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Technical Handbook



Social Quality and Sustainable Development of Rural Territories

Why must Sociability be Capitalized?

Carlos Julio Jara Martinez



Inter-American Institute
for Cooperation on Agriculture

RURAL DEVELOPMENT



Social Quality and Sustainable Development of Rural Territories

Why must sociability be capitalized?¹

Rural Development Technical Handbook No. 34

Carlos Julio Jara Martinez

June 2005

¹ This text was originally presented as a paper at the International Forum: Territory, Rural Development and Democracy, organized by the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture in Fortaleza, Ceara, Brazil, in November 2003. Several changes were subsequently made to the text as a result of applying the principles it promotes during a technical cooperation activity in Barquisimeto, Venezuela, which the author took part in as a consultant in 2005.

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This publication is also available in electronic (PDF) format
from IICA's Web site at www.iica.int.

Editorial coordination: Carlos Julio Jara Martínez
Translation: Penny Houghton
Layout: Ana Catalina Lizano
Printed: IICA Headquarters

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Social quality and sustainable development of rural territories:
why must sociability be capitalized? / Carlos Julio Jara Martinez
-- San Jose, C.R.: IICA, 2008.

38 p. ; 28 cm. (Rural Development Technical Handbook No. 34)

ISBN13: 978-92-9039-912-4

Published also in Spanish

1. Rural development 2. Sustainable development 3. Rural areas I.
Jara Martinez, Carlos Julio II. IICA III. Title

AGRIS
E50

DEWEY
333.7

San Jose, Costa Rica
2008

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INTRODUCTION

Nature is under increasing attack and society's vital force is being dissipated on an unsustainable path. Every day, we can observe the collapse of ethical values and the rapid transformation of most institutions. The modern era is reaching its end, and the one that will take its place is permeated by complexity, contradiction and uncertainty. Today, as never before, the approaching destiny of any society is revealed to be a minefield of confusion and danger. The rates of change are so accelerated, the interactions so intense, the flows of information so dynamic, that the phantom of the unpredictable haunts us permanently and we never overcome the amazement caused by the surprising elements that arise from these complex interactions. We live alongside chaos and the unexpected, and every day we feel the pressure of having to ceaselessly organize the process of permanent disorganization in which we are immersed.

We are present at the birth of a new era that bears the seal of complexity. And it is within this context that we must think, feel and construct the new paradigm of sustainable development, which we want to imbue with territorial perspective and scale. The quality of territorial development processes depends on how we construct our social conditions within this reality. This complexity obliges us to create multidisciplinary approaches combining global and local elements, the State and civil society, the collective and the individual, the tangible and the intangible, the exterior and the interior, the observer and the observed. In the 'homo-heterogeneity' of the territories, we must learn to act in continuity and in rupture, in turbulence and in mobility, in uniformity and in diversity, in the archipelago of cultural values and worlds.

We must learn to understand the essentially multidimensional element – subtly integrated by culture – that allows us to

reach a collective agreement on what we observe. We are challenged, therefore, to construct a development that is principally cultural; based on a different development culture. Latin American rurality is weighed down by a series of problems that cannot be resolved with the theoretical and methodological references of the old paradigm. We must try to observe rurality from a complex perspective. It is not a question of putting on new glasses and adopting the same point of view, productivist, instrumental and competitive. It is a matter of destroying the old glasses in order to observe and work with the territorial reality in a different way and from a different subjectivity. Anyone who only uses modern glasses, produced with instrumental rationality, will merely see the profit phenomenon of the development process; but it also displays the colors of peace, solidarity, social cohesion, and pleasure.² If only we could produce a more hopeful sociability, a better social quality, based on supportive ethical values and feelings.³

We have to decide whether we are going to live as human beings ruled by foolishness or as human beings ruled by good sense. Because “the human being can be both devil and angel.”⁴ Development must be re-defined as a process that is essentially guided by the ethical qualities of the human spirit. Human society must develop an improved ability to determine the course of its own evolution and to make conscious, responsible, participative, careful and informed choices. Much of this will depend on our capacity to improve the quality of the social fabric in order to achieve a sociability where relationships increasingly have a supportive and confident dimension. What we sow in the hearts of the rural communities is what we will reap from the manifestations in their territories.

How can we create this environment? What qualities can be cultivated in this rational and irrational, wise and foolish, hardworking and playful, empiric and imaginative, prosaic and poetic, loving and hostile, careful and destructive,

competitive and supportive, rational-emotional being?⁵ What are the principles and the values that sustainable development should affirm in order to create a more human way of thinking, feeling and living? What does sustainable and human rural development really mean? Development is essentially a socio-cultural process that gradually awakens social goals of justice, equity, cohesion and prosperity. The sustainable society is a potential, as is the human being. If we have the power to choose, it is because we have the capacity to be creative and responsible; we can guide the processes based on the ethical values of love (compassion), truth, justice, freedom, solidarity, tolerance, responsibility and respect for life.⁶ This ideal society has not yet been born, it is merely a possibility. But, if we paid more attention to the intangible dimension, trying to sow relations of creative cooperation – social quality, we would possibly go further than we expect.

In this regard, rural development with a territorial perspective is either sustainable and human development, or it simply is not.

I consider that the development process is sustainable based on a systemic conception. Cognitive, affective and emotional democracy, kindness, thoughtfulness and solidarity are 'auto-eco-organizing' principles that guide the specific paths that must be laid out at the local level. Local actions gain coherence and complementarity from efforts born of economic wellbeing, environmental sustainability, participative democracy, cultural diversity, social equity and spiritual freedom.

1. Locked in an iron cage

We can judge a development theory or strategy by its fruits. We reap what we sow. The development model we have

⁵ Edgar Morin, *Os Sete Saberes Necessários à Educação Superior*. UNESCO, Cortez, 2002.

⁶ According to a study on universal values. See José María Tortosa, *El juego global: maldesarrollo y pobreza en el capitalismo mundial*, Icara & Antrazyt, Barcelona, 2001.

is the one we ask for as a society and, in particular, the type asked for and defended by the elite who monopolize power. Above and beyond the advantages sought, this type of development has a reductionist, materialistic – mechanist – vision, which makes the economic-productive dimension the motor that drives change.⁷ We know that no process of growth alone, devoid of public policies on redistribution of assets and opportunities, can guarantee social wellbeing. But this way of thinking continues to triumph pervasively.

The strength of this economicist tendency appears to be inflexible. We must meditate profoundly on this type of paradigmatic creature that we are incubating in the name of territorial rural development. Are we merely changing our glasses while retaining the same vision? Rural sustainable development is an adventure imagined throughout ethical values.

Some of the new proposals have still not transcended the economicist matrix of the ideology and remain prisoners of rational materialism. We speak, for example, of the territorial economy compared to the agricultural economy, of the competitive aspects of the changes in production and not of the self-sustainable aspects⁸ of territorial rurality. We are contaminated by economicism, even though we are aware that the economy is probably the most backward human dimension. We are complicating the issue of “social capital” even further, placing the old concepts of the classic economy in modern dress, further removed from awareness. This ideological bias prejudices our search for new social fabrics in the rural territories, as well as for economic wellbeing itself (since this is based on relative territorial self-sufficiency), by limiting our search for social and production quality.

We are now talking, for example, about the new concepts of territorial social competitiveness and of territorial environmental competitiveness that erode reasoning power,

⁷ It is necessary to grow qualitatively enough to respond to the basic needs of society, of each individual, man or woman, to free up their time, so they can concentrate on the development of other human dimensions.

⁸ Originally, the author used the term “sustainitive” (*sostenitivos*), to try and distinguish the most empowered processes from the connotations of the term “sustainable.” However, this term was edited to avoid misunderstandings.

locked up in its old hypotheses.⁹ I think and I feel that any vision of competitiveness, restricted or whole, incorporates the concept of war. But, we continue imposing the idea that unless competitiveness exists, development does not exist, and if development does exist, competitiveness exists. This is the dialectic of the eternal return to utilitarianism, to the “sole hypothesis.” Profit is the energy that secures power and enhances the ego of most individuals. This discourse affirms that social competitiveness is the “capacity of agents to act efficiently and together based on a consensual conception of the territorial project, promoted by agreement between the different institutional levels”;¹⁰ opposing agreements that generate social cohesion. It is affirmed that the ideology is constructed and reconstructed by common sense. There are evidently other useful concepts to explain this same process of collective action, including the so-called “social capital.”

But can there be competitiveness in the environment dimension? Obviously there is competition among ecosystems and in nature. According to Capra, “in [nature] there is dominion, but always with a broad context of cooperation. The species do not form hierarchies, but rather networks within networks. There are conflicts and competition, but not power-based relationships, in the sense that one person is forced to act according to the desires of another.”¹¹ For rural territories to be sustainable, the communities of social and institutional actors must follow the basic principles of the ecology. Likewise, the dialogue between economic rationality-emotionality and ecological rationality-emotionality, alone, is not sufficient to take a careful and intelligent decision on the type of environmental management of the territories. It is necessary to politicize the economy and “ethicalize” politics in order to promote care of the environment and to define the environmental limits of the territorial economy, based on conversations among the actors, access to information, a respect to local knowledge and values, and discussions between scientists

⁹ Rafael Echeverri, Adrián Rodríguez and Sergio Sepúlveda, *Competitividad territorial: elementos para la discusión*, IICA, Costa Rica, 2003.

¹⁰ Gilda Farrell, Samuel Trillón and Paul Soto. *La competitividad territorial: construir una estrategia de desarrollo territorial con base en la experiencia LEADER*, Brussels, LEADER European Observatory, 1999.

¹¹ Fritjof Capra, *Determinismo Biológico ou Integração Sistêmica?*, Berkeley, USA, www.ecoar.org.br, 2003

and politicians. The social fabric must be strengthened and relations of trust and inclusion sought.

The dominant tendency continues perceiving rural development almost exclusively as a problem of financial investment, of creating local financial institutions, business management, technology transfer, infrastructure and, evidently, always seeking the principle of economic efficiency. This perspective has to change. The so-called social competitiveness does not necessarily promotes economic wellbeing: it only respects and obeys real profit and market value. The sustainable development process is synonymous with a network of inter related activities, creative communication among sectors, in a caordic (caos and order) structure strongly linked to feelings of confidence and not morely to the utilitarian rationality-emotionality of technology and markets. Individuals and social actors communicate and in addition to exchanging information, they exchange social and political energy. This opens up an area of shared agreements – a resonance – that affirms the idea that development is always created “with others.”

It is necessary to go beyond the limited concept of competitiveness based on economic efficiency that is always guaranteed by a quantifying rationality. According to the conventional vision, this quality of survival in the system's most dynamic and open markets pays homage to a chain of factors (that are not always technological), where the best-positioned agents generally win. We know that the efficiency that spurs economic growth is not always determined by the organic composition of capital. A variety of discriminations are in play, values inherent in social exclusion, entrenched in an institutionalism seen as rational, solid and modern.

Productivity is, in essence, a social exchange and, consequently, must be sustainable and inclusive. It depends on factors such as creativity, access to information, valorization of local knowledge, quality of the production practices, certification of the processes, safety, identity, marketing costs, motivation, social articulation, a sense of social justice, etc. We want to build up the capacity to produce with quality and inclusion on a territorial scale and not simply reproduce the utilitarian logic of the “tiger let loose in front of the captive donkey.” And this depends on an

educational change that stimulates innovation capabilities, as well as solidarity among social actors and agents of production, expanding opportunities.

We can only question the myth of competitiveness if we consider the aspects of human nature that underpin association, such as cooperation, complementarity and solidarity. If the conventional concept of competitiveness – which universalizes the principle of opposition – refers to forms of competition based on a combination of low wages and differences in productivity, and incorporates quality, good production practices, safety, design, and knowledge of the origin of the processes. We unable to affirm the concept of quality, to seek, to produce better and differently, to construct horizontal rural enterprises, and to generate self-sufficiency rather than simply producing more, indiscriminately. It is the supportive nature of the social fabric that can lead us towards a more authentic development; to mobilize social energies from within, activated by hope self esteem, towards new forms of community relationships.

The discourse of sustainable development has to escape from the iron cage of the past and from the trends of the present. Competitiveness between equals cannot be created throughout the territories of Brazil because they are mostly unequals, but perhaps qualitiveness can.

The experts who produce and reproduce the dominant systems of the truth about development insist that we must be pragmatic. There is no place for alternative discourses, for notions of hope and possibility. This pragmatism without conscience produces unsustainable methods of social and ecological development, that are politically unfeasible in the long term. Each time we promote a conceptual rupture, we confront strong resistance. Precisely when the reality of poverty, subordination, and environmental crisis demands new concepts more forcibly, the harder the conventional discourse tries to mask the root of the problems. It appears that capitalism, progress and modernity cannot be criticized. A progressist vocabulary is used that incorporates hegemonic ideological elements that are fed by functionalist resignation. Any criticism is interpreted as opposition to the future; and those who do not agree are stigmatized. Such is the pathology of normality.

Despite all this, I believe that the human crisis we are experiencing in multiple dimensions, accompanied by the exhaustion of the conventional “models” of development, is fostering a change in awareness and an ethical change of the paradigm.¹² Our way of perceiving the reality is slowly changing, as new cultural and political spaces open up. The growing poverty, the attacks on the environment, the destruction of identities, the false democracies, the wars for control of sources of energy, the plundering impact of certain “free trade” agreements, the multiplication of experiences of suffering, climate change, among many other pathological manifestations, are beginning to erode the “truths,” to delegitimize certain forms of cultural life, to create new spheres of human possibility.

A new holistic concept of thought and development is gaining ground. This concept guides a new and much more reverent way of observing and working with nature; it points towards the adoption of new technologies and new forms of social organization, towards a culture and a policy imbued with civism to make possible an alternative development societies are demarking the democratic creation of a new social contract. Such new paradigm it combines the physical and social sciences with philosophy and with dimensions of the spirit to create a network of learning about knowledge that gives shape to reason illuminated by the heart.

2. Taking a new look at the rurality that still survives¹³

Nowadays, the notion of the rural world condition – rurality – encompasses many intrinsically related dimensions. When

¹² See, Marilyn Ferguson. *The Aquarian Conspiracy: Personal and Social Transformation in our Time*, New York, USA.

¹³ The concept of the “new rurality” is the sum of several notions: (a) a new approach to rural reality, or a new way of perceiving everything, which was destroyed by reductionism; and (b) a new configuration and a new dynamic of rurality created by economic, political, cultural and ideological globalization, by the destruction of peasant economies, by ideological crises, etc. Regarding the latter, rurality is always new and old at the same time. Rurality is always changing and never goes through the same stage twice; there is always a change in the past that is manifested relentlessly.

we speak of sustainable rural development, we must adopt a unified vision of the rural reality – of rurality – that we wish to develop and that can be implemented from a territorial perspective. In the same way that the territory behaves like a complex system, human action on the territory also has a systemic nature. The minor reality of rurality is uni-diverse and is manifested in historicity, in singularity, and in the bio-cultural-socio-diversity of the territories. We can only perceive its explicit order.

For those accustomed to a Cartesian interpretation, looking at the whole, envisioning the innumerable links that form a social fabric is difficult to understand. But the fact that it is difficult to work with the diversity of unity, or the unity of territorial diversity, does not eliminate the challenge to build a better future. When someone challenges unsustainable truth regimes, it is because he feels condemned by them. We need to approach its implicit order.

It is in this sense that it is said that the process of rural development on the territorial scale requires intersectoral and multi institutional interventions. We face a complex and complicated challenge that must reinvent the old institutions, decisively and irrevocably, so as to enrich the social fabric tending towards harmony and cooperation, rather than towards competition, separation and political control. This can produce a new rural sociability with political capacity and energy capable of alleviating poverty, healing inequalities and exclusions, and environmentally sustaining economic growth.

In truth, we still do not know how to improve and multiply the interactions among the different social and institutional agents, that energetic mesh of changing social links that marks out the course of development. It requires a great dosis of social and environmental love. I believe and feel that collective enthusiasm, the confident articulation of relations among different social groups, the constant sharing of information and knowledge, contribute energies that are truly capable of transforming the life and destiny of a society. A fragmented sociability, depressed and stripped of the power of intervention is like a tree without roots; it dies little by little. The process of charting and weaving what

the fragmented society is hiding is called structuring and generates cohesion, emergent social relations.

Most development agents lack the conceptual maps, capacities and instruments to look into the distance and see themselves as an integral part of the social fabric. They are trapped within old institutional barriers, at the mercy of neo-developmental or neo-liberal dogmas and of moral codes that nurture the worst characteristics of human nature. We must create escape hatches, design ways to achieve a new social order, based on a new ethical order. To this end, it is essential to produce other cultural genes and images of harmonious social relations inspired by thoughtfulness, which denote a hint of kindness. We are faced with the challenge of trying to improve the quality of social connections and, at the same time, disseminate creative cooperation, based on communicative contact, and the shared learning that generates knowledge the things that creates proximity are made off communicative energies.

We are learning little by little, by experience, to sow social trust and we have much to systematize to learn to cultivate this. We already know that the blind pursuit of productivist competitiveness is condemned to upset the rhythms of nature and rupture the social fabric. Experience, however, belongs to the past; it tells us what we should not do; to the contrary, the future is always creative imagination, a possibility. We always think with language and with images, not with the brain.¹⁴ The imagination or perception of a confident society results in behaviors that fuse purposes.

3. Sustainable development of rural territories

We are not going to make a retrospective critical analysis of the principal theories and conventional approaches to rural development. But, it is possible to adduce that, even

¹⁴ Juan Soto Ramírez, *Complejidad Cognitiva*, La Jornada, Mexico, February 5, 2003

if they operated mechanically¹⁵ and with a strong urban, parceled, centralist, sectoral and 'productivist' bias, the conventional rural development strategies would foster many changes in Latin American rural territories. Public and private investment, and even compensation programs to combat poverty, have somehow expanded political freedoms, economic facilities, social opportunities and also social and productive infrastructure, health care and educational services, and the basic hygiene of thousands of rural communities. Nevertheless, structural problems such as poverty and exclusion remain.

Much of that experience created is unsustainable; because, beneath it all, the developmental perspective turned what had always been 'multi-sectoral' into 'uni-sectoral.' In general, the rural strategies had a strong "chlorophyllous" nature promoting mainly scale economies, as if rural development had, necessarily, to be associated with sectoral modernization. That perspective rejected as "old-fashioned" the local values, accumulated knowledge, ancestral practices, traditions, production methods and cultural ways of life of rural communities, in particular, those composed of agricultural family units. This type of rural development dispensed with the notion of culture. Rural communities were described as lacking; there was no confidence in the local social or cultural forces, characteristic of the territory. The processes of modernization and technological change of the accumulated inventive, far from catering to the basic needs of these communities, increased the concentration of wealth and the inequalities and gave rise to greater environmental imbalance.¹⁶ The result was, and continues to be, an ambiguous disorder, an unequal construction, relatively dualist. Rurality is torn to pieces, fragmented, sectoralized, unable to assume the plural territorial context. And of course, the environment was submitted to aggressive forces. Not even the agricultural sectoral development approach was able to incorporate the higher vision of "expanded agriculture."

¹⁵ Machines operate and people act.

¹⁶ It is very easy to criticize. I have to confess that I collaborated with this pattern of economic progress. The feeling of frustration teaches us a great deal.

Based on this current of thought, modernizing plans were formulated in terms of components that incorporated mechanical inputs activated by technology and productive investment. This conditioned a vision void of territory. We were all witnesses off the fragmented interventions, the uncoordinated sectors and institutions, the emphasis on infrastructure, the manipulated participation, the passive population, clientelism, and the hand-out approach.

Many of these patterns of sectoral intervention led to the fragmentation of the social fabric and nourished the inequality between social groups and territories. Bettling on the strong leads to weaken the weak.

4. Territories

Brazil is an enormous and uni-diverse continental country, composed of a wide variety of rural territories.

Each territory has its own process of historical construction that would be difficult to reproduce in other socio-geographical spaces or in other times. Rurality has prolonged, multidimensional, changing historic roots, which contain complex paths that translate into specific territorial manifestation of development, that organize themselves, disorganize themselves and reorganize themselves, based mainly on the cultural energy of the many and heterogeneous local societies. The territory appears as a geographical area, cultural way of occupying a geographical space, but at the same time it is a multidimensional management in a permanent state of construction. At the same time, the social and cultural areas are created territorially. The territory is a dynamic concept; the past survives in it and the successive arrangements of the future are created in it.

Each rural territory is subject to a specific evolutionary dialectic, marked by the culture, the power games and the values and interests of the different segments and social actors, in a continual dance of interrelations and interactions with nature. The territorial scene reveals a diversity of

actors who act with their own “rationalities-emotionalities,” defining specific power structures and social fabrics of diverge patterns. By way of rules, the local actors and groups operate, conditioned by broader forces and systems; they create ties of dependence and interdependence, institutional frameworks that change constantly, as well as complex inter-territorial arrangements. In this way, the global world and the local-territorial world permeate each other dynamically, weaving hybridizations, where what is common embraces what is diverse, and duration leads to rupture.

Such inner dialectics materialize in heterogeneous socio-historical formations in which the concepts of natural environment, society, culture, time and space are unified. In these formations it is possible to observe the elements that condition territorial dynamics, the interior order, the germinative elements that explain the social objectives present and, at the same time, define the probable objectives.

The territories appear to us to be in a process of organic and geographic entanglement of elements from diverse dimensions. In this regard, seen from within their cultural borders, the territories reveal relatively homogeneous (homo-heterogeneous) properties; but, simultaneously, and seen from the outside, they also manifest very heterogeneous (hetero-homogenous) properties.¹⁷ Historically, this territorial ‘homo-heterogeneous’ becomes the process of adaptation of the human communities to their natural environment. Active adaptations, in the sense that they promote and accompany changes, are

¹⁷ “Territories represent geographic spaces that are usually continuous, and where, historically, multiple dimensions of social life have been integrated, in a permanent yet changing way. Territories reveal relatively homogenous characteristics, frequently structured on the basis of one or several central coordinating elements, which influence the behavior of the social actors and the local institutions, shaping the social fabric. The territory should be interpreted as another agent of national development. In general, the territory manifests a broad diversity of production dynamics and situations, environmental characteristics, and ways of organizing power and production, as well as a social mesh whose actors mobilize according to different perspectives, demanding strategic resources, services and opportunities for participation in the decision-making sphere.” Carlos Julio Jara, Project profile: *Desarrollo Sostenible de Oportunidades de Negocios, Capacidades Locales y Servicios Territoriales*, IICA-MAG, Quito, Ecuador, 2003.

usually shaped by the local elites, by the historical agents, and by their systems of representation.

The heterogeneity reveals a mosaic of social and cultural situations, production methods, natural environments, human capabilities, behaviors, social fabrics, and local trajectories that express specific different territorial development logics and dynamics.

The Brazilian rurality and rural sector are enormously diverse as regards the natural environment, production systems, the social situation of the producers, cultural values, the degree of association, soil fertility, the institutional framework, identity, infrastructure availability, management capacity, markets, etc.; not only between different territories, but also within each territory. This is what we call the territorial homo-heterogeneity

Indeed, each territorial reality reveals different potentials, different production dynamics and different social and political structures, as well as institutional schemas and living identities characteristic of each place.

As we can see, it is not easy to define territories based on a Cartesian vision. I feel the need to express myself in metaphors. A territory is not merely the physical area, a geographical fragment, the Pernambuco backcountry (*sertão*) in Brazil or the Orinoco basin in Venezuela, but rather a web of relationships with deep historical and political roots and diverse identities that go beyond its natural attributes.

Under this mantle, land, water, identity, gender, collective memories, cultural patterns, natural resources, changing landscapes, fauna and flora, coffee and onions, birds in the sky, production systems, farming methods, institutional arrangements, power structures, community networks, parish councils, intangible assets, ancestral sounds, ways of loving, ways of life, collective imagines, customary norms, legends, the past, the present, and dreams of the future are combined, in a marvelous and complex manner. The ties between rural men and women and the land are woven at the deep levels of the conscience where they are silently engraved, conditioning shared behaviors, or making

possible indeterminate events that appear probabilistic. This is the territory; its borders are marked by a culture-based identity.

5. Some advantages of the territorial approach

Both the conventional “chlorophyllist” and quantitative intervention strategies, and the hand-out compensatory models of “combating rural poverty” have proved themselves unable to resolve the calamitous social, economic and environmental conditions of most societies and rural territories. The sectoral approach is incapable of explaining or transforming territorial rurality.

If the creation of a sustainable society is the result of multidimensional changes, it is logical to expect that the factors that promote it are also multidimensional and, consequently, multisectoral. We therefore insist in paying greater attention to complex thinking. We need to develop new instruments of managing territorial development to deal with such complexity.

Rural territory is a ‘multi-functional,’ dynamic and open concept; it goes beyond the agricultural model of a ‘unifunctional’ nature and, consequently, the mechanical notion of production chains in vogue, which is also one-dimensional. We know that urban society is present in rural society and vice versa. Hence, we must observe the connections between rural and urban societies – production, political, cultural and social connections – in order to visualize converging interests and foster the creation of synergies among the policies of both rural and urban social actors, exploring patterns of ‘multi-sectoral’ diversity capable of leading to scale ecologies.

The territory is also a vital movement that should be understood, above all, as a network of social connections; as a confrontation and combination of perceptions that arise in the heat of political emotions and cultural values, and

as a social network of changing communication. The social actors and classes exist as action, as conflict, as agreement, and as a dynamic that creates the territorial history, which simultaneously transforms the social fabric creating new 'territorialities.'

The territorial perspective empowers the integration of sectors, and this leads us to imagine a spiral movement, in which all the dimensions interact and permeate each other. The territorial approach goes beyond the vision of rural as a synonym of agriculture, favoring the perception of a multisectoral and diversified territorial economy. When planning complex actions, we can perceive the possibility of a polyvalent economy, a process of production transformation that listens to and considers local specificities and initiatives, the endogenous potential the gifts of nature, a sense of belonging. We can listen to the changing melodies of the territorialized communities, perceive the diverse logics of the local actors, and the different cultural strategies for the management of natural resources, observe the platforms where the systems of belief, of know-how, and of social and production practices are played out.

Hence the pertinence of the territorial approach, which permits us to see the whole and to visualize the context, and makes it possible to understand both the lasting connections and the new elements that explain the territorial dynamic and the specific way it has developed.¹⁸

In the territories, the development of the rural economy is not synonymous with the development of family agriculture. This approach goes beyond the frontiers of agriculture, beyond the small family agricultural businesses that are nourished by diversity. Some segments of the rural family economy are 'pluri-active.' It requires an integrating, political and institutional response, of a 'multi-sectoral' type. Many of the small rural family economies are very enterprising or exercise activities other than agriculture, and reveal business initiatives and opportunities that can

¹⁸ It is important to read the document prepared by Rafael Echeverri, Melania Portilla, Adrián Rodríguez and Sergio Sepúlveda, *Desarrollo rural sostenible: enfoque territorial*, *Sinopsis*, IICA, 2003.

expand the labor market. The territorial approach makes it possible to create a polyvalent economy by activating endogenous territorial characteristics. It make it possible to promote inclusive opportunities.

In this regard, a ‘territorial interpretation’ of sustainable rural development allows us to articulate the old approaches of “combating rural poverty” with the new concepts of production arrangements, integration of small economies into large-scale business enterprises, cooperation networks, shared management and social quality, and thus transcend the closed compensatory perspective. Development strategies emerge out of the specific inner arrangement of each territory.

Furthermore, this approach goes beyond the vision of the “rational management of natural resources” that advocates environmental conservation, good production practices, clean businesses, protection of biodiversity, preservation of endemic species, etc. This approach opens up a broader reflection on the local processes that generate entropy or the consequences of the degradation of energy resulting from different territorial development methods. Evidently, we must listed to the market in any attempt to transform production, but a careful assessment of the territory also obliges us to capture the messages of the natural world in order to construct a spiritually sensitive culture, transformed into social quality.

6. Sowing “social quality”

Sustainable human development involves a new way of observing that allows us to capture the social principle alive in each territory, as well as its development dynamic. We are still unable to visualize the innumerable endogenous possibilities of Brazil’s vibrant rural territories. There are those who continue denying the fact that we are a sum of different cultures, with the ability to transcend our human, social, environmental and spiritual trajectory.

Societies such as Brazilian society must invest in alternative paths that seek original solutions which stimulate the feeling that we are part of heterogeneous territories, of a great diversity of energies, initiatives, talents and cultures. It is necessary to support the emergence of new historical agents, to increase the density and quality of the social fabric, to learn to value the environment and the culture above all. The history of each territory is always a social construct, but it does not follow a sole object; nor does, it necessarily reach an specific stage of modernization. We are merely walking together; we are going in the direction of the ethical image that we have adopted as our guiding principle. The development of human development is founded on social quality and cohesion.

It is urgent to sow “social quality,” stimulate the positive human potential, the collective energy that arises from a transparent and hopeful connectivity among actors, capable of attracting more intelligence and more solidarity to the emotional life. This aspiration must be as imperative as health care, education, and technological innovation. We should not restrict ourselves to learning how to win, to compete and to destroy; rather we have to be capable of cultivating political trust, cooperation and love.

Understanding the quality of the changing social fabrics should lead to a new type of philosophy of social and business education and organization. The energy that drives economic growth is a cause of discord, inasmuch as it is based on egoism, on lack of social cohesion, and on the imbalance of the human being. It would make a significant difference if certain social agents could think about what the poor have felt and still feel. They would probably change their perception and be more willing to establish relations of trust. We theorize about poverty. We need to descend to the territories where poverty shouts for emancipation and opportunities.

We are faced with the challenge of opening up the path towards less conservative and more mature thoughts and applying them to development plans and programs. The highest values of human nature continue to be “obscured” in the equation. We must incorporate the principles of social justice, cooperation and solidarity within the sustainable development discourse and within the normative

frameworks of public policies, because these principles are essential elements of the human condition.¹⁹

Sustainable rural development requires that we listen carefully to the proposals made by the social actors who know the potential of their historical territory, who add the collective and shared knowledge, who have intelligent and sensible answers to the ecological, cultural, economic and political issues, who are close to the essence of social life. If they can critically reflect upon the hidden implicit order and contextualize they situation priorities will flourish as public policies proposals. There is no definitive unique model; only stationary situations, political energies driven by ethical guidelines capable of creating sustainable possibilities. “Sustainable development methods” are the result of an innovative combination of factors, of a new dialectic synthesis derived from a change in attitudes, values and objectives.²⁰

It is possible to change the “development methods” that are produced and reproduced in the different territories, the connections that condition poverty, inequality, exclusion, unemployment and environmental degradation, among the many pathologies and anomalies that afflict Brazilian society. If we can produce exclusions, we can create inclusions. We must learn to understand that the reasons for everything are not outside ourselves. What role does our individualism and our racism play in the current problems and sufferings of Brazilian society? We are exceedingly programmed, but is it possible to bring about the transformation that Brazilian rural society demands, promoting a new territorial dynamic.²¹

¹⁹ Andrés Pérez Baltodano, *Entre la utopía y el pragmatismo: política, gobierno y políticas públicas en América Latina*, La Jornada, Mexico, 2002.

²⁰ The TSRE (technical support and rural education) methods, for example, still do not recognize the degree to which values and thoughts are linked to the emotions that condition certain behaviors.

²¹ Philosophically, this possibility is present in human nature itself. In any case, human needs are the same, and they include, also, the possibility of change. Any process of social exclusion, for example, hides within it its opposite, the energy to participate and act as free, capable and included subjects. And, as a result of coordinated public polices, based on the sustainable development paradigm, public-private partnerships can change the relations of intra-territorial and inter-territorial dependence and inter-dependence, even in this era of the globalization of the economic system, which tends to obscure territorial logics and blur the diversity of local social life.

Cooperation and trust are ethical values that can be engraved on the human conscience and culture. If we think of the sustainable development of the territories as a multi-dimensional and multi-sectoral process, capable of producing a dynamic integration of the liberating efforts of coordinated social and political actions, we can state that these new development methods can have a significant impact on Brazilian society

All the political, institutional, social and cultural energy mobilized from the processes of horizontal communication, discussion and dialogue, especially when it encourages social cohesion and creates constructive partnerships among actors, can have an impact on the nature of the more important processes and even change national destinies, forming innovative global structures. The multiplication of local social linkages – the higher their density the better – has sufficient energy to create an structural effect on a territorial scale.

Without the establishment of strategic partnerships among the different public and private actors and organizations, it is difficult to unravel the complexity of the social scene that confronts us. It is possible to create extraordinary changes, connect to the whole, based on the 'waves' generated by the parts; to produce sustainable vibrations that lead to a new human destiny. We are faced with the challenge of understanding, at least, the energies that lead to the separation and breaking up of society. Sustainable development methods spring from enriching the social fabric qualitatively. Positive attitudes allow the collective life to be tended; just as we sow and reap negative attitudes.

There is no a single universal formula. Societies transcend or break up based on the quality of association and disassociation. The equity and solidarity of the territorial society can be created on the basis of a permanent effort of dialogue, an exchange of the different social logics of action of the actors, consideration of their cultural knowledge and visions. It is possible to change the territorial trajectory, changing the way in which discussions are produced and the quality of the dialogue, weaving a new institutional network based on the quality of the connections. It is not

an easy enterprise. Out positive collective thinking, linked with an emotionality of trust and hope, can produce such qualitative transformation.

It is also possible to reorganize arrangements, to open up opportunities for access to knowledge, information and production assets, stimulating innovation processes that lead to higher levels of sustainable and inclusive productivity. To invest in social quality we must create collective learning environments.

7. Social capital compared to social quality

I feel that we are now better syntonized to discuss the reduced concept of “social capital,” a concept that does not appear to be adapted to the human condition. Capital is associated with calculations and a business perspective, and this is not adapted to either the complexity of human nature or the diversity of social relations. Moreover, the conventional experts in developmentalism do not appear convinced that the social factor can be a source of creativity in conditions of liberty that encourage the emergence of opportunities and the possibility of choosing between them.

Every day, the concept of “social capital” is cited in different academic and institutional circles with a higher level of consensus. There is no doubt that some social organization contains aspects or properties that facilitate reciprocal exchange and the construction of specific joint actions among agents and actors. Nevertheless, modernism changed the study of the social fabric as an instrumental exercise of the intelligence in order to promote economic and social development processes.

But, complex developmental processes do not need inferior concepts, particularly when we seek to change the paradigm. It is the eternal return to the “sole discourse” that seeks to transform reality into quantifiable values; because this discourse worships money, growth. All phenomena,

relationships, the quality of social life are reduced to the level of capital; human capital, financial capital, physical capital, natural capital, social capital, political capital. Please, let me know why humanity has to be reduced to capital. A motivated social actor must also be an intensely competitive actor. Greed and ambition, solidarity and trust become virtues that generate economic benefits. We reach the conclusions that the group ethic should be cooperative and, at the same time, necessarily profitable.²²

Why does the social factor have to be 'capital'? The social factor can and should prosper and "go beyond revenue" and other monetary interests. The human goal is the enrichment of inner quality; not merely making life prosperous in money and material goods. Why is it that the 'reciprocal social factor', which is not quantifiable, has to be less real?²³ Qualitative changes stem from the increasing interaction among the different social and cultural actors, based on shared ethical values and visions and established rights. Social quality is not a quality outside the observers; it is rooted in the social processes of power, gender, race, identity when you perceive society as a network of invisible energies of cooperation.

²² According to Marta Portela Maseda and Isabel Neira Gómez, *El capital social: las relaciones sociales afectan al desarrollo*, Internet, World Bank. 2003. "First, as with other forms of capital, social capital is a resource in which other resources can be invested in expectation of future benefits. Second, social capital can substitute for or complement other resources. As a substitute, agents can compensate the lack of financial or human capital by establishing good relations. Also, social capital complements other forms of capital, because, alone, it is insufficient to produce development. Third, as in the case of physical or human capital, social capital needs maintenance, because, to remain effective, social relations require periodical renovation and confirmation. In addition, as in the case of human capital, social capital does not have a reliable depreciation rate, because it does not depreciate with use, but rather improves; and, if it is not used, it deteriorates rapidly. Although social capital is not the property of the individual, it has the characteristic of being appropriable; in other words, like physical capital, it can be used for specific ends. Social capital can be used by a network agent for his own purposes (information, advice, etc.); it can also be transformed into other types of capital, but it should be emphasized that its rate of convertibility is lower than that of financial capital (which can be transformed into physical, human or cultural capital with relative ease). Lastly, social capital, as any type of capital, expresses a relationship: a relationship of civic cooperation and trust.

²³ Robert D. Putnam, *Comunidade e democracia: a experiência da Itália moderna*. trad. Luiz Alberto Monjardim. Rio de Janeiro: Ed. Fundação Getúlio Vargas, 1996.

The instrumental conception of social capital is not sufficient to promote sustainable development. The transition towards a sustainable society depends on our capacity to value and 'experience' the intangible elements inherent in a hopeful sociability: collective enthusiasm, social participation, information for all, care for the environment, the quality of a new institutional framework, and the empowerment of individuals and organizations.

The element that constructs this sociability is the emotional component of trust: the life force that trust manifests when it creates a communicating energy that embodies communicable information.²⁴ We all understand what trust means when we are betrayed. We experience trust when we are appealed to with a truth, and we act in consequence; thus, we accept what is different (lo otro), in hypotheses, in initiatives, in the sharing of the daily, changing social realities.

Social trust should not be understood as a simplistic attitude, born from the simple repetition of phrases, that helps facilitate contact and communication among social actors and individuals. Trust is not a synonym of passivity, nor should it condition any subordinate behavior. The most profound experiences of trust are spiritual and are accompanied by feelings of loyalty and commitment, as when individuals learn who they can count on to confront a problem. When trust is earned based on promises, when social participation is restricted; then, subordination arises. This is how 'clientelism' is reproduced leading to corruption. How many times do we create local environments rich in "social capital," but all this community energy ends up crashing into the wall of anti-poverty programs based on hand-outs, where the most distressing compassion reigns. Because such "social capital" does not produce mutual understanding, creative cooperation.

²⁴ In western psychology, trust is not considered an emotion.

8. Increasing the density of the social fabric: communications

Social and institutional actors are strengthened by their relationships of proximity with others; it is essential to create cooperation ties, networks. It is the relationships forged during discussions and contacts, concentered in joint actions, that allow the political will and the technical factors to be tied in, supporting the commitments. We have learned that the social actors express and develop a sense of belonging and confidence within the process of social participation. But they must be empowered by capacities, informed and coordinated to negotiate their interests, to reach agreements. The creation of democratic spaces where they submit their demands and their initiatives, and defend their rights is necessarily.

The world we live in is made up of the relationships we establish with others. We create a more or less durable network of relationships and linkages that permit an exchange between actors and generate closeness. The quality and quantity of these relationships depends a great deal on the ethical values that are transmitted in the material and symbolic exchanges contained in our communications, and of the concepts that guide the actions. It is always possible to change this fabric sowing alternative relationships.

Everything that is alive can be reproduced and conserved. Biology teaches us that living beings are molecular systems; networks that produce and transform molecules. Organizational structures do not change so easily; however, this is not true of the constituent molecules, the vital components that enter into the processes. Humberto Maturana²⁵ refers to the element that is modified as structure. He tells us: “a person becomes ill and loses weight, loses molecules; then he gets better, recovers his weight, his muscle tone. Here, a series of structural changes have taken place, but the organization, life, has been conserved.” In society, this does not happen naturally, so that we depend

²⁵ Maturana, Humberto, Francisco J. Varela, *The Tree of Knowledge: The Biological Roots of Human Understanding*, Boston: Shambhala, 1987.

on communications. We create institutions, rules of the game, cultural norms, emotionalities, a whole dimension of relationships that allow us to organize the quality of interactions on a permanent basis.

Fritjof Capra teaches us that one “of the most important institutions for the systemic understanding of life is the recognition that networks are the basic pattern for the organization of living systems.”²⁶ In the social and institutional dimension, life should also be understood in function of the concept of networks, only the connecting threads are the relationships that establish communication networks. Like the biological networks, which function to ‘self-organize’ the molecular systems, social networks depend on communication. Territorial development, by the mere fact that it works in multi-dimensionality, owing to the requirements of transforming production, gives rise to emerging social structures, institutional arrangements, and new forms of civic expression, decentralized modalities of representation, etc.

The scientific basis for the process of creating social quality is related to the qualitative and quantitative expansion of the relationships around us, on which we depend to live our lives. Sustainable development – social equity, cultural diversity, environmental sustainability, economic inclusion, political participation, spiritual tranquility, access to knowledge, institutional effectiveness – are created collectively within the framework of contacts, discussions, conversations, information; in brief, of communication, from which new interactions arise. Values, attitudes and knowledge are created and recreated constantly in the context of communications. These can be “enriched” qualitatively, by means of actions and practices, by the social actors themselves realizing that they are involved in the communications dynamic.

Thus, the development of social quality depends greatly on the communication strategy that is defined to give greater

²⁶ Fritjof Capra, *The Web of Life: A New Scientific Understanding of Living Systems*, New York, USA, 1996

density to the social network, creating empowerment. When we speak of communication for sustainable development, we are not referring to propaganda, but rather to the transfer of learning energies via communicative action and participative communication. Propaganda designed by marketing experts is not concerned with expressing a feeling of solidarity and community, except when it serves as an instrument for the promotion of charitable guilt. It can and does fragment society. The sustainable development of the territories requires educative communication, which promotes collective empowerment and social responsibility.

Social networks that are supported by communicative action necessarily – as in any reality – must express tangible and intangible aspects. The tangible aspect refers to the channels by which the educational messages, the emotionality, the information, must circulate. There are methods, a point from which the information is emitted, elements of access and terminals, broadcasting waves; but there are also content, an essence, an energy, and messages, circulating rationality-emotionality. Communication connects the networks that have the property of connection, that create cohesion, nourishing proximity, which leads to integration. Networks are active, dynamic, they encourage participation and social action. It is easier to integrate and create territories based on reticular visions and communicative action.

In rural territories where the “information” culture is somewhat weak, we must be imaginative to multiply the interactions by means of innovative flows of information and communication. Productivity, empowerment, creativity, identity claims, rest increasingly on the social energy transmitted by the networks.

The sustainable development process in the rural territories requires a major effort to integrate the social fabric through democratic linkages. The interaction among the actors involved is the reciprocal action that leads to a change in behavior. Strong social ties generally emerge from a feeling of interdependence, commitment, trust, credibility, congruence; all this interwoven by transparent communication. Collective achievements are easier

when there is greater closeness, when the strength of the opposition has been reduced through dialogue. Relations, based on exchange and dialogue, are almost always present when there is a need of 'the other.' The emotional burden of subordination – the shame of dependence – dispels trust and weakens cooperation, and the absence of these linkages threatens the formulation of any collective project.

9. Changes in the political culture

Unfortunately, our political culture has been shaped on the basis of "power over"; in other words, essentially, based on the will to dominate; and this creates separation. We are always struggling, fighting, protesting, and this struggle nourishes a perverse process of creating mistrust, ways of acting that rupture harmonious social relations. In the current political arena, disturbing emotions conditioned by interests predominate. "Such separateness" is incorporated into the daily codes of political behavior, generating tense environments that frequently lead to greater conflicts. The individual's emotional component is permanently vibrating with an energy of material dissatisfaction and distrust; this is truly fragmented sociability, "negatively capitalized." Attachment generally leads to suffering.

The creation of a sustainable society depends on our relationships, on the social quality of our social fabric. We have a great need to see a more integrated society, richer in norms and institutions that facilitate cooperation between people. Hence the need to develop a new political culture, and to create a critical, reflexive and participative spirit. The political culture, when it is limited by particularism, paralyzes relationships, prevents integration, weakens social cohesion, fragments and divides. Unable to put itself in the place of the other, party politics become thoughtless and irresponsible. Utilitarian values govern priorities and encourage the habit of seeking group or personal gain at the cost of others. We are unable to understand that within society we are unique individuals but, at the same time, interdependent members of the same society.

This inflexibility of the predominant political culture, which lacks solidarity, blocks possibilities of joint action. It is dangerous to remain locked into a Darwinist paradigm of the survival of the fittest. Competition gives rise to social separation plants the seed of mistrust. If we continue bringing our fears, our denials, our hates and our desire for power to social and political life, the quality of sociability will not change. We are 'feeling-thinking'²⁷ beings capable of building democratic life that corresponds to a vertically-horizontally integrated social fabric.²⁸

To create a new social fabric we must be accepted as different to be recognized as equals. This is a world of angels and demons, not of angels or demons. Creating social quality in a fragmented and multi-cultural society is not an easy task. But although it appears a titanic effort, it can be achieved through educative communication and the constant application of ethics to the vital energy of relationships. Each activity, each development project must seek communicative exchange, a fairer distribution of opportunities, and true reciprocity among actors with distinct identities. The art of social alchemy consists in uniting that which is antagonistic, accepting its legitimacy, in order to introduce complementarily. To creative collective enthusiasms we need to work along cultural expressions pointed by happiness and reflection.

We face the challenge of creating relatively stable agreements, anchored in ethical values, endeavoring to form networks or groups of inter-coordinated actors, who are motivated and capable of acting together. Networks promote interaction among people and institutions; they create the possibility that, when brought together, many different actors can combine their experiences and resources. Social networks should be nourished by enthusiasm or their actions will be amorphous and inconstant; because, as in the world of subatomic particles, actors who are able to act in synergy lack vitality as isolated elements: it is the interconnections that create new systems with entirely new properties. The actors cooperate to the extent that they are interrelated and become something more than themselves. The smallest acts, if they are carried out in the name of the common good that is shared with others, can unite, produce synchronicities,

and form a giant wave of new and integrating elements. You can promote positive butterflies effects.

Consequently, social cohesion becomes the goal and a permanent process of creation. The relations of cooperation among actors – the new values – bring about the union between the technical, social and institutional factors that must evolve in a complex manner in the specific scenario of territorial development. Such cooperation networks must therefore be promoted²⁹, through communicative education.

The basic issue is how to transform a series of interests and opinions, which are sometimes divergent and even opposed, into a consensual decision that benefits all and leads to the formulation of a common project. Cooperation can be stimulated, and the points of intersection increased by means of participative strategic planning processes. But the planning process must rouse enthusiasm, mobilize, generate collective energy, foster the sense of identity, and educate; to this end, it is essential to formulate culturally-sensitive methodologies that lead to democratic discussion and facilitate social mediation.³⁰

Over and above the plans, it is necessary to create social quality throughout the planning process. To build a common vision, a shared future project, we must enrich social relations qualitatively, multiply contacts, harmonious relations, and established conversations. This also means creating information systems of a territorial nature (global and local) that brings awareness and consciousness.³¹ The information must flow towards the territories and within them, as an input to the management process and, also, to stimulate the production innovation processes, the creative imagination. Much of this information must be “translated”

²⁹ Carlos Miranda, *Desenvolvimento Local Sustentável no Brasil*, IICA-Brasil, 2002.

Carlos Júlio Jara and Ribamar Furtado, “*Experiência de Planejamento Territorial: Projeto Identidade em Maranhão*”, Notes from a planning course for the Black communities in that State, IICA- 2002.

Carlos Jara M, *A sustentabilidade do Desenvolvimento Local*, IICA-Brasil, 1999.

into the codes inherent in the culture of the territory, to close the gap between the technical discourse and its local significance. No rural planning is possible without intercultural dialogue.

Access to knowledge and information allows the individual's capabilities and liberty to be expanded, opening up social opportunities, economic facilities, and political freedom.³²

10. The new institutional framework

Institutions are somehow the organizational resources that offer guidance, a direction, a certain sense of management and regulation. Institutions guide the social actors and the economic agents, indicate behaviors and the courses to follow within a certain logic or rationality. It is a dimension in which a 'uni-diversity' of rules and customs circulates. Some institutions are rigid and work favouring the interests of minorities. Few people dare to challenge the paradigms imbedded in such institutions, that are naturalized by diverse levels of formality.

Institutions act as engines with different capacities and power to drive the uncertain course of development, conditioning the social and economic activity of the different actors, communities and individuals that, simultaneously, create them. Territorial sustainable development requires new institutionalities.

We need institutions that allow us to adapt, to democratize, to become supportive, to decentralize, to care for ourselves, to coordinate us, to identify us, to make us responsible for ourselves. We have to learn to manage change as if we were navigating in a sea of uncertainty which surrounds an archipelago of certainties.³³ Institutional changes are

³³ Edgar Morin. *Seven complex Lessons in Education for the Future*, UNESCO, 2003.

always the fruit of the need to create institutional structures and relations adapted to the new methods of development in order to overcome the crisis of the old models.

Institutions can be identified, on the one hand, as formal bodies, schemas whose functioning depends on a series of norms and contracts that condition determined behaviors, and that structure relations and guide individual and collective efforts. They are changing structures and, at the same time, organizations designed to fulfill a specific purpose; they are relatively rigid and operate within a framework of laws, regulations, agreements and procedures. Institutions require rules that delimit behavior within a specific domain and give rise to regular actions that are frequently transformed into corporativism, by dogmatism and by their “power over.”

On the other hand, institutions are also based on customs and, indeed, condition certain social conducts by means of shared values, traditional practices and tacit agreements. Corruption, for example, is an institution – probably the most perverse and persistent of all. So as paternalism, sexism, patrimonialism.

We are challenged to create a new institutional framework. The dormant territorial potential will not awaken without the institutional component, conceptually and operatively organized in two ‘vertically-horizontally’ interwoven spheres. On the one hand, the sphere of functional connections among the States that permits sharing policies, the decisions and, above all, the responsibility for sustainable rural development. And, on the other hand, the sphere of the connection of the territorial actors and the local authorities, that make upward and downward coordination possible, and nourish the commitments.

It is obvious that the current institutional framework has been almost exhausted for purposes of sustainable development. This gives rise to the challenge to create a new project and contract. Creating a new institutional framework does not necessarily mean expanding the bureaucratic apparatus or signing formal empty agreements; but rather, fundamentally, defining new connections and relations among actors, new

directions and purposes, and a new system of rules and ethical values; in other words, a new organizational culture.³⁴ The value of a new institution for sustainable development does not reside in new equipment, or in its size, but rather in the quality of the ideas, in intelligence, in capability, in experience, in attitude, and in the active ‘rationality-emotionality’ of the actors involved.³⁵ Nevertheless, in this new epoch, informational connectivity is fundamental.

11. Social quality and identity

The sustainable development of the heterogeneous territorial world needs to improve the quality of internal and external social connections, bring the agents closer together, and increase the dynamic interaction that controls behavior. In this way, the territorial social identity is strengthened, together with the value of identity in relation to emotional energy that affirms and accepts, that recognizes itself as part of history that questions itself about the present and about the future. Most of interests are defined by cultural identity. Identity is a reservoir of spiritual energies. It can modify the direction of the wave of change when it discovers, by means of information, the sharing of experiences and participation, the possibility of pursuing a possible dream.

We know that the social fabrics with a strong sense of social responsibility and identity are better able to carry out joint projects. Nevertheless, this depends to a large extent on the affective social commitment to the territory. Identity “glues” the individual to the territory, homogenizes articulate elements, and aligns feelings with actual places. It symbolizes the series of meanings and values that we interiorize each day and that become part of us.³⁶ It situates and articulates the past, the

³⁴ Agreements are useful for generating a sense of responsibility.

Carlos Julio Jara, *Nueva institucionalidad para el desarrollo humano y sustentable*, IICA-Ecuador, 2003.

³⁶ Carlos Júlio Jara, *Projeto Identidade para as Comunidades Quilombolas de Maranhão*, IICA-Brasil, 2002

present and the projected future in a single intangible whole interiorized by the diverse social actors.³⁷

12. Associations and the associative culture

We need, for example, to promote a change in the traditional associative culture, in the obsolete associations that formally bind most of the family-based rural producers. This form of organization, created many decades ago to integrate the rural communities “in an orderly manner” into the central schemas of progress, and that sought, above all, to formalize the process of the vertical supply of goods and services, does not create inclusive help to create social cohesion or clusters. The bureaucratic cloning of community associations structures creates an interpretation of social life that generally is territorially indifferent, that fragments rurality, that does not facilitate the organization of the communities in direct networks of solidarity³⁸

These associations were administered as if they were instruments to facilitate the process of mediation and control of the community bases, so that the process of demanding local rights and claims was bureaucratically formalized. They are not functional bodies that operate to act proactively in the current economic climate; they are enclosed in the local world and prevent making the most use of the territorial opportunities for human and sustainable development. The traditional community association is in crisis. It is necessary to create a new model, capable of synthesizing present and future experiences and challenges. There are many exceptions, but in general, community associations are not ready to face the challenge of open markets.

³⁷ José Arocena, “El Estado, la descentralización y la iniciativa local en Uruguay”, en *Mujer y políticas sociales a nivel local*, CIEPLAN, Chile, 1992.

³⁸ Social cohesion is probably the main expression of a social fabric dense in close relationships, resulting from the interaction of the inclusive ideas, emotions, and experiences of a wide diversity of actors, who tend to merge their identities.”

We need to change old paradigm of rural social organization. The new epoch require new forms of social and territorial organization and the challenge is to invent them based on successful systematized experiences. Organizations that are neither too small – where there is no possibility of obtaining scale advantages – nor too rigid, and that stimulate the creative ability of their members, taking advantage of the latter’s talents, experience and memories. The challenge to open ourselves up to new forms of association – associations of an entrepreneurial nature; innovative capable to create true networks of small rural businesses based on efficiency, cooperation, information, quality, good productive practices, and reticular organization.³⁹ The production reconversion of the territories, particularly those where family farming predominates, requires new forms of social and economic organization for the community bases. Forms that are less bureaucratic, more flexible, more qualified, more modern and more operational.

³⁹ Reticular: corresponding to the mesh of all the horizontal and vertical relations that arise within the networks.

Characteristics and perspectives of community associations⁴⁰

Old local and sectoral paradigm	New territorial and intersectoral paradigm
Created by the centralizing State.	Functional for decentralizing power.
Vertical management and authoritarian culture.	Horizontal management and participative culture.
Bureaucratic and subordinate organization.	Flexible and autonomous organization.
Created by public offer	Created by local social and economic demand.
Instrument to capture local projects. Isolation.	Protagonism, capacity to generate common projects. Associations and networks.
Limited business management capacity.	Business management capacity.
Fails to differentiate public services from political favours.	Separates State services from part particularistic interests.
Constituted to integrate the community into the State and ensure burocratic control.	New linkages with the State, the private sector, and the market.
Solidarity is top down.	Solidarity is bottom up.
Culture of vertical assistance and intervention based on "power against."	Culture of "empowerment to"; adaptation of the community to the new contexts.
Functional proliferation for the implementation of compensatory development programs and projects.	Encourage the establishment of a new order and differentiated goals.
Attitude of cultural subordination, dependent management.	Attitude of rights, actors or subjects; interdependent and shared management.

Cloned methods of organization, homogenous and replicated models.	Differentiated and flexible methods, variable models, according to specific goals.
Leaders imposed, representatives, co-opted, 'clientilized.'	Legitimate leaders, representative, trained and informed.
Projects do not reflect the real needs of the communities.	Projects reveal assets and talents, the endogenous potential; self-management.
Individualistic leaders who compete for power.	Leaders who are managers, with the ability to guide, plan, interpret the environment; they distribute power, read the context.
Does not favor the creation of initiatives and businesses. Does not permit the producers and the market to be linked efficiently and competitively.	Need to increase business capital, to adapt dynamically to market requirements.
Actual structure does not support marketing processes.	Norms and mechanisms that facilitate marketing management.
Structure impedes the supply of services.	Norms and procedures that permit the offer of services.
External linkages arise from formal agreements.	External linkages arise principally from horizontal agreements and negotiations.
Isolated rural structures	Logic of territorial networks and cooperation ties.