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# A COMMON GOOD APPROACH TO DEVELOPMENT

Collective Dynamics of  
Development Processes



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Mathias Nebel, Oscar Garza-Vázquez and Clemens Sedmak (eds). *A Common Good Approach to Development: Matrix and Metric for a Collective Development Processes*. Cambridge, UK: Open Book Publishers, 2022, <https://doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0290>

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ISBN Paperback: 9781800644045

ISBN Hardback: 9781800644052

ISBN Digital (PDF): 9781800644069

ISBN Digital ebook (EPUB): 9781800644076

ISBN Digital ebook (AZW3): 9781800644083

ISBN XML: 9781800644090

ISBN Digital ebook (HTML): 9781800646742

DOI: 10.11647/OBP.0290

Cover image: Cuetzalan, Puebla (2008). Photo by Oscar Garza-Vázquez.

Cover design by Anna Gatti

# 11. Assessing the Nexus of the Common Good

## The Case of the Municipality of Atlixco, Mexico

*Valente Tallabs and Mathias Nebel*

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### Introduction

This chapter studies a preliminary application of the ‘pentagram of the common good’ (PCG) model in the municipality of Atlixco, in the State of Puebla (Mexico), seeking to analyse the dynamics of the nexus of common goods in this particular locality. The community of Atlixco displays interesting characteristics for analysing the common good dynamics, such as its size and sociodemographic composition, historical legacy, cultural wealth, and productive activity, as well as its proximity to the state capital.

The matrix of common good dynamics presented in Chapters 2 and 3 is the result of the work of a multidisciplinary research team convened by the Instituto Promotor del Bien Común (IPBC). The model is a novel and alternative methodology to the metrics of governance; one that does not focus exclusively on the effectiveness of governmental performance.

What is interesting in the proposed matrix is its systemic understanding of a municipality as a nexus of common goods; that is, it does not focus solely on the functions of democratic and legal authorities, but on the total sum of social institutions that govern common life.

The matrix addresses the gaps or contradictions existing between the mostly rhetorical use of the common good language in political discourse or public policies, claiming to work for the common good, and the *real provision of commons* in a community. This inconsistency is largely due to a superficial understanding of the notion of the common good. There is indeed a practical difficulty to pinpointing and capturing what the common good requires in terms of public policies and governmental actions, as well as a lack of assessment capabilities in terms of their impacts on the common good. In this sense, public policies claiming to work for the common good are usually ambiguous, not only by design but also because of a lack of assessment tools that capture their impact on the common good. Most of the time public policies claiming to act for the common good, act, at best, on intuitions or subjective interpretations.

Nonetheless, if the concept could be specified and brought back to the level of policies, it may help us to overcome some of the known limits and contradictions of development policies, as Alford argues in Chapter 9. The matrix of common good dynamics provides such a clarification and this chapter tries to show how it may be applied to a municipality.

## Revising Existing Governance Indicators

While there is a vast literature on the relationship between government, politics and the common good, a specific and practical discussion on the relationship between governance and the common good is actually scarce in political sciences.<sup>1</sup> And the few texts that address the topic adopt a normative stance, hardly ever analysing empirical data or offering practical recommendations.

On the other hand, many authors have proposed some kind of metric of ‘good governance’ at the local level.<sup>2</sup> But these indicators usually avoid

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1 To mention just a few works: *The Art of Public Strategy: Mobilizing Power and Knowledge for the Common Good* (2008) by Geoff Mulgan; *Advancing the Common Good: Strategies for Businesses, Governments, and Nonprofits* (2019) by Philip Kotler; *Dismantling Democracy: The forty-year attack on government and the long game for the common good* (2018) by Cohen; *In the Search for the Common Good: Manual of Public Policies* (2012) by Emilio Graglia, etc.

2 In the wake of the good governance agenda launched by the World Bank in the 1990s, measuring governance became fashionable and this brought a lot of attention to the question. However, the expectations that governance indicators may improve development practice were not met with results and the World Bank brought the experiment to a close in 2020. See <https://info.worldbank.org/governance/wgi/>.

the concept of the common good and cannot be considered similar to our common good approach to development (see Table 1). As mentioned by Nebel and Garza-Vázquez, these governance indicators heavily rely ‘on individual-level data [...], leaving out the *structural dimension of development*’ (see Introduction). Adopting a provider approach of the state, these indicators capture how citizens perceive the quality of public administration and services. Even if they include participation as one of their features, they usually do not capture governance as a collective capability and a shared achievement of the local community.

Table 1. Governmental performance indicators in Mexican municipalities.

INDICATOR	MAIN MEASUREMENT VARIABLES
ICMA ( <i>International City Management Association</i> )	Strengthens the institutional capacities of governments and professionalises their operation: planning, result-based budgeting, e-government, public finances, ethics, and public services.
SEDEM ( <i>Municipal Performance Evaluation System</i> )	1,140 indicators that consider all municipal management institutions.
CIMTRA ( <i>Citizens for Transparent Municipalities</i> )	Government’s transparency regarding budget expenditure, public works, provision of services, administration, urbanisation, councils, and spaces for the participation of citizens.

Source: Own elaboration.

None of the indicators mentioned above manage to capture what Nebel and Medina (Chapter 2) understand as a ‘common good approach to development’, which they propose should be based on information from groups or communities rather than individuals, focusing on the quality of *social processes* whereby basic common goods are produced in the community.

Other governance indicators/municipal indicators adopt a social responsibility approach of the public sector. They might at first sight seem more coherent with our purpose. However, a closer look reveals that they focus on the legitimacy of political authority and institutional outputs, eschewing again the social processes through which basic common goods are achieved in a community (Table 2).

Table 2. Indicators of the responsibilities of the municipal public sector.

INDICATOR	MAIN MEASUREMENT VARIABLES
Social responsibility indicators applied to public administration (those with a “glocal” <sup>3</sup> approach such as International Labor Organization, OECD, Green Books, Global Reporting Initiatives, ISO 26000)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• public value creation</li> <li>• competitiveness</li> <li>• social cohesion</li> <li>• transparency</li> <li>• sustainability</li> <li>• human rights</li> </ul>
UNE 66182:2015 (smart cities)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• institutional development for good governance</li> <li>• sustainable economic development</li> <li>• inclusive social development</li> <li>• sustainable environmental development</li> </ul>
ISO 18091:2014	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• efficiency and effectiveness of local governments and their policies to improve the management and relationship of citizens with their municipalities</li> </ul>

Source: Own elaboration.

Finally, there are indicators that do propose a common good approach, such as Felber’s ‘Economy of the Common Good’ (Felber 2011) or La Moneda’s ‘Government of the Common Good Index’ (La Moneda 2013). Although these two are novel (see Table 3), they lack a solid theoretical framework that supports their general conceptualisation. Their claim to be a ‘radical alternatives’ form of organisation or even a ‘revolutionary model’ of society is greatly overdone.<sup>4</sup>

3 “Glocal” is a combination of globalisation and locality. For the purposes of this work, it refers to the idea of ‘thinking globally to act locally.’ The concept comes from the Japanese term ‘*dochakuka*’ (derived from *dochaku*, ‘he who lives in his own land’), although many references credit Ulrich Beck as the creator and diffuser of the term.

4 For example, the German-based Association ‘Economy for the Common Good’ (ECG) developed a matrix and an indicator that attempts to measure the contributions of economic and public actors to the local common good. It assumes

Table 3. Government and common good indicators in the municipality.

INDICATOR	APPROACHES	MAIN MEASUREMENT VARIABLES
<b>Common Good Economy</b> (Felber)	<b>Methodology</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• matrix, balance, and common good</li> <li>• creation of 'energy fields' (local networks)</li> <li>• municipalities of common good</li> <li>• systematising good municipal practices</li> <li>• citizen participation as a key element of municipal management</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• human dignity</li> <li>• equality</li> <li>• social justice</li> <li>• solidarity</li> <li>• democracy</li> <li>• transparency</li> <li>• trust</li> <li>• ecological sustainability</li> </ul>

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that the economy must serve a community and rejects utility as the main driver of economic behaviours. By focusing primarily on community participation in the creation and redistribution of wealth, the ECG sees itself as attempting to revolutionise economics. However, the movement borrows most of its intuitions from the ubiquitous model of 'social economy', hardly a 'revolutionary' position in the German context. The proposed matrix of the ECG common good is limited in scope. It considers the stakeholders of economic activity, namely a) Suppliers, b) Owners, c) Employees, d) Customers and business partners, e) Social environment—and assesses the impact of economic activity on: a) human dignity, b) solidarity and social justice, c) environmental sustainability, and d) transparency and co-determination. This is definitely a rather narrow approach to the common good that reduces its scope to the impact of economic activity. The notion of the common good is broader and deeper than that. It includes a wide range of social actors and considers all types of social interaction through which common goods are generated. Similarly, the four dimensions proposed—while interesting—lack the coherence and specificity that would distinguish this from other development approaches (UNDP, World Bank, OECD, UN Development Goals). Cf. Felber (2015).

INDICATOR	APPROACHES	MAIN MEASUREMENT VARIABLES
<b>Government of the Common Good</b> (La Moneda)	<b>Fundamental Principles</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• participation and democracy</li><li>• cooperation</li><li>• transparency and ethics in all government actions</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• human dignity</li><li>• equality</li><li>• social justice</li><li>• solidarity</li><li>• democracy</li><li>• transparency</li><li>• trust</li><li>• ecological sustainability</li></ul>

Source: Own elaboration with information on each indicator from Felber (2011) and La Moneda (2013).

We will thus develop in the following sections a concrete proposal to approach and measure the common good dynamics in a municipality. It goes beyond management and public administration of a city or town hall and looks at the way citizens and political actors together generate and resolve public issues regarding the basic commons of the municipality. How they understand each other, so that on the one hand, politicians and administrators learn to include citizens in their decision-making process and, on the other hand, citizens are committed to politics in a broad sense.

To do so, we will follow the matrix of common good dynamics proposed in the PCG and seek, for its five dimensions, the sort of data and indicators that could be relevant to capture the local common good dynamic. This proposal, we will argue, can be an important contribution to the construction of a responsive government and a participative community.



## The Common Good Pentagonam (PCG) and the Subdimension Proposed to Measure Each of Its Five Key Normative Drivers

The matrix of common good dynamics presented in Chapter 2 is an analytical tool that helps us visualise the interactions between the five key normative drivers the IPBC team theorises are necessary for a common good dynamic to exist in a local community. Crucially, it allows us to consider the social interactions structuring the community as the key element of analysis. The model suggests that the density and quality of the relationships between its five key normative drivers form a matrix whereby it is possible to measure the quality of the common good reached by a specific local community. The common good pentagram allows us therefore to read a dimension through its relation to others, as can be seen in Figure 1 (see also Chapter 2). Agency, for example, can be understood and captured through its relations to humanity, stability, justice and governance.

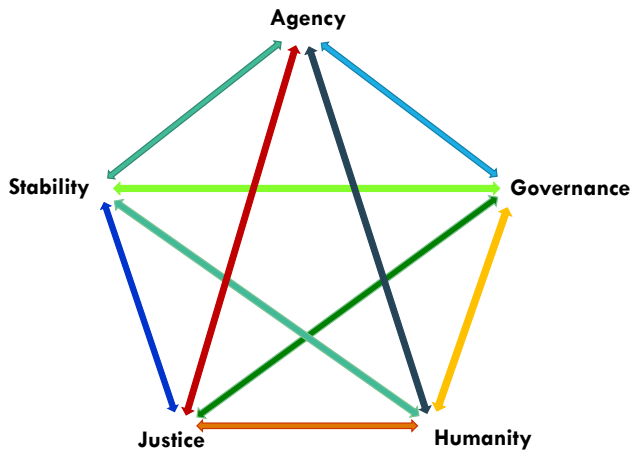


Figure 1. The common good pentagram.

We will not repeat here an explanation of the five dimensions proposed in the model that can be found in Chapter 2. Let us just add that while the model provides an analysis of the current conditions of the nexus in

a locality, it is also a powerful tool for decision-makers. It allows them to identify opportunities and challenges, defining short- and long-term strategies, as well as designing public policies aimed at triggering or strengthening the common good dynamics in the municipality.

In Tables 4–8 below, we try to identify for each of the five normative drivers of the PCG a set of subdimensions considered relevant to capture them, according to the following criteria:

- 1. Each subdimension should comply with conceptual aspects addressed by the literature for each normative dimension (see Chapter 2).
- 2. Each subdimension should capture one relationship of this specific normative dimension with those of others (describing, for example, how Governance is related to Justice or Stability).
- 3. That although many of these variables or subdimensions can be used interchangeably between dimensions because they capture them in various ways, for the convenience of the indicators, each one will be used in just one dimension, the one it best interprets.

Table 4. Governance Nexus.

Normative Dimension	Subdimensions	Relationship to Other Normative Dimensions (Nexus)
Governance	1. Transparency	Governance => <i>Stability</i>
	2. Co-governance	Governance => <i>Stability</i> Governance => <i>Agency</i>
	3. Participation	Governance => <i>Agency</i> Governance => <i>Stability</i>
	4. Governance	Governance => <i>Justice</i>
	5. Sustainability	Governance => <i>Stability</i>
	6. Expectations	Governance => <i>Humanity</i>

Table 5. Humanity Nexus.

Normative Dimension	Subdimensions	Relationship to Other Normative Dimensions (Nexus)
Humanity	7. Human Rights	Humanity => <i>Agency</i> Humanity => <i>Governance</i>
	8. Rights of the person in community (Political rights)	Humanity => <i>Justice</i> Humanity => <i>Stability</i>
	9. Rights in community (Group rights)	Humanity => <i>Agency</i> Humanity => <i>Stability</i>

Table 6. Stability Nexus.

Normative Dimension	Subdimensions	Relationship to Other Normative Dimensions (Nexus)
Stability	10. Right to Life	Stability => <i>Humanity</i> Stability => <i>Justice</i> Stability => <i>Governance</i>
	11. Life and Family Planning	Stability => <i>Agency</i>
	12. Collective Planning	Stability => <i>Agency</i>
	13. Policy	Stability => <i>Governance</i>
	14. Identity	Stability => <i>Humanity</i>

Table 7. Agency Nexus.

Normative Dimension	Subdimensions	Relationship to Other Normative Dimensions (Nexus)
Agency	15. Use of free/spare time	Agency => <i>Stability</i> Agency => <i>Justice</i>
	16. Freedom of association	Agency => <i>Humanity</i> Agency => <i>Stability</i>
	17. Freedom of expression and information	Agency => <i>Stability</i> Agency => <i>Governance</i>

Table 8. Justice Nexus

Normative Dimension	Subdimensions	Relationship to other normative dimensions (nexus)
Justice	18. Equality	Justice => <i>Humanity</i> Justice => <i>Governance</i>
	19. Effectiveness (availability/ accessibility)	Justice => <i>Stability</i>
	20. Social Mobility	Justice => <i>Agency</i>

Methodology and Objectives

As can be seen, the model consists of the five normative dimensions of the pentagram interpreted through twenty subdimensions. The calculation of where they intersect with one another can be translated into fifty indicators that will allow us to measure the dynamics of the nexus of the common good in a municipality.

The relevant indicators for each subdimension were chosen as a tradeoff between the existence and availability of data on the one hand, and the capacity of the indicator to capture the core of each subdimension. In organising the information, we took for each indicator the most recent

data available. For example, one of the subdimensions measuring the dimension of Governance is ‘Participation’, which in turn is explained by means of three indicators: (1) number of social networks or groups in the municipality, (2) number of civil associations, and (3) number of governmental activities designed to bolster civic participation.

Before presenting the mapping of the dimensions and their indicators in the test case of Atlixco, it must be made clear that this exercise does not intend to incorporate any complex statistical methodology, since its objectives, as outlined above, are merely descriptive and exploratory for what may become an instrument for policy planning. Thus, for this first exercise, a basic ‘traffic-light’ criterion— green/adequate; yellow/partial; red/inadequate—will be used to indicate whether the conditions of the variable being analysed are met based on its respective indicators and sub-indicators. The criteria for assigning a degree of compliance include the following:

1. The comparison is with respect to the average data of municipalities in the State of Puebla or in Mexico, depending on the availability of information.
2. When there is no data for comparison at the municipal level in Mexico, we will follow the recommendations of a recognised body specialising in such variables.
3. When there is no statistical data available, we will use first-hand information through consultations with municipal officials or community reference persons (priest, civil officers, etc.).

The following graph is used to represent the results of the traffic light methodology:

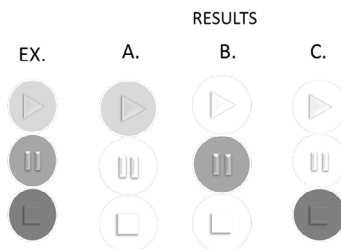


Figure 2. Traffic light indicator. Source: Own elaboration.

The light grey scale in A equals green and indicates *adequate* status, with the metric being on-target or better; the grey scale for B equals yellow and indicates *partial* status, with the metric being off-target and in need of improvement; and the grey C scale is equivalent to red, an *inadequate or poor* status, with the metric being off-target and unacceptable. Black indicates no information available. The criterion for assigning the conditions for this exercise are determined by comparing the local indicator to the average that the State of Puebla and/or Mexico has for that indicator.

In addition to the main objective of this exercise, we can consider that a second purpose, with a view to future exercises, is to determine whether the application of the PCG is sufficient or insufficient for municipalities with the characteristics of Atlixco (i.e., semi-urban and of average population for a Mexican city); whether there is enough information for generating meaningful analyses; and how difficult is it to obtain it when it is available.

Finally, a third purpose is to test the relevance and utility of such a mapping for public governance and decision-making process, as well as to inform citizens of the strength and fragility of the municipality.

In the description below of the Mexican municipality of Atlixco, the application of the PCG model is the central objective, finding advantages and disadvantages in the selection of the interpretive variables proposed to illustrate the nexus of the common good.

### Description of the Municipality of Atlixco (State of Puebla, Mexico)

Atlixco is located in the central-western area of the State of Puebla, thirty-one kilometres from the city of Puebla de Zaragoza, the capital (see Figure 3). According to the last national census (INEGI 2015), the municipality has 134,364 inhabitants, of whom 63,603 are men and 70,761 are women, with an average age of twenty-five years. Its area, 291.9 square kilometres, makes it a relatively small municipality, representing only 0.9% of the area of the State of Puebla.

Atlixco has a strategic location, due to its proximity to the capital and to some of the most important and populated municipalities of the state, such as Cholula and Izúcar de Matamoros. Even Mexico City is fairly close (158 km by road). This location has given it outstanding highway connectivity, linking it with large urban centres, a characteristic which favours the development of various economic activities.

The rapidly developing urban part of the municipality has an area of approximately 64 km<sup>2</sup>, which is equivalent to 22% of its total area. This urbanised growth has occurred both in its central area and in the area near the Popocatepetl Volcano in the western part of the municipality. The new growth is somewhat dispersed, partly responding to the location of two of its main productive activities: flower greenhouses and the textile industry.

According to Mexico's National Council for the Evaluation of Social Development Policy (CONEVAL) between 56% and 59% of Atlixco's population lives in poverty, putting the municipality at a high level of poverty (CONEVAL 2017). Although Atlixco has a diversified economy, it also has a high degree of migratory flow to the United States (CONAPO 2010). It should be noted that although Atlixco has an indigenous population of only 7.3% (INEGI 2010), about 33% of the population self-identifies as indigenous (CDI 2015), and 4.6% speak some indigenous language (INEGI 2015).

Atlixco means 'water in the valley or on the surface of the soil' in Nahuatl, the local indigenous language. Since the beginning of Spanish colonisation, Atlixco was a privileged and coveted place. Its fertility and abundance of water and labour led to a great agricultural wealth, based on the growing of wheat, which led to the area being considered the first granary of New Spain. The city also stands out for its good climate, with an average annual temperature of 20°C; it is popularly known as 'the place with the best climate in the world' (Atlixco City Council 2018).

Likewise, due to its location, landscape, and physical and economic characteristics, in 2015 the municipal seat was incorporated into the 'Programa de Pueblos Mágicos' (Magical Towns Programme) (SECTUR 2016).

## Interpretation of PGC Dimensions in Atlixco

### *Governance Dimension*

This dimension considers six subdimensions that in turn translate into eleven indicators. Using the values obtained for each subdimension and indicator, Table 9 (available at <https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.12434/2f7d12se>) shows the traffic light status according to the determining factors regarding the governance of the common good in the municipality of Atlixco.

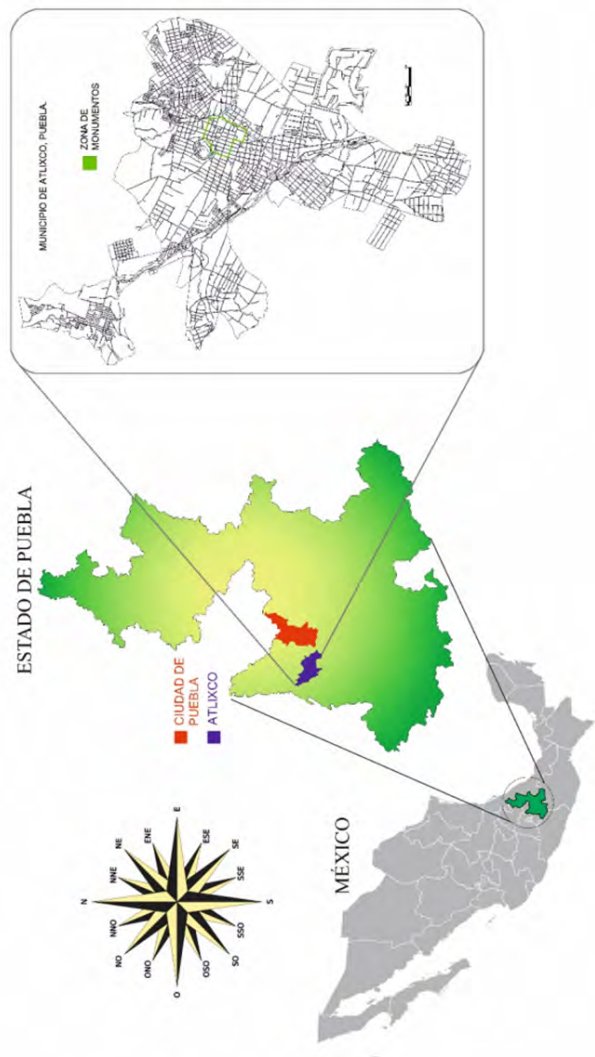


Figure 3. Map and location of Atlixco. Source: Francisco Ruiz Herrera (2017).



Regarding the transparency variable, the Institute of Transparency, Access to Public Information, and Protection of Personal Data of the State of Puebla has fulfilment data regarding the queries requested from the municipality of Atlixco, including time taken to respond and the form of response. The institute estimates, however, that for the size and conditions of the municipality, the number of consultations should be higher, and that the public information available on the city hall webpage as of 2018 is sufficient and clear. Thus, we are not facing a problem or an issue of efficiency or management effectiveness, but rather a matter of transparency and an accountability culture that ideally would permeate even more in the citizenry as something desirable and of real public utility. This seems to be a pending issue of public policy.

Regarding co-government in Atlixco, we find that there are both instances of and possibilities for citizen participation in the exercise of shared power and civic participation. However, there could be more initiatives, given the possibilities, but such initiatives do not exist, according to the information provided by the municipal government. Note that the 'Illuminated Villa' project, which takes place during the December holidays, does have a policy character, but we did not have information to confirm the specific policy outcomes of this event.

Regarding the government activities variable, there is a clear problem regarding homicide rates and perceived insecurity. The number of homicides recorded by the Public Prosecutor's Office for Atlixco is high, even for Mexico, and has been sharply increasing over the past ten years. Furthermore, the data only captures the 'officially recorded homicides', a figure which is known to be substantially lower than the real rate. We must therefore assume that the degree of homicides in the municipality is likely to be greater and that the worsening trend is growing.

Regarding the sustainability of governance, planning times from Atlixco's political authority are strictly what the law requires (municipal policy planning presented in the first three months of the new administration must span three or four years). However, in recent years, there have been no efforts to plan a long-term project (of ten or fifteen years). Moreover, there is no continuity in government programmes beyond a given administration (whether or not they are successful). The

fact is that each new municipal administration traditionally proceeds to change almost all the administrative positions of the municipalities (clientelism). In other words, there is neither institutional memory, nor support for efficient governmental actions between successive administrations, even when the same political party wins the municipality. Municipal authorities openly admit to this difficulty—the phenomenon is fairly common in Mexico—but do not seem willing to seek continuity.

Finally, in the area of expectations, we find that there is no information on institutional trust and degree of happiness for the municipality of Atlixco, although these data do exist for other municipalities in Mexico, including the state capital of Puebla.

### *Agency Dimension*

The agency dimension considers three subdimensions and six indicators. Using the value obtained for each subdimension and indicator, Table 10 (available here) shows the determining factors of the agency dimension of the common good in the municipality of Atlixco.

Our data indicate that the level of agency is good, with metrics being on-target in Atlixco. However, some specific aspects must be taken with a grain of salt.

First, even if the level of employment in the labour market is good or at least proportionately similar to those for the State of Puebla, it also includes in that number people working in the informal economy, whose employment is not submitted to the minimum legal standards.

As for Internet use and family life, no such information was available for this municipality (although it exists for others). As noted previously, it would require the gathering of specific information to capture how people occupy themselves in their free time.

Similarly, we would need a specific qualitative study to capture association life, mechanisms of social participation, and social activities in Atlixco. However, the perception of officials and civil society leaders is that ‘participation in public life’ in Atlixco is good, considering the range and diversity of activities enabling the participation of the citizenry.

Finally, it also seems that for the size of the municipality's population and its geographic area, there is a convenient variety of local media, in addition to the other state and national media available in Atlitxco.

### Justice Dimension

For this dimension, four subdimensions and fourteen indicators were considered. Using the values obtained for each indicator, Table 11 (available here) shows the determining factors for justice in the municipality's common good nexus.

Regarding common good dynamics in Atlitxco, justice is clearly one of the two dimensions creating an imbalance in the system of common goods and hindering the possibility of development. The several deep negative scores in this dimension highlight various aspects of justice that demand both more detailed analysis and urgent attention. According to our model, these shocking levels of poverty and opportunities must have an adverse impact on the whole nexus of common goods in Atlitxco, because the five normative dimensions are relational. Thus, a negative reading for justice also undermines stability, governance, agency and humanity, even if some of these are positive.

Without question, the most serious problem in Atlitxco is poverty, with more than half of its population considered as poor. Poverty is linked to inequality and to the possibility of accessing social services such as health, education, social security, etc. The proportion of the population living with less than USD 1.25 per day is very high, indicating that, despite an acceptable employment rate, workers' wages are low—i.e., insufficient to buy basic foods for their families—and people's working conditions do not allow them access to better life opportunities. This situation is in turn corroborated by the municipality's large, informal economy.

As for the effectiveness of justice in the municipality, the 'availability of' and 'access to' basic public services is usually bad, with some noteworthy exceptions. On the one hand, it has a fair coverage of electric light and the percentage of homes with access to drinking water is very high; on the other hand, the quality and distribution of these services is not sufficient, which in turn may affect the inhabitants' health. Something similar occurs with educational coverage which is

quite good (most are able to attend school), nevertheless the percentage of educational backwardness is high, revealing the poor quality of the system that 'leaves many behind'. However, the most negative aspects have to do with *public health coverage* (>50% population does not have access to the public health system); with the lack of an *effective public transport*; and with *Internet access* in the municipality (the technological gap, which currently puts people at a disadvantage in terms of information and education, work, and communication activities offered online).

### Humanity Dimension

The humanity dimension considers three subdimensions and six indicators and is the most complex dimension to capture in our approach, as it deals with 'standard expectation of behaviours' created by the institutional framework of the municipality. However, for the exploratory and analytical purposes of this first exercise, we thought that various forms of human rights could be proxies for a minimum standard of human behaviour in the municipality. Thus, according to the values obtained for each selected variable, Table 12 (available here) shows determining factors in the municipality of Atlixco for the humanity dimension.

As far as respect for human rights is concerned, we find that Atlixco does not rank high in reports of complaints of human rights violations in Puebla's municipalities; however, the mere existence of such complaints in the municipality cannot be considered a good indicator.

Regarding the rights of the person in the community, the negative relationship of economic factors that comes to light in other dimensions also appears here. A high percentage of the population lacks social security, which has to do with the percentage of people working in the informal economy, which in turn impacts the public health of the population. Although there is not a high degree of people suffering from malnutrition or addictions compared to other municipalities, these conditions are elements to keep in mind and upon which to improve. The amount of green spaces per inhabitant exceeds the international optimum level of 15m<sup>2</sup> / hab. However, this fact sharply contrasts with the accessibility to open public spaces such as parks, plazas, gardens,

sports facilities, etc., which are concentrated in the urban part of the municipality, meaning that people who live far away do not have easy access to them. Therefore, we deem the distribution of these spaces in the municipality inadequate.

Finally, the municipal government's provision of collective rights is positive, noting that the municipality does have a protected nature reserve (Sierra del Tentzo) and a diversity of museums for the municipality's size, public art, and cultural free events.

### Stability Dimension

This dimension is made up of five subdimensions and fourteen indicators. Using the values obtained for each of these, Table 13 (available here) shows the determining factors for the stability dimension.

There is a good deal of variation in the stability dimension, as detailed below. On the one hand, in the 'lifetime' variable, the data indicate that with respect to the local and national average, child mortality is an aspect to improve in Atlixco. On the other hand, the life expectancy of the municipal population is similar to the national average, seventy-six years.

In the 'family life' variable, two indicators stand out negatively: marriage and maximum level of schooling. In the first, we clearly see a growing crisis in life planning by couples who decide not to marry, which indicates that conjugal union, either religious or civil, is no longer considered an option. As family in Mexico functions as the most important social security network, this phenomenon already has and will have more negative consequences in terms of vulnerability and poverty. Of special concern is the increase in unregistered children (i.e., children without birth certificate), which in turn hinders schooling or inheritance.<sup>5</sup>

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5 This is an extremely complex problem in predominantly rural and very traditional municipalities. In particular, in Puebla the civil registry was until a couple of years ago a municipal responsibility. Given the diversity and complexity of some communities, determining the specific procedures for, say, registering a newborn, sometimes left some children unregistered (e.g., when the civil registry denied registration of a baby born out of wedlock). This has, in turn, created the problem of unregistered kids, which in turn creates complex situations when these kids want to actualise their right to attend school.

Few in the population plan out their work lives. The majority of the population does not expect or plan to have a professional career. Empirical evidence indicates that the lower this indicator is, the lower the economic returns by its citizens and the lower the chances of reducing poverty (Psacharopolous and Patrinos 2004), discouraging social mobility.

With regard to politics, in the last two local elections Atlixco's electoral participation was good, and similar to national and state levels. Through the political alternation that the municipality has experienced in recent years, we can see a clear willingness of the population to participate in political decisions and to either endorse or punish efforts that do not meet citizens' expectations. However, data regarding confidence in democracy, while not available for Atlixco, are low at the state and national levels. The population doesn't have a positive perception of democracy, but values it as an important tool of public influence; proof of this are the positive electoral participation and the frequent alternation of political parties in power.

Finally, as far as identity is concerned, the municipality has deep-rooted traditions and values. There is remarkable pride and interest in its main festival, the Hueyatlixcatl, which not only seeks to preserve tradition, but is the community's main cultural reference. Religious holidays are nourished and also represent a living legacy, involving a large portion of a population that identifies as predominantly Catholic.

## Conclusions: Assessing Our Results

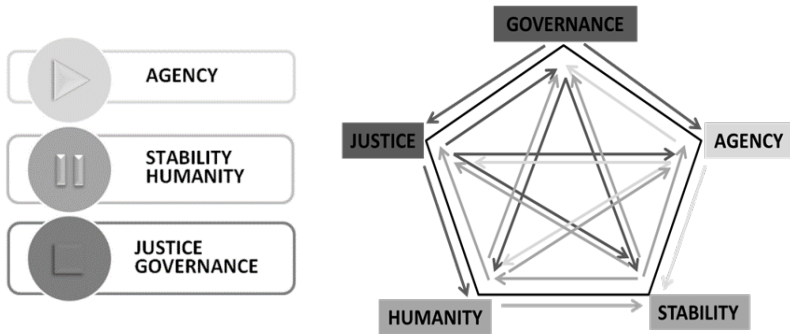


Figure 4. Results matrix for Atlixco.

The graphic expression of the results matrix of the pentagram of Atlixco's links of the common good gives us an interesting picture of the nexus of the common good in this municipality. The overall balance is not positive for the municipality as only 'Agency' turns out to be positive. As the model is relational, when one of the dimensions comprising the pentagram is negative, it will drag the other four dimensions back, generating structural dysfunctions that are hard to overcome. Now in Atlixco, two dimensions are negative and two others fragile. Development policies in these circumstances will most certainly fail if they do not explicitly address this systemic dimension.

More specifically, the negative readings for the 'Governance' and 'Justice' dimensions signal issues that must be urgently addressed if we want to trigger a development process in Atlixco. And of these two, the priority is 'Governance'. According to the model's conceptual definition of these dimensions, we can assume that there is a strong component of direct responsibility by the municipal government for the indicators being so critical. Take, for example, the high level of crime in the municipality. One of the basic tasks of government is security. The high levels of criminality in Atlixco are a failure of the government, past and present, to mitigate the phenomenon by implementing strategies to contain and prevent crime. Moreover, by letting the social context deteriorate over time (see Justice Dimension above), the municipal government created the level of marginalisation prevailing nowadays

in Atlixco, which is a constant breeding ground for criminality (people without a future, without decent work, without access to healthcare or social security).

Proposals for public policies regarding 'Justice' and 'Governance' could be grounded in those indicators whose scores are negative. It would, for example, undoubtedly help to have a long-term planning process that considers the needs and demands of the citizens beyond the three years required by law. Long-term objectives (of ten to twenty-five years) set by the community itself could serve as guidelines to the successive governments, framing their policies toward achieving these communal goals. It would also be pertinent for the elected authorities to have the political maturity to respect the institutional memory of good actions and government practices that people value, regardless of their partisan origin. In addition, it would be helpful to have an adequate public policy framework generated on the basis of reliable data collected in time series extending beyond the three-year mandate. Finally, strengthening professionalisation and creating new mechanisms for conflict resolution would be desirable, although it would be useful to have more accurate analysis and evaluation regarding this indicator.

The dimensions of the common good with intermediate results in their assessments are 'Stability' and 'Humanity'. Two elements draw our attention regarding the 'Stability' dimension: (a) the erosion of the family as the institution that traditionally provided social security and stability to individuals; (b) the average schooling years in Atlixco and their effect on social mobility.

There is a clear and growing crisis of the family institution. Couples no longer value getting married (either civil or religious unions) and many people enter and exit multiple relationships in their lifetime leaving them without rights, duties or protection. The children of these unions are frequently the worse off (they are abandoned or unrecognised, which hinders their schooling and access to work). Thanks to the crisis of marriage, the valuable stability and social certainty provided to a community by the institution of marriage is lost. Undoubtedly, there is an urgent need for a public policy supporting the family; policy that has nothing to do with mass marriage programmes, reduction or remission of civil marriage expenses, etc. What is needed is an integral policy recognising the role of families in providing stability to society, especially



as the first and most important primary network of solidarity and help that individuals can access. As a pillar of stability and solidarity in a poor country, the family deserves the support of the state (transmission of communal experience, structuring of human values, culture of peace, basic support, etc.).

The low average schooling years of Atlixco is another challenging aspect of 'Stability'.<sup>6</sup> Most people in Atlixco only achieve the secondary school diploma and do not seek or cannot access the higher education system. This, added to the lack of professional training, means that members of the local population enter the labour market in a position of fragility, which becomes visible in the low rate of upward social mobility for Atlixco. There is an urgent need for a public policy providing professional education locally, and facilitating access to the higher education system in Atlixco. Equally important is an assessment of the labour market in Atlixco and the creation of incentives to diversify employment opportunities in the municipality. Indeed, the people who do access higher education usually do not return to Atlixco once they graduate.

The dimension of 'Humanity' has one strength that should be highlighted: the environmental calling of the municipality. Atlixco is recognised as the regional reference point in terms of the cultivation of flowers and vegetables and as a centre for both cultural tourism, for the variety and quality of its festivals, for recreational tourism, and for its climate, spas, gastronomy, etc. Atlixco's inhabitants benefit directly from this reputation, which they pride, care for, and seek to enhance.

Finally, we find that 'Agency' is the highest-valued dimension in this exercise. While there is much to improve in terms of its labour and economic indicators, the social strength and capacity of the Atlixco community, in terms of organisation, expression and participation, stands out. These elements positively influence the other dimensions, somehow mitigating the other, more worrisome aspect highlighted previously. As society's backbone, the government must rely on the strength of these social conditions to generate desirable dynamics in government actions, whether through authentic public policies or participatory planning schemes that last beyond a single administration.

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6 Stability doesn't describe the conservation of social order, but its constant reinvention in order to create a future for all.

It should be borne in mind that since municipal governments have a decisive role in the implementation of public policy, analyses such as this one contribute to publicising trends and to defining strategic lines for local development in their present and future perspectives. The common good approach helps us to conduct a collective analysis beyond the simple dimension of the user or individuals, because the common good considers not only the welfare but also the general good of the municipality. In this way, this approach is a tool that serves to guide the dynamics of the much-desired common good.

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