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Workshop 11:

Social Work in Uncertain Times

Chairs: Cecilia Serrano Martínez and Domingo Carbonero

Challenges in the Context of Uncertainty: Implications for Diversity Management in Spain

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Introduction

As a consequence of the convergence of socioeconomic and political changes, to which protection systems must adapt, new realities arise in the context of uncertainty that call into question the concepts of subject and community. This article aims to highlight the impact of social changes on diversity management in Spain, as well as the challenges facing community intervention from the perspective of applied social sciences. Community actions include examples of success based on social cohesion, cooperation, and the active participation of citizens as sponsors of diversity management and intervention measures within the community.

The Development of Subjects and Citizens within the Community in the Context of Uncertainty

As a consequence of the convergence of socioeconomic and political changes, to which protection systems must adapt in order to respond to new realities, several concepts need to be taken into account in order to obtain a better understanding and analysis of uncertainty generated by change. In order to understand changing contexts in a more comprehensive way, the following aspects need to be considered as attributes associated with the transformation of social, political, artistic, and scientific life¹: (1) the revolutionary role of the event; (2) its interference; (3) the impact of the change; and (4) the effects of the

crisis. All of the aforementioned have an impact on the way we live and assimilate social life.

In the case of Spain, society owes its origins to so-called traditional values. As a result, two of its most significant features are the weight of the family in providing assistance and the impact of intergenerational transmission of poverty.² According to Eurostat data, Spain has the fourth highest Intergenerational Transmission of Poverty Rate in the EU.³ However, signs of change can be seen in certain areas such as the effect of the decline of the traditional family model, and the need for new social policies linked to diversity management. Nevertheless, other aspects relating to this context are unemployment and insecurity, making Spain the country with the second highest unemployment rate and highest rate of people living in households with very low work intensity.⁴ Nevertheless, the protection of young people can be explained by family dynamics. Within the European context, Spain is characterized, *inter alia*, by an above-average age of young people leaving home; above-average early school leaving rates; above-average rates of young people neither in employment nor in education, and an above-average unemployment and long-term unemployment rates.⁵

In essence, Europe is built on a set of political, economic and social rights that began taking shape in the mid-1940s. However, Spain evolved independently from the rest of Europe and only as a political subject in the mid to late-1970s which delayed its incorporation as a member of the European welfare states.⁶ However, on its incorporation, there was an immediate change in the concept of the subject.⁷ A process of individualization began, characterized by the “corrosion and slow disintegration of the concept of citizenship.”⁸ This implied the exaltation of private interests to the detriment of public interests and placed the very concept of community, which would

become characterized as fragile and ephemeral, on a lower plane. Community has traditionally been associated with the presence of a group of individuals in a specific geographical area, which, in turn, gives rise to a feeling of belonging. Analyzing the foundational principles of diverse cultures, the concept of identity has been linked to legitimacy and filiation, which is based on the exclusion of the other.⁹

From a functional perspective, various prototypical types of solidarity have been described over the years. Émile Durkheim initiated a tradition in sociology linked to community and social cohesion studies.¹⁰ His distinction between mechanical and organic solidarity refers to the differences between traditional and modern societies. In the same vein, authors such as Robert Merton and Talcott Parsons explored issues such as the formation of communities and deviant population groups. Parson argued that there is a link between social control mechanisms and deviant behavior.¹¹ In turn, Merton argued that deviant subcultures are linked to shared values and the distribution of resources.¹²

From a cultural perspective, researchers have taken a more in-depth look at the emic vision of community bonds. For example, Georg Simmel examined a specific type of interdependence in his definition of “the poor.”¹³ Specifically, the bonds of interdependence created between social groups receiving assistance and those not, with a focus on status and social image. This perspective was primarily adopted by the Chicago School and theories on the culture of poverty.¹⁴ With respect to marginal groups, the latter attempt to offer explanations from the social actors themselves that offer insights into values, beliefs, behaviors, and norms located on the margins of mainstream culture.

As for the concept of citizenship, the starting point should be the integration of the concept's singularities, given that individuals are the result of a progressive differentiation in the individualization process itself.¹⁵ Regarding the imaginary of community, in the current logic of changing societies, it would be more appropriate to link the concept with the term "tribe" in the broadest sense. In one of the classic definitions of community, Natalio Kisnerman refers to it as a "system of social relations in a defined space, integrated on the basis of shared interests and needs."¹⁶ Similarly, Ezequiel Ander-Egg alludes to a group of people who interact with each other and perceive themselves as a social unit in a determined geographical area. These components share functions, objectives, and a sense of belonging.¹⁷

Characteristics of Geographical Vulnerability in Spanish Society

If the distinguishing features of community are placed within the confluence of changes, diversities, and hybrids, then the idea of "tribe" would be associated with a combination of inclusive relationships: that is, the coming together of multiple identities that meet in the same time-space that comprises a diverse and heterogeneous group of individuals. In Spain, neighborhoods are diverse, with areas of action implemented in numerous cities according to their multicultural composition and problems of sociodemographic, socioeconomic, residential, and subjective vulnerability.¹⁸ Given this diversity, an "Atlas of Vulnerability" has been created to study the patterns of vulnerable areas.¹⁹

- (a) Demographic pattern. In this regard, it should be noted that the evolution of population growth indicates an increase in foreign nationals from 3.8% to 11.25% overall. This means that 48.54% of Spanish areas have a population consisting of

over 5.6% foreign nationals. In turn, there has also been an increase in the number of children with foreign nationality from 3.06% to 12.09% in the two most recent population censuses. Thus 22.84% of areas have over 13.9% children with foreign nationality. Other demographic realities indicate the weight of the over-75 years old who comprise 8.71% of the population. However, there are 24.18% of areas in which over 16.3% of the population consists of individuals over 75.

- (b) Socioeconomic vulnerability. The growth in the unemployment rate can be observed in the 2001 (14.20%) and 2011 (29.63%) censuses, with 18.84% of areas with rates higher than 30% of the population unemployed in the latter period. Similarly, youth unemployment rates have also shown an increase from 19.98% to 44.81%. Currently, there are 20.24% of areas with youth unemployment rates higher than 42.3%. Lastly, the growth of unskilled labor has increased from 12.20% to 18.90%, with 20.08% of areas with more than 17.8% of the population employed in unskilled labor.
- (c) Residential vulnerability. Around 6.99% of housing is in a dilapidated, poor or merely tolerable state, with at least 16.01% of areas with over 15.9% of housing in this condition. In addition, 9.47% of the housing were built before 1940. The 2011 census reflects 15.15% of areas with more than 25.51% of housing prior to this date.
- (d) Subjective perception and vulnerability. Data is only available for the period of 2001. First, 22.74% of the population perceives crime as a problem in their environment, with 40.17% of areas and over 20.6% of the

population perceiving crime as a problem. Second, 37.40% of the population perceives a lack of green spaces, with 40.07% of areas and over 39.8% affected. Third, 14.72% highlight the problem of poor communication, with 40% of areas and at least 11.1% of the population identifying this problem. Fourth, pollution problems affect 19.89%, and there are 40.15% of areas of in which more than 19% of the population is affected. And lastly, 31.18% perceive problems of environmental noise pollution, and there are 40.18% of areas in which more than 33.7% of the population is affected.

For more than a decade, community actions have been implemented to intervene in neighborhood geographic vulnerability. In Spain, examples of such interventions can be found in the neighborhoods of Casco Histórico and Delicias in Zaragoza, Cañada Real and San Cristóbal de los Ángeles in Madrid, Ciutat Vella and el Raval in Barcelona, and the Polígono Sur in Seville. Specific actions were implemented in these neighborhoods using proposals for community action defined by Marco Marchioni, which proved to be particularly beneficial inasmuch as he proposes the interrelation of four elements: territory, population, demands, and resources.²⁰ For community action to have an optimum effect, social participation is paramount. In this regard, obtaining consensus for participative development implies considering all the parts that comprise the complex group of social relations. Equally, from a community action perspective, it is important not to ignore the diversity of possible alternatives in order to include everyone in the sustainable development process.²¹

Challenges and Critical Proposals in the Framework of Community Intervention

In a context marked by rapid social, economic and political change, the roles of modernity and of the individual become apparent when it comes to creating new ways of responding to and coping with the phenomenon of social acceleration, characterized by the speed of social dynamics and “task overload” typical of the modern world and the break with the past.²² In turn, this context is framed within a more globalized context, which “has not managed to reduce poverty, but neither to guarantee stability.”²³ These changes suggest a “new form of modern slavery [that] is inexorably manifested in the dictatorship of haste, in the obligation to adapt to an accelerated perception of reality and to the belief in a dynamic of unlimited progress.”²⁴

In response to this dynamic, new trends and lifestyles have emerged such as the Slow Movement, which advocates modifying our fast pace of life in favor of social welfare and degrowth. This entails a reasonable use of resources and the environment, and moderate consumption.²⁵ However, in this debate, there are elements that have accentuated the problem, such as weak protection systems, job destruction, the inadequate distribution of wealth, the crisis of the welfare state, etc.

As a result, there has been an increase in old and new social risks relating to the growth of in-work poverty rates, problems of inequality, the emergence of new demands linked to the conciliation of family life, care dependency, and intercultural coexistence. The historical data compiled by Eurostat indicates an overall increase of in-work poverty rates in Europe,²⁶ with Spain figuring as one of the countries with the highest rates for 2004-2018; albeit, rates that are above 10% were only observed from 2008 onwards. In contrast, the Gini index has remained stable for the EU and Spain alike. However, the results from the data

for 2009-2017 point to Spain as one of the countries with the highest poverty and in-work-poverty rates for the period.²⁷ In contrast to the EU-28, Spain has a lower per capita social expenditure for social policies as a whole. With the exception of per capita expenditure on unemployment, Spain has lower expenditure on family and children, housing, and health and pensions.²⁸

In the period 2008-2017, per capita social spending increased in Spain and in the EU-28 in general, but by the end of the period differences began to emerge. In Spain, the only increase observed was in per capita expenditure for old-age pensions. However, while other items showed an increase in the EU-28 as a whole, they showed a decrease in Spain; giving rise to an increase in differences in social spending.

Social capital is a fundamental factor in the assessment of new challenges as it directly impacts the community, which, in turn, “is essential for the creation and maintenance of civil society.”²⁹ In the case of Spain, there are currently various projects linked to community intervention, such as the Community and Intercultural Intervention Project, managed by the private foundation La Caixa, which is deployed in neighborhoods with a high level of multiculturalism and social diversity. This same entity offers a community social accompaniment program aimed at the elderly in situations of loneliness, under the slogan “Always Accompanied.” Similarly, more and more “cohousing” initiatives are materializing in Spain. These initiatives were created with the idea of sharing living spaces and gaining services and companionship. Other initiatives have also emerged that promote the use of a circular economy in order to guarantee an efficient use of resources; an example is the Foundation for the Circular Economy.³⁰ These examples aim to guarantee sustainability, inclusion and coexistence in communities that have suffered the devastating effects of capitalism. In this regard,

it is vital to establish the logic of cooperation in contrast to that of competition and individualism. We need to look for tangible objectives and to rethink the challenges that the reality of uncertainty creates, in order to propose solutions based on the multiple capacities and resources available to us.³¹

Conclusions

In order to understand changing contexts in a more comprehensive way, we need to take into account the impact of crises, changes in social models, and the traditional values that have influenced and shaped Spanish society. We also need to consider the diversities that form part of community social life, which, in turn, change old models and create new ways of situating oneself in the community.

The decline of the traditional family model and the need for new social policies linked to diversity management, together with other aspects such as unemployment and insecurity, pose new management challenges for the development of Spain's social and economic policies. Social cohesion and coexistence are the ultimate goals in the process of community intervention, given that they respond to the diversities of geographical areas and the needs and demands of Spain's heterogeneous population.

Among the many challenges that the social protection system faces in terms of community intervention, the following need to be considered: ensuring active citizen participation and including the entire group of complex social relations in community action, and taking into account all the possible alternatives in a sustainable development process for everyone. In short, what the examples cited in this article have in common is the promotion of sustainability, inclusion and coexistence. Consequently, our proposal for diversity management is to include

actions based on cooperation as opposed to competition. To be successfully implemented, the proposed approach should be combined with the multiple capacities available to citizens so as to facilitate a high level of social participation.

Notes

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- ² Maurizio Ferrera, "The Southern Model of Welfare in Social Europe," *Journal of European Social Policy*, 1 (1996): 17-37; Gosta Esping Andersen, *Fundamentos sociales de las economías postindustriales* (Barcelona: Ariel, 2000).
- ³ Eurostat (2011), *Low Educated Parents by their Descendants' Highest Level of Education, Age Group 25-59*, https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=File:Low_educated_parents_by_their_descendants_highest_level_of_education_age_group_25-59,_2011_.png (accessed 9/10/2019).
- ⁴ Eurostat (2019a), *Ad-Hoc-Modules*, <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/income-and-living-conditions/data/ad-hoc-modules> (accessed 17/10/2019).
- ⁵ Eurostat (2019b), *Youth- Overview*, database, <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/youth/data/database>, (accessed 9/10/2019).
- ⁶ T. H. Marshall and Tom Bottomore, *Ciudadanía y clase social* (Madrid: Alianza Editorial. Colección Ciencias Sociales, 2007); Luis Moreno and A. M. Guillén Rodríguez, "La europeización del bienestar social en España," in *España 2015: Situación Social*, ed. Cristóbal Torres Albero (Madrid: Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas (CIS), 2015); Ana Marta Guillén and Gregorio Rodríguez Cabrero, "Evolución del estado de bienestar en España," in *España 2015: Situación Social*, ed. Cristóbal Torres Albero (Madrid: Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas (CIS), 2015).
- ⁷ Ana María Fernández, *Las lógicas colectivas. Imaginarios, cuerpos y multiplicidades* (Buenos Aires: Biblos, 2007).
- ⁸ Zygmunt Bauman, *Modernidad líquida* (México: Fondo de cultura económica, 2012), 42.
- ⁹ Édouard Glissant, *Introducción a una poética de lo diverso* (Barcelona: Ediciones del Bronce, 2002).
- ¹⁰ Émile Durkheim, *Las formas elementales de la vida religiosa* (Madrid: Akal, 1982).
- ¹¹ Talcott Parsons, *La conducta desviada y mecanismos de control social* (Madrid: Revista de Occidente, 1976).
- ¹² Robert Merton, *Teoría y Estructura Social* (Madrid: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1964).
- ¹³ Georg Simmel, *Les pauvres* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France (PUF), 1998).
- ¹⁴ Larissa Adler de Lomitz, *¿Cómo sobreviven los marginados?* (México: Siglo XXI, 1963);

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¹⁵ Paolo Virno, *Gramática de la multitud. Para un análisis de las formas de vida contemporáneas* (Madrid: Traficantes de Sueños, 2003).

¹⁶ Natalio Kisnerman, *Teoría y práctica del trabajo social* (Buenos Aires: Humanitas, 1990), 33.

¹⁷ Ezequiel Ander Egg, *Metodología y práctica del desarrollo de la comunidad* (Buenos Aires: Humanitas, 1993).

¹⁸ Fundación La Caixa, *Proyectos de Intervención Comunitaria e intercultural* (2019), <https://obrasociallacaixa.org/es/pobreza-accion-social/interculturalidad-y-cohesion-social/proyecto-de-intervencion-comunitaria-intercultural/que-hacemos>; <https://obrasociallacaixa.org/es/pobreza-accion-social/interculturalidad-y-cohesion-social/proyecto-de-intervencion-comunitaria-intercultural/claves-del-proyecto>, and <https://obrasociallacaixa.org/es/pobreza-accion-social/personas-mayores/siempre-acompanados> (accessed 31/10/2019). INE (2019) *Atlas de distribución de renta de los hogares* (2019), in <https://www.ine.es/experimental/experimental.htm> (accessed 17/10/2019).

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²⁰ Marco Marchioni, "Organización y desarrollo de la comunidad: la intervención comunitaria en las nuevas condiciones sociales," in "*Programas de animación sociocultural*," ed. María Luisa Sarrate (Madrid: UNED, 2002), 455-82.

²¹ Tomas Villasante, *Las Democracias Participativas* (Madrid: Hoac, 1995).

²² Josetxo Beriain, *Aceleración y tiranía del presente. Metamorfosis en las estructuras temporales de la modernidad* (México: Anthropos, 2008).

²³ Joseph E. Stiglitz, *El malestar en la globalización* (Madrid: Taurus, 2002), 30.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 175.

²⁵ Serge Latouche, *Decrecimiento y Postdesarrollo* (Barcelona: El Viejo Topo, 2003).

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²⁷ Eurostat (2019d), *Gini Coefficient of Equivalised Disposable Income - EU-SILC Survey*, http://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=ilc_di12&lang=en (accessed 23/10/2019).

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³⁰ Fundación economía circular, <http://economiecircular.org> (accessed 31/10/2019).

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