

CHANGE AND DEVELOPMENT: PSYCHO-SOCIAL APPROACH TO
COMMUNITY-BASED INNOVATION

Erick Roth

Universidad Católica Boliviana,

La Paz, Bolivia

First at all, I would like to thank the kindly invitation of Ghent University to participate in this event. It is really a privilege and a pleasure to be here. Thank you very much.

In this opportunity, I will address some concepts concerning Psycho-Social Change Model, with some emphasis in the so called “local development perspective”, and I will comment its applications only in the context of my country: Bolivia.

This approach emerged from Community Psychology (CP) as a necessary response from the developing countries interested in reshape the traditional notion of development. Psycho-social change model is also an interpellation to traditional social psychology which adopts an ideological neutral position in the study of human processes. It also gained strength and popularity in the critique of clinical psychology which seeks solutions far from the social context that determines and maintains human problem behavior (i.e. in the conventional mental health center).

So, CP is the branch of our discipline interested in the study of psychosocial factors that develop, promote and maintain the influence of individuals over the social environment in order to solve problems achieving changes in daily life of people. The community psychologist should be interested in participating in planning, designing and driving social change service programs that respond to that people’s needs.

Before going further to describe the psycho-social change model, I will briefly describe the socioeconomic context where such a model were conceived and studied and then I will

address some characteristics of that model commenting its links to psychological phenomena.

In other related paper some colleagues and I (Roth, Bohrt & Jung, 1993), remarked that Bolivian society is still living an important and chronic economic, political and social crisis whose origins has long lasting antecedents with invariant perspectives for the near future. Indeed, after ten years, the socioeconomic indicators are still reporting low levels of well-being and life quality in large portions of our population. The Bolivian Human development Index published by UNDCP (2012) does not reported increases over the 67, per cent, locating the country below the regional average. Per capita National Gross Product (NGP) reached in Bolivia 2 thousand 3 hundred (2300) American dollars against the average 7 thousand (7.050) of other countries in the same region. According to this report, Bolivia had an economic growth below the annual 5.2 per cent and poverty holds up incidence of 60 per cent, growing up in rural areas.

In these circumstances, infant mortality rates are among the highest in America (41 of each 1000 children born alive) and illiteracy is still about thirteen per cent compared with the average of eleven per cent in Latin-America. Another concern is our technological gap: only 23 of 1000 people own a personal computer in Bolivia; and that number rises to 59 of 1000 in other countries of Latin-America. While in our country we count 20 per cent of internet users, the Latin-American average is 36 per cent (Human Development National Report, 2012).

Bolivia is a multiethnic country and consequently multi-cultural: in its territory inhabit approximately 30 different ethnic groups besides Quechuas and Aymaras, all with their own cultural patterns and languages. In fact, 25 per cent of Quechua and seventeen per cent of Aymara, speak only their native languages. According to the last census, the number of Aymara people in Bolivian, is about 2 million living in the west side of Bolivia (La Paz, Oruro and Potosí). The aymara people in Perú, reached near of three hundred thousand inhabitants living in areas of Puno, Moquegua and Tacna. Chile's census reported

approximately 50 thousand aymara inhabitants concentrated in regions of Tarapacá and Antofagasta.

It is important to say that ethnical groups are the poorest population of Bolivia. This plurality has certainly become an obstacle for development from a conventional point of view, which cannot coexist with the original cultural forms.

Poverty and inequity then, are the most important sources of risk and vulnerability for large portions of population, especially women and children. Those risks use to be economical, social and psychological. In other words, poverty means unemployment, limited access to social services and psychological deficits as well.

Therefore, it has been stated (Roth, Bohrt & Jung, 1993), that the impossibility for Bolivia to abandon the dependency condition could be related with the lack of capacity to imagine and adopt a development model with local base, where cultural specificities could express by themselves and where social actors could also acquire local meaning. The proximal, daily, micro-social and the communitarian are local elements nurtured by the common cultural elements of people and by their needs and urges that are real and identifiable.

Local development stresses the importance of emergent local actors' participation (individuals, groups and institutions) and its social function in a context of a new political dynamic, emerged from decentralization, from the so called "social movements" and from a growing need of regional self-determination policy. This autonomic sense comes from the inefficacy and inefficiency of centralism, "bureaucratism" and "statism". Local development seeks self-directed alternatives where the poverty and exclusion reigns, and where the State was permanently absent. Those who postulate the local development model, assume that their planning and operation could be more efficient in the local context than in the national level. Even so, exercising social participation from the base (grassroots), the social control could guarantee the decisions affecting closer each citizen, making the developmental process more democratic. In brief, local development is a model seeking maximum participation of local elements around a concerted economic project that

inspires credibility and interest of majority. It is oriented to improve population's quality of life and their human development indexes.

The local value of development, acquires a special interest for psychology because this approach stands out those personal variables traditionally neglected by more traditional economics perspectives. These personal variables are the basic elements explaining the reasons why people are ready to change or to clarify the motives that address the search of new ways to face the improvement of their lives.

Therefore, the personal and group expectations, the subjective perceptions, the acquisition of new values and beliefs make also part of the locality, conforming the elements of people's daily life and becoming capable to determine not only the individual behaviour, but the collective conscience as well, defining the actions toward development.

If culture is one of the central components of the local, and if it is, as Ribes (1992) pointed out, the conventional referent of human behaviour or a set of practices governed by its conventionality (in other words, the referential frame in which the individual behaviour acquires and exercises), then the psychological subject matter is inseparable from the local and should play an important role explaining the developmental processes.

Social Change, Psychological Foundations of Development. In this paper, social change is conceptualized as a component of social development notion. This idea implies qualitative and quantitative variations in rural collectives through concerted decisions and actions with the assistance of external agents, in order to make improvements to their daily lives.

Development is in first place a qualitative change because it constitutes a modification of individual, familiar, institutional and other group behavioural patterns, caused by planned actions from an external intervening agent. It is also a quantitative change because it adds to the community lives, new goods and services previously inexistent (Roth, Bohrt & Jung, 1993).

Social change is in this sense, the psychological basis of development process, since it guarantees the consideration of extra-economic factors such as habit formation, value modification, behaviour patterns elimination, interest orientations and so on, building new individual, group and institutional lifestyles. Social change states then, that the economic phenomena is not an autonomous condition of development, and its analysis must be integrated into the reflection concerning motivations, behaviours and value system of the people who must be considered central actor of the process.

Social change, understood as a planned and systematic modification of lifestyles in order to adopt innovations with probability of better success, is a development facilitator. In other words, the development as a generic aspect of change is close related with dispositional psycho-social factors.

This proposal is entirely compatible with the statements of Perroux (1962). Perroux is a French economist who defined development as a combination of mental and social changes of population, with factors such as growth, accumulation and global product. The development problems imply economic, social, political, technical and psychological concerns, but first of all, these are human problems.

The previous statement drives us to think that if both elements complement each other and they are necessary and sufficient to understand development, this process could occur only if both concur with similar influences. The development of a given society does not occur only due to improvements in the per capita income of their inhabitants or to the availability of better social services, but also through implanting lifestyles compatible with change, expressed in a renovated value system, attitudes, beliefs and competences that could support innovation decisions and to impulse new initiatives in order to improve the human quality.

With illustration purposes, let us consider the following example. At least, half of the Bolivian economic active population is concerned with agriculture as a main productive

activity. Nevertheless, their contribution to the National Gross Product (NGP) is still below the expectations, and far enough from that expressed by other Latin American nations. This condition defines an economic sector with real difficulties to play a relevant role in development. In order to explain that problem, we used arguments such as lack of investment and insufficient financial aid to the sector, technological gap, weather factors, scarce availability of markets, etc., neglecting those variables emerging from the psycho-social dynamic.

Even in the case that we could improve our financial, technological and market conditions for the agriculture sector, our point here is that this sector would not grow enough to achieve better standards of living until it could fulfil the psychological conditions to face the change.

In other words, we must deeply modify the *manifested beliefs system* (for example, “*the government must be the main source of solutions for the productive sector*”, or this other belief: “*the Bolivian peasant, by the fact of being poor, must be a permanent subject of charity*”).

You may have also to change attitudes: those attitudes toward the market influences (for example: “*the price system of markets is unfair with the sector, consequently there is a rejecting attitude to negotiate their conditions*”; or “*competitiveness, high quality, private initiative or globalisation are capitalist notions that cannot be permeable to the national campesino movement*”). With those attitudes, farmers will lose opportunities to insert themselves in their respective economic clusters.

Probably it is also important to challenge the prevailing values that are specific to a culture, (for example: “*the work is fine but the fiesta is more important*”).

Finally, the *skills and productive competences* should be adjusted: (for example, financial management, and technological knowledge or markets negotiation skills), because actual

knowledge and competences do not fit with the conditions prevailing in the actual world scenario of agriculture economy.

Certainly, those psycho-social expressions cannot be afforded only with financial and technical means; they require a renewed vision of the development process, along with new competencies that could project the economic sector toward new self-defined goals and positive and proactive roles.

This vision, in the opinion of Ander Egg (1981), does not contradict the classical notion of development, but clarify our socio-economic reality, where the cumulative and durable growth of the internal global product, finds obstacles imposed by the people themselves, forming social and psychological barriers.

Interactive model of psycho-social change. The conceptions adopted by **psycho-social change** model derives from the primary concerns related with the interactive nature of community phenomena. Those notions impose the consideration of contextual processes that inter-relate individuals, groups and institutions, mediated by social, cultural, economic and politic factors, introducing the interdisciplinary perspective in the community analysis. The community problems are defined –from this point of view— as a complex product of such a relationship, where the psychological is just one of the different analytical levels (Roth, 1986).

In the present framework, change process demands not only behavioral adjustments in the recipient system, but also in the promoter systems as well; let see closer this concept.

In the rural development context, the local (Departmental and Municipal Governments), as well as social developmental institutions, so called non-governmental organizations (NGO`s), ruled by the Decentralization Law, are mainly concerned with fostering change, seeking social and economic development. Therefore, development could be mediated by a private or public institution, governmental or nongovernmental, which also intermediate the financial resources that support change and innovation.

The study of change dynamic must include the consideration of change agent behavior in order to guarantee the innovation process. For example, an implantation of a potable water system in a rural community will force the development promotion institution, to strengthen the local capacity in order to receive and support innovation. This can be done through technical and administrative assistance, promoting the multidimensional view of innovation (potable water means health and well-being, but could also mean horticulture production for family's income generation), optimizing the quality of technological transfer through teaching plumbing skills to beneficiaries for example, and to guaranteeing local political decision favoring the innovative process. We think (Roth, 1999) that change permanency, generically called *sustainability*, is in the first place, a complex function of what the change promoter does, what does not and how he does it, in order to impulse change; and in the second place, a function of what the recipient system does, what does not and how he does it, in order to support, assimilate the innovation, and to generalize it to other components of the system.

The importance of such analysis is obvious because neglecting the multiple and complex psycho-social variables involved in promoting and carrying out socioeconomic development, has contributed in the past, to important innovation assimilation failures, affecting the population well-being and credibility, resulting in a waste of financial resources. Therefore, it is important to insist that the social change must be understood from two different angles: from the innovator's behavior and from the receptive system's behavior. Nevertheless, we must stress that both spheres form a single, indivisible, but dynamic whole that should only be separated for analytical purposes.

Based on this dual behavior system, we can identify two different interacting levels that could explain change through corresponding actions: *implantation strategies* (carry out by change promoting institutions), and *assimilation factors* (characteristics of the changing system that are preconditions to support innovation). Therefore, social change must be understood as a complex product resulting from the ordered relationship of both constitutive elements (Roth, 2000). See figure 1.

Then, we must understand *implantation* as a dynamic process through which an institution proposes a community innovation with the purpose of promoting economic and social change; it is a systematic institutional effort seeking assimilation.

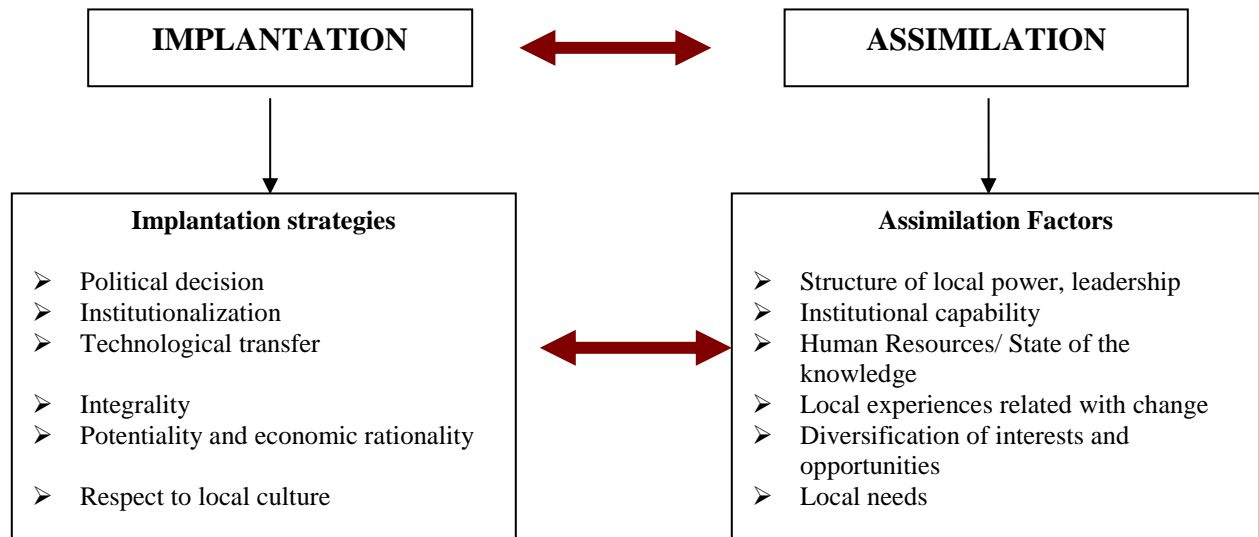


Figure 1. Interdependent components in the interactive model of social change

In the other hand, *assimilation* is a process through which community appropriates for itself implanted innovations and carries out change for its own benefit. Implantation does not drive systems fatally to assimilation; instead, an adequate implantation strategy should increase a successful assimilation probability, and a well-structured assimilation process should facilitate and guide the implantation impulse. Assimilation is close related with sustainability because if the innovation cannot be assimilated surely, it will not be sustained (Roth, 1999).

Thus, the change depends on both components: from the nature and characteristics of implementation (for example, the adequate dissemination of novelty) deployed by the change agent and from the nature and characteristics of the receptor that lead to assimilation (e.g. the system of beliefs, attitudes or values of the potential innovative). In other words, durable change can only be possible when: a) who drives him meets the requirements and adjust procedures in such a way that the proposal fits the expectations and

characteristics of the receiver, and b) when the characteristics of the receiving system are compatible with the adoption of the change and facilitate it. For example, technological change requires that who promote it should describe the advantages of the product, to adjust it to the needs of the user, to make compatible it with their culture, etc. Also requires that the receiver of the innovation have certain conditions that favorably affect the probability of adoption as values of achievement, beliefs in his own abilities to cope with change, skills to manage it, etc.

Well, as a summary we should mention the following:

(a) The change makes sense only if it is conceptualized as a social process. We understand change as a psycho-social phenomenon, which identifies both its origin and its effects.

(b) While the change is a natural process that influences everything, interactive model is interested only on the type of change that occurs by direct, deliberate and planned action with innovation and beneficial purposes.

(c) The model is interactive because we assume that the change is only possible as a result of the interaction between the strategies for implementation and factors of assimilation.

(d) Because of its interactive nature, it is possible to conceive change as a process of social construction. Both parties concur on equal terms and decide on the nature and characteristics of the adoption. The change as a participatory process prevents arbitrary decisions concerning the direction of change process.

(e) We also postulate that, in order to respond to the complexity of change phenomenon, the model must accept the contextually of its variables. We understand the contextually as the conditional influence of certain associated variables that affect probabilistically the willingness to adopt an innovation. Influence is considered conditional when no variables are by itself, responsible for the decision, unless it meets certain criteria.

Thank you