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Gestión estratégica de los centros universitarios municipales orientada al desarrollo local

Strategic management of the municipal university centers oriented to local development

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Resumen: Los centros universitarios municipales se conciben como instituciones con potencialidades para contribuir con el proyecto de desarrollo integral que en cada municipio cubano se ejecuta. Sin embargo, el análisis de las propuestas encontradas corroboró que la mayoría de estas carecen de una adecuada gestión estratégica lo que limita el aprovechamiento de sus potencialidades con énfasis en el capital humano y, por consiguiente, dificulta su responsabilidad social. Es por ello que en el presente estudio se exponen algunas reflexiones teóricas en torno a la gestión estratégica de los centros universitarios municipales orientada al desarrollo local.

Palabras clave: Centro Universitario Municipal; Gestión estratégica; Desarrollo local; Capital humano

Abstract: The municipal university centers are conceived as institutions with potentialities to contribute to the integral development project that in each Cuban municipality. However, a deep analysis corroborated that most of them lack adequate strategic management, which limits the use of their potential with an emphasis on human capital and, consequently, hinders their social responsibility. This is why this paper presents some theoretical reflections about the strategic management of municipal university centers oriented to local development.

Keywords: Municipal University Center; Strategic management; Local development; Human capital

Introduction

The new conceptions of development emphasize the local development as an expression of the real protagonism that organizations, social groups and each individual must possess in the management and sustainability of the development of their own territorial contexts of life, with the use of resources and endogenous potentialities. (Guzón, 2006)

On the other hand, in the Guidelines of the Economic and Social Policy of the Party and the Revolution, approved at the Sixth Congress of the Communist Party of Cuba, among other purposes, it advocates giving the municipality a set of powers aimed at establishing it in a factor of change and generator of its own development, as well as to continue advancing in the improvement

of the higher education in function of the development project that has been traced for the country until the 2030.

In order to respond to this challenge in a more effective way, in 2010 the Municipal University Centers (CUM in Spanish) were created as integrating institutions of the former municipal university branches with the explicit objective of contributing through their management to the development.

The creation of the CUM was a step forward in the University Policy of Knowledge aimed at local development based on the aim of aligning the university processes with the priorities and perspectives of the Integrated Development Project (PDI in Spanish) of each municipality. As a consequence, university functions and processes have been decentralized to the CUM, but it is still necessary for them to generate their own management model, without tending to reproduce the characteristics of provincial universities. These local academic organizations have real potential to contribute to the integral development projects of the municipalities where they are located.

However, based on an analysis of the literature on the work of the CUM in local development, it is possible to appreciate the existence of a certain decontextualization of its organizational management in relation to local development and in particular the Integral Development Project (PDI) of the municipality, characterized mainly by the extrapolation of models characteristic of the provincial universities or of the previous municipal university branches. For the previously stated reason this research aims to carry out a theoretical analysis about the strategic management of the CUM oriented to local development, so that they can respond more effectively to the priorities and perspectives of the integral development project of the municipality as an expression of their social responsibility.

Development

The term local development began to be used with great force in the late 1970s and early 1980s, when there was tendency to use it as a political strategy disseminated by international organizations and by scholars who saw the necessity to serve the affected by the inequalities that provoked global and exclusive development models of the very contexts of that development.

In the beginning these views focused on reductionist and technocratic positions that saw the region as an object of development that was managed by top-down entities, associated mainly with economic issues, but in the 1990s they moved and adopted other concepts integral to the postulates promoted by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), which emphasize issues related to

social equity, human well-being, and participation of the region as the subject of its own development.

Some of the most recognized authors in this field are Arocena (1995, 2004), Coraggio (1996), Barreiro (2000), Guzón (2006), Altschuler (2006), Boffill, (2010). For the majority, local development is seen as a process that requires the interested and trained action of its own actors, therefore, its participation becomes key aspect and introduces a singular premise: there is not local development if there is no decisive participation of its actors.

Consequently, it should not be seen as development on a smaller (local) scale, it is not the fragmentation of global reality (Arocena, 2004). From this perspective local development is understood as a process based on the use of endogenous resources and opportunities to produce well-being, among which we can distinguish the intentional involvement of its actors in the necessary decisions and transformations that can occur in and from various dimensions: "environmental, economic-productive and socio-cultural and institutional" (Guzón, 2006, p.10).

From the above analysis it is assumed as a definition of local development, "the process that orient local actors through actions of transformation of the territory in a desired direction and is of a continuous nature, even when partial goals are plotted as a spiral" Guzón, (2006, p.60).

In that order, the following are essential characteristics of local development:

- Prospective and strategic nature, in the fact that it is not improvised and reactive, that focuses only on the solution of immediate problems, but is thought process in the future.
- The qualified and interested participation of local actors to address these priorities and perspectives. In this sense it is a development based on learning and knowledge.
- Although the decisions on the actions to be undertaken are taken at the local level, this should not be understood as a separation of the National Development Policy, but as a complement to it, with certain independence.

The CUM as a local development actor: its strategic management

The local actor can be a person, a group, an organization that actively participates in the political, cultural and developmental processes of a community, region or country (Esteva and Reyes, 1998). In relation to the above, a distinctive element for the purposes of this research is associated to the recognition of the CUM as one of the organizational most important actors for local development, since it is responsible of the attention to the priorities and perspectives of this, for which it must perfect its processes with a strategic social vision. Consequently, teachers and other members of this university institution also constitute local (individual) actors.

In Cuba, this process is led by the top leadership of the party and the government, who constitute the main local decision makers in the municipality. In the Guidelines of the 7th Congress of the Communist Party of Cuba, the need for the University's link with local development is drawn from the effective deployment of its substantive processes.

Within the framework of this challenge, Cuba integrates higher education that reaches the municipalities with the creation in 2010 of the CUM as integrating institutions of previous representations of higher education in municipalities, called municipal university branches, with a new social order more explicit: to contribute to the development of the territories where they are located.

It is necessary to recognize that higher education through the municipal university branches contributed to local development, mainly in the increase of social human capital - considered one of its main indicators -, however, the actions were carried out from fragmented positions given, among other reasons, due to the insufficient integration of knowledge to jointly address the same problem, as well as the excessive dependence of these on their central headquarters (provincial universities corresponding to the training organization), which generally brought about the reproduction of the management models characteristic, matters concerning organizational strategic management still unresolved in the current CUM.

The formation of the CUM contributed greatly to reducing deviations, however, integration is more than unifying people under the same government or management, these are organizations that take advantage of the potential and resources (including the knowledge as the most important and decisive) of each part, and create an integrated whole to face the complex challenges that the current society and the PDI of the municipality imposes.

The CUM as academic institutions with legal identity have their genesis in the need to articulate this level of the educational system to the peculiarities and perspectives proper to the country's development, which is inserted in a world in constant changes that are ever faster, which imposes in turn transformations in all their organizations.

In this regard, the Ministry of Higher Education, in the Normative Documents on the integration of higher education in municipalities declared in 2011:

The integration of higher education in the municipality promotes the continuous and homogeneous improvement of quality in the training of professionals and other university

processes (...) and means an opportunity to be more relevant, being able to tackle collective solutions to problems of the territory (p.4).

It is understood that the CUM constitute a new and different organization with its own personality in relation to the municipal university branches and reach a higher stage in relation to its social responsibility, so that its management cannot be done from the same position as these last. The CUM merit their own model and management dynamics. In organizational terms, management exists because of the need to respond to certain demands, whether individual, group or organizational, internal and / or external. This is associated with one of the laws of administration proposed by García Vidal (2002), namely: original law of the correspondence between the social necessity and the tendency to make possible its satisfaction.

According to Villamayor and Lamas (1998), it is "a process of work and organization in which different perspectives, objectives and efforts are coordinated, in order to progress effectively towards institutionally assumed objectives and that we would like them to be adopted in a participatory and democratic manner "(p.7).

These authors conclude that management:

Is a game of consensus, dissensions and transformations that involve the entire institution and all its members. Management is not restricted to an internal view of the organization, but also results from the analysis of the relationships established between the institutions (as such) and their surrounding, on the one hand, and the relationships that each of its members generate in the same context, on the other (p.19).

In this order, and given that some constraints still persist, management with a strategic focus can contribute to the fulfillment of the social mission of the CUM, since they are conceived as open and dynamic systems, in constant interaction and exchange with their immediate environment, which is the municipality where they are and according to which they exist. For that, it is necessary that the potentialities (strengths and opportunities) that they have in that context mentioned by authors like Lage (2013), Nunez (2014), take advantage of their social order and function especially in associations to the use of the knowledge that their workers possess to develop the university processes according to the PDI of the municipality.

As a consequence, the strategic management of the CUM oriented to local development is understood as an "iterative and holistic process of formulation, implementation, execution and control of a set of maneuvers, that guarantees a proactive interaction of the organization with its

surroundings, to contribute to efficiency and effectiveness in the fulfillment of its corporate purpose "(Ronda and Marcané, 2004, p.21).

In this respect, organizational strategy is the most important mechanism for this university institution to guide its management towards the aforementioned goals, but it cannot be an extrapolation of the strategy of the provincial university to that of the CUM as has generally happened, but one that is its "specific", that among its distinctive features can be explicitly expressed the interest of contributing to the priorities and perspectives of the municipality's IDP and the involvement of academic actors in that purpose.

According to Chiavenato (2011), the organizational strategy is based on two types of analysis: the contextual to identify and analyze opportunities that must be exploited in terms of its transformation (organization and environment); and the analysis of the organization with the aim of identifying and analyzing its weaknesses and strengths in order to minimize and strengthen them in function of its essential mission.

The authors of this research recognize that among the essential inputs that the CUM we can consider: to develop their organizational strategy (the strategic objectives of the Ministry of Higher Education and the strategy of the corresponding provincial university), considered as general guidelines for their design, but not sufficient to accomplish the purpose with which they were created in Cuba. This requires, at the discretion of the authors, two fundamental premises:

- a) Explicit presence in the elements of the strategic planning of the CUM interests to contribute to the PDI of the municipality as a concrete expression of its orientation to the local development.
- b) Internal coherence among the elements for their social projection (oriented to local development).

For the first of the premises, let's consider questions such as the following to help the CUM in the design of its strategy: who are we? Why were we created? What are our objectives and perspectives? What can we do to accomplish our goals? How do we do it? What participation do other local actors have in the tasks we have? Let's draw attention to the need for all members of the CUM to participate with high responsibility in shaping the strategy, *i.e.* to be involved in it.

The second premise is oriented to the functionality of these elements, to their synergistic integration, qualities without which they are mere speech.

To conceive the CUM as a local development oriented organization is to understand it as an open, dynamic and complex social unit that exchanges information, energy and materials with its environment, possessing a specific structure and functions, composed of a diversity of actors with experiences, knowledge, know-how and experiences that, when properly managed, can contribute to the achievement of its strategic objectives and essential purpose, which is the gradual development of the contexts in which they are located, contexts that to a great extent influence the internal configuration and the external (social) projection of the university institution.

For these purposes, it is assumed that organizations "are social systems that produce goods or services, oriented by a social rationality, that have an administrative or management system, a structure, some resources, and are delimited by a specific socio-economic structure" (Martínez, 2007, p.11).

Among the authors who have dealt with the study of CUM management in relation to local development, we highlight Ojeda (2006), Núñez (2010, 2014), Boffill (2010b), Pérez (2012) and Hernández (2012).

In general, there is a consensus among these authors about the potential of CUMs to contribute to local development, since they are conceived as organizations that not only provide training for professionals, but also guide research and development taking into account the particularities and perspectives of its surroundings, as well as the rest of its processes (strategic support).

With the elements mentioned it can be affirmed that the strategic management of the CUM oriented to the local development, must be conceived according to the priorities and the perspectives of the PDI of the municipality, for which the following ideas must be taken into account:

- a) Municipal university affiliates have accumulated experience in linking substantive processes with local problems, but there was little integration among them, so that the knowledge that could be generated for such purposes was wasted. Instead the CUM can take advantage of the human capital it has to generate an organizational dynamic that allows a more effective response to social demands. The previous is one of the reasons that lead to the integration of universities in Cuba, a process that aimed at saving resources, establishing a model for the institutional management that integrates university knowledge and take advantage of the synergies resulting as the most efficient ways to answer the demands of a society.
- b) The CUM not only integrates the human capital of the previous subsidiaries under one government, but also they have real possibilities to take advantage of the knowledge of other

local and extra local actors to perfect the processes according to the priorities and perspectives of the PDI of the municipality.

A significant finding derived from the bibliographic consultation is the recognition of the postulates that contain the concepts Social University Responsibility (RSU) and University Social Relevance (PSU) as the pillars on which the CUM management can be strategically oriented to local development. These can be concretized in the following two ideas:

- First, CUM management must promote social change for local development with a prospective vision, for which they have to reinforce their links with society through an inter, multi and trans-disciplinary epistemological approach.
- Second, the relevance of CUM should be evaluated according to the adequacy between what is aspired to the PDI of the municipality and what they do daily to achieve their organizational objectives.

An idea that contains the meaning of the previous reflections and that constitutes the thread of the strategic management of the CUM oriented to the local development is expressed by Núñez J. (2010) when considering that "the idea of the bond university- society, is not a function, it is the organizing principle of university life "(p.56).

Taking into account the above, we consider that the strategic management of CUM oriented to local development should be characterized by:

- Systematic and systemic monitoring of the local reality and its development prospects in order to make them an object of study, content and output of university processes, to participate in conjunction with other local and extra local actors (who are agents of knowledge) in the processing, interpretation, as well as in the proposals of solutions that, from the university institution, can favor its gradual transformation.
- To take advantage of the potentialities offered by the different contexts and processes of the CUM to integrate human capital in order to improve the conditions of the university institution so that it can effectively attend to the priorities and perspectives of the PDI of the municipality.
- To promote a culture of organizational learning in the CUM as the fundamental way for the university institution to face, through the use of its human capital, the challenges imposed on it by the information and knowledge society in the context of local development.

Let's note the relationship between the priorities and perspectives of local development and inputs for the strategic management of the CUM. The bibliographic consultation recognizes that institutions of higher education in Cuba have decentralized their physical spaces and functions

towards municipalities, however, we wish to warn about the need to advance in the forms of management in the CUM to allow them to take advantage of their potential in terms of local development without tending to reproduce models and indicators characteristic of them. In this sense, knowledge management as a strategic management approach can be very useful.

The bibliographic consultation made possible to specify that the CUMs have a set of potentialities and strengths that can be used by their managers to strategically orient their management to local development:

- CUMs are a more dynamic, more flexible and personalized interface than the provincial universities.
- CUMs have an organizational structure that is less hierarchical and compartmentalized than that of provincial universities, which favors the social interaction between their workers and the flow of knowledge with an inter, multi and trans-disciplinary approach to the achievement of the local development goals. These may adopt a specific organizational scheme to address a specific problem, and other to address problems of a different nature, caring not to create an unwanted organizational chaos.

The CUM treasure under the same administration the human capital that develop the previous university subsidiaries, all of which is their greatest strength if they take advantage of the synergies that can occur as a result of their management (that of human capital).

- The existence in each Cuban municipality of a project or at least of an explicit intention of integral development to that scale, which demands the permanent interaction between CUM, government and other local actors in order to articulate the efforts and to take advantage of the synergies established.
- CUMs have the potential to generate deep interactions with other local and extra local knowledge holders, which should be used to generate organizational knowledge and improve university processes in the light of local development.

Conclusions

The management of the CUM is characterized as a strategic and complex process to deal with, among other elements, the alignment of its processes with the PDI of the municipality that as an expression of social responsibility has the University in local development. This new organization has a set of potentialities that should be used to guide its management to the

PDI of the municipality, one of which is associated with its human capital, through which it can add value to university processes in function of local development.

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