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La universidad intercultural mexiquense y las comunidades rurales e indígenas. Estrategias de acercamiento y experiencias de vinculación

The intercultural mexiquense university and rural and indigenous communities. Strategies of rapprochement and linkage experiences

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Resumen

El modelo educativo de la universidad intercultural tiene como objetivo la construcción del conocimiento en condiciones de equidad y diálogo con los pueblos originarios, sin embargo, debido a la carga ideológica neindigenista del modelo educativo, el enfoque teórico y las prácticas reales suelen discrepar. Por ello, el artículo analiza los modos de relacionarse de una universidad concreta, la Universidad Intercultural del Estado de México, con las comunidades indígenas de la región. Se realiza dicho análisis a través de los testimonios de una serie de protagonistas indígenas y no indígenas, involucrados en los procesos de la Vinculación Comunitaria, uno de los ejes del modelo educativo. Se concluye que la relación universidad-comunidad se caracteriza, por un lado, por la apertura de la Universidad a las iniciativas surgidas desde las comunidades incluyendo a los alumnos que de ellas proceden, pero, por otro, por una actitud modernizante que da prioridad a las nociones del desarrollo económico entendido en términos neoliberales ante la autonomía cultural del desarrollo propia de los pueblos originarios. En este sentido, ir desmitificando los discursos educativos



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hegemónicas se hace de primera importancia para asegurar la transparencia del sistema educativo y su funcionalidad en el contexto de diversidad étnica.

Palabras clave

Comunidad, interculturalidad, pueblos indígenas, universidad mexicana, vinculación.

Abstract

The educational model of the intercultural university aims at the construction of knowledge in conditions of equity and dialogue with indigenous peoples, however, due to the neoindigenist ideological load of the educational model, the theoretical approach and actual practices often diverge. For this reason, the article analyzes the ways in which a specific university, the Intercultural University of the State of Mexico, relates to the indigenous communities of the region. This analysis is carried out through the testimonies of a series of indigenous and non-indigenous protagonists, involved in the processes of Community Liaison, one of the axes of the educational model. It is concluded that the university-community relationship is characterized, on the one hand, by the openness of the University to the initiatives arising from the communities, including the students who come from them, but, on the other hand, by a modernizing attitude that gives priority to the notions of economic development understood in neoliberal terms before the cultural autonomy of the development of the native peoples. In this sense, demystifying the hegemonic educational discourses becomes of primary importance to ensure the transparency of the educational system and its functionality in the context of ethnic diversity.

Keywords

Community, interculturality, indigenous peoples, mexican university, linkage.

1. Introducción

The issue of intercultural higher education in Latin America is still an emerging and insufficiently known topic. It attracts the attention of researchers due to its high social relevance, since it is related to some of the most sensitive issues of the globalized world, such as: social exclusion, poverty, intercultural relations or cultural and collective rights, the relationship between minorities and the majority, etc. In the face of such a complex context, it is important to highlight that, in Latin America, the so-called intercultural and/or indigenous universities are far from being a homogeneous educational phenomenon; in reality they are a series of educational models that have been emerging in the continent since approximately the 1990s. In a way, all of these models are positioned against educational policies that simply attempt to include young people from ethnic groups in existing university structures. In summary, such educational models are characterized by the following:

First, they offer a type of higher education whose conception and modality can vary significantly (formal, rather informal, itinerant...). Secondly, they handle a concept of interculturality, which presents an immense semantic variation and is subjected to a range of discursive manipulations that depend on the objectives pursued. At the center of attention is the relationship between the nation-state represented by the majority society and the different ethnic groups seen as discrepant from this dominant model.

Third, it generally includes both members of the majority societies and members of ethnic groups traditionally seen as marginalized by these societies. However, the target population



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to which these educational policies are directed is usually clearly ethnic. Fourth, they maintain different types of relations with the official bodies of the countries in which they are located (for example, there are state-funded intercultural universities and others that are financially independent). Accordingly, intercultural universities may have different managers (governments, indigenous movements, etc.), a circumstance that pre-establishes what type of epistemic relationship each educational model will maintain with modern and globalized pedagogical ideology. Thus, intercultural universities are located at different points on the axis delimited at one end by clearly decolonial and epistemologically alternative positions to the Western intellectual tradition, and at the other end by what we could call neoindigenism.¹

If we focus on the first case mentioned, we can affirm that intercultural universities emerge on the periphery of Latin American societies, driven by the indigenous peoples themselves, and as such include in their projects the rethinking of existing social relations, often linked to autonomous demands and ways of life derived from the original worldviews (for example, the current of Good Living known as Sumak Kawsay or Suma Kamaña).

On the other hand, in the second case, intercultural universities promoted by national governments are understood as a kind of affirmative action (positive discrimination) that should compensate for the traditional inequity in the access of indigenous individuals to higher education. They usually operate with the concept of "educational relevance" which is equivalent to the curricular adaptation to the cultural realities of the peoples that the intercultural universities serve.

Mexico is undoubtedly the country with the most intercultural universities in Latin America. Within the framework of the National Education Plan (PNE) elaborated by the government of Vicente Fox (2000-2006), the foundation of ten universities of this type was outlined, a number that has even been surpassed. Most of them were founded by federal agencies and all receive combined federal and state funding.

The educational model of the Mexican intercultural university falls into the aforementioned neoindigenist category, for the following reasons²

- 1) It is an instrument of the state. It belongs to the Higher Education Subsystem of the National Education System, and is managed by the organism of the Ministry of Public Education (SEP) called General Coordination of Intercultural Bilingual Education (CGEIB).
- 2) It is an educational conception created from outside the native peoples. In the educational model, the native peoples appear as "attended entities", without having a decisive say in the conceptualization of the intercultural education provided to them, and without participating intellectually and actively in the practical management of the respective intercultural universities.

¹ Today, the Mexican indigenist ideology of the early 20th century (extended throughout the rest of the Latin American region) is perpetuated in the form of "neoindigenism". Neoindigenism maintains the paternalistic and welfarist attitude that characterized it in its origins, although nowadays it tends to avoid talking about direct cultural assimilation, and instead uses a more sophisticated rhetoric of "development of indigenous peoples" seen as marginalized entities that do not participate in the benefits of modern civilization (Korsbaek and Sámano, 2007).

² The following information derives from the critical reading and the discursive analysis from the educational model manual. For a more detailed information go to: Erdosova y Juarez 2017, Erdosova 2015, Erdosova 2013.



- 3) It practices a unilateral "dialogue of knowledge". The concept of the dialogue of knowledge that justifies the existence of intercultural universities prioritizes the modern Western conception of the self (success, competition, competitiveness, development, growth, progress, innovation, econocentric notion of well-being). In extension, the educational model offers training based on the conventional pedagogical structure (classrooms, teachers, knowledge exams, educational excellence, training by competencies) without giving value to the traditional mechanisms of education practiced in indigenous communities.
- 4) Seeks an idealized interculturality. The concept of interculturality used by the educational model leaves aside the socio-cultural inequalities and the imbalance of power among the actors involved in the project. In such a way that it is limited to postulate the desirability of a harmonious society of dialogue and cooperation between the cultures that make up Mexico, which are perceived as separate blocks in need of establishing communication. Likewise, by prioritizing the development (especially economic) of the areas served, intercultural universities relegate to the background the urgency of a multilateral interculturality that crosses the entire Mexican society.
- 5) It practices affirmative action. Despite admitting both indigenous and non-indigenous students, the emphasis of the educational model is placed on the former.

Derived from the above considerations, in this text we established the objective of analyzing and explaining how professionals trained by Intercultural Universities relate to the community through an intercultural strategy called Community Outreach or Community Outreach. This represents one of the main axes of the respective educational theory and is an inseparable part of the research processes, as well as of the teaching and learning processes. It should be noted that the impact on local society is the macro-objective of the educational model. The intercultural university places the link with society at the center, "not society in the abstract, but society directly" (Bastida and Albino, 2011, p. 327). To this end, the intercultural university has at its disposal the mechanism of the Link with the Community, which is determined in educational theory as follows:

Community outreach is considered as a set of activities that involves the planning, organization, operation and evaluation of actions in which teaching and research are related internally within the university and externally with the communities to address specific problems and needs. (...) The actions of linkage with the community contribute to the social, cultural and productive development of the communities, guiding not only the formative task but also the lines of research derived from the reality to which solutions will be provided. Thus, the Intercultural University fulfills its function of academic and social relevance by contributing to the solution of problems in its environment and establishing a mutually beneficial relationship between it and the community (Casillas and Santini, 2006, p. 153).

In other words, the purpose of Community Outreach is to turn the student into an active protagonist of his own reality through field work in community settings. In this way, it is considered viable to involve students with the problems of their places of origin and to orient them for the future: the professional formed by the intercultural university must have the commitment with the region (in the ideal case, he/she should return to work in his/her community of origin) to actively participate in its positive transformation.



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Community Outreach is applied in the area of research as well as in teaching. Each intercultural university is committed to generating development processes in the rural and/or indigenous areas of the respective region of impact, through two strategies. First, through the implementation of research and development projects managed by academics, in which students generally also participate. Second, through the performance of students, who acquire the necessary experience for their future profession through the specific subjects of Community Outreach (transversal axis of each degree) that involve field practices.

2. Methodological aspects

The Intercultural University of the State of Mexico (UIEM) where this research was conducted is the first intercultural university founded in Mexico (it was established in 2004). It was selected because it has a sufficiently long trajectory to assume that it has gathered abundant experience in the practical aspect of Community Outreach within its region of impact. The methodological strategy was to access this experience through the personal testimonies of a group of ten graduates, one of the former rectors and two academic workers in charge of Community Outreach practices. These testimonies were gathered through the qualitative interview technique and were complemented by non-participant observation within the scope of the UIEM and the initial bibliographic review.

Since the intention was to study the perception of the participants of the model, it was proposed to develop a qualitative type of work that would allow the collection of the voice and opinion of the interviewees to evidence the processes of the UIEM from a range of internal actors.

In the case of the graduate professionals, the group of informants that most concerns us because they are the recipients and practitioners of Community Outreach, 9 out of 10 are from the northwestern area of the State of Mexico and 1 migrated to this area from Alamo, Veracruz, at an early age. Their places of origin are: San Felipe del Progreso municipal seat (2), Emilio Portes Gil, community in the municipality of San Felipe del Progreso (1), Atlacomulco, municipal seat (1), Rincón de la Candelaria, community in the municipality of Atlacomulco (1), San Pedro de los Baños, community in the municipality of Ixtlahuaca (1), Jocotitlán, municipal seat (1), San José del Rincón, municipal seat (1) and Santa María Nativitas, community in the municipality of San José del Rincón (1).

In the communities of Emilio Portes Gil and San Pedro de los Baños, the indigenous population is in the majority, in San Felipe del Progreso it is approximately one fifth of the population, and in the rest of the localities it is below 10%; however, in all cases they are places with an indigenous presence and more rural than urban (with the exception of the city of Atlacomulco). According to these data, 7 graduates interviewed come from Mazahua (6) or Otomi (1) speaking families, although these languages are no longer the first language of the informants, and 3 are Spanish speakers who come from mestizo families.

3. Relationship between the university and local communities

As mentioned in the introductory paragraphs, the starting point for understanding how the UIEM relates to regional communities (rural and/or indigenous) is to recognize the University in its position as a provider of educational services and the communities as socio-cultural and territorial units that are recipients of this public policy of the Mexican state. It is important to highlight this fact because the language used in the educational theory of the intercultural university insists on using a multitude of concepts (interculturality, dialogue of knowledge, etc.) that give the impression that the intercultural university is a collective



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intercultural work (indigenous and non-indigenous) when in reality the educational model was not conceived, nor is it being managed through joint decision-making with the native Mexican peoples.

One of the few comments in this regard was made by Schmelkes, former director of the CGEIB, who stated that indigenous participation in the construction of the intercultural universities had been minimal (Schmelkes, 2008, p. 336). This means that the educational model establishes from the beginning a hierarchy between each intercultural university (active entity: manager) and the communities present in the respective region (passive entities: attended). Thus, in the UIEM there are academic and administrative personnel made up of both "mestizo" Spanish-speaking workers and those of indigenous origin and speakers of native languages, but in both cases their presence is limited to professionals with academic degrees, trained within the dominant educational system. On the other hand, the participation and axiological influence of indigenous community voices, for example, traditional authorities or elders, is marginal and not in a position to touch the essence of the educational model.

The above can be verified both by analyzing the official discourses, as well as by directly observing the events inside the UIEM or by reviewing the specialized literature (see for example Warnholtz, 2013). According to the opinion detected among UIEM students by Molina (2012), there is not a sufficient link between university authorities and community authorities, who are invited only to show them in public ceremonies with their traditional dress, achieving a colorful folkloric effect. In this regard, Felipe González Ortiz, the first rector of the UIEM, states the following:

The University must direct its efforts in the medium term so that it is completely in the hands of the native peoples... (...) The most optimistic achievement would be that we arrive at the generation of knowledge with different methodologies and their own epistemologies, and that come out of the thought and languages of the native peoples³

Similarly, Stefano Claudio Sartorello (2007), anthropologist and between 2007 and 2013 professor of another institution of the same educational model, the Intercultural University of Chiapas, considers that more than opening the communities to the intercultural university, it is necessary to open the intercultural university to the communities, that is, to seek a reciprocal relationship that overcomes the rhetoric of power and its conjectural political discourses. An example of such a "conjunctural discourse" can be illustrated in the words provided by the ex-rector of the UIEM, Francisco Monroy Gaytán:

(Community linkage) is something that I don't know how it started, but the linkage is very strong, I don't know if at some point we went out, but I think that in all the linkage work there was a need to work, we looked for state financing programs, we linked them with them and a network was created. And now it has been growing and I think it is consolidating more and more. (...) There has been a lot of acceptance. There is a lot of enthusiasm because what we have to work hard on is that they, the inhabitants of the communities, initiate and complete projects. It seems to me that the (Intercultural) University is highly valued among the communities, I think it has a lot of impact. And the perception, well, precisely in the work of some geographic researchers from the University of Warsaw, the first thing they told me after a field work tour was that

³ (Interview with Felipe González Ortiz, in Celote (2013, p. 158).



they felt that there was a lot of acceptance in the different communities for the University. And I think so (interview with Francisco Monroy Gaytán, rector).

This optimistic view contrasts with a more realistic comment made by Gerardo Sanchez, a communicologist of Mazahua origin, during a public event at the UIEM, which exemplifies a possible point of view of community stakeholders:

We already have a University, the University is very beautiful in terms of infrastructure and everything, but from my very particular point of view, it is now necessary to include the thought and the word of the indigenous peoples within this University. (...) I have the hope that hopefully the Mazahua will take over this University, that the thinking will really be within this University. I have commented, hopefully the University will be the seed of the Mazahua people's thinking, hopefully the great problems that the Mazahua people are experiencing will be discussed there. Hopefully the young people who are in the University will return to their communities to solve the problems, not to be part of the problem, but to solve the problems⁴.

This basic sample of the variety of discourses shows that the relationship between the Intercultural University and the regional communities is a complex and controversial issue. In order to clarify this issue from the point of view of the actors directly involved, we will now analyze the mechanisms of Community Liaison as described by the academics in charge of this area and the UIEM graduates.

4. Results. Perspectives on the reality of Community Outreach from within the UIEM.

The analyzed problem is divided into the following aspects: based on the axis called Community Outreach, the strategies used at the UIEM level towards the outside and those applied within the teaching-learning processes of the students.

In the UIEM we can identify two key projects. The first is called Social Incubator of Cultural Industries, which was created under the business incubation model supported by the Federation with the perspective of integrating into the processes of Community Linkage, promoting solidarity and local economies, and forming social businesses. The Incubator works with community producers (farmers, artisans, etc.), forming strategic alliances with the different chambers (de Negocio, Libanesa, Nacional Restaurantera), secretariats (of Economy) and groups (Walmart), and consolidating the business projects before the Ministry of Finance.

The second project, the University Tianguis, collaborates directly with the Incubator, participating in the sustainable productive projects together with the community producers, who were initially contacted by the professors of the Bachelor's Degree in Sustainable Development. The Tianguis has been held since 2011 every 15 days in the spaces of the UIEM, generating an occasion for selling, buying and bartering, where in addition to the producers involved with the Incubator, healers, midwives, etc. participate. It

⁴ *Intervention by Gerardo Sánchez of Radio Mazahua de Tuxpan during the presentation of the book El nacimiento de la primera universidad intercultural de México (by Antolín Celote Preciado), March 10, 2014, UIEM, San Felipe del Progreso.*



is also a teaching opportunity, since the students come into contact with the artisans and learn directly from them.

To learn about the ways in which the UIEM articulates with the communities through these two concrete strategies, two academics in charge, Alonso Reyes Lopez and Micheline Dorcé Donnacien, were interviewed. The interviews focused on clarifying the protagonism of the UIEM and of these communities in the process of design, management and implementation of the Community Linkage projects.

In the case of the Incubator, projects can arise from two sources: from requests from internal actors (students) or external (people from the communities or entire communities). According to Alonso Reyes López, the first incubatees were students and their parents who shared their ideas to land, such as raising sheep or rabbits; they also requested support to strengthen existing businesses. An illustrative case is that of Palmillas Plateros:

The community came forward. The 23 producers of silverware that were already consolidated, they were being supported since the 70s, but they have never had such a growth. When they arrived with us, we began to form this triple helix model, where we sought financing for them in the consolidation of organizations... Then we organized an exhibition of silver art with a cultural center and donated kilos of silver through companies to the 23 producers so that they could carry out their activity and have an exhibition and sales space (interview with Alonso Reyes López, academic).

Another possibility is that a project is formulated by the UIEM and in the form of a proposal is taken to the communities to be considered as an option by the local people. In these cases, the approach methodology consists of sensitizing the interested parties (students, parents, etc.) on entrepreneurial issues, advising them to make their ideas "come together" and making their projects possible in the institutional sphere (government agencies, organizations, chambers of commerce). In this process, there are different limitations, for example, the fact that official institutions strictly adhere to the vision of development based on profit, economic growth and competitiveness:

When we started, we did not have a theoretical and methodological approach. At the beginning we found an institution that tells you that you have to have a marketing plan, etc., so we said: "Well, the proposal is for small producers, we are with people with an average of 1.5 or 2 hectares, they produce for self-sufficiency, for self-consumption". And that began to be questioned and made it so that a project could not go through because they told us, "It's so they can sell their stuff, not consume it themselves" (interview with Micheline Dorcé Donnacien, academic).

The testimony cited above highlights the superimposition of the dominant economic perspective on local economic visions. The latter are influenced, even in the highly globalized State of Mexico, by indigenous cosmovisions and by the logic of community coexistence, in contrast to modern individualism oriented towards economic growth. Observations such as these are relevant for understanding the conceptual scope of the intercultural university's educational model, above all the concept of interculturality and the dialogue of knowledge in a position of equality. However, as can be observed in daily practice, there is a certain value disparity between traditional indigenous knowledge and modern scientific knowledge, the latter being the first inter pares.



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Now, let us turn to the experiences of alumni with Community Outreach at UIEM. At this university, each semester a subject is taught that should prepare students for field work with communities in the region. The subject of Community Liaison starts from the first semester with the objective that students begin to search for information and conduct research to reconnect with the past and present of the community, and thus achieve a kind of discovery of their own (Celote, 2013, p. 78; González, 2007, p. 73). The students choose the localities to be linked assuming that, by locating the needs of the target community, they will be maturing ideas that will later materialize in the form of a student project or a thesis.

Students can carry out fieldwork in groups or small teams. Field trips are organized with the help of a professor who has knowledge of the place and can mediate entry into the community for the students. The site may be selected by the collective decision of a work team, or also by the initiative of specific individuals, as it is possible for a student to propose his or her own community as the target of the project and even involve family members. It is also possible to do completely individual work. Then, with the support of the University, the approach is made.

To go deeper into this issue, it should be emphasized that young people from very different backgrounds study at intercultural universities. To begin with, it is necessary to mention the variant relevance attributed to higher education by the regional population, which is manifested in different types of personal attitudes. In certain sectors of the Mexican community, studies are not considered necessary to acquire goods, which is why more than half of the parents of UIEM students do not recognize the importance of university education (Silva and Rodriguez, 2012, p. 87).

In addition, the life experience of the students is far from homogeneous. Some come from municipalities or cities, and therefore the community environment may be outside their direct experience and limited to superficial and often stereotyped knowledge. But the majority of students come from marginalized localities and low-income families. The latter take advantage of the accessible location of intercultural universities, built in rural and ethnically concentrated areas, and for this sector of the population they often represent the only option for university studies. The UIEM is in the Mazahua ethnic zone and is located on the outskirts of the San Felipe del Progreso municipality. Therefore, for a large number of its students, the community is the primary socialization environment, which is a characteristic that most identifies them with the intercultural university, as Molina (2012) found precisely at the UIEM.

After graduation, the links between the alumni and the community of origin can either dissolve, or be maintained and continue to develop through the work performance of the new professional. The first situation is well documented, especially among young people of indigenous roots, graduates of conventional universities, who tend to join the formal urban market outside their places of origin. In rural communities, the fact that a young person returns to his or her place of origin may well be seen as a sign of failure, especially if he or she does not complete his or her studies. Intercultural universities seek to reverse this belief by training students to consciously engage with their villages.

Let us now review the particular testimonies of these interviewees about the Community Engagement that took place during their studies at the UIEM. The particular experience of each graduate has to do more than anything else with their previous involvement with community settings. Their perception of the fieldwork experience ranges from non-problematic experiences with the community to overtly conflictive situations. A detailed description of the respective experiences can be found in Table 1:



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Linguistic-cultural family background of the graduate	Community(ies) where the linkage was made	Summary of personal experience	Project follow-up
1. Ismael. Spanish-speaking mestizo	Rincón de la Candelaria, Atlacomulco	Diagnosis of 3 months during the 2nd semester of the degree. Positive reception in the community due to prior permission from the delegation. Local inhabitants were not familiar with UIEM, they expected to receive retribution for their collaboration in the project, there was a need to handle sensitive situations.	No
2. Yeni. Mixed Spanish speaker	Emilio Portes Gil, San Felipe del Progreso	Research on religions and their position in the community through the application of interviews. Positive reception due to the presence of a team member originally from the community, the familiarity of her father in the locality and the previous knowledge of the UIEM by the local inhabitants.	No
3. Jeri. Mixed Spanish speaker	Palmillas, San Felipe del Progreso	Research during the 1st semester of the degree on the social context of traditional medicine practitioners. Problematic reception, since the professor of the subject had not facilitated the contact with the community to the detriment of the quality of the work done. Concern of the team members about the possible appropriation of the work by the teacher led to the delivery of the final product directly to the delegation of the studied community. The opinion that most UIEM students do not show interest in sharing the fruit of the research with the communities.	No
4. Eden. Mazahuaspeaker	Jiquipilco	15-day research on the customs previously practiced in the community. Positive final reception after a period of mistrust and aggression. The opinion that the UIEM could carry out excellent projects if there was no lack of institutional support.	No
5. Norma. Mazahuaspeaker		Research during the 1st semester in the subject of Community Outreach. There were no clear agreements about the work done. During the rest of the course, the outlets were scarce. The opinion that Community Outreach was more practiced by the students of the Sustainable Development course.	No
6. Rosario. Mazahuaspeaker	San Juan Xalpa, Iztapalapa	Research during the 1st semester in the subject Community Outreach with the purpose of collecting traditional knowledge about medicinal plants. Positive reception, the inhabitants were pleased with the young people's interest in traditional medicine.	No
7. Gaba. Mazahuaspeaker		Research during the 1st semester, collecting data on a local legend. The work was done towards the end of the semester and time was scarce. Positive	No



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		reception due to the friendly attitude of the students despite their lack of knowledge of the Mazahua language, and the inhabitants' surprise at the young people's interest in the Mazahua language.	
8. Alma. Mazahuahablante	San Juan Xalpa, San Felipe del Progreso	Each semester a project was carried out in a different community (workshops, exhibitions, implementation of eco-techniques, environmental projects, elaboration of a monograph on a community that was not made public because it was unfinished). Positive reception in the community of origin, in the others the professors mediated. The UIEM was known in the adjacent communities, in the remote ones a presentation was needed.	No
9. Anayeli. Mazahuaspeaker	San Miguel Tenochtitlán, San Felipe del Progreso	Research on the history of the community through interviews with elders. Positive reception.	No
10. Griselda. Otomí speaker	Community of origin, several unspecified communities of the state	Historiographic documentation of the community of origin following an invitation to classmates. Subsequent research in various communities in the municipality (surveys on the social, cultural, economic and political situation, thesis). Both positive and negative reception, due to tensions caused by certain types of questions.	No

Table 1. Alumni's personal experiences with Community Outreach at UIEM

In the testimonies it is noted that at the beginning of the linkage, several circumstances must be taken into account: the fact that in some places the UIEM and its mission are unknown, which slows down the collaboration, the occasional lack of support from some teachers, the low interest and commitment of some students, and also the tension produced by the negative attitudes rooted in the communities, such as distrust towards any unknown person who is not a "paisana" (specifically towards upstart researchers) and the habit of receiving support and incentives (such as the lack of interest and commitment of some students):

The situation in the communities is somewhat delicate when it comes to entering, they generally expect to receive something, some support. A lot of this situation, I am sorry to say, but we owe it to our politicians, because they are the ones who deceive the people of the community when they are in some election period and never return to the community (interview with Ismael, mestizo graduate).

At the beginning, people see you as a little strange and sometimes they tend to be a little aggressive, but as you deal with them during the internship, they realize that your intentions are not bad, so they agree to your questions (interview with Eden, Mazahua graduate).

From the logic of their intercultural training, UIEM students are supposed to be equipped with certain skills (knowledge of native languages, intercultural dialogue methodology, etc.) that allow them to establish functional relationships with a community. One of the basic strategies to establish trust is to integrate into the work team a person knowledgeable



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about the place, preferably a native speaker of the local indigenous language. When the approach to the community is successful, it generally leads to enjoyable experiences:

It was easy to enter the community, since it was a team work, I was fortunate that one of my classmates belonged to the community and her father was well known in the community, so obtaining the information was no problem (interview with Yeni, mestizo graduate).

The people are kind, they let us into their house to see what kind of plants they had, they shared with us small leaves of the plants to use at home, some people even invited us to breakfast, while our conversation went on. Older people have many things to tell and it is nice to listen to them. (...) Some people were surprised that we were interested in our traditions, they were happy that we were interested in natural remedies when at that time allopathic medicine surpassed us in every way (interview with Rosario, Mazahua graduate).

Although the majority of the testimonies indicate having received a friendly welcome during their field work or having been able to develop it over time (8 out of 10), a series of limitations were also mentioned that did not allow the work to be carried out to the full. These limitations have to do with both the institutional organization and the personal attitudes of the actors involved.

Regarding the role of the University, the first issue that stands out in the testimonies is the amount of time to be dedicated to the fieldwork. In this context let us point out that according to a study conducted in 2014 (Medina and Hernández, 2014, p. 60), one third of UIEM graduates felt that not enough importance had been given to the professional practices of Community Liaison. Some testimonies from the present research support this position:

I don't remember how it was in the first semester, after that we almost didn't do it, in fact, the ones who went out to the community were the Sustainable Development students. We took the Common Core, it was like your last chance to decide what career you wanted to study, and we took a subject called Community Outreach, we did go out, but we almost never went out in the career (interview with Norma, Mazahua graduate).

This problem is evident in the unfinished projects without follow-up. This situation was pointed out by all the interviewees and shows that if the University does not provide conditions for students to develop their work continuously in a single community throughout their studies, it will be difficult to ensure a systematic and solid final result, such as a functional project or a thesis through which the knowledge gathered can be returned to the community that had provided it:

Then we did not return (to the community). The school was created a short time ago, I think that if there were support from the school, good projects would be achieved, better than those done by foreigners (interview with Eden, Mazahua graduate).

I think that the University's approach is wrong, very wrong, they are talking about how we are helping the indigenous people when it is not so. They do events to death and what good does it do? They should do real projects, start and finish or leave them in follow-up with the members of



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the community, research that is useful, that has results, that resources are lowered and that they are not lost along the way, that community help is seen (interview with Anayeli, Mazahua graduate).

The same academics in charge of Community Outreach also point out that it is difficult to keep a team of students working during the course of the degree, especially because the first practices of Community Outreach begin in the first semester (the so-called Tronco Común, which corresponds to academic leveling) when the students had not yet chosen the career and in the following semesters they follow their lines and stop coordinating with each other.

I had the case of some boys two years ago, and the girl even promoted light for her community, they wanted to appoint her as councilor of her community because she did many things in such a short time... And the commissariat proposed that she stay, that she do more for her community, but this girl said: "Hey, I am from the first semester, let me continue advancing and see what else I can do". But no, after a semester passed, other subjects were given and everyone went to their own division, the follow-up that I had was disintegrated because the girl was from another division (interview with Alonso Reyes López, academic).

In addition, not all students are motivated to leave their comfort zones. They feel that studying does not imply leaving the classroom and, faced with the discomfort of field work, they try to reduce the practices to a minimum or avoid them altogether. This has repercussions on the quality of the students' ethical conduct. They do not assume solidarity and commitment with the communities from which they extract information and do not share the final product of the work with those who had supported them in the research process (authorities, informants, guides, etc.).

The above-mentioned problem is complemented by the professional conduct of the respective teachers. In theory, the teacher is supposed to advise the students' work and mediate their first contacts with the selected communities, but in practice, not all teachers take care of these matters, which is detrimental to the quality of the students' work.:

The vast majority of the community did not even know what we were going for and I feel that the professors should have guided us on how to link people who do not have that knowledge. Now I think we could have advertised for the person we interviewed to teach courses or diploma courses or at least just classes for those interested. Anyway, now I can think of things that did not cross my mind at the time. We did the work in the first semester, so we didn't have the slightest idea of what we can do. We did not know that the field of action is very large and that we could do much more. (...) It is as if the professors here believed that in one semester you already know how to get involved with any community, since you have already learned it well. (...) We gave the work to the community delegate and to the person we constantly interviewed, whom we visited to integrate the research. That was our decision and above all our ethics because the professors did not make sure that this work would reach those involved in the community. I think that many colleagues are not interested or concerned about this, only about their qualification, and this increases the difficulties for the following generations (interview with Jeri, mestizo graduate).



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Let us point out in closing that after graduation, among the young people interviewed there is generally a positive attitude towards field work. Relating their experience with Community Outreach and work activity after graduation, we can affirm that half of them (5) have worked at some time in community settings in their respective jobs. On the other hand, the remaining 5 graduates who have not done this type of work state that they would like to do it or would not be opposed if such an opportunity came their way. This leaves favorable evidence about the social and intercultural values of UIEM graduates, although, in order to formulate more categorical conclusions, more detailed research on this aspect of intercultural higher education would have to be carried out.

5. Conclusion

The UIEM relates to the rural and/or indigenous communities of the region of impact through a series of strategies known as the Link with the Community (one of the axes of the educational theory of the Intercultural University), which consist of the articulation of institutional projects (business incubation, fair trade) and student projects within the framework of the formative processes. This relationship is manifested on the one hand in the willingness of the UIEM to be open to ideas arising from students and communities and support their realization, but on the other hand, also in a modernizing attitude that gives priority to notions of economic development (business creation, dissemination of entrepreneurial thinking in the communities) and anthropological practices of "rescue" of ancestral knowledge that are still preserved in the communities and that lead to rather superficial descriptions of mythology, traditional medicine, history, language, etc. Likewise, there seems to be insufficient feedback and exploitation of the work done by the students in the researched communities, either in terms of follow-up throughout the career or ethical commitment with the collaborating communities. Hence, interculturality and dialogue of knowledge as the key concepts of the University's educational model in practice result in an inequality of positions among the actors involved in the intercultural project.

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