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University – society linkage projects: 20 years working with the underprivileged sectors in Ecuador

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Abstract

Bonding the university with the society is a widely discussed topic in international literature. However, the university social responsibility in relation with the underprivileged sectors has not been amply investigated. This current research makes an analysis of the university-society linkage with the underprivileged sectors in Ecuador. This research was carried out through a case study at the Politecnica Salesiana University of Ecuador, which has more than 20 years of experience in making linking projects with deprived and disadvantage sectors. The methodology used for the analysis of these projects has been taken from the “Working with People” model, which is suitable enough for the planning of high social complexity development projects. The results show the suitability of the WWP model for the university-society linkage projects, and they also outstand the contribution of the UPS (Politecnica Salesiana University) to the development of deprived sectors from three dimensions, which are the economic, technical, political – contextual, and social – ethical.

Keywords: University-society; underprivileged sectors; working with people.

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1. Introduction

The university-society linkage, is the tool which allows the interaction between the academy and the environment, efficiently coordinating its teaching, research, culture extension, and service functions, allowing relationships with the productive and social sectors to mutually benefit each other, and favoring a strategic placement (Alcantar-Enriquez & Arcos-Vega, 2004).

The term linkage always relates to the relationships that exist - or must exist – between the university and the society it makes part of. Additionally, there exists another shared aspect: to consider this linkage as axiological positive, as a desirable function, or a ‘virtue’ element in institutions of higher education (Rios & Daza, 2005). Several investigations have been developed about the relationship between academy and society, especially with the business sector; the economic and political changes in the world have had a great impact in higher education models in Australia, Canada, the United Kingdom, and the United States (Slaughter & Leslie, 1997). The historical changes approved more than 20 years ago, have transformed the relationships between the university and the industry, and they have become the central point to obtain universities dedicated to research in the American Society (Turk-Bicakci & Brint, 2005). The increase of the investment has been significant if the patents, licenses, and the spending of the industry in R&D are measured (Duistra, 1992; Feller 1997; Hackett 2001; Mansfield 1995; Owen-Smith 2001; Powell & Owen-Smith, 2002). In this manner, the public research universities are responding to neoliberal tendencies, through a so-called academic Capitalism, making the higher education politics to depend on the macro-economic politics. Therefore, many university workers spend their time only to the business service (Slaughter & Leslie, 2001).

The federal legislation in United States promoted the transference of technology and the increase of academic dependence to business, transforming them into research and development (R&D) universities (Powell & Owen-Smith, 1998).

The influence of this Linkage with the Society was similarly extended to Latin America in many aspects; however, it reached a summit between the postulates of the 1918 Reform made by the University Youth in Cordova. They were moved by the situations they were experiencing in their country and in the world, initiating a movement for the genuine democracy of the teaching, to which the whole continent adhered. The different conferences about education that the UNESCO has convoked, like the Conference of Santiago in 1962, which establishes the bases for the inter-university cooperation, the essay of new higher education models, and stands out its responsibility in the formation of technicians and scientist required to accelerate the social and economic transformation process in the countries of the region. The Conference of Santiago in 1966 recommends a more adequate incorporation of the university in the national planning of the education and development. The document presented in the World Conference about Higher Education, called by the UNESCO in October, 1998, in Paris, proposes the new mission and functions of the higher education. The declaration of the Regional Conference of Higher Education in Latin America, held in 2008 becomes a milestone of accomplishments because it reunites the regional thinking about the needs, problems, and recommendations to higher education. Nevertheless, the universities have also changed in a significant manner, and in many aspects, which have allowed to better adapt themselves to the different contexts where they have been established (Perkin, 1991).

There are many relationship experiences between the university and business; however, there are no similar experiences about linkage between universities and underprivileged sectors, with exception of some of them about health issues (Renaud & de Sotelo, 2007). To better illustrate these type of linkage experiences, it is important to mention the intervention of the Politecnica de Madrid University with the people from Puno, in Peru. This shows the process of capacity improvements in the artisan women of Aymara Women Coordinator; an organization of women who are dedicated to the elaboration of handicrafts and who are beginning a development process with the reinforcement of their abilities, through different projects which are connected, it means, one after the other.

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The UPS echoing its institutional vision and mission, directs its academic endeavor towards the solution of social problems especially the ones coming from underprivileged sectors as a part of its social responsibility, through its linkage projects, which are analyzed from the WORKING WITH PEOPLE (WWP) model (Cazorla et al., 2013), whose conceptual framework synthetizes the evolution of the “modern Project,” and its dominant values, until getting a new focus for the planning of rural development projects in the post-modernity: ‘working with the people.’ The WWP model has been inserted in the international debates of “social learning” and incorporates key elements for the planning as social learning, from the cooperative participation, and from the project management models.

It is important to make an analysis of the experiences in the linkage projects from a WWP model for the sync that their components have with the social action scenario where the UPS interacts.

2. Methodology

This research is an empirical one, whose starting point is the 20 years of experience in Linkage projects at the Politecnica Salesiana University. The results of this research come from the review of different information sources about the contextualization of the topic University-Society Linkage, as well as from the projects data base taken from the University-Society Linkage Bureau at the UPS.

2.1. Research setting

The research was developed at the Politecnica Salesian University in the cities of Cuenca, Guayaquil, and Quito, in Ecuador, in the field of management of linkage with the society projects; from the Higher Education Law LOES, and the Ecuadorian Higher Education Academic Plan Regulation, whose projects are framed in solving social problems through “continuous training programs, research and development, and academic management, as long as they meet, throughout specific projects, the needs of local, regional, and national development” (CES, 2015, p. 37).

The national regulations governing higher education in Ecuador require universities to have the instance of Linkage with the Society, through which social problems can be solved thanks the university - environment interaction, allowing the development of important projects with various social actors such as: companies, social organizations, communities, and sectoral governments.

The intervention of the UPS with these different actors, is made through the figure of agreement and/ or project, legally recognized tools, which allow the university to successfully develop the linkage as well as the execution of its projects.

For the analysis, 1329 agreements and 286 projects of intervention with the environment that the UPS has maintained until today have been systematized, using a matrix that groups five types of agreements: macro agreements, training and formation, consultancy and advice, extensions and internships, and others, obtaining the following result:

The 61% of agreements correspond to ‘extensions and internships’ due to the fact that the UPS has a linkage with the society through its professors and students who search to accomplish with the mentioned academic figure that is a university mandatory requirement. ‘The Training and Formation’ agreements constitute the 17% and they are about the intervention of the university in training topics with the environment. With these results we can observe that the UPS manages this area, by which it has been able to reinforce its institutional image. The agreements classified according to framework agreement make reference to the intervention of the university with organisms and institutions where the support with specific activities that mean mutual work are required, it means, they have a synergy between the two parties (university – environment). This space constitutes the 12% of the total of agreements signed. The consultancy and advice topic refers to the rendering of services required by all the institutions that need the participation of the university in solving their particular problems. Therefore, we can see that the UPS has signed 108 signed agreements, which represent the 8% of the total, showing that this is not strength of the UPS. In the classified agreements as others, we can find the ones that are not specific regarding their actions, but they are general and do not represent a major

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impact in the intervention. For this reason, this type of agreements only represent a 2% of the total, being at the end of the classification.

In relation to the projects, they have been classified according to the dimensions required by the WWP model;

We can observe that the UPS mainly works in the Technical – Entrepreneur dimension of this model. We can find that a 42% corresponds to this dimension. The Social-Ethical dimension counts with a 39%, and finally the Political-Contextual dimensions counts with a 19%.

2.2. The UPS and the WWP model

The journey of the UPS in the linkage with the society area includes diverse scenarios that go from very specific and small interventions to ones that come into play in academic formation processes of long duration. These linkage projects are analyzed from the Working with People model, as a suitable conceptual framework to guide the linkage with the society actions in the planning and direction areas of high social complexity projects (Cazorla, et al., 2013). From this model, the expert and experimented knowledge holds a period of 20 years of service to the community by the UPS.

The analysis of the experience lessons will be done from the three dimensions of the Working with People model: Technical – entrepreneur, political – contextual, and Social – Ethical due to the affinity among the dimensions that the projects have.

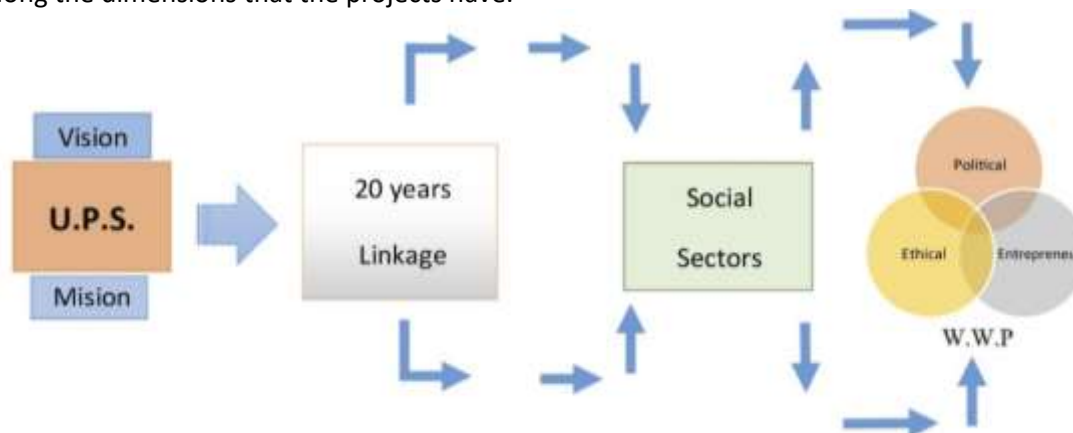


Figure 1. Research Methodology Scheme Source: Own elaboration (2016)

The WWP model starts from essential features (Cazorla, de los Rios & Salvo, 2013) as the respect and primacy for the people, the guarantee of social benefit, and the sustainable development, focusing from bottom to top, and multidisciplinary, and the endogenous and integrated focusing. Thus, the WWP model and the philosophy of the UPS tend to be models where the person and his benefits prevail above all. For this reason, the Linkage management of the UPS is obliged to continue in this way, accomplishing the planned dimensions in the WWP model; the *social – ethical*, the *technical – entrepreneur*; the *political – contextual* that allow us to reach a social learning.

3. Obtained Results

The obtained results present the experience lessons of the 20 years working in Linkage projects from a Social, Entrepreneur, and Contextual vision according to the logic of the Working With People model.

3.1. The linkage from a social – ethical dimension

The Salesian Society founder of the UPS, from its arrival to Ecuador in 1888, has been positioning its philosophy in the Ecuadorian population thanks to the favorable impact of its well-recognized social

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labor developed through the systematic teaching of handicrafts; this is the base from which the UPS has maintained its image, and making an academic management under the Salesian principles as the daily practice of its philosophy.

Consequently, the beginnings of the University was framed for its academic offering directed to majors of technical order; from these areas, the Linkage with the Society Bureau managed the projects. However, some majors directed to the formation of the indigenous people were created; majors such as Management for Sustainable Local Development; Intercultural Bilingual Education, and Anthropology. Through them, the education proposals of this segment of the less favored population were attended.

There are several projects to mention in this dimension; however, it is worth mentioning the most relevant. The Bilingual Intercultural Education major established a project aimed at training the communities of the Achuar ethnic group, located in northeastern of Ecuador, and who for many years have been marked by a sedentary way of living, spread out in the Amazon region as defense chains of the jungle. The Achuar are integrated in the Interprovincial Federation of Achuar Nationality of Ecuador, FINAE, which groups the Achuar or Ashuar of the Pastaza and Morona Santiago provinces. They are approximately 10 thousand inhabitants, distributed in 50 communities. For this project, a support Center was installed in Wasakentsa, which provides attention to the students. Most of the graduated students are working in their own communities, and others have been able to get political positions and work in public institutions of the area.

Another project of relevant impact and of regional character is the one made with the Community of the Jubones River watershed; social organization of private rights, legally recognized through a Ministry agreement, which comprises 12 municipalities: Giron, Nabon, Oña, San Fernando, Santa Isabel, Pucara, Saraguro, Zaruma, Chilla, El Guabo, Machala, Pasaje, and also two province governments: Azuay and El Oro, all of them located in the watershed of the Jubones river, and with the purpose of promoting the sustainable management of the resources immersed in watershed of this river. The project allowed the implementation of two training programs, one in a Master's program with the tittle Local Sustainable Development, and the other, which is a bachelor degree with the tittle Governability and Political Management. Thus, the participation of the different local actors in the academic programs of the university is promoted and facilitated. The 45 bachelor and 40 master students that started their university studies, will be the articulating link of the university management, with this indigenous group conformed by two provinces of the country, indirectly influencing about 490,000 inhabitants. Seven mayors, nine councilmen, 20 political directors and leaders in general attend this process of academic formation. All of them have been able to graduate after an academic process, and also to replicate, in their management spaces, their acquired abilities.

A cantonal project is the one developed in the cantons of Giron, Nabon, Santa Isabel, and Pucara, in which 248 peasants belonging to 48 communities participate in it. They are spread over the four cantons whose population goes over 56,000 inhabitants. They attended an average of 2,635 training hours. The training process was made in their own cantons where professors from UPS went with a series of topics regarding different fields. The planning of the project was considered for a whole year with weekly attendance. The project was replicated for 5 years.

In addition, in this very dimension, we can find projects of minor regional nature, with the purpose of descending the levels of organization, but with a strong impact like the project with Parish Council of Santa Ana where 1,200 inhabitants attend the programs. The participants are from 22 communities in where 40 training courses have been developed.

Finally, we will mention a project of neighborhood nature as an example of the university linkage in specific areas, such as the neighborhood leaders in a project called "Consolidation of social actors in the Marginal Urban Areas in Cuenca," which is managed by the Provincial Government of Azuay through the Province Participation Plan. The main goal is to enhance the local development of each of the neighborhoods and participant parishes of Azuay. The attendance in this project is as follows: 70 leaders

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from 15 neighborhood committees of Cuenca and 4 Parish Councils, attending 144 face-to-face training hours every weekend during 5 months.

In this way, the UPS aids, through its linkage projects, to different rural Parish Councils adapting to their different needs, and sharing their expertise with the people from where praxis of the WWP model is observed in the Social-Ethical dimension.

3.2. The linkage from the technical – entrepreneur dimension

The relationship of the UPS with the austral companies has had a good impact since the beginning of the university because its academic offering was focused on meeting especially the technical field; thus, 90% of the graduates were working in the industrial field. This fact made the university could be linked more easily to this sector and establish a strong link with the aim of strengthening the human resources of the business sector. Therefore, formation and training programs were implemented with different austral companies, whose significant impact contributed to the technological development of the region.

More than 2,000 people from enterprises in more than 100 various courses have been trained in the UPS throughout its institutional life. The topics range from software assistance courses to practical workshops in laboratories. The trainings course have been adapted to the multiple demands of the business environment, considering aspects like the modality, methodology, place, schedules among others., in order to meet the expectations of the participants.

The strong relationship of the UPS with the business sector has allowed the realization of the project called: Industrial Technology Center (CTI) of the Politecnica Salesiana University through the dual education process.

The aim of this project is the practical training of the student in the training company during five semesters in application of the theoretical- practical curriculum. The project addressed to the technification of human resources of enterprises, started from the study to many companies. In this process 52 students participate supported by the Ecuadorian - German Chamber of Industries and Commerce; Chamber of Industries of Cuenca; Indurama Induglob S.A.; and Continental. Thus the project consolidates the positioning of the institutional image in the business field, reaffirming the linkage quality of the UPS with its environment within collective thinking.

Another project in this dimension is the one carried out with the National Board of Defense of the Artisan called: "Training in Administrator of Craft workshops and Manager of Craft workshops;" this is an autonomous organization of the public sector in charge of administering the Law of Defense of the Artisan. This project has been executed in cities that are capitals of province such as: Cuenca, Guayaquil, Quito, and Azogues; as well as in the cantons: Gualaceo, Sigsig, and Biblian; training 210 artisans in 360 hours of face-to-face training for one year. The objective was to significantly professionalize the participants. The training process was done in each environment of the artisans, during three days a week during night time. The impact was significant.

Finally, another project of lesser importance was developed with the Cooperative of agricultural, livestock, and services of food to live better production "PROGRASERVIV" which is a cooperative formed with the objective of contributing to the social and economic development of its members and the community.

PROGRASERVIV is an organization that was born from the bankruptcy of a savings and credit cooperative, COOPERA, that had great economic success but a poor management. This failure led them to start again with a different vision and to choose the UPS as manager of their change. Through joint work, this cooperative creates strengthening chains for the production and marketing of healthy and nutritious foods such as vegetables, legumes, fruits, meats, fish, seafood, and in general, products derived from agricultural activity benefiting local small farmers. In this project, 35 of the 84 members attended the process that lasted 186 hours. The interaction among the majors of the UPS was an important added value in favor of the university. The improvement of the ventures favored around 100

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families indirectly who increased their income. The improvement in the management of the ventures by the participating members has been an important experience in the training process. The linkage with the social actors of the microenterprise has allowed new places of academic management. This project has been a research topic in the doctoral lines at the UPS and UPM (Politecnica de Madrid University).

With the analysis of these three projects, it can be observed the incidence of the UPS in the business environment at macro, meso, and micro level; thus contributing to the technical entrepreneur dimension of the WWP model and enhancing the essential pillars of the future of the environment as is the efficient management of the generation of goods and services.

3.3. The linkage from the political - contextual dimension

The diversification of the academic offering of the UPS has allowed majors, such as: Management for Sustainable Local Development, Intercultural Bilingual Education, and Anthropology; to link them, through their students, to the diverse rural and political spaces of the region. In this sense, there have been a number of approaches with the civilian population in order to achieve better spaces for citizen participation in the political scenario mediated by governmental institutions such as Provincial Councils, Mayors, Parish Boards, Neighborhoods and Communities.

We will highlight specific projects that have been carried out at the provincial, parochial, and neighboring levels; in order to observe the intervention in the high, medium and small levels of organization; with the purpose to observe the impact of the institutional image on the environment.

The project called "Training Plan 2009" was established by the Provincial Government of Azuay, and obeys the regulations expressed in the Constitution of the Republic of Ecuador. 540 employees, workers, and staff of the Provincial Government of Azuay attended this training project which consist of 2,004 hours covered in 91 courses. Its objective is to strengthen the capacities of the staff of the Provincial Government of Azuay in order to provide a better service to the citizens and better participate in the provincial management.

The training project was run in the UPS classrooms on different days and times at the convenience of the applicants, to whom the highest profiles in the various subjects required had to be selected due to the level of expertise of the actors. With this project the UPS became a university for everybody and for life.

In this same dimension, it is worth analyzing a project of smaller scope, but with the same impact, called "Institutional Strengthening of Parish Boards by means of training, addressed to the members of the Parish Councils of Azuay" by an agreement with the Association of Parish Councils of Azuay, AJUPA; which is an organization that brings together 21 parish councils of the province of Azuay. 117 representatives of the Parish Councils of Azuay participated in this process, attending 166 face-to-face hours of training. The objective is to strengthen local development and training in sectional government administration processes, as well as to promote the development of capacities and skills for local management. The project was developed in 5 months, and the participants attended the UPS classrooms on Fridays from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. The diversity of the participants in terms of age, gender, skills, and knowledge was an important feature that served as a scenario to apply and validate various andragogical educational techniques and methodologies, which would ultimately serve for their application in similar projects.

Finally, a project of smaller territorial scope and very significant is the called "Training Program for Neighborhood Leaders of the urban areas Cuenca." This project, aimed at the neighborhood presidents of Cuenca, is the result of the institutional image acquired from the actions undertaken by the UPS on the issue of linkage with society in vulnerable groups. The Management for Sustainable Local Development major of the UPS was in charge of carrying out this training process requested by the Municipality of Cuenca. It is important to emphasize that the neighborhood is the basic representation of territorial organization in national development. 156 of the 380 presidents of the neighborhoods of

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Cuenca, who are the representatives of about 100,000 inhabitants, attended this linkage project. They participated in 171 classroom hours and 90 hours of autonomous work in six months.

The development of the project was done in the UPS classrooms, on Sundays on a non-stop-basics schedule. This training process has fundamentally served for neighborhood leaders to begin to socialize the information acquired and rethink their participation as a neighborhood president within the city budget; this has caused a strong reflection in the realization of participatory budgets.

Consequently the UPS has contributed favorably with the Contextual Political dimension in virtue of its social impact from the analyzed projects and the others that are in this dimension.

4. Conclusions

The revised documentation reveals the importance of generating, in higher education, processes of linkage with society in order to satisfy the ethical duty demanded by society and to justify the nature and existence of the university; the different approaches to linking are structured on the basis of the construction of science with social awareness, building the learning in scenarios shared between the text and the context; therefore, forming people with social and professional relevance oriented not only to the service of society but rather towards the promotion of a desired social change.

The experience lessons have shown that any linkage process that the university undertakes, no matter how small it is, means a great added value for the educational institution because the institution is inserted in the scope of action, strengthening the positioning of the university image.

The statements of the institutional vision and mission are the cornerstone for undertaking the concrete actions of linkage, because from these postulates, the operational planning of the linkage is projected. This is how the UPS strengthens its philosophy from the Salesian society and takes as its legacy its assistance to the underprivileged, contributing with valid proposals that serve to promote the development of people.

The experience lessons analyzed from the WWP model show several considerations to keep in mind; in this sense, the importance of undertaking projects in favor of civil organizations is emphasized from the ethical-social dimension, placing the person at the center as the main agent of social development; this way, the academy directly affects the process of local and regional development through the direct actors who are the multiplier agents of the proposals undertaken in each of the established projects. In this same dimension, we must retrieve various learnings from the acquired experiences, which take into account topics of culture, andragogy, and pedagogy that give feedback to the academy with a view to strengthening and improving internal learning processes. The relationship with people who have long been actors and leaders of their localities, favors not only strategic allies but also facilitates the process of promoting the academic proposal of the UPS in their context.

From the technical-entrepreneur dimension, the direct relationship between UPS and the company stands out, a situation implemented since the beginning of the university management as a result of its connotation of polytechnics adopted from the Salesian system in terms of technical assistance (arts and crafts) as well as a tool for entry in the environment. In this sense, UPS's leadership in the technical area allows it to open its actions towards the non-school population of the company, artisans, and citizens in general who demand its specialized services to undertake development processes. On the other hand, the action of the UPS from its graduates, has served as a significant contribution in the technological development of the environment. From the political-contextual dimension, there is a continuous growth in the University-Environment relations, especially with communities and civil and governmental organizations, which, through their leaders and social actors linked to the UPS, either in their majors or programs, demand from the university assistance in their varied proposals of linkage.

Consequently, there are three scenarios that have been the basis of the UPS linkage projects; the first scenario is the assistance to the most vulnerable people as a paradigm of Salesian activity based on the Salesian charism, which has contributed to the positioning of its institutional image; the second scenario is its polytechnic status that has allowed to position its academic offering in the environment; and final

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scenario is the direct involvement with social actors who confirm the quality and warmth of the Salesian work. In this way, the WORKING WITH PEOPLE model fits perfectly in the performed analysis because of its condition of working with people and for its people.

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