

# *Psychosocial Innovation: Precisions for Psychosocial Intervention*

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The global problems that the nations are currently facing-some exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic- include challenges as diverse as political violence, the climate crisis resulting from global warming, the increase in poverty and unemployment, shortcomings in public health policies, and discrimination based on gender, race, and religion, among many others. These challenges affect all countries regardless of their level of economic development, so strategies are sought that link productive activities with social devices that address the different forms of vulnerability in communities (Menelau & Adaid-Castro, 2017).

Colombia is no stranger to the present situation, requiring skilled professionals with innovative tools to address the problems (Lyon et al., 2020). This implies the knowledge and mastery of strategies that allow the understanding of human behavioral phenomena and their implications; in particular, professionals must be able to transfer this theoretical knowledge to the people for whom such knowledge has been generated. It is in this framework that the discussion of psychosocial innovation arises.

Psychosocial innovation refers to the development and application of creative and effective solutions to address social and psychological needs or problems. This form of innovation involves the combination of knowledge, methodologies, and techniques from psychology, social sciences, health sciences, technology, and other relevant fields to

propose and implement transformations that promote the well-being and quality of life of individuals and groups (e.g., families and communities).

Psychosocial innovation can range from therapeutic interventions and emotional support programs to violence prevention strategies and promotion of social inclusion. Its main objectives are to improve mental and emotional health and promote coexistence and peaceful conflict resolution.

Psychosocial innovation is inherent to psychosocial intervention, which requires the identification of social problems or needs, whose approaches to the solution or transformation of those realities involve the affected community. This challenge implies solid disciplinary and methodological knowledge, which can be used as the means of conducting psychological work and determining the intended outcome, having as a goal the subjective, psychological, and social well-being of people in their natural context (Blanco & Valera, 2007).

These types of interventions have: (a) a planned design that recognizes social reality and scientific evidence, (b) an implementation monitored and fed back to the community, and (c) an analysis of outcomes. They also require that, as social sciences, and to achieve the social appropriation of knowledge, the implicit and explicit evaluative considerations of the historical context of the people to whom they are addressed must be taken into account (Blanco & Valera, 2007).

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Such appropriation, in turn, implies a challenge of constant construction and innovation, to come up with new solutions or expand existing ones, adjusted to the sociocultural moment of the communities. Innovation has traditionally been related to change (Barreto & Petiti, 2017); however, “innovating means transforming processes, employing creativity and ingenuity to generate new ideas and applying them to everyday life, to the development and successful launching of new products or services to the market” (Barreto & Petiti, 2017, p. 388).

According to Fonseca-Retana et al. (2016), defining innovation is a complex task. From the review of the concept, these authors identified three common characteristics of innovation: (a) the first is novelty, which refers to innovation as something new, of a radical type or a significant improvement on something existing; (b) the second is its application, practical use or commercialization, i.e., the innovation must make it clear that the invention has one of these purposes; and (c) the third, the idea, refers to the source for innovating, which is the generation of creative ideas since they are the raw material for the innovative process.

Innovation was born in response to the economic and development needs of States. The background of the concept in terms of social innovation, according to Klein (2017), is located after World War II; then the concept became popular in the 1960s and is affirmed in the works of Drucker (2014), relating to the way of generating solutions to social problems from an economic or administrative point of view.

Social innovation has also been applied to designs focused on social changes, transformations, and even revolutions that seek to improve the living conditions of vulnerable or excluded populations. Options have been put forward where innovation makes sense from a macro approach to public policies, and from micro community dynamics to society (Jessop et al., 2013). In all these cases, the aim has been to identify the role of the different actors in the changes needed to solve political, economic, and environmental problems -and what is observed in all of them, is that the transformations involve society as a whole-

Innovation has also played a relevant role in research and development (R+D) models, which were quickly transformed to include product development (R+D+I). Here, innovation becomes a central part of the relationship between researchers and the productive sector. This concept has been used as part of the core strategy to sustain investment

in science in low-resource countries and has subsequently been integrated, following extensive scientific evidence, with the inclusion of society in the equation (R+D+I+S), where basic research and industry are integrated through government regulation in the triple helix model of Etzkowitz and Leydesdorf (1995). Such elements correspond to the core of innovation processes in the knowledge society.

Subsequently, as Cavallini et al. (2016) point out, the need to expand the quadruple helix model, which includes civil society and the media, became evident, to try to close the gap between innovation and civil society. However, it is necessary to mention that the main disagreements of these modeling approaches arise because their application and development occur in countries with incommensurable levels of growth and investment in science compared to other contexts. As López-López (2020) has pointed out, they constitute distinct knowledge ecosystems that are not comparable. Despite these critiques, such models have influenced, and continue to do so within the framework of knowledge management in universities.

Therefore, changes are promoted from the person and their relationships towards society, and from society to groups and individuals. In psychosocial innovation, we start from the perspective that the design of innovation involves the use of mixed, participatory, and constructive methodologies and that the university as an institution is one of the scenarios of formation and empowerment of the multiple helixes proposed, taking into consideration the particularities of our knowledge ecosystem.

Psychosocial innovation, then, seeks to generate creative and effective solutions to social problems, based on a deep understanding of the contexts and their relationship with people. It is an approach that promotes the participation of the social actors involved in the problem, understanding that they are the ones who best know their needs and resources, and therefore, who can generate more effective and sustainable solutions.

Psychosocial innovation is based on the idea that social transformation cannot be achieved from outside communities, but must start from their own capacity to generate change. In this way, it seeks to strengthen the exercise of citizenship and empower communities to be the agents of their own development. In this regard, psychosocial innovation represents a response to the challenges posed by a globalised society in constant change, and to the need

to train professionals capable of adapting to new realities and generating innovative solutions to social problems.

Advances in the different applied fields of psychology, within the framework of the development of a dynamic and demanding society, pose challenges to the discipline that require *training for change*. In the case of Colombia, the Sustainable Development Goals of the [United Nations \(2018\)](#) are a working guide that commits a psychosocial perspective on the various objectives, as well as the dynamics related to the social and armed conflict that the country has experienced. This has generated contribution scenarios from psychology, such as those proposed by the transitional justice mechanisms that commit psychosocial innovation as a resource that contributes to the construction of a society that makes peaceful coexistence sustainable.

In a country like Colombia, where mental health demands and social problems are the main objectives for the political reconstruction of the social fabric, the social and human sciences are the disciplines that can contribute to the understanding of the human experience of these problems, individually and collectively, participating in the deep understanding thereof in contemporary society. In other words, the appropriation of psychological modeling and social methodologies is required for the approach of knowledge, which contribute to the innovation of programs, services, and projects in the contexts of coexistence and peace, and human development and quality of life; at the same time, they promote the social appropriation of knowledge and the effective transfer of the resulting solutions to the population that is the object of psychosocial innovation.

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