

Article

Poverty and Sustainability in the context of entrepreneurship and public policies

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Abstract: Poverty is a perennial phenomenon in society that has become increasingly complex, manifesting and analyzing it under multiple typologies: absolute, relative, temporary, structural, and multidimensional. In part, it is found that there has been a lack of greater and better development of public policies simultaneously: comprehensive, differentiating, sectoral, and intersectoral, initially from three perspectives: in terms of territory, according to its capabilities; in terms of sociocultural conditions according to their triggers and behavioral context of individuals and social actors; and, in terms of economic activity, especially in terms of human capital capabilities and access to opportunities and services. In the 21st century, within the context of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), poverty persists dramatically worldwide, and its measurements still have an economic bias, especially in terms of income and wealth. Latin America is no exception to this latent and dramatic situation. Its multicausality with special predominance, among others, of labor income, the level of education and the type of occupation, seems to indicate the insufficiency of its econometric analysis and management, but rather a multidimensional and dynamic view is urgently needed in the context of public policies usually anchored in positivism, incorporating the socio-cultural dimension and behavioral sciences, in order to undertake creative and innovative paths to its solution that are integrative, complex in an imbricated/intricate/rhizomatic manner and inclusive from the possible margins allowed by the current international economic order and the predominant relations of production.

Keywords: Poverty, sustainability, entrepreneurship, public policies, complexity.

1. Introduction

Initially, studies on poverty were approached from monographic perspectives, particularly under the notable influence of the economic sciences, particularly in relation to income and wealth levels. Throughout human history, poverty has been addressed from philosophical, theocratic, and complex perspectives. The latter, more recently, due to its customary and perennial presence, remains unresolved, but also because of the evolution of sociocultural influences and schools of thought, as well as its diverse manifestations across different sociohistorical moments in humanity.

2. Literature Review

A systematic search was conducted on conceptions of poverty, especially during 2000-2023, across databases based on the bibliographies of two recognized bibliometric studies and a World Report on Poverty: Nzasabayezu (2024), Kanmodi et al. (2023), and the World Bank Group (2024). The conceptions were identified with the fields of knowledge declared in the texts of said documents. In turn, direct relationships with sustainability suggested in the same texts were established based on three more usually recognized dimensions: environmental,

social, and economic, as well as the relationship with the broad and complex conception of entrepreneurship and sustainability of two master's and doctoral theses respectively (Porras-Jimenez, 2006 and 2014).

3. Material and Methods

This study employed a multidimensional, qualitative, and interdisciplinary approach within a non-experimental design. The phenomenon of poverty, with historical connotations, was observed and analyzed at various times through documentary analysis, both from the perspectives of the primary disciplines identified and of those that have made the greatest relevant contributions. The inductive-deductive method was incorporated, drawing on limited observations of the poverty phenomenon and its relationships with sustainability across environmental, social, and economic dimensions, and, in turn, within the context of entrepreneurship and public policy.

Emphasis was placed on poverty from psychological and complexity perspectives, as they reveal a growing accumulation of contributions from the most influential fields, such as economics, sociology, and anthropology, among others.

4. Results

4.1 *Conceptualizations of poverty in the context of entrepreneurship and sustainability*

4.1.1 An approach to the multidimensional context of poverty: sustainability and entrepreneurship.

Entrepreneurship is assumed from a multidimensional perspective in an environment of permanent imbalance, permeated by the deconstructive framework of culture (beyond the economic-business vision, although inclusive of it), according to Porras-Jimenez (2006; 2014), that is, entrepreneurship is:

The action and attitude at the individual and collective level of living beings, especially the human race, to generate, start, reorient, maintain and execute initiatives and solutions in response to problems, opportunities and/or needs related to the human being and the interacting environment, through self-referential organizations, which are constituted as living organisms, with relational representations and practices predominating among their actors in a space-time context, which make the existence of an entrepreneurial spirit possible (p. 40; 182).

At the same time, sustainability is assumed in which the entrepreneurship phenomenon becomes, as a vital nature-society process, alternative to development and from a multidimensional perspective that seeks at geo-spatial levels with relevant actors, the satisfaction of bio-physical-socio-cultural and spiritual requirements, favoring the adequate flow of material goods, equitable access to social services, the efficient supply of community services and the concerted availability of governance mechanisms and good government, promoting regional identity and culture, creativity and innovation, solidarity and cooperation, and inclusion together with affirmative actions (Porras-Jimenez, 2006, p. 123; *Ibidem*, 2014, pp. 200-201).

4.1.2 The multidimensionalities of poverty.

The complex context of poverty previously described leads to a multidimensional understanding of poverty, which becomes a vital nature-society process that emerges in geospatial settings with relevant actors and under multiple manifestations or emphases, challenging the satisfaction of biophysical, sociocultural, and spiritual requirements. Various approaches or perspectives on poverty have been developed over time, ranging from the simplest, based on monetary factors, to broader ones that address sociological and psychological aspects, among others. Studies on poverty are often permeated, cross-cutting, or intertwined with those related to inequality, development, inequity, marginalization, exclusion, or the gradual, ascending expression of a social disease: poverty, misery, indigence, and pauperism. Poverty is a common phenomenon that today, according to UNDP and OPHI (2024), involves approximately 1.1 billion people living in multidimensional poverty, and of these, nearly 500 million live in conflict contexts. This phenomenon can be considered from at least four perspectives in the historical development of humanity, each with diverse conceptions and interpretations: philosophical, sociological, economic, psychological, and complex.

4.1.2.1 Poverty from the philosophical field.

From a philosophical perspective, and especially from an ancient and pre-modern perspective, it presents an interpretive dichotomy: On the one hand, as a moral problem that affects human dignity and autonomy (inherent in ethics) and excludes the exercise of citizenship (inherent in political philosophy); and on the other hand, as a virtue based on detachment from material goods that allows for the search for truth and justice (Socrates identifying it as an ethical virtue, Diogenes of Sinope, Heidegger maintaining its existential condition for the search for being). However, along with the previous dichotomy, an interpretive perspective of poverty emerges, especially in the midst of the rise to modernity, based on the socio-economic conditions that prevail in a social class that survives exploitation (the proletariat) and emerges as a consequence of the class struggle, which is challenged by politics in order to modify these conditions. Here, it is important to remember that the currently dominant capitalist system has not yet influenced the previous interpretative journey of poverty.

In this same field, and in the contemporary era of late modernity for some, postmodernity for others, or liquid modernity for others, alongside the rise of rights on the path toward justice and the predominance of the economy, the understanding of poverty as the deprivation of capabilities (Sen, 1983) will emerge or re-emerge. These capabilities will transform their rights into real freedoms, which will pave the way for competency development in education and pedagogy, and in academic programs, leading logically to accommodation with the dominant capitalist system. Also important will be the approach to gender as a component of poverty (Nussbaum, 2000).

4.1.2.2 La pobreza desde el campo sociológico.

Sociological conceptions and interpretations of poverty constitute a key body of research on poverty and public policies related to it, given that sociology focuses specifically on the structure, organization, and relationships within society. For some, the dominant classes or owners of capital, who control the means of production, exploit the labor of the working classes, causing impoverishment (Marx and Engels). For others, poverty is created both materially and symbolically (Bayón, 2015). According to the same author, poverty is conceived, experienced, institutionalized, and even legitimized within societies through their social relationships. That is, it has also been socially constructed, influenced by cultural, political, and economic factors, and refers to a particular set of values associated with a lifestyle. Others argue that the dominant perspective on poverty has been rooted in the intention of counteracting the most extreme effects of an exclusionary development strategy that generates inequality (Jaimez, 2016).

In general, and from a sociological perspective, poverty is approached as: a social construction conditioned by the social, cultural, and economic context; a close relationship with inequality; a relationship with culture; and a stigma or association with the environment. Their studies tend to focus on structural-functional theory, as it serves a purpose in society and maintains a social hierarchy. However, from a critical theory perspective, it would imply a struggle for resources and power between social groups, resulting in social exclusion. From a dependency theory perspective, it would be caused by the power relations and domination of rich countries over poor countries, given the existence of poverty in both countries. However, it is also understood as a high level of vulnerability among certain sectors of the population. Therefore, these perspectives imply long-term public policies to reduce the widening gap between social classes, improve access to and distribution of factors and means of production, and promote the growing dynamics of association that can be advanced by groups of countries most affected by poverty levels.

4.1.2.3 Poverty from the economic field.

From an economic perspective, poverty presents a complex issue. It involves the deprivation of resources and capabilities to meet basic needs, and its factors include job insecurity, unemployment, income inequality, and lack of access to markets and opportunities. There is copious literature on this perspective. In fact, as a socioeconomic problem, poverty is divided into extreme (absolute) and relative (relative). However, according to Anikin & Tikhonova (2016), the characteristics of the former include lack of knowledge, intolerance based on religion and culture, population growth, and corruption.

Moreover, even with the most recent attempt from the economics of a multidimensional perspective with the Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) that identifies multiple deficiencies at the household and individual level in the areas of health, education, and standard of living” (United Nations Development Programme, 2015), it would not be sufficient. However, it could be considered a route in trance towards the broadest multidimensional perspective on the subject that implies a better context for the management of public policies and entrepreneurial activity.

4.2 *New multidimensional challenges of poverty in the context of entrepreneurship and sustainability.*

4.2.1 Poverty from the field of psychology.

From a psychological perspective, there is still a need for more evidence, especially empirical evidence, since according to Davis & Williams (2020), psychological research on attitudes and perceptions plays two important roles in the fight against poverty: helping people understand the barriers to escaping poverty and providing tools to persuade them to support poverty alleviation programs. On the other hand, according to Fell & Hewstone (2015), psychological conceptions and interpretations of poverty appear to permeate social psychology. The link between mental health and poverty has been demonstrated, and mental health is both a causal and consequent manifestation of poverty (Hollingshead & Redlich, 1958), South Africa (Barbarin & Khomo, 1997); Australia (Bor, et al., 1997); USA (Langner & Michael, 1963); and the United Kingdom (Weich & Lewis, 1998). In addition, there is relevant information from the National Institute of Mental Health (Bourdon et al., 1994). The authors initially propose four thematic areas of psychological research on the understanding and prevention of poverty to be considered in the management of public policies on poverty, although they should be accompanied by ongoing empirical research, preferably localized: social processes (extremely negative evaluations characterize stereotypical perceptions of those living in poverty); mental health is associated with psychological well-being and happiness through self-realization along with the idea that poverty begins long before adulthood; genes and environment, and brain and cognition. However, other authors, in addition to mental health and cognition, also incorporate beliefs and preferences (Ye Rang et al., 2025).

Public policies on poverty from the psychology field should intersect with the entrepreneurship approach from the humanities (Porras-Jimenez, 2006), with important contributions and precursors from McClelland (1961 and 1980), Gilder (1984), Baumol (1993), and Jennings (1993), among others.

Table 1. Main thematic areas and public policy actions on poverty from the perspective of psychology.

Main thematic areas	Some public policy actions
Social Processes	Consider this population deserving of assistance, identify and address the culture of poverty, promote intergroup contact, and foster self-efficacy grounded in one's competence and capacity for success (from a social psychology perspective). Videos that seek to raise aspirations. Participatory psychotherapy for professional and work settings.
Mental health	Consider stress management, schizophrenia, anxiety, and depressive symptoms, as well as alcohol consumption and, with it, long-term unemployment.
Genes and environment	Consider early interventions to break the cycle of poverty. Increasingly, policies based on socioeconomic status (SES) are being eliminated and implemented.
Brain and cognition	Monitoring and addressing cognitive deficits in executive function and language development. Supportive measures that address the "scarcity hypothesis" and foster a long-term perspective. Increase capacity to manage limited resources to avoid increasing reliance on programs and initiatives with high levels of welfare.

Note. Lewis (1966); Fell & Hewstone (2015); Haushofer, J. & Salicath, D. (2024); Ye Rang et al. (2025).

A limitation of the approach to poverty from the field of psychology that could in turn be an advantage for the management of public policy around such a sensitive issue for society is that according to Fell & Hewstone (2015), given the Western origin of most psychological research, it implies that care must be taken when generalizing the results to other cultural or economic contexts.

4.2.2 Poverty from Complexity

In the transition to complexity, the current approach to multidimensional poverty, with indicators based on health, education, and standard of living, could be adopted (see Table 2).

If various studies on poverty were reviewed across different space-time contexts, contrasting causes, factors, implications, and effects, it would seem that the phenomenon presents a causal cycle or chains of causality in a circular process perspective, to the point of inferring a multicausal scenario. Therefore, it would call for the management of multidimensional public policies, based on multi and transdisciplinary studies, a complex issue in the current state of the issue and the implementation of public policies, given its positivist and sectoral emphasis, despite some literature and intentions regarding intersectorality, the latter as a hope for improving intervention levels in the face of the phenomenon and as a preamble to the hopeful complex perspective of poverty.

Indeed, conceptualizations of poverty seem to be associated with themes that ultimately configure a multidimensionality in terms of multiple causalities and effects, as the United Nations (2014) would begin to

envison, regarding objective one of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), on ending poverty in all its forms everywhere:

Poverty has many dimensions, but its causes include unemployment, social exclusion, and the high vulnerability of certain populations to disasters, diseases, and other phenomena that prevent them from being productive.

Table 2. Main thematic areas and public policy actions on poverty from a psychological perspective.

Dimensión	Components
Health	Availability and access to health centers, drinking water, sanitation, and adequate nutrition.
Education	Availability, quality, accessibility, and equitable distribution of educational centers and services.
Standard of living	Access to municipal service infrastructure, such as drinking water, sewage, and transportation.
	Average household consumption of public services, such as drinking water and electricity.

Note. Vizuiete-Salazar et al., 2024; Zuluaga y Bonilla, 2005; Medeiros et al., 2021; Vázquez Brust y Zambrano Barragán, 2020; Yan et al., 2018; Muñoz et al., 2018; Pérez Akaki y Fonseca Soto, 2017; Rojas-Gualdrón y Caicedo-Velázquez, 2017; Ponce, 2015; Annoni et al., 2015.

This multidimensionality, in terms of multiple causalities and effects, implies multiple short, medium-, and long-term public policy actions related to: the deprivation of capabilities, the capacities for human autonomy, perceptions and attitudes among individuals and groups that favor the simultaneous manifestation, causality, and effect of poverty (including beliefs and practices), the search for justice, the scale of values associated with a dominant lifestyle, social, cultural, political, and economic factors, the dominant global development strategy (including access to and distribution of the factors and means of production) and the role of inequality within it, the role and power of social groups in accessing resources, and finally, the current and necessary reconfiguration of power relations between countries within the framework of the Sustainable Development Goals (2nd version: 2015-2030).

On the other hand, the Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative (OPHI), based on a study based on data from three developing and three developed countries, has identified that poverty is best described in terms of three sets of interrelated dimensions (see Figure 1).

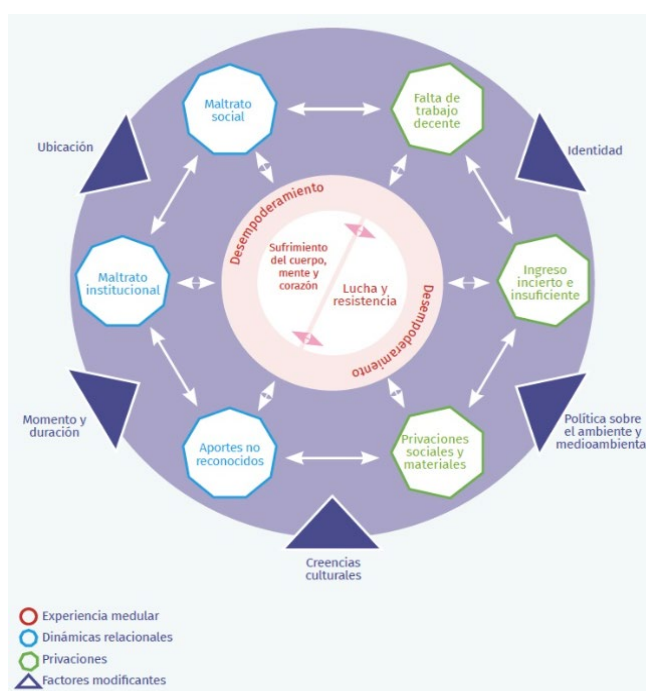


Figure 1. Diagram of the dimensions of poverty.

The sets and their respective dimensions (see Table 2) include:

Table 2. Sets of dimensions, dimensions of each set, and modifying factors on poverty.

Dimension sets	Dimensions of the set	modifying factors
S1: Core experience of poverty.	<p>Disempowerment: Lack of control and dependence on others, resulting from severely limited choices.</p> <p>Suffering of Body, Mind, and Heart: Experiencing intense physical, mental, and emotional suffering, accompanied by a sense of helplessness at being unable to do anything about it.</p> <p>Struggle and Resilience: Continuous struggle for survival, which includes resisting and countering the effects of the multiple forms of suffering caused by deprivation, abuse, and lack of recognition.</p>	<p>– Location: urban, suburban, rural.</p> <p>– Timing and duration: short episodes differ from long ones; poverty experienced in childhood or old age is different from that experienced during working life.</p>
S2: Relational dynamics.	<p>Institutional abuse: The failure of national and international institutions, through their actions or inactions, to respond appropriately and respectfully to the needs and circumstances of people living in poverty, thereby ignoring, humiliating, and harming them.</p> <p>Social abuse: The way in which people living in poverty are perceived negatively and treated poorly by other individuals and informal groups.</p> <p>Unrecognized contributions: The knowledge and skills of people living in poverty are rarely seen, recognized, or valued. Often, both individually and collectively, people living in poverty are wrongly viewed as incompetent.</p>	<p>– Cultural beliefs, for example, whether poverty is seen as caused by structural factors or personal defects.</p> <p>– Identification with discrimination based on ethnicity, gender, and sexual orientation, which adds to the discrimination associated with poverty.</p>
S3: Deprivations.	<p>Lack of decent work: The common experience of not being able to access fairly paid, secure, regulated, and decent work.</p> <p>Insufficient and uncertain income: An income that is too low to cover basic needs and social obligations, maintain family harmony, or enjoy good living conditions.</p> <p>Material and social deprivation: Lack of access to goods and services (education, healthcare, adequate housing, etc.) necessary for a decent life and full participation in society.</p>	<p>– Environment and environmental policy, from climate change, land degradation, and pollution to the lack of public infrastructure.</p>

Nota. Movimiento Internacional ATD Cuarto Mundo, junto con investigadores de la Universidad de Oxford (2019).

5. Conclusions

With the previous perspective on poverty raised especially in this chapter, the importance of promoting from public policies, and especially in the Latin American scenario, both social entrepreneurship and social innovation emerges, based on co-creation and with a collaborative approach with sustainability that integrates efforts from the public, private sectors and civil society, given that the first "proposes to respond to social needs, promote and sustain values, knowledge, capacities and resources at the service of society" (Salinas and Osorio, 2012) and according to Sampaio & Sebastião (2024), the second consists of "a process of development and implementation of novel solutions to social problems and needs, which often involves a combination of creativity, collaboration and ingenuity (Phills et al., 2008), and this also "can be expressed in changes in behaviors, perceptions or attitudes that, ultimately, lead to the establishment of new social practices" (Cajaiba-Santana, 2014) and in turn, covers diverse or multiple fields of study such as demanded by current conditions of poverty.

A collaborative approach to sustainability must consider cooperation and complementarity or shared values, coordination and integration among diverse and even dissimilar actors and interest groups, asset-based community development (ABCD), access to factors and means of production, public investment in infrastructure and food production, and resettlement, among other things (Nzasabayezu et al., 2024).

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