

University and Society: Innovative University Projects

The end of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st have witnessed an increasingly important presence of two new collective actors in contemporary sociopolitical analysis. They are civil society and community. (Cohen y Arato, 2000; Panfichi, 2002; Dagnino, 2002; Olvera 2003). According to Roberto Mori (1999), the “renaissance of civil society and the community approach” are tied to some specific changes in contemporary society.

On one hand, at the economic level, are the changes stemming from the crisis of the Welfare State, and its inability to solve the collective consumption needs of its population, mainly those of its poorer social sectors (Castells, 1976, 1983). This inability of the Welfare State to fulfill the responsibility of ameliorating the inequalities generated by capitalism, has been attacked from two different sides, which sometimes are, involuntarily, complementary.

First, the neoliberal groups, defenders of the “free market” who propose the notion of the entrepreneurial State, that is, the State with the characteristics of a business enterprise. In this context, the State is defined as a facilitator that creates the conditions that allow private enterprise to provide the necessary social services. In this group one finds those who advocate privatization of State corporations.

The second group defends the empowerment of communities. It displays many variations in Puerto Rico, Latin America and the Caribbean. In view of the incapacity or the unwillingness of the State to solve the needs of its citizenship, the non-governmental organizations and the community groups have made their presence felt through organized protests or by on taking the social and economic responsibilities abandoned, delegated or transferred by the State.

On the other hand, the changes at the political level have been evident in the crisis of the United States’ representative democracy model, as shown dramatically by their elections of 2000. In Latin America it is manifest through the election that brought Fujimori to power in Perú, the struggles of the Chavista movement in Venezuela, and the expulsion of the Bolivian President, and in the Caribbean through the political crises in Haiti and the Dominican Republic. Other world regions have encountered similar problems as well.

The above mentioned changes have brought “the reduction of the State’s role in societal issues” (Mori, 1999), which is necessarily accompanied by decentralization and the growing importance of local powers, such as, municipal, sectorial, or local communities; of community

groups, nongovernmental organizations (urban or rural); non-profit organizations; cooperatives, corporations owned by workers, and others. All of the above point to the reevaluation of citizen participation.¹ The impact of all these processes in education has been significant. I would like to discuss here and open for discussion the relationship between the university and society.

Theoretical background

Gerardo Munck (1990) stated that the growing connections between the notion of citizenship, social movements and democratization demand a redefinition of the concept of citizenship (1990:38). In 1993, urban planner Saavedra added that recent scientific, technological, social, geopolitical and economic changes have given citizen's participation "a fundamental role in the development processes and construction of the future" (1993:90). In 2002, (Dagnino: 7) the Latin American representatives of the Civil Society and Governance Project of the Institute of Development Studies, Sussex University stated in the presentation of their research:

Since more than a decade the concepts of civil society, social space, citizen participation and democratic governance have become analytical and normative referents to the study and critique of democratization processes in Latin America... Thus, we witness the diffuse, unequal but generalized emergence of a social expectation to a more inclusive and less exclusive democracy, controlled by citizens, more responsible to society and less monopolized by the political elites.

Democracy and participation are being redefined in the context of recent theories of social movements. Self-government becomes the alternative for empowerment and democracy. It is not merely any form of self-help even if it may include it. Self-government implies a decentralization of the decision making process and a redefinition of social power.

There are several elements in this theory that are pertinent: first, the notion of utopia in the Freirian sense, or Utopia as a project that can become reality. Melucci (1996) stated, "Contemporary social movements are the prophets of the present".

Second, there is the expansion of duties and rights. This notion is tied to the idea of autonomy, which is important for both the university as an institution, and for the citizens it

educates. This includes the notion of culture as the privileged means to expand the political content. In 1992, Escobar and Álvarez stated that the social movements of the end of the 20th century have a great potential for growth as long as they promote the extension of political awareness to the citizenry and the appropriation of culture by the social actors. As other theoreticians of this last decade, these actors view culture as a privileged space for action by the contemporary social movements. Education is one field where the dominant and the alternative cultural contents of the time are debated.

Third, consider the very important role of collective identities in the design of an alternative social context. In *The Power of Identity*, Manuel Castells (1997: 2) stated that social movements appear as an expression of the collective identities, which “challenge globalization and cosmopolitanism on behalf of cultural singularity and people’s control over their lives and environment.”

Fourth, there is the influence of culture has in politics. The reconceptualizing of cultural instances of the social, as something more than a reflection of the economic level and the class structure has validated its role in politics. As in the economic struggles, and in constant interaction with them, the debates at the level of culture express the existing antagonisms of the different groups in the quest for hegemony and social power. Escobar, Dagnino and Álvarez stress the importance of **political cultures and cultural politics** (1998:7

The implications of this theorizing for education are immense, be it informal socialization, popular or higher education . One has only to examine critical theory in education by Freire and others, with or without his influence. ²

In the same fashion, in the theories of other professional practices such as Urban Planning and Social Work, one can find notions that point to the need to redefine the way that the university relates to society.

In his book *Metropolis 2000* (1993), Thomas Angotti pointed to the importance of developing urban strategies that include in their design the strengthening of the community. The author is member of the Planner’s Network collective which publishes a journal by the same name. Its members have pioneered the promotion, in the United States, of the view that planning is a participative process. What is relevant about this collective is their systematic commitment to analyze critically the existing urban policies, and to develop concrete actions to influence them in the cities where they live or work.

Another collective project, Caribbean in this case, and pertinent to this discussion was the Urban Environment and People's Participation in Cuba, Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic Project organized by the Interamerican Planning Society, SIAP its acronym in Spanish. We, the participants, were all from the Spanish-speaking western Caribbean. In 1997, SIAP published in Cuenca, Ecuador, the book titled *¿Quiénes hacen ciudad? ambiente urbano y participación popular en Cuba, Puerto Rico y República Dominicana (Who Makes the Cities? Urban Environment and Citizen Participation in Cuba, Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic)*, to which we all contributed, wherein was gathered the product of that endeavor. The main objective of the project—which from now on will be called MAU—was to analyze in the most holistic way possible, some of the concrete experiences faced in each country, and which populations affected by problems of urban decay decided to act and solve their problems in a participative way.

Representing Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic, respectively, Luz Vega, professor of Community Social Work and Andrés Navarro, Architect and Planner, stated in the book “it is focused on the marginal segments of society” (1997:92). This is the segment that has had the least participation in our societies' decision-making. The authors recognized that:

Popular participation faces some limitations, which we do not wish to ignore. Among them is the absence of a participatory culture. Every effective participatory process faces the need to become a learning process, because it must begin by breaking the patterns of exclusionary and subordinate social relations among the participating actors, who are diverse.

In other words, citizen participation cannot be decreed and does not happen spontaneously. It is necessary to include well thought out educational practices that induce the social actors to acquire relevant skills in order to take responsibility for decisions regarding their country or city, that is, to be citizens.

In 2001 a group of authors published the book *There is an Alternative*. Each author wrote on specific alternative to corporate globalization. These were different stories told with different voices, methods and technics. Nonetheless, they shared a perspective that corresponded

to the Subsistence Perspective developed, as the editors pointed out, during the last thirty years, by Maria Mies and her colleagues. That is why the book was dedicated to her. Theoreticians and activists, coming from feminists, environmental, anti-imperialist and antiracists struggles reveal in each chapter “already existing community initiatives that defy the tenets of corporate globalization” around the world and pose real and practical alternatives. The virtue of this collective initiative is twofold: on the one hand it expands the knowledge about existing experiences that assert that “another world is possible”; on the other hand it provides evidence that there is a “critical mass of people around the world who are in the position to formulate a common theoretical framework of resistance to corporate globalization, as well as to participate in the construction of alternatives to it. (Bennholdt-Thomsen, Faraclas, von Werlhof: xi).

Already since 1993, Marco Raúl Mejía, Colombian Educator and Researcher, was calling attention to the urgent need to create new educational paradigms, because we face era and civilization changes that point to a new way of looking at the world, and that demand from us all, as inhabitants of the planet, that we abandon previously held notions (1997:7).

He pointed to the need for a new agreement between Education and Politics (1993:19-21), which is necessary because the idea of democracy has become conflictive in the 21st century.

“Increasingly, Democracy is penetrated by the information market industry...” At the same time that we affirm a new political culture, in which the strength of civil society, participation, empowerment, self-help, etc. will be founded, we are losing “the boundaries between citizenship and being consumers of messages.” (1993, 1995) As Mejía, we must ask ourselves how would educators be represented in that context.

Methodologies to address this task have been developed in and outside of Latin American universities and in other countries. For example, Sociologist Orlando Fals Borda’s participative research-action, adult and popular education created by Paulo Freire and further developed by educators such as Oscar Jara and Raúl Mejía. All methodologies concur in addressing the need for protocols to systemize people’s experiences and turn them into a fundamental tool for learning.³ Unfortunately, the way we research and teach in our universities does not support these kinds of processes (Mori, 1999).

Up until now, we have taken into consideration thoughts from different fields (theories about social movements, planning, education, sociology) all linked by notions of democracy, participation, systemization, and education. We have yet to look at the notion of self-help and civil society before moving on to discuss the projects.

Mexican Sociologist Juan Manuel Ramírez Sáiz defined the notion of self-help. He stated that it implies the capacity for self-regulation. To accomplish this, it is necessary to change the power relations, to decentralize them..." (1993:34).⁴ For the author, self-help should increase the group's capacity for self-regulation; therefore, it must be political in character. He warns against "citizen participation" originated by the State, which reduces it, at times, to the exploitation of the labor force by pushing self-help with the proposal that the funds and labor be supplied by workers. That is, it becomes a process that is neither participative nor an exercise of citizenship because, "it does not take into consideration raising the consciousness of those who receive the goods in relation to the city." (1993:45).⁵ This brings yet another notion, generalized during the last decade: the notion of civil society. This is equal to or more ambiguous than all the notions we have presented in this work.

This ambiguity sometimes trivializes the concept and is cause of an optimistic celebration that we must moderate by creating projects that are educational and political and, educational policies. This uncritical optimism about the strength of civil society can become an obstacle to the possibility of a new political culture. The abovementioned educational projects should prepare us for the exercise of citizenship.

Ángel Israel Rivera has written abundantly about the need to invent a new political culture. In his book *Poder social versus poder electoral* he stated the need for "the construction of new ways of democratic participation" (2001:433-434). His approach is utilitarian. His question is: "Which is the most useful, most operational definition... that can be used to activate a growing number of citizens to create of a new political culture...?" (2001:442). Using this as a starting point, the author proposes that civil society be defined in terms of what kinds of behavior or actions transform the inhabitants of a country into "civil society" (2001:443).

However, the former does not happen in a singular linear fashion, as it may seem. We must be critical and not naïve, as per Freire's narrowed definition of the term. There is yet a long way to go and the university has an important role in designing the methods for implanting the

protocols to accomplish a critical reading of reality, in order to overcome “the traditional representative democracy” mentioned by Rivera.

This is the importance of the contributions of our Mexican and the other Latin American colleagues mentioned at the beginning of this presentation who have been defining the many meanings of the notion of civil society. Cristina Sánchez ⁶ wrote the article “Reflexionando sobre la sociedad civil” in which she pointedly asks: “But, what is civil society?” (1993:299). Sánchez pointed out that in political speeches as well as in academic works the notion is mentioned many times but never defined. In the article, she is critical of its ambiguous use (1993:299). ⁷ Cohen and Arato (2000) provide an exhaustive analysis of the concept from a variety of perspectives: historical, genealogical, political etc.

Sánchez, emphasizes the importance of defining to the last detail the different interpretations of civil society in order to distinguish when these processes of “widening social participation, solidarity and consensus” are controlled by those who hold political power and not by civil society.

Both the critical and the utilitarian approach to the topic of civil society are necessary as the new educational projects are designed for the university. The first prevents the naiveté of not taking into account the discourses and economic and political structures that influence groups of people and their practices. The second avoids paralysis due to hypercriticism produced by a certain academicist style.

It is in the innovative cultural search, (Mejía, 1995), which, according to Melucci is led by social movements, where critical and transforming educational currents will be incorporated to make possible “the new social organization in tune with the new times” (Mejía, 1995).

From that it must not be understood that solely the market should define the university’s function and that its mission is to adjust to its demands. What I mean is that, as part of its mission of being a constant challenge to social conformism, the university must generate changes in the citizenry, and create new educational goals that shake the citizens formed by it.

The university should generate a style of thought that makes evident the contradictions of the dominant discourses of the hegemonic university and political elites. And that also makes evident the exclusions and conflicts that are produced by the “alternative” discourses voiced by the emerging elites of both. Also, a dynamic way of thinking that makes clear the conflicts and exclusions within the subordinate discourses.

The former is indispensable because most of the times some discourses want to exclude concepts and objectives belonging to others. But it is with the struggle, the conflict, the dialogue, the debate that the need to negotiate becomes imperative in order to legislate or, if negotiation fails, make revolutionary changes.

It is important to evaluate thoroughly the models and patterns of teaching and learning. That is what the case studies I am presenting here do. These academics and students approached topics such as: women and poverty, housing design that addressed social need, participation, self-help, community organization, sustainable development and participative research and planning with a will that has not exempted them from making mistakes. That risk is their gain and, perhaps also, ours.

Project Presentation

Through the second part of this paper I will show how the processes discussed previously have changed the meaning of what we now understand as the social responsibility of the University, based on experiences in Puerto Rico. These initiatives have contributed to the creation of other educational paradigms that will, in turn, provided a new definition of the University's social responsibility.

Faculty and students at the University of Puerto Rico carried out most of the projects. They were: Proyecto MUNDI and Taller de Diseño Comunitario at the Río Piedras campus; the Bachillerato Experimental en Investigación y Acción Social at the Humacao campus; and, finally, the Proyecto de las Guías para el desarrollo sustentable de Vieques that was developed by the Technical and professional support group for the sustainable development of Vieques [*Grupo de apoyo técnico y profesional para el desarrollo sustentable de Vieques*, GATP] made up by faculty of the University of Puerto Rico and other higher education institutions; students from the University of Puerto Rico, and other professionals. I have respected their voices and language, editing only for purposes of clarity, because each individual with his or her expressions demonstrates differently the possibility of another sort of relationship between the University and the community that surrounds it.

This section contains the responses given to me by Edwin Quiles of Taller de Diseño Comunitario; Carmen Guemárez of Proyecto MUNDI; Roberto Mori of Bachillerato Experimental en Investigación y Acción Social. They coauthored this effort. I assume

responsibility for any of its shortcomings. I wrote the presentation of the Grupo de Apoyo Técnico y Profesional para Vieques project, of which I shared coordination with Professor and Planner José Rivera Santana from Universidad Metropolitana de Puerto Rico. The questions were: How and when did the project begin? What concerns or needs brought about its creation? What was the institutional framework? What were the project's goals? How does the project propose a different relationship between the University and society as wholes, or between their segments? What kind of redefinition, if any, did they propose? How does the project contribute to democratization, decentralization and strengthening of citizen's participation and seizure of local power?

The Taller de Diseño Comunitario

The Taller de Diseño Comunitario, founded in 1998, was affiliated to the School of Architecture at the University of Puerto Rico, but before that time was already working on community projects with the participation of many disciplines through design courses. In formalizing this effort they sought to the Taller as a center for technical assistance. It sought to develop participatory work with the “clients” and users to involve them in the search for solutions. On taking part in the design processes and making decisions, they hoped that the participating groups would gain more control of their environment and, on the last analysis, of their own lives.

The Taller was formed as a response to the need of many civil society groups to propose development and environmental design that would solve problems that impinge on their quality of life, but that for lack of resources do not have access to this kind of service. As co-authors of their own proposals, the clients become capable of running them, once the design phase was completed and negotiated with the authorities.

Because the project is multidisciplinary other professionals and University faculty members were invited, in accordance with the specific needs of each project. For example, the intense workshops, known as “charrettes” —held once a year— in which professionals, students, community and government representatives, make up teams to elaborate innovative proposals to solve socio-spatial problems that require urgent attention, such as low-income housing for the poor and the integration of the University at Río Piedras with its surrounding community.

In addition to offering technical services, the Taller carries out research projects that support its educational mission. The experience gathered from participation in the Taller enables the students to see closely the social reality of the country and to commit their creative talent in search for solutions to problems.

The Taller operates from the School of Architecture at the University of Puerto Rico at Río Piedras. The actors are: at the University, students and professors; in the community, groups of residents, institutions such as churches and government agencies, professionals who volunteer their services, and sponsors from businesses, industry and foundations.

The purpose of the Taller is to share space where professional expertise and the knowledge of the citizens achieve environmental solutions. It provides students the opportunity to apply theory in search of solutions under, at times, very limited budgets and codes, without compromising creativity. This allows them to negotiate and measure the effectiveness of their proposals with “real” clients. The future architects value greatly the opportunity to experience “real life” and takes them face to face with the processes through which people develop their every day lives. These experiences sensitize them to the needs of “others” and give them the opportunities to investigate with clients and help them to acquire skills to work with them and communicate ideas. From the viewpoint of praxis they became motivated to look at theory critically and to also look at professional praxis from a creative and innovative point of view. Architects who base their work on social processes and critical reasoning are in a better position to offer creative proposals that better address people’s needs.

The project contributes to democratization, decentralization and strengthening of citizen’s participation and seizure of local power. Participatory design questions the conventional elitist way in which the profession is practiced, and assigns equal value to content as well as process. Content is the materializing of search and analysis and process is educational and an empowering experience.

Centro de Investigación/Acción Social (CIAS) y del Bachillerato Experimental en Investigación/Acción Social (INAS)

The Bachillerato Experimental en Investigación / Acción Social came about through a proposal submitted in November of 1992, by the Social Sciences Department of the University

of Puerto Rico at Humacao to the Fondo Institucional para la Innovación de la Docencia at that institution's Central Administration. It was approved in that year.

The project had two main components:

- a) The creation of a Center for Research and Social Action, CIAS in Spanish
- b) The development of an Experimental Bachelors' Degree in Research and Social Action

Program design with two main components took place in January of 1993 and included, at once, both initiatives: the creation of CIAS and the Bachelor's degree. The latter was designed and established as an experiment with a group of students that were admitted for the 1993-1994 academic year, but who were reclassified to begin the degree in August of 1994.

Some of the needs that the academic renewal initiative wanted to address at the University of Puerto Rico campuses at Río Piedras and Humacao, and in society were the following:

a) The need that the University of Puerto Rico play a more active role in solving social problems in terms of direct services and in generating knowledge that may be useful in the development of strategies to accomplish solutions.

This makes it necessary to address concrete social problems. For example, to sponsor direct professional services to needy people, organizations and communities, and research projects oriented towards creating viable means of action to solve social problems. These practices must also be linked to educational processes, course contents, teaching methodologies and producing graduates who possess the necessary knowledge, skills and attitudes.

b) The need for academic innovation in response to the fast social transformations so that academic offerings may be accommodated to the changing world. This is particularly true at a time when:

- new areas of human knowledge are emerging as a result of discoveries and new technologies;
- interdisciplinary points of view are imperative to allow a more integral approach to solving problems.
- a global look at human knowledge is necessary to make use of the contributions from other cultures, especially Caribbean, Latin American, European and Asian.

c) The need to seek new ways to produce knowledge, particularly oriented towards the solution of concrete social problems.

To accomplish this, it is necessary, in turn, to create programs and projects where the student

- is actively involved in the process of generating knowledge and learning;
- develops independent and critical thinking while learning;
- become sensitive to social problems;
- acquires technological skills to employ for human improvement;
- uses real-world resources to learn;
- learns by being involved with the social reality as a facilitator for learning.

d) The need for the University of Puerto Rico's involvement with other social agents in collaborative projects to seek solutions to social problems and in preparing professionals who want to follow that course.

Thus, the accomplishments will be:

- financing of academic projects;
- that the social agents serve as a point of departure for action and research in concrete projects;
- learning experiences in the "real world"

The institutional framework for the project is the Humacao campus of the University of Puerto Rico. The participants are faculty from the Social Sciences and Social Work departments.

Traditionally, universities have, in varied degrees, accomplished three basic functions: education, research, and services. Service is normally considered an "additional" or "social" function, carried out through activities such as informal community education, promotion of the arts and sports, consulting services to government and organizations, lending of physical plant and others.

Since its beginnings, the University of Puerto Rico has carried out these three functions, but has not integrated them. Neither has it taken on directly or in isolated instances, a mission of struggle against inequality and social injustice, that is, it has not focused on the struggle against poverty.

The participative research and action leads to the understanding that the best role the University can play regarding poverty is to support, in diverse ways, the initiatives that may emerge from the community-based organizations and other governmental formations. These initiatives may or may not be in disagreement with some of the existing neoliberal policies of empowerment for communities that governments have tried to impose.

In general terms, the support that the University must provide to the struggle against poverty and inequality for these organizations should be **not only direct service, but also a combination of education and research** (author's emphasis).

This project contributes to democratization, decentralization, and strengthening of citizen's participation by fostering the empowerment of sectors that have been excluded from power in a democratic system, and treating them as social actors and not objects of public policies. The expected result at long range is some level of citizen participation; the development of deliberative processes; a greater demand for participation in local decision-making, and, ultimately, greater democratization of the exercise of power within society.

The Proyecto Modelo para el Desarrollo Integral de Comunidades Urbanas en Desventaja Económica (MUNDI)

The Proyecto Modelo para el Desarrollo Integral de Comunidades Urbanas en Desventaja Económica (MUNDI) began in January of 1990 as a result of a collaborative experience with three public housing communities in urban San Juan, following the conceptualization and establishment of a Centro de Práctica Autónoma at Residencial San Martín in Río Piedras.

The experience was part of the curricular revision process that was taking place at the Social Work Department the Faculty of Social Sciences at the end of the 1980's. The process propitiated critical thinking about the social reality in Puerto Rico and about the expected changes in the social welfare system within the model of the Welfare State. It led to pondering about the mission of the University within the national concept and to the examination of the mission of Social Workers in that reality. It addressed the educational needs of graduates if they were expected to contribute significantly to the processes of social change. That led to the notion that more than educating non-critical professionals who would serve the established political and economic system, it was necessary to form professionals who held a critical view of reality. They would become collaborators to improve living conditions in economically and socially

disadvantaged communities. This analysis led to two decisions regarding curriculum. The first one resulted in the creation of a course titled Organización de la Comunidad y la Elaboración de la Política Social (Social Work 4027).

This course was made from the viewpoint that programs and services best suited to the interests and needs of the communities can be developed from within them. And the communities' organized struggles can contribute to policies and legislation favorable to their interests or to policies harmful to their interests.

The second decision was to conceptualize a Centro de Práctica Autónoma directly affiliated to the Department that would serve, in a practical way, as a laboratory for not only social work students but also for students of other disciplines. That would produce a reciprocity between learning at the university level and popular knowledge leading then to a different way of producing knowledge. The first experience became a reality in January of 1990 at Río Piedras's Residencial San Martín, when the interests of the docents coincided with the interests of community leaders and culminated in 1994 in the concept of the MUNDI Project. The model was presented to the Federal Department of Education's Urban Community Services Program, which provided funds for it from 1995 until 2000.

Today, the program continues in San Martín and Las Gladiolas through their centros de prácticas autónomos, and receives direct support from Citibank's Community Reinvestment Program and the Banco Popular Foundation. This support is directed to promote economic self-help to develop self-employment alternatives and micro enterprises for families affected by the Social Welfare Reform. The project was a concept developed from a pilot study done by professors Carmen Guemárez y Carmen Ana Guzmán with the purpose of obtaining a profile of that population.

The institutional framework has been the University from the viewpoint of Academia, in close collaboration with the communities, other branches of the University of Puerto Rico and other universities, such as Interamerican University. Some state agencies, not-for-profit organizations and the private sector have also participated. This makes it an interagency and interdisciplinary project.

The social actors in this effort are University faculty and students from different disciplines, and diverse administrative units with support from the institution's President. The

pilot study was about La Reforma (Welfare Reform), and its effects upon families headed by women.

From the previous description it may be inferred that this project promoted a direct relationship between the University and the communities within a dynamic and natural reality that go beyond traditional and institutional parameters.

This direct and collaborative coming together created experiences that allowed the community's access to knowledge and technologies and the enrichment of both the community and the University.

It has also allowed the active participation of communities or their segments in search of solutions and proposals of new alternatives for facing the challenges brought about by the redefinition of the relationship between the State and society.

Grupo De Apoyo Técnico y Profesional para El Desarrollo Sustentable De Vieques (GATP)

In June of 1999, the Comité Pro Rescate y Desarrollo de Vieques (CPRDV), Alianza de Mujeres, and other organizations from the island of Vieques —lay and religious— called upon university students, faculty and administrators, and other professionals to form an interdisciplinary group of citizens to inform them about its development. They requested technical and professional advice for sustainable development and a participative strategy that would include *Viequenses* when preparing proposals for development, when such discussions took place, and a say in decision-making.

The demand from the people of Vieques was not new. The Alianza de Mujeres had already done it through their slogan: “Vieques es nuestra casa” (“Vieques is our home”). The CPRDV also clamored for sustainable development with the four “D’s”: *Desmilitarización*, *Devolución*, *Descontaminación*, *Desarrollo*. That is, demilitarization, return of the lands, decontamination, and development. Also, through demands made by the fishermen’s organizations in defense of their right to earn a living; by the disobedient civilians from the camps at Monte David, Cayo Yayí, and others, who were promoting consciousness raising about the ecology; and by the community of Monte Carmelo’s efforts to organize, and other groups.

In keeping with the spirit of looking toward the future, the Grupo de Apoyo Técnico / Profesional para el Desarrollo Sustentable de Vieques (GATP acronym in Spanish) came into being. Its goal was to collaborate with the people of Vieques in the production of guides for the island's sustainable development. The guides, had to be oriented towards transformation through citizen involvement and economic self-help.

GATP was divided into working committees about geography, environment, economy, health, and social and cultural development, among others. The Comisión de Desarrollo Social, Cultural y de Procesos Participativos (Social, Cultural and Participative Processes Committee) that I coordinated, took the task of establishing a participatory pilot research and planning project that included the different classes and segments of civil society in the island of Vieques.

The project's motto was: "La protesta con la propuesta" ("Protest with a proposal"), to highlight the idea that, although actions to expel the Navy from Vieques and recover the lands were important, it was equally important to plan rationally the use of the lands and other resources.

Workshops and focus groups took place in seven communities in which thought was given to the problems and needs of the *Viequenses*, their ideas about what were the alternatives for solving them, and what participation implies.

The workshops were very effective and brought about the adherence of new sectors of civil society to the movement, for participation in public hearings, radio programs, television documentaries, discussions about the guides, and the monitoring of local and federal agencies.

In November 2000, GATP, Comisión Cooperativa de Apoyo a Vieques, and Alianza de Mujeres opened the Casa de Cooperación y Apoyo de Vieques: Protesta con Propuesta, which would be headquarters for all three organizations.

The Casa de Cooperación y Apoyo de Vieques has become a center for communal activity in matters pertaining to protest and resistance and to programs and planning for the future as well, where university students also participated. Today, it is known as Casa Alianza and is partially financed by the municipality of Vieques.

In January 2001, with the support of other UPR professors and the participation of university students from Vieques, I organized the Proyecto Universitario de Divulgación de las Guías (University Project for the Dissemination of the Guides) to prepare educational modules that inform the population about the alternatives for development before, during and after the

referendum. Because knowledge is power, the faculty and students of the University projects and some *Viequenses*, produced the educational modules in comic book form about sustainable development. Thus, the six-part Collection for Sustainable Development in Vieques was initiated.

The *Guides for the Development of Vieques: Diagnosis and Proposals* were finished by GATP, after consulting with organizations in the island. They have been distributed to legislators and government agencies. At present, they are being used as guidelines by Estudios Técnicos, Inc., private corporation contracted by the government to prepare the Territorial Management Plan for Vieques and Culebra (Plan de Ordenamiento Territorial de Vieques y Culebra).

With respect to the institutional framework, this project is an example of how a social movement of volunteers that stems from civil society incorporates the work of university students and faculty outside of the university's walls. Eventually the benefits of the work serve sometimes as models, or to begin other processes within conventional institutions, such as government and higher education. At present, the guides are available at the following email addresses: lcottomo@prtc.net and ftato@estudios-tecnicos.com, jorgecr@caribe.net. The collection may be found at the website of the University of Puerto Rico's Unesco Chair: <http://unescopas.rrp.upr.edu/documentos/tirillasind.html>.

The experience gathered through three years of intense interaction with the Vieques community, working on the Guides, and producing the comics had a strong educational component. In addition, it has the pertinent professional component contributed by the specialists in the group. We have lived what among the Faculty of General Studies is called an experience of transdisciplinary thinking that we are already incorporating to the University.

The projects's contribution to democratization, decentralization, and strengthening of citizen's participation is evidenced by the fact that all of the its original aspects, which the *Viequenses* and GATP identified as indispensable, were met:

- it was initiated by civil society.
- it was an exercise in participative democracy.
- it included participative research and action.
- it became a community education process.
- it used consensus or agreement methods to make decisions.

- it was be directed to community's self-help and sustainable development. As per the report released by the Comisión Social, Cultural y Participativa.

This process was very enriching because it allowed integration into the diagnostic process the participation of people who, otherwise, would have never been heard. To participate in the Protesta activities was very meaningful. "Partaking of the workshop was a kind of therapy," said an individual. Our goal is to go beyond the therapeutic and make possible the attainment of power.

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Endnotes

¹ Included below are a few examples of the abundance of literature that deals with the topic. The United States: Angotti, Tom (1996). *Metropolis 2000*, Routledge, New York, (1993); Mathews, David, (1997). *Politics for People*

(*Política para la gente*). Washington, D. C. Kettering Foundation, Biblioteca Jurídica, Colombia; Ramírez Sáiz (1996). *Social Movements and Politics (Los movimientos sociales y la política)*. Mexico. University of Guadalajara. Dominican Republic: (1996) *Local Power in the Caribbean (Poder local en el Caribe)*, CEEAL; (1996) *Urban Anthology (Antología urbana)*. Ciudad Alternativa; Dávalos Domínguez, et al. (1996-2000). *Urban Development and Participation (Serie de desarrollo urbano y participación)*. University of Havana. Puerto Rico: Rivera, Ángel Israel (2000) *Civil Society and Status in Puerto Rico (La sociedad civil y el status en Puerto Rico)*. Volume I, chapter 1, p. 8. Editorial Nueva Aurora. San Juan, Puerto Rico. Miranda, Elizabeth (2000). *Work With Community Groups (El trabajo con grupos comunitarios)*. San Juan, Puerto Rico. Publicaciones Puertorriqueñas. In addition, there is the theoretical literature upon which the work of the NGO is based, Corporation for the Support to Educational and Community Programs (Corporación de Apoyo a Programas Educativos y Comunitarios), or CAPEDCOM, acronym in Spanish.

² hooks, Belle (1994). *Teaching to Transgress*, Routledge, N.Y.; *Globalización, pensamiento crítico y pedagogía de la liberación: Homenaje Póstumo a Paolo Freire*; Freire, Paolo y Donald Macedo (1993). *Alfabetization: Reading Words and Reading Reality (Alfabetización: Lectura de la palabra y lectura de la realidad, Siglo XXI, México*; Ordoñez Peñalongo, Jacinto (2001. "Paolo Freire's Contribution to Higher Education: Epistemological Perspective". *Exégesis*, Year 14, No. 41 ("El aporte de Paolo Freire a la educación superior: perspectiva epistemológica". *Exégesis* Año 14, Núm 41; Freire, Paolo (1993). *Pedagogy of Hope (Pedagogía de la esperanza)*; (1994). *Letters to Cristina (Cartas a Cristina, Siglo XXI, México)*; (1993). *Pedagogy of the City (Educación en la ciudad)*. Continuum, NY. ³ Selener, Daniel (1997). *Participatory Action Research and Social Change*. Cornell University. (1996) *Manual for Participative Systematization (Manual de sistematización participativa.)* Instituto Internacional de Reconstrucción Rural. Bolivia.

⁴ Ramírez Saiz, Juan Manuel (1993). *People's Housing and Its Actors (La vivienda popular y sus actores)*. Universidad de Guadalajara. México. In this book the author defines self-help as self-government and self-management. The latter is limited to passing on the power to administer to the members of a business, and not to govern. (1995) *Social Movements and Politics (Los movimientos sociales y la política)*. Universidad de Guadalajara, México. In this text the author lists and explains other means to act politically in the cities; all linked to the notions discussed here: 1. to intervene in public life, to form public opinion; 2. to participate in government's decision-making; 3. to take steps toward democracy, to mobilize autonomously; 4. to formulate and build alternative social and political projects.

⁵ For Ramírez Sáiz, self-help is between politics and economics. Therefore, it is presented differently according to the self-help model being considered. It could be Socialist, Liberal or Socialdemocratic. The distinction is important, because the self-help discourse depends on the ideology of who is promoting it.

⁶ Sánchez, Cristina (1993). "Reflexionando sobre la sociedad civil" in *Dinámica Urbana y Procesos Políticos* (1993). René Coulomb, Emilio Duhau, Coords. At the 2001 **Latin American Studies Association Conference**, in Washington, D.C. (LASA, September 6-8), many papers were presented that created, looked at closely, and defined the polysemic notion of civil society. Their analyses could be a future project that would enrich these thoughts.

⁷ Although civil society is not the focus of this work, two clarifications quoted by the author are pertinent. First, the three meanings that according to Norberto Bobbio, are given to civil society: "1. as a condition pre-existing the State, not yet a State, 2. Antithesis of State or alternative to it; and 3. Dissolution or end of the State." Second, the four visions of civil society, as pointed out by Salvador Giner, and which the author uses as a starting point for her own: a) classic liberal, b) Hegelian, c) classic Marxist, and d) Neomarxist or Gramscian. Cohen and Aratoz's book delve deeply into these issues.