The Responsibility for the Development

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This text recaptures the concern about the exclusion-development binomial. Its focus is not the one from macro-economical analyses, but the one from reflections about the roles that may be played by social entrepreneurship and social responsibility in the construction of a social development sustained process.

It is aimed at recovering some theoretical aspects of the subject, as well as highlighting the practices developed in the universe of complex organizations, either from the so-called First, Second or Third Sector.

As a script for exposing a few analyses and propositions on themes of Sustained Development, Social Entrepreneurship and Corporate Responsibility, this text derives from old and everlasting concerns about social justice.

The Challenge that Remains

During the 1960’s and 1970’s, scholars and investors related their understanding of development to the growth in industrial production. Development stood for urban-industrial growth focused on macro-economical goals, often disconnected from social and environmental needs, typical of each municipality and its population.

The sequels of this narrow vision were patent in social indicators, which led to the famous metaphor of the two contradictory countries. Accelerated urbanization, unstructured migrations, exploitation of natural resources and mostly, low life patterns of large portions of the population evinced the model as insufficient to raise economical balance and social justice.

As opposed to the proposal of fast economical-industrial growth, the concept of development started to be defined with broader reach, qualified through the notion of sustainability.

The Rio 92 summit meeting was a milestone in the consolidation and dissemination of the concept of sustainable / sustained development. Development was not synonym to growth of some modern economical sectors any more. It had become a proposal for continual betterment of the multiple factors that influence human well-being and life conditions of people in society.

The concept of Sustainability assumes that multiple groups of social, economical and political forces are articulated so as to obtain simultaneous improvements: balance in income distribution, pattern of peoples’ life quality, access to civil rights and public service, guarantee of preservation and effective conditions for the reproduction of natural resources.

When the concept of sustainability is associated to the notion of development, it automatically leads to the challenge of collaboration. However, no matter the more concise or ambitious definition one adopts, the obvious propellers of this process are participation, mobilization, cooperative work, shared effort, collective construction. Perhaps due to these analogies, the considerations about development in the dawning of a new century may have
propitiated room for recovering a concept considered obsolete: the notion of social responsibility.

The Challenge of Collaboration

Social Responsibility is seen as a broad concept, in which the corporation, keeping its business commitments, creates methods, plans and incentives for it to internally and externally manage to cooperate with the expectations of social balance and justice, thus surpassing its by-law functions and even the interests inherent to its core business.

In a research developed in 1999 for the Council of the Comunidade Solidária, a mapping of entrepreneurial social performance was made, oriented at verifying if enterprises stimulated their employees to volunteering. From this mapping, resulted the study “Enterprises' Strategies in Brazil: Social Action and Volunteer Work”, which detected that 57% of a meaningful sample, formed by 1,200 companies from several sectors of Economy developed actions and projects aimed at reducing or eliminating social problems, which were not their entrepreneurial mission or strategic business objective.

For social performance, corporate volunteering and others to solidify in the corporate internal context, there must be at least a trend of adoptions of a so-called “culture of social responsibility”. Corporate social action must be preceded by the exercise of social responsibility inside the organization. This means that the characteristics of social equity and justice must be inherent to the managerial policies and practices, once the lack of coherence is evident in the company that pretends to be “socially responsible” but avoids ethical principles in its actions and decisions.

Studying Collaboration in Social Responsibility

In the effort for producing systematized knowledge about cooperation alliances between organizations for the development of social action, a research was made in 2001/2002, aimed at understanding the practices of corporate social performance, the ways in which these alliances between organizations from diverse sectors are established, and the trends generated from the action of such partnerships.

The cross-sector alliances are, in this context, the cooperation relationship established between two or more organizations, which may be inserted in any of the three sectors. Proposing the concept of strategic alliance, Austin tries to highlight the partnership relationships that acquire characteristics of deeply intertwined allied organizations.

In spite of the huge heterogeneity in corporate social action, results of the research may be singled-out, allowing reasonable generalization:

- Such practices seem to be ever more integrated to the group of corporate strategies
- The preferred area for projects and programs promoted by the enterprises is Education and the target population is constantly formed by children and adolescents.
- Corporate social action is still mainly philanthropic.

Reflecting about Responsibility and Entrepreneurship
The results of these studies allow the observation that new social actors – enterprises, entrepreneurs, executives and employees – are more and more incorporated in the scenario of organizational cooperation with social finality. However, the data just demonstrate the existence of a trend, still too restricted to ensure that initiatives of corporate social action are promoting effective impact on structural problems like uneven income distribution, educational gaps and lack of individual conditions for savoring freedom – a premise for development.

Such verification lends truth to the main criticisms that analysts shoot at corporate initiatives in winding social entrepreneurship or supporting social projects and programs as ways to solidify their corporate responsibility. But these critics are not enough to discourage the movement or to prove it blankets manipulative intentions. With the same arguments, one may construct reverse analyses: like saying that social responsibility practices may expand and deepen enough to unleash cultural transformation. A basic condition for this is the space and legitimacy for social entrepreneurship to blossom.

One may infer that cross-sector alliances lead to institutional strengthening, fan concepts of responsible citizenship, and make specific social programs and projects feasible. If they take on a strategic component, they may influence public policies, creating with their actions, facts and results that redirect Government strategies and orientations. In that sense, they may become major leaders of structural change processes in Brazil socioeconomic context, effectively contributing for social change.