Co-created model of social innovation that promotes social impact in Vocational Training Institutions

Gabriela Carrasco[1], Ignacio Díaz[2], Diego Ramírez[2], Waldo Soto[3], Alex Silva[4]
[1]2811, NYC, US [2]2811, Santiago, Chile, [3]Director, 2811, Berlin, Germany, [4]Santo Tomás, Santiago, Chile.

Abstract

Higher Education Institutions (HEI) have a fundamental role in generating positive social impact in the communities to which they belong. However, it is necessary to restructure the perspectives with which they are working, evolving from a rigid and welfare model, to a collaborative and co-creation one.

This paper aims to explore from theory and practice, how an Institutional model of social innovation can be designed involving stakeholders in the process. This will make it possible to realize that the incorporation of co-creation as a central element in the construction of a model is beneficial for the communities and generates greater and better results within society.

Keywords: Social Innovation; co-creative solutions; social impact; Vocational Training Institutions.

1. Introduction

Higher Education Institutions (HEI) are complex systems, with a defined trajectory, and with a momentum difficult to change. However, changing the current way of interacting with their communities can ignite a new source of solutions to the most pressing social and ecological problems. Several international and national level agreements aim to improve the current relationship between HEI and communities, but it is a space that still requires new models, intra-innovations and frameworks to materialize the change. This is particularly interesting and urgent in the Vocational Education Training sector in Latinoamérica, where also the HEI plays a role of contributing to economic equality, social inclusion and to the continuing training of the population.

This paper explores the co-creation process of a new educational model to accelerate the co-creation of solutions to urgent problems of disadvantaged communities in Chile. This model was co-created during the years 2020 and 2021, in the middle of the COVID-19 pandemic, which also gives the opportunity to better contextualize the Vocational Education Training (VET) and its role in society after this global crisis. Together with presenting the process behind the emergence of this model, the paper discusses the main threats and challenges that an approach like this can present. Perhaps a comprehensive understanding of new education models in the VET sector in the continent can help HEI to improve the strategies to help the society to be better prepared to the increasing threats related to climate change, democracy deterioration and economic inequality.

2. Context and problem

In 2016, UNESCO presented a strategy for Vocational Training Institutions that supports the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and which was agreed by the 193 Member States of the United Nations. Within it is the promotion and guarantee of and inclusive, equitable, quality education that provides learning opportunities for all people, establishing priority areas of action: Promotion of youth employment and entrepreneurship, promotion of equality and the equivalence of genders and and finally facilitate the transition towards sustainable economies and societies, proposing the key role played by HEI to promote ecological skills (UNESCO, 2016)

In Chile, the Ministry of Education has the "Strategic Transversal Dimensions in Vocational Training Institutions", highlighting different areas of work: Quality, Territorial Development, Gender equity, Inclusion and Sustainability (Ministry of Education of Chile, 2020)

Similarly, the National Accreditation Commission of Chile (CNA) - a public and autonomous body whose purpose is to verify and promote the quality of HEI in Chile and their programs

- presents a "Guide for External Evaluation" in matters of Institutional Accreditation for Vocational Training Institutions, where content innovation plays the role of updating study plans. Likewise, from the Public Engagement, all Vocational Training Institutions must take into account the results and impacts of their programs (CNA, 2022).

Based on the foregoing, Social Innovation (SI) emerges as a response, which has different definitions but most theorists agree that its main axis is the search for common good, which protects people already the families of the abuses of all superior instance, of centralization, bureaucratization, welfare, among others (Martínez, 2015). To do this, Higher Education Institutions must implement and facilitate the creation of multiple initiatives, catalyzing learning from different disciplines in the face of the same problem (Gatica, Soto & Vela, 2015). Likewise, it is interesting to observe how social innovation initiatives have been organized in the form of laboratories or centers of social change within HEI. In this sense, in 2009, at the World Conference on Higher Education (WCHE), a call was made to contribute to the equitable development of universities through innovation and social responsibility (Martínez, 2015).

However, there are still barriers against institutional innovations, the most important being, according to Mulgan, Tucker and Sanders (2007): Efficiency (fear that the system will worsen in the short term), Minds (fear of changing assumptions, values and norms), Relationships (fear of losing relationships or contacts) and Interest (fear of changing status or learned mechanisms), the latter being the one most strongly linked to collaborative work between Institutions and their community. Despite this, there are HEI that wish to contribute to improving their strategies in order to better and more effectively face the social, economic and ecological challenges that afflict them.

This is the case of Santo Tomás Institution, in Chile, with 21 branches and more than 80 thousand students (University, Professional Institute and Technical Training Center), which has an Organization for Public Engagement Direction whose mission is to increase the contribution of the Institution to the most vulnerable communities in Chile. And that, now, is open to the emergence of a new policy based on Social Innovation, which is complex and diversified, and which hopes to open new opportunities for other houses of study, installing in them models and policies that improve, through cooperation and novelty, the conditions of the Institution and their environments.

3. Co-creation of a social innovation model that accelerates the social impact of Vocational Training Institutions

For both Gillwald (2016) and Mulgan (2016), the concept of Social Innovation is linked to the novelty of a solution to a problem, always looking for new mechanisms that remedy conflicts, in a better way and with a greater scope than previous solutions. Added to this, SI

assumes that novelty must change the basic routines of a society, its flows of authority, resources and belief systems (Westley, Antadze, Riddell, Robinson & Geobey, 2014). A change reflected by a less vertical and more horizontal work strategy, and where the central point is co-creation or co-production with all the levels and agents involved in the Institution (Voorberg, Bekkers, & Tummers, 2014).

Given the definitions of social innovation, the question is then how to install a set of policies, activities and capacities that support the emergence of more social innovations, and that these derive in addition to the teaching and innovation work of HEI.

The search for a model, for an educational innovation for social change, should tend to position all the levels involved as agents of change in the face of the problems that develop in their environment, thus contributing to their training as human capital and strengthening their social cohesion (Martínez, 2015). This would generate a reaction, both in their environment and in the Institution itself, forcing all those involved to adapt to a model of co-creating solutions to future crises or emergencies. In the case of Vocational Training Institutions, this model of promoting innovation would accelerate an impact both collectively and individually: In the first case, the SI would cause different entities within the institutions to generate the same multidisciplinary solution to a common problem. While, in the second case, all the professionals involved in the co-creation social innovation model will have the necessary experience to carry out SI in their respective individual projects.

4. Methodology

Between 2020 and 2021, an information survey was carried out with teachers, administrators and authorities of the Santo Tomás Institution, with the objective of designing and implementing a collaborative and co-constructed SI strategy. This stakeholder mapping consisted of semi-structured interviews with authorities from different institutions (University of the Basque Country, Universidad Minuto de Dios and Fundación Colunga), which have already designed an IS strategy, in order to learn about and use their experience as a frame of reference in the Santo Tomas Institution. In addition, two exploratory and diagnostic workshops were held, one with the authorities and teachers of the Santo Tomás Institution, and the other with its academics and officials. The next step was to ask a series of questions (open and closed) to different institutional entities to assess their knowledge about SI. Finally, the implementation of the Strategy was carried out through different meetings -in order to validate the IS Institutional Strategy and the different products that were part of it- implementing courses related to IS in the Institution.

5. Results and findings

Thanks to the co-creative diagnosis process at the Santo Tomás Institution, Social Innovation was defined as: "The collective search for new solutions aimed at solving social challenges with special emphasis on improving the quality of life of vulnerable communities. These new solutions can be a product, a service, a process, a practice or a management model that must be bidirectional, co-created, measurable and should aspire to generate permanent changes in society".

In this way, the definition would be in line with the essential elements in which all IS projects are framed: Co-creation, this being collective, bidirectional and pointing to the need to work collaboratively, thus generating multidisciplinary solutions to social challenges and environmental issues faced by the communities that are related to the Santo Tomás Institutions. Impact, that is, understanding of how the solutions affect, directly or indirectly, at a social, environmental and economic level. Novelty, where it is essential to implement and recognize the most innovative solutions which are also linked to sustainability, where every project must be lasting and continuous, allowing its model to prevail over time, aspiring to scale and, ultimately, to change the system in which it is framed.

In the case of the Santo Tomás Technical Training Center (CFTST), its Institutional Strategy for Social Innovation aimed to strengthen the connection and impact of the institution in the community. In this way, the implementation of SI as a strategic axis in the CFTST was based on sustaining a training framework for students, and also a plan for institutional change towards a culture that promotes co-creation. In this way, the Strategy would successfully insert itself into the Institution in a permeable manner, that is, it is impacted and has an impact on its environment, in constant feedback with the community and community partners and in balance with external requirements.

One of the projects carried out by this Institution around social innovation is "OdontoClean", a project that aims to generate information of clinical and practical importance for the patient and their families, and to be able to deliver it to those who have the greatest difficulty in reaching or get it. In this way, they work co-creatively with these people, generating support networks to solve the problem and generate a positive impact on the communities.

A Strategy for Institutional Change that would also be supported over time by a Change Team, in charge of being the interlocutor between institutional policy and work in the territory. Also having the role of promoting a culture of SI from the spaces that exist within the institution as well as the creation of new spaces necessary for its operation.
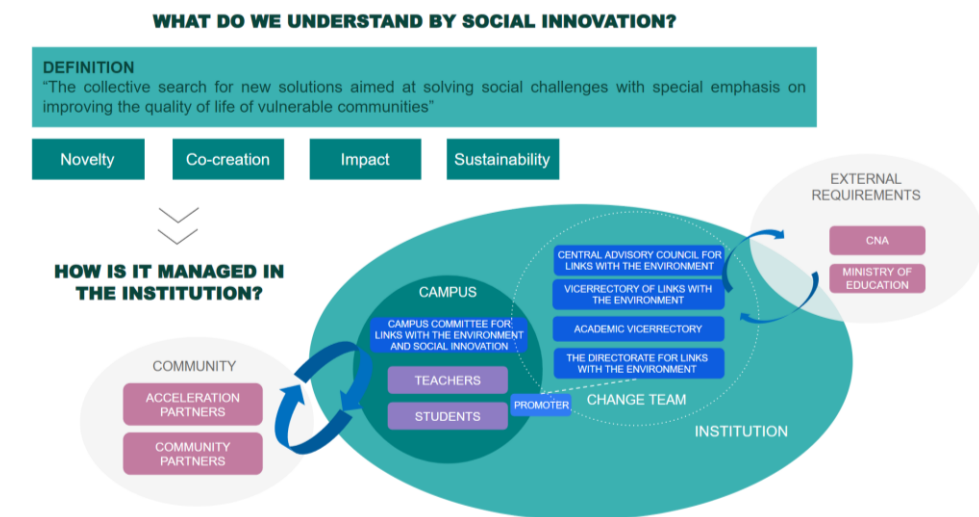
Figure 1. Institutional model of Social Innovation. Source: Own elaboration based on institutional model.

Within the implementations, different employability skills can be mentioned, through SI, in all students, teachers and collaborators of the Santo Tomás Institution, which would be divided into Curricular, Extra or Co-curricular and the Continuing Education program. Processes measured by indicators of Inputs, Results and Impacts.

In the case of the actions to be followed by the Strategy, these were measures in the short term (0 to 1 year), medium (1 to 3 years) and long term (3 to 5 years), divided into those focused on the Training of Students and Linkage and those focused on Institutionalization, Governance and Operations:

For the Training of Students and Bonding, the short-term actions focused on the introduction of the re-design and implementation of a class of social innovation called TDP, a. For the medium term, they focused on the integration and updating of knowledge in IS in all careers. While for the long term, a definitive inclusion of IS in all careers would be mandatory, thus consolidating the CFTST as a leading institution in Chile (and/or Latin America) in IS.

At the same time, for the Institutionalization, Governance and Operations group, short-term actions focused on the formation of the Change Team regarding the Strategy. For the medium term, work began on the inclusion of other venues in the SI, thus allowing the multidisciplinary exchange proposed by the Strategy. And finally, for the long term, it would be expected to generate the first studies on the multidirectional impact between the Strategy, the Institution, the students and the territory, based on competences in Vocational Training Institutions in Chile, Times Higher Education Report.

Although the Strategy generates an impact in the territory by the different institutional actors, it also trains students so that once they work in their respective disciplines, they can generate an impact in their own communities. In this way, the Strategy not only produces an impact in the territory linked to the institution, but also makes it possible for the impact to continue to grow over the years, transmitting the skills linked to social innovation.

6. Challenges and considerations on replicability

There are a number of challenges that must be considered when carrying out this Strategy. In the first place, despite the fact that both teachers and authorities were considered throughout the co-creative process, the students were only surveyed in the Strategy design. For this reason, it is essential that all sectors of the development process be taken into account, especially those who will see SI in the classroom or in the projects in which they participate. Second, because the Santo Tomás Institution has 21 branches throughout the country, the design of the Strategy must consider the diversity of needs resulting from different territorial contexts. Since the latter could hinder the consolidation of a single Institutional Strategy. Thirdly, since the Institution has multiple actors and bureaucratic channels to carry out changes in its Institutional Strategy, time and spaces must be considered that the Institution can count on in order to approve and/or review the design, otherwise The Strategy may suffer from various delays and difficulties.

Regarding replicability, it is necessary to maintain a high project management capacity, conversation moderation skills and conflict mediation. This will generate networking and internal and external communication skills, which are in line with intercultural skills and an entrepreneurial culture that is constantly renewed by feedback. Another consideration is the validation of the Strategy transversally by the Institution, the management teams, officials and students. Finally, the Institution must cleanly/legally declare the desire to install an IS Strategy.

7. Conclusions

The purpose of this exploratory study was to get closer to understanding how the HEI, VET providers in particular, can co-create new models for fostering its social impact. The paper presents a model that could be easily replicated in different HEI institutions across Latinoamerica, taking into account the challenges and notes on replicability shared in the last section. However, a deeper study on the sustainability of these models is needed, where could be taken into account how the leading team is able to sustain such a creation over the time.

References

Gatica, S., Soto, W., & Vela, D. (2015). *Ecosistemas de innovación social: El caso de las Universidades de América Latina.* Santiago: Ashoka.

Martínez, M. C. (2015). Social Innovation in Higher Education of Mexico. *Revista Iberoamericana para la Investigación y el Desarrollo Educativo, 6*(11).

Ministerio de Educación. (2020). *Estrategia Nacional Formación Técnico Profesional.* Gobierno de Chile. Obtenido de Gobierno de Chile.

Mulgan, G., Tucker, S., Ali, R., & Sanders, B. (2007). *Social Innovation. What it is, why it matters and how it can be accelerated.* Skoll Centre for Social Entrepreneurship.

National Accreditation Commission of Chile (CNA). (February 09, 2022). *National Accreditation Commission of Chile (CNA).* Retrieved from https://www.cnachile.cl/Paginas/misionvision.aspx

Students4Change. (2019). *Innovación y Emprendimiento Social en Instituciones de Educación Superior.* Ciudad de México: Hola Publishing International.

UNESCO. (2016). *Estrategia para la Enseñanza y Formación Técnica Profesional (EFTP) (2016-2021).* París: UNESCO.

Voorberg, W. H., Bekkers, J. M., & Tummers, L. G. (2015). A Systematic Review of Co-Creation and Co-Production: Embarking on the social innovation journey. *Public Management Review*, 1333-1357.

Westley, F., Antadze, N., Riddell, D. J., Robinson, K., & Geobey, S. (2014). Five Configurations for Scaling Up Social Innovation: Case Examples of Nonprofit Organizations From Canada. *The Journal of Applied Behavioral Science, 50*(3), 234-260.