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Expanding Capabilities for Epistemic Justice Through Social Innovation: The Case of Business and Management Courses in UNIMINUTO, Colombia

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Introduction

The term social innovation has gained increasing importance in academia, policy-making, third-sector organisations, and business (Marques et al. 2018), and the number of academic papers and importance of the topic in public debates have been on the rise in recent years. These articles point to the fact that thousands of 'social innovations' are growing in different domains and territories, addressing social challenges from innovative perspectives (Howaldt et al. 2019). Social innovation is seen as a strategy to find new solutions to societal problems from a different

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standpoint, more connected to local needs, processes, capacities, and perspectives. Nevertheless, despite this great interest in the concept, its definition remains very elusive. There are, however, some elements that are common to different definitions (Marques et al. 2018): social innovation is about addressing social needs that have not been met by other means; it is about the application of new ideas, irrespective of them being new products, processes, organisational models, ways of communicating, or others; it actively promotes participation, civic engagement, and inclusive relationships among individuals, especially those that are (or have been) neglected by previous economic, political, cultural, or social processes; it values the process of implementing new ideas as much as it does the outcomes (Moulaert et al. 2013); and these innovations are not just good for society but also create the capacity for society to act in order to improve (Hubert 2011).

It is not surprising that social innovation has also been considered a new 'must' in academic environments (Palavicini and Cepeda Mayorga 2019). Interest was initially found in business schools, but now the demand and the will to engage with social innovation as a tool for social change can be found in very different academic domains and disciplines (Mirabella and Eikenberry 2017). An increasingly large number of initiatives in very different institutions and contexts are working on introducing social innovation into their curricula and in their teaching practices. Nevertheless, there is still no clear idea on the ends and means for addressing the formation of 'social innovators' in universities (Palavicini and Cepeda Mayorga 2019).

On the one hand, there is no clear idea about the *ends* of teaching social innovation, that is, what are the specific competencies to be generated in students. A minimum common ground between different perspectives is that social innovators should be able to engage communities and to generate solutions to social problems. In this sense, the ends of teaching would be to generate competencies for creating more just and sustainable societies through innovation (Smith et al. 2015). The competencies framework has proven to be a relevant way to frame and identify the specific ends of teaching and thus for planning educative processes (see, e.g. Palavicini and Cepeda Mayorga 2019). However, it does not provide a comprehensive approach for understanding how competencies

are developed, that is, how to teach—and learn—in order to develop social innovation competencies in higher education institutions.

On the other hand, there are no shared specific ideas on the means for teaching social innovators, that is, on the specific methodologies and approaches to be adopted. A broad common understanding indicates that developing competencies for social innovation should imply engaging with local communities and their problems, co-creating solutions, and promoting broad participatory processes (Palavicini and Cepeda Mayorga 2019). This involves all stages of innovation processes, from the definition of problems to scaling solutions—stages which should be put into real practice in educative processes. Nevertheless, there is a need to examine how these methodologies and approaches should be deployed in practice.

There is still a need to build a theoretical framework for a better understanding of both the ends and the means for introducing the teaching of social innovation. Beyond that, it is also necessary to undertake empirical research on the myriad of cases of institutions and teachers interested in producing social innovators in universities. This is the overall aim of this paper: to propose a framework to understand the processes of teaching social innovation and to use it to explore a relevant case.

We build our theoretical proposal by considering a key issue both in social innovation outcomes and processes: the role of knowledge. In processes of teaching and learning social innovation, the creation of knowledge and the politics of knowledge play a key role, as social innovation implies shedding light on unsolved problems and engaging in a process of mobilisation and of the co-production of new knowledge to solve these problems collectively (Moulaert 2013). From this point of departure, we try to propose a theoretical framework drawing on two approaches.

First, we draw on Amartya Sen's capability approach for a comprehensive understanding of teaching and learning processes regarding social innovation in higher education. This has proven to be a relevant framework for understanding teaching processes that pursue social justice and the expansion of wellbeing (see, e.g. Boni and Walker 2013). The capability approach has been celebrated for proposing a clear evaluative space regarding the contribution of a given process to justice, that of

capabilities (Robeyns 2005). Moreover, it proposes a comprehensive framework that allows an in-depth exploration of the relation between the ends, the means, and the contextual factors that model teaching and learning processes. In addition, the capability approach has been seen as relevant for capturing the multidimensionality of wellbeing and the processes involved in wellbeing expansion (Robeyns 2016). In the debates on higher education, it has been studied how the capability approach can complement the approach based on competencies. For some scholars (Lozano et al. 2012), the capability approach can help us, when assessing higher education learning processes, to go beyond competencies framework and put freedom at the centre of the analysis. Moreover, the capability approach can help us in understanding 'pedagogy as a Socratic processes of discussion, debate and participatory dialogue in which knowledge—including values—is intersubjectively constructed' (Lozano et al. 2012, p. 144).

For our aims, we consider that Sen's approach provides elements for assessing processes leading to more just situations. Nevertheless, it has to be taken into account that some scholars (Deneulin 2011; Robeyns 2009) believe that Sen's ideas do not provide a full theory of justice and that they should be connected with elements from other theories and approaches in order to build a compelling theory to assess the contribution to justice made by a specific project, process, or policy.

Secondly, we draw on Fricker's (2013) ideas on epistemic injustice, in order to address the specific contribution of social innovation in university teaching to improve justice regarding knowledge and also to capture how the politics of knowledge play a role in processes of teaching, learning, and practising social innovation. We consider two aspects of epistemic justice: first, its distributive dimension, that is, how this process positively affects the distribution of epistemic goods, such as education or information, and, second, aspects regarding discrimination, that is, how the process of fostering social innovation in universities challenges the existing deficit of credibility of some people and collectives due to prejudices in the hearer's judgement and how they challenge disadvantages when it comes to making sense of significant areas of their social experience (Fricker 2013). As we will explore, this approach helps us to provide

a comprehensive perspective of the role of knowledge in the introduction of social innovation in higher education.

The combination of concepts from both the capability approach and epistemic injustice literature provides us with the elements for building a more robust exploration of the processes involved in social innovation in higher education. This allows us to create more specific questions, such as those addressed in this chapter:

- Which epistemic capabilities can be enhanced in students when engaging with local communities in fostering social innovation processes, and how?
- How this case study has contributed to challenging epistemic injustice inside universities and in the communities that are involved in teaching-learning processes?

We use this framework to address a specific initiative in the context of a project for higher education capacity building, *Students4Change*, financed by the European Union's Erasmus + Programme. The project is based in the implementation of pilot courses incorporating social innovation, using the competencies framework. For his aim, our analysis, based on the capabilities and epistemic justice approaches, tries to provide a different perspective, which is more directly connected with issues of autonomy, freedom, participation, and justice.

The case study concerns six pilot courses in the *Corporación Universitaria Minuto de Dios* (UNIMINUTO) in Colombia. These are undergraduate courses based on various disciplines related to management, which have been carried out in four different cities in Colombia, in very different contexts. These pilot courses have introduced various changes in their objectives, planning, and methodology in order to foster students' competencies regarding social innovation. Mostly, they have promoted students' engagement with local communities or small local businesses in order to understand their problems and propose solutions. For these aims, very different techniques, methods, and strategies have been deployed. The exploration of the case study has been made through a combination of multiple methodologies (interviews, participant

observation, workshops, research of secondary information, etc.) and followed a qualitative strategy.

The chapter proceeds as follows: the next section elaborates the theoretical framework for addressing the introduction of social innovation in higher education by engaging communities; Section 3 presents the methodology used; Section 4 provides a discussion of evidence regarding our guiding questions; and the concluding remarks present reflections on the framework and the case, both for practice and future research.

Framework

The Capability Approach

The core characteristic of the capability approach is its focus on what people are effectively able to do and be, that is, their capabilities (Robeyns 2005). This contrasts with welfarist, resourcist, and other approaches which focus essentially on specific assets people have. Sen (2001), who pioneered the approach, argues that our evaluations should focus on what people can do and be and on removing obstacles so that they can live the life that, upon reflection, they have reasons to value. These reasons are multifaceted and plural and cannot be reduced to utility. The capability approach thus evaluates processes according to their impact on people's capabilities (Robeyns 2005). Beings and doings, which Sen calls *functionings*, constitute what makes a life valuable. Functionings may include working, resting, imagining, being part of a community, and so on. The difference between achieved functionings and capabilities lies between the realised and the effectively possible. Functionings can be achieved because people have the capabilities and occur depending on personal choices, which, at the same time, are shaped by personal (e.g. physical conditions), social (e.g. public policies, institutions, social norms, power relations), or environmental (e.g. climate, geographical location) conversion factors (Robeyns 2005).

Unlike other approaches, goods and services are not an end in themselves under the capability approach, but they are a means. They should

not be thought of as exchangeable for income or money; the important thing is the effect they have on a person in their ability to realise a capability (in a classic example, a bicycle may be beneficial in different ways for different people because it may expand their capability to move, or to be healthy, or to interact with nature). Moreover, the relationship between goods and the valued capability is influenced by the different conversion factors mentioned (personal, social, or environmental). Thus, material and non-material circumstances shape people's opportunity set and also influence the choices that people make from their capabilities in order to achieve functionings.

The capability approach, thus, normatively defines a space of evaluation and introduces elements to understand the process of the expansion of these capabilities (Robeyns 2005). However, even though few scholars believe that Sen provides a full comparative theory of justice (Ballet et al. 2013), most agree that his approach, though incomplete, nevertheless provides a good basis (Robeyns 2009; Nussbaum 2003; Deneulin 2011; Claassen 2017). For them, the capability approach essentially defines a clear space of evaluation to assess a process, policy, practice, institution, or organisational change (Robeyns 2005). This is why, in order to be a full theory of justice, it requires other components and ideas, as there are no clear normative elements in Sen's capability approach to assess the importance beyond individual preferences and for the common good of a given process of capability expansion. In terms of the analysis of justice of a given process, this opens the way for connecting the capability approach with other contributions, such as those coming from debates on epistemic justice.

Epistemic Justice

Although experiences of injustice regarding knowledge had been previously addressed, the idea of 'epistemic in/justice' brought new debates in order to explore this kind of injustice. In this sense, the work developed by Fricker (2007) has been crucial. The idea refers to unfairness in relation to aspects of the production, communication, or understanding of knowledge. For Fricker, a key concern in the debates on justice has to be

fairness considering humans as knowers and as producers and communicators of knowledge.

The concept has evolved rapidly and has been adapted in order to address very different social processes and contexts. As Fricker herself states, 'the category of epistemic justice should be considered an umbrella concept, open to new ideas about which phenomena should, and should not, come under its protection' (Fricker 2013, p. 1318). There are no precise boundaries, and its use has evolved (Fricker 2017).

As Fricker (2013) indicates, epistemic injustice can take either *distributive* or *discriminatory* form. On the one hand, *distributive epistemic injustice* refers to the unfair distribution of epistemic goods, such as education or information (Fricker 2013). This idea connects with liberal conceptions of justice and particularly with those related with resource-based approaches, even though Fricker refers to a very specific resource—epistemic goods—that are not considered in this tradition.

On the other hand, *discriminatory epistemic justice* differs more from liberal approaches on justice. This kind of injustice has two main dimensions. First is *testimonial injustice*, which takes places 'when a speaker receives deficit of credibility owing to the operation of prejudice in the hearer's judgement' (Fricker 2013, p. 1319), that is, when someone's knowledge is ignored or not fully believed because that person is a member of a particular social group, for example, regarding class, gender, race, and geographical origin. Second is *hermeneutical injustice*, which is prior to communicative activity. For Fricker (2013, p. 1319), a subject is hermeneutically marginalised when she/he belongs to a group which does not have access to equal participation in the generation of social meanings. For this reason, she/he is put at an unfair disadvantage when it comes to making sense of a significant area of their social experience. In other terms, hermeneutical injustice occurs when someone's experience is not understood (by them or by others) because there are no concepts available that can adequately identify or explain that experience. Fricker uses the example of sexual harassment, a concept that makes sense of a social experience of a group suffering injustice and which had not existed until recently. This maintained a situation of disadvantage for some people (generally, female workers) regarding the communication of experiences and the creation of social meanings.

Some other key considerations regarding these forms of injustice can be made for the aims of our study. First, there are structural forms of injustice, embedded in practices, networks, and relations of relations (Fricker 2017). These forms of injustice, as Pohlhaus (2017, p. 13) states, 'create their harm within, and sometimes through the use of our epistemic practices in institutions'. These include educational curricula and the structure of academic disciplines, as several authors indicate (Mohanty 2004; Ourlaw 2007). Epistemic injustice thus sometimes occurs within the activities and institutions that knowers engage with in order to know (Pohlhaus 2017, p. 13); as such, the case of the university is paradigmatic. Nevertheless, the university may also be a relevant arena to transform these structural forms of injustice. Second, they are not deliberate forms of injustice (Fricker 2017), precisely because the causes of these injustices are structural. For these reasons, fighting this kind of epistemic injustice requires something more than just actions that empower individuals. However, this does not discount that individual agency plays a fundamental role in maintaining or challenging epistemic injustice. For these reasons, when addressing epistemic injustice, the focus should not only be on individual practices but also on how these practices are modelled by structures and how structures are challenged and transformed by practices.

Connecting the Capability Approach and Epistemic Justice to Assess Community Engagement and Social Innovation Practices in Higher Education

As mentioned, the capability approach may provide elements for a comprehensive and multidimensional understanding of processes of change, expanding wellbeing related to practices of introducing social innovation in higher education. For its part, concepts from epistemic injustice can provide elements to put the issue of creation and communication of knowledge at the centre and also to propose, together with the capability approach, ideas for a theory of justice that can be useful to assess specific processes of change.

Connecting elements from these theories, we consider that in a given process epistemic capabilities are enhanced, that is, capabilities to co-create and communicate knowledge. In this way, the idea of epistemic

resources in Fricker is reframed and can be considered as the knowledge capabilities that a person has reason to value. These capabilities are created thanks to the combination of goods or capability inputs in the teaching and learning processes (e.g. planning, methods, evaluation, material resources, interactions). Both social factors (e.g. university regulations) and personal factors concerning students (e.g. personal motivations or belonging to specific social groups) model how these resources may become capabilities through learning processes. The process of the combination of inputs creates different processes, contents, practices, and spaces of interaction and communication. Within them, testimonial and hermeneutical injustice may take place or may be challenged.

This framework may help us to address, on the one hand, how redistributive epistemic justice takes place through the creation of epistemic capabilities in the engagement of students in communities and, on the other hand, how these practices and processes of interaction and communication challenge or reinforce discriminatory epistemic injustices.

These ideas are represented in Fig. 3.1, which reinterprets the diagram by Robeyns (2005), considering elements of epistemic justice.

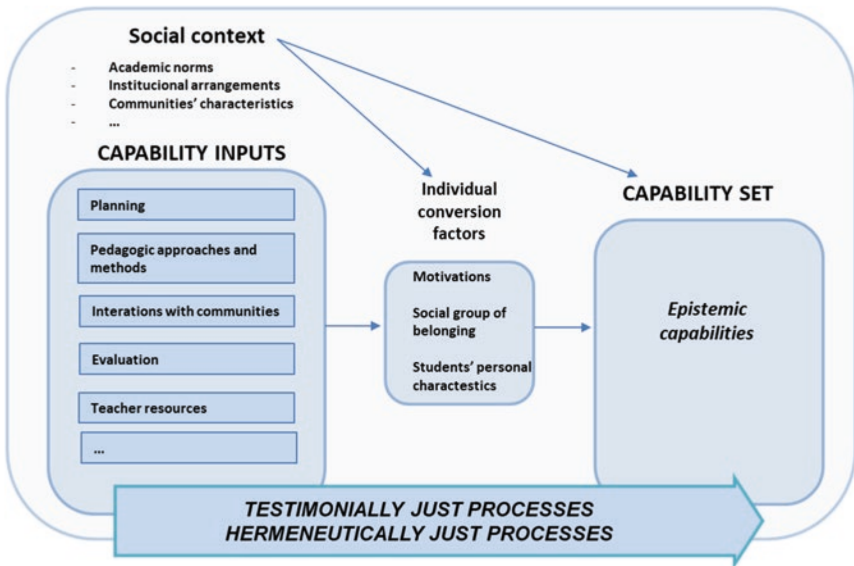

Fig. 3.1 Capability expansion and epistemic justice. (Prepared by the authors, based on Robeyns 2005)

Methodology

The information for the case was gathered during the process of assessing the experience of UNIMINUTO in the framework of the *Students4Change* project. This process took place between October and December 2018 and aimed to address the different dimensions of the experience from a systemic and comprehensive perspective. The assessment addressed the general context of the six pilot courses, key inputs modelling learning and teaching processes, key drivers of these processes, and expected and unexpected learning outcomes in students.

For gathering primary information, the following methods were used: interviews with the six teachers developing the pilot courses; three participatory workshops with students of three of the pilot courses (90 participants in total) to identify key moments, processes, and outcomes of learning; one participatory workshop with students of the other three pilot courses (20 participants); three interviews with community stakeholders; and three meetings with key policy-makers from the three UNIMINUTO campuses. For secondary information, various documents were consulted, such as syllabus and planning documents of pilot courses, strategic documents from UNIMINUTO, and the teaching diaries of the six teachers.

The information was processed by means of a qualitative content analysis, drawing on categories and subcategories derived from the framework presented in the previous section.

The analysis used both deductive and inductive strategies. We deductively used the key categories of our framework: inputs or means for the capability expansion; key aspects of social context; key individual conversion factors; and epistemic capabilities expanded. These were used in order to structure the initial analysis of our sources of information: the content of interviews, workshops, diaries, and documents and the notes taken during meetings, visits, and workshops.

For some categories (inputs, aspects of social context, individual conversion factors), we also deductively departed from some subcategories (which were also used in order to build the interviews and which are mentioned in Fig. 3.1). For example, on inputs and means, we used the categories of 'pedagogic approaches', 'interactions with communities', 'planning', 'evaluation', 'resources', and 'teachers' previous experience' in order to analyse data. From an inductive approach, these subcategories were complemented or reframed during the analysis. For example, the category on 'interactions with communities' was separated in 'relations with community during the project' and 'feedback to community'. New subcategories also emerged, as 'managing expectations'. For the category of capabilities, we used a purely inductive approach in order to obtain the different subcategories.

The subcategories used structured the exposition of findings. These findings were connected and discussed from the ideas of testimonial and hermeneutical epistemic injustice.

Our epistemological and ontological assumptions take elements from both interpretivist and critical paradigms (Lincoln et al. 2011). We consider knowledge to be mediated not only by people's perspectives and interactions but also by the positions of people in social systems and reality to be modelled by power relations and struggles within these systems (Lincoln et al. 2011). As stated, the aims of our study were essentially exploratory, as we are proposing and empirically testing new theoretical propositions and new avenues.

Case Study

UNIMINUTO and the Pilot Courses

UNIMINUTO is a private Colombian university with a great sense of social commitment, which has positioned the institution internationally as a model of inclusive education, not only because the tuition costs are affordable for low-income groups but also because the university extends to places in the country that other universities do not due to geographical

limitations or situations of violence. It is the university with the widest coverage in the country, having more than 124,000 students distributed over 36 municipalities in 18 departments (out of the country's 32), receiving professional training in engineering, business, education, and humanities programmes in both face-to-face (around 29% of students) and distance (around 71%) modalities. UNIMINUTO's student body is characterised as being young (58%), with low incomes, either coming from remote areas of the city or having to commute from their home municipalities to attend classes. In many cases, students have to combine studies and work (either with a formal job or in informal activities). UNIMINUTO's stated educational model is based on responding to the needs and priorities of the country's regions and placing the student at the centre in order to 'build a country that is fair, reunited, fraternal, and peaceful' (UNIMINUTO 2014). This involves training comprehensive professionals capable of leading social change. Consequently, the classroom must integrate learning with reflective practice, thereby making knowledge not solely the product of formal learning but also of the know-how of the communities being interacted with.

The six pilot courses analysed were chosen as a result of an internal call from the *Parque Científico de Innovación Social*—PCIS (Science Park for Social Innovation), a specialist unit of UNIMINUTO to connect communities with science, technology, and innovation, based on the principles of social innovation. The set of courses fulfilled several criteria: they were proposed by the teachers; pertained to different UNIMINUTO campuses; fell under different modalities of education (face to face and distance); and included a variety of subjects. All the same, these were subjects that had been operating for years. The pilot courses rather aimed to reformulate and introduce changes in the approach and methodology compared to previous years, in order to work on (or focus more intensely on) social innovation skills within the framework of the *Students4Change* project. The project provided training, tools, and exchange spaces for teachers to carry out the pilot courses.

The pilot courses were conducted in the following locations: Pasto campus (Nariño department, in the south-western part of the country), small in size, where four programmes are taught. Most of the students come from municipalities around Pasto and have to commute for over an

hour to get to classes. The pilot course was undertaken within the subject of innovation and creativity for the generation of business ideas with sixth-semester students from programmes on business administration, financial administration, and occupational health administration. A total of 119 students participated in the pilot. Ibagué campus (which is located in the Tolima department, in the middle of the country), larger, where eight technical and seven university programmes are taught. The pilot course was carried out within the distance business administration programme. Thirty sixth-semester students participated. Llanos campus (in the city of Villavicencio, in the east of the country in the department of Meta), having two technical programmes and 11 university programmes (six face to face and five distance). The pilot course was conducted within the business administration programme as part of the subject on organisational analysis and diagnosis, with 30 fourth-semester students. Bogota campus, in the city of Bogota, is the oldest UNIMINUTO campus with the largest number of both undergraduate and graduate programmes. Two subjects within the business administration programme carried out the pilot: the entrepreneurship course, in which 62 fifth-semester students participated, and the strategic management course in which 40 ninth-semester students participated. Finally, Bogotá Virtual and Distance campus (UVD), like Bogota's face-to-face campus, is the largest in its modality. The pilot course was carried out within the public accounting programme in the business school. Fifteen sixth-semester students studying the subject of professional practice participated.

It is important to point out that the teachers in charge of the subjects that were part of the pilot courses fulfilled specific characteristics that could have assisted the process of social transfer and appropriation of knowledge by the communities with whom they worked: (1) all are teachers who, at different times, have received training through workshops, courses, and boot camps, in topics related to entrepreneurship and social innovation; (2) at least four of the six have a career trajectory both inside and outside the university involving topics and/or projects related to these territories; and (3) they are especially sensitive to social issues.

Course Approach

The pilot courses were conducted with a clear orientation towards the local needs and perspectives of the territories and places in which they were developed. The approach of the courses was based on the social appropriation of knowledge, addressing both the need to address social innovation skills through praxis and to manage knowledge on a participatory basis with communities to enable transformations within their contexts. In the courses, scenarios for the co-creation of knowledge were proposed, in which students, using their classroom knowledge, would guide the communities with contributions related to their professions. In turn, communities using their needs and experiences would provide practical and contextual knowledge to generate opportunities for social innovation.

From the outset, the working logic was of re-signifying the classroom as a scenario for the social construction of knowledge which accommodated both the collective knowledge of the territories and their actors and the formal and structured knowledge of the academy in order to transform paradigms of exclusion and marginalisation of knowledge. To this end, each teacher—depending on the subject, the local context of the campus, and their own experience—proposed the pilot course, taking into consideration that the exercise would allow the students to get closer to real contexts. The pilot courses not only had to correspond to the curriculum of the programme they were part of but also to include work on social innovation competencies that, in the judgement of each teacher, could empower both the students and other actors involved in the process.

The six pilot courses that were carried out featured certain common characteristics:

Firstly, for UNIMINUTO's pedagogical praxeological approach, the learning process went through four periods:

1. Seeing: this involves exercising observation and imagination to problematise and distinguish ideas around the object of knowledge.
2. Judging: this entails abstracting and interpreting lived practices in the light of knowledge, connecting tacit knowledge with scientific

knowledge to obtain new conceptions, inferences, and explanations of reality to produce data and ideas to address specific challenges.

3. Acting: to consolidate new representations of reality, establishing connections that produce transformations in the ways of being-thinking with regard to the object of knowledge.
4. Creative feedback: the pedagogical experience was ordered and represented in order to evince reflections on the lived pedagogical practices and the innovations and transformations they generated (Avella Bernal 2017).

Secondly, in order to develop social innovation processes, the PCIS proposed applying 'the social innovation route', which has been developed and tested in multiple territories and projects. In the case of the pilot courses, the route was used for the teachers to identify (during the planning for each course) in which of the phase or phases the students will work in the particular processes they will be engaged during the course.

The idea is to work different competencies in different phases (e.g. competencies regarding creativity are more developed in the 'create' or 'prototypes' phase; students work more on competencies regarding critical thinking in the 'understanding' and 'analysing' phases). Using the perspective of the social innovation route, students had to develop and apply the competencies defined by the teacher in particular phases of the route. Nevertheless, all the cases involved: periods of working in the classroom on concepts and tools for interacting with the communities; periods of addressing the challenges faced by the communities, which involved both reviewing general concepts and understanding the particular conditions of each community; periods of analysing and creating solutions directly with the communities; and, in some cases, periods of the implementation phase by the communities themselves. For each case, the teacher established an issue, a strategy, and a methodology for working with the community, taking into account the context, the subject, and the competencies to be strengthened.

The Villavicencio campus carried out its pilot project with producers of rice bread in the municipality of Restrepo. The teacher established initial contact with the producers' association; subsequently, the students,

through work groups, approached the producers to arrange and carry out an organisational diagnosis for each business based on the techniques and tools discussed in the classroom. In the case of Ibagué, the teacher carried out preparatory work with a women's association from the village of Coello Cocora in the Ibagué municipality. Later, together with the students, they analysed the case and prepared and carried out a field visit in which they applied an 'empathy map' and a business canvas with the women of the association in order to define business models. In the case of Pasto, the teacher used the strategy of strengthening the existing relationships the students had with the community, either due to their work or their origin. In this case, working in teams, the students established contact with the communities and defined the challenges to be resolved, while the teacher accompanied each team and assisted them in identifying and applying the most appropriate tools for each challenge. The Bogotá teachers, both face to face and UVD, used the classroom training model. They provided their students with tools and competencies so that, subsequently, they could apply these competencies in the ensuing contexts which arose; in this way, some students applied them in their work and others in their family environments. The Bogota teacher of strategic management conducted classroom training that concluded with a field visit to the municipality of Cucunuba, Cundinamarca, to carry out a participatory observation process with local groups.

Analysis: Expanding Epistemic Justice?

Creating Distributive Epistemic Justice by Expanding Epistemic Capabilities

We first address the pilot courses from the perspective of distributive epistemic justice, exploring which epistemic capabilities have been expanded, and how, and the way this connects with epistemic justice. Regarding the capabilities that students feel they had developed during the course, the results suggest the expansion of epistemic capabilities on

various levels. These levels are variously connected with justice and the engagement with others.

In the first place, students refer to capabilities regarding knowledge that are purely individual and that have less direct connection with justice, even though, considering that these students come from lower classes, this expansion can be considered as promoting distributive epistemic justice. For example, they refer to the capability to critically analyse situations and problems in complex contexts, the capability to develop new knowledge from practice and from interactions, the capability to identify sources of knowledge in people and situations, the capability to be open to change, or the capability to identify one's own limits regarding knowledge. Secondly, students refer to another group of epistemic capabilities that are still individually expanded but that are more connected with justice and with the common good. For example, some consider they have developed the capability to emphatically observe and listen, to empathise with others and to engage with them, to give recognition to and value different worldviews, or the capability to critically analyse and reframe one's own past and personal history in the light of other's experiences. Thirdly, some students refer to another group of capabilities which are directly related to distributive epistemic justice and to the promotion of the epistemic goods of others, particularly of the most excluded. For example, they refer to the capability to understand their own responsibility towards others; the capability to create and facilitate creative processes of co-production of analysis and of new ideas for change; or the capability to identify, create, and share ideas to change unjust realities. Fourthly, a few refer to capabilities which are also very directly connected with epistemic justice but that can be considered as collectively developed through engagement with communities. They are similar to those identified for individuals but refer to the collective. For example, this is the case of the capability, as a collective, to understand, analyse, or create solutions for change.

From this analysis and clustering of epistemic capabilities, two further general considerations can be made. On the one hand, these capabilities refer to very different aspects of knowledge such as the connection between power and knowledge, to the creation of consciousness, to self-esteem, or to recognition. The idea of epistemic justice that appears in

our case is an 'umbrella' (Fricker 2007) covering multidimensional and complex phenomena. On the other hand, the capabilities identified are related, and students refer to connections and synergies between them such as those related to developing empathy with those connected with the development of co-creation processes.

Means for Capabilities Expansion

Evidence points to several key aspects regarding the means for the expansion of these epistemic capabilities.

Firstly, regarding the *teaching staff*, the key inputs that stand out are their commitment, motivation, and dedication. The teachers made an important effort in terms of time and energy to get the courses off the ground, which has been recognised and supported by fellow teachers and by those responsible for the programmes, areas, and centres. Nevertheless, their commitment has been even greater than could have been expected of them, in the light of all their other obligations, so it would seem that they have over-exerted themselves beyond their responsibilities. On the other hand, the teaching staff had ample previous experience. Despite being—in almost all cases—very young, their previous teaching experience, although not extensive, was fundamental in identifying and implementing innovations in the pilot courses. Specific experience in social innovation methodologies was not necessarily very broad in all cases. However, each teacher departed from a different point and incorporated more or less new ideas and tools according to their previous knowledge and objectives. Nevertheless, they also asserted that they were able to rely upon pedagogical resources, both material resources and knowledge of new tools, having worked on social innovation in the courses.

Secondly, regarding interactions with the environment, it has been key to build *relationships of trust* with community actors with whom the teachers worked. The teaching staff have gradually built these relationships following different strategies, as has been indicated. In some cases, the teacher had established the relationships prior to the beginning of the course and had prepared the dates of the field visits beforehand. In other cases, it was the student body that generated the relationships with the

community, with the accompaniment of the teacher. In these cases, the teacher did not carry out as much preparatory work on relationship building, but demanded greater follow-up. The different schemes and types of relationship all seem valid and interesting for generating new epistemic capabilities, depending on the teacher and the circumstances of the course.

Thirdly, concerning the *teaching-learning methodology*, in all cases this is a question of connecting with the realities of the communities in two ways. On the one hand, in relation to the objective of the subjects, in all cases it is oriented towards understanding, analysing, and solving the specific problems of small businesses, communities, or organisations. On the other hand, in relation to the techniques, in the courses new techniques are taught and tested for analysing problems, proposing solutions, and developing prototypes in a participative and creative way. This generates different spaces for dialogue and exchange between students and communities.

Fourthly, the thorough and detailed—but also flexible—*planning* of the whole educational process, especially for the moments of relating with the community, has been a key input. In some cases, a more intensive timeframe of contact, following a longer period of classroom work, was chosen. In these cases, there was more detailed planning on the part of the teacher. In other cases, contacts have been made on a more extended basis over time, but on the basis of short visits, and the teacher directed the accompaniment to a lesser extent.

Fifthly, another relevant input for generating epistemic capabilities concerns the *evaluation* approach adopted. The cases show the importance of appraising principally through continuous evaluation and, also, of evaluating on the basis of alternative outputs, not just the conventional ones, for example, pitches, videos, prototypes, and models. It is a question of making these outputs relevant and appropriate for the community and its requirements.

Sixthly, it seems fundamental to communicate *feedback to the community*, especially as a way of not breaking established relationships. In all cases, the question of the continuity of the processes that are set in motion appears to be problematic and unresolved. This is a complicated issue

that can generate frustrations and problems in terms of the epistemic capabilities developed.

This concerns, lastly, *managing expectations*. Expectations can be a fundamental input for capability development, but managing them can be problematic. Sometimes excessive expectations have been generated regarding the impacts that can occur in the communities and about the continuity of the commitment, which in turn have generated frustrations and problems—which were not always explicit—in the relations between teachers, students, and communities.

Conversion Factors in Play

Next, we indicate key social and personal factors that modelled the expansion of epistemic capabilities based on the above inputs. In the first place, we deal with social factors.

The question of *academic regulation* proves to be of great importance. In this sense, it does not seem that the policy and regulatory framework of the university has been a problem in the courses analysed. On the contrary, the subject syllabuses and teaching plans seem to have left room for flexible interpretation, thereby introducing changes in the approach and methodology. In fact, the incorporation of methodologies, techniques, and processes to work on social innovation, according to some teachers, causes these guides to be more meaningful and their contents to be implemented in a better way.

Regarding *institutional matters*, it has been indicated that the university and the particular campus have given formal support to teachers of pilot courses, which has enabled and facilitated the actions. However, it appears that not enough recognition has been made of the level of commitment required by teachers (e.g. by reducing the commitment to teaching or management tasks required by teachers of pilot courses). Along with institutional support, the context of informal support from other colleagues has also been very important, taking many forms such as covering teachers for some tasks, granting flexibility, or exempting them from attending meetings.

It appears that another very important question of context concerns the *profile and motivation of communities*. The pilot courses have, in several cases, encountered a sense of fatigue with 'academic extractivism' from many local businesses and community organisations. They claim that they often receive students who are rarely involved in a purposeful way, who do not give back enough, and who do not continue relationships, so that communities are treated more as instruments than as key protagonists of the learning process. In some cases, it has also been mentioned that these businesses or communities often have a strong resistance to change. They may be unreceptive to innovative proposals from students, which may make it difficult to expand skills. In any case, the pilot courses illustrate how these difficulties are not given conditions, rather, their impact can be addressed and reduced through the construction of close and trusting relationships with the actors with whom one works in the processes of social innovation.

In the second place, we indicate some aspects concerning the students' individual factors that have modelled the processes of their expansion of capabilities. In general, this is a highly motivated group of students, which has facilitated the course development and the utilisation of the inputs. Furthermore, it seems that by using methodologies for social innovation and generating practices connected with the territory, working with real cases, the students' interest and commitment are strongly increased. However, the results suggest that there are also different personal circumstances that make it difficult for many students to learn: there are people with low levels of motivation, which, furthermore, do not increase during the courses; there are also cases of students with a number of time restrictions, given their work and family obligations; and cases in which, due to their geographical location and lack of resources, it is very difficult for the student to travel to the communities for fieldwork.

Challenging Discriminatory Epistemic Injustice

Challenging Testimonial Epistemic Injustice

The evidence in the previous section enables a discussion of the contribution of the case under study regarding discriminatory epistemic injustice. In this regard, we address both testimonial and hermeneutical injustice.

Regarding testimonial epistemic injustice, the evidence suggests that this may be challenged in our case in two senses. On the one hand, we find the construction of credibility for people and communities regarding their judgements, knowledge, and perspectives of their own problems. This is taking place for some groups suffering a situation of particularly strong unrecognition, as is the case of small farmers and indigenous communities. On the other hand, in our case, we find the construction of credibility regarding the perspectives and ideas of these groups for creating and imagining solutions and alternative futures. Their voices are then recognised both for understanding and for transforming situations. Evidence suggests that this credibility is also complex and multidimensional in how it is generated and deployed: it has a rational and analytical dimension, for example, when students and the people in communities dialogue and reason. Moreover, this credibility is built through parallel and more emotional processes that entail the creation of empathy, respect, confidence, and the will to work together. The challenge of situations of testimonial epistemic injustice and the creation of credibility takes place through the use of specific methods and in different moments and processes. This may happen, for example, through the use of tools that promote listening and co-creation (e.g. the use of interviews by students or the use of workshops in communities for creating shared visions of the desired future, or for brainstorming), in the generation of formal and informal spaces of dialogue, or in the efforts of teachers for facilitating relations between students and communities.

However, some evidence suggests that the process may also reinforce aspects of testimonial epistemic injustice in less visible ways. For example, the cases may replicate a form of extractivism in different aspects, while the relationship with communities may be primarily focused on the

learning processes of students and not on the recognition and support of the community. Moreover, the creation of high expectations and the interruption of the continuity of the process after the academic course may generate new injustices and the devaluation of recognition. Further, it seems that a specific kind of language and tools (such as those of innovation or creativity), which are alien to communities, may be imposed on them. In this way, the credibility and recognition of disadvantaged communities may be taking place but within the rigid frames, limits, and impositions of academic courses, tools, and languages.

Challenging Hermeneutical Epistemic Injustice

Our evidence does not provide clarity on the contribution of the processes under study regarding hermeneutical epistemic injustice. The very nature of this aspect of epistemic injustice makes it very difficult to assess and to determine whether it is challenged in pedagogic processes which are limited in time and scope.

It is not clear whether new concepts or terms that can be relevant to identify, communicate, and challenge realities of oppression have arisen during the processes under study. Nevertheless, it can be said that the pedagogic processes may have created conditions and spaces to create new social meanings that could be relevant for communities to make sense of significant areas of their social experience. In the courses, different spaces of dialogue between students and community and within the community were created. Within them, on the one hand, students may be providing new and relevant elements for communities to share their troubles and aspirations and to communicate with broader audiences. For example, they provide a new language and terms such as 'visions', 'social innovations', or 'prototypes'. On the other hand, communities provide their ideas, such as those related to local knowledge and with terms such as 'food sovereignty'. In these processes, local ideas and terms may connect with those of academia and may be reframed and made more visible for other people to understand the social experience of communities. For example, in one of the cases, informal urban waste collectors shared their experiences and proposed how to improve their activities.

In this process and through the dialogue with students, they reframed their activities as a 'contribution to urban sustainability'. They can now also communicate their way of working as a 'prototype' to be supported and even scaled up with public support.

In addition, in these dialogues between students' and communities' new concerns, meanings, values, and ideas have emerged in students, which are relevant to understanding their own realities. For example, one student mentioned that by observing the valuable and admirable 'austerity' of some rural communities, she changed the meaning given to the word to a more positive one. This helped her to better understand and value some practices in her own poor urban community.

However, these processes of creating new meanings by connecting languages and logics of academia and community are full of risks and ambiguities, as we suggested earlier. They may be not only creating empowering social meanings but also introducing new forms of alienation, extractivism, and epistemic injustice by distorting and obscuring the communities' own terms, meanings, and aspirations.

Concluding Remarks

The chapter has sought to address the question of how and in what sense the creation of competencies for social innovation in higher education may be contributing to the creation of more just societies, with regard to knowledge. Using the terms we have employed, the issue is how expanding students' skills through working with social innovation might contribute to epistemic justice. In order to address this question, a framework was proposed based on the ideas of Sen and Fricker, which seeks to understand these processes in a comprehensive and multidimensional manner. This framework has been used to analyse the case of six pilot courses in UNIMINUTO that have incorporated the teaching of social innovation through the direct connection of teaching processes with the realities of specific communities.

The analysis of the case shows that students' commitment with communities generated various epistemic capabilities in them: from those

purely on the personal level, with a less direct connection with justice (such as the capability to analyse complex contexts), to others with a strong collective and justice dimension (such as the capability to work together to understand a problem and transform reality). There are also capability that are related to epistemology in multiple and complex ways, connecting issues such as knowledge, power, conscience, and motivation, among others.

The case suggests that a variety of key aspects model the expansion of these capabilities, for example, the creation of multiple occasions and spaces for dialogue with communities; the formation of trust and good relationships between teachers, students, and communities; the profile, commitment, and experience of teachers; thorough planning; and the reorientation of assessment and aligning it with outputs that are relevant to the communities. Nevertheless, there are also problems and tensions, such as teacher overload, problems in managing expectations, and those arising from the challenges involved in the continuity of processes, as well as the difficulties of time or resources faced by many students.

The case shows that these processes can challenge epistemic discrimination in the dual sense indicated by Fricker (2013). On the one hand, they can contribute to challenging testimonial injustice, since these processes of dialogue, co-creation, and the generation of empathy and trust result in greater credibility from the perspectives and judgements of the communities, especially in the case of groups habitually subjected to this type of epistemic injustice such as peasants and indigenous people. On the other hand, it can challenge hermeneutical injustice, insofar as the dialogue between local ideas and concepts and those brought in by students can generate new social meanings that allow communities to communicate and receive due attention and understanding. In any case, these are ambiguous processes, full of tensions, in which the extraction, absorption, distortion, or stripping of local languages and meanings may occur, along with the imposition of concepts and approaches that are alien to the territory and the community.

Finally, the work illustrates the interest of connecting particular concepts from capability approach and epistemic justice discussions in an operational framework in order to explore pedagogic processes linking the university and communities. Nevertheless, these connections and

framework may be refined and enriched with other concepts, in order to more fully capture the complexities, tensions, and contradictions of processes, as with those illustrated in the case study. In any case and in broader terms, capabilities and epistemic justice ideas seem to be relevant for exploring the role played by social innovation to build more just societies via universities.

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