

## TRUST: A RESOURCE FOR COMMUNITY MANAGEMENT

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### ABSTRACT

*In view of the growing panorama of urban poverty and a limited impact of social policies aimed at fighting such poverty, it is necessary to analyze the strengthening of the population's capacities to manage improvements in their quality of life. Some of these capacities are explained by social capital, to be understood as the set of associative and cooperative relations based on trust and reciprocity. This would enable the population to expand its field of opportunities and obtain collective benefits. The purpose of this article is to find out from a poor neighborhood of the city of Mexicali, Baja California, Mexico, the trust levels that its population experiences with members of its community, authorities, and institutions. The purpose is to determine if the existing level of trust is favorable, or otherwise if it constitutes an obstacle for the development of community-oriented initiatives to improve their living conditions. For this purpose, a survey was applied and in-depth interviews carried out in the Ampliacion Xochicali neighborhood. As a result, it was found that, although the level of trust is low, mainly in the authority, the population jointly participates in the search for actions to increase their well-being.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Trust, Social Capital, Community Management*

### INTRODUCTION

In Mexico there is a crisis of confidence that affects both, the government, institutions and the population. On the one hand, in 2015 only 28% of the population expressed their trust in the federal government and 32% in those responsible to provide justice (OECD / CAF / CEPAL, 2018). On the other hand, the Encuesta Nacional sobre Capital Social en el Medio Urbano 2006 (the National Survey on Social Capital in the Urban Environment 2006) reported that only 28.8% of the population considered that the majority of the population as reliable, this percentage was reduced to 26.1% in 2011 (ENCAS, 2011).

Empirical studies (Martínez Cárdenas et al, 2015) show that in Mexico, groups that experience some type of segregation have lower levels of trust; therefore, in a poverty context with economic segregation, it is necessary to analyze the extent of trust, in view of the links between trust and well-being (Helliwell & Wang, 2010). In addition, during 2010 only 8.3% of the population was organized to solve some of the problems of their locality or neighborhood and 13.4% was coordinated with the authorities for the attention to some problem (ENCAS, 2011) in the country. This created an interest to identify whether trust constitutes a resource that favors participatory processes for the community management, especially in a municipality such as Mexicali with a population of 988,417 inhabitants (INEGI, 2018), of which 27.4% were in poverty in 2015 (CONEVAL, 2018).

The purpose of this survey was to find out the trust levels that the population experiences with members of its community in a poor neighborhood of Mexicali, Baja California, Mexico, with their authorities and institutions, in order to determine if the existing level of trust is favorable, or otherwise, if it constitutes an obstacle to developing community-oriented initiatives to improve their living conditions.

### **Trust, a Resource of Social Capital**

For Putnam (1994) social capital is an attribute of communities and defines it as "aspects of social organization such as trust, norms, and networks, which can improve the efficiency of a society by facilitating coordinated action" (Cited in Ramírez, 2005, p.26); In this type of capital, trust is towards the community, and among its members. In this sense, Charry and Massolo (2007) have stated that for a community to develop their interest in getting together as a group for the solution of certain situations, it is required to have a degree of trust and knowledge among the subjects who are grouped, but also their trust in other subjects, institutions, and organizations.

Trust "is an intangible asset that allows voluntary willingness among parties to perform interdependent actions in a state of uncertainty" (Martínez-Cárdenas et al, 2015, p.38)

Trust stems from interactions (Durstun, 2000; Gordon, 2005); thereby reducing uncertainty about the behavior of others (Gordon, 2005). On the other hand, "whenever there is confidence, the possibilities for both experience and action do increase" (Luhmann, 2005, p. 14), and otherwise, if there is no trust, the necessary links to carry out collective actions cannot be created (Helliwell & Wang, 2010).

### **METHOD**

The measurement of trust is considered a complex task due to its intangible nature, so approximate variables are used theretofore (Martínez-Cárdenas et al, 2015), hence, this survey was developed from a methodological triangulation (Martínez, 2008; Rodríguez et al, 1999), which consisted in the simultaneous use of qualitative and quantitative approaches, thereby expanding the validity of the results obtained by reducing possible biases when using a single method.

Thus, in a first stage, where the work had a descriptive purpose, when developing a diagnosis of trust levels in the Ampliación Xochicali development, a structured questionnaire was applied to household heads in order to know their trust levels towards members of their community, authorities and institutions; as well as the management actions that they carry out in their community. For the application of the survey, the 270 houses of the development were visited and 237 surveys were applied, representing 87.5%.

In a second stage, the study adopted an interpretive character by seeking to identify, through focused interviews (García and Oliveira, 1994, Sierra, 1998), how trust influences community management for the improvement of their well-being.

## Survey Site

The Ampliación Xochicali development is located in the southwest of the city of Mexicali and the housing development was delivered to its inhabitants in 2005, under the modality of progressive housing that consisted of houses with one room, a bathroom, safe water, electricity and drainage systems for the poor population, provided through an adjudication process operated by social leaders.

Thirteen years after its creation, the Ampliación Xochicali development is considered an experience of progressive urbanization consisting of a basic housing unit, presents positive results, since although the basic housing unit delivered to the population already had safe water, electric power, and drainage systems by 2018, the coverage of urban equipment has attained a 25 to 35% medium range, since the neighborhood also has residential type subdivisions of recent creation. However, there is still a deficit with respect to other equipment for culture, health, recreation, sports and education facilities at the upper-middle level (XVIII City Council of Mexicali-IMIP, 2007).

## RESULTS

### Trust Levels

In the Ampliación Xochicali development, a question was made to most people regarding the reliability of its inhabitants where only 11.5% answered they were reliable, in counterpart, 59.0% said they should look after their own backs and 28.2% answered that there are all kinds of people.

In relation to the trust that people have towards "the others", the interviewees had divided opinions based on the knowledge they have of others and the degree of interaction with them. When asked if the people are reliable, they responded:

"Not all. Because [some] people are not so sociable here, they do not talk to one another, they do not have interaction among them."(Mónica)

According to the people interviewed the little free time the inhabitants of such development have hindered interaction among them, thus there is little knowledge and recognition among them that results in a lack of trusts.

On the other hand, the ones who trust in others relay of the level of knowledge they have on them giving them an extent of expectations as to their behavior.

"People are reliable because they see that, at least with whom I have contact, they are people who are married and have children. One can see they are well treated and loved; they attend to their children's schools meetings, as they like to participate in activities that have to do with the family."(Irene)

In order to deepen trust in the Ampliación Xochicali population to the members of the community, they were questioned about it, on a scale of 1 to 10, where 1 represents minimum trust and 10 total trust.

According to the results of the survey presented in Table 1, it was found that the population relies to a greater extent on relatives, friends, and neighbors; in addition, although at a lower level, on civil organizations and churches, as well as those in charge of the administration of justice. With respect to members of the government, electoral organisms, and political parties, the population has lower trust, even though, for the first case, these were elected by the popular vote.

Regarding the authorities and institutions, the interviewees distrust them based on the knowledge and evaluation they make of them in the performance of their functions, attributing acts of corruption, abuse, and injustice. The foregoing was pointed out in the focused interviews.

"I do not trust the government, they have disappointed us in many aspects and I believe they have abandoned the essence of what true government means. They are more focused on becoming entrepreneurs for the creation of jobs, the same they disappear. But the public server is far from being really one and takes care of the essence, i.e., the family as the basis of the society."

On the other hand, the little confidence in the political parties is attributed by the interviewees to the fact that the political parties do not comply with their campaign proposals. In this sense they state:

"I do not trust political parties because they never comply with what they offer. They say they're going to help us if we vote for them, and then we do vote they forget their promises, and alas! they do not comply." (Glenda)

**Table 1: Trust in Social Agents**

| Social Agents            | Average Trust Level |
|--------------------------|---------------------|
| Members of the Community |                     |
| Family                   | 8.9                 |
| Friends                  | 8.5                 |
| Neighbors                | 7.4                 |
| Authorities              |                     |
| Governor                 | 4.3                 |
| Mayor                    | 4.2                 |
| Diputies                 | 3.9                 |
| Senators                 | 4.1                 |
| Justice Administrators   | 6.2                 |
| Institutions             |                     |
| Political Parties        | 4.5                 |
| Civil Associations       | 6.9                 |
| Electoral Organizations  | 5.7                 |
| Churches                 | 6.8                 |

**Source, Survey Applied on 2018. 1= Minimum Value 10= Maximum Value**

Regarding the authorities and institutions, the interviewees distrust them based on the knowledge and evaluation they make of them in the performance of their duties, attributing acts of corruption, abuse, and injustice. The above is jot down when they point out:

"The government, yes. Do I distrust government? Yes, I do, because they have disappointed us in many aspects and I believe they have abandoned the essence of what true government means. They are more focused on becoming entrepreneurs for the creation of jobs, the same they disappear, but they are far from being good public servants and take care for the essentials; i.e., the welfare of families as a basis of society." (Irene)

The low level of trust in the government is associated to the transparency the population perceives from the government's decision, being the same considered either very little (41.9%) or not transparent at all (49.4%). In the same sense, 55.7% acknowledge the existence of high corruption levels in the municipality; nevertheless, 50.3% acknowledged that the citizens are to blame for fostering such corruption.

"Well, I'm going to tell you the truth, all the political parties are the same, they are all the same, while they are fighting for the position, they promise and promise and they just have the position and they forget, they forget us." (Lupita)

### Communitary Management

Community management is a process that takes place in a given community and is based on collective, continuous and open learning for the design and execution of projects that address social needs and problems.

In order to identify, from the perception of its inhabitants, the problems that exist in the Ampliación Xochicali development, and the importance that they attribute to them, they were asked what they considered the main problem of their development. The results obtained indicated that the main problems of the neighborhood are public services (40.8%), mainly the lack of pavement and the deficiencies in the garbage collection service. Public insecurity appeared as the second problem (38.9%) because recently, according to the respondents; there has been an increase in the number of robberies to house, gang quarrels and other acts of vandalism. On the other hand, pollution (15.0%), as the third major problem affecting the neighborhood, is closely linked to the problem of lack of paving, since the main source of pollution is airborne dust particles from vehicles in transit.

The problematic of the Ampliación Xochicali described in the previous paragraph, originated a series of collective actions tending to reduce such problems such as the formation of a public works committee for the management of improved soil and the integration of neighborhood watch groups. It should be noted that although the lack of public safety is the second most important problem for the community, only 8.7% of the population is organized to give it attention. It is important to highlight that the committees that have been integrated, such as public works in charge of the management of public lighting and soil improvement, have been promoted by the authorities, and the participation of the population in these committees is scarce. They only met once during the last year.

The aforementioned problems, added to the lack of equipment (XVIII City Council of Mexicali-IMIP, 2007) suggested that the population of the neighborhood would be carrying out collective actions aimed at addressing these problems; However, Table 2 shows the scarce participation of the population in these actions.

**Table 2: Population Actions Aimed at the Communitary Management**

| Actions  | Population |
|--|------------|
| Applying support from a political parties                            | 11.7%      |
| Applying support from popular representatives (Diputies or Senators) | 12.9%      |
| Applying support from to any civil entity                            | 13.8%      |
| Joint action with other affected individuals                         | 14.7%      |
| Attending for decisions taking regarding their community             | 15.0%      |
| Participating in the solution of their community problems            | 16.3%      |
| Integrating him/herself to neighbors' commisions                     | 18.9%      |
| Signing petitions for their community                                | 20.4%      |

**Source: Applied Survey on 2018.**

In the opinion of the interviewees, 52.0% believe that the organized neighbors can have little influence on the authorities for the attention to the problems that arise in their neighborhood, while 12.3% consider this influence as null; *i.e.*, only 30.3%. This may be associated with the limited participation of the population in collective actions aimed at managing improvements for their community. On the influence of the neighbors in the authorities so that they carry out improvement actions for the development, the interviewees recognize that they can influence if they carry out requests

collectively, but at the same time they identify the need for those who lead the requests or if the organization is integrated by people with recognition in the community; *i.e.*, with a social capital that motivates the participation of the rest of the members.

"We can influence a lot, really a lot! All that is needed is first to identify the people who have weight in the community, to identify them as good people, who are workers, so I believe that the community does respond. I tell them that to the extent that the government sees people organized, we will get many things."

Likewise, the interest of the population in community matters was identified and their willingness to participate in the search for a solution to them; however, participation has been scarce. About the reasons why people do not collaborate to solve the problems of their neighborhood, the population pointed out in the first place, that everyone is interested only in their own problems (38.8%); second, they do not agree (37.5%); and, thirdly, that nothing is achieved (9.8%), among other less frequent reasons.

## DISCUSSIONS

The Ampliación Xochicali development population whom they trust more are their relatives, followed by friends and neighbors. In the second level of trust, institutions were located and, finally, with very little trust, the authorities. The previous results coincide with the point made by Fukuyama (1995) when mentioning that the subjects, having no confidence in the members of society tend to take refuge in their family circle and that according to Martínez-Cárdenas et al (2015) the level of trust in the family takes the opposite direction to the trust placed in society.

In the case study, the lack of trust in the authorities and institutions was found associated with the low participation of the population in the search for a solution to the problems that affect the community, such as Charry y Massolo (2007).

The neighborhood organization in the Ampliación Xochicali development obeys to the attention of concrete problems, and once solved, it disappears, wasting a resource for the management of other benefits. For this reason, it is necessary that the authorities or civil society organizations promote activities aimed at providing training in social organization and management among the population, triggering the mobilization and use of the social capital they possess in order to achieve the empowerment of the community and with it an effective action for the improvement of their living conditions.

In addition, under a sustainability approach, it is recommended to promote social intervention schemes that seek to formally integrate the community into participatory planning and management actions, where the population assumes an active role in making decisions about the public policy actions that they seek to influence their community and where they also recognize the importance of taking into account the perceptions of the population about what they consider a priority, since such perceptions influence the expectations of government actions, and based on those expectations, its impact and the performance of government instances is evaluated.

As exposed in this work, it is possible to point out that trust is a potential resource that should be promoted among the population, so that it becomes an ally to promote management processes aimed at improving their living conditions.

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