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From university student associationism and student undertakings to the Polytechnic Salesian University-Commune[1]

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Synthesis

This paper describes the meaning and importance of the Salesian University Association (ASU) and student entrepreneurship groups of the Salesian Polytechnic University (UPS) based on the fo-

1 This article deepens the research by the same authors, José Enrique Juncosa, Daniela Moreno, Karla Altamirano Ch. and Paula Salazar C. (2019).

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llowing central points of analysis: horizontal and collaborative learning, and the cultivation of co-responsible and self-regulated student management spaces. These aspects favour the development of student citizenship and the construction of the university-commune. ASU groups and student enterprises establish training environments and offer still- to-be-discovered possibilities that aim to promote communal modes of production, deliberation and creation of productive initiatives beyond the mainstream rationale of the Market.

The investigation begins with a simple exploration of the concept of "youth associativity" both from the point of view of the Salesian pedagogical model and youth condition. The field research consists of two moments that articulate different resources: the first explores student perceptions around their experiences of ASU groups, based upon a survey of the different members of the ASU groups of the UPS-Quito branches between April and May of 2016. The second moment includes two narratives that reflect the central points of the analysis through reflecting on students' experiences of associative groups that differ in aims and degrees of formal 'ways-of-interactions'. The first narrative refers to the ASU *Utopia*, a group of student journalists who publish the Journal *Utopia*; the second refers to *co-workings*, a self-managed student space that encourages the cultivation of student ideas and ventures.

Introduction. Minimum theoretical exploration and Salesian university associationism at the Salesian Polytechnic University-Quito Headquarters

One way to address young people's tendency to come together (associativity) is to consider it as one of the institutional elements of the educational proposal of the Salesian order. In part, this is due to the great influence of Pietro Braido's work, *Don Bosco's educational system*. In the second half of his work, Braido breaks down the orga-

nizational forms of the Salesian educational proposal (Braido, [1962] 1984, pp. 311 ss.); among them, the one that best deepens the features of youth associativity that interest our research is the part dedicated to the Companies (pp. 369-380) and the type of religious associations centred around youth devotional figures empathetic with students and *oratorios*.[6] However, we think that youth associativity is a principle that permeates in different ways through all the organizational forms in the UPS, especially the festive *oratorio*, that is moved and greatly encouraged by active participation and youth acting.

Although the fieldwork description of the companies seems to limit youth association to the framework of religious forms of association whose main objective has been to cultivate selective youth itineraries of the *good Christian*, in it Braido highlights two organizational principles of absolute relevance and profound meaning for any form of youth association in line with the *good citizen* and the university-commune. These principles, that constitute perhaps the most valid novelty of the Salesian pedagogical model, are the following: a) the free and voluntary participation of young people (principle of freedom and voluntary registration); b) the principle of organization according to which all activity should be "the work of young people", born out of their own initiative and responsibility.

Moreover, Salesian associations promote self-regulated spaces by young people, carried out with a "democratic sense" of action (Braido, [1962] 1984, pp. 377-378) in which familiarity prevails in interactions.

6 **Translator's Note** - Don Bosco, the founding father of the Catholic Salesian order, established the oratorio, a place for marginal and neglected young people who had been abandoned to their own destiny. In such a place, the Salesian fathers created a sense of family where such youth were welcomed, looked after, and educated. It was a place of prayer, education, play, and togetherness. There is not an equivalent term in the English language, which is why we use the original Spanish one.

In regard to youth initiatives and responsibility, and reading between the lines, Braido allows us to see that the options relating to the strategic vision of the Salesian work are previous and decisive with respect to pedagogy, as they anticipate the nurturing of organizational and leadership capacities for potential future leaders. In this regard, says Braido:

> Going into the knowledge of the companies, it can be immediately highlighted how the character of freedom and initiative is already guaranteeing the call to the young people themselves for the responsibility of the positions [...], and to make them responsible for the organization of the meetings and the execution (helped and controlled) of the initiatives. (Braido, 1984, p. 378)

In this way, the pedagogical project implies the clear potential of training young people in order to involve them in a larger project of shared responsibility. In essence, the university is a shared project co-managed by young people, who have a rightful place in management, government and decision making. Therefore, the strategic vision of the university project gives new meaning to the Salesian pedagogical vision by reclaiming the pedagogical and formative objectives, since young people are trained to make, develop and build the university environment.

Sandrini (2017) highlights that the Salesian university considers young people as protagonists rather than recipients, and recalls that, from the beginning, Don Bosco involved young people in educational and pastoral actions. Such a recognition adds a new element to the original conceptual path that we set out to follow: the promotion of youth associativity provides an alternative to avoid youth overcrowding by offering young people differentiated itineraries of training, management and responsibility:

> Many of the young people of Don Bosco continued to be recipients, but many of them were transformed into protagonists, citizens in their *oratorios* and society. This is the ultimate goal of the Salesian mission inspired to Don Bosco, to turn recipients into protagonists through diverse

> associations and groups. The groups, called companies, freed Don Bosco's *oratorio* from the danger of widespread growth. (Sandrini, 2017, p. 239)

Today, youth associative practices do not constitute an exclusive expression of educational contexts, and are recognized as an intrinsic feature of 'what it means to be young' that is continually being redefined. These practices are expressed through multiple forms and constitute, so to speak, an element without which it is impossible to think and understand young people, especially those practices of citizenship in terms of youth-life projects. Their "associativity-ness" defines their life and participation in society, in politics, and in their educational institutions during their lifetime. According to Unda (2016), youth status implies forms of association in educational contexts that are mobilized around requirements rather than the institutionalized exercise of rights (i.e. greater awareness of entitlements but lack of knowledge of the formal mechanisms of their enforceability), and through network connectivity also considered a right.

Other studies (Agudelo, 2016; Vázquez, 2016) state that forms of youth associativity carry with them a strong ethical and political burden because through them young people are made subjects and citizens. These forms transport militant, disruptive, critical, transforming exercises of citizenship articulated to territories. Therefore, today it is necessary to imagine associativity more and more as a collective capacity characteristic of the youth condition rather than an inherent feature of Salesian pedagogical practice.

UPS Salesian University Association - Quito[7]

University associativity is born out of the Salesian Youth Movement in Ecuador, and seeks to explain the different associative groups in the university. In November 2004, an associative propo-

7 We thank Carlos Francisco Mejía, technician and animator of the ASU Groups at the UPS-Quito. We wrote this section on the basis of his contribution.

sal was launched, called the University Movement, which generated a series of meetings to shape a proposal to guided the project. By January 2005 there were approximately 36 groups, at the national level, in the departments of Pastoral, Culture and Student Welfare. This sparked the organization of the First Meeting of the University Groups (March 24 to 26, 2005, Cuenca); it also encouraged the need to give consistency to the associative work, especially with regard to the organization and formation of the groups. It is at this meeting that the "University Salesian Association" (ASU) was brought to life.

The associative proposal began to be structured as a favourable space for the development of personal abilities, skills and competences, but also to give rise to the educational and pastoral relationship where educators and young people could experience Salesian familiarity and values. Between 2007 and 2008 this associative experience was re-structured by including other areas of youth expression arising from university life. At that moment, it was decided to convene nationwide the II ASU National Meeting (27- 29 November 2008, at Quito Headquarters), thanks to the support of the then Rector of the Salesian Polytechnic University, Father Luciano Bellini.

Because of the growing associative activity and the responsibility of supporting the group processes, the Department of Pastoral of the UPS proposed a set of rules and regulations to protect all the activities of the ASU groups; to standardize procedures for membership of the university youth association, the development of the groups' life and members, and the process of identity formation of a Salesian university associative group. In May 2011, the Higher Council approved the document entitled "Competencies of the Salesian University Associationism".[8] This document influenced the subsequent establishment, on June 15-17 2011, of the First ASU Parliament in

8 Minutes of Higher Council meeting, May 2011 / Resolution Nº 0043-04-2011-05-11

the city of Cuenca, with the objective of discussing and approving the regulations and powers of the ASU to be submitted for approval to the UPS Higher Council.

In November 2011, all existing groups were given an accreditation, and the General Regulations and Competencies of the Salesian University Association were and still are in place[9]. These have been modified and implemented in the subsequent Encounters and Parliaments. In a progressive move, the UPS understand the ASU Groups as spaces where student associative groups' activities can be cultivated; practical and theoretical training in active citizenship, leadership, personalization and socio-political commitment can be promoted, and conditions and opportunities for students to develop their life projects can be offered. At the Quito headquarters, there are 41 ASU groups within various areas and with different degrees of vitality, visibility and validity, with 11 groups in the academic area; 8 in cultural; 10 in socio-political one; 1 in communication; and 13 in the area of sports. The following table shows the various groups according to their area:

Table 1
ASU Groups at Quito Headquarters,
Salesian Polytechnic University

Areas	Purpose	Groups
Academic area	To develop skills and abilities such as charity work, research and development of skills and abilities, based upon classroom learning	• Robotics Club • Explo-Nature Club • GAOS • Kutuku Guardians • Environmental club • UPS Net Academic Community Quito. • IEEE Student Branch

9 Minutes of the Higher Council meeting, November 2011 /Resolution Nº 0108-07-2011-11-15 / 16

		• Automotive Club • Bioethics • Research seedbed • Informatics security
Cultural area	To strengthen university educational community participation in activities that promote cultural identity; artistic skills development; and rescue of local traditions	• Urban Dance • Theatre group • Chorus • Musical bands • Contemporary dance • Ecuadorian dance • Tai Chi • Ballroom Dances
Socio-political area	To strengthen self-knowledge and generate skills that encourage personal and social development	• Salesian Leaders Students • Youth for the Future • Salesian Youth for Change • Protocol • Forza Corazza • Mahatma Gandhi Social Action Group • Oscar Romero • Mountaineering Club • Laudato Yes • Missions
Communication area	To develop and disseminate university communication products	• Utopia Journal
Sports area	To involve members of the university community in sports teams representing the UPS	• Mixed Martial Arts for Peace • Physical Bodybuilding and Power • Taekwondo • Cheer dance • Chess • Volleyball • Basketball • Rugby • Running • Football • Table tennis • Swimming • Athletics

Source: Salesian Polytechnic University, 2019. Quito Headquarters ASU Groups

Today, Salesian university youth associativity is a broader and more complex category that goes beyond the ASU groups, and is formally recognized through resolutions of the Higher Council, so that it is possible to include other forms of associations based on the principles of student freedom and co-responsibility, for example, student directives and associations centred around co-workings that encourage student entrepreneurship. Thus, in the three branches of the UPS, there are 98 ASU Groups in which 2120 students participate while almost 3000 students participate in 38 student enterprises.

A distinguishing feature of the ASU groups that set them apart from other associative forms (without separating or excluding them), is that the established groups include a coordinator who is not a student (usually a teacher), while in the latter an absence of hierarchies and student self-regulation are noticeable; in both, participation in decision-making and non-hierarchical deliberative ways of working.

The co-workings of the UPS, mentioned in the second narrative, apply the principles of associativity in their context and modality, and combine processes in which students are active participants in the development of their competencies to create new projects and ventures. The process begins with the ideation camp (Bootcamp Recréate) that encourages students to work collaboratively to solve global problems based on local actions and viewpoints. Then, the camp (RETHOS) takes place, where these solutions are tried out, and that is based on mentoring by experts in areas such as marketing, investments and teamwork. Students who fulfil a high level of their initiatives, become a part of the Co-working School of Space Managers. Part of this activity is the "co-living" camps that generate solidarity and support among students with academic difficulties and at risk of dropping out.

Student perceptions of participation in ASU groups

The results of a semi-structured survey of 192 students[10] participating in various ASU groups[11] identified some perceptions regarding the scope but also the pending tasks about shared learning, freedom, and responsibility. Below, we list the answers to the questions that describe in their own words students' perception of their associative experiences in ASU groups.

Systematization of survey results

Question 1: In your experience of the ASU, you think they are a training tool because (rate the possible answers from 1 to 5 in order of importance, 5 being the most important)

- In the ASU I can cultivate deep and authentic friendships

Importance Value	Number of surveys	Percentage
5	62	32.29%
4	27	14.06%
3	25	13.02%
2	29	15.10%
1	49	25.52%

10 The sample size was 192 respondents from the ASU Groups of the various UPS campuses in Quito: 127 students from South Campus groups; 64 students from Campus Girón groups; and 1 student from one Kennedy Campus group. For Careers, the composition of the sample was as follows: Environmental Engineer (46 students); Computer and Systems Engineer (33); Psychology (16); Electronic Engineer (11); Business Administration (10); Accounting and auditing (10); Electrical and electrical engineering (10); Automotive Engineer (10); Mechanical Engineer (10); Social communication (8); Biotechnology (7); Management and leadership (5); Civil Engineer (5); Telecommunications Engineer (5); Mechatronics Engineer (3); Pedagogy (3); others (2).

11 The composition of the sample of the ASU areas was as follows: Socio-political groups (83 students); Academic groups (52); Sports groups (48); Cultural groups (8); Communication groups (1).

- In the ASU I learn to be a leader and share decision-taking

Importance Value	Number of surveys	Percentage
5	38	19.79%
4	66	34.38%
3	36	18.75%
2	41	21.35%
1	11	5.73%

- The ASU motivate to study with greater responsibility

Importance Value	Number of surveys	Percentage
5	22	11.46%
4	27	14.06%
3	85	44.27%
2	34	17.71%
1	24	12.50%

- ASU help me to be creative, generate ideas and projects

Importance Value	Number of surveys	Percentage
5	25	13.02%
4	54	28.13%
3	25	13.02%
2	69	35.94%
1	19	9.90%

- The ASU help me to deepen spirituality and live according to values

Importance Value	Number of surveys	Percentage
5	45	23.44%
4	18	9.38%
3	21	10.94%
2	19	9.90%
1	89	46.35%

Participants' responses include the following:

- Being part of any ASU group takes you to life experiences
- In the ASU groups, good friendship is cultivated and each group becomes a family

- Sport nourishes your life
- The responsibilities that help me get perfect seem perfect
- The bond between friends is strengthened
- ASUs help to act independently and be responsible
- It teaches you to be a better person

Question 2: What do ASUs contribute to thinking of a university as a common good of which we are all co-responsible? (Rate the answers from 1 to 3 in order of importance, with 3 being the most important)

- Because we relate not according to principles of authority but to joint responsibility and collective interests

Importance Value	Number of surveys	Percentage
3	86	44.79%
2	39	20.31%
1	67	34.90%

- Because teachers coordinate and encourage, but we as students take the decisions

Importance Value	Number of surveys	Percentage
3	24	12.50%
2	101	52.60%
1	67	34.90%

- Because in the ASU my contribution, my idea and my initiative are valued by colleagues

Importance Value	Number of surveys	Percentage
3	82	42.71%
2	52	27.08%
1	58	30.21%

Participants' responses include the following: in the ASU there are more options for changing the group's decisions.

Third question: Why would you recommend being part of the ASU to your colleagues ? Write about no more than three lines

In the following table, answers to this question are composed of two columns; the first relate to the recognition of ASUs as a training environment (meaningful / collaborative learning); the second relate to the recognition of ASUs as spaces for exercising citizenship and shared decisions (co-responsibility, participation).

Table 2
Answers to question 3. Why would you recommend to your colleagues to be part of the ASU?

Responses in the line of training environment and collaborative learning	Responses in the line of citizenship and student leadership (shared participation decisions, self-regulation)
Because we always try to achieve collective learning, without limitations of previous knowledge *Because it helps you grow and learn beyond the classroom. Because each group has a different organization and interests* *Because they help you forge a spirit of friendship, cooperation and innovation by developing different projects in the environmental and economic social field. This helps us to be better professionals and to carry out a more fruitful group work* *Because it is a way in which we can invest our time in a healthy way and learn new things, we do what we like to do, in my case I love to dance and I can develop my skills better* *Because it is a form of integration with other collective groups that help you in your personal and academic training; they also teach you aspects such as: responsibility, organization and teamwork* *Because they help you forge a spirit of friendship, cooperation and innovation by developing different projects in the environmental and economic social field. This helps us to be better professionals and to carry out more fruitful group work*	Because it helps the common good and the University Because… ideas of change can be generated within the university educational system, and these ideas are respected and accepted by animators and teachers It allows me to participate in joint activities with the university It helps you to know and be part of the University from another perspective. The environment makes groups of great camaraderie It helps us to train as leaders and acquire knowledge It is a way of having freedom, support and being able to create new ways to innovate and make a difference

Brief comments

Regarding the first question, which seeks to establish the recognition of ASUs as a space for student identity and training. Positive assessments are mainly grouped into the following indicators: ASUs

are spaces for learning leadership skills and shared decision making, and open up the possibility to cultivate deep friendships. Responses highlight the opportunity to exercise responsibility and independence.

Replies to the second question, the one that related most to our concern for the university-commune indicate recognition of common goods. Co-responsibility and student participation in decision-making show consistent and balanced groupings around each of the three indicators: co-responsibility and collective interests prevail over decision-making by authority; prevalence of student decision over teacher decisions; and appreciation and group assessment of individual decisions. Because although not all prevail, everyone has participated in the decision-making, that is a clear communal practice. A contribution indicates flexibility in decision-making, in the sense that they can change over time, and as a ASU trait to be valued that indicates progressive collective learning in decision-making above the established horizons of logical frameworks and other forms of business deliberation.

The answers to the third and open question revealed some interesting aspects, including the following: the ASUs contribute to seeing the university from another perspective and although they are not related to learning in the classroom, they generate energies that enhance and improve such learning. At the same time, the ASU groups are forums that generate proposals for change in the university.

Narratives of experiences in ASU groups and student ventures

Narrative of the ASU Utopia group. Daniela Moreno's Testimony

Paulo Freire stated that humans are biological and historical beings (1999) and we have memory because there are records,

whether written, multimedia or spoken stories that give us collective and individual identity. Human beings have the need to communicate in various ways and under any circumstances. Since 1996, the Utopia University pastoral journal has been a space for students' collective strengthening within the framework of developing communication skills in the three branches of the UPS.

At the beginning, the newly-formed journal was four pages without any specific design, printed in black and white, and run by students, teachers, Salesian priests and lay collaborators. The objective was to inform the university community about university activities. Over time, the journal themes diversified and a style was defined; editorial parameters were established, and journalistic rigor grew through a process of training students in the area of communication so that the initiative would be sustainable.

Thus, in 2009, the *ASU Utopía* group was established through a team of students dealing with editorials, reporting, publishing, and the nationwide production of the magazine, from the viewpoint and lived reality of young university students, based on their life contexts, and academic and human expectations. The journal is established through the active role that the students play in its production, due to the need to legitimize spaces for dialogue and dissemination of the knowledge generated from the academy into Society. The group emerges under the protective umbrella of the *Salesian charism* guidelines on an ethical perspective on Life.

Thus, Utopía journal is a creative space in which its associates read about Life with inquiring eyes and whose projects have an academic-cultural approach that confirms their social responsibility as professionals and human beings. In addition, in and through editorial activities, it promotes students' practical and theoretical training with active participation, leadership, and socio-political

commitment within a wide environment, that enables them to be subjects and agents of their own growth.

UtopíASU as a space for collaborative learning and problem solving

With more than twenty years of uninterrupted work, the journal *Utopía* has established itself as a collaborative learning space for young university students. It is a platform of real actions that has been maintained and transformed over time due to the dynamics of knowledge generation. It has been learning through trial and error. First in the search for suitable methodologies to develop the communication skills of the new students interested in becoming a part of the initiative, and second, in consolidating the operability of the editorial process in the generation of a printed communicative product.

From the classroom to reality, this space has generated a cyclical process (from reality and practice to the classroom) of knowledge building in and through social interaction (Roselli, 2011). The various teams of students are responsible for activities such as documentation, photography, planning, training, editing, coverage, among other production activities that are carried out in a shared space in the journal office.

These pre-professional spaces are suitable to generate transferable competences, such as *social responsibility, insertion capacity, leadership for change* as well as the ones specific to the area, such as *communication and media skills* in addition *to problem solving,* all of them ASU objectives, especially the ASU Utopia, that is part of communications.

Everyday *journalistic work* challenges us as people and professionals. It is the praxis, understood as the fabric of action and knowledge, that prevails in the ASU Utopia. In the journal we do not do mock-ups of articles or interviews, but we rely on journalistic rigor, editorial norms and write responsibly in compliance with the

parameters of the national law of communication; we investigate to contrast and verify the information to be shared all the while keeping to a strict timetable. In signing our contributions, we expose both our work and our name. Our work and our name are our only wealth. Therefore, the ASU Utopia is a space to experiment in every sense of the word (from Latin *ex perire*; 'exposing *oneself* to danger') because we put at risk our profession in each article, each photo, each content, while at the same time savouring the freedom, granted by the university environment, to give voice to the issues and struggles that inspire us.

The proposal of the Salesian pedagogy as applied in the ASU groups includes training in ethical values to be good Christians and honest citizens, in addition to professional values. As young people, our cultural, social, economic and ideological realities meet and converge in the university. It is in this space that we share them.

We are what we write, and although the articles reflect an individual authorship, there is a feedback process in the spaces of production of common criteria that we share. One of those spaces is the editorial board in which we discuss together our topics and our approach to a given report or interview. We discuss whether the intended angle to an article is consistent with the aspect we are going to work on; we share contacts, we support each other's article by suggesting photographs, perspectives, authors. We share life with those who, as our classmates, become friends and then colleagues.

In everyday practice, we develop skills such as our ability to synthesise ideas, to do context analysis, and to improve writing styles, the research and documentation processes, and content generation. If in the classroom we learn in order to do, in the ASU Utopia we do in order to learn. In *learning by doing* we polish ourselves as professionals. ASUs are spaces in which we face real problems that we cannot avoid. It is not a commitment where we seek to gain more

credits for extra work to *raise our grades*. It is a space that confronts us, firstly to make a retrospective, and secondly to work in a group to achieve a goal.

In these spaces, *the reciprocal influence among the members of* volunteer editors on the *work team is of mutual responsibility* (Collazos & Mendoza, 2006), because we are aware that for the journal to have survived for more than twenty years it has meant sharing knowledge with newly-arrived students who join our team. While some graduated and began their professional career, others started giving life to a self-taught but reflective and collaborative training cycle.

Decision making and students' empowerment

From the perspective of (students') empowerment as a value, the experience of ASU Utopia cements the basis on the positive aspects of humankind being the master of one's strengths, abilities and skills that allow everyone to take control of their life with commitment, awareness and critical sense (Silva, & Martínez, 2004). Hence, the teaching-learning processes are conscious ones and give students an awareness of their abilities to potentially enhance their action to transform, and thus transform their environment (Torres, 2009). That is to say, in collaborative environments, they will learn to project their positions, doubts and approaches with freedom and security, promoting reflection and developing cognitive skills that will help them in their profession and social relationship.

The incidence and importance of university student journalism has several edges. The first is the information that makes visible students' activities, projects and interests in the university context, in academic, cultural, and sports activities through which students present themselves to the university community. Secondly, it is a pre-professional showcase that accompanies the student in the explora-

tion and strengthening of their abilities. Today, many of the communicators who work in various media started their work in university journals or newspapers. Thirdly, it is the generation of interdisciplinary networks that give visibility to both the medium and the editor, because of the bonds generated by the contacts involved in the production of an article.

During our apprenticeship in the Utopía journal, we learned that as students we give voice and contribute to the transformation of our lived realities by giving space to topics of interest to the university community, and thus generate a dialogue among all its members. As Utopia journal, we contribute to the development of the editorial policies and reject the vision of journals aimed exclusively at teachers. This student-led journal follows academic guidelines within international regulations that focused on journalistic rigor.

Critical knots

Both as students and editorial team of a journal, we face various conflicts that we overcome with intelligence and coherence. One critical point is to face the temptation of self-censorship, letting ourselves be carried away by prejudices about the type of institution to which we belong, and mistakenly assuming that certain issues cannot be touched for fear of censorship. Yet, it is at that precise moment that we initiate an internal process of negotiation with the institution, respecting the boundaries within which we operate but feeling totally free to denounce or express what, as young people, we see, feel and think, so long as the information is verified and backed up. Therefore, in the journal we learn to gauge our institutional belonging with our visions and visions of the world.

Another critical point is the low rate of reading. 50.3% of Ecuadorians read between one to two hours per week, while 13.5% do so

for three to four hours. Those who read the most are people aged between 16 to 24 years old (83%) while those over 65 years old read the least. 33% of the youngsters who read do so to address their academic obligations, while 32% do so to learn something, as the 2012 INEC survey on reading habits informs us. Therefore, the student-led nature of the journal does not guarantee overcoming the difficulties of reading habits. In addition, during the whole process of giving shape to the student journal, we experienced the pressure exercised by some teachers who wanted to publish in a student journal. According to the narratives about how the journal started, these tensions originated in the belief, at that time, that the magazine was a tool of the Pastoral department (a tool for pastoral work). In time, it became clear, instead, that the journal is indeed a pastoral journal in the sense that it expresses the Salesian option for students' active roles in Salesian universities. This is a pastoral option in the true sense of the word.

The frenzy to achieve academic legitimacy through publications and becoming visible to students, led to some teachers insisting to have a space in the journal. Today, teachers and authorities are invited or taken into account during reporting, or are expressly invited to contribute articles. Finally, we face apathy. Young people have often lost hope in political, social and civil organization processes, due to the corruption present at all levels and in all social spheres that has led to them losing interest in leading, being active agents and engaging in training processes, or giving priority to banal activities.

Narratives of an experience in the StartUPS co-working. Testimonies of Paula Salazar Costa and Karla Altamirano about their student entrepreneurship

The term co-working was born in Berlin, from the idea that it could be a space oriented to a community with common interests. During 2007-2008 such an idea took force due to the global econo-

mic crisis; however, such spaces were born not only with the idea of being shared offices for professionals but also to promote intensive collaborative work around a common initiative, at the same time being multidisciplinary and based on the concept of community. Co-working spaces can be considered as a new form of urban social infrastructure that allows contacts and collaborations between people, ideas and places of connection (Merkel, 2015). What does such a space have to do with the Salesian Polytechnic University, and why is it relevant for a higher education institution?

The StartUPS Co-working project is part of the UPS strategy to become an innovative and research university, and started in 2015 in the Vice-Rectorate for Research. As part of this strategy, innovation and entrepreneurship are considered levers of change that, in combination with the strategy and the potential to carry out new institutional policies, will achieve their objectives in the short and medium term (Herrán *et al.*, 2014):

> The implementation of this strategy has sought to promote entrepreneurship through the training of UPS agents (teachers and students), in order to develop a culture of entrepreneurship as well as their skills in project management. The objective of this entrepreneurship is the creation of an Ecosystem of Innovation and Entrepreneurship (EIG) in the UPS. (Salgado et al., 2017)

As implemented in the UPS, StartUPS co-working consists of 4 physical spaces in three cities in Ecuador: Quito (2), Guayaquil (1) and Cuenca (1). Beyond their appearance as attractive places for student interactions, the space of co-working is a space for creativity; new business ideas; and growth that are developed through the learning of soft skills that students cannot acquire in a traditional academic context. Such competences are collaborative, multidisciplinary, and horizontal (where teachers, students and administrators are peers, and break the accepted order of hierarchies). In this way, co-

working encourages learning according to the relationship of "learn by doing", and allows the information received in class to become knowledge (Maldonado, 2008).

Co-working also transfers knowledge to the classroom and its meaning is not exhausted during the process of learning: there, many students develop lines of knowledge and research deeply linked to their interests.

In the UPS, co-working focuses on students, on their personal development because it transcends entrepreneurship projects. It seeks that students may work on their life projects, and aims to educate entrepreneurs to find their way regardless of where they operate (Salgado *et al.,* 2017).

The culture of collaborative learning; solving collective problems; and learning by doing

The StartUPS culture is based on a popular saying from South Africa: *umuntu, nigumuntu, nagamuntu*, which in the Zulu language means "a person is a person because of others." In this framework, a person is open to learn both from their environment and from others; to help each other with and in the midst of others, because the individual does not feel threatened when others are capable or good at something: if we all collaborate we can obtain greater benefits and so the opportunity for growth is available to all (Lutz, 2009).

Collaborative learning is a process that takes place in communities. According to Driscoll and Vergara (1997), collaborative learning is cooperating in achieving a goal that cannot be achieved individually. This is precisely what happens in entrepreneurship: if the entrepreneur faces the market alone, it is more likely to fail. On the other hand, when you have a community that supports you, you are more likely to succeed. Collaborative learning is characterized by:

a) individual responsibility - all members are responsible for their individual performance within the group; b) positive interdependence - group members must depend on each other to achieve the common goal; c) collaboration skills - the skills necessary for the group to function effectively, such as teamwork, leadership and conflict resolution; d) promoter interaction - group members interact to develop interpersonal relationships and establish effective learning strategies; and e) group process - the group periodically reflects and evaluates its operation, making the necessary changes to increase its effectiveness (Collazos, Guerrero, & Vergara, 2007). In other words, tacit knowledge is "deeply rooted in the action and experience of an individual, as well as in the ideals, values or emotions that he embraces" (Fernández, Martínez-Conde, & Melipillán, 2009).

Interdisciplinary learning builds new knowledge structures through the integration of various disciplinary perspectives, theories and methods. In addition, knowledge is achieved not only through explanation but also through the process of communal problem solving. Thus, people who work under this model enrich both their perception of the problems and their sensitization towards the yields and limitations of their discipline.

The inverted classroom, or inverted learning model, changes the moments and roles of traditional teaching in which the lecture, usually delivered by the teacher, can be attended by students at other times and out of class through multimedia tools. Thus, practice, usually assigned for the home, can be executed in the classroom through interactive methods of collaborative work, problem-based learning, and project realization (Coufal, 2014; Lage, Platt, & Treglia, 2000; Talbert, 2012).

The model of the inverted classroom (Martínez, Esquivel, & Martínez, 2014), considers the identification of competencies as a central element. At this point, the teacher becomes the mentor who

guides the process of knowledge, acting as an assistant or support. For the student, the information becomes assumed knowledge, since the lecture is necessary to develop their enterprise.

According to Bacic and Avezedo (2008), the consequence of horizontal relationships is a greater gain for participants, because they demand a greater initial commitment; present a greater probability of survival; and foster an environment of community and collaboration where learning is joint.

According to the principle of learning by doing, the goal is to train people capable of interpreting the phenomena and events that occur around them (Marcos, 2011). In order for the learning to take place, students must be prepared to identify the difficulties and mistakes they make during the process, in order to overcome them. This intentional exercise is called self-regulation learning, which is a self-directed process through which apprentices transform their mental abilities into academic skills (Jaramillo, Piñeros, Alvarez, & Lopera, 2006). Applied to academic courses, it provides a learning experience that engages students in a complex and meaningful project, through which they fully develop their abilities, skills, attitudes, and values (Maldonado, 2008).

Notes on the BioComfy case

BioComfy is a biotech-based venture that stems from the need to prevent women from becoming infected when using a public restroom. The start of the venture began after the event Recréate in March 2017, a type of ideation camp of the Salesian Polytechnic University that invites groups of multidisciplinary students –from careers such as biotechnology, electrical, communication, and administration– that have a business idea and the urgency to solve an everyday problem.

During the development of the enterprise, collaborative and multidisciplinary learning, conflict resolution, inverted classroom and learning-by-doing models were applied. It was collaborative and multidisciplinary learning, because entrepreneurship calls upon different disciplines (design, prototyping, biotechnology, marketing...). Decision-making took place through consensus, through agreement on clear rules of work, and through the efforts of all participants. The venture underwent several modifications over time, from changing a number of names and brands (Confident-Comfy-BioComfy), through group members leaving; from zero production to a degree of continuous production; to gaining national and international recognition and awards.

One of the major difficulties arose from the lack of clarity on the difference between an undertaking and a business venture; between an entrepreneur and a businessperson, since both refer to different levels of complexity and formality. We believe the University can support enterprises and entrepreneurs, but the steps towards establishing a business and becoming a businessperson is a decision about risk for the interested parties alone. However, learning is still pending and there is much to learn and discuss about it.

Each of the challenges has helped us to grow professionally, personally and to strengthen the current team. With each of our achievements, we want to strengthen the entrepreneurial culture within the university, and thus create responsible companies with social and environmental commitments. At BioComfy, we still have an extensive path to undertake. Our responsibility is to grow, open markets and fight to reduce the rate of women with infections due to the use of public toilets.

In conclusion, the co-working of the UPS is not only a hotbed for companies, but also a training environment for those involved that allows the development of skills that go beyond the traditional

education system. A student who is involved in co-working becomes agent of their actions and their surroundings, thus forming agents of change, good Christians and honest citizens.

Conclusions

A literature review established that the UPS's option for the development and promotion of university associations, in all its forms and nuances, is rooted in what is perhaps the greatest novelty of Salesian pedagogy: the respect for freedom, and the generation of self-regulated spaces for young people to decide and act. Such features reclaim the need to overcome overcrowding, and offer students alternative itineraries with the freedom to grow with others. Salesian youth associationism in the university context offers the possibility of generating enhancing environments. In such space, features of the Salesian pedagogy and life forms inherent to our youth and to come together and mutually enhance each other.

It was made clear that the university field is an area of student agency par excellence, that considers young people responsible for a project in which they must propose, decide and act. This implies accepting that the Salesian pedagogical proposal somehow revolves around a broader and long-lasting project that gives it meaning over time. Such a project, that is prior to all university citizens, is the raison d'être of the university-commune. Likewise, the importance of university associationism as a collective form through which young people assume citizen capacities and grow in the knowledge and exercise of rights was noted. This allows the emergence of the possibility of viewing the university as an arena of citizenship.

Surveys show that ASUs are seen as spaces for new learning that contribute to personal growth through imagining and developing concrete projects and actions in collective training environments. Where the exercise of student leadership is concerned, it is

emphasized that ASUs are relevant because they allow the generation of ideas of change in the university system, changes that are respected and accepted by other members of the academic community.

The narratives highlight two reflective experiences from two diverse forms of associations: the ASU Utopia Groups, long-lived and long-standing in the UPS; and a relatively recent venture (*Bio-Comfy*). Both revealed the same institutional choice, albeit with different elements, to put students at the centre of processes. Among the main lessons and challenges for the Salesian Polytechnic University is the following: the collective forms of learning generated from and by students (horizontal learning, depending on problem solving) that should also permeate the learning practices within the classroom, and set a style, an institutional culture based on student agency and manifestation of university citizenship.

In both environments, a culture of decision-making, creativity and management is cultivated along the lines of the university-commune, especially since the university is more clearly and directly assumed as a common good and open to the contributions and decisions of students. Although co-workings cultivate deliberate forms along the lines of the commune, it is still pending to consider productive alternatives beyond the market and non-monetized forms of exchange; for example, the exchange of work for work, as contemplated by some authors in this volume.

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