

Architecture with the Community, development, and community sustainability opportunities from architecture learning

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Abstract

This formative program of teaching, research and community engagement of the architecture career is based on the Community Outreach Model of the Pontificia Universidad Católica del Ecuador, University Social Responsibility criteria, and the predefined institutional research lines for a situated and social pertinent training of future architects. Its activities seek to revalue the role of architecture in society and its contributions to social development through participatory processes and interdisciplinary actions with community partners. This program articulates three key concepts -socio-environmental responsibility, raising of healthy living landscapes and the figure of architects as interpreters of reality- in the Community Management course and in community service projects. This seeks to train professionals who are committed and aware of their social reality, a community empowered by its development and a university with social impact and open to change in search of a fairer and more humane society. In this article we will go through the conceptual principles on which this program is based, we will review the methodology of approach to communities through some examples and we will reflect on the achievements and difficulties of the proposal to establish debate lines on the social function of the architecture and its relationship with the various social actors.

Key words

Community outreach, service-learning, public space, interpreter architect, architecture learning

1. Introduction

‘Architecture with the Community’ is an articulation program of Teaching, Research and Community Outreach, proposed by Faculty of Architecture, Design and Arts (FADA) of Pontificia Universidad Católica del Ecuador (PUCE) since 2018. This articulation seeks to revalue the participatory processes and raise awareness about the importance of learning architecture and the quality of the habitat in the cooperative construction of the societies.

The program is an umbrella that covers three instances of the Architecture career. First, it covers the community engagement projects that students must carry out in the last levels of their career. It also involves actions from the Living Landscapes Laboratory, a research space proposed by Karina Borja (2012) that structures the methodological proposal of the program. And finally, it associates the course of Community Management, an educational module that reflects on the social role of the architect, the current importance of participatory projects and the processes of monitoring management in the communities. The three components revalue the work of ‘the others’ by promoting interdisciplinary actions. With these three edges, the sense of Social Responsibility in students is reinforced, emphasizing the importance of the profession and its impact on people. Likewise, it seeks to empower the social actors of their own development processes, the responses constructed jointly are never imposed or assistance. They are based on the co-responsibility and management capacity of the community partners.

2. Theoretical framework

2.1 The role of architecture in social transformation

This research focuses on understanding the office of architecture as a service to improve the quality of life in the society. If the aim of training architects, as in other professions, is to train competent professionals for the demands of the labor market, it is also necessary to think about citizens who see themselves as jointly responsible for life in common and agents who respond to the contemporary social challenges (De Manuel Jerez, 2018), that is, architects for social transformation. The Charter UIA-UNESCO for Architectural Education (2017) establishes that the objective of architecture training is to understand architecture as an interrelated system where problems of different nature converge and to face them it is necessary to acquire skills “beyond aesthetic, technical and financial aspects of the professional responsibilities” (UIA-UNESCO, 2017, p. 10). The current concerns of architectural training are in the social commitment of the profession, in the awareness of the role and responsibility of architects in society and in the construction of sustainable human settlements for a better quality of life (UIA-UNESCO, 2017).

As Montaner & Muxí (2010) mention, when architecture does not respond to real needs, all forms of dissatisfaction of the inhabitants become visible, leading to depression, social violence, domestic violence, stigmatized neighborhoods, and unsustainable cities. That is why it is important to cover architecture education from an integral perspective of teaching, research and community engagement that connects students with reality, puts them in the role of the other and from there generates shared learning for a joint construction of spatial solutions. Likewise, it is necessary for society to learn to value habitat spaces as opportunities for meeting and building community from a shared vision of development.

The integral formation of all the actors involved in these processes needs to overcome education focused on curricular content and move towards active methodologies for participation in the design, promotion of self-management, promotion of social commitment, integration of knowledge, expression of affection and assessment of the contribution of each of the academic and social instances involved in the development of projects for sustainable social development.

2.2 A socio-environmentally responsible university

The University Social Responsibility approach (USR) is a concept derived from the social and environmental problems that our society has, in order to create a sustainable world. For Professor François Vallaeys (2007) USR is "an ethical and intelligent management strategy of the impacts generated by the organization in the human, social and natural environment". For its part, the USR network of the Association of Jesuit Universities in Latin America (AUSJAL) in 2014 proposed a management system that seeks to produce impacts in five areas and in an integrated manner: educational impacts, cognitive and epistemological impacts, social impacts, organizational functioning impacts and environmental impacts (AUSJAL, 2014).

We understand USR as a cross-cutting criterion for all higher education substantive functions (teaching, research, community outreach and organizational management) that aims to train all university actors in a comprehensive, conscious and committed way so that their future professional practice is consistent with the socio-environmental, economic, political and cultural context, and their actions represent effective responses to the social transformation needs, promoting justice, solidarity, equity and human sustainability.

To achieve the previously mentioned impacts, the university, in its four substantive functions, would implement actions from four key aspects: 1. the experiential experience, understood as direct contact with communities and strategic partners; 2. knowledge and critical analysis of the history and reality of the context, through action-research; 3. implementation of responses to social needs with high technical and professional development, from each of the careers offered, specifically and also integrated into interdisciplinary actions; 4. the strengthening of the public sense as a space of transcendence for professional practice. Figure 1 shows the implications, criteria and impacts of AUSJAL's USR proposal.

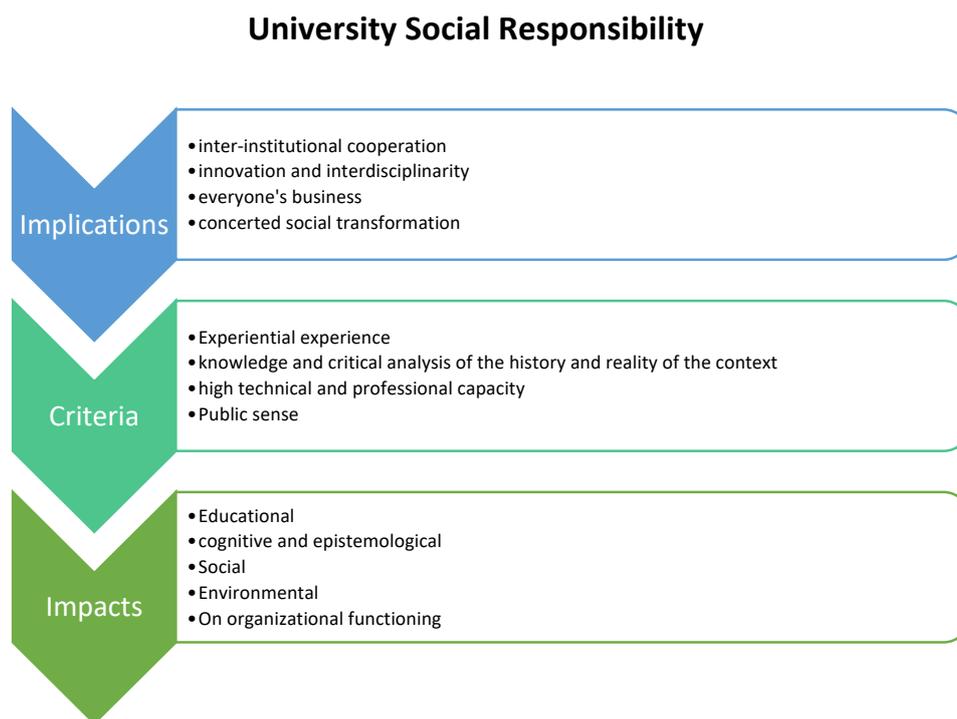


Fig. 1 Proposal of AUSJAL's University Social Responsibility

The proposal is to introduce this approach in a transversal way in all the daily aspects of the university and for this, administrative and pedagogical strategies and methodologies must be implemented aimed at the comprehensive training of all university actors. Among these methodologies is Service-Learning (SL), defined by the Centre Promotor d'Aprenentatge Servei de Catalunya in the Roser Batlle book *Service-Learning, social commitment in action* as “an educational proposal that combines learning and community service processes in a single well-articulated project, in which participants are trained by getting involved in environment real needs in order to improve it” (Batlle, 2020, p. 14).

SL is a useful strategy to articulate teaching with social bonding and bring students into close contact with reality; with this in mind and from a different point of view, they assume their professional practice as a service to the society.

Since 2016, PUCE has been working on strengthening its Community Outreach Model (González-Ortiz et al., 2019), which proposes the training of the professionals through integration of the three substantive functions of the university: teaching, research as production of knowledge and social projection as exchange of knowledge with society, putting USR-AUSJAL criteria as a conceptual and action basis. This Model differentiates the linkage forms that university can carry out from teaching, research, and internal institutional management. As for the articulation with teaching, it is proposed to carry out human and sustainable development projects. Through four phases in the development of these projects (diagnosis, planning, execution and delivery of results) and supported by a management system that registers, orders and systematizes information, and monitors, evaluates and measures results, the Community Outreach Model seeks to provide effective and interdisciplinary responses, exchange knowledge between community and university, and

strengthen capacities of vulnerable populations to achieve two key goals: committed students to social development and empowered communities for their development. In this way, welfare practices are avoided and co-responsibility and cooperation between different social actors is encouraged (See Fig. 2).

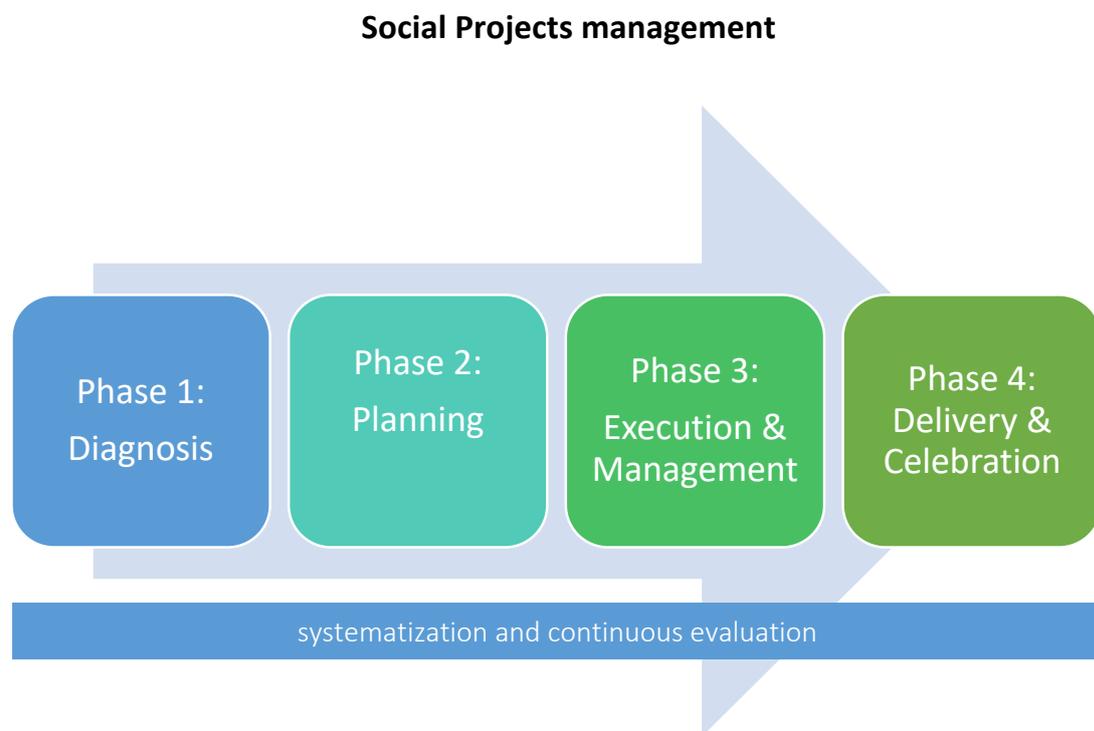


Fig. 2 Roadmap social projects

On the other hand, projects management system makes it possible to measure the incidence and the university social impact with its community partners, through the measurement of indicators such as goals achievement and actors involved satisfaction level.

Some careers, including Architecture career, have chosen to introduce community service project management into the curriculum, establishing the Community Management course and the pre-professional community service practice as their channels of action. Thus, the introduction of SL methodology in students' training process is evidenced.

The key points of the implementation of this Model in Architecture career are the creation of trust bonds between students with the community, through strategic alliances and the joint construction of sustainable responses to identified problems in participatory design processes, of this form a mutual and meaningful learning of inhabiting is achieved.

2.3 The raising of healthy living landscapes

The Living Landscapes Laboratory is the first research group of FADA in PUCE that is articulated with teaching and community outreach, promoting action-research. It was born in 2013 and rescues community experiences and methodologies applied in the field under the motto of “raising healthy living landscapes”, a concept developed by PhD. Karina Borja (2012) and seeks to re-read landscapes from a critical position for a harmonious coexistence with the context.

“Living landscapes, proposed as an intercultural concept, include the idea 'I am landscape' and 'we are landscape', as well as the presumption that they have feelings (love) and wisdom (think). They are raised by us, and, at the same time, they raise us, in a correlation of the landscape with life. They are named in plural because there are different landscapes, each with its own character, qualities and feelings, since they have been raised in different ways, in various places, by other *runas* (human beings). The natural landscape contains the balance of the energy of

the wise nature in its maximum expression and extension. The urban landscape is generated with a different way of breeding " (Borja, 2016, p. 279).

The idea of living landscapes starts from an intercultural conceptual base of respect for differences and coexistence of various analytical, dialectical, phenomenological, structural and hermeneutical rationalities. Interculturality allows movement between western culture and ancestral cultures, in this case the Andean culture, not as opposites but as complementary. It makes it possible to recognize, respect and articulate cultural differences.

In Andean thought, everything has life, the relationship of the human being with nature, the environment, the landscape is from subject to subject. This fundamentally changes the way of facing life, because it implies breaking a paradigm to enter another that places the human being in its true dimension, not as the center of the world, but as one more thread in the living tissue. For this reason, laboratory's proposals are respectful towards the environment and society.

Addressing community development projects of the Architecture career from this proposal brings to USA approach the perspective of interculturality, the rescue of collective memory and respect for nature, not only from perspective of sustainability but also from co-responsibility, correspondence, and reciprocity.

2.4 The interpreter architect

As a third input, we have the critical position of the professional developed by the Imaginary and Space Transformation Research Group. Analyzing the professional practice of architecture, three ways of responding to social requirements can be identified: architecture FOR, architecture OF, and architecture WITH the society (García Ramírez,

2012). The first is an imposed architecture, from a colonizing paradigm and at the service of power (Sánchez-Cuenca, 2009), which ends in the figure of *leading* architects who impose their solutions from a messianic perspective and the idea of architects as creative geniuses. Its opposite is the vision of architects as technical instruments that fulfill orders and carry out the wishes of their clients. The figure is *junior* architects who do what they are told. Finally, architecture, that is projected from dialogue and participation with the actors involved in the process, is born from the figure of the architects as interpreters of the needs and realities of society. These architects seek to provide their projects with a social and human meaning through strategies such as respecting the knowledge of the other, assuming the community reality as their own, giving more importance to the design process than to the results, permanently providing feedback on the participatory process, empowering social actors and using symbols such as socialized deliveries and celebration of processes (Ríos et al., 2016).

3. Methodology

The traditional approach to learning architecture is based on the pedagogy of action. The "learning by doing" of John Dewey (Castiñeiras, 2002) has been developed through active methodologies that seek the creative development of students and their attitude of innovation making use of technology and other tools to produce a relevant and impactful architecture. However, the most contemporary trends point towards social learning, proposed in the socio-cognitive pedagogical model by Lev Vigotsky (Ormron, 2008) and based on service, involvement, relationship with nature, empathy for the others and the formation of autonomy.

The meaningful learning of architecture is based on the construction of dignified knowledge of high value for people. This is achieved through experiential interactions of the

participants with their socio-cultural environment through various active didactic strategies, for example, developing projects, responding to challenges, and providing playful characteristics to spatial actions in order to achieve the appropriation, the enjoyment and the care of the space. This allows, in addition to "hooking" people, to mediate for a responsible and conscious emancipation, not only with their own reality but with that of others and with the environment, that is, to achieve a commitment to the upbringing of a healthy living landscape.

Using the SL methodology, where the relationship between academy and community is a pretext to develop environments of solidarity and joint learning (Rodríguez Gallego, 2014), a true involvement of all actors is achieved, a significant learning marked by inclusion, co-responsibility and sensitivity to build spaces for community action and the common good. To this end, in 2016, the methodology of participation in the field of the Architecture career in PUCE was consolidated and the '*Architecture with the community*' program was born, which articulates curricular contents of the *Community Management* subject of the study plan of the career with the community service projects so that students have an experiential experience developing projects in marginal and rural-urban vulnerability areas with the tutoring of teachers who accompany them in reflecting on the importance of the social role of their profession.

The community partners of the program are communities in vulnerability situations that need a social transformation and civil society organizations who give support for each development project within the program. With them, medium and long-term projects are carried out, strengthening their identity through products such as architectural projects,

workshops or space installations, as well as monitoring the processes that are necessary to achieve the projects.

This methodology seeks to bring the community closer to the technical work of the professional, valuing and recognizing the work of all. Architects are trained who are sensitive to the affective relationships of the inhabitants with their environment, respecting their symbolisms and ritualities.

Three stages of approach are established: inform–compromise, diagnose–propose, and deliver–value. The first seeks to establish the conceptual parameters used and the steps to follow to engage all the actors. In the diagnostic phase, problem with causes, effects, and alternative solutions are investigated, social actors are involved, and reality and context are analyzed in conjunction with the community. Finally, a symbolic delivery of the product or phase to be completed is made, emphasizing the process and the importance of all the people in the elaboration of the project (Ríos et al., 2016).

It is important to understand that every project is transformed over time and depending on the empowerment of the communities, the intervention continues or not. In this regard it can be noted that many communities are affected by political interests and for this reason it is essential to work with other social organizations through strategic alliances that support and validate social development processes. Each tutor teacher is free to propose his work schedule to act in the territory and to look for the most appropriate strategic partners since each project is different and as the methodology indicates, the management and feedback process is important to evaluate the different possibilities.

4. Results

During 2018, twelve preliminary projects, seven workshops and four follow-ups were carried out, each with their respective diagnoses and products delivered. It has worked in three territories of Quito and one nearby Latacunga: La Merced, La Mariscal, La Loma Grande and Chugchilán reaching an approximate population of 18,000 people.

There was an approximate participation of 160 students, 16 teachers and three administrative officials of PUCE who worked together with five public agencies, three private companies and three third sector organizations simultaneously, which shows that tripartite strategic alliances are fundamental to develop more sustained processes in search for social transformation (See Fig. 3).

For example, the alliance with the Municipality of Quito and the neighborhood social organizations has served to carry out *Integrarte* project into the Special Zonal Tourist Administration La Mariscal. This project was based on a diagnosis of the street situation of children and adolescents in the sector carried out by Geography and Architecture students with the guidance of social organization of street educators in Quito. Based on this report and the need to make the problem visible and dignify the street situation, four strategies for appropriation and raising awareness of public space were proposed. The Architecture students carried out the temporary installations with the support of the municipal administration over two years. Finally, as a proposal for monitoring and reinforcing the actions carried out, an extension to the project was presented with the participation of other social and cultural organizations of the sector for the call for municipal participatory budgets for 2020 with the aim of promoting the appropriation of public space by the neighborhood residents.

¿CUÁL ES EL TRABAJO DE LA ARQUITECTURA CON LA COMUNIDAD?

ARQUITECTO INTERPRETE

Interpretar necesidades y reflejarlas en los proyectos.

CONCEPTO

Es un proyecto de vinculación de la carrera de arquitectura que apoya a los procesos de desarrollo sostenible y de planificación de comunidades desde el fortalecimiento de la identidad hasta la toma de conciencia del espacio y su territorio. Se busca con esto el mejoramiento de la calidad de vida.



JUSTIFICACIÓN

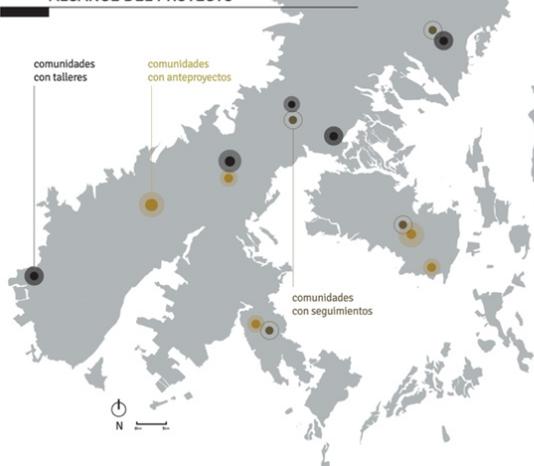
Arquitectura con la comunidad es un espacio que articula la parte técnica de la carrera con la comunidad, aportando con procesos participativos, que revaloran el trabajo del otro. El programa trabaja sobre poblaciones vulnerables que necesitan de una transformación y un apoyo inter-institucional para su desarrollo.

60% de las edificaciones en DMQ son informales



Un acercamiento real a la profesión, que permite a los estudiantes, a manera de prácticas, conocer las necesidades de la población de manera específica y relacionada con otras carreras.

ALCANCE DEL PROYECTO



OBJETIVO GENERAL Mejorar la calidad de vida de comunidades vulnerables, implementando procesos participativos que revaloricen la identidad y la cultura del territorio.



ESPECÍFICO

Desarrollar anteproyectos arquitectónicos, talleres o instalaciones espaciales con metodologías participativas y procesos de sistematización de experiencias que fortalezcan los tejidos comunitarios.



METODOLOGÍA CON vs. PARA

La arquitectura con la comunidad. Un equilibrio entre el arquitecto y las personas. La comunidad deja de ser un actor pasivo para convertirse en un protagonista activo de sus propios proyectos.



- 1. PRESENTAR E INFORMAR**
qué es lo que se pretende hacer, cuáles son los pasos para lograrlo, cuál es el resultado final que se obtendría; y, establecer los compromisos de las partes involucradas.
- 2. INVESTIGAR E IDENTIFICAR**
los actores que van a trabajar. Se produce un acercamiento al usuario, se determinan los lineamientos e intenciones del proyecto y se realizan las propuestas junto a la comunidad.
- 3. ENTREGAR Y EVALUAR**
con la comunidad todo el proceso y se realiza un acto simbólico que permita concluir con las fases y comenzar con las diferentes etapas de ejecución y de concreción del proyecto, se valora el proceso participativo.

- ANTEPROYECTOS**
Gestionar y Asesorar para el desarrollo y construcción de los proyectos. Determinar problemas a nivel de contexto y de funcionalidad espacial.
- TALLERES E INTERVENCIONES ESPACIALES**
Observar de forma general la memoria y la identidad de las diferentes comunidades. Visualizar problemas y amenazas latentes en los barrios de la zona DMQ.
- PROYECTOS DE SEGUIMIENTO**
Temas de empoderamiento y de gestión para que los proyectos puedan ser concluidos. Capacitaciones continuas para realizar un seguimiento adecuado.

RESULTADOS



Fig. 3 Program Systematization until October 2018.

Likewise, the model of *Architecture with the Community* program has been disseminated in several academic spaces and has attracted the attention of other careers such as Graphic Design, Visual Arts, Psychology or Education to carry out joint interdisciplinary work.

From the perspective of the community, the specific project developed in La Merced parish, where a flexible space was designed together with the group of older adults for their group activities, continued to a next instance where empowerment and management of the community achieved funding through municipal participatory budgets for the construction of the first phase of this Multigenerational House.

The social impact of the program can be considered from two points of view: on the one hand, the monitoring and evaluation carried out by the university itself based on the Indicators for Measuring the Results of Projects pre-established by the Dirección de Vinculación con la Colectividad de la PUCE (2018), and, on the other hand, the perception of satisfaction and intention to continue with the commitments by the communities based on the work actually carried out, this information is monitored during execution and after the projects are completed through surveys and record of testimonies of the inhabitants of each place. In the first case, the indicators of inputs, processes and results allow us to know that the program is highly relevant and is aligned to the institutional objectives for the transfer of knowledge to the community by the university. During the period of analysis, the program has 80% of its specific objectives have been met and the transformation of resources into results is highly efficient. All this reveals that the program is institutionally qualified as sustainable and replicable to other realities. Regarding the perception of satisfaction of the

communities and their intention to continue with collaborative work, the surveys show a general level of satisfaction of 88%, a value that is considered high impact and acceptable to renew strategic alliances for shared work.

Specifically, the community of Chugchilán, in the province of Cotopaxi, states that they have strengthened their identity and that thanks to the 'seed proposals' presented by the Architecture career, productive entrepreneurship and the improvement of facilities have been promoted to implement experiential tourism and the rescue of the community's cultural landscape. For its part, in La Merced parish, ties between the university and the community have been strengthened to promote the management of the construction of the following phases of the Multigenerational House and the materialization of other spaces such as 'Classrooms for catechesis' and improvement of community public spaces. It should be noted that the members of the neighborhood organizations of La Merced continue to seek the collaboration of the *Architecture with the Community* program for the development of new projects, which indicates the level of trust achieved through joint work. In the case of La Loma Grande, which is a neighborhood in the Historic Center of Quito, the empowerment of the neighborhood's inhabitants has been strengthened to undertake actions to rescue public space and reduce gentrification, implementing dramatized historical route projects where the *Architecture with the Community* program has contributed with the design of the dissemination material, the historical research on local architecture and the promotion of the project. For La Mariscal neighborhood, where PUCE University Campus is located, the alliance means a mutual growth in the University-Community relationship, based on the actions undertaken, the neighborhood organizations can make use of the University's facilities to carry out participatory assemblies and workshops. The municipal administration

maintains the University as its strategic partner for the implementation of neighborhood improvement projects and programs for the appropriation of public space through ephemeral interventions for the valuation of habitat. In general terms, the *Architecture with the Community* program can be evaluated as a highly positive university strategy with a strong social impact in the concerted social transformation processes based on the spatiality and quality of the habitat.

5. Conclusions

Architecture with the community has brought together the vision of the interpreter architect, the concept of raising healthy living landscapes and USR approach through SL to promote in students and teachers the social role of the profession. This program serves as an articulation between Community Management subject, Research, and Community Outreach lines of the Architecture career.

When planning projects, the differences in times and distances between academy and community should be taken into account to avoid long and poorly sustained processes. Therefore, processes, phases, and results must always be evidenced, making closings that strengthen participation. Although bureaucratic processes, both internal and external to the university can generate delays and some discomfort in the development of the projects, once they are finished, the participants feel great satisfaction with the work done and the inconveniences do not have a major influence on the final perception of experiences.

It is important to implement these practices from academic ambit as they demonstrate the social role of the profession. Socially, there is a tendency to think that architecture can only be valid when it is built, leaving aside other processes and methodologies, but when the actors realize the wide spectrum of action and the importance of generating awareness in the

habitat, improvement of the quality of life and the possibility of expressing desires through projects, changes this perception. The Community Management class has been the trigger for other subjects to get involved with SL and can show the connection with reality to build situated and pertinent proposals to social needs.

The joint participation of students and residents allowed an exchange of knowledge that reinforces the culture appreciation and the positioning of architecture as a social service, this generates learning beyond the discipline and the construction of social relationships of great satisfaction that end in a real and heartfelt appropriation of the projects. It is recommended to identify the collectives and social organizations of each sector for joint work, this helps to empower the projects and facilitates the future realization of the proposals.

For the university, it is important to maintain its links and its vocation of service to society. For this reason, it is necessary to work on the means of systematizing and evaluating each experience. However, the knowledge exchange through projects is a strength since it works from processes and in territory which generates constant feedback among the actors, in addition to raising awareness about existing realities. It is also necessary to train tutor teachers and students in methods of approaching the community to avoid impertinent or unassertive glances.

The transformation of reality will be consolidated in the long term, since it implies changing imaginaries about the relationship that one has with the landscape and with the territory. It is about respecting what surrounds us and hence the importance of generating awareness and revaluing the cultural aspects of society. All these learnings are of a formative nature and are based on long-term processes, for which, the university must invest resources and strengthen alliances with its territorial partners. The transformation processes are the co-

responsibility of all the actors involved, and the greater links and affection bonds exist, the stronger the spatial constructions and social interrelationships will be.

Ethics declaration

Conflict of interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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