

# Socioecological Resilience in Eco-Neighborhoods- A Psychosocial View

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When we ask ourselves about our capacity as a human community to confront the problems of global warming, we see the need to specify this approach in its practical dimensions and develop appropriate concepts to thematize this problem. This involves understanding the relationships between a specific human conglomerate and the ecosystem where it lives. The case of eco-neighborhoods is an example of this. For this we require a language that allows us to thematize the various dimensions of the phenomenon. We will study the relationships between the prefix eco, which in this case refers to the natural context, and the term neighborhood, which corresponds to the human conglomerate that inhabits it in a particular way. The purpose of this article is to explore the various dimensions and processes that we could take into account in understanding what this human conglomerate would be and to establish some practical criteria that make it possible to strengthen it in the face of the environmental problems that arise. We will call this strengthening resilience.

First of all, we understand the process of life in eco-neighborhoods as a whole. It is about looking at life from a comprehensive perspective, that is, as a process in which all dimensions are related to each other. It is of no use to focus on an isolated element, ignoring the other dimensions. The problem of global warming as an expression of the general deterioration of environmental balance forces us to adopt a comprehensive view where the reality of life in all its complexity is recognized.

That is why we adopt the holistic approach, which could be summarized in the statement: "The whole is more than the sum of the parts." This statement comes from Gestalt psychology where it is shown that all perceptual phenomena respond to a principle of internal self-organization of organisms and that this phenomenon cannot be inferred from the sum of stimuli that accompany it. The phenomenon of life must be understood as a whole and cannot be reduced to the fragmented analyzes typical of experimental sciences focused on variables and factors [1]. What is required is an epistemological questioning of the forms of atomistic knowledge and the adoption of an approach that recognizes the capacity for self-organization of life and respects the processes that underlie it.

It is not from the elements that we access to understand the totality but from understanding the ways in which these elements relate

and organize each other that we will be able to recognize the processes that make it possible [2].

The holistic approach was later developed towards the systemic perspective, where to understand a situation, we must be contextualized in the system of relationships in which said situation is configured [3]. It is from the systemic perspective that we adopt the concept of eco-neighborhood where the relationships between the ecosystem and the social system intersect.

We understand the ecosystem as the set of relationships and interactions between living beings with their environment under certain conditions. The ecosystem is a biological system made up of a community of living organisms (biocenosis) and the physical environment where they are related (biotope). (<https://www.biodiversidad.gob.mx/ecosistemas/quees.html>).

It can also be assumed that an ecosystem consists of the biological community of a place and the physical and chemical factors that constitute the abiotic environment [4]. It is worth noting here how the concept of community among all living beings is presented, which we must return to when we talk about community among humans.

On the other hand, we understand the social system as the set of relationships and interactions between human beings in a given context. We emphasize that the social system is not the group of people, but fundamentally the ways in which they relate to each other. These relationships are determined by norms, values, rules, projects, laws, beliefs, etc. Based on these, roles are established and groups, organizations and social institutions are built.

Finally, when we talk about the environment, we are referring to the joint view of the ecosystem and the social system. This could be summarized as the SSE socio-ecological system.

The capacity of the environment or the socio-ecological system to resist or absorb sudden or constant impacts is recognized as socio-ecological resilience. A resilient system maintains the fundamental elements of its structure and function through reorganization, learning and adaptations to new circumstances [5]. Returning to these authors, we identify three principles that will allow us to describe and act on the processes of resilience: Diversity,

connectivity and feedback.

Each of these three principles must be able to be described in such a way that its components, units or elements can be identified, based on observable criteria that can be measured or compared with each other. This is called that they can be mapped and evaluated.

Let's look at some possibilities for identifying these principles

### **Diversity**

Refers to the different elements or components that are related in a given system. Greater diversity among elements increases the possibility of adaptation to potential disturbances and increases the available options and mechanisms.

In the case of the ecosystem, we can talk about the diversity of soils, climates, geological formations, as well as the diversity of flora or fauna species. A territory occupied by a monoculture is easy prey to pests and has little capacity to face changes of a different order.

In the case of the social system, we can also talk about various actors, cultural groups or institutions, as well as various systems of knowledge, ideas and perspectives. Diverse systems of social organization that coexist democratically make the human group more adaptive to face unforeseen situations.

### **Connectivity**

The way in which the different elements that are part of a system relate to each other allows us to identify how they are connected to each other. Connectivity refers to the interdependencies or dependencies between the different parts and elements of an SES. Some elements relate to each other forming particular groupings and these can also be related to other groupings and, on the contrary, distanced from them. There are types of plants that are associated with types of animals, forming particular ecological niches. There are human groups that relate to other groups or organizations, or are associated with certain species of fauna or flora. It is about identifying the elements that are connected to each other within a system and the intensity with which they are connected. How does the interaction occur between the actors or groups that interact? What is the "strength" of such interactions? It is then about identifying interactions between elements, forms of grouping and organization and relationships between individuals, groups and organizations. The diffusion of ideas and strategies depends on these interdependencies.

### **Feedback**

The capacity for self-organization and self-evaluation, through dialogue and critical reflection on the interactions between the components of the system, are the way to strengthen the system. Feedback patterns are the most important attribute of resilience. Feedback is the governing force of any particular system. To the extent that the different actors or elements of the system carry out activities to evaluate the effectiveness of the actions, to analyze their results, to plan new actions, to explore various alternatives and concertedly choose the best options, to that extent You will be able to infer the strength of the process and the organization. Feedback must be part of each of the stages of the process.

With these concepts about the systems and their forms of strengthening, we are going to approach their application in the experiences of eco-neighborhoods.

According to the formulation proposed by the Cali Econeighborhood Table, an econeighborhood is a "Community resident in an urban territory, administratively recognized as a neighborhood, committed to building a harmonious relationship with its environment, through the development of urban criteria. architectural, spiritual, social and cultural, economic and ecological measurable." The adoption of this definition is the result of a broad debate where we have been able to delve deeper into the meaning of some terms [6].

Exploring the Colombian institutional definition of the term *barrio*, we find that according to Gil "A *barrio* is the administrative subdivision of a commune or the urban area of a municipality, and can be defined as an "identifiable urban unit, a system organized relationships at a certain scale of the city and the seat of a certain urban community" [7,8]. The neighborhood has identifiable limits based on morphological or spatial changes or through the perception of its inhabitants; sometimes coinciding with geographical features, natural edges or created barriers, which define a specific territory. A neighborhood usually has its own identity either by tradition, or by its urban characteristics or by its creation process, and its inhabitants have a sense of belonging that differentiates them from neighboring neighborhoods.

First of all, we find that a neighborhood is an urban unit created for administrative reasons from which a territory belonging to a commune and a municipality is delimited. The neighborhood is a territory of the urban area, which differentiates it from the rural area, from the sidewalks and townships and as such it refers to the spaces, streets, homes and buildings and the infrastructure of services provided to its inhabitants.

Secondly, it is an organized system of relationships between the people who inhabit this territory. Gil mentions some psychosocial dimensions with respect to this system, such as the perception of its inhabitants, the sense of belonging or identity, or its community character. And he states some causal processes such as tradition, the transformation of space by its ways of living, by the creation of barriers and differentiation strategies from other neighborhoods.

According to a review carried out by Tapia, the key definition agreed upon by sociologists of a neighborhood should be understood as "the basis of cohesion and social capital and as the place of the local community." "A community is characterized by being a unit made up of a social organization in a specific location, where people find the means to live, but in which an identity and a sense of belonging are also generated." Taking these main characteristics into account, the neighborhood is then understood as a community in the full sense of the concept as it is "a small area occupied by a limited number of people living in close proximity and in frequent contact, a primary group face to face". In fact, Burgess (1984: 147) comes to homologize the concept of community with that of neighborhood by stating that "the neighborhood or community is the result of three types of influences: ecological, cultural and political" [9].

When we assume that a neighborhood is "the basis of cohesion and social capital" we can recognize that the way in which the territory is built or delimited is a starting point or a condition of possibility for processes of social cohesion to be built there based on recognize the group of people as social capital; However, by stating that the neighborhood is "the place of the local community" we can fall into the error of presuming that in every neighborhood there is already an established community or a group of people

who behave like a community, with which we ignore the various ways of expression and existence of a community and we run the risk of ignoring and not knowing what it means to be a community as well as the potential that a human group can have as “social capital” or as a community, at the same time that we will not understand why we can fail. by assuming without supporting knowledge that the inhabitants of a neighborhood are a community or cohesive unit. We will explore some of these different ways of configuring collectivities.

A group of people living in the same territory does not constitute a community by itself. If we refer to the people who live in a neighborhood, we cannot assume that we have a complete or closed human group. The territory of the neighborhood as an interactive context does not allow us to think in a simple way about the relationships between the people who inhabit it. On the contrary, we find multiple people who, although they live in the same territory, may not even know each other. Some know some of their neighbors and beyond that they do not interact with other inhabitants of the same neighborhood. Additionally, the neighborhood is part of the life of the commune and the city, and its inhabitants are in communication with other people perhaps in a more personal and intense way through the media and new technologies. Some act in an organized manner around certain cultural or spiritual activities such as life in a park, religious ceremonies or other cultural activities. Others only go home to spend the night. In short, we find ourselves with a human conglomerate that is crossed by dynamics that at a given moment can favor encounter and communication, and/or by dynamics that favor isolation and atomization or individualism. These forces or dynamics can coexist simultaneously, making it necessary to recognize and assume the complexity of the problem.

For these reasons we adopt the systemic approach that allows us to recognize, on the one hand, the human conglomerate or collectivity as a set of diverse individuals that inhabit a territory, and on the other, identify the various categories of interactive contexts that are part of the daily life, as well as other interactive contexts that respond to other dynamics such as community life, institutional practices, cultural, religious, sports practices, etc. This systemic approach must also be complemented with a psychosocial perspective that allows us to recreate connectivity, that is, recognize and differentiate the forms of connection or relationship between people as well as the ways in which they live or create a particular situation.

Psychosocial understanding will allow us to thematize the existing relationships between a series of people who make up a community or human conglomerate, where diverse forms of relationships occur, which do not necessarily correspond to acting communally. We will take an approach to the meaning and process that can give rise to the formation of a community, in such a way that we can establish some categories that allow us to understand the difference between a series or group of people and a community itself, as well as focus on the understanding of the conditions that allow the transition from one to the other.

Understanding a situation psychosocially is first recognizing that the reality we encounter is a relational system. We refer to a set of people who are in a delimited context and who relate or interact with each other. Understanding the relationships between these people and the characterization of said relationships or interactions is the key to assuming that the situation created has been psychosocially understood. Secondly, it is necessary to

recognize that as a product of these relationships or interactions, a situation has been created or a reality has been built [10]. It is in this sense that it is stated that all reality is a social construction that is a product of the relationships or interactions between the people involved in it [11]. Psychosocial analysis seeks to understand or interpret a reality based on the relational or interactive system that gave rise to it and the process through which that situation was constructed or created, as a prior step so that people who find themselves in that situation can consider the possibility of its transformation into a different situation or reality, according to their experience, their values, their history and their desires to build a different way of life. From this point of view, it is expected that the actors will get involved in a feedback process, agree to develop a critical perspective on their situation that allows them to consider the problem of its genesis, its maintenance or its transformation.

Another fundamental element to understand a situation psychosocially is to recognize that the situation can only be understood from the point of view of the perception of the people who are experiencing it. A situation is defined by the meaning that the people who experience it attribute to it. Likewise, the meaning of relationships or interactions between people depends on the way a person perceives themselves and how they imagine they are perceived and judged by others. The language that the person uses to name and judge themselves or feel named or judged by others is expressed symbolically and these symbols are the mediators between human relationships or interactions. From here arises symbolic interactionism as an approach that gave rise to psychosocial thinking. that has subsequently been developed in other theoretical approaches such as social phenomenology, ethnomethodology, the scenario approach, systemic theory, critical theory, liberation psychology, social constructionism and cognitive psychology among others [11-23].

Once it has been clarified what it means to approach a human group and its situation psychosocially, what remains is to understand the relational system as such and within it the levels and forms of organization existing between the actors.

Therefore, the problem of transforming a neighborhood into an eco-neighborhood implies, from the point of view of the social system, thinking about the steps that the social conglomerate of a community can take to become a self-organized community around, in this case, improving its relationships. with the ecosystem. But from the psychosocial point of view, the community is made up of people or individuals with the ability to reflect on themselves, self-aware, who freely decide how they relate to themselves and others.

Each individual is a conscious regulation center of their relationships with themselves and with others. Therefore, to think about the relationships that make up the human and biological system, we must first turn to the capacity of each person to become aware of their circumstances and to regulate or consciously decide how they adopt ways of relating to themselves, to others. others and with the ecosystem.

From this point of view, the starting point for strengthening the socio-ecological system is for each of the actors or people who inhabit it to review how they consciously and reflexively confront the situation and others.

In any system of relationship between two people “each person can adopt two fundamentally different forms of action. Each

person can proceed according to his or her own experience, or according to the other person's experience, and there is no other type of personal action possible within this system. That is to say that while we consider the personal action of self to self or self to another, the only possible way to proceed is in accordance with one's own experience or with the experience of the other" [19].

From this derives the first political act of community empowerment regarding the territory, taking responsibility for oneself: "If one defines oneself based on the powers of others, he will never know what ground he is stepping on. Only by discovering the genuine, unique and singular place where one finds oneself in solitude can one find out what ground one is walking on" [24]. From here we find the way in which we assume the relationship with the other. There are two ways to assume the relationship with the other. Recognizing it as an instrument or object to satisfy some need or recognizing it as a fellow human being. This is how we are presented with the panorama of human relationships that are based on reciprocity or the denial of reciprocity.

All human beings are interdependent. The other is a means to fulfill my needs. I am a means for the other to achieve theirs. From this perspective we are all instruments of others and we can be looked at as objects, as strangers, as strangers. In the denial of reciprocity, I refuse to be a means for the other to fulfill themselves and struggle and conflict are generated. In the affirmation and recognition of reciprocity we can collaborate between strangers so that some needs can be realized. These types of actions include collectives, conglomerates or series.

Jean Paul Sartre proposes the concept of the series to understand the collective activities where we interact among strangers or strangers. A collective is understood as a social structure of a serial nature, where people relate to each other towards a common objective that acts as the serial object that determines the behavior of the collective [15]. For example, people who queue to wait for the bus, or to board it, follow the rules of citizen behavior, occupying the seats on the bus according to the order of arrival. It is an ordered behavior that allows relationships between strangers, like good citizens, according to the serial principles imposed by the serial artifact or instrument, the bus. In the same way, multiple collective activities between strangers would be understood. Attending a movie, a soccer game, shopping at the supermarket, or street behavior.

The absence of reciprocity between unknown people who collaborate with each other to fulfill their needs is characteristic of a large part of the collective activities typical of the daily life of a neighborhood. Denial of reciprocity can lead to conflicts and confrontations.

We speak of a serial collective when people do not know or recognize each other, they relate as strangers based on rules of coexistence based on serial principles. In this case, people are interchangeable with each other and there is an instrumental relationship with the other.

However, situations often occur in which seriality is suddenly broken. The bus crashes or a tire bursts, a fire breaks out in public spaces, etc. In these moments all the strangers recognize each other in the face of danger and realize that through solidarity and mutual help they could overcome the emergency situation. Now everyone is willing to act creatively by helping each other to save themselves. This is what Sartre calls the fusion group, where everyone is interdependent and supportive.

In an emergency situation, seriality is broken, the other is recognized as a fellow human being and a sense of solidarity and mutual help emerges. In the face of imminent and collective danger, mutual aid is the main resource for survival. Interior relationships begin where the other is recognized as similar. Once the emergency is over, the possibility of dialogue and interest in getting to know each other opens up.

At this point the existence of the group is already raised as a category that opposes the series. The main difference between the group and the series refers to the quality of the relationships between the people in the group. In the group there are internal relations and in the series, there are external relations.

In interior relationships I recognize the other as a fellow human being, as someone equal to me, who has similar needs and fears. I recognize that the other is a human being, with unique characteristics that make him irreplaceable and I build with him the meaning of humanity. By recognizing the other as a human being, I recognize myself as such and introduce the appreciation that gives rise to mutual respect and a sense of human dignity. The affective dimension of social relationships appears here, which is what makes these human relationships. As Maturana takes it up: "It is in the affective dimension, or more precisely it is "in love, that the social phenomenon is founded. Biologically speaking, love is the bodily readiness for action under which one performs the actions that constitute the other as a legitimate other in coexistence with one. When we do not conduct ourselves in this way in our interactions with others, there is no social phenomenon. Every time one destroys love, social coexistence disappears".

On the other hand, in relationships of exteriority, the other is only an instrument to fulfill my needs, he is a foreign object and I am not concerned or concerned with his future. Any other can be replaceable or interchangeable.

From here we can establish a significant difference between what social relationships are and human relationships themselves. Social relationships can be merely instrumental, mediated by interest and rules of behavior. In human relationships we talk about the emotional dimension, the sense of we, and social commitment in the construction of a common future. In social relations of a serial nature, we then identify the processes of alienation, mystification and conflict where we thematize many social phenomena as indicators of dehumanization. Among them, the problem of global warming is presented as a problem generated by the modernization of society (seriality) and the loss of the link between human beings and nature.

Once the difference between the series and the group is clarified, we can follow up on the various ways in which collectivities can lead to community processes.

From an emergency situation we identify the possibility that a serial collective experiences the transformation into a fusion group. This can be identified from the meeting between two people, in a small group, in a broader community and can acquire dimensions at the crowd level.

Below we will describe some of the modalities of group formation, which will allow us to have some categories to monitor and analyze community processes.

Once the emergency or exceptional conditions that gave rise to the formation of a merging group, a couple falling in love or a festive meeting, an experiential workshop, an academic program, etc., have been overcome, the danger of falling again into seriality. The initiative then arises to continue together on the basis of an oath or official commitment. Thus arises the sworn group, marriage as an institution, the promise of fidelity and the authorization for mutual control in the event of non-compliance with what was agreed. The threat of expulsion from the group, family or sect. What was once united by a creative bond of love, affection and solidarity is now united by mutual actions of coercion and control.

In the event that the merging group emerges around the solution of a common problem, the learning experience can occur in the practical solution of a problem, seeing the advantages of acting in solidarity around a common objective or goal. Thus the group project emerges as a new object around which the members relate. This group project can be organized progressively to the point where the specific and different abilities of the various members are recognized, and complementary roles are created that give rise to teamwork. Thus, the group organized around a task or around a common project emerges.

The participatory construction of a common action project is so far the best strategy to develop a sense of community. A real experience of how a comprehensive development plan for a neighborhood was built can be found in Arango [10]. There you can see the methodology adopted inspired by Participatory Action Research. A general methodology to promote eco-neighborhood processes can be found in the base document of the Municipal Table of Eco-neighborhoods of Cali.

To the extent that there is a common project, in which all members of the group have participated, there is a greater possibility that the community process will be consolidated and strengthened. For there to be a community process, it is then required that there be a common objective, shared by all members of the group, and that there be emotional bonding in the development of relationships between the members of the group. We can then speak of a sense of community, or sense of community, which implies a sense of belonging and co-responsibility.

However. Once tasks have been systematized and no longer depend on the creativity and commitment of someone in particular, this person can be replaced by anyone else.

It is at this moment that the organized group becomes an institution. In the institution, creative processes are replaced by technical procedures and can be executed by someone who only possesses the corresponding technical skills. When group members can be replaced by anonymous people, the process is institutionalized and falls back into seriality. They are no longer real people but rather roles that can be performed by anyone or by a robot. The institution is now the skeleton or corpse of what was initially a common project.

We now find ourselves in a historical moment in which in the world of work we all run the risk of being replaced by machines, and in which the collective processes traversed by seriality condemn us to disjointed social dynamics where individualism, anomie and dehumanization.

Faced with this situation, the need arises to generate and strengthen community processes. Now we can sustain that the community is the set of people, groups, teams, organizations and institutions that

collaborate with each other from a sense of we and committed to a common project of humanization. We can now affirm why not all the inhabitants of a territory are a community.

Although, for sociologists, a neighborhood should be understood as “the basis of cohesion and social capital and as the place of the local community”, this does not mean that community processes can be considered established a priori in this territory [9]. The human conglomerate that inhabits the territory of a neighborhood is crossed by dynamics that can favor encounters, communication and the establishment of community processes, as well as dynamics that favor isolation and atomization or individualism. These forces or dynamics can coexist simultaneously.

The human collective of a neighborhood is being influenced by social, community, civic, institutional, media and new technology organizations, and therefore it is necessary to recognize the ways in which the various social organizations affect the interactive contexts for the general conformation of the neighborhood. community life.

Currently, social capital is spoken of to refer to the processes and dynamics adopted by networks of reciprocity, voluntary cooperation and commitment that contribute to the formation of the community. In this context, “Trust is mentioned as a form of social capital, which is the most inclusive factor in terms of facilitating voluntary cooperation.”

### Conclusions

From the social point of view, socioecological resilience lies in the capacity of the social system to transform itself from being an amorphous and complex conglomerate to progressively developing a community process that tends to involve, increasingly, larger sectors of the population in the construction of a sense of we committed to a common goal related to improving its relationships with the ecosystem [25-27].

It is about the transformation of the collectivity into a community. This requires first carrying out a complete mapping of the social system, its inhabitants, its groups, organizations and connections and adopting a strategic plan to build a community. It is required to have a defined vision of the process to be built.

It is first necessary that the inhabitants interested in developing as an eco-neighborhood establish a community-based organizational coordination that is independent of other organizational forms and institutions to guarantee the autonomy of the process and external opportunism.

Once the organizational form is established, it is necessary to adopt a strategy that is based on the identification of the real needs of the members and the search for self-managed solutions based on the community’s own experiences and knowledge, providing feedback evaluating the relevance and effectiveness of the actions. Permanent feedback and evaluation are the key to community learning. Based on these evaluations, new actions are recreated and projected.

Respect for all people in the community and valuing their experiences and knowledge are the key to building the trust and reciprocity necessary to consolidate the community.

The ethical and transparent management of all procedures combined with the participatory evaluation of the processes will

be the key to building trust that will make a neighborhood a beautiful place where new hope for the planet will be built.

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