



Sociology beyond the academia

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After finishing my studies in business administration, I wanted to find new ways to contribute to social improvement in my country (Mexico). Thus, in 2012 I decided to study the Master in Sociology (Research) at the University of Barcelona, which seemed to me that could give me useful insights in that regard. There I was fortunate to meet professors Ramon Flecha and Marta Soler, founder and current director of the community of researchers CREA, who taught the class of sociological theory. With them I learned about two lines of research that interested me deeply because of their potential to improve society. The first was research on Successful Cooperativist Actions, led by Ramon Flecha. The second was the research on schools as Learning Communities and Successful Educational Actions, led by Ramon Flecha, Marta Soler and other CREA researchers. In 2014 I obtained a predoctoral scholarship from the University of Barcelona to carry out doctoral studies in sociology with CREA. I was able to collaborate as a predoctoral researcher in a project on competitive cooperative enterprises of the Spanish National R&D Plan, and in a project on evaluation of the social impact of social sciences of the 7th Framework Program of Research of the European Commission. In 2016 I gave up my predoctoral scholarship and returned to Mexico to work on the transfer of the Learning Communities project to schools in my country. I refocused my doctoral research on the field of sociology of education

to study that process and its impact on overcoming social inequalities.

In Mexico there are numerous schools of social sciences that offer studies in sociology. Some of the most influential in the country belong to the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM), the College of Mexico (Colmex), or the Metropolitan Autonomous University (UAM), among many others. There are various journals on sociology in the country, among which the *Revista Mexicana de Sociología* (SCOPUS Q2), edited by UNAM, or *Estudios Sociológicos* (SCOPUS Q3), edited by Colmex, stand out. There are also sociology congresses organized by teaching associations, such as the Congress organized by the Mexican Society of Sociology (SMS) in 2019, or the XXXIII Congress of the Latin American Sociology Association (ALAS) that will take place in our country in August 2022. As a result of the global crisis due to COVID 19, in our country much of the current sociological debate focuses on describing the negative effects of the pandemic in various social areas such as work and employment, education, or gender violence. Other topics that Mexican sociology usually deals with are racism and discrimination against indigenous peoples, sexist violence and sexism, or the characteristics of democratic processes in Mexico. It should be noted that universities, journals and sociology associations in Mexico tend to have their main international ties mainly with sociologists from Latin

America and Spain. However, some Mexican sociologists also establish ties with other sociology associations abroad, such as the International (ISA) or the European (ESA) Sociological Associations.

I currently work in the field of education, specifically coordinating the transfer of the Learning Communities project to different countries in Latin America. I am hired by the Natura Institute, which is a civil organization created by the Brazilian company Natura to promote actions that contribute to the improvement of education in the countries where the company has a presence. In 2013, the Natura Institute established a collaboration agreement with CREA and the University of Barcelona to transfer the Learning Communities project to schools in six Latin American countries: Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Mexico and Peru. The network has expanded, and in recent years, schools from Costa Rica, Ecuador, Nicaragua and Paraguay have also joined the project. Always in collaboration with local organizations with experience working in education, the Natura Institute has helped more than 9,000 schools learn about and implement the Learning Communities project. In all this, my job is to coordinate the actions of the organizations that are part of the Network so that more schools become Learning Communities, and to ensure that the transfer of the project is always done respecting the original scientific basis. I also advise third parties, such as educational authorities and other civil organizations that want to learn about and promote the project in their territories. Throughout these years I have published scientific articles on the impact of Learning Communities in schools on the continent, mainly on the educational and social improvements achieved by some schools that implement the project in Mexico.

Contrary to reproduction theories that assert that the school can only reproduce oppressive relations, and to postmodern approaches that discourage social change by analyzing all educational actions in terms of power, the dialogic sociology of education has shown to contribute concepts and educational practices that are indeed useful to transform social reality from practice. Learning that education can contribute to overcoming social inequalities, but only when it is

based on scientific evidence, is one of the sociological contributions that has contributed the most to my professional activity. Specifically, knowing that there are Successful Educational Actions (SEA), i.e., practices that have been validated by the international scientific community as effective for increasing academic performance and improving social cohesion in any context where they are implemented, has been extremely helpful. SEA have been implemented in hundreds of schools around the world, and there is a large body of scientific literature that demonstrates the improvements that many of these schools have achieved. As a professional who works promoting educational interventions, knowing the SEA means that there is no need to experiment with other people's children. On the contrary, in our interventions I only suggest to the schools with which we work educational practices such as SEA, whose effectiveness has been proven in very diverse contexts. The students and families of the schools with which we work are the main beneficiaries when this type of practices is implemented, since excellent educational results are achieved as well as greater social inclusion. However, professionals who rigorously promote SEA also benefit, because the transformations that schools experience increase our own professional prestige.

For someone who works in education, it is essential to have an understanding of social phenomena such as social inequality, discrimination or gender violence due to the influence they can have on the life trajectories of students. In this sense, sociology provides relevant knowledge to understand the functioning of our societies and understand the context that surrounds educational communities. However, to be truly relevant to practice in areas such as education, sociology needs to go beyond its descriptive nature. Instead, sociology can and must go from describing reality to seeking to identify actions that, in line with the objectives democratically established by our societies, manage to transform those situations of inequality. This approach is the one currently used by some of the social science research projects that have achieved the greatest social impact at an international level, as is the case of the project *INCLUD-ED. Strategies for inclusion and social cohesion from education in*

Europe, funded by the 6th Framework Program of the European Commission. This project investigated not only which educational policies produce failure and greater social exclusion, but also which educational strategies and practices effectively contribute to overcoming social inequalities and promoting social inclusion from education. Its main scientific contributions, which are precisely the Successful Educational Actions, are being implemented in thousands of schools around the world and have served as the basis for a growing number of public policies in different countries in Europe and Latin America.

Currently, sociologists in Mexico and the world face the challenge of demonstrating that our work is socially relevant at a time when economic crises, pandemics or armed conflicts make our societies question how to distribute public resources in a way that achieves the greatest return to the population. To the extent that sociology is placed at the service of society, not only to describe social processes but also to iden-

tify actions that successfully overcome social inequalities, it will maintain its relevance for society. In the words of Dr. Marta Soler¹, professor of sociology at the University of Barcelona and director of CREA, “if society prioritizes a reduction in gender-based violence, social scientists should study this dimension, analyze it and go beyond, identifying what to do to reduce it. In doing so, we should identify the actions that have been successful in reducing gender-based violence, to find how they can be recreated in different contexts” (Soler, 2017: p. 13). Hopefully, that approach of public sociology grounded in the principles of dialogic democracy expands more and more in all areas of sociology in Mexico and the world.

Notes

¹ Soler-Gallart, M. (2017). *Achieving social impact: sociology in the public sphere*. New York, NY, USA:: Springer.

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