



# Analysis of the application of the governance principles of sustainable development to territorial research-action.

Blanca Miedes Ugarte

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*WP5-GOVERNANCE:*

*ANALYSIS OF THE APPLICATION OF THE GOVERNANCE PRINCIPLES OF SUSTAINABLE  
DEVELOPMENT TO TERRITORIAL RESEARCH-ACTION.*

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**Blanca Miedes Ugarte**

WP5-Leader

[miedes@uhu.es](mailto:miedes@uhu.es) , + 34 6 55 44 78 41

**Adresse professionnelle**

Observatorio Local del Empleo – Universidad de Huelva  
Avda. Fuerzas Armadas s/n. Campus de « El Carmen » PB7  
21071 Huelva- España

**Summary** : This communication summarizes the work and the debates that are being carried out within the CAENTI WP5, *Analysis of the application of the governance principles of sustainable development to territorial research-action*. After a description of WP5 objectives and 2006 performance, main controversial points of WP5 will be presented. In particular the research action concept, the discussion on the principles of territorial governance of sustainable development and the limits and potential effects of research-action application will be addressed.

**Keywords**: research-action, principles of governance of sustainable development, ethical and methodological aspects of research.

## WP5-GOVERNANCE:

### Analysis of the application of the governance principles of sustainable development to territorial research-action.

1. f. *Arte o manera de gobernar que se propone como objetivo el logro de un desarrollo económico, social e institucional duradero, promoviendo un sano equilibrio entre el Estado, la sociedad civil y el mercado de la economía.*

2. f. *ant. Acción y efecto de gobernar o gobernarse.*

*Real Academia Española (<http://www.rae.es>)*

#### 1. WP5 CAENTI OBJECTIVES.

This communication summarizes the work and the debates that are being carried out within the CAENTI WP5, *Analysis of the application of the governance principles of sustainable development to territorial research-action.*

Main task of the WP5 in the framework of CAENTI consists on deliberating on ethical and methodological principles that should be respected by research protocols of social and human sciences, so that research results favour territorial governance and therefore the sustainable development of territories.

Main deliverable of this work will be the elaboration in 2007 of a *European quality letter of research favouring territorial governance of sustainable development.*

During 2008 the practical aspects of the application of the principles of the quality letter will be focused, in particular those regarding the use of information and communication technologies in the research processes.

#### 2. GENERAL DESCRIPTION OF WP5 PERFORMANCE.

First scientific coordination meeting of WP5 was held at Huelva University on May, the 5<sup>th</sup> 2006. Main objective of this first encounter was focusing the coordination activities that might be performed in the course of the first phase of the project (March to December 2006), as well as to agree a suitable calendar for the whole project.

Participants agreed in dealing with WP5 objectives analyzing and considering their own research practice. In order to do that each participating

university would carry out a catalogue of its research projects developed until the moment.

An essential aspect was to come to a consensus about the conceptual framework in which the WP5 debates will take place. For this reason each research team should include in its catalogue its own point of view relating to the following questions:

- Which is the general framework for the relationships among sustainable development, territorial governance principles, research in Social and Human Sciences and territorial intelligence?
- How does research-action improve territorial governance favouring sustainable development?
- How do principles of balance approach, participation and partnership condition research?
- How do new technologies influence these processes?

The discussion on these topics allowed giving evidence of the multidisciplinary and multidimensional character of the WP5 work. Although all the participants agreed with the general definitions about *sustainable development*, *governance* and *territorial intelligence* summarized in the Document of Work of CAENTI, an interesting debate on the research-action concept arose.

For practical reasons, in order to address coordinates and to establish the kind of research projects to be included in the catalogues of experiences, the group decided focusing in the research-actions experiences that fulfilled both following requisites:

- The research object should concern territorial development, local governance, sustainable development and, or, territorial intelligence.
- They should have been developed *for* or *with* territorial actors.

Due to the crucial role of the *research-action* concept for the whole CAENTI coordination action, the group agreed in the importance of getting a more precise consensual definition about this last topic in further meetings.

At the end of August 2006 the six draft versions of the catalogues of experiences had been addressed to the WP5 leader. WP5 research team members belong to diverse disciplinary fields and take part in different research structures, for that reason they presented different approaches and points of view in elaborating their individual catalogues. Therefore, members had not understood and answered all the questions in the same sense and this generated a remarkable heterogeneity in the answers. Notwithstanding, general guidelines had been respected and the diversity of answers constitutes a good departure point to go deeper on the debates that necessarily will have to take place in later stages.

In the following section we describe some of the points in those the discussions have been focused until now.

### **3. WP5 MAIN CONTROVERSIAL POINTS.**

#### **3.1. Research-action concept.**

The decentralizing policies of the latest decades implied a stronger importance of the regional land local actors in the definition of the strategic guidelines of the territorial development and in the management and evaluation of the projects which have a territorial base. The decentralized territorial entities have a stronger power than in the previous periods. Besides, public entities try to involve the private actors as broadly and deeply as possible in the design and management of the territorial projects, by giving a more important role to the civil society in these processes.

This proliferation of decision-units on the territory makes thinking about the territorial governance, the rules creation, the processes and practices that determine the way decision are made on a territory.

Good governance needs a kind of knowledge on the territory that generates global visions on the main problems that can affect the sustainable territorial development. Nevertheless, the scientific

knowledge about the territory is a complex knowledge as it is difficult to identify and quantify causal links among lots of potential factors. Besides, it is an uncertain knowledge because of the scarce information, the measure errors and the undetermined results. Consequently, the knowledge about territory is usually ambiguous and different legitimate interpretations that are based on observations or valuations of similar data are used to coexisting.

In this latter case, values have a special importance when we make the results interpretation. To get a knowledge that favours governance, the territorial actors', and even the actions recipient people', participation is fairly necessary. Indeed, territorial actors and beneficiaries emphasize different kinds of knowledge and explicitly underline different values systems from which the scientific results can be interpreted.

On the other hand, during the performance of their own actions, the territorial actors can neither generate this knowledge set that is necessary for good governance.

The problems complexity, actions sectorialization and urgencies that are linked to the actions requirements usually prevent the actors from generating the global visions which are necessary to solve the territorial problems and which need scientific knowledge and methods to develop.

The actors and especially those who work at the closest level of the actions recipient people, often do not have the basic tools that are usually used in the scientific field to gather, analyse and rarely share the information that they are used to managing.

In other cases, the information is available but they do not have the theories, methods, instruments, place and time to interpret this information and convert it into useful knowledge for action.

As a consequence of the above described processes, the new challenges of the territorial governance - achieving a more effective adaptation of policies to territorial and citizens' needs and increasing civil society participation in the decision making processes- demand strengthening the alliance between the scientific world and the territorial action.

CAENTI partners have been trying to reinforce this alliance in the field of territorial socio-economic development during the past fifteen years. Their research projects have been direct or indirectly linked to development projects on the territory, in

collaboration with the actors in charge of the management of these territorial projects.

However, the intensity of this collaboration between research and action does not always reach the same intensity. In one of the limits of the scale, the grade of the actors' implication can be minimum, consisting exclusively in demanding the study that will be the basis for the designing of policies or territorial actions. In the opposite end, actors and researchers are part of the same research team, carrying out the research jointly in the framework of a territorial project.

Between one and another side there is a great variety of situations, therefore one of the main challenges of WP5 is delimitating the participation level from which it can be deemed a genuine articulation between research and action. In other words, another WP5 objective is defining a research-action concept that allows operationalising the terms of the commitment between science and society in order to fostering territorial governance.

The bibliographical revision carried out by the participants of the WP5<sup>1</sup> shows that the research-action concept has been defined in a different way by authors of different disciplines. In addition to this, in the framework of each disciplinary field the concept is already evolving what indicates that, in a certain way, this concept is still under construction.

The debate within the WP5 has not still concluded, but it has been reached an initial definition that makes compatible the different points of view. That is, the research-action is that kind of inquiry which satisfies these two requirements:

- It is carried out in order to achieve simultaneous and articulately both objectives, a research objective and an action objective.
- It is a participatory research which is carried out **with**, and not only **for**, the territorial actors.

Taking this consensual definition as a departing point it can be said that, in wide sense, the research-action is not merely a methodology or a technical specialty, but rather a way of understanding the social science (Wadsworth, 1998) and, more generally, the whole scientific activity.

It is a way of doing research which wonders about the effects of the external choices that scientists do in doing their work regarding to the outlined questions, the focused problems, the used methods, the involved actors, the recommendations that are

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<sup>1</sup> We are grateful to Mihai Pascaru of the University of Alba Iulia for the bibliographical upgrade he has carried out.

made as a consequence of the results, etc. This is a focus that implies to explicitly recognize and internalize the ethical issues involve in all research process.

From this recognition another of the main WP5 challenges arises: to define which are the ethical and methodological principles that must be respected in the research-action processes, so that the results of these last ones fostering territorial governance.

### **3.2. Governance principles of sustainable development.**

The Document of Work of CAENTI establishes that during this first year the members of the WP5 would carry out a discussion on the principles of the governance of sustainable development. The result of this debate should be the framework to analyze which should be the ethical and methodological principles which ought to be respected by research-action processes in order to foster a more effective adaptation of territorial action to inhabitants needs and to boost the participation of actors involved in decision making processes.

The following three basic set of principles have been involve in these discussions.

In the first place, just as it was described in the DOW, the framework of CAENTI regarding to this point described the basic principles that must be respected on the research action processes fostering territorial governance of sustainable development as the three one that have been praised by the European Union regarding to its programs and communitarian initiatives in the field of the economic and social development:

- **Multidimensionality:** focussing research object using a multidimensional and multisectorial well balanced approach.
- **Partnership:** fostering and involving territorial partnerships in the research-action processes.
- **Participation:** assuring that territorial actors' participation is carried out in an effective way.

The second considered set of principles consists of those enunciated by the European Union in 2001 regarding to "good governance"<sup>2</sup>:

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<sup>2</sup> COMMISSION DES COMMUNAUTÉS EUROPÉENNES (2001): Gouvernance européenne. Un livre blanc. COM (2001) 428 final.

- Transparency in the processes of decisions making,
- Citizenship participation,
- Well balance assignment of responsibility and accountability,
- Coherence of the political measures and actions,
- Coordination of sectors involved.

In third place, there have been considered the principles relating to the policies of sustainable development enunciated in the Summit of Brussels of June of 2005<sup>3</sup>:

- Promotion and protection of fundamental rights,
- Intra and intergenerational solidarity,
- Open and democratic society,
- Citizenship participation,
- Public-private partnerships with companies and social actors,
- Coherence of policies and governance,
- Exploitation of the best available knowledge,
- Caution principle, and
- “Who contaminates pay” principle.

The consideration of the second and third set of principles has allowed WP5 adding to the three original principles described in the DOW other five basic principles that should be respected by the research-action processes:

- Transformation: it is an implicit principle in the research-action concept; it consists in fostering the transformer role that research can performed on social reality.
- Sustainability: it consists in carrying out long term research processes which are needed to obtain a more evolutionary knowledge in order to generate sustainable territorial development dynamics.
- Transparency: the research-action processes must lead to a higher transparency of the results regarding to both knowledge and policies, facilitating and democratizing the processes of decisions making.
- Co-responsibility: the component “action” and the component “research” are equally responsible for the evolution of the process.
- Co-learning: the research-action processes must facilitate the cooperative learning of all the participants, improving the capacity of the territorial system to look for

solutions to the future problems keeping in mind their past experience. In other words, they ought to strengthen the development of the territorial intelligence.

The application of these principles, in order to be effective, ought to affect to all the research stages: the topics selection, the employed methodology, the pursued results and the diffusion and transfer results systems. Their implementation is complex, and hence the necessity to analyze the methods and research-action protocols that can facilitated its future development.

The work of WP5 for 2007 will consist, in the first place, in completing the list of principles and in defining them in a more precise way; secondly, the main implications of their actual performance should be addressed, including the possible adverse effects; and thirdly another important task would be the designing of research-action protocols that can boost the actual application of these principles. The result of this work will be the *European quality letter of research-action favouring the territorial governance of sustainable development*.

### **3.3. Limits and potentialities of the applicability of research-action processes.**

Another aspect in which the WP5 has focused is in identifying the limits that the effective practical application of these principles imposes to the research processes and the potentialities that the extension of its use can foster.

Regarding to the limits, they are basically concentrate on the institutional context in which the research-action processes are performed.

Considering the research side, although in general the necessity of the development of multidisciplinary approaches being carried out in partnership is acknowledged, neither the systems of research funding, neither the means of scientific diffusion, neither the structure of academic merits boost this sort of projects, especially in the field of the social sciences. On the other hand, participatory methods are, in some cases, unjustifiably considered rather suspicious and accused of lacking objectivity.

From the point of view of the action, there are also several factors limiting the applicability and extension of the research-action practices: the urgency of the territorial necessities which does not allow the employ of time and resources for research, the imposed “management by projects” system which brings as consequence the public

<sup>3</sup> See Conclusions de la présidence – Bruxelles, 16 et 17 juin 2005, Conseil Européen, 10255/1/05 REV 1 29, Annexe I.

policies and actions fragmentation, the variability of actors involved in territorial actions, the capacity of the territorial actors to appropriate and internalize research methods and tools incorporating them to their daily management and, of course, of the will of the actors of generating genuine participatory processes in the long term.

Regarding to potentialities, all the WP5 participants have pointed out the absence of systematic evaluations that prevent evaluating in a precise way the impact of the research-action projects on territorial governance. However, the analysis of the results of research-action projects which has been summarized in the catalogue of experiences allows sketching some of the positive aspects to be expected from this approach.

The general idea is that this sort of research, fostering actors' information and knowledge sharing, allows a better adaptation of actions to territorial needs, a higher coordination and coherence of policies and a better resources allocation. In particular, participatory methods enhance social capital when increasing transparency and generating confidence among the actors.

Another meaningful expected effect of this kind of research-action processes is actors' appropriation of scientific methods and tools for analyzing, managing, and evaluating territorial projects, which have been adapted in each case to their own specific needs. All this can extend an evaluation culture allowing actors a more systematic learning from their experiences. The final consequence of all this effects is actors' empowerment so as the increase of their endeavour capacity.

The benefits for the research are obvious as well. This kind of processes provides with more pertinent information and it allows confronting research results in a more direct way.

The question is that the generation of these positive results is by no means automatic. The development of a culture of the participation favouring the development of territorial intelligence is not a linear process. There are so many involved variables that the advances can be followed by important setbacks having strong adverse effects (institutional confidence failures, for example). This is the reason why it is so important analyzing these processes and studying in depth the possible ethical and methodological rules leading to better results.

An unfinished subject of WP5 is analyzing the potentialities and the limits that information and communication technologies use can provide to these processes.

#### 4. PERSPECTIVES OF CAENTI WP5.

In 2007 a letter of quality will be jointly elaborate with the whole of the participants of the CAENTI. It will establish the principal ethical and methodological recommendations for research-action likely to guarantee the respect to the principles of governance of sustainable development.

The methodology and work groups will be shape depending on the preconizations of the final report. This task will be tackle in a meeting which is previewed to be held in Liège in January, the 19th and 20th 2007.

In 2008 the reflection will be focused on technologies favouring these developments. The reflection must contribute to enhance a more general approach to "research-action" concept, methodologies and practices.

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