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## **Starting early: relational capital networks for street children in emerging knowledge-based public service models**

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Leticia I. Lopez

Instituto Tecnológico y de Estudios Superiores de Monterrey (ITESM),  
2501, Eugenio Garza Sada, Monterrey, 68849, México  
Email: letyflorencia@yahoo.com.mx

Blanca C. Garcia\*

El Colegio de la Frontera Norte, COLEF,  
(Northern Borderlands Research College),  
277, Técnicos St. Tecnológico, Monterrey, 64700, México  
Email: blancagnava@gmail.com  
Email: bgarcia@colef.mx  
\*Corresponding author

**Abstract:** This paper aims to contribute to the literature with a case study on institutionalisation of public-service knowledge-networks. It stems from a four-year doctoral research dealing with institutionalisation processes (IPs) of institutionalised nursing homes in Latin American cities. The paper will first bring a theoretical background on profound social change through network formation for community building purposes. It will draw from Giddens' *structuration* model from the Barley and Tolbert (1997) perspectives. This will allow observing social capital construction and its role in building networks, organisations and institutions in emerging knowledge-oriented public service contexts. The paper will depict action-learning as the main methodological approach, using a practitioner-based qualitative analysis of institutional processes. Networks that include families, nursery shelters, funding and childcare entities amongst others, would be identified and expected to link with policy-makers and authorities, in order to consistently prevent the perverse effects of homelessness: violence, abuse and social exclusion in our cities.

**Keywords:** new public management; NPM; knowledge-based networks; relational capital; homeless children; Monterrey.

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**Biographical notes:** Leticia I. Lopez is a PhD graduate at the Monterrey Institute of Technology (ITESM). For a number of years, she has been keenly working along key agents in Monterrey to consolidate a collaboration network that could consistently support the children nursing homes in the city. She expects to pursue a deeper network construction model using notions developed in her doctoral work, in order to facilitate community construction and knowledge-based development schemes for institutions and the voluntary sector in her city-region.

Blanca C. Garcia is an Interdisciplinary Human Resources Developer dedicated to the facilitation, creation, policy and research of development studies, such as knowledge-generative environments that engage people to learn at the city-region level. She holds an Assistant Professorship position at the Public Policy Department of El Colegio de la Frontera Norte (Northern Borderlands Research College, COLEF) where she works under the flag of knowledge city schemes, focusing in city-region development through networked processes and initiatives of knowledge-based development (KBD) in urban contexts.

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## 1 Introduction

For the past 20 years, social capital, participation and social innovation have been gathering momentum beyond their status as secondary components of the new public management (NPM) formula, along with other paradigms in the construction of urban communities. In addition, the rise of the networked economy has emphasised the importance of intangible assets and the construction of knowledge networks within market systems and all intangible mechanisms that underpin them. As a few *networked society* models emerged, some key notions related to relational capital and knowledge conversion also came along to analyse and re-interpret urban communities' intrinsic worth, leading to knowledge-based perspectives. In such context, this paper will observe how people in cities develop new forms of organisation, participation and citizenship following notions of knowledge-based societies. More specifically, it will observe how knowledge-based citizenship principles are present in the construction of networks and other social forms that promote new forms of social organisation.

Clearly, in the rise of a fully networked society, an important question is how to create communication networks to strengthen core societal private-civic-government partnerships and encourage regionally based social innovation. From a development point of view, answering this key question would lead to a strategy to overcome issues such as isolation, exclusion, lack of social skills, and absence of foundational institutions from which to develop and regenerate localities and impoverished regions. This paper stands on the *network metaphor*, as a key element to establish and nurture a culture of connectedness within key local institutions focused on the attention of homeless children – such as nursery shelters, government and civil agencies –, and with strategic partners inside and outside their own geographical spheres for networked collaboration. As regions' individual capabilities are expanded and interlinked, it is believed that networked institutions could become a collective asset and a pole for knowledge-based development.

Indeed, from a development point of view, high expectations lie on networked strategies such as learning, defined as a process of knowledge-creation. Learning is hence assumed as an institutional capacity to affect the processes of citizen participation, governance and the management of social innovation. Following this line of research, this paper presents a contextualised study of networked collaboration between the civil

society and the municipality, as well as at state and federal levels of government, in a city-region with ongoing knowledge-based development initiatives. Research has included a review of the existing literature on the transition between the welfare state and the relational state, which heavily relies on networks of collaboration to carry out its social objectives. The study will explore the practices and possibilities of network construction that promote actions, decisions and policy-making, which in turn would favour homeless children in the northern states of Mexico. Under the scope of knowledge-based development, we will thus attempt to characterise the socio-organisational practices of a city-region in transition: a process that started a few years back with connectivity as the main goal of the federal government to develop children-oriented institutions in the North East region of Mexico, the Mexico-Texas borderland.

The proposed work closely observes the creation of regional and intermediary networks; the impact will be enhanced support for anticipated challenges and policies in the Monterrey city-region. To a certain extent, this work also includes collective integration and convergence activities for SMEs and NGOs in the state of Nuevo Leon, whose capital city is Monterrey. Networks and systems explored have a number of distinctive elements, which specifically illuminate the fluidity of networking arrangements in complex worlds such as the Monterrey society as a whole.

## **2 Social capital and networks in the relational society**

Surely, one of the successful definitions of the state in terms of public management has been that of the ‘enabling state’ (Gilbert and Gilbert, 1989; Gilbert, 2002, 2005). In theorising a potential *relational state*, Gilbert (2002) has advanced that the enabling state seemingly offers an approach oriented to the market that focuses on benefits that promote participation in the workplace and overall individual responsibility. Gilbert’s (2005) approach emphasises a state, whose role is to provide social protection through public support, thus generating private responsibilities.

On the other hand, British sociologist Giddens (2007, p.134) prefers a different kind of relational state, as the ‘guarantor state’ that “influences on the results to favour the public interest, and even guarantees them”, instead of an enabling state that “employs social investment as much as possible to help people help themselves”. Unlike the American approximation of Gilbert, Giddens advances a state that seeks to empower its citizens, as well as providing a framework of guarantees (minimum wages, for example). For Giddens, public service institutions should be as responsive to the needs of those they serve as are most private firms vis-à-vis their clients.

In the same line of thought, we could include proposals of Field (1996) about the ‘stakeholder welfare state’, and Lind (1992) and Weiss (1998) regarding the ‘catalytic state’. Ideas of a highly active society are also found in the *third way* advanced by the new labourism in the UK, in which people are thought to prosper best with an active and strong society where members are aware of their duties towards others and to themselves (Blair, 1998). On the other hand, Donati, in his seminal work on *The Relational Sociology*, shifts the focus of sociological theory onto the relational order at all levels. Clearly, Donati’s work, as in a number of knowledge-based models, assumes that knowledge is dependent on relational/social capital – it is at least ‘processed’ in social interactions – but the dynamics of knowledge production and associated increasing

competition undermines the traditional social capital (families, workplaces, local communities).

These ideas were previously embraced by Etzioni (1988) and Giddens (1994, 1998) himself, but in the last decade emerging notions of public management have also included the iconic concept of *governance*. Kooiman (2003) defines governance as the totality of public and private interactions dedicated to solve problems and create social opportunities. He calls it *interactive governance*. There are relevant aspects in this perspective that relate to the definition of relational state, where a strong state is not something that is derived from a constitution, but it happens to be something contextual and entrepreneurial (Pierre and Peters, 2000). Governance approaches that would be relevant to the notion of relational state are those in which the institutions are strengthened, and those in which the state is not only analysed from the inside-out, but also from the outside-in (Mendoza and Vernis, 2008). All these elements and changes clearly portray the need for public managers' relational leadership and network entrepreneurship skills. Indeed, today's context is already requiring public managers to exercise a 'humble and facilitating' leadership style, based on openness, dialogue and participation, with the ability to think at the partnership/network level, give strategic direction and encourage experimentation and diversity [Mendoza and Vernis, (2008), p.25].

### 2.1 *Knowledge, social leaning and networks*

On the other hand, the term *network* designates a social relationship between actors. Actors in a social network can be persons, groups, but also collectives in the form of clusters, institutions, communities or even societies (Seufert et al., 1999). Networks are determined by contents (e.g., products or services, information, emotions), form (e.g., duration and closeness of the relationship) and intensity (e.g., communication-frequency). It is thought that form and intensity of network relationships establish the network structure (Burt, 2000). Moreover, the relationships between the actors are founded upon personal-organisational or technical-institutional interconnections on a long-term basis (Seufert et al., 1999). Network member's relationships stem from their individual autonomy and interdependence, their tensions between cooperation and competition as well as reciprocity and stability. Clearly, "boundaries are constructed socially by the network members" (Seufert, 2003).

But, what is knowledge? There is a tradition that goes back as far as Plato, known as the *tripartite theory of knowledge* that defines it as justified true belief. The tripartite theory says that if you believe something, with justification, and it is true, then you know it; otherwise, you do not (from <http://www.theoryofknowledge>). Clearly, the deeper our learning, the more conscious, specific, and articulate will be our knowledge of what we do not know. In a way, at an individual level, we become aware of our ignorance (Popper, 1963). However, this piece of work adheres more to definitions of knowledge as a social learning process, and therefore a collective harvest.

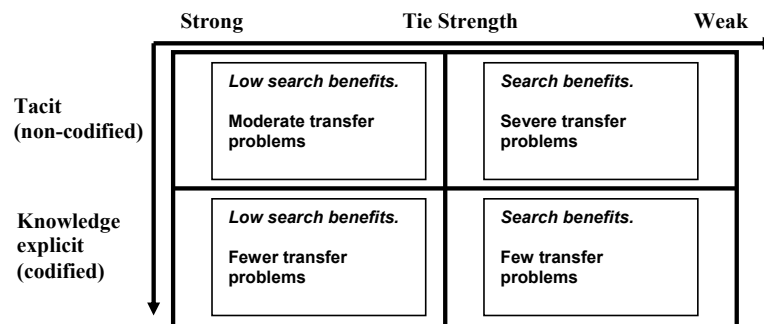
This conceptualisation of *knowledge processes* as *social processes* is most prevalent in modern knowledge-based and learning-related literature. For instance, Berends et al. (2003, p.1036) define learning as "the vehicle for utilising past experiences, adapting to environmental changes and enabling future options" and draw inspiration from such fields as psychology and management science. Like Giddens, Berends and his colleagues believe that structure is a resource for interaction in the sense that individuals or actors do

not construct social reality from scratch but draw upon preexisting structural elements in their actions. Existing rules and resources make human actions possible, but in turn human action is constrained by existing structures, which elicits that structure as both enabling and constraining (Berends et al., 2003; Timbrell et al., 2005).

## 2.2 Socially networked environments

Social knowledge networks are also defined by different degrees of knowledge transfer capabilities. Hansen (1999) found that weak ties help a sub-network search for useful knowledge in other sub-network, but impede the transfer of tacit knowledge, which requires strong ties between the two parties to an effective transfer (see Figure 1). Strong ties are defined by bonding, bridging and linking social capital. Bonding social capital refers to the intra-community ties within relatively homogeneous groups (family and ethnic group, amongst others), in which members can depend on in situations of need. Bonding social capital helps build group cohesiveness and a sense of shared goals. Bridging social capital refers to the inter-community ties between individuals and groups, which cross social divides, such as ethnicity, gender and socio-economic status. Although these are unlikely to be as strong as the intra-community ties, it would seem that a combination of both is required for individuals to “transcend their communities and join the economic mainstream” (Gratnovetter, 1995).

**Figure 1** Network strength



Source: Adapted from Hansen (1999) in Augier and Vandelo (1999)

Linking social capital or embeddedness, for some authors (Taylor et al., 2004), refers to the nature and extend of the ties connecting the civil and political spheres [Taylor et al., (2004), p.228] and/or the relations between individuals and groups in vertical, hierarchical or power-based relationships [Healy, (2002), p.79]. The concept of embeddedness reflects a relatively horizontal distribution of power relations that fosters mutual trust and cooperative norms between citizens and the state [Wallis and Killerby, (2004), p.250]. Strong ties seemingly allow for face-to-face interaction between the two parties involved in the transfer, and thus the richness of the media used for the knowledge transfer is high and better suited for transfer of tacit knowledge (Augier and Vandelo, 1999). On the other hand, authors like Melucci (1999) add dimensions like solidarity and interdependence, when actors in a network produce collective action because they are able to define themselves and their field of action (relationships with others, availability of resources, opportunities, constraints).

Nevertheless, according to Hansen (after Gratnovetter, 1973), distant and infrequent relationships, i.e., weak ties, are highly efficient for knowledge sharing because they give access to novel information by bridging otherwise disconnected groups and individuals in organisations. Surprisingly enough, opposite strong ties are likely to provide redundant information, as they often exist among a small group of actors in which everyone knows what the others know [Hansen, (1999), p.83]. Hence, in terms of relational social capital, a characterisation of networks by their *bonding* and *bridging* social capital is associated with those interpersonal relationships that can be labelled as ‘strong ties’ following the classic distinction by Gratnovetter (1973, 1985). The article by Gratnovetter (1973) titled ‘The strength of weak ties’ is a classic in this field. One of the main points of the article is that *weak ties*, i.e., ties between persons who do not know each other so well, are important as channels of new and unexpected information. At the core, this is the strength of *weak ties*.

Correspondingly, *strong ties*, i.e., relations with more familiar persons, may not provide as new and unexpected pieces of information as the *weak ties*. Putnam (2000) has also emphasised how the *bonding* social capital refers to the *intense* and *tight* interpersonal networks. In social capital concepts such as *associativity*, the *bonding* social capital is connected to the relationships among members who are actively involved in the activities and who know each other well. Correspondingly, the concept of *bridging* capital refers to the social linkages between and among persons who do not know each other very well. This kind of *bridging* capital in the *associativity* context refers to the relationships among those members who are quite inactive and take part in association activities only occasionally (Garcia, 2006). In brief, no one can own social capital only by him/herself, as it lies in relationships between and among persons. For the relational purposes of this article, we have adopted the social capital definition as advanced by Burt (1992): it is both the resource contacts and the structure of contacts in a network. Holding a certain position in a social network can be “an asset in its own right. That asset is social capital” [Burt, (1992), p.12].

### **3 Network creation in the Texas-Mexico borderland**

The north east region of Mexico is a territory of contrasts. Three states (*counties, regions, departments*) integrate the Mexican North-east: coastal Tamaulipas (bordering the Gulf of Mexico), inland Nuevo León and Coahuila. All three states share their borders with (USA) Texas, a challenged borderland in which both positive and negative social capital is being created. Monterrey, the capital city of Nuevo León is considered the city-region epicentre on the Mexican side of the border, and is about a 3.5 hour drive from the nearest border-crossing point.

#### *3.1 Networked nursery shelters in Monterrey, Mexico*

From an outsider view, the Mexico-Texas border region has suddenly gone from being a “model for developing economies to a symbol of Mexico’s drug war chaos, sucked down into a dark spiral of gangland killings, violent crime and growing lawlessness” (Emmott, 2011). In that context, however the Monterrey city-region in Nuevo Leon portrays a solid life and business culture established over a hundred-years-old entrepreneurship standards. Such culture has created a notorious corridor of social capital and opportunities for

collaboration with several communities within Mexico and its neighbouring Texas (Pavlovich-Kochi et al., 2004). Hence, a valuable debate and research around the idea that social capital and network creation can be expressed and leveraged in such contexts could be quite revealing and informative despite challenging contexts such as the Mexico-Texas borderland.

Indeed, in the context of children nursery shelters, a set of dynamic processes of network creation in Monterrey (Nuevo Leon) were triggered by a succession of facts back in 2011. In this year, a new public policy initiative at state level was launched to regulate nursery shelters. The whole society in the northern city of Monterrey was not quite prepared to assimilate the new responsibilities that state government officials were proposing. However, the norm generated a wave of changes in the interactions and relationships between the different nursery shelters and the local government, led by a leading institution called DIF<sup>1</sup>. In this crisis context, new players emerged. And new regulations set the pace for capacity-building within the institutions that would more closely seek for the protection of Children's rights in the state of Nuevo Leon.

Hence, the present research work undertakes the analysis of relationships between actors within the process of institutionalisation of children living in nursery Homes in Monterrey (Mexico), and the kind of agency they portray according to the sociological perspective of Giddens (1990) before and after the government normative standard was made public. Research involved the observation of the learning and network-generation processes amongst stakeholders. Most importantly, it also involved a reflection-on-action space, both with assigned doctoral thesis supervisor and in meetings with some of the actors who were continually involved in the process (and remained in it) for eight years. Most actors remained the same during this period: they are individuals who went through the institutionalisation process from 2006 to 2013 performing their functions either in nursery shelters, in institutions or state government offices. It is the observation of their relationships and the change of social structures for the protection of institutionalised children, which is at the core of this research work.

My observation of institutional learning and network-generation processes was done mainly as a participant-observant of this intense and continuous interaction process between stakeholders. During eight years, I had a role in the institutionalisation process as a participant observer, who was managing, administering, articulating part of the process and doing research (during the last four of those years) at the same time. I also joined some small group discussions, where I was managing the knowledge gained by the questions generated by both parties during meetings, planning, projects etc. Those interactions became meaningful learning and at the same time contributed both to the analysis in terms of research and also in terms of planning in the benefit of nursery shelters for compliance with the new legal framework.

In this context, I had a privileged role: I was an active actor, deeply involved in the process. In those terms, I think I became an *agent* (Giddens, 1990), defined as follows:

- a Agent is competent: The fundamental criterion of competence is that an actor is able to explain, if asked, almost every activity he does. Agents routinely and almost effortlessly have an ongoing theoretical understanding of the fundamentals of their activity. As part of a civil society organisation (CSO), I joined a government committee for decisions on regulation and professionalisation of nursery shelters where I was asked my opinion of how actions and decisions were taken.

- b Agent is reflexive: Reflexivity is the agent's ability to consistently record physical and social aspects of the contexts in which s/he moves. This reflexivity is what makes recursive social practices possible. I used a field diary in all meetings, interviews, events, group work, etc. I recorded important aspects in this diary, which included dialogues of every encounter, which I would later analyse from a sociological perspective to share with the same and other actors in order to reach consensus and agreements. This in turn, led me to build a panoramic view and to integrate the vision of all those involved in the reality observed.
- c The agent is intentional: the agent responds to reasons and motives in his/her actions, although many of these motivations are not part of their discursive consciousness. Giddens distinguishes between two realms (both part of a layered model): rationalisation and motivation. Rationalisation corresponds to the theoretical understanding that the agent has about his/her actions and the motivation has to do with desires that are not necessarily known by the agent. For instance, I grew concerned about abandoned children who live in nursery shelters before I knew my family history. I got involved as I grew more aware of the reality lived by this vulnerable sector of our population. But above all, I was acutely aware (in the midst of a violent scalade in Monterrey city) that there would be bitter consequences in our society if a solution was not reach through concrete actions in favour of nursery shelters. Giddens (1990) believes that the action is considered to be intentional when the actor knows she/he will have a certain result and use that knowledge to achieve such result. Moreover, the agent's action has unintended consequences and unforeseen implications that are beyond the scope of the agent, hence *intentionality* in Giddens is different than being strong and purposeful in his/her own actions. In fact, Giddens (1990) defines *intention* as an act of which the author is known, or believed to be of a particular quality and outcome, and in whom this knowledge is used by the actor to achieve the quality or result implied by that knowledge or belief. Summing up his position on the intentionality of the agent, Giddens (1984) advanced: "I am the author of many things I do not have the intention of doing nor want to produce them; yet, I do them". When I started my research process in 2009 not imagine that experience a historic moment at the national level for the protection of the rights of institutionalised children and the structural changes it would bring.

#### 4 Action learning for network construction

This paper stems from a four-year ongoing research at doctoral level that started with a passion for articulating social interactions, an entrepreneurial spirit and an aspiration for social innovation. Long before embarking into doctoral research, I founded a non-governmental organisation (NGO) called *Mexican Little Giants Foundation* (MLGF) in the aim to offer and gather financial support to child nursing homes. MLGF took a mediating role in the local array of institutions (public and private) that wanted to help modernise the welfare system in place to assist and institutionalise abandoned children in the city of Monterrey, and the state of Nuevo Leon in general. I hence fully joined (although I had been part of) the process of regulation and professionalisation of the Nursing Homes in this city-region. Although I come from a family in which grandparents actually lived in a Foster Home and were later adopted by loving families, I was not



necessarily aware of all the mechanisms involved in a city-wide process of Nursing-Home change. Rather, I became aware of it all during the process of research, including my assumptions based on personal family experience. In terms of research, I have adopted a socio-constructivist approach, in the sense that I considered one by one all the actors' perspectives involved in order to observe institutionalisation processes. However, since research would analyse my own practice and involvement in the process, I chose the action-learning (AL) approach coined by Revans (1959), as the most suitable tool for the kind of research I was pursuing. Pioneered by Revans and developed worldwide since the late 1940s, AL provides a well-tried method of accelerating learning which enables people to handle complex issues more effectively. It involves working on real problems, focusing on learning and actually implementing solutions. It is a form of learning by doing. Thus, I selected this methodology in order to reflect and elaborate through my role within MLGF, and to allow me to account and reflect on my action and articulation of some actors who have participated in the institutionalisation process undertaken by a good number of stakeholders in the city of Monterrey.

#### *4.1 AL as the basis for highly engaging research*

AL is based on a radical concept:  $L = P + Q$ . This means that *learning* requires *program knowledge* (i.e., knowledge in current use) plus *questioning insight*. AL is an approach to individual and organisational learning. Working in small groups known as *sets*, "people tackle important organisational or social challenges and learn from their attempts to improve things" [Pedler and Abbott, (2013), p.5]. *Sets* provide challenge and support: individuals learn best with and from one another as they each tackle their own problem and go on to actually implement their own solution. The process integrates: research (into what is obscure); learning (about what is unknown); and action (to resolve a problem) into a single activity and develops an attitude of questioning and reflection to help individuals and organisations adapt and promote change in the midst of demanding workplace requirements. AL particularly leads subjects to become aware of their own value systems, by demanding that the real problems tackled carry some risk of personal failure (Revans and Mann, 1989). The AL approach has been successfully applied to a wide range of situations in industry, commerce and the service sector world-wide. It is especially effective when tackling strategic problems in the boardroom and at social consensus-based meetings. At the same time, it develops skills for new responsibilities; improve productivity and mostly for bringing about major changes in large organisations and improve services in the health and education sectors in the social realm.

#### *4.2 The challenge: to build a new network of collaborators*

The challenge was to transform an old and rusty group of civil organisations [Revans, 1982), p.606] into a dynamic network that could serve the homeless children in our city. This was the passionate, urgent quest that dozens of city people were embarking to. Would our group of organisations eventually take such turn? Somehow, lights of hope existed in every corner of our network. In fact, a lot of new fresh ideas came about. Slowly, we came to realise that becoming a networked learning system seemed to be the most effective way of embedding processes and enabling partners to sustain continuous development [Borzsony and Hunter, (1996), p.24].

In fact, the cardinal principle of the process, just as the one Revans' had for the Belgian Foundation for Industry and the Universities, was *learning by doing and helping colleagues to learn by doing* [Revans, (1982), p.287]. But while doing so and becoming a learning network, we needed to lay the foundations of a new breed of projects that would show results in the social context. We had an urgent responsibility vis-à-vis the civil population and all the institutions that were already in place. We thought that for the most part, that responsibility could be fulfilled by involving the maximum number of stakeholders possible into a collaborative feedback process on a long term basis. So, the objectives set for the people working at municipality level were, in short, *deutero-learning* (or learning to learn, [Dilworth, (1998), p.37]) and developing multiple learning partnerships in search for academic quality (Borzsony and Hunter, 1996).

In order to achieve such objectives, our organisation MLGF, and our working group later, developed a set of beliefs that helped us work throughout time, and reflected the kind of networked learning system we wanted to become.

Our first principle was that *people can be trusted*. Being in a culture with a high power distance, high uncertainty avoidance and a fairly high degree of collectivism (Hofstede, 1997), people tend to avoid responsibility in decision making; to accept bribes in exchange of special favours and to distrust even their closest friend. However, we wanted to have trust as one of our main working values. In the same tone, our second belief was that *people are able to make their own decisions* [Borzsony and Hunter, (1996), p.24]. These two beliefs combined actually empowered people, and enabled them to develop accountability, commitment and ownership of their own work. In fact, we took Casey's (1983, p.45) advice when he said that AL would work if [our] people owned it, and we started to ask the question: what do they own now?. Our third belief was that *if people learn, people change*. Essential to the learning organisation, the learning process in the workplace conveys development and change, and it so does at different levels: from the individual to the team and to the organisation. An added bonus to this was that if people learned, they would grow better at adapting to uncertainty [Revans, (1998), p.25]. Our fourth belief was that *relationships*, as well as partnerships, are *generated by conscious, planned networking activities*. While extending our area of influence and action into the industry and other organisations, our 'client' relationships became paramount and strategic. These principles and beliefs helped us to focus more in the learning task to be achieved, but certainly breaking through an old system of culture-embedded habits with AL interventions prepares a team for some surprises. However, we clearly understood that our job was to create spaces in which mixed groups of people can create their own partnerships and learn together. For this to be sustained, we focused into enabling partners to facilitate learning and change for one another so that the new processes could become embedded in the emerging culture [Borzsony and Hunter, (1996), p.24]. Our AL change intervention took into account the five basic elements of AL: the *problem, set, client, set advisor* and *process* [Spence, (1998), p.1]. These tools would be strategically useful to observe actors functions: nursery shelter homes and their interactions with governmental instances.

### 4.3 *Interactions and dialogues as data*

Following the AL scope, and aware of the methodological demands of my sociological approach, qualitative techniques such as interviews and document analysis were

considered important tools in order to record systematic knowledge about the social world I chose to research. Hence, instruments selected for field work were:

- a interviews
- b documents generated by the actors
- c diary with participant observation notes.

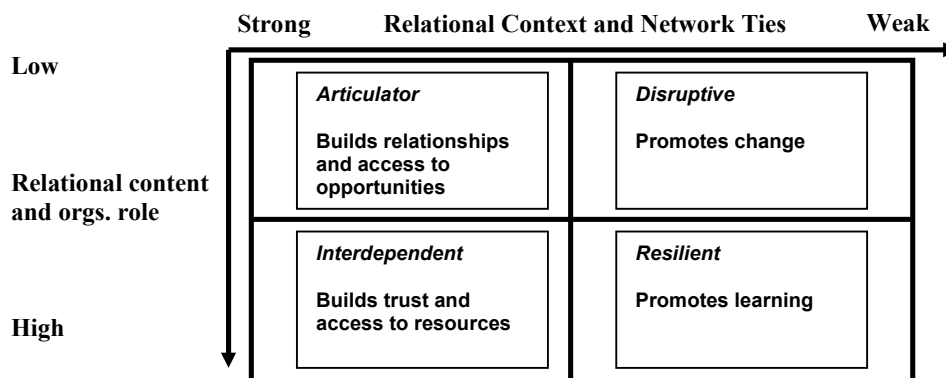
Interviews grew in complexity as years went by, since they were a series of dialogues with the same people during a process of eight years. Also, I was part of the process of creating empirical documentation that was generated as a result of information and knowledge systematisation. So, working teams I was part of at the time created some of the now official process reports. As for the field diary, it was written continuously, following the same ethnographic process used in ethnographic disciplines to record experience-based empirical information. Participant observation and empirical data recording were the means to obtain information about two types of actors in society: nursing shelter homes and government instances involved in childcare. Validity of results will be obtained through triangulation of data. Both by comparable information from different stakeholders, and from the analysis through different perspectives on the same reality observed: the regulation and professionalisation of nursing shelter homes in Nuevo Leon between 2006 and 2013. For methodological purposes, these three sources of information were called *subjects of knowledge*, because when these actors were asked to reflect on the context around them or to establish processes of dialogue in favour of the model of institutionalised childcare in which they were participating, they were usually able to build new knowledge (tacit knowledge into explicit knowledge or explicit knowledge into more explicit knowledge (Nonaka, 1991). This process would match the methodological process of AL proposed by Revans, in which individuals transform tacit knowledge into explicit knowledge. Eliciting actors' interviews was also a mechanism to lead them to reflect on their actions and relationships with other actors. The interviews emphasised dialogues about interactions they had had since 2006 in relation to care and protection of institutionalised children. In this sense, the empirical information obtained from fieldwork was provided by fellow companions who, like me, were deeply involved in the observed process and reality. Interviews led by non-structured methodology produced reflective narratives of actors that increased in richness and depth during the eight-year process. They triggered two lines of reflection during the methodological process of analysis, namely:

- a Information generated by 16 nursery shelter homes (out of 38 private homes that were operating in Nuevo Leon by December 2012) was considered for research purposes. It would allow us to identify the way the homes operate, the social life they foster and the kind of relationships they entertain with state government.
- b Information generated by some key people within the DIF Nuevo León who had been involved in the process from 2006 to 2013 was also considered for research. It was selected for discourse analysis purposes, in order to further detect the level and intensity of relationships and network construction.

## 5 Challenges for emerging networks in public service institutions

In 2012, none of the existing nursery shelter homes in the city of Monterrey had an operating license because they had not yet complied with the requirements of the new law issued months earlier in 2011. A deadline was set for compliance with the requirements on June 30, 2012. However, requirements were demanding and challenging, and most nursery shelter homes did not seem to have enough time to meet them. Instead, they gathered to request a unanimous petition for extension to deadline compliance. This constituted one of the first acts in their newly found collective action. Moreover, 39 out of the 42 privately owned nursery shelter homes were at high risk of being closed due to lack of compliance, which made them mobilise perhaps for the first time to look for assistance and support. This also created a problem for the state government. In a worst case scenario, if they enforced the law on one hand, they would have to relocate all the children from the incompliant homes on the other hand. At that point in time, local government did not have the logistics nor a plan to supply for the emerging needs. Interestingly enough, most of the existing nursery shelter homes till this point in time had not been operating without constant interaction with one another, nor had they had serious interactions with the state government.

**Figure 2** Responses in networks



Source: Adapted from Gratnovetter (1985) and AbouAssi (2013)

On the other hand, state government itself, in an effort to prepare for law enforcement of the Act to regulate nursery shelter homes, developed and re-structured its staff by July 2011. DIF, the unit directly responsible to followed up on civil society developments, hired new staff, going from 8 to 33 employees. This way, DIF was making sure that each nursery shelter home would have one representative, whose function would be to support and monitor regulations in order to promote regulation and professionalisation. By doing so, the government instance sought for a new equilibrium point in the current structure, as it moved forward in terms of childcare and social development administration.

On their side, nursery shelter homes began to interact with one other, and discuss best practices for the challenges ahead. They also discussed the new directions of their relationship with the state government of Nuevo Leon, who relentlessly requested them to comply with newly established requirements in order to grant an operating license. Some people in Nursing Homes voiced out their disagreement, they had many points

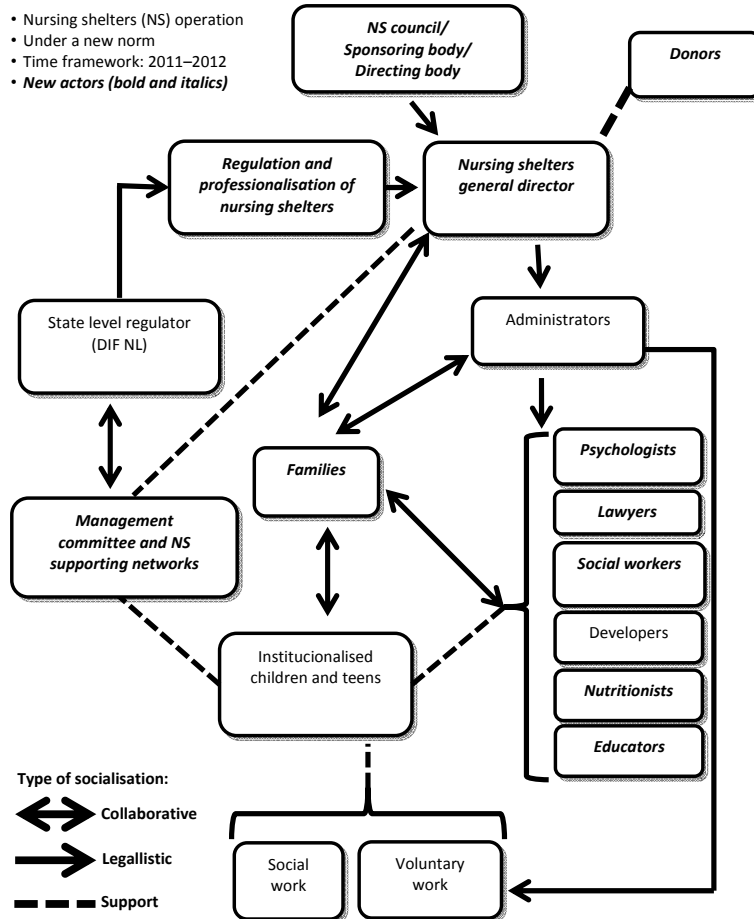
against the Act. This mobilisation triggered the networking and relationship-building amongst nursery homes. As Mellucci (1999) mentions, the actors produce collective action because they are able to define themselves and the field of action (relationships with others, availability of resources, opportunities, constraints).

This characterisation of organisation roles in a network could be useful when analysing a clusterisation of networks, such as:

- 1 service implementation networks
- 2 information diffusion networks
- 3 capacity building networks
- 4 problem solving networks.

All of these networks were present in nature and were deemed necessary in the case of the process analysed for Monterrey, as the next paragraphs will depict.

**Figure 3** Participant agents in children’s nursing shelters by July 5th 2011 ruling



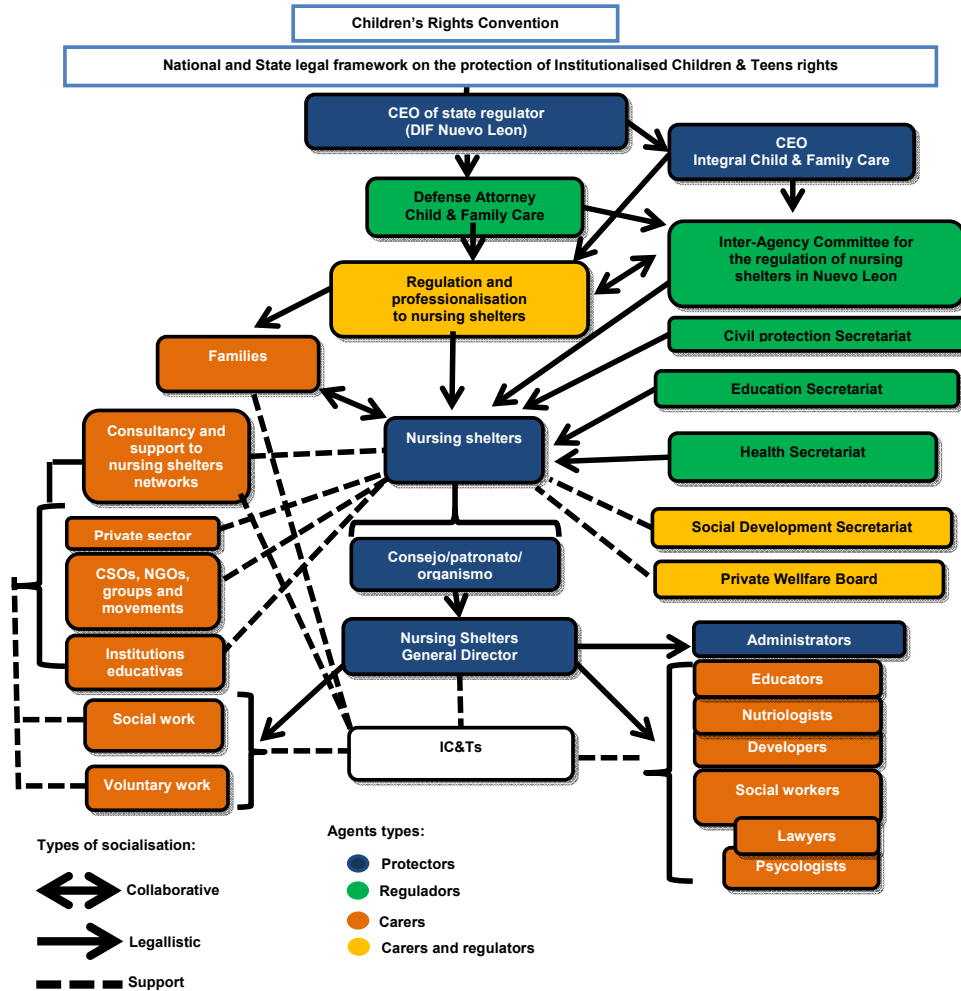
Source: Adapted from own field work information

As research field work continued, it was observed that new roles (and types) of interactions and socialisation among the different agents involved in the operation of the nursing shelter emerged, especially after July 5th 2011 ruling. Those interactions and process of socialisation are represented in Figure 3, which attempts to show how the new agents were integrated into the process inside a shelter. Before the new legislation, most of the nursing shelters did not formally have a Council or Board within its organisational structure. In some institutions, its founder played the role of general manager, but also Attorney, accountant and so on. From the area of regulation and professionalisation of nursing shelters, the state regulator (*DIF Nuevo Leon*) began to advise and assist them on how to create a governing body responsible for the compliance with the institutional mission and the fundraising of the shelter. This regulator began to consolidate culture-change processes in institutions requiring so. For that huge task, a central government agent was appointed. The agent triggered a series of different types of socialisation with and amongst institutional directors and agents, as part of his/her role to oversee, guide and support the work of the operating head in nursing shelters.

Moreover, during research, it became quite apparent that several types of agents would emerge during the process of institutionalisation that would later integrate the nursing shelters care model of Institutionalised Children and Teens (IC&Ts) later in 2012, as illustrated in Figure 4. The three main types emerging from research can be paired up to the ones advanced by Gratnovetter (1985), Mellucci (1999) and AbouAssi (2013) as *Disruptive*, *Articulator Resilient* and *Interdependent*. Those emerging types are the following:

- a *Protective agents (interdependents)* – they are responsible for ensuring the protection of IC&Ts at state level (Nuevo Leon). They make sure that the necessary actions are carried out so that IC&Ts' rights are not violated and are freely enforced in contexts such as boarding schools, nursing shelters and other care places for this purpose. They follow the guidelines of the International Children's Rights Convention and other guidelines advanced by international bodies for its compliance. These instances are the authoritative voices that enforce reforms and publications of new legal frameworks in order to contribute to Children's Rights protection in the particular setting of nursing shelters for IC&Ts.
- b *Regulating agents (articulators)* – their main function is to supervise nursing shelters' compliance with the law. They are responsible for creating the necessary mechanisms to coach and advise these institutions, so that they can make the necessary changes within their operation to comply with the law. They are organisms with legal authority on regulation, supervision, administration and sanction of nursing shelters at state level (in Nuevo Leon).
- c *Caring agents (resilients)* – their actions are focused on providing support to the nursing shelters in order to improve their operation and work so that they can comply with the guidelines established in the existing legal framework. They made donations in-kind, cash, projects and program planning aimed at the comprehensive development of IC&Ts, as well as for the staff working within these institutions. Part of their responsibility is to develop a life plan to care for IC&Ts, and to collaborate on their training during their stay in nursing shelters.

**Figure 4** Participant agents in IC and TS and emerging care model from 2012 on (see online version for colours)



Source: Adapted from own field work information

This model of protection of institutionalised children (IC&Ts, depicted Figure 4) started to operate from 2012 on, and has progressively been established as a valid operating system. Over time, it was observed that each fulfilled agent role actually changed the social practices of the nursing shelters, as well as the type of relations they entertain with Government authorities, companies, educational institutions and civil society organisations. In the bottom line, they all aim to supporting children, with a vision to permeate to the rest of the agents in the system so as to protect the rights of institutionalised children in Monterrey Nuevo Leon.

## 6 Discussion and conclusions

It is thought in social capital models that the social practices are built into habits that are long-lasting and transferable over time (Bourdieu, 1990). These practices were present in the daily activities of the nursing shelters since their foundation and until 2011; some with gradual changes over time but which relate to the protection of the Rights of Children were operating mostly in the same way. The integration of the action to the existing structure is carried out at two levels according to the theory of structuring, one of them is social integration (micro), which refers to practices of communicative characteristics, is the individual action of the actor. Before the publication of the law, actors as insiders in a shelter had the following recursive practices (or *mental categories*, *ibidem*) translated into actions that were shaped by the social space where these actors have been interacting constantly in the history of the operation of the nursing shelters in Nuevo Leon. In the paragraphs that follow, some individual actions that were carried out continuously over time within an institution of guardianship and custody of children have been categorised and conceptualised. Stemming from the analysis of organisational responses in nursery shelter homes in Monterrey; this paper has considered the behaviour of local networks responsible for IC&Ts as they respond to shifts in public policy and decision making. Elements of network behaviour and social capital shifts (Mellucci, 1999, Giddens, 2006) are held constant in this analysis. Moreover, an attention to multiple types of connections (contracts, referrals, information exchange, joint projects, etc.) that hold networks of organisations together are the basis of our analysis of nursery shelter homes in Monterrey. The present analysis constitutes the first exercise of its nature for the ongoing research project related to relational capital networks for street children in emerging knowledge-based public service models. Some types of organisational behaviour in networks identified are depicted in the next paragraphs.

The institutionalisation process in the shelters initiated new forms of socialisation during the interactions between agents. Mainly three types: collaborative, legalistic and supportive.

- a Collaborative socialisation is an interaction with reciprocity among agents, i.e., both are modifying their actions by the exchange of stimuli that arise in the relationship. Agents are changing their way of operation, beliefs, way of thinking, and their way of relating, which impacts on the relationship and interaction they have with other actors. In this type of socialisation, changes are generated in the social practices over time.
- b Legalistic socialisation is expressed between two agents, in where one of them has the authority to legally regulate and supervise the other during the interaction. This legal authority is provided by a legal framework in place, is a relation of regulation, taxation, and therefore submission on the part of the other agent.
- c Supportive socialisation arises in the interaction of two agents, when one of them provides support with knowledge, human resources, donations in cash or in kind, accompaniment, counselling, programs, projects in support of the other; as part of its objectives of operation.

All three forms of interaction were observed in the identified typology of agents as follows:



### *6.1 High access to resources and opportunities/strong ties: interdependent or protective agents*

High access to resources shows the ability of an organisation to promote the first quintessential element in networks: solidarity. Solidarity, which is thought to derive into an interdependent behaviour (Mellucci, 1999), is the actors' ability to recognise themselves and be recognised as members of the same system of social relations. In our analysis, it was observed that the 41 homes that were registered at DIF in Nuevo Leon were subsequently convened by the agency for training, and working meetings. Some policy makers reportedly mentioned: "We ought to be convincing about how much *all* nursery shelter homes need to embrace our model, an consensed model on how to treat children, how to educate them". In this context, government officials were considered as part of a greater informal network, at the same level of home representatives. Even though government officers have a different status and rationality, they pursue the same ultimate goal for the benefit of children, and that puts them on the same side as shelter homes. Local government is not their enemy after all.

### *6.2 Low access to resources and opportunities/strong ties: articulator or regulatory agents*

Low access to resources shows the ability of an organisation to promote and articulate new relationships. For instance, since one of the DIF requirements was to certify their facilities building plans, about ten nursery shelter homes got together to seek for assistance to an architect's consultancy, in an unprecedented act of solidarity against the rules. They found out that if they requested a good number of the same requirement to a single architect firm, they would produce the certifications at a very low cost. Overall, they would pay a handsome sum, but would set each of them at a lower cost. Indeed, those ten homes qualify as *disruptive* collective actors who negotiated and renegotiated different aspects of their action (Mellucci, 1999).

### *6.3 High access to resources and opportunities/weak ties: resilient or caring agents*

High access to resources shows the ability of an organisation to promote and foster learning processes. Learning announces both a process of change and the presence of conflict. In our analysis, all the nursing homes undertook a renovation and a learning curve to take part in the initiative that would henceforth regulate their operations. However, some of them expressed in their speech and actions that they disagreed with what the state government was advancing and viewed him as an adversary: "I have visited other shelter homes and observed what they have done in their dealings with the Attorney General and DIF. They have spoke about lawsuits. There have been some nursing shelter homes with an attitude...?"

Such findings parallel typologies of agents with the nature of their relationships, and would confirm the relational elements within the networks increase in a substantial amount the relational or social capital they had in any given starting point, which in our study goes from 2011 to 2014. Networks to procurement, funding collection, legal advice and support are clearly in place and working. Indeed, this first approach to findings confirms Mellucci's (1999) typology of agent behaviour and it could thus be advanced

that a number of opportunities reside in the weak tie nature of the resilient or caring agent networks, followed by the interdependent or protective agents.

In brief, this paper has advanced research issues that are tightly linked to the operation of nursery shelter homes for children and teenagers in Monterrey (Nuevo Leon, Mexico) which are undergoing an intense institutional process of learning and change. A reconstruction using AL as methodology and a contextualisation of these phenomena were attempted for research purposes, while constant change of actors and agents were observed in the context of a society with acute social problems that calls us all for action. The paper has advanced that nursery shelter home institutions are embedded in networks of relations that shift over time, increasing and decreasing their social (relational) capital. These networks are made of both weak and strong ties based on existing relationships. It was observed how these relationships are built and developed over time through exchange and interactions. Starting as weak connections, relationships are confirmed and ties evolve, strengthen, and mature when interactions become more frequent, exchanges become more extended, and trust becomes reciprocal (Hansen, 1999; Augier and Vandelo, 1999). This means the type of ties (strong or weak) that an entity in the network might change over time, depending on the role, function and *action* it plays within the network. The resulting collective action within the network can also shift.

In conclusion, findings on emerging typologies of organisation roles within a network, paralleled with models such as the one Mellucci (1999) advances, was a useful tool in portraying the inventory of capabilities and relationships generated by a network undergoing profound changes in its structure and performance. Clearly, the model was case-specific in the sense that it explains organisational behaviour under tension, motion and change. In fact we are collectively building a brand new structure for caring and protecting homeless children in Monterrey and promote universal Human Rights for all our Children. This is a task worth a million networks.

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## Notes

- 1 DIF stands for family integral development, and is the federal (national) instance of Mexican government with local representation to provide care and assistance to children, mothers and families in Mexico, especially in vulnerable circumstances. Some of its functions are covered in UK by the *Department for Communities and Local Government* and the *Sure Start Children's Centres*.