IMPROVING PUBLIC MANAGEMENT THROUGH TERRITORIAL GOVERNANCE. LESSONS LEARNED FROM COVID-19

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ABSTRACT: Collaborative territorial governance experiences play a fundamental role in improving public management to mitigate health and the economic crisis impacts due to COVID-19 pandemic.

The Ministry of Interior (SEGOB, in Spanish) of the Mexican federal government implemented the methodology Neighborhoods Networks for Solidarity Support "Redes Vecinales de Apoyo Solidario" (REVES, in Spanish). It is a territorial organization system based on community co-responsibility that aims to improve the satisfaction of basic needs derived from the health and economic emergency caused by COVID-19, and is an example for municipalities throughout Mexico. REDES implies a collaborative territorial governance system. In this article we describe and analyze the actions carried out by seven municipalities that are executing the project.

Keywords: Territorial and collaborative governance, networks, public management, municipality.

INTRODUCTION

Our aim is to underscore how collaborative territorial governance experiences have a fundamental role in successful public management to mitigate health and economic crisis caused by COVID-19.

The article is divided in three parts. First, we provide a theoretical conceptualization of governance, its meaning –specifically collaborative

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territorial governance–, its key elements, and some inherent concepts. We describe the theoretical-practical argumentation that justifies the advantages, development and implementation in local governments.

In the second section, we present the experiences of seven municipalities. They exemplify collaborative territorial governance systems under REDES –its primary objective is to respond to the needs as a result of COVID-19 pandemic. The Ministry of the Interior of Mexico encourages the use of REDES for local governments to improve the living conditions of citizens due to the health and economic emergency we face worldwide.

The third and last part, we present the achievements of the seven local governments. We hope readers can ponder on the value of using local governance systems in municipal public management as a tool to solve specific problems and situations in their territory.

All the information was through qualitative research. We conducted in-depth interviews, and video-meetings that allowed the municipal experiences to be presented.

Although it is early to talk about the impact and final result of the implementation of REDES, there are some key elements we can infer that facilitate its management and improve the COVID-19 situation that exists in Mexico and word wide; without a doubt networks are effective public management tools to improve the conditions of citizens during confinement.

1. ON THE ISSUE OF GOVERNANCE

The paradigm of governance implies that relationships are developed with an active collaboration and social participation. The term has multiple interpretations and definitions, but in the last three decades several common elements arise: the presence of the government or governmental actors that relate and interact with non-governmental actors, civil society, in order to improve, collaborate, cooperate and be more efficient to solve common problems. We can summarize it as the interaction of various stakeholders, from different sectors, with a common goal.

If we analyze the concept of governance by different authors, we can see an evolution from 1980 to the present. Classical European authors such as Renate Mayntz, Jan Kooiman, R.A.W. Rhodes, Joan Prats i Catalá, among others, explain this new approach of managing public affairs, in which the governments organizational structures increasingly depend on the cooperation of private and social actors –outside of their hierarchical control–, to seek solutions to society's problems.

Joan Prats i Catalá (2005) highlights that: "… governance is the method of governing, not the only one, but the most representative of our time". Governance is the product of the evolution of public administration of the 20th century and currently this century: from bureaucracy, new public management, later public management reaching our current development of governance.

Governance needs the government as its coordinating body. The latter must change from being an "omnipotent solver" to a "manager of interdependencies". Prats (2005) argues that governance does not eliminate the role of government, but rather reinforces its role as an entrepreneur, facilitator, mediator, conflict solver, negotiator and rule-maker. He recognizes that some functions can be performed by other business and social actors since governments are not the only stakeholders facing today's great social issues, and explains that the vertical structures of the State must be transformed into a combination of vertical and horizontal structures, derived from the new needs for the effectiveness and legitimacy of public action (Prats i Catalá, 2005).

Rhodes (1997) is one of the authors who began with the theory of governance by networks. Networks are presented as the solution to coordination and management problems of modern societies. This author refers to governance as "network management". Social coordination and management of inter-organizational links are a common form of networks. The government plays an important role as a facilitator in the development and function of networks.

Luis F. Aguilar (2007) refers to governance as the process of directing or channeling. Society and the government define a sense of path, values and objectives regarding their "associated life". It includes the way in which work will be organized and divided to reach social objectives. He explains that governance is a new focus within the new public management where society and the government share responsibility of federal, state or local level policies. It encourages the active participation of different organizations (public and private) for the advantage of a good government performance, as well as the achievement of objectives that improve societies quality of life. For this author, governance promotes a governing style based more in coordination than command, more horizontal than vertical, and with new public and private partnerships.

For Alfonso Iracheta (2012: 39) governance:

> … expresses the process in which social actors decide in an organized way their fundamental objectives of coexistence and the coordination to achieve them […] and pursues to recover and rebuild the public nature of the State, as well as its capacity to govern and administer, placing citizens at its center.

Public action comes to life by the coordination of collective action (participation of social actors), since it is recognized that the State cannot look after everything, thus becoming into a network of horizontal relationships.

R. Uvalle Berrones (2005) describes that governance is necessary, but not sufficient, for public policies to achieve their objectives. Public administration must be inclusive and democratic; it must involve citizens to participate actively in the policy processes of the community. The State is a facilitator that encourages and promotes true governance to obtain the best results. The joint participation of government and citizens in the process of creating public policies is important, from problem identification within the community, to the development or establishment of the policy, its implementation, execution and evaluation.

Rosas-Ferrusca et al. (2012: 119) synthesize some key aspects of the concept: "… governance is the process in which citizens collectively solve their problems and respond to the needs of society, using the government as an instrument to carry out their tasks". For the authors governance has citizens and organizations as their focus, both acting jointly with the government. Governments must operate as a network and less with vertical and authoritarian structures. Territories are the central sphere for decision-making and the execution of public policies. The institutional structure of governments (federal, state and municipal) has been overtaken by reality, requiring new forms of participation to function more efficiently.

C. Zurbriggen (2011) discusses regarding the presence of international agencies (World Bank, United Nations Program and the Inter-American Development Bank) in Latin America. These agencies promote governance as the best tool to provide better infrastructure services and achieve sustainable development in the region. This perspective includes the privatization of public services, new offers of social policies, and decentralization processes. The recommendations of the international community suggest governance as an alternative tool to attain improvement in health services, which is why public-private partnerships are promoted to provide public services. This includes participating stockholders from the public and private sectors.

1.1. TERRITORIAL OR LOCAL GOVERNANCE

For many local governments territorial governance is strategic to improve public management due to COVID-19, in some cases even before it began. Territorial governance enables to establish relationships and interactions between municipal level stakeholders and local non-governmental actors –social, private, academic sectors and society as a whole–. These relationships improve territorial development and solve common problems. The conjunction

of actors cooperating and collaborating helps to mitigate the serious situation caused by the pandemic, including insecurity problems.

Farinos (2015) explains that policies should not be imposed on territories, but rather adapt to them. Territorial governance allows regions to decide and make their own policies based on their needs. Farinos affirms that territorial governance is framed to a geographical setting and society. Both are key elements when deciding and planning on the future, which improves relations between the State, businesses and society.

Thus, the primary objective of territorial governance is to achieve cohesion through the joint application of sustainable territorial development strategies. Therefore, local governance has the task of coordinating interactions between participants in a specific territory, through innovative cooperation formulas that promote social and institutional capital, strengthen the community's social cohesion, and work in the joint construction of a territorial project (Zurbano Irizar, 2008, in Abad, 2010).

Enrique Cabrero (2005) mentions that in order to better understand territorial governance, it is necessary to recognize the collective action of the various local actors, specific groups within the territory, coalitions and conglomerates of interests, as well as the relationship between governmental and non-governmental players. It is important to identify networks of participants, interaction mechanisms and the regulation between them, as well as the role of local government.

1.2. COLLABORATIVE GOVERNANCE

Collaborative governance relies on a multi-actor and inter-organizational collaboration. It is the conjunction of various stakeholders that have a civic commitment, and cooperate with each other and build consensus regarding common objectives (Siriani, 2009, cited in Mariñez-Navarro, 2015).

The work of Mariñez-Navarro (2015), mentions that the use of technologies in the collaborative governance approach promotes collaboration and open citizen participation. It connects citizens, organizations, companies and the government. This promotes the exchange of information, knowledge, resources, opinions, debates and can be a helpful tool for decision-making regarding a common problem. It also may facilitate entrepreneurship and social capital development. The digital revolution and the use of Web 2.0 allows public and private participants, and organizations to collaborate in real time to co-create public policies.

Citizen participation and engagement are key elements in collaborative governance, as both are a positive influence regarding trust, legitimacy, and government accountability. The existence of a collaborative governance

network in a territory can improve the efficiency of the making of public policies, their implementation, the development of social capital, the improvement of public services, the detection of local needs, better information flows and accountability, as well as giving a greater voice to society (Mariñez-Navarro 2015, p. 80).

Information communication technologies (ICTs), Web 2.0 tools and smart phone applications are important instruments that complement and support citizen participation initiatives. Citizens can use and access information, schooling, communication, create and participate in public discussions, all these strengthen the diversity of opinions, the flow of information and freedom of expression. These digital and information tools pave new ways of interacting, by allowing citizens, organizations and other stakeholders to be co-producers and co-creators of actions and content; organize themselves into subgroups and networks. As well as share knowledge, strategies, concerns, thus being able to influence public decisions.

Civic engagement networks (neighborhood associations, sport federations, cooperatives, among other) are essential social capital. The tighter these networks are the more likely the members of a community will cooperate for their common good.

The value of these governance approaches lies in that they integrate processes that are aimed to transform reality, improve public management, the lives of the citizens at the local level and thus impact the territory. They provide fertile ground for alternative schemes of administration and public management. A key role will be the flexibility and adaptation that each one has to specific situations and territories.

Several management experiences regarding governance arrangement at the local level spawn spaces and structures that promote active citizen participation. For example, participatory budgeting, citizen participatory laws, or the creation of citizen councils or committees for various objectives.

Two successful examples that illustrate territorial governance systems in health issues are in Brazil (Souto Mair and Dornelas 2008), and Chile (J. Salinas, A. Anselmo, et al 2007).

In the first a family health model was developed. They introduced Health Councils (with civil society representatives) with a close relationship to the municipality's health team, creating networks with the community. A highlight of this experience is that the municipal government called for associativity in the community and the formation of networks with civil society organizations (CSOs), providing evidence that the greater number of participation of CSOs, the more effective the health family program was in each locality.

In the second example, a National Council for the promotion of health by the name of *Vida Chile* was established. It included a network of local councils constituted with CSOs, community organizations, private entities, the academy and municipal authorities. The project had excellent results in terms of coverage, 98% of the country's municipalities had a Community Health Promotion Plan and a *Vida Chile* Committee, and the program provided benefits to 20% of the country's population. Here too, the participation of CSOs and community organizations together with local governments were key to its success, and exemplify local governance.

The concepts of governance from European and Latin American authors have complemented each other and included new connotations, always revealing as a central theme the active and co-responsible participation of society alongside the government, to solve common problems that concern the locality.

2. COLLABORATIVE TERRITORIAL GOVERNANCE: CASE STUDIES DURING COVID19 PANDEMIC.

"Neighborhood Solidarity Networks (REVES in Spanish)" (CIAS, 2020) is a multi-stakeholder coordination and interaction platform for community advocacy and social transformation in emergency scenarios at the local, regional and national levels. It is a territorial organization system that covers basic needs derived from the COVID-19 emergency. This method established priorities and the community's co-responsibilities (mutual aid and solidarity). These networks build a system that identifies the most urgent needs of the community (food, health, emotional care and public safety), making the best use of existing resources. REVES has three levels of territorial organization: 1. The street or household unit, 2. The neighborhood or zone, and 3. The town or municipality. Each level has a responsible liaison, named neighborhood, sector and municipal liaison. The networks are connected through digital technologies, using WhatsApp. The operation manual developed by (CIAS, 2020 a and b) establishes seven steps as to how the networks are implemented at the local level.

In April 2020, this methodology was adapted and implemented by SEGOB as part of the actions by the Mexican government to face the COVID-19 pandemic, in collaboration with the non-government organization "*Centro de Investigación y Acción Social, Jesuitas por la Paz*", and summon for solidarity through REDES, referring this strategy to nearly 2000 municipalities throughout the country (SEGOB, 2020a).

Since April 2020, SEGOB has maintained periodic meetings with municipalities. They provide advice and consultancy to local governments, and give them tools for a successful implementation of this methodology in their communities. Up to mid-September, 2020, 52 virtual meetings have been scheduled and more than 184 municipalities, organizations and entities that participate in REDES have been contacted.

Initially (between April and May), SEGOB divided the country into eight regions. From these 13 states and 17 municipalities were selected, considering their fatality and contagions rate due to COVID-19. A second phase was carried out and included 29 municipalities in 18 states. Using local participatory diagnosis, the program was strengthen, so localities could identify their own problems, and successfully implement the methodology of the strategy.

After six months of lockdown/semi lockdown in Mexico, it is too early to present results or impacts of the experience under REDES during the COVID-19 pandemic. Its implementation in municipalities has been gradual, but three degrees of progress can be distinguished. First are the ones that are still in the planning phase (initial stage). Second are those in the first implementation stages, and third are those already advanced in structuring and working with the network (follow-up stage).

We will now refer to some of the experiences at the local level of the different stages.

2.1. MUNICIPALITIES IN THE INTIAL STAGE

2.1.1 Local goverment of Salamanca in the state of Guanajuato

Salamanca is in the initial stage. They have "*Vecino Vigilante*" a neighborhood watch program –neighbors, businesses and municipal authorities participate– that promotes protection among neighbors for the safety of their community. Each street has a representative, who is trained to organize the area. The objective is to reduce crime and reinforce coexistence among neighbors.

WhatsApp groups are created and the issues that are addressed are local government´s public services complaints, public safety measures (fraud and extortion). Thanks to REDES neighborhood trust has improved, as well as the social cohesion, and support among community members. It also helps to identify needs regarding crime prevention and restoring the social networks in the community (SEGOB, 2020c).

2.1.2 Local goverment of Iguala de la Independencia, in the state of Guerrero

This municipality has begun its organization by sectorizing neighborhoods. It integrated 69 into the networks, by establishing "solidarity tables" food

donated by the same community. REDES has also helped to recover public areas, provide support for women victims of violence (with an effective communication to care for women), or focus on situations or problems within the community. For example, REDES helped find a missing child, or provide medical attention to neighbors with blood pressure problems or glucose levels in diabetics.

Local media such as radio, posters, videos, social networks such as Facebook (URL *Red Vecinal de Apoyo Solidario Iguala*, from the local police crime prevention office) have been used to sponsor the REDES program. These platforms publish activities, share knowledge, invite people to join the project, promote hygiene and procedures when in public spaces and provides a close contact between citizens (SEGOB, 2020c).

2.2. MUNICIPALITIES IN THE IMPLEMENTATION STAGE

2.2.1 *Local government of Acapulco de Juárez, in the state of Guerrero*

SEGOB proposed REDES to Acapulco, and in May 2020 trained 160 municipal public servants for this purpose. This local government was chosen because it was already working –since 2019– on the Project for the Reconstruction of the Social Fabric with the NGO "*Centro de Investigación y Acción Social, Jesuitas por la Paz*". They had committees to interact with CSOs and business, among other participants. The local government already had the territory divided into sectors, which made the implementation of REDES easier since they had an established structure.

Unlike the original project, REDES was divided into five levels. The first within housing blocks for a neighborhood contact (there are 13,170 of these contacts). The second level was of a Group (ten blocks, reaching 1,317 group contacts). The third level, covers a section (called the zone link, 439 of these). Then the fourth level is the electoral district of the locality and the sectorial link (there were seven) and finally, the municipal coordination. Acapulco has approximately 275 neighborhood networks. In addition, containment is being carried out by block, with access to contact phones in case of emergencies (Municipality of Acapulco de Juárez, 2020a).

The materials and operation manuals offered by SEGOB (2020b) were adapted for Acapulco. These documents explain the logistics, communication between groups, the strategy´s implementation, among others. In addition, on the municipality's website there is a section called *Acapulco Unido* with video links of the program among other actions (Municipality of Acapulco de Juárez, 2020b). They also have two apps *Reporte Ciudadano*, citizens can file reports or complaints, and *Consumo Local*, which promotes local consumption.

Coordination and communication between stakeholders and residents of the town is through WhatsApp, video calls are also encouraged if necessary.

The municipality has 35 community kitchens to support people with food insecurity, geolocated in its website, where donations can also be made, and neighbors can register to form their own networks. There is also a directory of Acapulco businesses, as well as services, with the possibility of being geolocated on a map (Municipality of Acapulco de Juárez, 2020ab).

The purpose of these actions is to generate trust in citizens as well as share responsibility and coordinate work with the inhabitants of the municipality (SEGOB, 2020c).

2.2.2 Local government of General Escobedo, in the state of Nuevo León

General Escobedo (2020a) in Nuevo Leon has implemented REDES in 204 of their most vulnerable (economic problems and domestic violence) areas in neighborhoods (70% of the municipality). They established networks at the neighborhood and housing block level.

The local government divided the territory into 14 sectors, each one with a responsible coordinator and 212 fellow neighbors (per housing block). 227 WhatsApp groups have been created, each with a different issue depending on the neighborhoods' needs. Some of the themes relate to food, psychological care, public safety, recreational activities, among others. The municipal liaison is in charge of delivering the required municipal support. In addition, there are 24 hour 1-800 telephone lines to attend medical and psychological care issues, and a specialized line regarding domestic and gender violence.

The project allowed to approach different stakeholders of the community. Three CSOs support the project as well as various businesses with whom alliances were made. They provided donations and products in kind. The program *AyuDar* was developed to support families in need with food packages, approximately 40,000 of them have been delivered.

As a result of the implementation of REDES, more than 5,000 families have been attended (approximately 20,000 people), with the impact of having a local government with a more efficient communication and greater proximity with citizens.

According to the municipality of General Escobedo the use of WhatsApp facilitated,

> the formation of groups has allowed to have constant communication with citizens, know their needs and generate trust. It is important that neighbors themselves establish the rules of use of the group and the actions for noncompliance. (Municipality of General Escobedo, 2020a).

Another technological tool used due to COVID-19 were video-meetings. These are used for high priority issues for the community and helped lessen tension and citizen stress. Also a free web 2.0 page was setup for small and medium size businesses to promote their products to the public. More than 280 local companies –including others from different municipalities registered– (Municipio General Escobedo, 2020b).

A disadvantage in the use of ICTs was that not all residents had internet and their mobile devices did not allow them to access the app.

These networks have also aided to mitigate economic problems. They help promote local consumption by showcasing and offering local products of the territory. They created the program *Dinámica por la Paz* for each neighborhood to fight domestic violence against women (which has increased). They used Zoom to generate family coexistence spaces to carryout activities, games and playful dynamics, including a contest to promote healthy family life and values. A great effort has been placed to improve this emotional area. These activities brought positive results and helped reduce stress in people. A pre and post intervention survey has been used to measured them.

REDES has been important, since it provides structure to the ways neighbors and institutions communicate. It makes it possible to make aid programs more efficient, reach citizens, create a bond with families, and allows to fulfill the specific needs of the population (General Escobedo Municipality, 2020c).

The coordinator of the REDES program of the municipality mentions that although the program was created for COVID-19 contingency, they now consider that it should be a policy that stays permanently within the municipal administration (General Escobedo Municipality, 2020a).

2.2.3 Local government of San Nicolás de los Garza, state of Nuevo León

In this municipality REDES is implemented for a solidarity based economy. Through a Web 2.0 platform, they developed a "trade" web page for 10 neighborhoods (11,500 inhabitants) from the most deprived areas. The objective of the "trade" project is to provide food to families who lack of it. According to the reports, this project has positive results, since it is possible to exchange either a product for another product, or a service for a product or viceversa. For example, a construction worker does a job in exchange for food. It is important to mention that on the subject of governance, the local government has a close relation with local companies, who support with resources, especially food and improvement of the family economy (Municipality of San Nicolás de los Garza, 2020a).

Another REDES initiative in this local government is *Vecinos Solidarios*, where young volunteers are given COVID-19 protective equipment and they

provide support by doing supermarket purchases and other errands for vulnerable neighbors and the elderly so they don´t leave their homes. They even organized a "challenge" to help vulnerable families. Regarding psychological care, the municipal government has been very concerned. Through REVES the local government has detected that emotional support is highly required by the people of the locality to address stress and anxiety. Another important issue they face is food insecurity. Food packages have been distributed to the people who need them most. On the municipality´s website there is a link "*Consume San Nico*" to promote local consumption, and another one where restaurants can register for home delivery (Municipality of San Nicolás de los Garza, 2020b).

2.3. MUNICIPALITIES IN FOLLOW-UP STAGE

The municipalities in this section are the most advanced implementing REDES. They already have an organized neighborhood network structure or committee, which allowed REDES to adapt more easily.

2.3.1 Municipality of Tijuana, Baja California

Since 2008, Tijuana began to work with citizens on crime prevention and violence reduction issues. A Citizen Security Neighbors Committee Program was established to promote a culture of good neighbor, fostering values of tolerance, respect, cooperation, teamwork, citizen participation and improvement of the quality of life in the city.

The program involves joint work between society and the local government. After 12 years of the program, an operational reengineering was carried out and 18 programs were created. Currently there are 215 recognized neighborhood committees and they use ICTs and social networks, such as Facebook. Periodically parents, teachers and neighbors receive training, as well as transversal work with other government entities such as the local family development system (DIF, in Spanish). Thus neighbors have the ability to transform their environments and recover their community.

Tijuana took advantage of the established structure and organization and adapted REVES' methodology. The government has a well-organized system to form committees and neighborhood networks, and the people who participate are recognized by the city's Town hall.

To implement the strategy of REVES the local government divided the actions into three steps. First: Social Bonding, where they summon citizens to be part of the networks. The second step is Committee's Formation: citizens are selected, work groups are organized, and the protocols to form the committees are established along a formal structure (President, Vice President, secretary

and four members). To participate citizens must meet certain requirements (be Mexican, of a certain age, should not hold public post, among others). In the third step –protocol– committee members are sworn in and an official document is drafted.

Currently Tijuana has more than 1,500 community leaders –all volunteers–, whom the city council provides training on an ongoing basis. By community leader we understand: "…a participant who recognizes the problems in his area and wishes to contribute to improve the quality of life of his family and neighbors" (Eduardo Goriz in SEGOB, 2020c).

2.3.2 Local government of Nezahualcóyotl, in the state of Mexico

In Nezahualcóyotl REDES is also being implemented. Since 2015, the local government had several Neighborhood Security Networks. They divided the town in quadrants, 100 community polices for 100 quadrants, in four zones. Neighbors are in constant communication with the community's police officers to give quick notice of crimes or public safety issues. Currently there are 10,954 neighborhood security networks, and 1,200 business networks. This model provided an excellent framework to implement REDES due to COVID-19 (Municipality of Nezahualcóyotl, 2020).

REDES presented three types of schemes in this municipality. The first was to identify vulnerable people (i.e. seniors in poverty, people with chronic diseases). The second helped identify donors, such as businesses, CSO's, to set up aid food stands in different parts of the territory where neighbors could donate food. The third scheme was the distribution of donations in an unbiased and helpful manner to those in need. Young people registered in the federal program *Jóvenes construyendo el futuro*, helped by gathering the food aid going house to house. Also emotional and psychological support was provided to those neighbors suffering from stress and anxiety.

The project has a second stage that involves permanent training for citizens, in a horizontal network focused on sustainable human security, physical integrity and prevention. Themes regarding health issues, natural disasters and urban risks are covered.

The authorities mention that REDES has been valuable, especially to identify the population at risk and to implement programs during COVID-19. A current program *La lectura toca a tu ventana* aimed at local children for virtual story telling (fables and tales), started to invite children and the local police to read stories together (keeping health protocols such a social distancing). This has helped reduce stress and anxiety in the territories. Sixty story telling sessions have been done, reaching 1,200 children. Another program *Violencia de Género* provides care to women who have suffered violence. The program

has more than 600 members. There are other programs, where neighborhood networks have been fundamental to implement them (Román Mejorada, SEGOB, 2020c).

3. ACCOMPLISHMENTS AND CONSIDERATIONS REGARDING REDES

Even though the implementation of REDES in the different municipalities shown is unique and based on their own needs and resources, we can identify common achievements.

Attention to needs: In all cases, in the first months of the pandemic we can underscore three actions: priority was given to secure food to vulnerable population; efforts were directed to provide emotional and psychological support to reduce stress and anxiety (including domestic and gender violence); and provisions to support the families' economy and promote local consumption.

The use of networks: The most relevant uses of the networks at the beginning of the confinement were monitoring health situations of the population of the territory to channel support, meet basic needs, emotional care, monitor the most vulnerable neighbors, prevent family violence, and distribute aid (external support from government and private institutions, and civil society).

After three months of confinement, at the end of June, beginning of July, in some states lockdown measures were lessen (businesses, restaurants, shops among others begin to reopen at 30% of their capacity). REDES provided a platform to follow up on the support provided chiefly in the local economy's revival (local consumption), and also public safety issues.

REVES structure and organization's strength: In the case of Tijuana and Nezahualcóyotl we can highlight that because they already had a previous network structure and experience, it was easier for them to adapt and meet the needs due to COVID-19, and thus are the more advanced cases in implementing REVES. In both municipalities neighborhood networks started years earlier to address insecurity problems in their area. The public entities that developed the networks where Crime Prevention and Citizen Participation, and in the case of Nezahualcóyotl the police department. Regarding municipalities in the initial stage their structure and organization has been slow. As they have more experience it will consolidate. Such is the case of Acapulco.

Increase in neighborhood trust: A relevant and common aspect of the neighborhood networks in the territory is that in all the cases there was an increase in neighborhood trust, thus more social cohesion of those who share a territory. Neighborhood networks can be a way to transform and rebuild the social fabric in the community.

Increase in social participation: Neighborhood organization increased social participation and encouraged alliances between local authorities and sectors of civil society (businesses, universities and CSOs).

Formation of Committees or Councils: REDES fostered neighborhood committees or working groups with specific issues (food donations management, emotional health support, local economy promotion and solidarity, public safety, identify vulnerable people). In most cases the working committees had positive results and achieved their objectives.

Use of digital tools: All of the neighborhood networks employed digital tools to communicate and coordinate, the most common ICTs was WhatsApp, Web 2.0 pages and the use of videoconferences and video meetings.

Evolution: Considering the first six months (March-September) of the COVID-19 pandemic in Mexico, neighborhood networks have evolved. At the beginning, their main function was to attend the food, health and economic emergency. Now their focus is in producing more active societies to rebuild the social fabric, make closer relations with other community participants and coordinate solidarity actions to address social problems in association with the government and society. We can highlight the participation of CSOs among other stakeholders to rebuild the social fabric in the community.

Issues addressed: The most common public problems addressed were the reconstruction of the social fabric, crime prevention, community resilience, attention to needs due to COVID-19 (food, health, mental health, economic development), and develop joint work with the community, education institutions, government, religious associations, civil society, and businesses. This underscores a genuine system of territorial governance.

Public management: To develop an institutional system, it is important to systematize the information (activities, stakeholders, goals, beneficiaries, etc.) evaluate network performance, establish indicators. So far, none of the municipalities has a formal information system. Tijuana has regulations regarding the creation of working committees, and for the results achieved. Nezahualcóyotl has also partially systemized its information.

4. CONCLUSIONS

With the cases presented of local governments implementing REDES we can observe their benefits and magnitude to the citizens in these territories.

The municipal level is strategic to improve the living conditions of people. Local governments are suitable to generate local governance and citizen participation initiatives. Some of the traits that municipalities have are: a) they are the closest order of government for citizens, therefore they identify the relevant problems experienced in the locality, b) local governments must focus in attending the collective interests within their territory, c) municipal public administrations can be flexible to meet the specific citizens´ demands, d) they have greater possibilities to create favorable conditions to include individuals or groups interested in public matters, therefore promote participation citizen, e) they can promote community identity and make citizens conscious of the importance to commit locally.

The collaborative territorial governance approach provides greater value to the role of citizen participation, even in decision-making process. Compared to the new public management approach that focuses more on products, results and impacts. Local governance can contribute to greater legitimacy and credibility of government action and generate winning circumstances for all participating actors.

Collaborative territorial governance and the cases presented postulates that the local government is a facilitator or administrator in the networks' formation and training so that participants and managers within the networks assume the co-responsibility that this implies.

The formation of collaborative territorial governance networks, where different government and civil society stakeholders are involved and do joint work to solve problems that impact the neighborhood, conveys tangible benefits for the population and the local government; since at times problems surpass the government's capacity to solve them. Also, territorial governance networks strengthen the government's legitimacy, promote social cohesion, create public value, increase trust among citizens and towards the government. Thus facilitating problem solutions.

The collaborative territorial governance project developed during the pandemic presented in this article is a worthy example of coordination and communication between different participants, where citizens (street level), neighborhoods (sector level) and local authorities ally to mitigate the health and economic crisis. Each player puts skills and resources, making it possible for vulnerable people to receive aid and support.

It is crucial to strengthen and transform public management at the local level, particularly regarding the relationship that exists between the government

and citizens, in order to face the economic and social crisis unleashed as a result of COVID-19 pandemic.

Municipalities need to develop collaborative territorial/local governance systems to face the new challenges that the present crisis has left in society, and expand local democracy, generate civic commitment, and promote the development and progress of the local government.

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