

The municipality as protagonist scenario of the current agricultural transformations in Cuba

A. Suset¹, Taymer Miranda¹, Hilda Machado¹, E. González² y O. Nicado³

¹*Estación Experimental de Pastos y Forrajes "Indio Hatuey",
Universidad de Matanzas "Camilo Cienfuegos", Ministerio de Educación Superior
Central España Republicana, CP 44280, Matanzas, Cuba*

²*Departamento de Sociología y Cátedra UNESCO de Desarrollo Humano Sostenible,
Universidad de La Habana, Cuba*

³*Empresa Pecuaria Martí, Subdelegación provincial MINAGRI, Matanzas, Cuba
E-mail: antonio.suset@indio.atenas.inf.cu*

ABSTRACT

This work briefly reviews the literature that supports the analysis of the aspects related to the evolution of territorial and agricultural transformations in Cuba. Reference is made to the role of the State in the implementation of strategies to support the development processes in the Cuban countryside, in an international context which sometimes favors, and occasionally limits, the performance of the agricultural structure and the rural areas of the nation. The paper also examines the potentials of the municipality as strategic scenario to promote sustainable alternatives of agricultural production which guarantee –among other aspects– food security, employment generation and the rational use of natural resources, from the articulation of the agricultural sector with management of the local government. All this occurs in a context of decentralized transformations and in which different types of producers coexist, also organized in a diverse way. The integrated agroproductive and rural development model, with territorial vision, is visualized to be starting and under experimentation, and the flexibility and diversity with which the process occurs will allow to adjust the model and adapt it to the characteristics of the territories and the different stakeholders, according to the national development strategy.

Key words: community development, territorial transformations

INTRODUCTION

In the last decades new proposals in sustainable rural development and territorial development began to be managed, paradigms which emerge as a consequence of the transformations experienced by the Latin American rural and agricultural context, and also because of the inviability of the implemented development strategies, due to diverse causes (political as well as technological): boom of neoliberal strategies, crisis of the paradigm focused on conventional agriculture, revitalization of knowledge and practices belonging to the farmer agriculture, environmental crisis and agri-food insufficiency; these processes have impact on the traditional ways of conceiving agriculture and its role in the current society, as sustained by Suset and González (2011).

In the complex international scenario where an increase of poverty, food lack and scarcity, social insecurity, migrations and environmental degradation is observed, it is necessary to ensure that the stakeholders who intervene in development are

capable of transforming the existing practices: this would allow the management of a sustainable way of life and better subsistence strategies, essentially, for rural areas.

In the case of Cuba, after the revolutionary triumph of 1959, measures were implemented aimed at achieving the immediate redistribution of income in favor of workers and marginated groups, the elimination of unemployment and territorial differences, along with the increase of the population's standard of living, such aspects, together with the social policy directed by the State (CIEM, 1997), constituted the first acknowledged trait of human development for the country.

The above-mentioned transformations had the purpose of supporting the diversification of the organization and production forms, which facilitated the understanding of the importance and viability of development in the different territories of the country. This allowed the implementation of decentralized strategies, at territorial and municipal level, as occurred

in rural areas and the agricultural sector. Hence at present opportune steps are taken to grant the municipality a protagonist role in decision-making, from the vision of the local stakeholders and their productive organizations. For such purpose, different institutions and organizations were gradually created, in the interior of the country, to respond, with their functions, to territorial demands.

This work presents an assessment of the development territorial perspective, as well as of the transformations which are required to be implemented in the agricultural sector at municipal level, as alternative for the decentralization and stimulation of the economy of the context.

Some considerations from literature review

The new rules of the globalized world allow to appreciate the need of flexibility and participation as central principles of management and production, issues which are best managed in less wide spaces, for example, the territory or rural localities. Thus, at present the territory and planning from it acquire importance, as alternative of resistance and persistence of population groups, cultures, life strategies and alternatives of productive practices.

Shejtman and Berdegú (2004) consider that participation constitutes an essential aspect for the construction of citizenship in Latin America, and according to González and Cambra (2004) it should be understood as integral and multidimensional participation of the population in the complex process of construction of their individual and collective life.

Hence it is derived that the new relation between global and local aspects allows to grant higher relevance to territories, considering them not only in geographical terms, but as the spaces in which the different institutions and agents participate and are interrelated, in order to achieve a better quality of life for their population (Costamagna, 2005). This implies a social construction which exceeds the physical or spatial dimension.

In the context of territory, institutional development has the purpose of stimulating and facilitating the interaction and coordination of the local stakeholders among themselves, and also between them and the relevant external agents; as well as increasing the opportunities for the population at a disadvantage to participate of the process and its benefits. The territory should be visualized as a matrix of organization and social interactions and not as an abstract space or receptacle of activities; hence in the face of uncertainty and changing scenarios, the

social, cultural, institutional, historical, geographical and environmental forces must be considered.

The important role played by the aspects related to identity, which are given in the scenario of the territory and not in work spaces (Arocena, 2004), is also acknowledged here. The culture- and identity-related topics are important for achieving a sense of belonging, for which the territories constitute decisive development spaces; that is why the socio-territorial identity constitutes a key factor for the mobilization of collective energies in favor of regional or local development.

Moyano (2008) sustains that although agriculture has a relevant role as support of rural areas, it is not enough to maintain a live and dynamic social tissue in many rural zones, for which other endogenous and exogenous resources must be used to revitalize areas where the agricultural activity finds difficulties for its full development. In this sense, Link (2006) refers that the territory constitutes a space of human dimensions, with community connotations, where confidence and interknowledge prevail, and which show neither relevant roughness nor contradictions for the access to richness and the control of productive processes through participation.

As it is observed, the initiative of promoting sustainable rural development from the territory constitutes a viable strategy. From this development perspective, the analysis of the aspects which limit or favor management at territorial and local level is facilitated, and in turn it allows to identify the potentialities of social, human, productive and physical capitals. The understanding of the influence of globalization and the external factors on the management of rural locality development is also promoted. On the other hand, although the economic aspects are considered essential, identity, trust and solidarity are valued as potentials for the actions and the transformation of rural reality and its ecosystems.

The perspective of territorial development in Cuba

With the triumph of the Cuban Revolution, state production in socialist enterprises was facilitated and an enhancement of food production was attempted through agricultural transformations, among other substantial changes which rapidly improved the living and working conditions in the country. This facilitated a development which had as limitations that it did not give sufficient value to the sociocultural variables that participate in productive processes (Suset, 2004), for which promoting growth and distribution of the obtained results was supposed to

be almost natural, not considering the importance of the real participation of workers and inhabitants in decision-making regarding the territory and the projections linked to the productive processes.

The ultimate objective was –and is– to achieve territorial environments in which the citizens could fully express all their personal and collective potentials. In this regard, and unlike most Latin American countries, Cuba began to defend territoriality in development management since the beginning of the popular and inclusive political project proposed by the Revolution.

Regarding the above-expressed facts, four programs may be identified, which played an essential role in the conformation of the interest in the territorial-local space: the transformation of agricultural production; industrialization; territorial distribution of social services and the constitution of the Organs of People's Power, in the limits of a new political-administrative division, which meant the intention of decentralization of the state apparatus at all levels and the concentration of the absolute majority of the economic and social activities under the administration of the lower levels of the state apparatus, that is, municipal levels (Castro, 1974).

In the last twenty years, and in spite of the serious economic limitations, the effort by the State and the Government has been aimed at the enhancement of these territorial links, with the development –particularly– of the provincial level in the higher industrial and service branches, and of the municipal level in the contribution of intermediate and basic services. In this sense, in the 5th Congress of the Cuban Communist Party, it was established that the territorial economy should assume an increasingly active role in the search and instrumentation of solutions related to local development, from the resources, culture and tradition of each territory. Likewise, the national activities would be complemented based on the same premises¹.

An aspect related to the above-explained facts, and which is visualized as alternative and visible mechanism of solution to the problems experienced by agricultural production with a subsequent impact on the reinvigoration of economy and import reduction, is the proposal of transformations gathered in the Guidelines for the Economic and Social Policy framed in the 6th Congress of the Cuban Communist Party (PCC, 2011).

Obviously, the process which is referred above does not occur spontaneously; for it to take place the operativeness in management at territorial-local level should be facilitated, mainly in the relation to the economy, production, identity and everyday life of people, independently from their condition as labor force or inhabitants of the context.

The creation of people's councils, the reorganization of agriculture (still an ongoing process), the opening of local agricultural markets, the incorporation of certain service and craftsmanship activities, the promotion of small-scale local industries, the progressive implementation of a tax system, the introduction of alternative technologies for reducing the energy and material expense, the environmental management and enhancement of municipal administration, among others, are strategic development lines which at present find the best conditions for their materialization in the already-structured territories.

The above-presented issues, in spite of being supported by the Cuban legislation, have not achieved in the social practice the projected remarkable impacts; nevertheless, from academy and research, there are referents which aim at the acknowledgement of the territory's relevance as a development choice. In this sense, Espina (2006) refers that the crisis and reform made the relevance of the territorial-local scenario emerge strongly, as space of social heterogenization, expression of disadvantages and inequalities, and strategic decision-making. In this regard, the substantive components are administrative decentralization and participation.

From the above-explained, it is inferred that the presence of territoriality in the Cuban reform is presented as the possibility of development, with a design focused on equity as a right of the citizenship and articulating axis of the social policy. This design emphasizes administrative decentralization and real participation through territorial and local transformation projects, as well as on diversification of the economic agents and the mixed and cooperative economy; but the predominance of state property and the reinforcement of social programs based on local public services, are maintained.

The analysis made by Espina (2006) states that the development perspective assumes the idea of the territory as strategic factor and, for the Cuban case, it is integrated to the conception of development of the

¹ Economic Resolution of the 5th Congress of the PCC, in Granma November 7, 1997.

country, where the State preserves its redistributive and control capacity over the economy, which allows it to attenuate disadvantages, attend to extreme situations and stimulate innovative options.

The perspective of the territorial-local development in Cuba allows to understand the importance of the municipality as the basic level for decision making, visualizes the need to articulate stakeholders and actions from a decentralized and diverse perspective, and in turn it acknowledges heterogeneity at this level. It also indicates the importance and the contribution generated to the territory by the economic organizations of higher economic contribution; in addition, it propitiates the acknowledgement of the Government's role as key stakeholder in development management, in the generation of strategies and innovations which decrease the burden of the State in problem solving. On the other hand, it allows to evaluate the role of the agricultural sector as promoter of local economies and the influence of the articulation of the agricultural structure on other sectors and on the local government on the food warranty and security of the municipality.

The municipality as current strategic space in the sustainability of the territorial and agricultural development

In the case of Cuba, the municipality constitutes the most important decision structure at territorial level, as at this level the State is organized in a group of basic public organizations. In it the economic and political powers, the information generation and distribution centers and the elements of sociocultural identity of each zone, are found. In this sense, Guzón (2006) refers that in the municipality the start of the local, daily space occurs, the space of interpersonal relations, of diversity, where life is produced and reproduced and the satisfaction levels of individuals and groups are reached –or not. For such reason, the sustainability of the municipality –as physical space and space of basic social interactions– depends on the satisfaction of the elemental needs of its inhabitants, without compromising the welfare of future generations.

At present, any development program for the search for sustainability at municipal level must follow and comply with, as much as possible, essential issues such as the ones stated by Cásares and Arca (2002):

- Efficient use of resources, water and energy saving, and trend towards the utilization of renewable resources at a rate lower than their regeneration.

- Reduction, reutilization and recycling of residues.
- Adequate soil planning and management, combining the development of the municipality with landscape conservation and guaranteeing adequate integration of the diverse uses existing in the territory.
- Promotion of a diversified economic structure which guarantees higher socioeconomic stability, reduces people displacement and decreases good transportation.
- Provision of wide and equitable cover to the basic social needs of health, education and access to adequate housing and paid employment.
- Warranty for all inhabitants of the access to information and implementation of systems to promote their participation in decision-making.

On the other hand, Hernández (2004) stated that for implementing the local economic development the utilization of the internal capacities and the promotion of endogenous development are necessary, from the use of the potential of local institutions, the physical resources of the context and the available human capital, without the vision that problem understanding and strategy elaboration should come from organizations external to the localities.

From the above-explained facts, the municipality is outlined with potential of planning capacity and promotion of initiatives aimed at socioeconomic development, with positive impacts on the improvement of the daily lives of its inhabitants and workers; it also constitutes an unlimited reserve in the solution of problems through self-management.

The new municipality roles in Cuba

From the economic restructuring started since 1993 and with the creation of the basic units of cooperative production (UBPCs), supported by the Executive Order No. 142 of September 20th, 1993, the Agreement No. 2708 of the Executive Committee of the Council of Ministers and the Resolution No. 354/93 of the Ministry of Agriculture (General Regulation of UBPCs), a contribution was made to the increase of local food production through plots and farms. In this stage the idea of urban agriculture was proposed, in order to guarantee fresh food –basically vegetables and spices– for the local population, improve food quality without importing inputs, and stimulate national consumption. Such proposal also included popular rice and fruit production, with smallholder farmers. This process was accompanied by a gradual change of paradigm,

with the presence of organic, agroecological, conventional and mixed agriculture, where the combination in the productive systems was privileged.

Afterwards, the concept of suburban agriculture was introduced, which constitutes a territorial, municipalized vision of supply of different locally-produced agricultural products (Cruz and Sánchez, 2001); it allows to substitute imports and national –and preferably local– inputs are basically used, under the organic, agroecological or mixed paradigm in livestock or agriculture exploitation, or the combination of both, as a way to guarantee inputs.

The above-explained process was followed by the municipalization of agriculture, which was conceived from the creation of the municipal agriculture delegations and land distribution. The latter was supported by the Executive Order No. 259, which authorizes the distribution of unused state lands, as usufruct, to natural persons or legal entities, to be used rationally and sustainably, according to the aptitude of land use for agricultural production and the planning process of the local, provincial and national needs; likewise, it is based on the combination of new planning forms with the existing ones and on the inclusion of the local balance of produced food (for consumption at territorial level) and the provincial or national balance (for the distribution and consumption to other localities of the province or the country, as occurs with potato and rice production), for which the municipality-province-country relation, regarding the agroproductive and rural development logic, should also allow to adequate the needs of local demands to the conditions of the country.

In this scenario, the municipality takes up a new role in land distribution, planning of local agricultural productions, control and supervision of local markets and decentralization of the price policy at this level. The municipal and provincial governments fix the tariffs according to the market conditions, for which they make the system more flexible. On the other hand, there is a diversification of producers, with predominance of the cooperative and private forms, and the presence of a higher number of smallholders; in addition, the movement of urban and suburban agriculture is widened, and there is an incipient industrialization of the local production, which acquires value when there is significant surplus.

Commercialization is carried out in a diversified way, with state control over the production and transformation of the role of the state agricultural enterprise into enterprises of technical services. In this process the creation of territorial input markets

for agriculture and the flexibility in the use of hired labor in farmer and cooperative production, are still pending. The tax on monetary income is also introduced.

A new model of production-commercialization and consumption of agricultural products is being managed, with the participation of provincial and municipal governments; and there is also the intention of adapting Cuban agriculture to the existing conditions in the different territories of the country, substituting imports, propitiating self-supply and agri-food security at territorial level and the search for new forms of production realization with more social commitment and market participation, i.e., a combination of market and social commitment of the farmers to provide food for educational and health institutions, the system of social welfare, among others.

Nevertheless, the centrality of the Cuban State continues and the combination centralization-decentralization is observed, in coexistence and permanent tension; territorial development is also present within a conception and closely related national and international contexts. Diverse contradictions appear since a period of model display and its adjustment is identified. Overproductions are observed in certain products and territories which cannot be utilized, as in the case of fruits. The storing and transportation system is under experimentation and frequent collapses occur due to the lack of transport; in this regard, the input market is not solved. Likewise, the current stimulation systems and price tariffs should be restructured.

There is little development of agroindustry in the municipal space; reference is made to the transformation mini-industry and macro-industry, as aspects which should be enhanced in the new construction of articulated rural development at territorial level.

On the other hand, the technological model is not clearly defined, although at present the mixed model prevails. Hence the model, experimentation, innovation, and professional training in agriculture, and in the territories with predominance of agricultural production, should aim at promoting small production and cooperatives; that is, the style of professional training should be adjusted to the work in farms –with integral productive systems based on agroecological and low-input logics–, and to the self-managed development of the municipalities, to find the right adaptation to Cuban conditions.

CONCLUSIONS

The aspects analyzed in this paper serve as support and facilitate the understanding of the viability of the sustainable rural development alternative, with territorial vision and articulation of stakeholders, aspect which suggests overcoming the global-national and disarticulated vision.

The administrative decentralization and real participation constitute the substantive components which should rule the required transformations, in the productive organization and processes, as well as in the territories and localities.

Agricultural production, in the case of Cuba, is visualized with high value and as support of the construction of alternatives for integral rural development, from the territorial and local perspective.

The Cuban model of rural and agricultural development is open to experimentation and change, but it is still in its initial stage.

BIBLIOGRAPHIC REFERENCES

- Arocena, J. 2004. La tensión actor-sistema en los procesos contemporáneos de desarrollo. Ponencia presentada en el Seminario Internacional sobre la Agenda del Desarrollo en América Latina. Universidad Católica del Uruguay. 9 p.
- Cásares, J. & Arca, J.C. 2002. Gestión estratégica de la sostenibilidad en el ámbito local: la agenda 21 local. *Revista Galega de Economía*. 11 (2):1.
- Castro, R. 1974. Fragmentos de las palabras de clausura del seminario a los delegados del Poder Popular, electos al iniciarse la experiencia de Matanzas el 22 de agosto. Documento del Comité Ejecutivo del Consejo de Ministros. La Habana. 10 p.
- CIEM. 1997. Investigación sobre el desarrollo humano en Cuba 1996. Editorial Caguayo S.A. La Habana. 110 p.
- Costamagna, P. 2005. El territorio y las instituciones en las iniciativas de desarrollo económico local. *Territorio, Instituciones y Desarrollo Económico Local*. Documento de trabajo. Argentina. 12 p.
- Cruz, María C. & Sánchez, R. 2001. Agricultura y ciudad. Una clave para la sustentabilidad. Fundación Antonio Núñez Jiménez de la Naturaleza y el Hombre. La Habana. 180 p.
- Espina, Mayra. 2006. Apuntes sobre el concepto de desarrollo y su dimensión territorial. En: Desarrollo local en Cuba: retos y perspectivas. (Comp. Ada Guzón). Editorial Academia. La Habana. p. 35.
- González, E. & de Cambra, J. 2004. Desarrollo humano, cultura y participación: Notas para el debate. En: La participación. Diálogo y debate en el contexto cubano. Centro de Investigación y Desarrollo de la Cultura Cubana "Juan Marinello". La Habana. p. 51.
- Guzón, Ada. 2006. Estrategias municipales para el desarrollo. En: Desarrollo local en Cuba: retos y perspectivas. (Comp. Ada Guzón). Editorial Academia. La Habana. p. 50.
- Hernández Aymara. 2004. Neoliberalismo y localismo ¿una asociación posible de desmentir? En: La participación. Diálogo y debate en el contexto cubano. Centro de Investigación y Desarrollo de la Cultura Cubana "Juan Marinello". La Habana. p. 71.
- Link, T. 2006. La economía y la política en la apropiación de los territorios. En: Análisis Latinoamericano del medio rural. No. 3. ALASRU. México. p. 251.
- Moyano, E. 2008. Multifuncionalidad, territorio y desarrollo de las áreas rurales. Trabajo presentado en la XLVII Reunión Científica de la Sociedad de Estudios sobre los Pastos. Córdoba, España. 14 p.
- PCC. 2011. Lineamientos de la Política Económica y Social del Partido y la Revolución. <http://www.granma.cubaweb.cu/secciones/6to-congresopccFolleto%20Lineamientos%20VI%20Cong.pdf>. [08/01/2013]
- Shejtman, A. & Berdegue, J.A. 2004. Desarrollo territorial rural. Debates y Temas Rurales. No. 1. RIMISP Centro Latinoamericano para el Desarrollo Rural. Santiago de Chile. 53 p.
- Suset, A. 2004. La relación comunidad-entidad productiva ganadera y su incidencia en el desarrollo local. Estudio de caso en Palma Sola y Kindelán. Tesis presentada en opción al título de Maestro en Estudio del Desarrollo Rural. Colegio de Postgraduados. México. 166 p.
- Suset, A. & González, E. 2011. Descentralización y transformaciones territoriales. La visión municipal para el desarrollo rural y agropecuario en Cuba. En: La ganadería ante el agotamiento de los paradigmas dominantes. Vol. 1. Universidad Autónoma de Chapingo. México.

Received: November 21, 2011

Accepted: January 25, 2013