



Centro Integral de Innovación Social: the university in the territory

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Abstract

The Universidad Católica del Maule has a history of relationship with the territory through its research centers, clinical fields, internships in rural and urban schools, access programs to higher education, among others, which have allowed it to strengthen a network of actors who participate in university activities. This article aims to show the experience of the Comprehensive Center for Social Innovation (CIIS), which, based on a participatory process with internal and external actors, developed a model of Social Innovation to be institutionalized in the undergraduate curriculum. The CIIS is an entity that articulates institutional links with actors in its environment to achieve reciprocal learning, collaborative work in the search for mutual benefits and the permanent improvement of the institutional functions of teaching, research and links with the environment. . Facing the challenge of transforming the university culture that has traditionally privileged vertical, tutelary and welfare relationships with the environment; and the poor alignment of training with the needs of practicing the profession.

KEYWORDS: SOCIAL INNOVATION, UNIVERSITY, TERRITORY, PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT, TEACHING

Introduction

Universities are challenged in the scenario of the 21st century to institutionalize their social commitment by developing an academic work oriented to meet the demands of society, and to overcome the notion of the university as a closed, self-referential space with enlightened pretensions and distant from the social context with which it intervenes or studies (Saravia, 2017).

Reality shows that universities, in their link with the external environment, carry out diverse experiences organized under different approaches and models such as, university social responsibility, innovation and development, social innovation, social management, social entrepreneurship, social marketing, etc. However, even when the bidirectional nature of the Linkage with the Environment is reiterated, there is a predominant practice that lacks integrated actions, with diverse, fragmented, and isolated activities and tasks (Adán et al, 2016).

To face these challenges, the path chosen by the Universidad Católica del Maule is Social Innovation, understood as a work strategy that allows strengthening the University - Territory linkage. In this scenario, in 2017 "Centro Integral de Innovación Social" was created, which aims to seek social transformation from collective and innovative creation processes.

Recognizing the existence of diverse knowledge and territorial contexts, with which we aspire to work horizontally and in a network, in creating joint strategies for the sustainable development of the Maule Region and its inhabitants”.

Theoretical Framework

Transitioning towards a model of sustainable development based on relational modes of collaboration, participation and social deliberation challenges university work and with it a new model with respect to the ivory tower with which the institutions acted, which traditionally privileged vertical, tutelary and assistential relationships with the environment. Social Innovation at the university level has oriented its work from different approaches and models, influenced by disciplines such as economics, sociology, and public administration. This has resulted in multiple practices such as social entrepreneurship, social responsibility, solidarity economy, social management, among others. From the perspective of Villa (2013), among the concepts most used by higher education institutions are social or civic engagement, university social responsibility, service learning, and social entrepreneurship.

Several researchers warn that, to make Social Innovation in universities, a systemic approach should be considered. Specifically, some authors (Domanski, et al., 2016; Westley, et al., 2011; Gatica, Soto and Vela, 2015) put forward the idea of innovation ecosystems, to refer to competencies of an organizational nature that articulate teaching, research, extension and management, which allow transforming and promoting solutions to the challenges of the environment. In this sense, it is important to emphasize that innovation goes beyond being just the development of a product; it is also a change in the practices and work routines of the entire organizational system and its strategic partners.

Methodology

The experience takes place in a rural commune in Chile, where the CIIS works collaboratively with the community to identify problems in the territory and design social innovation projects. Through participatory socio-territorial diagnosis, 5 critical nodes and 20 proposals for preliminary projects possible to address were collectively identified.

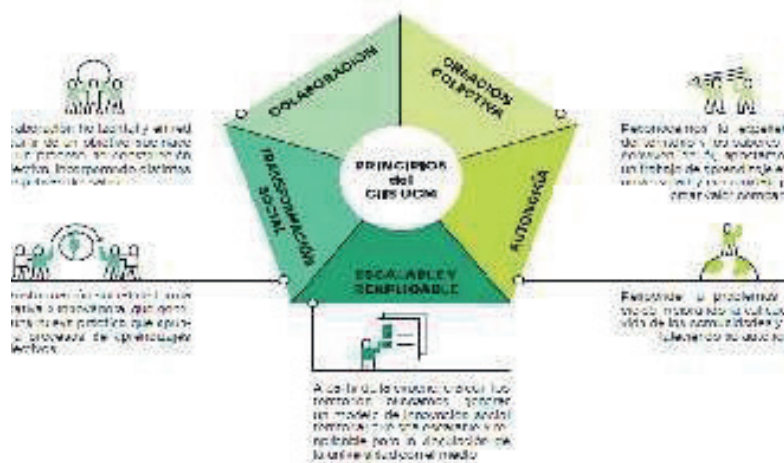
Through this experience, a Social Innovation Model is built to be implemented in undergraduate teaching, allowing the link between teaching and the territory to be strengthened for relevant training with the needs of the environment. This allowed the UCM to strengthen the Link with the Environment in urban-rural communities in the region, through Social Innovation as a co-creation tool in which all those involved participated in initiatives that seek to improve the quality of life of people.

Results

The CIIS of the Universidad Católica del Maule is defined as a unit that strengthens interdisciplinary work between faculties, the formative potential of undergraduate and graduate studies, research, and bidirectional linkage with communities, as detailed in its principles (Figure 1), all aligned with the challenges presented by the region in the social, economic, territorial, and identity of Maule, Chile. Committing to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) through SDG17 of Partnerships to achieve goals, realizing that the CIIS UCM fulfills two functions:

- Design and implement a model of Social Innovation, with a strategy oriented to experiential active methodologies that articulate the needs of the local community with the training of professionals.
- Coordinate the work developed by students and teachers with the communities in order to jointly address the detection of social needs that are not adequately covered, as well as the solutions, generating new social relationships and new models of collaboration between university and community.

Fig. 1. Principios CIIS UCM



Discussion

Social innovation, which is the basis of the CIIS, involves a work strategy that strengthens the university-territory link. This generates constant learning and weaving networks that contribute to the work of the center, generating opportunities for academics, students and members of the community. The above reflects the contribution to the fulfillment of SDG17, by carrying out activities with the support of its faculties and external collaborators such as: private sector companies, public companies and institutions, NGOs and higher education institutions.

Conclusions

Social innovation is a requirement faced by university institutions and is expressed in the quality and depth of the training provided to future professionals, as well as the ability to influence the solution to the various problems faced by the territories and their inhabitants. Complementarily, to advance in bidirectionality and, therefore, in significant, permanent and systematic interactions in the generation of collaborative and mutually beneficial spaces between the University and public and private actors at local, national and international levels.

Limitation and Futures Research

The CIIS UCM requires operating conditions, institutional articulation of the functions of teaching, research and liaison, and this implies tensioning the resistance of the institutional culture to advance in social and educational practices committed to innovation. Thus, the need for a reflective process of the university community emerges, regarding the work done, its impacts and effects on improvement decisions. This is a key way for the university to not only advance in its responsibility to society, but also to legitimize its role as an institution and its academic work.

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