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## ESSAY

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Translated by Tim Ennis

# DECENTRALIZATION AND EMPOWERMENT: A SOCIAL POLICY CHALLENGE\*

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Through a series of interviews with social program developers, this paper examines the operating conditions of a decentralized system of social program development, along with its opportunities and limitations. This analysis firstly comes down in favor of the hypothesis of “empowerment” (proposed in the paper “*Habilitación, pobreza y política social*”), while also arguing that to incorporate the empowerment dimension in social policy, decisive progress needs to

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*Estudios Públicos*, 59 (invierno 1995, “Descentralización y habilitación: Un desafío de política social”).

be made in the process of decentralization. Consistent with the idea of equitable social development, the author argues, there is an urgent need to consider decentralization as a permanent pillar of public policy.

## Introduction

This paper forms part of the research project “Decentralization, Social Development and Poverty” (*“Descentralización, Desarrollo Social y Pobreza”*), whose main purpose has been to help enrich and develop social policy via a qualitative study of poverty in Chile, with emphasis placed on the personal characteristics that might lead to taking better advantage of the opportunities offered by the social welfare system and the country’s growth in general.

The research undertaken has made it possible to verify in the field the study’s initial hypothesis, namely that within populations traditionally classified as poor there are significant differences relating to the achievement of targets or overcoming conditions of material poverty. In other words, from this point of view the poor are not a uniform conglomerate of people with material shortcomings, but a complex world where not everyone has the same ability to overcome this condition<sup>1</sup>.

As well as the above, and considering the general social policy strategy that has been adopted in this country, it seems an opportune moment to seek ways to understand and, therefore, respond to new challenges on the issue of overcoming poverty. Implicit here is the thesis that if we assume a new type and level of national development, it would be appropriate also to associate this with a special type of program and policy for social development.

If our country’s current economic growth and development conditions prevail, it is highly likely that as a result of greater wealth, social policy needs will arise that are unsuspected today. For example, it is clear that in some sectors the issue is not a matter of coverage any more, but rather of quality. In other sectors, typically addressed by social programs and policies, housing for example, the type of products generated by

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<sup>1</sup> The preliminary texts of the research were published in the series “*Antecedentes*” (Nºs 1-9) published by *Centro de Estudios Públicos*. A summary of the main methodological aspects and the conclusions of the research on the dimension of empowerment can be found in the paper by Ignacio Irarrázaval, “Habilitación, pobreza y política social”, which is reproduced in this number of the journal *Estudios Públicos*.

housing policy is today being strongly questioned, in the sense that standards are below those associated with current levels of per-capita income, and consequently the housing solutions demanded do not correspond to those currently being produced.

Apart from the impact a new stage of development may have on the different programs and products of current social policy, we believe the greatest change should be linked to reforms in the administration of social resources, mainly through greater or more effective decentralization of the programs. In this way one would be responding to the main challenge that emerges from the research carried out: the need to incorporate into the social welfare process institutional capacities, instruments and management mechanisms that include local characteristics —relating both to the place where the program is carried out and to the people involved— in decisions on programs and projects. The main challenge therefore consists of translating the concept of empowerment (or lack of empowerment) which the research proposes as an analytical category<sup>2</sup>, into the management of decentralized social policies and programs.

Finally, we understand that the eradication of poverty in this country involves an active search for mechanisms and procedures to allow greater private-sector participation, an active role played by beneficiaries themselves and a progressive acceptance that overcoming poverty is more than a project or task pertaining to government. Necessarily, it is a project for the whole of society and, consequently, a challenge that needs to permanently updated.

In this study, the conceptualization of a continuum of personal situations characterized by greater or lesser “empowerment” (a term which summarizes positive personal and cultural conditions for relating effectively to the formal system in general, and the social welfare system in particular), was compared with the conditions in which social policy is currently carried out at the local level, seeking thereby to reconcile the research results with the possibility of generating and coordinating programs to respond to this particular segmentation of poverty groups. In this context, it should be stressed that the concept of empowerment was generally received very positively by the experts interviewed<sup>3</sup>.

In the proposal for social policy strategies and actions with a personal and empowering content, the decentralization of the public administra-

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<sup>2</sup> See Ignacio Irarrázaval, *op. cit.*

<sup>3</sup> The concept was presented to a group of specialists in social development, selected from different municipal organs and private social development institutions.

tion of programs is a key element. This paper presents ideas and results investigating the relation between the two.

In the first part of the paper a conceptual framework is set up for developing local social policies and programs, based on reflections on the general state and condition of the national decentralization process. The second part describes the results of a series of in-depth interviews carried out with developers and managers of local social programs, aimed at characterizing the conditions under which social welfare programs are currently carried out, as well as the perspectives and images of decentralization that they work with, their perceptions of the validity of our hypotheses and the results obtained, and, finally courses for action and future investigation. The paper concludes with reflections on possible developments in the decentralization process as well as public action to promote social development.

## I. MUNICIPAL SECTOR CHALLENGES AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

The recent boom in the municipal sector in response to proposals for decentralization and local development have identified, in an increasingly precise way, the needs that have to be addressed in achieving effective administration of local development in its spatial, urban, social and economic dimensions. This, in a general context of a significant economic, political, administrative and institutional change.

Consequently, it is worth noting here the main characteristics which, in our judgment, define the present situation in local sector development, relating these to the possible spaces to be occupied by local or municipal governments in contributing to the eradication and defeat of poverty. In particular, it is important to emphasize how emerging issues in the process of consolidating local decentralized government are linked to new forms of action in social policies that embrace the concepts of empowerment.

### **1.1 The decentralization process and social policy**

The fundamental paradigm of political and administrative decentralization has opened up and, in fact, has constituted an integral part of the government agenda, gradually consolidating itself in innovative forms of development administration based on the resources, potentials, limitations and constraints in each locality. This, in the territorial, economic, social and institutional spheres.

Currently this process is gravitating towards the reform of the structure of state administration, in basic legal frameworks, in regulatory provisions peculiar to each municipality, in the make-up of the administrative structure of the public sector, etc. Clearly this transformation is far from concluded and, what is more interesting still, it is developing into an ongoing activity; i.e. we are facing the possibility of accepting that decentralizing administrative reform, apart from comprising a set of images, proposals, targets and concrete objectives (which in themselves might make up a sort of decentralizing horizon), also implies a disposition and openness towards gradual and systematic processes of reflection, improvement, review and putting into practice of proposals that are increasingly more in tune with the conditions of each locality.

Decentralization as a form of administrative organization represents changes in the style and forms of government, emphasizing, for example, the concepts of governability and equity in management<sup>4</sup>. From this point of view, decentralization can be seen as a line or axis of government work, with successive stages of progress, which does not end with the devolution of administrative faculties to local authorities.

Having said that, although the widespread use of decentralization terminology and concepts implies a clear opportunity in that it indicates the acceptance of a trend, it also brings with it certain risks associated with a lack of systematic and continuous processes to promote decentralization, as well as the absence of universally accepted indicators to evaluate the process and a confusion of stages within it. This can be seen in the recurrent confusion between actions of administrative devolution and decentralization, which translates, for example, into believing that decentralization ends with the transfer of decision-taking faculties on merely administrative procedures to lower administrative levels, rather than the definition of local development goals and the resulting policies and programs.

Recent progress in the national decentralization process has tended to focus on improving the political institutional framework (especially the generation of authorities), on the improvement and transformation of the legal bases of decentralization (Regional Government Laws, Municipality Act, Municipal Revenue Act), on promoting mechanisms for citizen participation in local administration (Borough Councils, Regional Councils, Neighborhood Association Law), and to a lesser extent on perfecting tech-

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<sup>4</sup> See Sergio Galilea and Pablo Jordán, "Gobernabilidad urbana in Chile: Algunas reflexiones, enfoque y propuestas", in *Working Paper*, N° 10, "Consulta nacional sobre Desarrollo Urbano, Ministry of Housing and Urban Development", Santiago de Chile, 1993.

nical mechanisms for undertaking public investment in the regions and localities.

Without belittling past achievements in this context, we believe there is a need to improve and advance in the decentralization of attributions and resources for local government action; in other words, overcoming the general condition of administrators that municipal and local authorities possess, and endowing them with growing and progressive levels of autonomy and decision-taking capacity.

In synthesis, our country belongs to the set of nations which have accepted that by promoting a decentralization process, development options are improved in all dimensions, at the same time as responding to varied social demands and promoting a pattern and style of development with profound consequences at all levels of government administration. While acknowledging progress already achieved on this question, which, it should be pointed out, have put the country in an outstanding position, efforts are needed to take new decisive steps in the process, especially as regards local authorities' and government capacities for taking action and proposing initiatives. This is strongly linked to the research results in terms of generating fresh views of the characteristics of poverty in this country.

The main opportunities for developing policies and social programs of decentralized stamp, in accordance with the new conditions imposed on the local institutional framework by the decentralizing reform of public administration, relate to the greater capacity that local authorities have today to orient local development, with the formal setting-up of instances for citizen representation in the municipal decision-taking process, and the growing demand for forms of participation by civil society and the private sector in the provision of social services. For that reason it is necessary to incorporate categories of selection of the population which relate types of decentralized services and programs to the principle of targeting the most needy, as well as taking advantage of styles and scales of work which naturally emerge in the local scenario.

The decentralized management of social programs should reflect the diversity peculiar to any social group. This diversity, consistent with the notion of decentralization, cannot be incorporated into centralized social program management, characterized by universality, the definition of mega-category groupings, homogeneity at the time of creating solutions, and consequent depersonalization.

The most important lesson to be drawn from the research is that within the poor segment of the population, according to the official definition, there is a wide variety of situations spaced out along a continuum,

which reflects the presence in individuals of a set of attributes thought to be fundamental for overcoming poverty, in the context of the social welfare system existing in Chile, the country's general development conditions and on the basis of social policy principles.

In poor sectors of the population, empowerment constitutes a category for selecting and grouping poverty which is consistent with conditions for decentralized social policy action. By stressing the personal conditions, as well as the material or economic conditions of the beneficiary, this leads to new modes of defining projects and programs, as well as the evaluation, action and finally the administration of social development, which support new categories of evaluation, new development targets apart from the quantitative, new spaces for participation and new forms of public-private cooperation in the municipal space. The clear consequence for the scale of programs, the type of attention or provision, the form of operating and administering projects, the time horizon for the design and development of programs, the forms of evaluation, the weighting and valuing of resources and other things, are all key aspects in linking a concept such as empowerment to social policy decentralization.

Clearly, the current form of decentralization in social sector public policy administration in Chile is a long way from this scenario, and in practice is one of the most important fronts in the rich and on-going process of decentralization and, particularly, in the grand task of national development: overcoming poverty and achieving social equity.

## **1.2 Democracy and Local Management**

A first important element which characterizes the overall trends and challenges of change in the local administration scenario, is the consolidation of the democratic regime and the consequent rebuilding of citizen participation structures and forms of expression of opinion and action, in our case in the local administration space. The search for a solution to many problems relating to the conditions of urban life, which in themselves put a renewed accent on local capacities to provide solutions to such problems, is a significant part of the agenda. Material poverty, unsatisfied basic needs, questions of employment, welfare and urban services, and other issues linked to housing and residential surroundings, clearly form the focus of concern among community leaders and representatives.

Democratic administration in local and decentralized urban management stresses the ideal of participation, citizen representation and transpa-

rency in administration. In decentralized and empowering social policies, such conditions are fundamental.

One of the research findings is that there are sectors among the poor which show an extraordinary creativity and capacity to take initiatives themselves to improve their material condition, to make use of the opportunities that the social welfare system offers: in other words, to fix things for themselves. In this respect, the important role of women needs to be emphasized, in their dual roles as housewife and worker, and, not infrequently, community leader.

Democratic local administration spaces offer clear opportunities for generating programs to overcome poverty, which, backed by official resources, can mobilize the personal, financial material and management resources of the beneficiaries themselves. In this respect, the preparation of *ad hoc* programs for special groups is clearly a space for empowerment, for decentralized management.

The opinions of those interviewed, presented below, provide clear examples of issues, sectors, groups and projects in this sense. All of them share the fact of being sufficiently specific, small-scale or local as not to form part of centralized social development programs. Consequently, all of them are social development experiences which it is possible to implement locally, in a decentralized way. In the vast majority of them there is also the possibility of incorporating empowerment as a variable for selection, as well as an objective to be achieved.

### **1.3 The new economic order and decentralization**

The second element that affects local government is the reorganization model of national economies in response to a transformation of their productive structure and apparatus, to satisfy the requirements of the new terms-of-trade scenario characterized by aspects such as the integration of markets, domestic and foreign competition, adjustment policies, a changed state role, stimulus to private-sector initiative, etc.

The way in which this new economic order affects local administration varies from case to case, but there are clearly at least two basic constants: firstly, local administration moves towards a collective reflexion on the economic destinies of the locality; i.e. the way in which actions undertaken by the municipality, and the public sector in general, affect the productive capacities of the locality, is now an important element, as government designs favoring subsidy as a style of resource allocation steadily fall out of favor.



The second dimension of impact is the extreme opposite. Adjustment policies have given pride of place to a structural condition of our societies, namely the existence of vast groups of the population living in situations of great shortcoming. Poverty, and overcoming it, are today a central component of public policy definition at all levels.

In both spheres, that of the insertion of the locality into economic development and growth, and that of meeting the needs of low-income groups, an important role is there to be played by the modern municipality and local development agencies.

### **1.4 Decentralization and Environmental Sustainability**

Finally, and as a third dimension of local administration, there is growing concern today for environmental sustainability as a task of state administration. The acute contrast that exists between benefits obtained in the short run and estimated long-run costs, in relation to the natural basis that underpins development, has thrown into relief the importance of analyzing and controlling modes production and wealth creation. Wealth, while fundamental for overcoming of poverty, should not be created at the cost of sacrificing opportunities for development and growth in future generations. In other words, sustainability is motivated by the goal of combining growth strategies with safeguarding the natural base, in order to make possible opportunities for a growth process that is sustained over time.

Like the previous dimensions, the municipality has the job of interpreting currents and proposals on this issue, finding spaces and formulas for its insertion into local administrative practices.

The link between development policies and urban management emphasizing environmental stability, on the one hand, and overcoming poverty on the other, becomes clear when one considers that a significant part of the environmental costs of urban development relates to poverty situations. For this purpose, suffice it to mention the enormous environmental cost represented by traditional forms of satisfying fuel needs in low-income sectors —the main reason for rapid deforestation in outlying urban areas. Likewise: unsuitable ways of treating and disposing of domestic waste, inadequate sewage treatment, pollution inside the home, outbreaks of unhealthy conditions associated with water consumption, lack of drains, etc. Clearly, the poor city is a non-sustainable urban system, with dangerous patterns of use and exploitation of the natural base, for which reason it is a relevant factor in decentralized strategies for overcoming poverty.

This aspect, which is systematically ignored, is a natural point of coordination between traditional forms of local urban administration and anti-poverty programs of an empowering stamp. In other words, residential surroundings, on a domicile, municipal, neighborhood and community scale, constitute a focus of support for the decentralized development of innovative social programs. There, the traditional roles of the municipal system come together with public perception of the function of local government and an orientation favoring the individual recipients, beneficiaries or program participants<sup>5</sup>.

In synthesis, the productivity of the locality (as an expression of the contribution of the city or settlement to national growth, based on its specific characteristics), the promotion of economic development, together with attention to social needs and the incorporation of the sustainability dimension, define the development agenda for the public sector in general and the municipal sector in particular. This, within a framework of state reforms aiming at modernization, specialization and large-scale macroeconomic adjustments, and, in the political sphere, the consolidation of democracy. This, in turn, sharply marks the search for institutional spaces for participation, the coordination of public policies with private-sector strategies, and the adaptation of legal frameworks to make possible the adoption and use of orientations of this sort.

In brief, what is at the forefront of the decentralization challenge is the consolidation of local governments, of authentic institutions for leadership in the administration of a locality and the represented community. The conceptual translation of this lies in the concept of *management*, which, complementary to that of local administration, extends the horizon of local government work into designing local development strategies, coordinating local with central policies, with as research into the local reality seen as an input in highly specific proposals, among other things.

The decentralization of social administration, backed up by resources, administrative innovation and institutional consolidation, can provide a response to the main challenge posed by this study: namely, incorporating dimensions of analysis and proposal into social policies and programs

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<sup>5</sup> In this sense the research developed instruments for selecting and identifying the empowered population, based on residential living conditions. The housing improvement index (IMV) thus constituted a means to translate categories of analysis and evaluation into an instrument for supporting local action, through specific social development programs defined on the basis of the concept of empowerment. The IMV, along with its methodological and conceptual components, can be found in Margarita Greene, "Índice de Mejoramiento de la Vivienda", in the series "*Antecedentes*", N° 4, Centro de Estudios Públicos.

which recognize the diversity of the individual beneficiaries of social programs, thereby moving social policy towards a new level of targeting. The only instrumental expression that we see as possible is decentralization: greater resources and autonomy for local administration to respond to the specific needs of each locality.

## II. LOCAL CONDITIONS FOR AN EMPOWERING SOCIAL POLICY

This section presents the results of the research project “Decentralization, Social Development and Poverty” as regards the issues of decentralization, municipal social administration and empowerment. The field work in this case involved two stages. The first sought to obtain information, via a public opinion survey, on public perceptions of the roles and functions of municipalities, and the demands that are met by local governments. In the second stage, and once the central work of the project referred to had been concluded (the results of which can be found in the article by I.Irarrázaval “*Habilitación, pobreza y política social*”), we proceeded to interview in depth a group of administrators and promoters of social action programs at the local level, in order to compare their opinions with the results of both the public opinion survey and the main research.

### 2.1 Public opinion survey: Main conclusions

In a nationwide public opinion survey, carried out by *Centro de Estudios Públicos*, questions included the issue of the municipality and the needs that people satisfy at this level of state of administration<sup>6</sup>. The results of this survey, apart from the specific quantitative figures, made it possible to put forward certain hypotheses regarding public perceptions of the municipality as an organ of government and local administration, and these were tested against the in-depth interviews.

An initial conclusion to be drawn from the survey results is that the municipality is perceived by the public as the government institution most resorted to in carrying out various bureaucratic tasks, like obtaining permits and applying for benefits from the social welfare network. Without any doubt, the municipality is the state institution that is closest to the population on a daily basis, to the point where 38.7% of those interviewed

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<sup>6</sup> The results of the survey were published in “Estudio Nacional de Opinión Pública: April 1992”, *Working Paper* N° 180 (June 1992). Centro de Estudios Públicos.

had accessed it during the previous 12 months. The next institution in order of priority was the Civil Registry, with 25.5%. Clearly then, the municipality is an active agent in the normal daily life of the population, and so a local actor of great importance.

As regards the type of paperwork or action for which one might have recourse to the municipality —the topic of the second question— 48.4% related to obtaining some benefit from the social welfare network administered by the municipality (application and/or access to subsidies, obtaining a CAS index) or interviews with social workers. Other paperwork related to obtaining building permits (3.3%), driver's licenses (10.3%), municipal permits or vehicle licenses (13.6%), and others (19.1%).

Given the administrative structure of the Chilean social welfare network, which puts the municipality in the role of chief administrator, this clearly shows us that the municipality is the main agent visible to the population on matters of social development or overcoming poverty.

It is curious, however, that when asked about the most relevant function of the municipality, a majority (56.9%) of those interviewed replied that the municipality's most important role is the administration of education and health services in the borough (both services were transferred to municipal administration at the end of the previous decade), putting in second place the creation of jobs (14.9%); in third place the maintenance of clean streets and orderliness in the borough (10.3%); fourth place, ensuring the provision of basic services (6.4%); fifth, promoting cultural development in the borough (6.0%), and sixth, enabling the people to participate in local power (5.4%).

What is surprising in this response is the apparent contradiction between uses that those interviewed make of the municipal structure, and their perception of the role of the municipality as an institution of local administration. Hypotheses can be put forward to account for this apparent contradiction:

a) The municipal role in social welfare and the administration of social development programs is seen as somewhat temporary, rather than structural or traditional. This perception could be related both to the role itself (the idea that it is a central government role) as well as the fact that a significant part of social programs under municipal supervision were conceived in response to moments of national crisis.

b) The municipality is perceived solely as the administrator of social programs designed at the central level, and not as an originator or driving force for social development at the borough level.

c) The population does distinguish between administrative functions of the municipality in which there is space for designing proposals as well as faculties for prioritization and leadership (those indicated as of greatest importance), and those functions where there is no clear space for local maneuver or influence. This second group includes the functions of social network administration. The very system of allocating subsidies and benefits itself which selects beneficiaries using technical mechanisms based on points, could be a key element in this perception. The municipality is consequently perceived as a letter box, an interface between demanders, on the one hand, and funds and programs designed centrally, on the other.

As part of the interview work, in particular in defining the role of the municipality and local agents in social development, the aim was to determine the most correct interpretation (see below the opinions of those interviewed on this ambivalence between the perception of municipal functions and services obtained through the municipality).

In conclusion, the public opinion survey provides bases for drawing up scenarios and proposals linked to the role the municipality can play in decentralized social development strategies in this country. In the first place, it is clear that the municipality represents an established institutional space in the origination and administration of social welfare and development programs. This is linked to a overall consolidation of local institutions as executive arms of national policies. The borough is, for this reason, a unit of analysis, an organizer of information and a territorial space defining the scale and action of programs. In the second place, and despite the above, it is clear that the role of promoting local development, and social development in particular, is not seen by the community as one of the fundamental roles of municipal administration. This is surprising when set against the needs the community satisfies via the municipal apparatus. In this sense, the municipality is not seen as the expression of the decentralization process and less still as a space of government administration. The notion is one of a service agency, an organ of urban administration and control.

## 2.2 The interviews: Main findings

Bearing in mind the information provided by the survey, as well as observations made by participants in focus groups held as part of the main body of the research,<sup>7</sup> we proceeded to draw up guidelines for in-depth

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<sup>7</sup> See I. Irrázaval, *op. cit.*

interviews with experts in the management and administration of social programs, the results of which are presented in this section.

In the framework of the methodology proposed for the study, a group of social workers and social program developers were selected from the municipal public sector and from private social development agencies, all of whom were given the same list of questions.

The interviews, structured in four sections, aimed to gather information based on the following objectives:

a) Record the current situation of local administration of development and social welfare programs, in terms of elements relating to their functioning and administration, and the legal framework in which the institution operates.

b) Test the central hypotheses of the project “Decentralization, Social Development and Poverty” against the experience and perceptions of local social policy administrators, to establish whether they are compatible or not, and from this standpoint identify the viability of theoretical and conceptual proposals which view the local area as a space for the administration and promotion of social development.

c) On the basis of these perceptions, which also serve to classify the type of orientation the administrators themselves have, define the requirements to be met to make progress along these lines, as well as their structural limitations, the issues to deal with as priorities and possible scenarios regarding the public/private relationship.

### 2.2.1 The current situation regarding the local management of development and social welfare programs

This first section of interviews worked with informants in order to characterize structural and institutional elements that might be defining a special type of social management at the local level. Aspects were addressed such as the availability of information, the existence or otherwise of locally generated social policies, the perception of the institutional role, as well as projects and management constraints, among other things.

The questionnaire aimed at defining the potential that exists to carry out locally generated projects. This was quantified on the basis of the existence or otherwise of local programs and, above all, possible diagnoses of issues or problems not being dealt with.

*Perception of role and management:* As regards the role played by municipalities and local agencies, the interviewees defined four of these:

- (i) Administration of the government's social network
- (ii) Welfare
- (iii) Social promotion, and
- (iv) Coordination

Specific examples include:

*in administration*: "implementing national policies..., administering subsidy programs";

*in welfare*: "satisfaction of basic needs";

*in promotion*: "development of labor organizations through training and contracts..., local development in specific communities..., proposing social policies at the local level";

*and in coordination*: "supervision of social public utility services..., the main actor in the coordination of social development".

Clearly these categories reflect the functional diversity that can be seen in the local management and administration system in the social sphere. In relation to the hypothesis put forward here, noteworthy elements include the opportunity to develop social programs or policies in the local space, support for communities or specific groups and the coordination of welfare and social development actions in local spaces. This underlines the opportunity represented by an administrative apparatus endowed with faculties to incorporate other agencies and actors into social development actions undertaken locally.

In addition, those interviewed draw a distinction between the faculties and roles of decentralized program administration, on the one hand, and spaces to undertake decentralized social development actions, on the other.

As regards technical operating conditions, according to the interviewees the generally predominating guiding instruments for action are information about social stratification together with specific diagnoses of thematic areas. The most frequent scale of analysis is the borough, and the dominant approach involves detecting basic needs that go unsatisfied, quantifying deficits in the provision or coverage of some service or program, and/or identifying potential beneficiaries of central government programs.

This, of course, emphasizes the administrative dependency of local agencies in relation to the operation of the program defined in the national system. The local role is restricted to identifying and selecting beneficiaries, on the one hand, and administering and controlling the execution of the program, on the other. Clearly, qualitative diagnoses are few, as are a

characterization of the processes or patterns of poverty reproduction, the analysis of actors, identification of risks, advantages and shortcomings — all of which are necessary for drawing up strategies for local development and choosing courses of action to be followed. The local potential to formulate strategies, plans and general social management and development orientations, are therefore strongly conditioned by a lack of this type of study and diagnosis, as well as administrative and budgetary difficulties.

Having said that, the correlation between spending allocations and the priorities defined by diagnostic work is mostly perceived as positive. This, although it may seem obvious, underlines the fact that in the framework of the operating conditions imposed by the current system, including the institutional element, the system currently in force does have a response capacity. In other words, there is an effective structure for diagnosis, selection of beneficiaries and the execution of spending and investment.

Furthermore, and consistent with the very definition of the programs, the quantitative type of assessments, in most frequent use, show the effectiveness of the system in operation. The quantification of people attended, solutions provided, goods distributed or care provided, all reinforce the extent of success in this area.

On the other hand, however, those interviewed stress the absence of qualitative assessments aimed at characterizing the impact of programs, their temporal recurrence (quarterly, semestral, etc.), the beneficiaries' perception, among other things. As a result, the assessment system in use only partly reflects a program's impact, which does not make it possible to improve future applications. Associated with this comment is the notion that if this other type of evaluation was carried out, a space would be opened up for introducing additional elements— locally defined and implemented— in the formulation and execution of programs and projects.

When asked about the level of care provided in their sphere of action, interviewees mostly replied that this was low. The reason most often given pointed to the lack of human and material resources. The notion here is that although it is true that available resources are spent efficiently, local needs are greater. Thus there remain areas, issues, human groups and problems which, although seen as possible to incorporate into the activities of the institution, are not so incorporated for resource limitation reasons.

Related to this perception of the role and scope of institutional action, the interviewees proceeded to identify population sectors that need attention, but which are not receiving it due to the restrictions mentioned



above. Here they tended to identify young people, pointing to problems related to coming to the end of the educational cycle, insertion into the world of work, as well as family organization and development, which puts the accent on issues closely linked to the concept of empowerment. The interruption of the educational process, the lack of mechanisms for personal adjustment to labor market cycles and conditions and, above all, the weak presence of values related to responsible parenthood and the family, are clearly critical spaces that need to be dealt with, and where the conception of an empowering social policy is relevant.

The other group that is repeatedly mentioned is women, and here the interviewees stress the difficulties of their incorporation into the world of work, as well as family issues, such as teenage pregnancy, abortion, and children born outside marriage.

In addition, interviewees identified people who are indigent, elderly and disabled among groups needing help. On the other hand, they also stress problems of drug addiction and problems linked to the performance of children in the educational system (food allowances, school transport, extra-curricular projects for young people).

According to the opinions expressed by interviewees as requirement types, from the standpoint of a poverty that is heterogeneous in terms of people who are more or less empowered, it is clear that the type of projects or programs that they have in mind coincide with a personalized approach to care (training, education, motivation, rehabilitation, etc.), and which also is targeted on young people and women.

The widespread view that these problems should be addressed urgently by the welfare and social development system can be explained by at least two factors. The first relates to the fact that the initial design of our social network puts the emphasis on looking after groups at risk, so that spending has favored care for mothers during pregnancy and childbirth, infant nutrition, pre-school coverage, while in subsidy-type actions (on questions of housing, unemployment, pensions, etc.) priority has been given to providing homogeneous conditions for the population, always targeting the most poor. The growth of social spending in this sense has tended to strengthen existing programs and/or increase transfers, for which reason there has been no capacity to address other social development issues.

As well as the above, another reason, and very likely a principal explanatory variable, is that it is difficult to address problems detected through a national program. In other words, these are problems which by their very nature cannot be associated with a quantifiable lack of some good or service, and this makes the operation of a national system of social

welfare provision difficult. Here one is faced with problems that need to be dealt with locally, which implies a need to strengthen local institutions with resources, instruments and roles for dealing with these problems: i.e. it means an authentically decentralized conception of social administration.

The research project “Decentralization, Social Development and Poverty” has revealed that there are fundamental differences in an individual’s chances of breaking out of poverty via the opportunities created by the state, the private sector and the national development process as a whole, and these depend on the individual’s greater or lesser empowerment in the poverty situation. As clearly expressed by Irrarázaval, the characterization of the individual profile of a poor person in terms of different degrees of empowerment, along a continuum of multiple variables or dimensions, gives as a result that this degree of empowerment is, in one way or another, transferred to the family and thus to the process of social reproduction<sup>8</sup>. This means that ways must be sought (decentralized social policies and programs) to break the vicious circle of this empowerment. To this end, education, the family, work and the generation and development of reference models stand out as spaces for exploration and action. Similarly, young people and women are sectors that are extremely relevant to this challenge.

The concrete form which these programs may take will depend on the conditions and demands of each place or locality. The creativity demonstrated by interviewees when suggesting specific projects is notable: offices to attend to juveniles, educational scholarships, school footwear (“children don’t go to school because they don’t have shoes”), housewife training, welfare in the neighborhood, housing improvement, labor departments and neighborhood training, etc.

*Perception of decentralization.* By characterizing the situation of social welfare in the country, nearly all those interviewed (all except one) considered that decentralization does not exist in this area, or only exists in an incipient form. We believe that this reply involves elements of judgment relating to the local exercise of the faculty to govern, in terms of autonomy and sufficient resources to design locally based actions.

Consequently, when interviewees were asked to identify the critical points for achieving decentralization on social issues, they firstly mentioned the question of resources (“more resources for the municipality, linking funds from the social network to participation in the Common Municipal Fund..., increase in the cost estimates for providing welfare services so as

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<sup>8</sup> See I. Irrarázaval, *op. cit.*

to better cover the real costs through transfers"); secondly, the need for greater autonomy and decision-taking space ("transfer responsibilities to local technical people..., give greater importance to diagnostic work for planning..., give specific weight to local governments..., decentralized decision-taking"); thirdly the need for better coordination ("a better relation between the region and the borough, and between the municipality and the regional government..., define the horizon of action..., greater efficiency in decentralized programs..., greater analytical training in borough institutions"); in the fourth place, elements linked to giving greater participation to local agents ("assigning greater importance to neighborhood councils").

Moreover, interviewees were asked how they would compare the current decentralization situation in their borough with their idea of what decentralization "ought to be". This question was posed as an alternative way to investigate a decentralized model of social administration. Replies very totally varied. Interviewees alluded to a multiplicity of factors such as the "absence of local regional power"; they spoke of "different visions on investment between central and local authorities"; some people said that decentralization meant giving greater autonomy to the municipality, "a greater consideration to local conditions, whereas the current system is only de-concentration". The common issues in these replies involve autonomy in decision-making and problems in harmonizing and synchronizing the view of problems from the central and local viewpoints.

In order to complement the picture of decentralized social administration, interviewees were asked whether they thought local programs of social development could occur in Chile. This was the only question on which there was totally unanimity and uniformity: "Yes."

What benefits or advantages would greater local autonomy in the administration of social development proposals provide? The answers to this question are once again, of a general nature, but on the whole they provide a measure of aspirations in this context: "give municipalities analytical capacity and so consider them as valid partners..., greater impact in administration, collective solution of problems; a significant role for intermediate organizations and non-governmental organizations...; more operational work...; recognition of local realities and conditions...; make general programs compatible with local projects...; adaptations to programs that act as a framework...; respond more effectively to local needs". There were also replies relating to the associated risks: "one might end up prioritizing excellence rather than redistribution towards the poorest sectors...; the risk of a politicization of decision-making...; clear procedures and elements would be needed to redistribute resources in an egalitarian way".

In answer to the question as to what types of specific, and thus local, projects could be dealt with by a system of decentralized provision, the informants stressed the relationship between decision-making autonomy and resources as a fundamental element for making progress in this direction. On the issue of groups not covered by national programs, they mentioned various programs. These included initiatives aimed at providing integral attention to family groups, thereby simultaneously covering various sectoral aspects of the poverty problem: housing, education, labor-market participation, nutrition, etc. Implicit in this approach is the central element which characterizes poverty from a qualitative point of view; in particular the fact that the problems of poverty afflict the complete family group, as well as doing so simultaneously.

The conclusion reached in the research project "Decentralization, Social Development and Poverty" stressing the need to develop empowering social programs from the standpoint of the family nucleus, is verified intuitively and empirically in this proposal by the informants.

Other types of actions mentioned by the interviewees relate to the need to empower community resources by seeking forms of self-sustaining development. Here, the underlying idea is to get away from welfare-type social policy, recognizing that in the local space it is possible to conceive and develop initiatives aimed at community growth, by designing programs with medium-term assessment horizons, stressing elements linked to material progress, sustained growth, the modification of work-related social patterns, etc. As regards empowerment, it is clear that this type of program depends on an initial understanding of the available resources, of the personal characteristics of the group or groups participating and of a strategic sense of the opportunities to launch economic-growth initiatives.

A third type of program repeatedly mentioned by interviewees relates to those aimed at minors and young people in situations of risk (problems of emotional instability, drug addiction, alcoholism, school drop-out and delinquency). Clearly, this issue should be given increasing priority in view of the largely juvenile condition of our population.

In summary, from the view provided by the experts we conclude that there is a need to advance in a decentralized way in generating systems of social attention which reinforce the integrity of social policies and intervention in multidimensional groups and issues, such as the family, minors and young people, education and work.

Linked to the above, the research sought to make a list of opportunities which, in the judgment of the interviewees, would allow decentralized administration of social policy. In this sense, the political conjuncture ap-

peared as a fundamental element, linking the democratic institutional framework with new possibilities for undertaking actions of local social work. They also pointed out as relevant the recent legal amendments to the municipal regime, related to the option of incorporating new areas into municipalities' work.

Another aspect, among those most stressed by interviewees, relates to the possibility of creating and putting into practice initiatives of local social development administration which integrate the private sector into actions traditionally carried out by the public sector. By the private sector one understands intermediate community groups, private social development agencies, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and of course firms.

Democracy as an organizing principle, along with institutional reforms and greater integration of the private sector, are clearly consistent with the identification of the main trends affecting consolidation and change in local administration forms, as presented at the beginning of this text. The modern conception of local management, by stressing change in modes of action, as well as promoting institutional consolidation and decentralization, stresses democratic conditions and coordination with the private sector as critical dimensions.

As regards the main constraints on such opportunities being be materialized in decentralized administration of social development programs and policies, without doubt the main limitation mentioned is the lack of financial and budgetary resources. This is an issue, of course, which relates directly to the heavy dependence on central funds earmarked for providing for certain programs. In this context, what is stressed is the limited financial capacity to implement new locally generated programs or projects.

A second element considered as a constraint by interviewees is the influence exerted on the decision-making system by the party political structure, which tends to translate into a distribution of resources in relation to the interests of representatives rather than the main needs. Here the underlying point is consequently the question of representativeness as an element for participation.

A third aspect relates to the political will to assume the costs of a process of institutional adjustment which would make it possible to generate a new type of program. Certainly in this case there is awareness that the development of a new mode of local social development action will involve errors in the learning process. According to some of the interviewees, the risk-taking capacity of the authority is small in relation to the size of the challenge. In fact, as a hypothesis, it could be added that the resource

constraints mentioned above imposes low risk quotas on the administrative apparatus. To solve this, the generation of project funds that could temporarily supplement this situation would be welcome.

In addition, and at the administrative level, mention was made of the absence of institutionalized control and follow up mechanisms, with attention being drawn to the need to generate them simultaneously with the program. An awareness of the need to strengthen the governance of administration in aspects of control and transparency, follows from this limitation. Here, in turn, one sees a traditional attachment to administration with a strong normative and regulatory base, characteristic of a hierarchical system of public administration. The inverse observation to this is reflected in the fact that the high level of bureaucratization in the administration of traditional social programs is also cited as a constraint on a decentralized social administration process. This issue is also correlated with the idea that in central government agencies there is a perception that the local or municipal sector does not have the capacity to take charge of a social policy approach marked by strong decentralization.

*Resources and the importance assigned to social projects.* Finally, we wanted to record interviewees' perception of the degree of importance the institution itself gives to dealing with problems of poverty and social development. Here, the question of the percentage of resources destined to social programs was also raised.

Half of the informants argued that of resources destined to social welfare and development in local budgets, more than 60% come from central government; 30% of those surveyed raised this estimate to 80%.

As regards whether the local authority gives priority to social issues, 70% of the replies said yes, and this translates into the importance of budgetary allocations of the municipality's own resources related to this question. In this respect, it was even argued that 100% of institutional resources were destined to social questions.

From these replies, one can clearly see what the CEP survey had already recorded: the key role played by local development agencies in the administration and execution of social programs. Moreover, the authorities' awareness of the importance of this role, associated with an understanding of the dimensions and particular characteristics that poverty assumes in each locality, represent, without doubt, outstanding opportunities in the argument for greater decentralization of social development policies and resources. Budgetary constraints, and those relating to administrative bureaucracy, an acceptable risk quota and a lack of mechanisms for resource transfer, could all be overcome by accepting the favorable conditions mentioned above.

From this section of the interviews, which aimed at characterizing the conditions in which the administration of strategies, policies and social development programs in decentralized agencies (mainly municipalities) takes place, it is possible to establish the following conclusions.

Firstly, it is clear that overall trends of change in the institutional framework (political, as well as the legal and administrative regime), together with general policies towards national development, are having an impact on the local administration system. Moreover, positive correlations are established between the general challenges and actions of social development and overcoming poverty.

In a more detailed look, the outstanding perception is that while propitious conditions exist for greater decentralization of social administration, these do not materialize for lack of resources, weakness in local political structures, a lack of risk-taking capacity and, at the technical level, because of an inadequate administration structure. Inadequate in the sense of a structure that responds highly efficiently to a model involving a de-concentrated administration of social network resources, but which places restrictions on scenarios of greater local discretion in decision-taking relating to the formulation of local proposals for social development.

To this diagnosis should be added a clear awareness of the possible advantages of including local business initiatives coordinated with private sector, aimed at providing coverage and attention to sectors or social groups currently not considered in national programs and, in addition, characterized by local particularities.

As regards the capacity and timeliness of confronting a new type of social action, characterized by greater or effective decentralization together with an approach favoring attending to new groups, problems or issues in social development, there is an almost general agreement on the need for this. This is illustrated in the priority assigned by local authorities to social issues in the emerging agenda of specific social actions and in their acceptance of the fact that, with the current administrative structure, actions cannot be carried out providing support or assistance to the organized community in empowerment-related aspects such as education, family structure or economic development.

Finally, as regards modes of diagnosis and evaluation, most methodologies are aimed at identifying and overcoming quantitative deficits, mainly linked to unsatisfied basic needs, social services coverage and emergency attention. In general, this means using quantitative outcome indicators (the number of beneficiaries or applicants, the number of solutions provided, the number of attentions per day, coverage, attendance per

event, etc.). Thus, methodologies of recording, follow up and evaluation, relating to the qualitative dimensions of the impact of programs are under-used or simply not considered. This aspect is crucial as it raises the need for a new type of social action strategy, complementary to that of targeted coverage, along the same lines as can be identified in the project “Decentralization, Social Development and Poverty”. This, indeed, does constitute an attempt to apply qualitative methodologies to identify and characterize poverty, aimed at giving a personal content to the definition of poverty and complementing the traditional definition based on income or unsatisfied basic needs.

### 2.2.2 “Empowerment” as a concept and as the basis for decentralized social policy management

In this section of the interviews we tried to confront informants with the results of the research concerning the concept of empowerment, in order to verify the study’s hypotheses and explore the possibilities of turning them into innovative proposals related to decentralization of social policy. It should be recalled that, at the start of the “Decentralization, Social Development and Poverty” project, meetings were held with experts in the social sector, where the issue of dependency on social programs, as a potential risk in our social welfare system, was discussed. At the same time, the possibility that there might be fundamental differences within the poor population was explored. The consistent opinion that, apart from observable disparities in the availability of goods or services, the differences among poor people related to personality and culture aspects (behavioral models, habits, values and others) motivated researchers from the outset. For this reason, we acknowledge here the significant collaboration that social workers and assistants provided us, throughout the research, based on their experience and daily interaction with poor people. The results obtained were doubly validated: by poor people themselves who helped to characterize the phenomenon, and by experts in the social field<sup>9</sup>.

Consequently, we now asked our informants if by any chance it is possible to distinguish fundamental differences between groups treated as

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<sup>9</sup> The paper by Ignacio Irrarázaval “Habilitación pobreza y política social”, also published in this volume, as mentioned above, presents a synthesis of the results of the investigation on empowerment and poverty. The methodology and specific results of the research are described in the series “*Antecedentes*” (Nºs 1-9) (June 1993 -June 1995), Centro de Estudios Públicos.



poor. On this question, all the interviewees were in agreement, pointing out that one sees attitudes and ways of confronting poverty which reflect different degrees of preparation.

Thus for example, a first differentiating element mentioned is the existence of groups that are capable of organizing themselves to develop a strategy to achieve certain results (obtaining subsidies, assistance, materials, carrying out public infrastructure work, etc.), whereas other groups remain in a passive state, first waiting to be noticed and then waiting for official aid. In this respect, the interviewees stressed the importance of administering welfare resources in a temporary way, so as to discourage patterns of structural dependency among beneficiaries.

In another reply, differences were brought out in the definition of roles within the home, an aspect which has been recorded by the researchers in the field. It is argued that the lack of a clear definition of roles within the home (provider, superior authority, housewife, etc.) contributes to the emergence of patterns involving lack of respect between the couple, inconstancy, abandonment of the home and, among other things, a failure to conform to a basic model that gets transmitted to the children.

Another element mentioned in the replies was that these differences reveal the need to establish modes of social assistance which, while respecting the principles of subsidiarity, recognize and support personal effort through greater participation by the beneficiary, as well as the targeting of social projects. A key element here is the need to enhance the municipalities' institutional capacities to develop this type of program.

Finally, in another reply, emphasis was placed on the nexus between the qualitative problem and specific income situations. Here it was argued that poverty and destitution define a threshold that is not recognized in the social policy structure, positing the thesis that extreme poverty might be correlated with lesser empowerment among people. In this respect, a system of social benefits where beneficiaries make minimal efforts to obtain a subsidy or specific benefit, exclude from the safety net all those indigent people who, due to lesser empowerment, lack the motivation or behavior structure compatible with this type of social policy design. For this reason, it is recommended to strengthen and increase the local capacity to attend to indigent groups with empowering programs (adult education, employment opportunities and training, family placement of the undernourished, family therapy, etc.) in the course of which the active participation of the beneficiary would be accentuated.

In synthesis, the hypothesis of differentiation among poor people, centered on their potentialities to make use of opportunities —empower-

ment—, was recognized and agreed on by all interviewees, with each of them providing characteristic expressions or examples. At the same time, strategic guidelines were suggested for incorporating this dimension into social policy, and everyone agreed that detecting and dealing with needs should take place locally, for which reason there was emphasis on the need to decentralize the management structure of the social assistance network and its resources.

As regards the issue of whether the current system of social development policy administration has the capacity to discriminate between these two types of poverty, nearly all interviewees said no. The reason for this, they argue, is that current tools for selecting beneficiaries, which stress material shortcomings or income as variables, do not make it possible to incorporate the qualitative elements mentioned. In brief, there is insufficient discretionary space for local professionals to enrich their evaluations.

Later, recommendations were received on the type of methodologies that it would be useful to generalize, in order to bring local social policy closer to a more personalized process of beneficiary identification and selection.

On this particular issue, the recommendations were for direct work with social organizations (“they know what they need”), the restructuring the labels of social stratification, personalized work on a case-by-case basis with the beneficiary, following up support, making periodical assessments, integrating social programs into social development programs, among other things. Overall, it can be said that there was general agreement among informants as to the inadequate range of instruments and modes of work used in the execution and administration of social programs. Constrained by definitions imposed by the programs themselves, the flexibility needed for a conceptual framework, such as that of empowerment, is greatly restricted. In addition, there is a clear interest in incorporating methodologies and modes of operation which link institutions to groups in the community—social development agencies that are active in the locality—and to the beneficiaries themselves. Bringing providers closer to beneficiaries is seen as fundamental in implementing social development strategies set in a qualitative concept that recognizes differences between poor people.

In addition to this, the question of structural dependency, which can arise from programs or modes of implementation of the social network, was discussed. It was clearly recognized that all monetary subsidies carry with them the risk of becoming stable income sources for the benefited families. On the other hand, the small specific amounts involved in each case cause them not to be incentives or signals towards inaction or a lack of effort. They are a complement to family income.

The type of programs that do induce welfare dependency, in the opinion of those interviewed, are those that provide material aid. In such programs, an indirect monetary transfer occurs, not necessarily backed up by a proposal for overall improvement in material living conditions. This does not detract, however, from the idea that in emergency situations it may be necessary to provide material assistance to those affected (housing, clothing, bed clothes, etc.).

With regard to operational or administrative elements in the subsidy network, and social policy tools in general, we asked about the presence of modes of action which might contribute to structural dependency on the part of beneficiaries. Despite some dispersion in the answers, the following topics were extracted as matters of concern: possible political costs deriving from the suspension of a benefit; recording methods, by not recognizing qualitative improvements, make people remain classified as poor, when they no longer are; the methods of selection do not discriminate according to levels of beneficiary contribution, thereby inducing minimum personal effort; difficulty in integrating databases, for which reason a person or group may receive more than one benefit, or else receive a benefit without the right to it; and, finally the community itself which pressurizes for a maintenance of the status quo —i.e. for the perpetuation of acquired benefits.

Related to the ideas and opinions expressed above, a need was identified to make progress in extending the provision of programs and projects for locally rooted social development, thus differentiated according to target group, as well as according to the purpose of the action and the contextual conditions in which the project is placed. The importance of the conceptual framework of empowerment as an opportunity for generating actions that work directly with people, rather than with their material conditions, was also emphasized.

As regards the orientation of proposals of program types, emphasis was placed on choosing initiatives which contribute to the empowerment of participants, thereby complementing more traditional expressions seen in terms of providing a given good or service. In this respect, it was thought that the program should provide a response to a perceived and concrete need, which would also involve active participation by the target population. A second element is that social assistance should be linked as far as possible to job training or labor market insertion, thereby stressing the need to establish links between the programs and some concrete evidence of progress. The third aspect highlighted is that the program should contain certain elements of contribution by the beneficiary, either in time, organiza-

tion, material or financial resources, or otherwise. This condition is linked to the “ownership” of the program or project by the beneficiary, an aspect considered crucial in the option of permanency of the initiative over time. Finally, and consistent with what has been argued above, it is seen as fundamental that the project, firstly, serves to bind together dispersed actions or programs, and on the other hand leads to the mobilization of new resources for collective action in overcoming poverty. In this sense, the identification of sponsoring institutions, or the insertion of the action into the broader objectives of some organization, are ideas which open up the possibility of coordinating social policy on a local scale with the private sector.

In addition, and in relation to differentiating approaches that the local authorities may undertake with a view to offering a new type of local social action, emphasis was placed on the need to make institutional objectives compatible with those of the community, providing encouragement to those carrying out project initiatives, distinguishing between different types of poverty in investment planning, social spending and actions, thereby improving the targeting and attention to the poorest and most needy, and progressively favoring the efforts of individuals and community organizations.\*\*\*

A final question relating to putting into practice a decentralized social assistance framework was the identification of problems and issues of social development in which the component of locality was present along with that of empowerment: i.e. local social development projects. Those mentioned included strategies for improving housing, socio-family problems associated with work (casual workers, migrant workers, miners), informal employment and informal production, drug addiction and alcoholism among juveniles, programs for the recovery of residential neighborhoods and residential re-densification; the woman as provider, among other things.

From this section of the work we conclude that the hypothesis of empowerment, and the results of the research carried out, are accepted by the interviewees, who reacted very positively to the opportunities that the study’s conceptual framework and its methodological development offer them to better carry out their functions.

When the question of how to translate ideas of qualitative characterization into modes of action was explored, a rich variety of opinions was produced which, as a whole, point to a more decentralized form of action favoring direct and personalized action with the beneficiary, based on the principle of rewarding efforts carried out, or those that could be carried out, by the beneficiaries themselves, and with a significant emphasis on the strategic choice of projects and their conditions of execution.

With regard to dependency as a potential problem arising from current social policy, attention was drawn to the danger involved in monetary transfers and lifetime or permanent subsidies; as the main difficulty in dealing with such a situation, the potential political costs of suppressing what could be perceived as an acquired right were pointed out. Having said that, the amounts currently involved do not seem to involve a risk of inducing structurally dependent conduct.

From these reflections on administrative and methodological issues, it is clear that the current structure of social program administration is not capable of differentiating between different types of poor people, apart from incomes and material conditions. Hence, the absence of people-related modes of diagnosis emerges as an impediment to greater social policy decentralization. It is also concluded that the modes of selection and resource allocation currently in force —central programs administered locally— may be promoting a bureaucratic view of social policy, which detracts from its original role: namely, the creation of opportunities for social development, based on the principle of equity and the permanent goal of favoring the most needy. Anonymity, the scale of intervention and the statistical and quantitative handling of the system result in a social policy which is efficient but depersonalized. In proposing a form of social policy which stresses identification with the person and the family group, it certainly becomes crucial to use alternative methodologies linked to dealing with cases, community development and group work, among other things.

A very important lesson is that intuitively, as well as from experience, the concepts, potentials and requirements of a form decentralized social policy are present among the experts, administrators and executors of social development actions in the local space. Hence, we point to the opportunity represented for a future stage in Chilean social policy, by the fact that this is emerging not only from needs that are not satisfied in the current system, nor only from a differentiated characterization of the target population, but also from the field experience of those whose job it is to implement this proposal. Certainly, this is a favorable condition which should not be scorned.

### 2.2.3 Requirements for putting decentralized social policy administration into practice

In this part of the interview process, with needs, opportunities and constraints now identified, strategies were explored which local organizations in charge of social welfare could take on, to achieve decentralization

of social policy. These strategies and specific proposals are linked to issues such as the role local organizations should play in a different types of social policy, the attributions or faculties required for this, as well as identification of the main bottlenecks which would need to be overcome in an overall decentralization project, based on democracy and fundamentally aimed at attending to the needs of the poorest.

On the other hand, as well as this there is the question of how the municipality is perceived by the community and by the demanders of benefits and opportunities for local social development. This seems to us to be relevant as a means of verifying the results of the public opinion survey, and for contrasting the hypothesis that a significant part of the difficulties that might be experienced in Chilean social policy may arise from the system's administrators, particularly in dispersed agencies.

A first important element here is the recording of the strategic guidelines that the municipality or institution should assume in carrying out its social role, in order to improve or create local conditions for development among less empowered individuals and families.

As well as reiterating the need to directly involve beneficiaries in the different stages of the project, the interviewees argued for the need to carry out social diagnosis covering personal aspects of the potential beneficiaries, thereby distancing themselves from current practice. For this purpose it is considered vital to create media for favoring greater coordination and interaction between the local development agencies in the decentralized space. The opportunity to complement databases, as well as investment and spending strategies, the assignment of certain types of problems to special agencies and other similar conditions arise from this proposal.

Other ideas on how to orient the work in a scenario of differentiated attention relate to the creation of places and instances for meetings between agents acting in the field, the faculty to decide on ways of spending social network resources, the development of models of analysis and assessment of cases as a function of the vulnerability of each one, and even the decentralization of programs and projects in the borough area itself. The latter is of interest given the dispersion and diversity of the issues and problems that may occur within a given community. As regards the roles of the institution in a scenario of greater social policy decentralization, the interviewees offered a wide range of possibilities. The most frequently mentioned role was that of coordinator of community initiatives leading to local development projects. Increasing the responsibility and attributions in implementing social policies would be an obvious consequence of a change of this type.

A specific role is the coordination and joint administration between municipalities, private development agencies, NGOs (non-governmental organizations), and the organized community. Linked to this role, it was argued that it is necessary to gather and process information to serve as support in decision-taking and the programming of actions. A need was also stated for providing local or decentralized agencies with wide-ranging attributions for targeting subsidies or assistance consistently with the knowledge arising from being close to the beneficiaries and local reality.

A fundamental role always noted was that of administering and implementing social programs and projects according to resources and demands of the spatial context, as well as the economic and social context in which one works. For this purpose, promoting social development on the basis of a global project and management program was seen as fundamental, as well as being able to rely on a flow or structure of financing consistent with developing medium-term strategies. Without stating so explicitly, reference is made here to the operating conditions of local government.

When opinions were sought as to whether structural modifications to the legal and regulatory frameworks in force were needed, there were surprises in the sense that a significant fraction of the interviewees argued that current frameworks defined a significant set of faculties and attributions, so that the problem lay more in a lack of human, material and financial resources to carry them out or develop them to the full.

New attributions that might be considered for local governments relate to a general change in the role of municipal administration, and are therefore of a more structural type. Such changes, along with policies relating to direct election of mayors, mean giving the municipality attributions on questions of land management, the promotion of economic development and tax issues, as well as property, capitalization, subcontracting, and attributions for adjusting staff in relation to the local development project; and on the basis of this, formulating local development strategies, as well as those of economic and social planning, financing, policy management, and of course the eradication of poverty in the borough.

The issue exists on two levels: firstly, enhancing decentralization within the ruling legal framework, which translates into extending the attributions assigned by the de-concentration of functions, and adding greater resources; and secondly, relating to a structural change in the municipal regime in favor of administrative structure similar to a local government. The interesting thing, however, is that the two strategies are complementary, and can perhaps be conceived of as stages or phases in the decentralizing process and their social policy consequence.

A central element in defining local social development strategies, as well as in the search for paths of progress in decentralization, relates to how the citizenry perceives local agencies, in terms of its roles, capacities and project.

On this particular question, a clear difference arises between private and public institutions. Interviewees working in the former did not tend to see big discrepancies between what those institutions are, their mission and their purpose, and how they are perceived by beneficiaries. On the other hand, interviewees from the municipal sector believe that users or beneficiaries have a negative perception or at least vague perception of the municipal role.

In the first place, it is argued that the role of the municipality is perhaps perceived as mere welfare, almost charity, which would suggest an important lack of clarity as to its social role. This has already been seen in the public opinion survey mentioned above. The opinion exists that the municipality does not have the institutional capacities to respond to the social needs of the community being cared for. A specific judgment in this sense is that, since the country's return to democracy, excessive expectations have been generated regarding what municipalities can do in social development. As fundamentally negative perceptions, mention was made of the fact that municipalities are excessively bureaucratized organizations, and so lacking the capacity to react to the diversity of the local social environment.

In addition, when asked for an opinion on whether the community understands the fact that the municipality or agency has attached importance to the issue of overcoming poverty, once again there is a dispersion of views as mentioned earlier: total clarity in the case of private social development agencies; incomprehension or only partial comprehension in the case of municipal agencies. When asked to make their observations more precise, interviewees stated that they recognized actions were being carried out in this field but they do not form part of the main pillar of municipal administration.

In this respect, the hypothesis for interpreting the results of the survey mentioned above would seem to be corroborated, in the sense that that community appears to understand that the fact that the municipality acts in administering the social network is a partial, almost circumstantial aspect of the institution, rather than a structural one.

However, it will be difficult to change this perception (and equally, the priority assigned to this role by the different authorities), unless new faculties are granted to the municipalities associated with a new stage in



social policy administration in this country, marked by personalization in social benefits. For this purpose, a conceptual framework such as that developed by the investigation on qualitative poverty is fundamental.

From this section of the interviews it can be concluded that the interviewees assigned a significant role to local agencies in the administration of decentralized social policy. Together with this, and on the basis of their own expressions, it can be stated that there is awareness of the need not only to extend attributions and resources, but also to jointly generate two fundamental conditions.

The first of these conditions can be characterized as the welfare and local development network in the local or decentralized area. This network may be supported by an administrative territory such as the borough, a special set of boroughs, a city or a neighborhood. The fundamental thing in this concept is that the network has recourse to the municipal sector, the community, and private social development agencies. With its own resources or transferred ones, the central thing is for this network to seek the coordination of investment efforts and projects. On the basis of this way of structuring the programs, information is transmitted and shared, experiences are exchanged, macro targets are agreed, resources are mobilized and, most importantly, forms of association directly arising out of the local reality are consolidated.

A second condition relates to defining institutional roles in the next social policy step: i.e. it relates to the need to modify the perception that users and beneficiaries have of the role played by municipalities in social development issues and, by extension, local development. The municipality in the framework of decentralization is the basic institution of the government system. In its particular case, its task is to orient borough development in the territorial economic and social spheres.

In carrying out this role in the social policy area, changes are involved in modes of operation as have been described or outlined in this paper. In the first place, it is essential to carry out a characterization diagnosis of the local social problem, which as well as detecting material shortcomings should record the conditions of the people involved and characterize social trends in the community, the opportunities, the potentials, the limitations and restrictions, which will help to define the administration strategy to be followed.

This diagnosis should include a characterization of the operating conditions and resources of the organization itself, its projects, financial flows and available staff, among other aspects. Moreover, it should include a record of other agents or projects acting in the same jurisdictional area, as these constitute relevant inputs in any local social development strategy.

To put this type of administration strategy into practice means having basic resources available, as well as political will, clarity of social goals and a vision of institutional targets. These, in turn, should include the key aspects of coordination, management and promotion which the interviewees mentioned.

As result of this type of social action, complemented by the principles of participation and democracy, the perception of the social role of the municipality must change from one of welfare provider and distributor of subsidies, to that of local social development promoter with a commitment to the people and problems of the local community.

An effectively decentralized social policy management, which emphasizes the adaptation of social and community development strategies in each municipality or institution to the particular characteristics of the locality in question, thus involves accepting the need for a changed management style as well as the idea that the eradication of poverty is everyone's responsibility. Indeed, the task of overcoming poverty cannot be totally assumed either by the State sector or by private charity alone. It is an issue that makes demands on all institutions and organizations of society. In heading up local strategies for overcoming poverty, the municipalities have undeniable advantages. However, the constraints imposed by resources, the scale of attention, at times the area itself, strongly suggests effective coordination with private agencies in setting up local networks of welfare assistance and social development.

Thus transformed into a political project as well as a welfare task, the job of overcoming poverty is an issue for discussion and consensus in the local space, generating new mobilizations and certainly a redefinition of the roles of the agencies involved. The main point, however, is that where this idea is applied, aggregate benefits are obtained for the most needy, as a result of integral attention or at least multi-sectoral consideration of their needs, and a response is given to issues and problems of empowerment. Actions of investment and social spending, both private and public, should redound in personal and family transformations which we identify with the process of empowerment or social development.

### III. CONCLUSIONS

In this study, by using a series of methods, we set out to explore the possibility of relating the thesis of empowerment—that poor people differ among each other in the personal and cultural characteristics they have for

overcoming poverty— to a decentralized administration of social policy. For this purpose, we undertook a public opinion survey and carried out in-depth interviews with a selected group of promoters of social action programs. Below, by way of reflection, we present the ideas to emerge from this work. As regards the relation that can be established between empowerment, social policy and decentralization, there are clear coincidences between the hypothesis of the project “Decentralization, Social Development and Poverty” and the opinions held by local social development agents. Accordingly, there is a need to clarify and define policy arguments and social development strategies which acknowledge the diversity among poor groups in society, thereby making it possible to include local initiatives and proposals in social welfare programs, which transfer responsibilities and resources to agents close to the beneficiaries themselves and which, ultimately, make possible the decentralization of social policies.

This is not to deny the effectiveness of the social policies and programs currently in force, with results and procedures that are successful from the standpoints of coverage and targeting. However, the structural conditions that gave rise to these programs have changed: there is a high level of learning already achieved, and so there are human resources qualified in selecting, preparing and implementing social projects. The management and administration capacity for locally executed programs has been demonstrated, and consequently, the low capacity level argument does not have any validity. Similarly, democratic administrative processes have opened up to the community opportunities for greater participation in social development actions, which do not generally translate into new local management procedures.

The diversity of poverty, understood as requirements for different types of attention, spatially and between people, is neither recognized nor has a part to play in programs currently in operation. It is not only a question of greater resources. It is also a matter of greater attributions, including those of drawing up locally defined policies, strategies and social programs. Local differences have to do with culture, historical development patterns, predominant economic activities, patterns of localization and social relations, etc. In other words, they go beyond a characterization of material or income deficits.

The integration of social action seems a path worth exploring. The various programs in operation originated in sources each of which has its own logic and instrumentation. The information bases are the same and they do not include more precise diagnostic elements which would make it possible to differentiate programs at the local level. Integral means focu-

sing on a beneficiary the different options in terms of attention: choosing from the menu in a formal and personalized way, if you will, whereby synergetic benefits may be obtained in personal development. An example of this approach has been the program of family placement of undernourished children: the child is attended as well as the parents, training is provided, as well as access to the housing subsidy, etc.

Empowerment may indeed be a differentiating element in the locality. More empowered people can continue to be attended by the traditional network. The less empowered need specific and local programs and actions. The empowerment factor would also make it possible to classify current programs and their modes of implementation.

To be consistent with a national growth model that demands greater investment in human capital, social policy requires decentralized social actions linked to specific personal problems. The strategic emphasis should be on the person, on integrality and on empowerment as a goal. We have been down the path of coverage and targeting, to go beyond this requires new ways of looking at things.

The opportunities for decentralization exist. Furthermore, there is a need to enhance the governability of our policies, particularly local development ones, including social, economic and territorial policies. This requires forms of action which incorporate beneficiaries and legitimize the actions of the authority or local agency, as well as relying on structures that can be subjected to scrutiny or assessment (transparency, information, shared decisions, diffusion, etc.).

Today the administration of social development aimed at eradicating poverty in local agencies includes a large component of central program administration, with scant availability or possibility for the generation of programs, strategies and assessments. The modes of diagnosis are aimed generally at registering shortcomings, rather than understanding processes (vicious circles, cultural or behavioral pathologies, environmental impact, etc.). This is very closely related to the obtaining of resources, which are basically associated with specific funds that are limited in their scope and operation. This is not to say there is no empirical understanding of other aspects: it is simply a question of the structural impossibility of paying attention to them, of providing solutions in these dimensions.

In the private social development agencies, including NGOs and the Church, the approach tends to be different: an agency's thematic specialization (e.g. nutrition, health, women, etc.) usually implies a way into the world of poverty, from where one can relate to its multiple aspects. Consequently, one sees a greater degree of integration in private social welfare

efforts. This difference, of course, is related to other key aspect: open availability of resources, smaller-scale attention, more frequent and better relations between professionals and the population catered for, institutional legitimacy, etc.

For this reason decentralized social action policy should consider these structural aspects of institutions or agencies, strategically orienting themselves towards generating processes of attention which coordinate both types of agency, thereby multiplying the capacity for action based on the potential of each one. Feedback, shared diagnosis, information, records of experiences, evaluation, co-financing, methodologies of “market segmentation” by level of attention or institutional experience, complementary professionals, working material and equipment, joint formulations of strategies and social policies, project banks, are just a few of the possible areas of joint action.

There is agreement that the tools in use for diagnosis, project development and evaluation, respond to the goals of implementing central programs, i.e. to administrative dispersion. For the decentralization of social policy, or its enrichment with locally structured options, it will be necessary to investigate further and in different ways, to design operational mechanisms that are different from those currently in use, and above all, to get away from the quantitative type of evaluation or coverage as the main way of justifying programs.

Decentralization is necessarily a political choice. In this regard, mechanisms of local democratic management demand adjustments in the modes of action and operation of the program. The necessary local identification of projects will arise from open and participatory processes with strong local content. The link between development agencies, whether public or private, will be strengthened, giving legitimacy to the process. Authoritarian conceptions of excessive paternalism will not prosper or respond to the kind of phenomena seen in poverty.

A non-postponable aspect of these future guidelines for local development is the incorporation of the private sector into different stages of the process. This not only makes it possible to incorporate new resources into the process of eradicating poverty, but also makes possible the integration of efforts, and breaks the logic of dealing with poverty as a state task pertaining to the public sector. Overcoming poverty, in particular its expressions in the locality, requires accepting the national task that this represents. Poverty constitutes the most important of the breaks on growth in this country, because it continues to require huge resources, and because to grow one needs healthy, educated and socially integrated people.

For this to be effective, big strides need to be made, among other things, in financing systems, in the creation of legal and instrumental options for channeling collective and entrepreneurial efforts into appropriate agencies for intermediation, in local institutional strengthening with special concern for credibility and transparency in management, in the design of mechanisms for effective control. The task is long and far-reaching. It requires political will and decision; it is the task of decentralization. □