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**REFLECTIONS ON UNIVERSITY SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY:**  
**PRACTICES FOR THE CONSTRUCTION OF CITIZENSHIP**

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**Abstract**

The purpose of this document is to carry out a reflective exercise based on the development of the research called: “Las prácticas de responsabilidad social universitarias: aportes a la construcción de paz y tejido social” [The practices of university social responsibility: contributions to the construction of peace and building up social structures] developed during the years 2018 and 2019 at the Corporación Universitaria Minuto de Dios, as a scenario where university social responsibility takes relevance linked to the substantive functions of higher education in Colombia, as an exercise that tends towards the construction of citizenship that allows linking the transformation of local realities accompanied by science, research, technology and innovation. In the same way, it seeks to relate some of the conceptual elements taken up by different authors as part of the support of Social Responsibility practices, in which they are linked to future professionals allowing them to recognize, understand and reflect on the social realities that are lived in the Colombian daily life.

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## 1. Introduction

Colombia is a country that presents in its historical construction a series of milestones that permeate social relationships and dynamics, framing them in scenes of violence that have passed through different social spaces. In this sense, the research project " University social responsibility practices: contributions to the construction of peace and social fabric " aimed to identify the contributions that the Practice of Social Responsibility (PSR), carried out in the Corporación Universitaria Minuto de Dios - UNIMINUTO, provide for the construction of social fabric and therefore the construction of peace from local realities, recognizing their changing contexts, showing that the role of the University is essential to generate transformation processes in social reality.

## 2. Problem Statement

In the development of the research, it becomes evident that higher education institutions need to commit to social demands in local contexts, and in turn have responsibility for the construction of pedagogies that enable the interaction of students with the reality in which Their daily lives are developed in order to generate, from the actions of social projection, the accompaniment to community processes that link, from the academy, actions that contribute to the construction of a culture of peace and non-violent actions in the different social organizations.

In this sense, PSR constitutes for UNIMINUTO, a pedagogical exercise that is accompanied by the praxeological thought of the work of El Minuto de Dios<sup>1</sup>. Its relevance is given by the possibility given to students and teachers to accompany processes with external sectors where people in a condition of economic and social vulnerability are immersed, generating actions that allow strengthening community processes that promote the development of capacities, the assemblage, empowerment and social struggle of the communities (UNIMINUTO, 2014). This scenario allows to propose the development of a praxis directed from an emancipatory perspective that has two functions: In the first place, to train students to be highly sensitive to social problems by establishing relationships between the global and the local, and secondly, it contributes to the resolution of these problems in the spaces where the PSR is carried out (Acosta & Lozano, 2019).

This exercise represents, among others, a series of challenges in the face of logistical breakdown, but its potential lies in being able to place in students the ability to become citizens of the world. That is, from the PSR it is not intended to directly generate transformation scenarios of the conditions of exclusion and marginalization of the populations and territories where it is carried out., rather, it allows through its execution the production of new political subjects aware of their subjection who develop an ethical-political exercise committed to social change and, above all, allow the construction of world citizens with contemporary knowledge who appropriate the theoretical models of citizen training and education for development.

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<sup>1</sup> The work of El Minuto de Dios is one of the most influential social service works that has action in Colombia whose main objective is to ensure the integral development of the human person and marginal communities.

The PSR is conceived as a stage where the dialogue of knowledge of the different actors that compose it is allowed; at the same time, it constitutes a scenario in which relationships are woven between students, interlocutors from institutions and the population or community they serve, that is, teaching-learning is given by the networks that are woven, allowing through others to know, recognize and understand reality (Acosta & Lozano, 2019).

### **3. Research Questions**

The PSR has allowed students to generate processes of reflection on their life stories, against which, as a setting for the evocation of their experiences in the face of possible peace-building scenarios, which occurs through the recognition of the realities of the populations with which the different organizations that have an alliance with UNIMINUTO work, allowing students to understand the scenarios of violence that permeate the daily lives of the subjects, where, the historical reality of the Colombian armed conflict has generated the genesis of urban violence that strengthens social problems such as poverty and the dissatisfaction of basic needs, and in turn configure violent relationships for conflict resolution.

For this reason, the PSR in themselves constitute a scenario in which peace education is a constitutive element of the peacebuilding perspective, that from the epistemologically and theoretically based pedagogical actions allow students to recognize the development of non-violent actions for daily interaction in the communities, and in turn allow communities to reflect on the contexts of violence, promoting actions that tend to transform the vision of populations that experience conditions of social and political vulnerability, claiming the human condition and the dignity of the communities that have historically inherited these conditions in their territories.

In conclusion, PSR allow the generation of social networks between entities, communities and the university as a setting that allows to generate learning from the dialogue of knowledge that has potential in the possibilities of generating sustainable actions that make possible scenarios of transformation of realities, In this regard, the PSR of UNIMINUTO are linked to the principles and ideas on University Social Responsibility, where coordinated actions based on the university social projection find for the Colombian case the development of "daily actions for creative and peaceful management of social conflicts" (Acosta & Lozano, 2019, p. 201). These actions, in turn, are linked to the pedagogical actions of the different actors of the local realities that tend towards overcoming conditions that generate poverty and social exclusion that beyond the signing of a peace agreement, the history of the armed conflict remains impregnated in the communities, and from this type of actions, cultural transformations are consolidated that point to the construction of citizenship, and in turn allows coexistence free of violence..

### **4. Purpose of the Study**

Based on the conclusions raised from the research on PSR developed in UNIMINUTO, it is necessary to propose the scenario of University Social Responsibility (USR). In this sense, Vasilescu et al. (2010), are not wrong when they point out that university social responsibility is like an exercise that strengthens civic commitment and citizenship through volunteer actions, allows students, teachers and

administrative staff of the universities provide social services to their local communities that favor the promotion of sustainable development through actions with an ecological and environmental focus.

Similarly, Vasilescu et al. (2010) cite Reiser (2008) who defines the concept ofUSR as:

a policy of ethical quality of performance of the university community (students, professors and administrative employees) through the responsible management of the educational, cognitive, labor and environmental impacts produced by the university, in an interactive dialogue with society to promote sustainable human development. (p. 4179)

In turn, Ahumada-Tello et al. (2018) state that society demands a greater participation of universities in social events as an exercise of responsibility that is linked to freedom, ethics and tolerance; This is framed in the role of Universities in the construction of knowledge and training of future professionals who will have an impact on cultural, social and environmental aspects in different stages. Likewise, Jaramillo (2009) puts on the scene the ethical attribute related toUSR as the development of actions directed from the universities in the face of the awareness of their role in society, as a response to the situations and derived social problems of globalization.

In that order of ideas, Vasilescu et al. (2010) recognize from the approaches of Jónasson (2008) some trends that occur in the university sector, the most important being the increase in the world number of students, which shows a trend towards universalization of higher education mainly linked to the advancement of information and communication technologies, in turn, access to university in different age ranges is especially evident in several European countries and in Latin America, which implies that more and more people enter higher education institutions at different times in their lives.

Continuing with this hypothesis, the trend of expanding the forms of access to higher education is added with the offer of new academic programs that enjoy acceptance and have made a place in the demands of the community, generating more and more professional and vocational fields that demand a space of tension between the approaches of the academy with the practice, allowing scenarios in which university social responsibility takes force in the face of the needs of social contexts and dynamics.

Universities can promote the construction of scenarios that contribute to social and environmental sustainability. For this purpose, the intellectual, technical and human capacities that allow the operation of social projects with an impact on local territories are necessary. But this requires that it be thought of as a plan that systematically seeks to incorporate its members into relevant actions that contribute to professional training, the development of knowledge that offers alternative solutions and solutions to social and environmental problems (López et al., 2015).

## **5. Research Methods**

The research was carried out from a hermeneutical approach and a qualitative perspective The development phases were oriented towards observation, planning and action, accompanied by a process of reflection in each of its moments; the information gathering techniques used were semi-structured interviews, discussion groups and documentary review. In the theoretical review, a look at the different

perspectives of peace was made, emphasizing imperfect peace that allows to demonstrate the potential of communities to transform conflicts and be active subjects of peace building. In the theoretical review, a look at different perspectives of peace was made, emphasizing imperfect peace which shows the potential of communities to transform conflicts and be active subjects of peace building, as well as its link with the concept of social fabric and the relationship of the two categories.; in the same way, a general overview of the implications of a professional practice is given, delving into what UNIMINUTO understands in the PSR. and in that sense, reflect on the experiences of constitution of the social fabric in the PSR, developed by the students of Social Work of UNIMINUTO, and the contribution for the construction of Peace

## 6. Findings

In accordance with the conceptions previously raised, it is evident that the USR breaks with the paradigm of Corporate Social Responsibility and becomes immersed in an exercise that from higher education, leaves aside the concept of employability, and is linked in a more profound way with social development, making an exercise of transition towards the notion of citizenship that allows from the perspective of students and teachers, make a reading of the realities and local contexts in which they are immersed, and from the consolidation of knowledge in terms of science, research, technology and innovation it approaches an exercise of reflection from ethical-political positions that are oriented to empathy and meeting with others. This ethical perspective of knowledge allows orienting towards new visions of economic models, society and human beings. USR involves promoting and generating updated knowledge strategies where modern technological advances are related to popular and local knowledge in a policy of multiculturalism and dialogue of knowledge (López et al., 2015).

Many of the positions of the USR have been developed from Latin America, which becomes a benchmark against the implications of the application of the USR, such as the processes developed in Colombia, Chile and Mexico (Quezada & Rodríguez, 2019); In this sense, the perspective regarding USR has been expanding and generating transformations in the conception of the substantive functions of higher education: teaching, research and social projection.

These elements can be located within what Acosta and Lozano (2019) define as the dimensions that guide the PSR of UNIMINUTO, in the first place, critical citizenship training, which links training in an articulated way with the knowledge and reading of the problems of the local-global reality, allowing students to develop a critical view of the socially established order, and assess the actions of resistance that different actors assume in the face of injustices, taking a position regarding the different discursive approaches proposed throughout the PSR. Second, through training in active citizenship (understood as emotional and agency capacity), the student will assertively identify and manage their emotions and will engage in processes of social development and transformation from the philosophical principles of nonviolence.

That is why universities have to look for a pedagogical model that accounts for this, with processes that allow, in turn, the critical analysis of reality and the proposal of alternative solutions to the latent or manifest social problems of this , framed in positions that link the promotion of Human and environmental Rights with which, USR materializes as a scenario for citizen training (Moran Matiz,

2010); consequently, universities cannot function as independent entities, Rather, they should promote the University - State - Society relationship as a social capital that allows mutual learning (Moreno Moreno & Aguirre González, 2018).

Under these dimensions, USR is then transformed into a concept that is linked to the possibilities of social transformation, which start from educational exercises, processes that highlight the need for higher education institutions to break with the schemes that keep them in the classroom. In this sense, higher education must project its action scenarios aimed at focusing the production of knowledge in local contexts, so that, with this, it allows communities and populations to achieve real human and social development linked to empowered citizen action from dialogue and joint construction of social problems that emerge day by day in daily life.

## 7. Conclusion

In closing, it is necessary to think about the successful exercises that are developed in the execution of the USR, such as the PSR of the UNIMINUTO, which seek through university extension to find transversal action points (where all areas of knowledge converge) to the development of human capacities, in this case of the most vulnerable communities. In the same way, from these insights, it becomes evident in the current contexts that the world is facing and the inevitable transformations that milestones such as Covid-19 will leave in local and global contexts, the need for higher education institutions to get involved with local realities, to which universities, from an exercise of university social responsibility, must be participants in the construction of citizenship.

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