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# From charity to social development: associations and local government in the city of Segovia (Spain)

## De la caridad al desarrollo social: asociaciones y administración local en la ciudad de Segovia (España)

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### Abstract:

Collaboration between associations of a municipality and local administrations is a priority objective in local development programs in Spain. Social workers play a fundamental role, since the social services of the administrations develop programs that promote citizen participation. In this article, we present the results of a project to stimulate partnerships in the city of Segovia, Spain, analyzing to what extent the proposed collaboration model is based on a model of sustainable development based on democratic citizenship.

**Keywords:** Community centers, strategy, mission, cooperation, social justice.

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### Resumen:

La colaboración entre asociaciones de un municipio y las administraciones locales es un objetivo prioritario en los programas de desarrollo local en España. Los trabajadores sociales desempeñan un papel fundamental, ya que los servicios sociales de las administraciones desarrollan programas que promueven la participación ciudadana. En este artículo, presentamos los resultados de un proyecto para estimular alianzas en la ciudad de Segovia, España, analizando en qué medida el modelo de colaboración propuesto se basa en un modelo de desarrollo sostenible basado en la ciudadanía democrática.

**Palabras clave:** Centros cívicos, estrategia, misión, cooperación, justicia social.

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*“Wanderer, there is no road, the path is made by walking.”*

*Antonio Machado*

## **1. Introduction**

The relationship between associations, local administration and social work is a well-studied topic. Community Social Work was born as a method of social work in the United States and its antecedents were developed from the COS (Charity Organization Societies). From the outset, ties of belonging, identification and interaction are worked out to achieve objectives, meet needs, solve problems or provide citizens with resources.

Lindeman in 1920 was one of the first to use the term community organization. In the 30's of last century Steiner applied the method of community organization with the aim of meeting the needs of the population. But it was from the 1950s and especially in the 1970s that McNeil, Murray Ross, and Ezequiel Ander Egg, with their community development methodology and practice, among others, encouraged communities to develop their capacity to solve their own problems, from a holistic approach and with the necessary participation of the people.

In this context, this article presents the results of the Segovia project, from a perspective that analyzes the intervention model centered on citizenship, and whose objectives are:

- To explore the professional social work intervention scene together with the associations of Segovia.
- Identify the strategies and actual mission of social work and its intervention proposals so as to promote the autonomy and self-management of the entities in Segovia through their community centers.
- Show the change that occurs from charity to social justice with the new strategies for community social intervention.

## **2. A model of social development centered on citizenship: local administration, democracy and human rights**

The dream of transforming the social context as propounded by Vygotsky, the social theories of Beck, Guiddens, Habermas or the educational of Freire have given way to different models of intervention. The intervention model is the one proposed by Sagarrio Segado and Rafael Acebes (López 2015: 133):

## 1. Training and Evaluation Phase

Group Planning

Needs Assessment

Establishment of goals

## 2. Intervention Phase

Processes

Tactics

Tools for group dynamics

## 3. Final Phase and assessment

Quantitative/qualitative assessment

Identify benefits

Working with emotions

Ensure access to assistance

The viability of democracy is based on the viability of its citizens life trajectories. By becoming a reality, they improve the personal trajectory of our fellow citizens. And in the process, let us not forget this, our own model of life and wellbeing is improved. (Moreno, López and Segado 2012). The process includes understanding, observation, definition and conception, bringing together people's wishes and viable proposals.

In order to achieve this goal, we have developed a process of research and analysis and a holistic approach to the reality of the centers in Segovia so as to maintain, improve or transform the context in which we work, depending on the case.

The only system to produce an active social, cultural and civic action that serves all people is to provide them with means of expression and representation that give them identity and strength and presenting the following criteria: employ the ability to assess, have the attitude to reach the isolated, the ability to organize the unorganized, give collective identity to the anonymous, bring people to the front, promote creativity and therefore socially bring value to those who are not valued on a daily basis.

The intervention strategy is developed in the city of Segovia (Spain) with different groups and associations, due to the imperative need to create community and make Segovia a participatory city, enabling the communication processes through interaction and meeting spaces in order to create a city of coexistence.

Associations and local governments play a key role in social development in Spain. From a charitable tradition, now, this solidarity is combined with new forms of social justice.

Articulation, intelligent hybridization, an amplifying look, sentient knowledge... These are words of substance. Over time, we have seen that what seemed pretentious is the most useful. Social intervention has been highlighted through the creation of knowledge from practice, its results being validated in the society itself. The dilemma arises now that we are in a world of ephemeral heroes, where it is difficult to make anything last, because whatever is important quickly loses its value, and the knowledge and skills from a certain period cease to be useful before being completely mastered. As stated by Bauman, we are living in a liquid modern society where it is no longer advisable to learn from experience, but to have strategy and tactical moves is now the key to success (Bauman 2009).

Under this rationale, the strategic plan of the city of Segovia and its area of influence, "Segopolis" is developed. After drawing up a diagnosis, it showed a vision and a mission that set out the guidelines for the future, based on a city model with a strategy designed around five main spheres: territory, culture, economy, society and government.

Society, the axis that primarily concerns us, has as its mission the goal of generating new opportunities for social cohesion, in the context of social transformations taking place in Segovia (mainly related to new inhabitants, the promotion and empowerment of all people, the elderly in particular), providing new lifestyles and healthy leisure habits, promoting and accompanying a new civic dynamism and ensuring access to facilities in every neighborhood.

The welfare state channels essential services to society (education, health, housing, social services, pensions) that are internalized in Western citizens as a cohabitation agreement, wherever they may be, and that must be extended to the people who coexist with us. Furthermore, in the historic moment we are living in, a constantly changing society in a permanent state of shock (Klein 2012), also in relation to social policies, it has become more evident and clear that there is a need for a consistent, systematic and rigorous intervention at the different levels and areas of the individual, the group and the community, based on our democratic values (López 2010).

Girardet excellently defined the tyranny of a single mechanical and productive time, with its social norms of consumption, present in numerous everyday experiences, as in the fast food culture, that disposable consumerist culture that shortens and accelerates the lifecycle of objects and our anodyne relationship with them (resilience) and with the people, when "using" the same model without realizing that the city welcomes a citizens network that breathes and is home to many complex and sensitive human cultures (Girardet 2001). In this model of society that is trying to eat

us alive and that prioritizes money in many aspects of life, we have to propose a model where there is not only economic growth but cultural development, a more equitable distribution of wealth, which means democracy, the language, the neighborhood, participation and equality, not only regarding opportunities, but also in the results. We are aiming for a more cohesive society that promotes genuine coexistence in all aspects of our life (López 2013).

This social habit, this community social work, must be developed in a new social context, a new plural and diverse culture of empathy (Breithaupt 2011), in which communication and understanding are daily challenges. This new digital society, based on new technologies (telecommunications, internet, information society, etc.), as opposed to the analog society we used to live in, has to go along with dialogue, mutual learning and reflection, which are intrinsic values and the essence of the human being.

### **3. Reinforcing the link between local administration and associations: the case of Segovia**

Any social intervention is done from a situational reference: the environments or contexts in which people develop their own life and their coexistence. This determines lifestyles in many ways and also how citizens feel, and in Spain in general and in Segovia in particular, for centuries solidarity has been marked by a strong charitable and religious presence, past social forms of action that coexist today with new developments and more professional methodologies that not only try to maintain or improve a situation, but also transform it.

Within this framework, we offer spaces and meeting places because whoever occupies the space gets visibility, legitimacy and exchange. In this context, the social worker stands at the border, enabling the transit, the exchanges, making possible that the interactions are carried out without cost or with less efforts in order to reach a better balance, harmony and wellbeing. Thus, the social worker tries to promote the engagement between the individual and the objectives set: to promote social and personal resources, to build capacity and encourage participation, valuing the skills (organizational, self-determination, etc.) of people with whom he/she works in a plural, complex and diversified manner.

In a society with multidimensional, changing and interconnected relationships, the City of Segovia counts with 13 municipal community centers, which are multi-purpose meeting places where 69 spaces are offered all kind of social activities. By giving these spaces away, we are encouraging synergies, center boards are created and we evaluate and work with tools to create and organize groups, implement projects, develop the community and to foster personal development, interpersonal relationships, social participation and equality, with only one strategy: to value each and every one as they deserve.

The goal is to educate in the community, the district, which is where every person learns and socializes during life. The goal is to make public space a participation point again, but a lasting one, not only of casual and brief interactions; to make it a place for dialogue, discussion, confrontation and agreement.

At this juncture, this article represents a proposal for intervention that contributes to that change from charity to development.

### *3.1. Community Centers and Social Development*

The driving force for change is active engagement, making community centers an asset for the development of any democratic city, due to their key role for both the creation and recreation of broader social and political processes as in the genesis of a true effectiveness towards the commitment of municipal management with a true participatory emphasis for the promotion of citizens.

The consolidation of procedures that are effectively agreed among people involved in achieving real progress on the political and social modernity can only be reached through a real disposition, deeply imaginative and bearing in mind first and foremost the need to promote an effective citizen engagement.

This mission is carried out with the premise of social justice, sharing and living with past social interventions, that are to be respected, but promoting a more cohesive and fair society based on the recognition of rights and the legitimization of all people as equals, focusing on encouraging participation, mainly by the most vulnerable groups and promoting volunteerism and cooperation for development to make the individual and groups not passive recipients, but the protagonists of their own process and its main resource.

The organization of social services in Spain is carried out through the Autonomous Communities (regions) that delegate the intervention to provincial councils and municipalities with more than 20,000 inhabitants, as in the case of Segovia. In Castilla y León, an autonomous community to which Segovia belongs, the Social Action Centers are providers of proximity care in social services, but since they were regulated by law in 1988, And advice and support and family and coexistence that have been developed mainly, leaving aside the participation and animation and community development, which had very specific weight in Law 18/88 of social action and social services.

Community centers are the main working tool, enabling the culture of citizen involvement and activation, aiming to weave a dense NETWORK, loaded with meanings, possibilities, resources and also concerns.

Community centers are defined, In Regulation of the network of municipal centers of the City of Segovia, as publicly owned municipal facilities intended to promote and increase the fabric of social community relations, strengthening associative life. This social role is channeled through the provision of a wide range of personal services in an original synthesis of the concepts of cultural dissemination, creativity and expert support, around a backbone: the empowerment of community development and active and effective participation of citizens. In other words, they are spaces for the community that encourage socialization through social, cultural and relational activation and engagement that enable our society to reach its full potential.

Community centers should be considered under certain general principles: decentralization, versatility, citizen involvement, active participation and funding. Based on these basic principles, their implementation and deployment are carried out through a network of centers in which the City Council provides a number of services to all citizens in order to facilitate the access to the institution itself, the services, the culture, the citizen relationships, the promotion of all sorts of associations and the activation and involvement of citizens; and for these centers to provide services, facilitate coexistence, promote citizen engagement from decentralization, offer quality of civic life and build a supportive, educational and relational community and city.

Community centers then become a basic tool for the socialization processes, enablers of active and creative leisure, as opposed to the growing trend of passivation and instrumentation of leisure time; active engagement in the city life as opposed to a constant delegation of responsibilities.

Community centers generate curiosity and eagerness to know and learn; they detect, welcome, encourage and help to implement all kinds of initiatives; they enhance the initiatives emerging freely between citizens and nearby entities providing the means and resources needed to achieve them as far as possible; they cover those segments of citizen involvement in social, cultural, participative and relational activities that are most needed in the given context and play a key role as places of interpersonal encounter.

All of it grounded on the following processes:

1. The community, social and personal development, and the active, comprehensive and actual citizens' engagement and involvement.
2. The articulation of community centres in a network of centres with operational units.
3. The preservation of management and programming autonomy by the community centres to promote the emergence of citizen initiatives and synergies, both individual or collective, and the wide openness to civic empathy and experimentation.



And roles:

1. Facilitate the development of freely emerging initiatives, both individually and collectively, aimed to cover needs in the areas of communication, relationships, partnerships, information, learning, leisure and creation.
2. Serve as a meeting, relationship and education framework for active involvement of people in managing their emotional, community, social and cultural life.
3. Provide infrastructure and access to the resources available to carry out activities by entities and altruistic groups aimed at improving citizens' conditions.
4. Disseminate those actions, services and associations and municipal programming of particular interest to citizens.

### *3.2. Citizen participation and social development*

The organization focuses on a management model based on active citizen involvement. A management model for a community center is more than the simple provision of the best suited means and resources to achieve the abovementioned purposes, as an end in themselves, because it is in the management of the centers where the two fundamental reference axes of the proposed model are synthesized and converge: the active citizen involvement and the integration of services.

From the social perspectives and theories, community centers must have a comprehensive functionality: One strategy, the project as an instrument, defined resources and coordination. Creating a new and different path which promotes coexistence and ideas; serving as a meeting point for the community, diversity, hopes, participation, citizen feel, recovery of personal esteem and community synergies in a public, possible and desired horizon.

We discovered that one of the keys for social work is being aware of the relational vulnerability. Although everyone talks a lot about democracy and participation, even merging them into participatory democracy or democratic participation, it is clear that we were not taught to participate. However, the here and now is within the citizens, it is in the direct contact with reality, in the neighborhood, supporting educational processes that enable personal growth, a critical insertion into the social fabric supporting new alternatives, providing and mobilizing means and resources and raising awareness and working with the community in a motivating way where the experiential and existential bonds are increasingly becoming the true driver of social action.

If we are aware of this: Why are we still keeping citizens away? Why are we insisting on old methods for new times? Why, if it is not working, aren't we changing the

situation? Repetition is easy, the challenge is in the change. Thus, the success or failure depends primarily on the ability or intuition of technical staff and policy makers to design programs according to what citizens are demanding and need and to pay attention and truly listen to their suggestions, and maybe, coherently, get carried away by them.

There are obvious needs and clear aspirations: employment, safety, equipped urban environment, accessible services. But, more deeply, there are collective requests to be discovered, social hopes that are not directly expressed: social recognition, participation in civic centrality, strengthening of the socio-territorial identities, features and diversity of the urban environment, protection of individual privacy.

The question which arises is whether the political-administrative organization of local government is able to evaluate the requests, measure the effects of its participatory-socio-cultural activity, generate new resources and promote citizen activation. The management approach of community centers is simple: any association or group wishing to use the spaces of the network of municipal centers must refer the request <http://www.segovia.es/centros> to [centros@segovia.es](mailto:centros@segovia.es).

If there is a request for a room, but for a prolonged use or for the transfer of a location, an interview with the person responsible for the association requesting it will be required in order to assess the suitability of the activity. And in the case of a continuous use, an agreement is signed.

Later, once the activity is concluded, an evaluation form must be submitted, stating the level of satisfaction of the activity, the number of participants, objectives met, incidents, suggested improvements, any damage to the facilities and materials and the contribution of the activity to the city.

These simple steps are the technical instrument for the professional to coordinate the activity in the municipal centers and to see the level of fulfillment and responsibility of the associations with their commitments. It also helps the groups to be realistic, and as a starting point for the social work in particular and all professions in the social field in general, to learn how the center, besides being a workplace, is an area for global intervention, intrinsic to the intervention at the individual and family level, which is the field we mostly work and obviously focusing particularly on the beneficiaries.

In Segovia, we are lucky enough to have delimited neighborhoods, with a well-defined and deeply rooted identity, and we have 3 centers for social action which serve as a reference for the comprehensive social services of the city.

Proximity provides a feeling of warmth and quality, enables a deeper understanding of the activities being developed, the work is done more in line with the reality

of the neighborhood and more attention is paid to the needs of each center, trying to enhance group and community intervention.

The relationship and the task must also go intertwined with the people working at the City Council, and must be done in an almost educational manner and knowing that there are habits and ways of doing which, although inefficient, are legitimated over time and generate reluctances to change, especially from insecure, fearful or better-off people. The suggested operational and organizational improvements are also offered with scarce resources so it takes an extra effort to lead the work of the local community centers in an efficient way.

The user uses, the citizen engages, the user is provided with, the citizen is asked: What do you want to do? How would you solve this issue?

The multiple possible responses can be summarized as follows:

- **Simplicity.** The user expects to receive, with low or zero level of commitment, appealing to their right as citizen, to have the need met. Saying that in that case, not in that way.
- **Illegality.** The user appeals to the casuistry of bad practices to later demand them, arguing that sometimes there is no justice and the policy or procedure can be overlooked. Stating that not in this case.
- **Conflict.** With the confrontation as a form of relationship, claiming discrimination or bad treatment, and threatening to go to higher bodies, etc. Providing the corresponding conduct assertively.
- **Repetition.** The user believes that the results expected will be achieved by repeating the same argument a thousand times, like a broken record. Answer with bureaucracy and procedures.

All of these are usually linked to an overwhelming exposure with an ideological and non-technical speech in which "you are with me or against me". Racist, sexist, radical, etc. (Fear and censorship are generated everywhere; words need to be measured as in a disguised dictatorship).

These experiences are a burden to bear. The professional is aware that it is more denigrating for the person to use supportive paternalism than medieval charity, because back then there was no rule of law and instead of promoting free and independent people, we created institutional dependence, often protected by professionals who do not suggest any process or assessment and just follow the flow in a pointless activism.

These responses are often the result of a personal or associative positioning and some people or entities base their interactions on conflict and constant struggle. This

leads to a reaffirmation vis-à-vis the other, but it is an effort and a terrible personal burnout. When a professional does not get involved in this corrupted dynamic, the other person feels contempt or neglect, partly because she/he is exposed and ashamed with a feeling of emptiness, which is scary.

Given this situation, the response is to involve that person through effort in order to grow, change, be empowered, etc. Otherwise, the task makes no sense.

### *3.3. Associations and local administration: a complex relationship*

There are associations that use the spaces as “storage” rooms, filling cupboards with obsolete brochures, the centers’ bins are not used, things are flushed down the toilet and we neither can nor want to monitor or punish these acts. This is a very sensitive issue but if we do not take action, this behavior is justified, which sometimes empowers the defaulter. Everyday life is like that sometimes, understanding the users rights as a “give me” claim, without showing any responsibility.

Segovia is a privileged city for the development of a collective experience of support and solidarity that emphasizes the altruistic dimension of people and confirms that generosity has an impact for a healthier, happier and more productive life.

Cooperation can be defined as the exchange in which participants benefit from meeting (Sennett 2012) and it is based on a number of capabilities that require specific skills and participational spaces from which everyone benefits. The goal is to create a win-win situation, knowing that the benefits are more valuable assets than material goods or the time and effort shared: happiness, health, a vital purpose, a meaning for life are received and personal growth is reinforced (Smith and Davidson 2014).

We are aware of the obstacles, the new current challenges and we need management models that shall face greater challenges, also using new communication technologies. It is therefore essential to establish programs, research methodologies and intervention techniques that enable the recovery of our ability to bond, to meet again and trust; to showcase the intangible, to strengthen self-confidence and trust in others, to develop our empowerment, our personal, group and community capabilities. To do so, it is necessary to link people to their networks of belonging (López 2015).

With the means and resources at our disposal, we have developed a thorough analysis and we are assessing the progress made in this area during these past years. There have been many efforts from many people to achieve a more inclusive city.

One of the first steps we took was a study that helped us identify obstacles, but also the awareness of our capabilities. A team has worked with the objective to know

our reality. We carried out meetings, interviews, SWOT analysis (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats) and debates open to all citizens: Segovia alive.

Participation by itself does not guarantee success, nor the best results. On the contrary, if it lacks purpose, process and debate, mistakes and biases are amplified and in some cases, when there is a lot of group pressure, they silence discrepancies. We are determined to move forward and build a fairer, more caring and more participative city on the basis of our closest reality, shared values and know-how, also having a critical eye, inherent to people who want to improve and transform reality to make this a better world, although this may seem an utrophy.

There are many opportunities to develop civic work. Segovia is a city with its own identity and also with a deep attachment to its neighborhoods, many of them established during medieval times and others with a strong rural nature, where neighborliness and mutual support are a key value.

The network of municipal centers also provides spaces for working groups and meeting points to share experiences and get training and gain knowledge and skills.

The proximity also helps for local media to echo the work done, and this task should probably be further encouraged to make its contribution to society more visible, also taking advantage of new technologies and new forms of digital communication which create new spaces and relationships.

These new ways of being and acting can also bring about positive change and dynamism, creating a much-needed constant regeneration of positions in the associations, visions at work, intervention methods and leading roles. They also create an urgent need for constant advice and training.

Therefore, we have great strengths thanks, among others, to the large network of associations and the diversity of entities, with over 350 of them registered in the municipal register of associations and civic organizations of Segovia.

However, we do not forget the difficulties we face:

Segovia has two demographic realities: the aging population, which is an achievement of our society; and the diaspora of young people who leave the city in search of a better future. Many young people study or work outside the city and this fact, together with the constant processes of change and uncertainty, hinder the natural generational replacement in Segovia.

Also, the accelerated way of life makes events arise precipitously and although we are all aware of the problems, there is little awareness for social causes and participation is often seen more as a chore than a benefit.

Many people do not have enough information and they report wanting it but not knowing where to find it. This fact is added to the lack of engagement and commitment to prolonged work and to a sometimes exhausted associationism that has been developing a huge task for many years and, perhaps due to that burden and overexertion, that gives an image full of pessimism and constraints instead of one of vitality and hope.

Two great bad habits are also threatening the associations, the first being the use of this work as a tool to get employment and second, the selfish personalism that only thinks about the I. It is obvious that a participative person is enriched with knowledge, skills and attitudes, improves self-esteem and social networks and is surely benefiting from the experience. If this is an inherent result, it is welcome. The bad side is when someone comes just for their own interest, as those who take advantage of associations and volunteers to get profits or feed their own ego.

We partly understand that this is somehow related to a rhythm of life that is sometimes incompatible with participatory action. The dehumanization of people, the increasing care for things, the consumerism and the complexity and bureaucratization of the tasks make the information and power fall into the hands of a only few, just as it is in society.

This is in addition to the limited monitoring of associations and their work; the little innovation and adaptation to a new era from the associative work; and the weak ability to attract people and a lack of means that sometimes leads to a poor management.

Of course, when generally speaking, we understand the many differences among associations and their evident disparity of means and resources. A moment like this also serves to measure strengths and find synergies, share resources (people, skills, spaces) and experience, enrich ourselves, both in general and more specifically in relation to specific aspects favoring a chromaticism with a multicolored amalgam.

#### **4. Conclusions**

Feeling is the most real way to be really.

Based on the results of the work of these last two years, but also on the trajectory of social participation in the City, we find that associations and social administration are the backbone of a citizenship with values.

In Western society, everything ethical that has to do with feeling has been devalued, only now, when ethics flow in moments of crisis and appeals to the person as the transforming axis of society, when a profession such as social work, often unrecognized at the same level as other sciences, emerges strongly by its praxis and ability to do from the sentient intelligence.

We think that sharing our experience is essential to knowing and working a variety of skills necessary to energize, such as social workers, relationships between associations, communities and local administration:

- To resolve conflicts, or reduce their virulence to a point of coexistence. Skills in negotiation, mediation, etc.
- To manage diversity in a globalized and interconnected world, and therefore subject to influences.
- To refine decision-making mechanisms.
- To encourage more horizontal multidirectional relationships.
- To learn how to share the responsibility, through the essential empowerment of the communities, taking accountability for their own future, recognizing their context and potential limitations.
- To know how to adjust presences and absences, as well as distance, both cognitive and affective, paving the moment of departure of the participatory work.

To do so, we have objectified and designed strategies and an action plan for social craftwork. With its implementation, we aim to make progress in the promotion of expansive thinking, eliminating value judgments, generating multiple options towards the transformation of these ideas into tangible realities, without forgetting the assessment that will define us and identify both significant improvements as well as gaps or failures to be fixed. We always bear in mind that the first and ultimate goal is the people with whom we empathize from a true understanding of their reality and circumstances. Likewise, we are aware of the context and we generate solutions, keeping what is truly adding value and helps us to achieve new goals.

We hope to make motivational progress and we get excited with the process.

Jose Angel Cuerda, former mayor of Vitoria-Gasteiz for two decades, defined the city as something more than an urban space: a city is its people, how they live, how they work, how they enjoy, how they interact, how they organize, how they identify themselves... The city is obviously a social space: the city is its people. The city consists mostly of the following values: freedom, personal security, equality and solidarity, which, in the end, are nothing but milestones that are paving the path of peace and friendly coexistence, that we all seek (Cuerda 2000).

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