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Nicolás Monge

Social Sciences, Social Innovation and Public Policy. Universities as Agents of Change

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Social Sciences, Social Innovation and Public Policy. Universities as Agents of Change²

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Contents

Abstract	4
1. Introduction	5
2. What do we understand by social innovation?	6
3. Chile: An example of growth without equality	6
4. Social Sciences and Social Innovation	8
5. Universities as agents of change. The case of the Public Policy Center PUC	9
<i>Laboratory of Social Innovation and Entrepreneurship</i>	10
6. Conclusions and Policy Guidelines	11
<i>The National Social innovation System</i>	12
References	14

Abstract

Chile has experienced high economic growth in the past two decades, which has not been reflected in its inequality rate (Gini of 0.5), which is the worst of all OECD members and is probably associated with many of the country's social problems. It is in this context where social innovation can be a powerful ally to achieve development. In this way, it is proposed that Social Sciences are fundamental for the creation of this type of innovation by considering the needs of the objective population in a bottom-up logic. In this context, universities can be agents of change since they have academics and students that can use this knowledge to generate innovative solutions to different social problems, promoting the union of the public and private worlds and the third sector, with the objective of achieving a greater impact on Chilean society. The case of the Public Policy Center of the Pontifical Catholic University of Chile is presented and its Laboratory of Social Innovation and Entrepreneurship, as an example of a university institution that generates social innovations. Finally, a model that serves as a guideline for the creation of public policy in this subject is proposed.

1. Introduction

Much can be discussed on the meaning of social innovation, its components and implications, but solving social problems through innovative ideas seems to be the common objective of the different visions of the concept. In this way, areas such as education, health, environment and work, among others, can be improved, contributing to the wellbeing of people and their context. This last point is vitally important when we understand that work is done with individuals and groups with different and variable needs and forms of behavior to the point that social innovation can function perfectly in one country and fail in another if the model is not adapted. It is then when Social Sciences, in its work of understanding the mind and human behavior, can become a central element in the creation, implementation and /or evaluation of social innovations with positive and significant impacts.

In this context, the public and private sectors and non-profit organizations are covering different social problems, but often their efforts are autonomous and isolated. On the contrary, these players should unite to create and implement more effective social innovations (Phills/Deiglmeier/Miller 2008).

On the other hand, universities combine research with teaching and the application of concepts to different problems that concern the above-mentioned sectors, driving the discussion and generation of public policies regarding them. But then, can universities be agents of change using knowledge to generate social innovations together with the public and private worlds and that of civil society?

This paper is centered on Chile, a country that is developing and has shown positive economic growth with a GNP per capita (PPP)³ of USD 15,866, the second highest in the region⁴ (WEO 2011), and high human development⁵ (HDR 2010), but at the same time an alarming distribution of income with a Gini of 0.50 in accordance with the report “Society at a Glance” of the OECD (2011), the highest of the countries that comprise that organization. Regarding this, data and statistics will be shown that reflect one of the main causes of social problems in Chile, growth without equality.

In a second step, the importance of Social Sciences will be raised for the generation of social innovation led by universities and their study centers, showing as an example the case of the Public Policy Center of the Pontifical Catholic University of Chile and its Laboratory of Social Innovation and Entrepreneurship. The base idea is that universities may be the best platform to develop and drive the concept of social innovation, involving all the relevant players and applying their knowledge to different problems in Chile.

Finally, it will be shown that despite the interest of the population regarding social subjects, there is no concrete social innovation policy in Chile that articulates the efforts to generate change along these lines and a model will be presented that joins the principal elements described herein, which serves as a basis for the development of a public policy in this subject.

³ Purchasing power parity.

⁴ Only exceeded by Argentina with a GNP per capita (PPP) of USD 16,832.

⁵ Located in 45th position of the total of countries included (169), and second in Latin America.

2. What do we understand by social innovation?

The Center for Social Innovation at the Stanford Graduate School of Business defines social innovation as *“a novel solution to a social problem that is more effective, efficient, sustainable, or fair than existing solutions, and for which the value created accrues primarily to society as a whole rather than private individuals”*. (Phills et al. 2008: 36). This definition places its attention on social problems, although other authors have emphasized the satisfaction of social needs through innovations developed and publicized mainly through organizations with social objectives (Mulgan/Tucker/Ali/Sanders 2007).

Both groups of authors highlight that social innovation can arise from different sectors (public, private, civil society, the third sector and academia) and that the collaboration networks between them are necessary in order to develop better social innovations and widen their impact.

Although the discussion is expansive, for the effects of this paper we will understand that a social problem arises from one or more unsatisfied needs caused by market failures, and affects the wellbeing of people and their surroundings. In this sense and as we will see when we relate Social Sciences with this subject, the social problem does not exist per se, but is built on the basis of the needs of the objective public, who must be active participating agents in the solution.

With this clear, we will define social innovation as those tools⁶ that seek to resolve one or more social problems, generating a solution where there was none before or proposing a more efficient and fair one than the one that already exists. As with “classical” innovation, a process of “creative destruction” must occur, a concept used by Joseph Schumpeter (1942) to explain the importance of uninterruptedly destroying the old and creating new elements, generating development. This, because social processes are not static and it is precisely innovation that permits its dynamism to be addressed.

On the other hand, it is common for countries to generate innovation by adopting and adapting technology from overseas (Eyzaguirre/Marcel/Rodríguez/Tokman 2005). The same occurs with social innovation⁷ which can even give a social objective to innovations that were not created for this, such as the case of charity campaigns that are done through facebook.

Unfortunately, the State is not capable of remedying all market failures, due to its limited resources or due to the failure of knowledge and methodology to face them. This is when different social players become protagonists, with collaboration being key to innovating socially.

3. Chile: An example of growth without equality

The intention of this section is to show a vision referring to the Chilean reality, with the objective of supporting the importance of promoting and developing social innovation as a national policy. One of the key aspects within the process of social development refers to the economic ambit, where Chile stands out from among its peers, implementing a neo-liberal system in the decade of the 1980's which, after a series of modifications implemented with the

⁶ Whether goods, services or processes.

⁷ Such as the microcredit system created by Muhammad Yunus.

return of democracy, gave the country its best years of growth with an average rate of 7.2% between 1990 and 1998, while Latin America did so at an average rate of 3.3% (Ffrench-Davis 2008).

However, and despite the impressive economic progress, the strong reduction in poverty from 38.6% in 1990 to 15.1% in 2009 (Casen 2009), the exponential increase in the capacity of consumption of the population and the decrease in child mortality, among other factors, series of social conflicts remain that have not been resolved, among which mainly stand out the inequality of income among the population that, as we stated previously, today reaches a Gini of 0.5 (OECD 2011). Regarding this, it is interesting to highlight that in 1990 the ratio between the extreme deciles was 36.2, in 1996 it was 36.4 and for the year 2000 it was 40.6 (World Bank 2003). In other words, the economic growth did not affect the inequality caused by the Asian crisis which began in 1997 and increased the gap between the rich and poor.

Today the country presents economic growth rates that have not been seen since the “golden decade” (1990-1997), with a growth of 10% for the first trimester of this year, and 6.8% for the second (Banco Central 2011), accumulated inflation to July 2011 of 2.3% (INE, 2011) and an unemployment rate of 7.2% (INE 2011), but contrary to what might be thought, Chile’s sociopolitical situation is at its most critical point since the return of democracy, given that the popularity of the president only reaches 26%, and the level of approval of the opposition is a meager 20% (CEP 2011). Also, according to OECD (2011), only 13% of Chileans express high trust in their fellow citizen.⁸ More serious still, in accordance with the last Socioeconomic Characterization survey (CASEN 2009), in per capita autonomous income of the home, the richest decile earned almost 46 times more than the poorest decile. These figures show us again that economic growth is not a synonym of development with equality and the decrease of social problems.

Education is key to improving access to opportunities and to lower inequality, but Chile still has much progress to make in this ambit. In this sense, the decile aged between 18 and 24 with the lowest income has 16.4% access to higher education, while for the richest decile, this is 61.5% (CASEN 2009). On the other hand, the economic return from the years of schooling is a key point to overcoming poverty. In this way and in accordance with the CASEN survey (2009), a person with 17 years of education (obtaining a university degree) receives an average monthly income 3 times higher than someone with 12 years of education (completing high school). Furthermore, in Chile there is no free higher education, fees are high⁹, and the number of scholarships is less than optimum, so many students must get into debt and carry this debt with them for several years, limiting their development and perpetuating inequality.

Chile is a country that is rich in natural resources (mainly copper), which however does not ensure high growth rates. On the contrary, experience shows that countries with abundant natural resources grow less than those that do not have any (De Gregorio, 2009). In this way, it has been proposed that Chile must move from the primary exporter model to the economy of knowledge model, where institutionalism, human capital and innovation join to grow with equity (Eyzaguirre et al. 2005). These authors indicate that Chile does well in the first ambit, but presents gaps in education¹⁰ and in innovation. Regarding the latter and in accordance

⁸ The OECD average is 59%.

⁹ For example, the psychology degree course at the Universidad de Chile has a monthly reference fee of USD 400, while the minimum wage is approximately USD 395.

¹⁰ In accordance with the authors, improving innovation but not increasing human capital will follow the line of inequality, since those who can apply technology will be those who have had a better education, in the case of Chile, the higher deciles.

with the last innovation survey conducted between 2007 and 2008¹¹, the expenses made for research and development (R+D) only reached 0.4% of the GNP, when the average for the OECD is 2.3%. Furthermore, of the total of professionals with a doctorate, 82% work in universities and only 5.1% in companies. Also, 31% of companies realize some type of innovation and of them only 5% do so jointly with universities. Likewise, 27.8% of innovating companies know of some of the public support programs for this matter and only 5.3% use some of them.

Therefore, although there is a National Innovation System, the figures speak of low investment in R+D and a meager link between the players in this system, making the consolidation of an economy of knowledge difficult.

The figures herein speak to us of the principal challenge for social innovation in Chile, working for a more equalitarian society. Achieving this objective will mean advancing towards a society where justice prevails over charity.

4. Social Sciences and Social Innovation

Attempting to resolve social problems necessarily implies contact with groups of people and their context, whose needs and behaviors can vary in accordance with multiple variables. If these are not considered in the construction of the problem, it is probable that efforts will be lost in solutions that lack a real impact. In this sense, Social Sciences and their study of the nature of man, his activities, institutions, relationships and conduct (Cáceres 1997), are fundamental so that social innovation does not commit the error of generating instruments that, although they appear to be innovative, do not generate the expected change.

In this way, the main contribution of Social Sciences refers to the use of the qualitative approach, *“where social reality is built by the subjective senses that orient conduct and the actions of the subjects”* (Román 1999: 32). This phenomenological view tells us that events are not independent of the subjects, for which as well as being described, they must be understood. Therefore, qualitative research is key to understanding the needs of people and communities which it is proposed will be helped through social innovation.

However, the qualitative approach, also used by Social Sciences, cannot be excluded from the social analysis, since objectifying reality and attempting to quantify it (Román 1999) gives us a more complete understanding of the problem than if it was only built from the subjectivity of the subjects.

In this context we propose that universities have sufficient intellectual capital to generate and promote social innovation from qualitative and quantitative research, driving social change jointly with the relevant players in order to build innovative solutions.

¹¹ Conducted in accordance with the OECD criteria contained in the Oslo and Frascati manual.

5. Universities as agents of change. The case of the Public Policy Center PUC

The Observatory of the European University (OEU 2006), in its methodological guide highlights that apart from educational and research purposes, there is a third mission for universities relating to the link with the non-academic world (industry, public authorities and society) that can materialize in two ways: an economic one where we find spin offs, contracts with industry, intellectual property and human resources; and a social one that includes participation in policy-making and public debate, involvement in social and cultural life, contracts with public entities and the public understanding of science.

The third mission has become important in Chile, so much so that the National Accreditation Commission, an entity that must verify and promote the equality of higher education, incorporates as one of its evaluation criteria the link with the ambit referred to as the “set of ties established with the disciplinary, artistic, technological, productive or professional ambits, with the objective of improving the performance of institutional functions, of facilitating the academic and professional development of the members of the institution and its updating or improvement, or of complying with institutional objectives” (CNA, 2010).

The Pontifical Catholic University of Chile has situated the third mission as an integral part of its mission, indicating that this institution “aspires to achieving excellence in the creation and transfer of knowledge, and in people’s education, inspired on a catholic conception and always at the service of the Church and society” (PUC, 2010).

This mission sets the bases for the generation of tools to deal with the different problems in Chilean society. In this way, we present the Public Policy Center (CPP UC) as an example of an academic model that was created in the PUC for the creation and implementation of social innovation, coordinating the public and private worlds and that of civil society.

This institution began in 2009 with the merger of the Public Policy Program and the Office of Public Affairs, establishing the mission of “*contributing to linking the academic affairs of the UC with the principal challenges of the country in the ambit of public policies, offering a multi-disciplinary management platform to promote the role of the University in the analysis, research, teaching and proposal of public policies, from our UC identity*” (CPP UC 2010).

In accordance with this mission, the CPP UC model consists of taking the requirements issued from different sectors (Government, companies, foundations, etc.), to seek academic experts and to generate a project that involves all the relevant players, obtaining information for the creation of public policies that address the social issues mentioned.

In this way, 4 main axes were established: (i) research applied to public policies, (ii) practical work in collaboration with the public, social and municipal worlds, (iii) continuous education and training on public policies and (iv) the debate and proposals of public policies.

The center is structured by area (social, education, public management, among others), with the objective of collecting the different needs present in society and to structure multi-disciplinary work teams¹² that address them with a more complete outlook and generate significant impacts.

Different projects and programs realized by the CPP UC can be considered to be social innovations that are linked to different social players. Among them are:

¹² Psychologists, sociologists, economists, educators, engineers, lawyers, among other professionals, participate actively in the Center’s projects.

Puentes UC: Their purpose is to relate the academic world with the municipal world (local governments), coordinating professors and students so that they participate in the needs set out by the municipalities through theses, reports, internships, research and coursework.

Metropolitan Observatory for Children and Adolescents in Street Situation: The last survey of homeless people realized in 80 counties countrywide (MIDEPLAN, 2005) counted a total of 675 under 18's in this situation. In 2007 an observatory was created to end this problem, gathering players from the public, private, university worlds and the third sector who are interested in searching for solutions. It is coordinated by the CPP UC and has a system for monitoring and following-up these children, gathering valuable information for the generation of public policies in this respect.

Elige Educar: Born in 2009, this is a public-private program developed to improve the valuation of the teaching profession at school level, which is transcendental for the formation of future generations¹³. It is based on the English experience named Training and Development Agency for Schools (TDA) and it proposes that in 2014, one of every five students in the educational system will come from 20% of the best students and that this profession will be one of the 5 that is most socially valued in Chile.

Laboratory of Social Innovation and Entrepreneurship

The Laboratory of Social Innovation and Entrepreneurship (LEIS) is a pioneering experience begun at the end of 2009 with the objective of publicizing and promoting these concepts, as well as making practical experiences in the subject known.¹⁴ The project is funded by InnovaChile¹⁵, a public fund to support the undertaking and innovation. It must be noted that this source of financing was not created to back social subjects, but the importance of promoting these subjects allowed the LEIS proposal to be accepted.

This laboratory is coordinated by an executive team and has the support of the sector advisor integrated by personalities from the public, private and academic worlds and from the third sector, interested in promoting projects and social innovation. Likewise, LEIS is comprised of two areas:

Editorial and communicational publicizing: This will be done through a website where we can find news, interviews and columns on this subject, as well as related papers and studies so that the population can inform itself and participate. Furthermore, those interested can join the social networks (Facebook and Twitter) and find other people with the same social interests. Finally, we find a twice-monthly newsletter that promotes the contents of the website.

Publicizing through activities and events: Interdisciplinary dialogs are included for the opinion of different relevant players in the subject (municipalities, social innovators businesspeople, academics, etc.), as well as a contest to reward the best initiatives in projects and social innovation, and a seminar to address this subject from the viewpoint of experts and agents of change.

¹³ Only 36% of the population believes that the level of teachers improves (Elige/Educar/Adimark 2010) and close to 80% of teachers hold that the status of their profession is medium or low (Avalos/Sevilla 2010).

¹⁴ LEIS is led by the CPP UC in association with the "ForoInnovación", a non-profit organization that promotes innovation in Chile.

¹⁵ Belongs to the Production Development Corporation of Chile (CORFO).

LEIS has sought to put the importance of these subjects into public discussion, and has gathered important information in this regard in accordance with the qualitative approach, serving as a bridge between all sectors of society. The results of the first year of operation speak of high general interest in social subjects, but at the same time, confusion and lack of information of the population regarding projects and social innovation, related to the concept of corporate social responsibility. For this reason, LEIS proposes using the information gathered to deliver a definition and a position in this regard, hoping that it will be used for the construction of public policy in this ambit, converting LEIS into an agent of change born in the university world.

6. Conclusions and Policy Guidelines

Chile has proved to be an economically stable country. Proof of this is its incorporation as the thirty-first member of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) in 2010, being the only South American country and the second Latin American one (after Mexico) to be part of that organization.

However, a significant number of social problems show that economic growth does not necessarily translate into development; on the contrary, in an unequal society like the Chilean one, most of the economic benefits are received by the smallest part of the population. This situates the Chilean State in a redistributive and protectionist logic that does not manage to cover all needs, creating space for the different players to generate social innovations that diminish or solve these problems through collaboration and without competition.

Faced with this, the Chilean population has shown a significant interest in social subjects, specifically referring to volunteer activity. In this regard, in accordance with a national study of volunteering conducted in 2011 by “Fundación Trascender”, 67% of the population believes that solidarity is a characteristic trait of Chileans. Another study (Irarázaval/Salamon et al. 2006) determined that in 2004, 7% of the Chilean population contributed part of their time to volunteer work, and if we consider total employment by non-profit organizations, 47% are comprised of volunteer workers, situating Chile as the country with the highest volunteer participation in Latin America.

Despite the interest of society regarding the resolution of social problems, in Chile there is no social innovation policy that structures, incentivizes, evaluates and regulates the initiatives created by this sector, jointly with the public, private and academic worlds.

On the other hand and in accordance with the example given by the Public Policy Center of the Pontifical Catholic University of Chile, universities have the advantage of having teachers with different areas of knowledge, and the infrastructure, resources and students whose learning may be improved if they apply what they learn to real problems. They therefore have the capacity to coordinate the different players to carry out joint actions that generate innovation with a higher social impact, complying with the third mission set out above. In this way, the link that the universities propose to establish with society must include the contribution of Social Sciences in the sense that the solutions must not be pre-conceived from the academic world, but rather must be built along with the individuals who integrate the determined system, avoiding remedying needs that do not exist in reality or duplicating projects that end up competing with each other.

So, in response to the question initially put forth, universities can and should be agents of change, generating, supporting and/or promoting social innovation jointly with all the people or institutions that can contribute to the solution of a determined problem, but the creation of a public policy that gives sustenance and maximizes all efforts in this subject is necessary.

The National Social Innovation System

As we indicated previously, Chile must progress towards an economy of knowledge where innovation is a key element in improving production processes. In this sense, the economy of knowledge cannot leave social needs aside; on the contrary, there must be an institutionalism, human capital and innovation especially designed to satisfy these needs. To achieve this, we propose the creation of a National Social Innovation System¹⁶ that gathers all the relevant players in this subject, with the objective of solving social problems, generating collaborative work through a network that avoids competition, creates funds and support instruments and evaluates impacts as well as certifying the quality of the innovations.

This systemic logic should include the following players (Figure 1):

The public sector: Must place at the disposition of the population funds and tools that are specifically oriented towards the creation and application of social innovation. Also, the creation of a regulatory framework and a division specifically dedicated to these subjects is necessary in order to give the system a solid structure. Furthermore, the contribution by the municipalities is fundamental in order to relate to the different counties in the country, address their needs and allow the system to be decentralized.

The private sector: In general, its contribution to social innovation is done through corporate social responsibility, destining human and financial resources for this. Furthermore, business has even arisen where large companies incorporate smaller ones and the communities in which they are inserted as suppliers through productive chains, creating new models of joint development. In this way, the private sector becomes a fundamental element for economic growth to generate development and cannot be left aside from the system proposed.

The Third Sector: Refers to the “non-state organizations that pursue collective objectives, and do not involve obtaining profit or recover their production and supply costs through a market price” (Gerstenfeld/Fuentes 2005: 10). Foundations, ONGs and organizations from civil society are included, that attempt to satisfy different social needs, in many cases in an innovative manner.

Universities: In accordance with the third mission, these institutions must lead the economy of knowledge in the social sense since within them there are academic experts on different subjects, students that can learn while helping to solve social problems, volunteer programs, social research, infrastructure and even resources, that situate these institutions in a privileged place to be the engine for this system. Although in Chile not all universities have the same level of students, academics or infrastructure, participation in this system could favor those that are less efficient by generating a type of university chain that promotes collaborative actions in favor of innovation and social learning.

Target Group: Social innovation is oriented towards solving specific social problems in accordance with the needs of different groups of people, but the solutions must not be

¹⁶ As an entity differentiated from the National Innovation System, since although they share common elements, their objectives are not the same.

assumed by the other players in the system. Very much on the contrary, defining an objective group must begin from the needs of the individuals who are to be helped (bottom-up), who must be active in the search for solutions supported by the entire systemic framework. As we have seen, it is here where social sciences are key for social innovation to be really effective.

Social Innovation National Council: Taking the Chilean National Innovation Council as an example, this entity must be comprised of representatives and experts from all the above-mentioned sectors, seeking to advise the president of the republic and his ministers on social innovation policy guidelines, and constantly evaluating the functioning of the system so that it can adapt to the evolution of society.

Figure 1



Although the construction of this system warrants a more in-depth analysis that is outside the scope of this document, the presumption is that the detection of a need expressed by a group of people (bottom-up) leads to the identification of a social problem that enters the system, and the different players interested in solving it join and develop a collaborative solution that is more efficient and fair than those already in place. In this context, Social Sciences will be fundamental for understanding the reality that is to be modified, and universities will have a protagonist's role due to their human and intellectual capital, assuming an active role as agents of change in a country that still has a long path to travel to reach development without leaving equality aside.

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