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## **Challenges of local development in municipalities of the southwest of the state of Mexico**

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## ARTICLE SECTION

### **Challenges of local development in municipalities of the southwest of the state of Mexico**

*Abstract:* The objective of the article is to identify the endogenous factors that have slowed down local development, as well as those that could promote it in the municipalities of the southwest of the State of Mexico. It is the product of a study that was developed from the construction of a qualitative methodological proposal that made it possible to identify the incidence of policies and the role played by local actors in promoting local development. The variables that were considered for the analysis are: territorial factors, the role of local actors, and identity as a factor that promotes development. For this, four municipalities with similar characteristics were selected: Amatepec, Luvianos, Tejupilco and Tlatlaya. The results showed that in the four study municipalities a policy with a top-down approach appears as a constant, focused on the economic dimension, which does not consider participatory mechanisms and local identity as factors that can promote local development. The conclusions obtained reaffirm the proposal to satisfy the needs and demands of a population, through the participation of the members of the local community in development processes, also considering their identity elements, by virtue of the fact that they favor the sense of belonging and social cohesion, which in turn generate and promote local initiatives and participatory mechanisms for solving common problems.

*Key words:* territorial factors, local actors, identity, policies.

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## IDEAS CLAVE / HIGHLIGHTS / IDEES CLAU

1. La desigual distribución del ingreso genera un incremento en los niveles de pobreza, en particular en territorios rurales.
2. La política de desarrollo local-regional de municipios del suroeste del Estado de México no ha logrado mejorar las condiciones de vida de sus pobladores.
3. Se observa una política gubernamental con un enfoque descendente que no considera mecanismos participativos y la identidad local como factores para impulsar el desarrollo local.
4. Es necesario identificar los factores endógenos que frenan el desarrollo local, así como los que podrían impulsarlo en los municipios del suroeste del Estado de México.

1. The unequal distribution of income has generated a significant increase in poverty levels, particularly in territories with rural characteristics.
2. The local-regional development policy implemented in municipalities of the southwest of the State of Mexico has not managed to impact the improvement of the living conditions of its citizens.
3. A government policy with a top-down approach is observed that does not consider participatory mechanisms and local identity as factors that can promote local development.
4. It is necessary to identify the endogenous factors that have slowed down local development, as well as those that could promote it in the municipalities of the southwest of the State of Mexico.

1. La desigual distribució de l'ingrés genera un increment en els nivells de pobresa, en particular en territoris rurals.
2. La política de desenvolupament local-regional de municipis del sud-oest de l'Estat de Mèxic no ha aconseguit millorar les condicions de vida dels seus pobladors.
3. S'observa una política governamental amb un enfocament descendent que no considera mecanismes participatius i la identitat local com a factors per a impulsar el desenvolupament local.
4. És necessari identificar els factors endògens que frenen el desenvolupament local, així com els que podrien impulsar-ho en els municipis del sud-oest de l'Estat de Mèxic.

## EXTENDED ABSTRACT<sup>1</sup>

In most Latin American countries, it is observed as a common denominator that the neoliberal capitalist model, characterized by the unequal distribution of income, has generated a significant increase in poverty levels —particularly in those territories inhabited by populations with rural characteristics — despite the implementation of programs and projects aimed at local development. In Mexico there are several states that can be considered as representative of the situation of poverty, the State of Mexico being one of them, and within it the Municipalities of the southwest of the State of Mexico: Tejupilco, Amatepec, Tlatlaya and Luvianos, considered as object of study in the present investigation.

The local-regional development policy implemented in these municipalities has not managed to impact the improvement of the living conditions of its citizens; the data shows that the actions undertaken through the municipal development plans have not contributed to the fulfillment of the objectives of development and reduction of poverty, since in their formulation and execution the conventional vision continues to predominate, from top to bottom, that privileges the economic dimension, leaving aside participatory mechanisms and local identity as factors that can promote local development.

Therefore, the objective of this article is to identify the endogenous factors that have slowed down local development, as well as those that could promote it in the municipalities of the southwest of the State of Mexico.

In order to achieve the stated objective, a conceptual approach to local development and public policies is initially presented; likewise, the regional development policy in the State of Mexico is briefly addressed to subsequently apply the methodological proposal with a qualitative approach, which is built from the review of analytical proposals of local development from different authors, selecting concrete experiences at the municipal level.

Through the application of this proposal, the local development conditions present in the study municipalities were identified based on three established dimensions: territorial factors, the role of local actors and identity. Four municipalities with similar characteristics were selected for the study: Amatepec, Luvianos, Tejupilco and Tlatlaya.

The results showed that in the four study municipalities a policy with a top-down approach appears as a constant, focused on the economic dimension, which does not consider participatory mechanisms and local identity as factors that can promote local development.

The local development process requires the integration and social cohesion of those who inhabit a common space; in the studied cases characterized by a situation of poverty and marginalization, the determined participation of local social actors is the alternative to define a better course towards development.

The endogenous factors that could promote better living conditions stem from the identity factor, since social cohesion around the organization of productive activities is based on customs and traditions, which generates and strengthens local initiatives and the possibility of generating participatory mechanisms that could also be reflected in public affairs, in the formulation and execution of municipal development plans, where the scope of the strategies and actions are not limited to the fulfillment of a legal mandate, but

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<sup>1</sup> Traducción exclusiva de los autores / Authors' exclusive translation.

rather, by responding to the socio-economic realities and cultures of their territories have a positive and effective impact on the development and reduction of poverty suffered by those who live in the four municipalities of the southwest of the state of Mexico.

Consequently, it is about involving local agents, while taking into account the realities of each territory, its resources, potentialities and identity elements, in order to encourage the participation of the population and local initiatives, by virtue of that development strategies are more effective and efficient if they are decided and implemented at the local level by the stakeholders themselves, endogenous development being a fundamental factor, given that it depends on the initiatives and capacities of community actors and not of a top-down policy.

It is precisely at this point where one of the main obstacles to achieving local development in the study municipalities, so that, in order to promote the strengthening of the economy and the improvement of the quality of life of the inhabitants of the four municipalities, it is necessary to combine the efforts and initiatives of the different local actors such as representatives of civil associations, agricultural and livestock producers, academia, youth, merchants, among others, by virtue of the fact that they are the ones who live and know better your needs and your historical perspective.

The aim is to encourage the social actors of these communities to enjoy authentic participation, granting them power and real decision-making options in the design and execution of policies and on those actions that influence their own well-being and that of the population in general.

For this purpose, it is required that in the process of formulating the development policy, the different local actors are made participants and protagonists, including the citizen proposals put forward by them, and that, through the various participation mechanisms, their participation is considered, involvement in the execution of said policy. It has been observed in the study municipalities a lack of linkage at the local level between the authorities, the private sector, civil society and the academy to coordinate the design and execution of strategies and actions that contribute to the fulfillment of the objectives embodied in the Development Plans Municipal.

Another obstacle to achieving development and reducing poverty in the study municipalities is the lack of a regional vision of development by the government of the State of Mexico, since, although the latter assumes regionalization as a strategy of development and considers twenty regional development programs as planning instruments, recognizing that the twenty regions differ from each other in their economic, social and cultural aspects, in practice a government policy is observed with a top-down approach, disjointed and distant from the population of each region.

In this order of ideas, in accordance with the theory of endogenous development that understands the territory as an agent of social transformation, of which the actors and organizations that participate in decision-making are part, in the case studies the culture of the territory as the reference that is at the center of the processes of transformation of the economy and society, ignoring the capacity of their local communities to use the development potential existing in the territory and respond to the challenges that are pose.

In other words, in the four municipalities of the southwest of the State of Mexico analyzed, the absence of a public management system that responds to the needs of people and guarantees their participation in the debates and decisions that affect their lives is identified. It is also evident that the governments have not promoted or channeled the

local initiative, translated into the social dynamics that allows the set of resources in each municipality to be mobilized for the benefit of the local community.

This finding reaffirms the proposal to satisfy the needs and demands of a population, through the participation of the members of the local community in the development processes, also considering their identity elements, by virtue of favoring the sense of belonging and cohesion social, which in turn generate and strengthen local initiatives and participatory mechanisms for the solution of common problems. However, the results of the interviews show that the governments of the four study municipalities, as well as the government of the State of Mexico, do not recognize the importance and incidence of local identity in the local development processes of these territories.

The foregoing represents an impediment to achieving the association between local development and social cohesion referred to by Orduna (2012), which occurs in two ways, first, local development is a vehicle for the consolidation of the components that characterize a society cohesive; second, progress in the local development process requires a certain degree of development in components of social cohesion such as a sense of belonging, inclusion, participation in public affairs, recognition and acceptance of differences, and equity. Achieving this association in the study municipalities is essential, and for this it is necessary to include the identity variable in the development equation.

It is pertinent to point out that the research has some limitations, since even when representative local actors were selected, it was only possible to interview three actors for each municipality, so its results are treated with some prudence, avoiding bias and bias as much as possible generalization.

This limitation is fundamentally due to the wide territorial extension, the dispersion and low population density of the four study municipalities, as well as reasons of insecurity and violence that the southern region of the State of Mexico has suffered for more than a decade. Therefore, for future research, it is suggested to identify and select a larger number of local actors to be interviewed, in order to include the views of the different social sectors, and thereby strengthen the analysis of the local development of the municipalities that are studied.