

Chapter 16

Innovative Management of Community Territories and Inter–Organizational Communication for Regional Development

Timothy Leonard Koehnen
University of Trás-os-Montes and Alto Douro (UTAD), Portugal

ABSTRACT

The chapter addresses engagement, facilitation processes, governance, decentralized decision-making process, and inter-organizational relationships in rural communities in Portugal involving the community lands in mountainous areas. These lands are multifunctional in that they are used for forestry, grazing of ruminants, honey production, mushroom and dry nut gathering, water and wind rights, as well as plant protection and preservation of ecosystems. The management of these lands is the responsibility of the common land associations. These local institutions and their leaders represent the local users of these community lands. The chapter presents empirical data from an exploratory research study of inter-organizational linkages with these common land institutions and other governmental organizations and civil society entities. The entities include ministry and regional level organizations, municipal governments, and local development associations.

INTRODUCTION

The chapter addresses interorganizational communication, relationships, and multi-stakeholder relationships considering aspects such as communication, coordination, and cooperation between national, regional, or local organizations involved with the territorial sphere of the common land associations. These general aspects are analyzed based upon an adapted instrument constructed by Kang (1984) and also interviews and observations at community territory (common lands) meetings. The importance for

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the exploratory study (case study) is to strengthen the collaboration through a discovery process with interorganizational strategic planning and governance, as well as to determine how to improve capacity building and administrative competencies in management of rural community territories and their natural resources. A question to be addressed involving the capacity building is linked to the role of a horizontal-based entity concerned with strengthening regional development. The question is: What entity can facilitate a strategy to improve interorganizational communication for the territory?

The improvement in relationships and communication among rural and regional organizations in the same sphere of interest is related to an integrated rural development approach that attempts to permit organizations to mutually reinforce one another, or in other words create synergy among all the institutions in the management of forestry, natural resources, and the landscape in the territory, with perhaps coordination by a regional entity. Organizations in the sphere of influence within an integrated system require coordination activities, collaboration, and minimization of conflict (Brouwer, Woodhill, Hermati, Verhoosel, & van Vugt, 2015; Kang, 1984; Mosher, 1976). Position or power imbalances between organizations can permit the stronger to ignore the weaker in strategic negotiations. In addition, distrust by one organization can disrupt communication channels and the sharing of information. The chapter discusses governance and consensus domain further in the section on solutions, recommendations, and strategic planning.

In this section, the chapter will justify aspects attributed to the density of communication and cooperation between agencies in the same sphere of interests or region. Webb and Shivakoti (2008) and Kang (1984) identify additional interorganizational aspects with some duplication of ideas such as the maintenance of linkages to the local level and local users (residents), devolution of authority through institutional overlap, conflict reduction, financial and administrative support, preoccupation with differences in organizational performance, the relevance of natural resource management, collective action, market forces concerns, and clusters of interest. Interorganizational communication and relationships can be improved through a strategic planning process that increases the participation of stakeholders at all levels of governance, while minimizing decision-making inequalities between governmental and nongovernmental institutional leaders and local residents concerned with improving their management capabilities, livelihoods, and economic situation (Bouwma, van Apeldoorn, & Kamphorst, 2010; Koehnen & Cristóvão, 2006).

The results section, which is the main focus of the chapter, will present information surrounding the 5-point scale ratings by the presidents of the associations of common lands and will then interpret the information. The chapter also identifies responses to two open questions concerning organizational objectives and projects implemented in the community. Additional observations are related to participation in meetings, international seminars, and interviews. In closing, the chapter describes the strategic planning process and finishes with a conclusion to identify improvements for the performance of these associations as well as community networks.

BACKGROUND: METHODOLOGY

The exploratory research study used a case study design that has been recommended by McNabb (2004), Cresswell (1994), and Isaac and Michael (1981). The purpose of the research was to describe and assess interorganizational communication and relationships by focusing on the answers by the presidents of

common lands associations, as well as interviews and the collection of information at meetings and a community lands seminar. The case study questionnaire collected qualitative and quantitative data about organizational finance, objectives, formal and non-formal communication methods, and the perspective of the president of these associations on various factors and aspects related to coordination, cooperation, and conflict or rivalry. This process reflects a preoccupation to involve multiple stakeholders representing civil society entities and local and regional governance authorities.

The presidents of these associations were asked to use 5-point scales to rate various aspects of interorganizational communication and relations by considering the influence of other rural development organizations in the sphere of the management of multifunctional territories such as the Ministry of Agriculture (MA-DGDR) that has the final authority with the forest services or *Autoridade Florestal Nacional*, the natural park of the Alvão that is guided by the Instituto de Conservação da Natureza (ICN). It should also be stated that the “Sítio Alvão/Marão” is a protected area makes up 59,000 hectares, which is approximately 60% to 70% of the common lands in the population study. We interpret from meetings and interviews that the natural park might be considered an authority in the eyes of the presidents of these associations as it relates to conservation of natural resources. The government municipalities and nonprofit organizations (NPO) and local development associations (LDAs) are also a part of the territory.

The questionnaire did not request the perspective of the presidents of these common lands concerning three entities: regional universities, *Forestis*, and *Secretariado dos Baldio de Trás-os-Montes e Alto Douro* (SBTMAD), although the questionnaire permitted the respondents to include or identify other organizations in their assessment for collaboration. The SBTMAD works closely with local-level common land associations to represent their concerns, which often run contrary to the national common lands policies. *Forestis* is a nonprofit forestry association that supports the management of private and community forests. The regional university requires strengthening the collaborative mode with the civil society, public organizations, and businesses in the region to exchange ideas, identify research challenges and weaknesses in knowledge transfer, and to construct interactive communication methods to address innovative regional developmental goals.

A short discussion of the three mentioned entities’ relevance in the sphere of influence or region has been determined through contacts, meetings, and discussions at the European Community Area Seminar in 2011 that took place at a regional university and at other meetings. The meetings and seminar brought together presidents, governmental leaders, university researchers, and stakeholders from the previously mentioned entities and, of course, many organizations found in the questionnaire. These entities also play an important role in this sphere of influence.

The questionnaire was adapted from a survey research study carried out by Kang (1984) to understand the factors influencing interorganizational relations between extension agencies and other agricultural development agencies in Asia. The adapted questionnaire has been used to determine interorganizational relationships between governmental and nongovernmental entities, while using additional observations tools to collect data such as interviews and participation in informational meetings involving key stakeholders.

The population for this case study research design includes the *Presidentes dos Conselhos Directivos dos Baldios*, or the presidents of common land associations in northern Portugal within the counties made up of the *Perímetros Florestais da Cabreira - Cabeceiras da Basto, Marão e Meia Via, Vila Real e Ordem, Montemuro, and Ribeira da Pena e Barroso e Mondim de Basto*. The study mailed a questionnaire to 44 of these associations from the *perímetros florestais*, and 25 presidents returned a questionnaire. The response rate for this study is 57%.

The exploratory research case study identified clues to improve organizational governance, strategic planning, and decision making by the actors or stakeholders involved in the management of common lands and community territories. In this endeavor, the chapter delineates aspects associated with the following questions rated by the presidents using 5-point scales: 1) “To what extent are the goals of each of the following agencies compatible or complementary to the goal of your organization?” 2) “How well does each of the following agencies perform their respective tasks in assisting or in carrying out rural development/reforestation/protection?” 3) “How important is it that your organization coordinate its work with each of the following agencies? In other words, is it important that each of these other agencies coordinate their programs and activities with your organization?” 4) “How much higher or lower is your position as a director in relation to the position held by the head of each of the following agencies?” 5) “When your organization meets with highest-level representatives of each of the following agencies to discuss issues of mutual concern, how much influence does your agency have on the process and the decisions reached?” 6) “How often does your organization have contact with each of the following agencies? How are the contacts made? Be specific.” 7) “There may be some competition or even conflicts between your organization and each of the following agencies over possible problem areas such as overlapping responsibilities, competition for the same scarce resources, etc. Concerning these competitions or conflicts, answer the following questions? a) When there are overlapping interests between your organization and each of the following agencies, how often does each of the following agencies attempt to interfere with the attainment of your goals or claim credit for the work of your organization? b) Do the following agencies distrust your organization when there are opportunities or important reasons for the agencies to work together?”

The chapter also presents the mean percentages that these organizations use to communicate formally and informally with other entities and organizations in the sphere of interests. Also, the manner used to finance the association is presented, along with organizational objectives.

To reiterate, the questionnaire permitted the respondent to identify other organizations in this sphere of influence outside those listed within the questionnaire. The respondents did not identify other institutions, for example, Forestis or the SBTMAD. Nevertheless, the SBTMAD plays a key role in supporting these associations in the process of decentralization and fomenting common land and agricultural policies while working for collective solutions since 1979. The SBTMAD represents more than 300 common land associations, organizations, and councils in the north and center of Portugal that link indirectly and directly to the users or small family farms in the community territories. The associations’ presidents with little experience in forestry projects can outsource the management role to Forestis in order to gain technical help in reforestation, fire control, honey production, mushroom production, and marketing the territorial products. In other areas with less assistance from the Forestry Service, we can find Forestis involved in forest projects that are not linked to the *Perímetro Florestal*. Historically, the regional university has been investigating the problems associated with these common lands in Portugal.

MAIN FOCUS OF THE CHAPTER: RESULTS

In this exploratory research study, a preliminary descriptive analysis has been presented. The findings are shown by descriptive means, and in the open questions, a selection of the contextual responses was selected by the researcher.

The presidents contributed information as to the sources of financial support to carry out their activities involving the governance of community lands. The percentages are the result of calculating a percentage mean from the 25 returned questionnaires: Self-financing 77%, Governmental/national support 19%, Municipality support 3.3%, and European funds 0.7%.

The activities that contribute to community revenue are the exploitation of community forest products, such as timber, resin, nuts, hunting and fishing rights, and fuel wood, while also including income from the rent received for the installations of wind power and mineral water property rights. It also includes indirect livelihood benefits to the residents around the community, such as pasturing large and small ruminants, beekeeping, and mushroom harvesting. These are the means to capture local revenue by these associations and the community users, members, or family farms.

The presidents use the collective funds for activities such as maintaining community roads, reforestation, clearing brush, fire prevention, and other activities. As the decisions for the use of these funds are decentralized, the funding decisions are criticized at other levels if the funded activities do not relate to the forestry mission or the area of support by the governmental organizations. For example, one association used their funds to support a community center.

The respondents were asked to identify their organizational (common land association) objectives. Some of the responses were as follows: to protect the common lands and administer the community forestry space while conforming to local customs and traditions, to prevent forest fires, to manage finances and community funds, to implement community projects with forestry income, to support reforestation projects, and to value the conservation of nature. Only one response established their objective as the conservation of nature. It should be noted that 60% of these common lands are part of a protected area overseen by ICN.

The exploratory research case study identified clues from answers to the questionnaire and other informational sources to recommend organizational governance, social action, and decision making by the actors or stakeholders involved in the management of common lands and community territories by way of a facilitation process. The chapter delineates aspects associated with the following questions rated by the presidents using a 5-point scale.

Table 1 shows the mean percentages using the responses to the questions related to formal and informal communication methods used by these presidents. The questionnaire listed these methods and asked them to give a percentage of time that they used them. The predominant formal method that they use to communicate with governmental and nongovernmental organizations is meetings and telephone conversations. Those organizations in the same sphere of interest or region need, in our opinion, to improve

Table 1. Formal and informal methods to communicate

Formal	Percentage	Informal	Percentage
Meetings	60.8%		
Telephone Calls	17%	Informal Discussion	54%
Project Partners	8%		
Information Exchange	8%	Informal Contacts	46%
Internet	3.2%		
Co-planning	2.6%		
Joint Programs	0.4		

communication methods that reflect a social process that associates more strongly with a participative strategic planning process where all stakeholders have an equal footing in decision making. There is a need to strengthen more joint programs and co-planning methods that usually are associated with methods that strengthen networks and partnerships. Further study should also probe deeper to confirm if the informal methods are associated more strongly with the local-level contacts with the community residents.

The presidents were asked to respond to the following: To what extent are the goals of each of the following agencies compatible or complementary to the goal of your organization? (1 = None, 2 = Somewhat, 3 = Compatible, 4 = Very or 5 = Very much). In the perspective of these presidents, there is compatibility with the governmental and nongovernmental agencies identified for this exploratory study. The entities fall within the same sphere of interest, although the national-level entities such as the Ministry of Agriculture and the natural park have a lower mean response rate. See Table 2.

The presidents were asked to respond to the following question: How well does each of the following agencies perform their respective tasks in assisting or in carrying out rural development/reforestation/protection? (1 = Very Poorly, 2 = Poorly, 3 = Adequately, 4 = Well or 5 = Very Well) The local-level presidents have a negative opinion concerning the assistance that they share in carrying out tasks with these governmental and nongovernmental agencies (see Table 3). In general, these local associations are not content with assistance from these entities within their sphere of interest. An innovative management alternative could attempt to change this perspective with a regional entity, such as a higher educational institution that engages these organizations and builds trust with them through cooperative and educational processes. This aligns with a smart specialization strategy by higher educational institutions for regional development.

Table 2. Compatible or complementary goals

Entity	Mean
MA-DGDR	2.3
Regional Forest Service	3.3
Natural Park	2
Government Municipality	3
LDA/NPO	3

Table 3. Perform tasks in rural development/forestation/protection

Entity	Mean
MA-DGDR	1.8
Regional Forest Service	2
Natural Park	2
Government Municipality	2
LDA/NPO	2

Another question deals with the following: How important is it that your organization coordinates its work with each of the following agencies? (see Table 4) In other words, is it important that each of these other agencies coordinate their programs and activities with your organization? (1 = Not at all, 2 = Somewhat, 3 = Important, 4 = Very or 5 = Very much). As these common lands are associated with a forestry perimeter with the objective to implement a partial forestry regime, the high coordination perspective with the forest service's stakeholder is important. The multi-stakeholder partnership requires facilitation by a regional entity, such as a higher educational institution, to engage greater discussion to improve coordination. The facilitation activity should be developed using an entrepreneurial discovery process that permits sharing of ideas on an equal footing by all the participants.

The next question (see Table 5) deals with the following: How much higher or lower is your position as a director in relation to the position held by the head of each of the following agencies? (1 = Much lower, 2 = Somewhat lower, 3 = About the same, 4 = Somewhat higher, or 5 = Much higher). In their perspective, they believe that they have an equal footing with all the directors in the other agencies. One could suggest that decentralization should place them in a better position to negotiate with the regional and national entities while reflecting the interests of the community residents. A neutral entity could play a role to address this through working to construct greater collaboration. The neutral entity could be a higher educational institution in the region or sphere of influence.

The presidents were asked to respond to the following question using a 5-point scale (see Table 6): When your organization meets with highest-level representatives of each of the following agencies to discuss issues of mutual concern, how much influence does your agency have on the process and the decisions reached? (1 = No influence, 2 = A little influence, 3 = Some influence, 4 = Much influence, or 5 = Very much influence). The directors responded as either a little influence or some influence. Are there innovative means to improve the cooperation and collaboration? The responses do not reflect a situation where there is mutual reinforcement with one another and suggests a possible role for a smart

Table 4. Coordination with other organizations

Entity	Mean
MA-DGDR	2.6
Regional Forest Service	4
Natural Park	2
Government Municipality	3
LDA/NPO	2

Table 5. Position as director

Entity	Mean
MA-DGDR	2
Regional Forest Service	3
Natural Park	3
Government Municipality	3
LDA/NPO	3

Table 6. Influence on process and the decision reached

Entity	Mean
MA-DGDR	2
Regional Forest Service	3
Natural Park	2
Government Municipality	3
LDA/NPO	3

specialization interaction with the stakeholders by the regional higher educational institution. This interaction in the form of a facilitation process could identify participatory structures and capacities that are local but whose transformation requires additional resources, innovative management styles, and new social skills. The higher educational institution in the region or sphere of interest can be the catalyst for these educational and participatory methods.

The presidents were asked a specific question related to interorganizational communication: How often does your organization have contact with each of the following agencies? (1 = Never, 2 = Seldom, 3 = Sometimes, 4 = Often, or 5 = Always) The response established that the directors or presidents of these associations often contact the forest services and sometimes with the municipal government and local development associations. There was a follow-up question as to the method of contact (see next question). This question was open and forced them to identify the method most used. They made contact most often by telephone, and further study needs to be completed to determine the quality or density of these contacts (see Table 8). Do they strongly link to equal negotiation for co-planning, joint programs, and partnerships (see Tables 7 and 8)? There is a tendency to assume it is not on an equal footing, considering the methods of communication that are used and the reactions to the Ministry of Agriculture policies reflected from interviews and comments at common land meetings. It is recognized that one-way communication is associated with power, authority, and control and can contribute to meetings and telephone calls. Two-way communication should be “a process in which the participants create and share information with one another in order to reach a mutual understanding” (Rogers & Kincaid, 1981, p. 63]. The contacts need to be more participative and involve co-planning, partnerships, and joint programs that will be discussed under the heading of strategic planning and innovative smart specialization strategy when higher educational institutions shape horizontal communication.

Table 7. Contact with organizations

Entity	Mean
MA-DGDR	2.1
Regional Forest Service	4
Natural Park	1.9
Government Municipality	3.2
LDA/NPO	3

Table 8. Communication methods by percentage

Methods	Mean
Telephone	46%
Meetings	23%
Person to Person	18%
Letters	9%
Protocol	4%

Table 9. Overlapping interests

Entity	Means
MA-DGDR	1.6
Regional Forest Service	2
Natural Park	2
Government Municipality	2
LDA/NPO	1

How are the contacts made? Be specific.

The next question probes for rivalries between agencies. It was as follows: There may be some competition or even conflicts between your organization and each of the following agencies over possible problem areas such as overlapping responsibilities, competition for the same scarce resources, etc. Concerning these competitions or conflicts, answer the following question? a) When there are overlapping interests between your organization and each of the following agencies, how often does each of the following agencies attempt to interfere with the attainment of your goals or claim credit for the work of your organization? (1 = Never attempt, 2 = Seldom attempt, 3 = Sometimes attempt, 4 = Often attempt, or 5 = Always attempt). In the perspective of these presidents who responded to the questionnaire, they believe that these agencies seldom attempt to interfere with the attainment of their goals (see Table 9). And it is noted that the local development associations/nongovernmental organizations never attempt to interfere in organizational objectives.

The last question to be presented looks at the question of trust (see Table 10). The following question attempts to understand problems with trust: There may be some competition or even conflicts between your organization and each of the following agencies over possible problem areas such as overlapping responsibilities, competition for the same scarce resources, etc. Concerning these competitions or conflicts, answer the following question? b) Will the following agencies distrust your organization when there are opportunities or important reasons for the agencies to work together? (1 = Never, 2 = Seldom, 3 = Sometimes, 4 = Often, or 5 = Always). The presidents do not perceive problems with distrust. The presidents believe that the organizations or agencies such as the natural park and the local development associations/nonprofit organizations never distrust them when working together. And yet, they perceive that the forest service and municipal government seldom distrust their organization. These are important entities for cooperation in the management of these community lands along with a regional higher educational institution. The partnership requires a smart specialization strategy with a trusted regional entity, such as a higher educational institution that could work to change these perspectives and inherent tensions.

Table 10. Distrust your organization

Entity	Means
MA-DGDR	1.3
Regional Forest Service	2
Natural Park	1
Government Municipality	2
LDA/NPO	1

The data analysis, interviews, and discussion have suggested that improvement in stakeholder partnerships and organizational relationships should be addressed. The next section discusses the relevance of facilitation, communication, partnerships, and strategic planning to strengthen organizational relationships, as well as increase the participation and mobilization of the residents as equal stakeholders in the governance of the local-level association or council. The social action or discovery process can contribute to improving innovative co-planning and joint programs.

Coordination does not happen without some type of facilitation, planning, or effort by all of the organizations in the sphere of interest. The study assumes that strategic planning or a social action process can improve organizational performance for all the entities within the natural resource and forest management. A regional higher educational institution can coordinate the collaboration by facilitating the dialogue between all the entities. The need for additional capacity building and strengthening of interorganizational communication can be interpreted from the data collected and thus link to the need for a regional university to adapt an innovative smart specialization strategy. The national or regional government can enhance economic growth and stability in the various spheres of interests in a region with developmental concerns.

SOLUTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The strategic planning process and multi-stakeholder partnerships have been recommended as an important tool for innovative rural and regional development since Beal and Hobbs (1964), as well the recent work of Brouwer et al. (2015) for being participative and enabling. The interactive steps or guide can be associated with the recent concerns in Portugal to develop social development networks (advisory councils/municipal strategic planning) within rural municipal governments in Portugal (Koehnen & Cristovão, 2006). It also has been addressed in other types of local organizations for involving local residents in the decision-making process (Koehnen & Santos, 2009). In this chapter, the approach is to improve interorganizational communication and planning with organizations in the same sphere of interests, as suggested by Bouwma et al. (2010), Beal and Hobbs, (1964), and others. The strategic planning process carried out by a key regional entity can also be an instrument at the local level to improve the involvement and participation of the local residents in the governance of these associations. Kempton (2015) has suggested a beneficial role of universities to facilitate social innovation (smart specialization) in peripheral regions by being a key driver for development and engagement.

Beal and Hobbs (1964), Koehnen and Santos (2009), and Koehnen (2011) described the following steps in the process of social action (strategic planning) that should not be considered linear, but open to the possibility of beginning the process again and doing more than one step at a time. For example, the process to identify relevant social systems in the sphere of influence or region might require further analysis. In any case, the steps are 1) analysis and identification of existing social systems and networks; 2) convergence of interest with citizens and stakeholders; 3) analysis of the previous social action in the community or region; 4) delineate the social systems and relevant networks; 5) start the steps of social action; 6) legitimize the process with local leaders and stakeholders; 7) create a diffusion process with the media and “engagement” (information sharing); 8) strengthen interorganizational communication; 9) create a consensual definition of needs and problems with relevant social systems, groups, and local organizations; 10) decide on action by relevant social systems and social networks; 11) formulate objectives, 12) plan for a decision on the means and education to be used in interventions, 13) build a work plan; 14) mobilize human, financial, and material resources; 15) complete the steps of action or intervention; and 16) evaluate the strategic planning process to improve, correct, and strengthen the process. This mechanism of community or regional development and organizational communication can be a learning process and mobilize the local and regional population in order to increase capacity for governance and resolve local problems associated with “empowerment” (Koehnen, Baptista & Portela, 2004; Koehnen & Cristóvão, 2006; Koehnen & Santos, 2009). Those involved in carrying out the engagement process can be the human resources from a regional university.

Beals and Hobbs (1964) and Woods and Sloggett (1990) have identified basic reasons for using strategic planning by communities and regions, as it promotes efficiency of the use of scarce resources by the stakeholders; strengthens coordination of the work of all the entities; establishes greater consensual decision making; gives the community or region a greater competitive position in rural development; constructs a participative process; mobilizes the residents, small farmers, and other stakeholders; and improves community communication and relationships with other entities in the sphere of interest or region.

In addition, educational programs organized by regional entities in rural areas can play an important role for rural and regional development and allocative ability of human capital (Huffman, 1974). In addition, Samuelson and Nordhaus (2005) explain that growth and stability of economies may require governmental investments in research and education for the qualification of human resources. “Education and special support in the form of training and mentoring is likely to be needed during the transition, so that previously excluded groups gain the capacity to interact effectively with local governance, educational and financial institutions” (Narayan, 1999, p. 36). These considerations are important for greater governance, management, and policy construction by the users of common lands and other stakeholders. Regional universities in the sphere of influence are horizontally positioned to facilitate this educational programming.

Pretty and Ward (2001) have recognized that constructive resource management has been associated with local-level management systems that still require external agencies (regional universities) or individuals to strengthen the knowledge and skills of local actors or users. The facilitation processes with local groups are vital for the maintenance of a community management system. “Where possible, work with existing social capital, especially people’s associations and organizations, for the design and delivery of projects. This has the potential to (a) improve beneficiary targeting, (b) reduce project costs, (c) enhance sustainability, and (d) strengthen civil society through strengthening these organizations” (Grootaert & van Bastelaer, 2002, p. 36).

And yet rural and regional areas in Portugal have adult and excluded populations that are not engaged in community or associational activities (Koehnen et al., 2010). For this reason, facilitators need to focus educational activities and training objectives to strengthen empowerment and collective decision making for local users of community lands. These facilitation programs need training modules that include leadership skills, civic education (understanding local government and social services), and governance and social development (leadership skills and collective action). The facilitation process can promote voluntary internship activities in governmental and nongovernmental organizations in these rural communities. These engagement activities would be a part of social learning and be supervised by external agencies (universities) with extension and development agents that promote group discussion sessions with local groups about their experiences.

The facilitation activities need to permit the participant to construct additional networks that reflect the vertical and horizontal relationships found in their local governmental and nongovernmental organizations. The facilitation process engages local people to construct leadership and human capital capacities and social skills that should be oriented toward collective actions within their communities. Common land associations and governmental organizations should be concerned with engaging the local populations in organizational management to increase community decision making and construct additional social skills through participatory activities such as advisory councils and voluntary internships (Koehnen, 2011 Koehnen & Cristóvão, 2006; Koehnen et al., 2010).

Rural and regional development policies require a holistic approach to strengthen facilitation processes in development and rural extension education organized at the regional university that reflects a smart specialization strategy in strategic planning. In many cases, rural and regional development policies need to value or support activities, such as participation in town meetings, internships in governmental or nongovernmental organizations, or other volunteer activities supported by regional universities. The engagement initiatives reflect a concern for building partnerships and networks in these rural communities and territories. The construction of the territorial networks and improvement in interorganizational communication should involve the entire regional population. Those with unequal skills and who are socially disadvantaged require facilitation to construct synergistic social and communication skills through a continuous nonformal educational system or rural extension programming that can take place at regional universities (Koehnen et al., 2010; Koehnen, 2011; Devaux et al., 2007).

The lifelong learning process is not one-dimensional, but multidimensional, involving the economic, social, cultural, environmental, and civic spheres in the rural regional areas. It reflects the concern that rural extension education, social learning, and rural development should increase the participation and empowerment of the local users in this sphere of interest or region. The university-led facilitation process involves a “learning activity undertaken throughout life, with the aim of improving knowledge, skills and competencies within a personal, civic, social and/or employment related perspective” (OECD, 2003, p. 15).

This mechanism to support regional development and organizational communication is a social learning and mobilization process for the local population to increase capacity for governance and resolution of local problems associated with “empowerment” and the territorial management of these common lands (Koehnen & Cristóvão, 2006; Koehnen & Santos, 2009; Koehnen et al., 2004). Social learning and facilitation can be integrated in the strategic planning process of those involved within, for example, a smart specialization strategy by regional universities.

FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

Foray et al. (2012) and Kempton (2015) promote innovative strategies for smart specialization with universities as one of the drivers for regional development. This establishes a horizontal decision-making activity through a facilitation process by university outreach actors and researchers. The civil society entities, associations, businesses, and governmental and nongovernmental organizations work together in collaboration to resolve problems within their territory or sphere of interests with support from both the national and regional government development organizations and the regional university. This implies that a university facilitator or researcher can lead these activities.

Foray (2015) describes smart specialization as “a process of diversification through the local concentration of resources and competences in [a] certain number of new domains that represent possible paths for the transformation of productive structures … [the] smart specialization process is embedded in productive structures and capacities that are local but whose transformation requires new resources, new technologies and new competences, perhaps generated within the same local area although they may also come from outside … What can emerge as a smart specialization is a new activity where an innovative project complements existing productive assets.”

Coordination, cooperation, and mobilization through engagement by the human resources from a higher educational institution can play a positive role in economic, social, environmental, and cultural regional development in peripheral regions. The role of universities in engagement, facilitation, social action processes for regional development, innovation, and economic growth can be associated with smart specialization strategies. Collaboration with the regional stakeholders within the civil society entities, local-level governments, businesses, governmental and nongovernmental organizations, and associations should reflect a strategy of facilitation, social action processes, and a smart specialization strategy. The higher educational institutions can build trust and collaboration with the regional stakeholders in a collaborative and innovative partnership that reflects the concerns and problems within a region.

The role of the higher educational institution to improve regional cooperation, interactive communication, and collaboration with the majority of stakeholders in the region can be an important research, teaching, and evaluation direction for the future development of a peripheral regional sphere of interest. The new approach for innovative solutions at the level of regional development requires a collaborative change in the governance and policies of regional higher educational institutions.

CONCLUSION

Coordination and cooperation can be strengthened through facilitation, planning, or collaborative effort by all of the organizations in the sphere of interest within a region. This engagement can be established by facilitation through a regional higher educational institution. The exploratory case study assumes that strategic planning or a social action process promoted by university staff can improve organizational and regional development performance in protecting and sustaining the management of forests and natural resources. The necessity for additional capacity building and strengthening of interorganizational communication and relationships can be gleaned from the data collected in the study and thus link to the relevance for governments and universities to enhance economic growth, engagement, and stability in this sphere of interest or region.

The facilitation process and smart specialization strategy to maintain and continuously improve linkages to the local organization for decentralized governance are relevant and important. Further consideration should address the social learning process to hear and address the concerns of the local users and rural residents in these communities responsible for the community territories. The social learning process is interactive and contributes to collective learning by all the entities in the region in order to strengthen decentralized decision making.

The social action process and a smart specialization strategy directed at social groups in these communities is important in order to strengthen the involvement and active participation of the local users and residents in the decision-making process within this sphere of interest or region. The devolution by national government organizations to the collective and local decision-making process does not imply that national government leaders and higher educational institutions use this situation to cut financial support for the management of community territories. It does assume that all organizations cooperate to foster and plan means to strengthen organizational relationships and performance. For this reason, regional universities have an important role to play for improving and strengthening regional partnerships.

“As Uphoff astutely recognizes, paradoxical though it may seem, ‘top-down’ efforts are usually needed to introduce, sustain, and institutionalize ‘bottom-up’ development. We are commonly constrained to think in ‘either-or’ terms—the more of one the less of the other—when both are needed in a positive-sum way to achieve our purposes” (Grootaert & van Bastelaer, 2002, p. 273). For this reason, the devolution by central government organizations to the collective and local decision-making process does not imply that national government leaders use this situation to cut financial support and facilitation activities involved with the management and engagement of community territories and regional development but support a lead entity such as a regional university for this democratic process. And thus, regional organizations made up of rural residents should cooperate to foster and plan means to strengthen organizational relationships and performance for the collective objective to maintain their institutional resilience and robustness (Nkhata, Breen, & Moismane, 2012; Westholm, Moseley, & Stenlas, 1999). The institutional robustness fits with regional universities that promote an innovative participatory process through a smart specialization strategy.

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KEY TERMS AND DEFINITIONS

Conflict: A perception that an organization has disoriented interest against another organization, created relationship problems, unequal access to resources and unclear responsibility that interferes with cooperative and collaborative activities between the regional organizations.

Cooperation: Organizations that share common interests and resources to work toward a unified objective or goal for regional development.

Coordination: All organizations in the same sphere of interest working to resolve problems to combat the regional development issues.

Facilitation: A non-formal educational and democratic process that engages pertinent stakeholders within an area of regional interest to assist them in a collective decision-making for collaborative regional development.

Interorganizational Communication: Horizontal communication between regional entities or organizations within a common sphere of interest.

Smart Specialization: An innovative process organized by a regional higher educational institution that promotes the transformation of productive structures in a region engaging the civil society, businesses, associations, non-governmental organizations and municipal governments to generate new economic and social activities.

Social Action Process: A purposive planned and executed bottom up or top down process that mobilizes and engages organizational stakeholders inside a sphere of interest to achieve a collective goal and objective for social and economic change that benefits the development of a community or region.