

Social Innovation Science Park (SISP) -- UNIMINUTO

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Summary

The Minuto de Dios Organization (MDO), created by Father Rafael García-Herreros in the second half of the 20th century, has focused its efforts on making service to society the driving force of each of its entities; these, always seeking to respond to social problems in Colombia in various aspects such as health, housing, education, and others. And it is thanks to this approach, that in 2012 the work of the Social Innovation Science Park (SISP) began

as a commitment to social innovation channeled to responding to social needs. In the article presented below, we will look at how the SISP came about, what it is, how it works, and its impact.

Article

In recent years, the term social innovation (SI) has evolved, being the central issue worked on worldwide; and in a country like Colombia, which has been characterized by its high rates of inequality, poverty, and social injustice, SI couldn't be postponed.

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Colombia, over the years and like many other Latin American countries, has presented great inequality and social problems that make the gap between the communities bigger. And it is thanks to this problem that

the Colombian Catholic Father Rafael García-Herreros began in 1955 the Minuto de Dios, a proposal at the service of the community, which in an alternative way sought to respond to the needs of the most vulnerable communities in Colombia. This is how, after a few years, it begins with the creation of the MDO, composed of a group of nine entities created for social development, each facing a different theme with which to work.

Within this great diversity of entities that make up the MDO, the Corporación Universitaria Minuto de Dios (UNIMINUTO) was formed, an institution of higher education created in the late 80's, as a commitment to education focused on social and social projection, human development, having a presence in low-supply sectors and whose objective has always been the facilitation of access to higher education in marginalized regions, taking into account social inclusion (UNIMINUTO, 2014).

UNIMINUTO became an example of SI being a reference, not only of the diverse innovations of the Minuto de Dios, but, also, of the facilitation of access to education, achieving the social inclusion that had as main focus, integration within its educational model for the neediest communities, following and articulating the educational model of the elementary and secondary schools of El Minuto de Dios, designing strategies to mitigate student desertion, and seeking coverage of the institution in Colombia (Gnecco, M).

As Bernal (2013) points out, the Minuto de Dios has been characterized from the beginning as an entity with a history of social innovation, all its works and entities have managed to be a source of inspiration in various areas, having a number of examples of where to reflect their efforts for the approach and development of social innovation.

How Was the Social Innovation Science Park Born?

Precisely, and thanks to the background in social innovation that accompanies the history of El Minuto de Dios, through UNIMINUTO and in partnership with various entities such as high-quality Colombian universities, government institutions, and private companies, the conceptualization of the Social Innovation Science Park began in 2011, with its inauguration in 2012.

Thus, the SISP is created as a UNIMINUTO entity, whose purpose is to be a service platform with which social innovation is achieved, adequately articulating actors from the public, private, and academic sectors within the marginalized communities, working to achieve more effective answers to the problems presented in the region where the community is a participant in the development of the same, together with science, technology, research, and innovation in order to achieve an integral development.

The social innovation approach of the SISP is addressed and understood as the creation of an original solution, thought either as a service, product, model, or practice, to a problem or need of a specific community. This must be created in a participatory manner, that is, it results from an exercise of co-creation between researchers and the community; additionally, this innovative solution must be sustainable, replicable, more efficient than other solutions presented within the same context and, above all, generate permanent changes in the community.

In addition to this, the SISP responds to functions such as the support and training of researchers for a better relationship with the community actors and the transfer of knowledge and social technologies (social innovations created from knowledge, methodologies, and validated instruments, formed in a package ready to be appropriated by other communities that can adjust it to their needs).

Work Areas and Their Functions

To achieve the articulation of all the actors and resources necessary for the creation of new and more effective alternatives to respond to a social problem, the SISP is formed by work areas, where each one fulfills a specific task, in order to advance towards the objective as agile and effective as possible. In this way, the SISP is composed as follows:

Project Platform

Being the largest area of the entity, the Project Platform is responsible for the presentation of the SISP to call for social innovation, science, technology, research, social appropriation of knowledge, among other topics, and also to track, control, and execute these social innovation projects financed by organizations from the private, public, national, and international sectors.

The platform also has four units in scaling or incubation, responding to various issues focused on the solution of social problems; among them is STEM Robotics (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics for its acronym in English), which has achieved the reinforcement of knowledge, skills, and abilities of approximately 150 children from various public and private institutions in marginalized communities such as those in the Ciudad Bolivar and Tunjuelito neighborhoods of Bogotá, Colombia. In the areas of Mathematics, Science, Technology, and Engineering support has been offered to these students through teaching tools such as LEGO and their link with robotics, all thanks to their work with communities of limited resources that have difficulty accessing education as well as its' alliance with various national entities willing to help meet the objectives of the program.

Another of these units is Green Community Businesses (GCB): Tourism and Agribusiness, focused on the

accompaniment and strengthening of small and medium sustainable business projects generating clean production businesses aimed at ecotourism and agroecological production. In the tourism part, GCB has made an agreement with the most important district tourism entity in Bogota, benefiting more than 4,000 people, with the completion of courses focused on tourism in the city, certifying the participants, and strengthening tourism. On the other hand, there is GCB Guadua, which seeks to strengthen the productivity of guadua, a kind of bamboo, in strategic sectors of Colombia by encouraging the use and commercialization of this product.

Likewise, EMPRENDEVERDE is the unit in charge of accompanying and promoting of "green" entrepreneurships, that is focused on the best use of resources with the least amount of environmental impact and its commercialization. Throughout its existence, EMPRENDEVERDE has achieved the support of more than 50 entrepreneurships presented by students of UNIMINUTO, has offered various courses with a focus on entrepreneurship training, and has managed to promote various brands resulting from entrepreneurship.

Articulation of Researchers Platform

As another work platform of the SISP, the Articulation of Researchers Platform seeks to bring together and articulate groups, students, and research nurseries with the community and the problems that are presented. In

addition to this, it trains new mediators, known as "Social Innovation Managers," which can be a better communication bridge in social processes with the community. As another part of their work, they're in charge of the academic demands to which it responds with the design of tools, courses, workshops, training communities, and groups of people who request support on topics such as innovation, design thinking, creativity, methodologies for the solution of challenges, entrepreneurship, use of the canvas model, among others; and the management of the information while making known the results of the investigations conducted.

Social Appropriation of Knowledge

It is a platform that supports the generation, transfer, and communication of the knowledge given in the interaction between the actors involved in a social innovation, so that, in this way, it can be made available to the public in general. This dissemination can be understood as the sharing of results of creative processes within the same areas of the SISP with the community. They also are responsible for communication through academic publications and the management of events, workshops, and activities for the circulation of knowledge and the review and monitoring of social technologies, brands, inventions, artistic works, literary, among others, to see their level of patentability and/or registration of intellectual property.

Observatory (Social Innovation Observatory -- SIO)

The SIO is the area in charge of surveillance and intelligence, focusing on the search and recognition of trends in social innovation worldwide, the identification of territories through geo-referencing, analyzing what opportunities for action can be presented, specific locations in conflict, or with social problems and other issues of concern. On the other hand, the SIO offers the service of systematization of experiences and structuring of social technologies, where the methodologies, learning, and other success factors of the social innovations created must be translated, so it is possible to replicate and take into account these experiences for other territories.

Additional Services

The SISP offers, to those who are interested in the development of entrepreneurship initiatives and social innovation projects, a workspace within the facilities so that these groups can stay and develop their ideas, always focused on social innovation and sustainable entrepreneurship. Additionally, accompaniment is carried out in the generations of spin offs and the incubation of projects, joining them to the SISP.

With this offer, it has been attended by more than 50 entrepreneurs in the digital area, the training of 500 social innovation leaders, and the accommodation of innovation

groups such as the Information Access Center (IAC) of South Korea, who have used SISP as a platform to reach the Colombian community with the participation of citizens of South Korea to share their culture and knowledge in technology with those interested from children to seniors.

Impact

Besides the achievements already mentioned in the review section of the work areas, throughout its existence, the SISP has achieved the execution of 10 million dollars in social innovation projects, and thanks to its various work platforms, it has made important alliances and strengthened issues around innovation, training people, and promoting positive development alternatives for the country. About the regional businesses, a collaboration has been made with 250 companies from the Colombian departments of Casanare, Antioquia, and Boyacá, creating a program for business strengthening in these sectors.

On the other hand, and in alliance with UNIMINUTO and one of the most important oil companies in Latin America, the SISP is supporting the strengthening of the Programa Nacional de Sustitución de Cultivos Ilícitos -- PNIS (National Program of Substitution of Illicit Crops) (Presidency of the Republic of Colombia, 2017), encouraging the replacement of illicit crops in the department of Putumayo for legal, productive, and sustainable crops. Additionally, only in the first semester

of 2018, 120 UNIMINUTO teachers were trained in terms of social innovation, with the participation of professors from international universities in alliance with SISP and UNIMINUTO. Also, 10 research groups of UNIMINUTO have been articulated with the challenges of social innovation that have been identified at the national level thanks to the mapping exercise of the SIO.



Why is SISP Social Innovation?

The SISP, unlike other entities, does not seek to generate solutions to problems through external work in communities in conflict, in the SISP the efforts are focused on working with and for the community, thus allowing the results to be more effective, understanding that a service, tool, or model designed to respond to a need, will be of better quality and more efficient if it is

created through an exercise of synergy between the tacit knowledge provided by local actors of that community and "Formal" knowledge or scientific solutions that can be offered by researchers from the technological and/or scientific side, immersed in a participatory action-research space, always allows the community to interact in the process of developing this innovation in response to their problems.

In addition, and as a strategy of strengthening of innovation in the work methodology, SISP in 2016 started with the conceptualization of the Social Innovation Route (Ruta de Innovación Social - RUTA), a work procedure created by the work team exclusively as a way of action of the SISP, consisting of a series of strategic steps that aims to generate more effective, organized, and agile social innovations in response to the needs of a community. Furthermore, this service or product always generates solutions that are more efficient, sustainable, replicable in other similar contexts and generated in a participatory way among the community. This allows the SISP to position itself as an innovative entity, proposing its own work methodology, and conceptualizing its own process.

The novelty of this route (RUTA) is not handled in a linear way, it is iterative, allowing it to go from a more advanced stage to an earlier stage to make necessary adjustments, if they are, and if they are going to be able to continue, achieving the desired result. It is composed of seven stages: Prepare, where the aim is to identify the problem

to be worked on and specify what will be needed for its solution; Understand, where the community is listened to, understanding its problems; Analyze, at what points the synergy of "formal" knowledge can be given with knowledge proposed by the community; Create, using various tools to devise the most appropriate solution, even looking at the possibility of reusing existing solutions adjusted to the needs presented; Implement, the solution to the community, making a schedule and budget for its execution and then monitoring it; and Packaging, identifying key elements of the solution, capturing the information and validating it; and finally, scale, looking for that creation to be taken to other contexts and adapted to its requirements.

Future Perspectives

The future goal of the SISP is, on one hand, to continue with the work that one day Father Rafael García-Herreros dreamed of making a reality, that enables the SISP to continue to be an example of the interest for social work that Father used as central objective to found the Minuto de Dios and so, continue to be an effective channel to break down barriers and keep working hand in hand with entities that bet on a better society. Likewise, the SISP is focused on continuing its projects with the community, as long as they are focused on finding a solution or response to their needs that lead to an integral development of the country. Additionally, new alliances are being considered

at both the national and international level so that these unions result in products that can benefit others.

In the future, we dream of generating social changes not only in Colombia but also internationally, positioning ourselves in the field of social innovation internationally and setting benchmarks for the sector with offices in other countries to allow us to achieve the impact and objectives that were the basis for the creation of the SISP.

Conclusion

The SISP has achieved through its life the fulfillment of the mission of functioning as a platform of articulation of actors in order to contribute to the integral development of Colombia and the application of social innovation because its structure allow the community to participate in the solution of their problems throughout the process, and with its own work methodology, making the solutions better quality, durable, replicable and, above all, ensuring the improvement of the situation of marginalized regions of Colombia that seek help with their problems.

Thanks to the background of social innovation and the focus on serving people, the SISP as an MDO entity has channeled its efforts and resources to serve the community, transforming them into innovative solutions for the region's most in need at a national level. Through its own work methodology, they are helping the integral development of the country and improving the quality of

life of people, one project at a time.

The work of the SISP, during these six years of existence, has come to change the lives of many people, not only with the projects carried out with and for the community, but also by opening the horizons and minds of the personnel that work there. It is a unique opportunity where knowledge and human formation is enriched every day.

The personal experience of working as part of this amazing project has managed to open my mind, enabled me to see different perspectives every day, and all of this has always been taught to the SISP team in terms of being creative, always listening to the community and working with them and to be "outliers," to be different from others, and even to focus on having an added value, not only as a work group but, also, personally as individuals.

The focus on the integral formation of the human being of the Minuto de Dios means that in the SISP we have the opportunity not only to learn daily from the experiences lived through our work with the projects and entities, but also to get to know about the topics of our field of work, and continue studying about these, thus ensuring a properly prepared and trained team. As a SISP worker I have managed to acquire knowledge of all kinds, I have opened my mind and managed to see things differently from my experiences.

In conclusion, the SISP is the ideal example of the dream of Father Rafael García-Herreros, a space focused on the

integral formation of the human being and on innovation for the sake of social development. It is here that we focus on continuing the work of the Father and are always thinking about the needs of the communities, making a union with formal knowledge, and thus achieving what Father Garcia-Herreros once said, "no one can go without serving others."

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Since 2017, Paula has worked in the Social Innovation Scientific Park -- UNIMINUTO and hold the position of Project Monitor in Science, Technology, and Innovation,

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