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Contributions of Inter-Institutional Collaborative Work in Extension Processes for Social Transformation: The Case of Ugrosanta

Aportes del trabajo colaborativo interinstitucional en procesos de extensión para la transformación social: caso Ugrosanta

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Abstract. This work is carried out within the framework of the School of Planning and Social Promotion of the Faculty of Social Sciences of the National University (UNA), Costa Rica. This academic unit was founded in 1974. Since then, it stands

out for incorporating extension practices into the teaching process, encouraging the active participation of students, academic staff, communities, and institutions through collaborative work that seeks the interaction of different social actors in favor of social transformation.

The paper presents the results of a three-year collaborative work developed in Santa Cruz de Turrialba, Costa Rica, in coordination with the Sistema Nacional de Áreas de Conservación (National System of Conservation Areas, SINAC), Unión de Agrupaciones (Association of Organized Community Groups) of Santa Cruz de Turrialba (Ugrosanta), fifteen students, and two teachers from the School of Planning and Social Promotion (EPPS). In addition, the project involved the participation of Ministerio de Cultura y Juventud (Costa Rica's Ministry of Culture and Youth).

First, key concepts to this analysis, such as collaborative work, university extension, and rural development with a territorial approach as the basis for social transformation, are explained. Then, the case study and the methodology used to prepare this article are contextualized. Finally, the results of the interviews conducted and the academic reflections resulting from the development of the university-society relationship through collaborative work are presented.

Keywords: collaborative work, university extension, social transformation

Resumen. Este trabajo se efectúa en el marco del quehacer de la Escuela de Planificación y Promoción Social, de la Facultad de Ciencias Sociales de la Universidad Nacional (UNA), Costa Rica. Dicha unidad académica surge en el año 1974 y desde sus inicios se ha caracterizado por integrar prácticas de extensión en los procesos de docencia, propiciando la participación activa del estudiantado, del equipo académico, de las comunidades y de las instituciones, a través de un trabajo colaborativo que busca la interacción de diferentes actores sociales, en pro de la transformación social.

Se presentan resultados de un trabajo colaborativo de tres años desarrollado en la comunidad de Santa Cruz de Turrialba, Costa Rica, en coordinación con el Sistema Nacional de Áreas de Conservación (Sinac), la organización Unión de Agrupaciones de Santa Cruz de Turrialba (Ugrosanta), quince personas estudiantes y dos profesoras de la Escuela de Planificación y Promoción Social (EPPS). Además, el proyecto contó con la participación del Ministerio de Cultura y Juventud de Costa Rica.

Primeramente, se señalan conceptos que son claves para este análisis, como el trabajo colaborativo, la extensión universitaria y el desarrollo rural con enfoque territorial como base de la transformación social. Después, se contextualiza el caso de estudio, así como la metodología utilizada para la elaboración del presente artículo. Por último, se exponen los resultados de las entrevistas realizadas y las reflexiones académicas que genera el desarrollo de la relación universidad-sociedad mediante el trabajo colaborativo.

Palabras clave: trabajo colaborativo, extensión universitaria, transformación social

Introduction

Public (State) institutions seek to implement actions based on direct work with the people who are beneficiaries of their services. This practice was widespread within the welfare state in Costa Rica (1948-1980) and remains covered by one of the powers and rights granted to society, which are recognized today in the Political Constitution as the right to citizen participation¹. Some institutions carry out fieldwork to achieve the expected connection between their actions and the context in which they work.

The public university has been thought of, from the collective imaginary, as a benefactor of society since it represents the opportunity for people to study and, thus, be able to become part of the labor market in better conditions. In addition, the university assumes other commitments, such as generating knowledge through research and extension.

Extension promotes a direct link and a dialogical relationship between students and teachers with society, actions that not only provide new knowledge but also strengthen learning processes built from practice and social commitment.

It is common for institutions and universities to do their work of community linkage and relationship within the same territory, and this may lead to two situations: 1. They work on the same or similar topics, but with particular approaches and interests, with different times and resources. 2. They work on different topics.

In the case under study in this article, the link between the UNA and the SINAC was established before the fieldwork in Santa Cruz de Turrialba. Although both institutions worked on territorial development from the communities, their initial approaches were different (SINAC's was the knowledge transfer, and UNA's was collective construction). However, they were adjusted based on the dynamics of dialog and the establishment of the link with Ugrosanta as an organization of the territory.

The particularities of this process, known as collaborative work, as well as the variables converging to achieve it, are shown in this article, thus inviting a reflection that motivates institutions to consolidate their field processes in a coordinated manner with different stakeholders who have a presence or are interested in providing conditions that generate wellbeing for the people of the territory.

¹ Article 9 of the Political Constitution of Costa Rica states that the Government of the Republic is popular, representative, participatory, alternative, and responsible.

Theoretical Reference

Inter-Institutional Collaborative Work

There is a variety of meanings associated with collaborative work. These meanings represent the broadening or deepening of teamwork and are mainly developed within teaching and learning spaces where that work is recognized as an opportunity to increase the knowledge and capabilities of the people involved (students and teachers).

The economist and professor Yochai Benkler (2006) refers to the concept from a position of transformation of the economy and exchanges between producers and consumers, where the latter move from a passive role (receiver) to an active one (co-creator) in defining the type of services and products they require.

Its deepening is made in reference to digital tools (the Internet, Wikipedia, Google Drive, among others). Benkler defines in his book *The Wealth of Networks* collaborative or common work as “the system of production, distribution, and consumption of information goods characterized by decentralized individual actions, executed through widely distributed media and outside the market and its strategies” (2016, p. 345).

This definition highlights elements linked to processes of self-definition, self-management, and autonomy of the parties that interact within the collaborative workspaces, in order to achieve a common goal through individual cooperation, understood as the contribution of experiences, knowledge, perceptions, and perspectives for everybody’s enrichment.

It is understood that collaborative work finds life in spaces or processes shared by heterogeneous people or organizations but with common ideals and goals. This interaction highlights the importance of communication, coordination, negotiation, and agreement as success factors.

There are five elements to be considered for collaborative work:

1. Positive interdependence: Group members pursue a common goal and share resources and information.
2. Promotion of interaction: The group members help each other to work efficiently and effectively through the individual contribution of each participant.

3. Individual responsibility: Each person in the group is responsible for his or her contribution and for how such input enhances everyone's learning.
4. Group work skills and abilities: Each person must communicate, support other people and solve conflicts with other participants constructively.
5. Positive interaction: Each person should keep a good cooperative relationship with others and be willing to give and receive constructive feedback and criticism on his or her contributions. (Barragan de Anda, De Aguinaga and Avila, 2010)

Referring to this concept implies being aware of the set of variables that simultaneously take part in the configuration and results of collaborative work. It incorporates elements ranging from individual attitudes and capabilities to institutional and organizational conditions, such as incentives and practices related to constant dialog and exchanges of experiences and knowledge that facilitate or hinder their development.

The elements mentioned above are taken as a starting point for institutional collaborative work, adding the willingness of the representatives of the institutions that participate in the processes as a fundamental aspect from the initial stages since it also favors the permanence of joint construction processes over time.

The contribution of this concept to this article is associated with the enrichment of extension processes after the articulation of different players since inter-learning is enabled, and the construction of a common theoretical and interpretative framework that makes sense to everyone is encouraged. This is achieved through the relationship between the community organization, public institutions, teachers, and the student population.

Each person brings experiences, knowledge, visions, and feelings that become valuable inputs in the process, which also never ends, as it has a cyclical behavior since the experiences, knowledge, visions, and feelings are constantly evolving due to the relationship and constant communication, ensuring that the process does not stop being enriched.

Within this process, the communal organization is understood as a group of people who gather with shared interests and goals and are located within a defined geographic space known as a community. According to Torres (2013), the community is understood as an “analytical and political category to understand and channel community processes and projects in an emancipatory horizon” (p. 9).

Although it is related to commonality and union, the truth is that there is heterogeneity, difference, and plurality in the community. This is why organizations are born and, within this diverse context, they coincide in values, ideals, and goals, thus motivating them to work together.

In Costa Rica, public institutions are classified according to their legal nature, among which are ministries, assigned governing bodies, autonomous institutions, semi-autonomous institutions, public companies, non-state public entities, local governments, electoral tribunals, and powers of the Republic. To define the classification, reference is made to the Political Constitution of the Republic of Costa Rica (CPRCR), the Organic or Constitutive Law, the Organic Regulations, and the criteria of the Attorney General's Office (Mideplan, 2010).

Therefore, a public institution is understood as an organization created in response to a need identified by the State, which operates with public funds and is not for profit; furthermore, its purpose is the welfare of people in different socioeconomic areas.

University Extension: A Pillar of the National University

From the beginning, the National University intended to consider decisions on formative education, research, and university extension (understood as the services the University should provide to the community at that time). For this purpose, Father Núñez established the following in the document entitled *Hacia una Universidad Necesaria (Towards a Necessary University)* (1974):

It should be borne in mind that such services must go beyond the traditional “university extension,” conceived and practiced as an occasional delivery of crumbs of knowledge to very restricted audiences or as a philanthropic attitude of vulgarization, atomization, and degradation of culture for popular consumption. This elitist conception must be radically replaced by the attitude that seeks and trusts to make people act as the subject of their own story and their own freedom. (p. 33)

This quote makes it clear that it was necessary to establish goals that would allow the population's active participation in the expression and self-organization of the different social players in favor of the country's development.

It is in this context that in 1974 the School of Planning and Social Promotion (EPPS) was created, in which the first university extension project of the UNA

was implemented, aimed at collaborating in the development of the Federation of Community Enterprises, which sought to be an organizational alternative for temporary agricultural wage earners (Sobrado, 1976).

Thus, since it was founded, the EPPS has incorporated the pillar of extension not only in its programs and projects but also in its study program, considering participation and dialog between different types of knowledge as crucial axes in the contribution to the development of communities and of the University itself.

The philosophical basis of the UNA is sustained by the dynamics of social change to provide society with the means to critically and scientifically rethink its accumulated experience. Its work has been shaped by four pillars: teaching, extension, research, and production.

Concerning extension, it was initially considered as the substantive area “... that allows knowing reality, acquiring a totalizing vision, and enriching and directing the academic activity as a whole, in search of liberation and social transformation” (Sánchez, 1989, p. 4).

Currently, from the National University, university extension is conceptualized as a task through which the university interrelates with the national community critically and creatively. University extension is a way of projecting the products of academic work to society, which allows them to be resized and enriched by perceiving the needs of society, thus materializing the university-society link. (National University, 2018)

This approach shows the interrelation of the university with the community, recalling that the conception of the necessary university established the importance of interacting with social reality, promoting participatory learning processes that allowed the communities to propose innovative and socially satisfactory actions in favor of the social transformation of the different territories of the country.

Rural Development with a Territorial Approach: Towards Social Transformation

To adequately address rural development with a territorial approach, it is necessary to define *development* and *territory*.

The concept of development has been transformed throughout history. One of its first approaches, in the 1940s, focused, according to Dubois (2014), on figuring out the causes and means to achieve economic growth, while new positions tended to concentrate on development objectives and goals.

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In 1990, Amartya Sen made essential contributions in the first Human Development Report of the United Nations Program by adding a social perspective, beyond the economic one, to measure development. The report states that “the aim of development must be human well-being. The way to relate the means to the ultimate goal must again become the central aspect of development analysis and planning” (PNUD, 1990, p. 33). This way, he defines that “human development is a process through which the opportunities of individuals are expanded...” (p. 33).

Sen, in turn, associates the standard of living with the concepts of capabilities, achievements, and goods and services. Realizations are seen as the conditions of life that can be achieved or not, while capabilities are shown as the ability to achieve these conditions. On the other hand, possessing goods and services is not considered a criterion for defining the standard of living (cited by Bolívar, 2009). From that moment on, the participation of institutions in development becomes important.

At the same time, with the publication of the Brundtland Report of the United Nations World Commission on the Environment in 1987, the definition of sustainable development was introduced, giving importance to the environment in such a way that needs are met without compromising the capacity of future generations. This was later ratified in the Rio Declaration, or Agenda 21, from the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development held in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, which states the right of human beings to live a healthy life in harmony with nature.

Later, the need to implement concrete actions was visualized, and the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) were developed with strategies for 2015 oriented to health, poverty, education, equity, and environment (Picazzo *et al.*, 2011). Finally, the new agenda, now called sustainable development, defines the global goals (SDG) 2015-2030 that are expanded to include issues such as water, energy, ecosystems, climate, industry, etc. (UN, n. d.).

The concept of development has broadened its scope by taking a *multidimensional* approach, mainly because greater importance is given to the goal associated with *human well-being* and *sustainability*, and therefore, with all those aspects that affect it.

Sepúlveda and Zúñiga (2008) identify them as sociocultural, economic, environmental, and political-institutional factors. This approach based on the goal and not on the object itself evidently implies the need to draw up strategies towards a transformation that seeks the most significant benefit for society (the people).

From this same approach, the territory is seen as a planning and management unit that articulates in local, regional, national, and international spaces. This *multiscale* vision considers endogenous and exogenous factors that influence or condition the development of rural territories. The above seeks to meet two primary goals: social and territorial cohesion. This cohesion is based on “... the construction of a society based on equity and a sense of belonging, which brings the territories together in a country vision. To achieve this, coordination and articulation of public institutions and the private sector, mediated by organized players in the territories, is required” (Ávila and Aguilar, 2020).

Ávila (2013) reflects on the importance for rural development to incorporate proposals from all sectors (*multisectorality*) in the formulation of public policies, strategies, and plans, in order to achieve comprehensive sustainability supported by principles of governance and citizen participation. The author embraces the new rurality approach, which emerged in the nineties and aspires to a space where economic activities and employment opportunities can be diversified, a vision that goes beyond the strictly agricultural aspect and promotes greater territorial dynamism in line with collective benefit.

According to the National Plan for Territorial Rural Development, Costa Rica, 2017-2022 (by the Instituto de Desarrollo Rural, 2017), in addition to the principles of multidimensionality, multiscale, and multisectorality, Costa Rica tries to meet the criterion of *differentiality*, which seeks to enhance and take advantage of the particularities of each territory, under a framework of actions that can be adjusted to different realities.

When thinking about community development and territorial approach, it is essential to first consider the definition of community. According to Zárate (cited by Carvajal, 2011), many positions regarding the term community coincide in some elements: “It is a set of people. They share some interests, features, or elements. They are located in a specific geographic area. They have a sense of belonging. There is intense interaction among members. It is a social unit” (p. 23). Likewise, Montero (cited by Carvajal, 2011) adds the dynamic aspect as an intrinsic element of the community, i.e., the community is in constant *transformation*.

The preceding matches the observations of Camacho (2013), who notes that the basic characteristics a community must have are a territorial dimension or locality, a group of people who interact there, and a space considered their own; these characteristics create an identity and social participation.

Regarding the territorial dimension or locality, Schejtman and Berdegué (2004) state that:

The territory is not an “objectively existing” physical space but a social construction, i.e., a set of social relations that both give rise to and express identity and a sense of purpose shared by multiple public and private agents. (p. 4)

Mançano (2009) suggests that the types of territories are defined, beyond a simple government space, in terms of social relations and, therefore, of relational space. On the other hand, this author points out that the principle of multidimensionality sees the territory as a totality that comprises geographic space and social relations.

Likewise, multiscalearity opens up the possibility of thinking of territories in governance spaces at different levels, from national to local, and this also brings about levels of conflict that arise from the heterogeneity and differential nature of the territories. In particular, Mançano emphasizes a comprehensive vision of the typology of territory as “...governance space, as properties and as relational space” (p. 17).

One of the concerns and, therefore, challenges that the National University identified in the formulation of its 2017-2021 Medium-Term Plan was the fragmented visualization of territorial action. Hence the need to link the approach to the territorial scope of action within its goals from an articulated and comprehensive perspective, which is consistent with the vision of totality proposed by several authors.

Contextualization of the Case Study

This case is associated with the experience gained from the project developed in the Organizational Practice I and II course, which is part of the study program of the Economic and Social Planning career. This course is attended by students in their third year of university education and takes place over nine months.

Although the students remain in the communities for an established period, the process can be extended with subsequent tuitions, incorporating the student body. The decision depends on the academic and social relevance of providing continuity and on the interest of the community or organization involved.

The course program defines the following:

The Organizational Practice is a space that contributes to training professionals with the ability to “develop institutional, organizational and social processes consistent with the most relevant current trends, namely the committed participation of civil society, encouraging decentralization and deconcentration processes and processes of local and regional self-management with the involvement of the development subjects.” (Academic Evaluation Report, 1998, p. 3).

Community practices are recognized in different spaces and by many local and institutional players. On several occasions, as in the case study, formal and informal alliances are built with institutions or community-based organizations.

The starting point for the project was the request made by the National System of Conservation Areas (SINAC) of the Cordillera Volcánica Central Conservation Area (ACCV) to EPPS to assign students to community projects located in the canton of Turrialba, province of Cartago, in the Central Region of Costa Rica.

In early 2016, meetings were held in order to learn about SINAC’s interest and the project with which student engagement and participation would eventually be established.

Among the initial negotiation elements in this type of alliance is the support to students (lodging, meals, access to information, opportunities for the development of workshops, and other activities) and the interest and commitment of the institutional counterpart and the community or organization with which to work.

SINAC’s initial intention was to serve two community organizations with which the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) had previously worked as a financing entity for productive initiatives and where SINAC identified the productive initiatives that would receive the economic benefit.

The two funded initiatives received the money, purchased materials, and some assets. However, once they ran out of money and inputs, they could not start or continue the activity. These initiatives became the basis for the organizational strengthening project that would be developed through student internships.

During a second stage, a field visit was organized to know these organizations in the canton of Turrialba:

1. One of them was made up of women who made craftwork with recycled material and was located in Pastora de Santa Cruz de Turrialba.
2. The other one was made up of people working as tour guides in the area, mainly from Guayabo and Santa Cruz downtown. Both communities are mainly engaged in dairy farming and agriculture. Tourists also visit Guayabo because the Guayabo National Monument is located there.

A discussion was held with each organization; this allowed its members and teachers to know each other and learn about their perception of and interest in the organizational strengthening project, as well as the contribution and role of the UNA and the SINAC in the process. A shared interest in work that could be done jointly was identified.

Students were assigned to the project at the beginning of the 2016 school year, and meetings were held with the SINAC officer in charge. In these meetings, the students received information about the project idea and what they had to promote.

This was followed by visits to the area. Finally, the organizations, SINAC, students, and academic staff held joint sessions. At the same time, the students prepared a contextualization of the area in the economic, social, environmental, and political-institutional dimensions, which turned into a participatory diagnosis.

Elaboration and Analysis of Diagnostic Results

This process was based on preparing a communal diagnosis with a participatory approach. Students enrolled in planning courses conducted the diagnosis with the support and advice from academic tutors and feedback from the SINAC. Subsequently, the partial results were presented and validated with a communal group in the area.

Diagnosis is understood as an applied research process that provides information for the solution of problems or the transformation of an identified situation.

Among the steps taken jointly by the students, SINAC, and the faculty are the following:

- A. The delimitation of the territory over which the diagnostic research would be carried out: Santa Cruz de Turrialba.
- B. The study dimensions were established.

- C. Interviews were conducted with institutions, organizations, and individuals in the community who, at that time, were recognized for their work and activities to benefit the community.
- D. Teamwork sessions were held to analyze the information collected through document reviews, interviews, and observation sheets to explain and evaluate the results.

Among the results, common elements stood out, both in terms of problems and development potential, such as unemployment, the migration of young people to study and find jobs, the saturation and devaluation of agricultural activities in the area, the scenic beauty related to its mountains, waterfalls, birds, fields with crops and animals, the Turrialba volcano, the Guayabo National Monument, and the fact of being the “cradle of Turrialba type cheese.”

The analysis of these results allowed the team to design a proposal that considered the common elements as a strategy to enhance rural community-based tourism.

The interviews and observation identified an organization whose goal, among others, was to promote tourism in the area. That is why members of the Association of Organized Community Groups of Santa Cruz de Turrialba (Ugrosanta) were invited to participate in the validation of the results and the idea of a proposal to contribute to its transformation. This organization would become the project’s liaison with local players over the next three years.

Construction and Implementation of the Proposal

Based on the agreement of Ugrosanta to continue the process jointly, the work team was given the task of submitting a proposal for developing a Rural Community Tourism Plan. The team developed and implemented the plan with the students, the SINAC, and the teaching staff as facilitators.

The base methodology is participatory action research since it allows the generation of collective knowledge nourished by the set of linked individualities. The main difference in this type of research is action, understood as the transformation engine, which in this case consisted of strengthening the organization, promoting participation, and generating capacities for the self-management of the members of Ugrosanta.

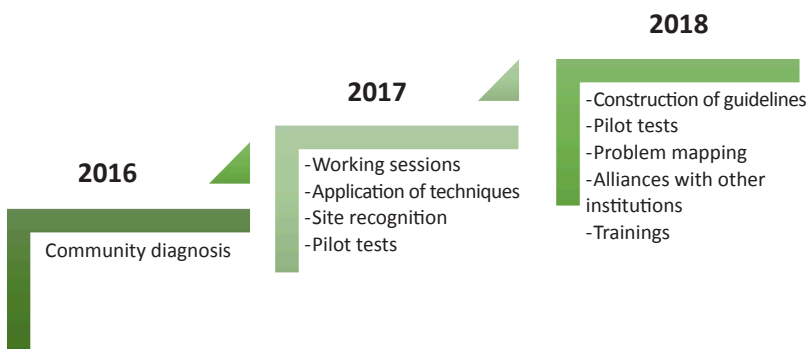
For Creswell, participatory action research has three essential phases:

Observing (which involves the construction of a diagram of the study problem and the collection of data), thinking (it includes the analysis and interpretation of the significant construction found), and acting (which encompasses the moment in which the research seeks the resolution of the problems identified through the implementation of improvements) that is the phase defining action research and differentiating it from other qualitative designs. (Cited by Ramos, 2017, p. 13)

Below are the main actions carried out during the years of joint work (Figure 1) and the results obtained (Figure 2):

Figure 1

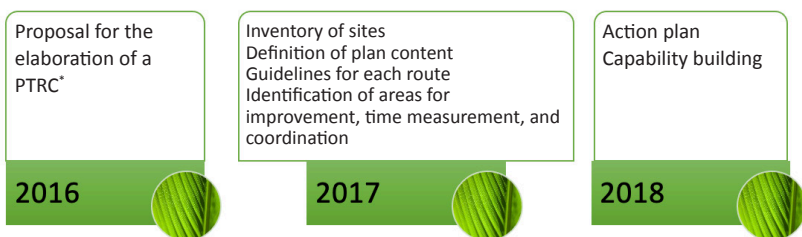
Main actions carried out



Note: Author's elaboration

Figure 2

Main results by year



Note: *PTRC stands for Rural Community Tourism Plan. Author's elaboration

The Methodology Used in the Preparation of This Article

The paradigm, approach, type of research, and techniques used to develop this article are outlined below, according to the characteristics of the process involved.

According to Valles (1999) and Sandoval (1997), cited by Carvajal (2005), the selected paradigm was the critical social paradigm, which is understood as the one that conceives the epistemic reality considering culture and social relations, which allows, in this specific research, an approach and analysis of the ways of thinking and acting of the social players of the community of Santa Cruz, the student body, the teaching staff, and the representatives of institutions and organizations.

A key aspect is that one of the authors of this article has participated, during the last five years, in community initiatives as a facilitator of processes for the development of projects that the populations consider fundamental, promoting a subject-subject relationship in which there is a social bond between the facilitator, the community, the student population, and the institutions, understanding subjectivity as a means of knowledge.

This research tried to know the perception of different participating players. For this reason, the research design was flexible, understanding that reality is dynamic and complex and that the validation of the research results is achieved through dialog and consensus, in which every type of knowledge is key to the analysis.

The approach used for this work was qualitative, supported by a case study that allowed examining the interaction of factors in the processes that sought to transform the organizational dynamics of Ugrosanta. The study was conducted based on people's perception of their reality; Bonilla and Rodríguez (1997), cited by Carvajal (2005), describe this process as capturing reality "through the eyes of the people under study..." (p. 12). This helped incorporate experiences and meanings the different stakeholders gave to the inter-institutional contribution in the extension processes that facilitate or not the community transformation.

Given its characteristics, the qualitative research delivered its findings based on reflections arising from a general context (the community of Santa Cruz de Turrialba) and a particular context (members of Ugrosanta, students, and people from the different participating institutions). These findings provided different perspectives and experiences based on the interpretation and perception of the stakeholders.

In particular, a descriptive type of research was used to identify the characteristics of interinstitutional work and its contributions to territorial development processes.

The sources of information in the development of this academic production were approached at the level of institutions (participating universities, National System of Conservation Areas, Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports), community, and students who actively participated in the extension process.

Documentary research was used as a research technique. The main documentation analyzed was the diagnoses and development strategies prepared by students of the School of Planning and Social Promotion in coordination with the different social stakeholders. This review allowed an approach to aspects such as community features, grassroots organizations, and institutions participating in the process from 2016 to 2018.

Another technique was the unstructured interview, which has “open-ended questions that are answered in a conversation, having as its main feature the absence of a formal standardization” (Abarca *et al.*, 2013, p. 107). Therefore, people from the institutions involved in the experience were interviewed, as well as students and social stakeholders belonging to community organizations.

Results

The results of the interviews with officials of the institutions leading the process showed that they recognize that the goal of the project is to strengthen communities for the development and linkage of productive initiatives or enterprises, particularly those related to rural community-based tourism. Thus, clear and shared goals help institutions to better guide their processes and legitimize their work with communities.

The institutions also pointed out the following elements to be strengthened: conflicts arising from the distribution or access to resources, the coordination of dispersed interests, and problems of communication and atomization of studies conducted by several institutions without concrete results or these results not returned to the community.

The analysis of results showed three categories: forms or practices of institutional work, contributions of the university extension process, and the process of community, family, and individual transformation. In turn, each category is analyzed from the point of view of the communities, the officers, and the students participating in the experience.

Forms or Practices of Inter-Institutional Work

Communities' Point of View

- The people interviewed recognize that alliances were important in the process; not only did they work with the UNA, but also with the local government, the Ministry of the Environment and Energy (the name given to the SINAC), the Ministry of Culture and Youth, and the Costa Rican Technological Institute (*Tecnológico de Costa Rica*, TEC).
- The work of the institutions is not considered separately; instead, according to people's point of view, they all follow the same line of work as an integrated process.
- It was expected that the participation of the Municipality would be more active, as it only attended very few meetings.

Perspective From the People of Participating Institutions

- The UNA and the SINAC acknowledge the participation of several institutions that provided added value and strengthened the achievement of the goals proposed within the framework of the organizational practices of the EPPS. The following are mentioned: the Costa Rican Tourism Institute (ICT), the National Learning Institute (INA), the University College of Cartago (CUC), the Ministry of Culture and Youth, the thesis students of the Tropical Agricultural Research and Higher Education Center (CATIE) and the Rural Development Institute (INDER).
- To a lesser extent, the participating institutions refer to passive participation of the local government of Turrialba, despite the great importance of the local government in community development exercises.
- The alliance established between the SINAC and the UNA, strengthened by three years of continuous work, is recognized in the practices developed around collaborative work: periodic coordination and follow-up meetings, fieldwork carried out jointly, articulation of initiatives of other institutions contributing to the process, induction, and accompaniment of students.

- Although each institution made specific contributions in accordance with their areas of attention and scope, the joint work and coordination made it possible to keep the process going for several years.
- The presence of previous initiatives or organizations that lead processes in the community facilitates the insertion of other initiatives that, adequately articulated, enhance the already existing resource. The Ministry of Culture and Youth had previously supported the organizational strengthening of Ugrosanta, with which they developed the first tourist route.
- The institutional maturity to share information and experiences is vital in articulation processes that allow going a step beyond individual work and recognition and, on the contrary, enhance collaborative work. The previous experience of the Ministry of Culture and Youth with Ugrosanta strengthened the process developed from 2016 to 2019.
- Although the continuity of the process is expected from one year to the next, the student team composition varies, and this was perceived by the institutions as affecting the progress of specific tasks since the group did not always return to the results achieved in previous years, and this implied generating new learning curves each year.

Perception of the Students Who Participated in the Experience

- The presence of institutions is recognized, but the articulation between them did not happen in the same way.
- Consistency in the interventions and support from the institutions towards the organization is necessary for the project to move forward.
- SINAC's support for students is recognized as an advocacy element for the success of the process. Methodologies and field work logistics were worked on jointly.

Contributions from the Extension Process

Communities' Point of View

- The training sessions were highlighted as a key contribution to the process, including teamwork, leadership, conflict resolution, the definition of the project's direction, ways to identify tourist

attractions, cost studies (which included how to evaluate the product to be offered at a fair price for those who provide the service and those who receive it as well). In addition, other initiatives were visited in order to share experiences.

- A promotion, demand, and marketing strategy Plan was developed with possible tourism routes.
- There is an appreciation of the lessons learned, especially with respect to community-based tourism.
- The perception of the officials is excellent. However, an official was reported speaking to people in an inappropriate tone; meetings with communities should not be that way because this bothers participating people.
- The role of the student body is key in these participatory processes. However, for the people interviewed, some students had little enthusiasm and considered the actions of interest only to fulfill their university course requirements.

Perspective From the People of Participating Institutions

- Institutionality recognizes the interaction that takes place in several ways: between people in the community, between the community and the institutions, and between institutions. The integration of students with families in the community is also recognized with great satisfaction; this generated empathy and promoted more accessible ways of working together.
- Capacity building emerges as a critical element widely mentioned by the participating institutions, particularly in competencies and soft skills, such as teamwork.
- There is institutional and student awareness of the needs and the great opportunities offered by the communities and their contribution to territorial development.

Perception of the Students Who Participated in the Experience

- There was a constant effort on the part of the student sector to attend to people's requests for information and advice.

- The articulation of work methodologies between universities and other institutions was an exercise in collective negotiation and construction that benefited the process and represented a great learning experience for the students.
- The starting point is the knowledge and needs of the people in the organizations, so the students' role was accompanied and generate concrete proposals that take advantage of the community's capacities and potential.
- Extension supported the strengthening of the organizational structures of the groups based on the ideas and initiatives that arise from the people of the organization, from collective work for the common benefit.

Community, Family, and Individual Transformation Process

Communities' point of view

- The Tourism Plan is considered a contribution to community development.
- Some people improved customer service and the infrastructure of their initiatives, cafeterias, and fast food restaurants.
- Although the beneficiaries did not finish the project as a group, their initiatives went on individually; as a consequence, changes are noticeable, as is the case for the project called Tortilla Workshop.
- The following are comments some interviewees shared: "This process has given us confidence; I manage to serve my customers better." "I learned a lot; I feel satisfied." "I've been delivering electronic invoices and learned a lot about how to manage the business." "This process broadened my vision of tourism."

Perspective From the People of Participating Institutions

- Among the changes identified are greater security in the community for the development of enterprises, openness to strategic alliances and linkages, new enterprises, and greater community identity.

- Development of a participatory planning process that responded to the needs expressed by the community.

Perception of the Students Who Participated in the Experience

- Putting into practice learnings obtained in previous years of study in specific contexts enriched students' training as planners with social awareness and created experiences that remain over time.
- This process reaffirmed the commitment to the career and finding the vocation, which becomes motivating during the last years of the career and will be an important experience in the professional working life.
- The development of communication, negotiation, and social awareness skills was fostered through direct contact with communities, organizations, and institutions.
- The people of the Santa Cruz community are recognized as hard workers and very willing to improve their current conditions.
- There is a personal commitment to community processes, thanks to the bonds built in workspaces with people and by sharing with them and their families through hospitality and conviviality for months.

Reflections

1. Community initiatives and projects should be thought of as processes within an articulated context that requires public and private partnerships.
2. Linking service and product initiatives are key to generating robustness and sustainability.
3. The parallel aim of institutional work should be to strengthen the self-management capacities of local organizations.
4. Local government must be involved in the processes being promoted from the territory in order to increase the articulation and viability of proposals.
5. The structure, dynamics, and organizational climate of the groups conformed by the community members are determining factors in the success of the process.

6. Visualizing the common good as a central element of community processes, accompanied by the institutions, must be the axis on which decisions and negotiations are made.
7. Economic resources are necessary but not indispensable to create successful processes in terms of the common good if there is a solid, clear, and committed community group.
8. The active involvement of students contributes to raising awareness and social and critical commitment. Therefore, it is essential that they show motivation and interest in the processes beyond considering this as a course or a training process.
9. The formulation of action plans based on the lessons learned in extension and collaborative work processes promotes quality in the work processes with communities.
10. Outlining a strategy that goes beyond a one-year vision (the time frame of organizational practices) facilitates the identification of more sustainable projects, as it contemplates a more comprehensive and systemic vision with the participation of different stakeholders.
11. Institutional deadlines and administrative processes do not necessarily coincide with the reality of organizations, and this is a major problem perceived by the Public Administration that needs to be overcome.
12. The continuity of community processes and projects may be affected by “professional jealousy” and State paternalism. To the extent that the participating stakeholders realize that the improvement of the conditions of one of the parts has a direct impact on the whole, the territory, the community, the family, and the individual, contributions will be more effective and balanced, and the articulation will be more natural.
13. While it is true that extension teams made up of university teachers or students can give recommendations to people in communities, they should not forget that these participatory processes are dialog meetings between different types of knowledge, not impositions that demotivate people.
14. The role of university extension should be to contribute to the social transformation paths proposed by communities, not to propose from the imaginary of those who appear as external stakeholders.

15. It is essential to build a work plan in a participatory manner and to review results with people in communities in order to determine whether or not processes are progressing and, thus, determine actions to be taken.

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