for the continuity and systematization of information.

When it comes to economic sustainability, organizations basically have four options: they are subsidized or have contracts with the state, they save money, they hold raffles or events that they organize themselves, and they also receive donations and loans. This economic aspect is what makes them most vulnerable in terms of their long-term survival, as their income is very precarious or they depend on external entities to carry out their activities, which creates instability.

In terms of organizational, administrative, and social sustainability, organizations are stronger in these areas, as they are aware that their internal and external actions must generate the common good. Similarly, it is important to note that, based on the focus groups, it was evident that, although there is coordination with other institutions, their participation in municipal and territorial programs and projects is precarious. Three important variables are noted in this last item: the first is associated with a lack of knowledge of municipal development plans and, therefore, a lack of participation in them; the second refers to knowledge of the plans, but without participation in them; and the third refers to those who, despite knowing about and participating in them, do not access any programs that are unrelated to them.

It was also revealed that the impact of organizations remains at the micro level, a fact that is closely linked to the low credibility of institutions and weak coordination with other interest groups. Accordingly, it is necessary to strengthen forms of community organization regarding political education, networking, and the empowerment of common objectives and goals, leading to greater participation both internally and in the public sphere. In this latter regard, collaboration and dialogue are essential for participation in the management, control, and oversight of public programs, as well as participation in deliberations on matters of public interest (Vivas et al., 2001).

Added to this is the individualization and marginalization of certain sectors, such as youth participation in community affairs, which generates a rejection of political intervention, given the perceptions and the way in which it has been exercised, through clientelist methods that divide leadership around the obtaining of gifts that favor a particular individual or a select group.

“ This generates sources of employment such as community mothers in kindergartens, who say that thanks to their work they can provide a decent life for their children (Palacio, 2016; Barrios, 2019). ”

Conclusions

In Bello's Commune 11, there is a presence of social and community organizations that contribute in some way to the generation of social development, making it an important commune for the municipality to continue strengthening community life.

The research highlighted the importance of these types of organizations in the territories, because they have become a source of basic needs, a place of protection and shelter for people, and an opportunity for young people to find role models to follow, leaders who generate well-being.

Networks were a vital issue for social and community organizations, but it is difficult to put into practice, as they still lack clear mechanisms for doing so. Although participants confirmed the importance of networking, such coordination is complex, as evidenced by the low level of participation and actual coordination reported by the protagonists in local or regional community organization networks and the low participation in municipal and territorial programs.

This makes it necessary to strengthen community organization in political training, skills for generating a culture of networking, a sense of belonging, and ownership of common objectives and goals, which can result in the increase necessary for local development and the ability to participate and influence public affairs.

“ In terms of organizational, administrative, and social sustainability, organizations are stronger in these areas, as they are aware that their internal and external actions must generate the common good. ”

Statements

This article is the result of research conducted on social organizations in Comuna 11 in the municipality of Bello.

The researchers declare that the financial resources were provided by the Corporación Universitaria Minuto de Dios “UNIMINUTO.”

We, the researchers, declare that we are the authors of this article.

We, the researchers, declare that the participants signed informed consent forms.

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