

Los centros universitarios municipales en la formación de actitudes ambientales para el desarrollo local

Municipal university centers in the formation of environmental attitudes for local development

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RESUMEN: Los centros universitarios municipales tienen la responsabilidad de asegurar la pertinencia social de la educación superior en los territorios; lo que implica que aseguren el acompañamiento a las autoridades gubernamentales en la toma de decisiones para el desarrollo local. El estudio argumenta acciones que promueven el papel de los centros universitarios municipales en la formación de actitudes ambientales de sus docentes para dar respuesta a la dimensión ambiental del desarrollo local y promover la adquisición de conocimientos para su actuar ambiental y con mayores posibilidades de transmitir actitudes ambientales responsables en el resto de la ciudadanía.

Palabras clave: Actitudes; Actitudes ambientales; Desarrollo local; Medio ambiente

ABSTRACT: The university municipal centers have the responsibility to assure the social pertinence of the higher education at the territories; what implies for them to insure the accompaniment to the governmental authorities in the overtaking for the local development. The study arguments actions that promote his teachers' paper of the university municipal centers in the formation of environmental attitudes to give answer to the environmental dimension of the local development and to promote the acquisition of knowledge stops his acting environmental and with bigger possibilities to transmit environmental responsible attitudes in the rest of the citizenship.

Keywords: Attitudes; Environmental Attitudes; Local development; Environment

Introduction

The insertion of universities in the municipalities has been a decisive step to materialize the aspirations of Cuban higher education that its professionals accompany government authorities in decision making, being pertinent to the demands of the society that created it or to which they owe

it. This aspiration acquires greater relevance due to the close science-government relationship that is fostered at the times that Cuban society is currently experiencing.

Since 2011, when the different existing university headquarters in the municipalities were integrated and the municipal university centers were created until today, the effort to bring the different processes of higher education closer to the territories through these institutions has been fostered.

Hence, among the most important functions is to promote local development as a process of transformation of the economy and local society, aimed at overcoming the existing difficulties and challenges and improving the living conditions of its population through a more efficient and sustainable use of existing endogenous resources and the promotion of local entrepreneurial capacities.

In this regard, Díaz-Canel (2020) states, “to ensure that, in universities, there is a way of thinking to detect problems and act accordingly from the scientific-technical, pedagogical potential, with all the existing culture in the university and make contributions that can generate compensations”

In the same sense, the author himself states (2020), “it is up to higher education specialists to be the most active participants in local development, because they are the ones who manage knowledge”

The study highlights the role of the municipal university centers in the formation of environmental attitudes for the local development of their teachers, as a result of recognizing that they do not take advantage of all the potentialities that the teachers of these institutions possess as they are prepared professionals and with responsibility before the management of knowledge, in the same way they do not manage to satisfy the demands and training needs in environmental matters of the decision makers of public policies and therefore express through their behaviors environmental attitudes that are in correspondence with the demands of contemporary local development.

On the other hand, it has been taken into account the existing potentialities in the university center of the municipality to promote environmental knowledge and to provide its teachers with attitudes that allow them to act with responsibility and future perspectives of mitigation and thus accompany governmental authorities in such processes.

The present research responds to the proposed objective of establishing methodological indicators that allow defining the role of the teachers of the municipal university centers in local development.

Development

The municipal university centers are part of the infrastructure of higher education centers and are in charge of guaranteeing access to university studies for people who reside and/or work in the territory, which facilitate the assurance of such processes with greater rationality, according to university requirements and in correspondence with the socioeconomic development of each municipality.

In this, sense Resolution No. 2/2018 of the Teaching and Methodological Work Regulations of the Ministry of Higher Education (MES) (2018) states:

...the municipal university center is the level of management that basically has a local character in the dynamics of its performance in that it is an organizational unit of the university that aims to carry out all the processes and substantive functions of higher education in the magnitude demanded by the municipality and to the extent that the required quality is ensured

At the present time, new paradigms are evident in higher education due to the need to transmit knowledge with equity and social justice, to achieve quality and relevance with response to the demands of local development, which causes changes to be shown in municipal university centers that favor the more general transformations occurring in Cuban society today and that reach greater dimension from the potentialities existing there in the process of social appropriation of knowledge.

For García, (2016) knowledge will fulfill important functions nowadays: “in this new scenario knowledge and innovation will have significant functions to fulfill to boost local development, and higher education has important cognitive capacities that can contribute a lot”

Thus, these institutions are oriented to fulfill not only the substantive functions of higher education: professional training, postgraduate education, scientific research and university extension, but their capacity to produce, disseminate and apply knowledge should be extended to the local society as a whole.

The creation of the municipal university centers has been the main institutional innovation in terms of achieving the aspiration of the country's leadership to link higher education with local development, which occupies a relevant place in the updating of Cuba's economic and social development model, in line with the Sustainable Development Goals set by the United Nations

(UN) with support in the country's Economic and Social Development Program in Agenda 2030. In essence, they promote initiatives aimed at strengthening the autonomy of the municipality endorsed in Article 169 of the Constitution of the Republic of Cuba.

According to Albuquerque (2001) "local development is a process of transformation of the economy and territorial society aimed at overcoming the difficulties and demands of structural change, in order to improve the living conditions of the local population" (p. 20).

This definition implies developing an arduous process aimed at promoting balanced local development, fostering the deepening of democracy in a broad sense and contributing to greater social equality with the participation of all stakeholders.

In the current Cuban perspective in which the municipality is considered the main social economic scenario, a conception of development centered on man as a concrete cultural expression is manifested, while the municipal university centers are considered as local institutions capable of inserting themselves competitively in such processes through the orientation of transforming actions of a continuous nature and in a desired direction, in which the institution and therefore its teachers, becomes a local actor for the materialization of its initiatives due to the level of participation it has in the management of knowledge.

According to Núñez *et al.* (2017), "the idea of the university-society link is not a function, it is the organizing principle of university life" (p. 56).

In this sense, it is necessary that these institutions have defined how they should contribute to local development with environmental attitudes; an aspect that is currently being worked on, but without a methodological scientific basis that provides teachers with elements to improve their role in this, since being managers of knowledge they promote and transform local processes, favor attitudes in the other actors so that they are able to feel and perceive the problems, weaknesses and strengths that the environments of action possess and sensitize them to become actively involved in sustainable projects of self-transformation.

In correspondence with the different theoretical contributions made on attitudes, it is considered that they highlight elements that make us reflect that the attitude has presence before the disposition or predisposition of the subject to act, respond and evaluate in a favorable or unfavorable way, a certain matter, event, object of the social and surrounding reality, which allows the individual, to assume analytical positions to contribute to the improvement of the world that surrounds him/her.

This reveals feelings, customs, knowledge, values, etc. and, in a certain way, allows the individual to assume the position of what he really is, so we agree with Núñez (2003), when referring that attitudes are understood as a cognitive process that leads to an affective development and sustains the conduct, the conscious way of finding oneself and being able to face a certain behavior.

Similarly, the concept of environmental attitude formation is assumed by Parada (2007), who conceives it as: "...a formative, integrating process, which, as a dimension of the educational teaching process, stimulates protagonist participation on the basis of individual appropriation of a system of values that defines their positive position towards the environment" (p. 16).

Correspondingly, the author of this study defines the formation of environmental attitudes for local development as a process of assimilation of environmental knowledge, which favors expressions of affection towards the environment, where feelings, interests and motivations are manifested in the behavior of the subjects that accompany government authorities in local development. (Pérez, 2021)

The results of the instruments applied showed that teachers do not always know how they should act in this scenario, that the center's management has not defined from the methodological point of view how to insert themselves in the dimensions of local development, which motivated the elaboration of methodological actions that help managers to project their actions in the teaching center in a different way. The actions were framed through the dimensions: Human resources training, socio-cultural, political-administrative because they are closely linked to the environmental dimension, the essence of the research.

Methodological actions to improve the role of teachers at municipal university centers for local development:

Thematic 1: Dimension "Training of human resources".

Objective: To promote social change for the sake of local development with a prospective vision, by coordinating with local entrepreneurs to adapt the supply of knowledge to the requirements of local productive profiles.

Methodology:

- To bring together the other training actors who are able to advise on the implementation of the new update of the Cuban economic model and to accompany the government in the elaboration of strategies for the integral development of the territory.
- Promote the participation of training entities such as education, health, sports, culture, among others that can contribute to the constant updating of the economic model in the local context.
- Establish methodological activities aimed at the appropriation of knowledge from different disciplines, highlighting local knowledge that can be incorporated into the other disciplines and subjects of the center.
- To take advantage of the potential of the different contexts and processes that occurs in the institution and in society in order to improve the responses to the priorities of the local development of the municipality.
- To maintain a work and research environment that allows the development of activities where criteria and experiences can be exchanged and extrapolated to the local society.
- Promote through knowledge an institutional management model that integrates university knowledge and takes advantage of the resulting synergies as the most effective way to respond strategically to the needs of the society that integrates it.
- To develop a broad feedback process based on situated knowledge where the methodological direction constantly updates teachers' learning based on the needs of local development.

Thematic 2: “Socio-cultural” Dimension

Objective: To promote the acquisition of aspects related to the cultural patterns of the different local actors involved, the management of the environment, the particularities of the contexts where it develops, the social representations and valuations.

Methodology:

- Participate in the activities developed by the Municipal Group for Local Development and incorporate proposals for solutions or compensations to local problems from the creative thinking of their teachers.
- To promote the permanent adequacy between what is aspired in terms of the local development program of the municipality and what they do on a daily basis to achieve their organizational

objectives, in such a way that they are able to analyze, process and interpret the existing social problems in their area of action.

- Permanently adapt curricular, research and university extension activities to the real needs of local development so that there is correspondence between what is done and what should be done.
- Take advantage of the knowledge of other local actors to improve their processes according to the priorities and perspectives of the integral development program of the municipality.
- Promote the exchange with local actors to learn about their criteria based on the knowledge of what they do on a daily basis, which can be incorporated to the knowledge of the other actors, establishing learning priorities according to the integral development program of the municipality.
- Promote the inclusion of elements of local development in the curricular activities based on the students' own experiences as part of these groups of workers of local entities that in one way or another work as local actors.
- Promote the realization of independent activities by the students where actions from the work centers where they work and make sure that these activities are linked to local development processes.
- Encourage the implementation of university extension activities aimed at local development projects that are developed in the territory to promote the role of teachers in such activities.

Thematic 3: “Political-administrative” Dimension

Objective: To promote local management facilitated through the coordination of public policies at the territorial level and the creation of “innovative environments” favorable to productive and entrepreneurial development.

Methodology:

- To promote research activities linked to the theme of local development through the establishment of projects that bring together students and teachers, where the former can develop their diploma projects and the latter act as researchers and tutors.

Thematic 4: “Environmental” Dimension

Goal: Promote a culture of environmental attitudes as a fundamental way in response to the environmental dimension of local development.

Methodology:

- To develop methodological activities in order to empower teachers with environmental knowledge that will allow them to assume pro-environmentalist positions in local development.
- Include in the institution's processes the attention to the specific potential and limiting characteristics of the natural environment, in order to ensure environmental sustainability.

Conclusions

The methodological indicators applied strengthen the role of the teachers of the municipal university center of Maisí in local development, evidencing the relevance of having a methodological tool that facilitates the accompaniment of the institution to the governmental authorities of the territory and favors the science-government relationship so necessary in the updating of the Cuban economic-social model. It constitutes a starting point in the autonomy of Cuban municipalities and enriches the work of universities in the materialization of their substantive functions and accompaniment to the development processes of the territories through the formation of environmental attitudes of their teachers.

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