University and Community Relations: Analysis of the Community Engagement of the University of the Free State (UFS) from the Capability Approach

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Abstract

In Southern countries, there are substantive experiences of integration of the university with the community, through community engagement. Such is the case of the University of the Free State (UFS), which managed to curricularise community engagement by incorporating service learning into their degree programmes in 1997. Public universities take on challenges to overcome the demanding task of consolidating the third function and tackling financing constraints, excessive managerialism, competitiveness and the institutional culture of the non-recognition of work with communities and budget allocation. For this to be possible, new research explaining how community engagement contributes to society must be produced. This paper presents the results of research conducted in the second semester of 2015, with the aim of understanding the contribution made by the community engagement of the UFS, with the aid of the capability approach. This research is of a descriptive and explanatory nature, based on the review of secondary sources and the application of two qualitative techniques, interviews and participatory observation. Special emphasis was given to the social information provided by primary and secondary sources, taking the service learning activities of the Bloemfontein Campus as a case study. The objective was to understand, from the capability approach, how community engagement generates institutional changes that favour those involved and explore the results deriving from this action, mainly in students and local actors. To address the analysis of capabilities, reference was made of the Professional Capabilities Index; with the values, knowledge and skills to provide services to society developed by Walker and Mc Lean (2013). As a result, the capability approach allowed the development of the analysis of the results of service learning, and to make visible the potential of the positive impact on the mid- and long term, towards the creation of opportunities to generate capabilities and the potential broadening of the participants’ functionings. It was possible to document and understand the potential of the service learning contribution to beings (values, principles, desires, affection, and emotions) and doings (knowledge, skills, abilities, and actions), mainly of the students and the community.

Keywords:
community engagement, service learning, human development, higher education

Category: Young scholar

1. Introduction

One of our main concerns is that economic liberalism and globalization are gradually constraining the autonomy to define public policies regarding areas of deep relevance, such as education, culture, health, and social security. Sousa Santos (2005) calls to reflect on the weakening of institutional governance, the privatization of public services, and the commercialization of the universities, mainly as a result of the contradictions and pressures of capitalism, the efficiency and productivity criteria, and the loss of security on State financing.

Nowadays, higher education faces obstacles to carry out the appropriate order of its priorities and university policies (Boni and Gasper, 2011), as well as the orientation of three basic functions: teaching, research and community engagement. It constrains the usage of its potential for social change and its function as a multiplier agent of the generativity of people and communities (Boni and Walker, 2016). This research focuses on the third main function of higher education, known in South Africa as community engagement, which is integrated to teaching and research. According to Erasmus and Albertyn (2014), this concept is internationally related to terms such as social action, extension, civic commitment, interaction with the community and, precisely, community engagement. It is related to the interactions with external groups, to the development of knowledge and exchange, skills, and resources.

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1 Currently a student for the Master's in Development Cooperation at the Universidad Politécnica de Valencia; advisor on university extension projects to the Vice-rector at Universidad Nacional, Costa Rica.
for the development and safeguarding of society as such (Osman and Petersen, 2013, p. 231). In 1997, the University of the Free State (UFS) achieved its integration to the degree curriculum through service learning. The UFS regulation offers several possibilities, appropriately defined, to develop the relation with the community (UFS, 2006). These include different modalities, from freer research relations in the community, through non-formal educational processes and workshops, and voluntary service, to a more structured work that is the result of the integration of service learning into the formal curriculum. The study is about the service learning actions that are carried out at the Bloemfontein campus, where is the community engagement component with the most UFS information. It intends to review its institutionalization and to recover the voices of the actors involved, through interviews and observation at the various fields of the several actors of community engagement: students, professors and academic management personnel, and organization representatives of the third sector, that belong to non-profit organizations that show interest, commitment and disposition to be knowledge partners with the University (Erasmus and Albertyn, 2014). The purpose is to explore how higher education, through community engagement, broadens the opportunities for participants to be able to access new freedoms which will allow them to expand the possibilities to reach valuable achievements to accomplish the life they wish to have. Therefore, it fosters individual changes that encourage people to begin positive actions on behalf of themselves or of other individuals and groups, and it is a freedom multiplier for people through the promotion of knowledge, skills and values that contribute to human development. Because of this, we look at the evidence of the achievements of the universities for the community should provide a framework for reflection about the role that universities have and must sustain and strengthen in time. Consequently, this research aimed to understand the contribution made by the UFS through community engagement to the human development of the actors involved, from Sen’s capability approach.

2. Case Study Description

2.1. UFS: Service Learning Background

The UFS was founded in 1904; it is one of the oldest universities in South Africa. Its main campus is located in the city of Bloemfontein, which is situated between Johannesburg and Cape Town. Bloemfontein, South Africa's judicial capital, is in the Free State province. It has an area of 6.263 square kilometers and about 600,000 inhabitants. The University has seven schools and approximately 31,000 students distributed between its three campuses: Bloemfontein, Qwaqwa and South Campus, where it serves the 84%, 13% and 3% of the students, respectively. In the years when South Africa was going through a political transformation, with the beginning of the new democracy and the post-apartheid reconstruction agenda, the transformation of education started as well (Preece et al., 2015). As a result, in 1997, community engagement was included in higher education through a series of national regulations and new accountability structures, established by the Department of Education (DOE) and the Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC) that belongs to the Council on Higher Education (CHE). In addition, service learning was included in order to contribute to the reflection and adaptation of new local contexts and their realities (Hatcher and Erasmus, 2008). Although the learning service model was based on the United States experience, where it is oriented to developing civic values in society, in South Africa it responds precisely to the State command of society

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2 According to Hatcher and Erasmus (2008), the concept of service learning has gained importance since its appearance in the early 1990s. It is used in several countries such as the United States, Australia, Egypt, Ireland, Japan, Mexico, South Korea and South Africa.

3 In the institutional scope, there are three clearly delimited academic spaces (UFS, 2006), namely, Category A: Community service, which includes academic research programs and service learning (optional modules); Category B: specialized academic services provided to the community, which includes research and community development projects; and Category C: participation and volunteer extracurricular interaction actions with the community.

4 The Centre for Research on Higher Education & Development (CRHED) is located at Bloemfontein campus. Its objective is to contribute to social justice and the elimination of inequalities in higher education. Its research areas are engaged in social welfare, agency formation (creating human capabilities) and reducing poverty in society. The following subject is part of its doctoral degree programs: Service Learning Contribution to the Education, Social Work, and Nursing Schools in the UFS. The present case study has been included in this Project and received the appropriate collaboration for its production.

5 Although South Africa was declared a Republic in 1961, it was only in 1994 that the first democratic election based on popular vote took place.

6 The initiative under the direction of the Joint Education Trust (JET), financed by the Ford Trust, which was made up by the main companies in South Africa, allowed the spreading of service learning in South Africa (Lazarus et al., 2008) intending this activity to be deliberate vis à vis the academy.
transformation and is intended to achieve results in the students’ knowledge. It is considered a means to nurture social responsibility and achieve reconciliation and a reduction of the deep inequalities wielded during the apartheid (Hatcher and Erasmus, 2008). During the second stage of the work, between 1999 and 2005, the Community Higher Education Service Partnerships (CHESP), developed a process in order for the South African universities to be able to conceptualize and carry out community service as a basic function of the academy. For this, they developed processes in order to generate institutional policies and strategies, and a great number of educational modules for professors and students.

In 1997, with the publication of the White Paper, the debate about the participation of community engagement in universities as an essential element of teaching and research was deepened. It was the impetus for the comprehension of processes such as community services, knowledge-based community service, community engagement and scholarship of engagement and the different combinations resulting from the encounter of teaching, research, service, commitment and the community, that can be seen in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Kinds of community engagement in South Africa

Source: Lazarus et al. (2008), adapted from Bringle (1999)

3. Theoretical Framework

3.1. Human Development and Capability Approach

Human development is a process by which the opportunities of people are broadened to achieve “a long and healthy life, access to education and the enjoyment of a decent life” (UNDP, 1990, p. 33). The changes in the concept of development that took place since 1970 with the development processes based on basic needs, have encouraged a people-focused approach. The United Nations Development Program (UNDP) widened the approach created by Sen, by including it in the 1990 Human Development Report (HDR), including socio-environmental aspects based on the fact that “the true wealth of a nation resides on its people” (UNDP, 1990, p. 31).

In Sen’s capability approach, the human being is the means and the end of development, and economic aspects are a means to achieve the objectives. Education, or the acquisition of knowledge, is acknowledged as a generator of basic opportunities to access other development options, where a balance between the formation of human capabilities and the use that people give to these acquired abilities on behalf of others is required. According to Robeyns (2003), provides a regulation framework that allows the assessment of individual wellbeing, of social arrangements, of the design of policies and proposals for social change, and the development of people. The approach includes all the dimensions of human wellbeing, not allowing it to be reduced to utilitarian terms or to just one component, since historically it has been linked only to economy.

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7 According to Lazarus (2008), the first community engagement policy in UFS was created in 2002 through a participatory and inclusive process that lasted about a year and a half; in 2006 the University Council approved its second version, whose input will be used in this research. Both are intended to focus the relevance of the link of community engagement with teaching, citizens and research, which will ensure integration with the community.

8 The approach addresses in an integral and integrated way the subjects of development, welfare, and justice, as well as the economic, social, political, and cultural dimensions of life, and is focused on the information that allows judgment.
Sen (2000) introduces *freedom* as the starting point of the capability approach, and defines it as the object of development. The evaluation under this approach is focused on the study of the social benefits, human wellbeing, and anything that will allow people to live a prosperous life, beyond the wealth, consumption, and income patterns. It is understood that the deprivation of freedoms is expressed in terms of poverty and lack of economic or political opportunities (Sen, 2000). Human freedoms or capabilities allow people to decide the kind of life they want, in order to do and be whatever they want. With freedom, people can decide in an informed way to act and to be able to shape their own ideas and decide the kind of lives they want to live9 (Robeyns, 2003).

Capabilities and functionings are two key concepts for this approach. According to Sen (2000), *functionings* or ways of functioning are the things that a person evaluates doing or being, or those forms of *being* and *doing* that people evaluate and are willing to do. Functioning is an *achievement* and ability is the *freedom* to accomplish functioning. *Capabilities* are the combinations of functioning that a person can achieve; they are the freedom to choose the way of life they want to live. For Robeyns (2003), both concepts are closely related, because the ability involves a set of functioning vectors that the person has been able to choose, within other possibilities. Ways of functioning are related more to the person's life conditions and the capabilities of their freedom notions. Wellbeing freedom is the set of capabilities a person has, and its functioning is measured in terms of their wellbeing achievements. *Wellbeing* is equivalent to the sum of the personal wellbeing achievements and the solidarity to help others10.

Nussbaum (2002) contributed to this approach results from the identification of the main human capabilities. It emphasizes the need of having a basic social minimum of capabilities for a decent life that promote what “people are really capable of doing and being”. From their capabilities, people will be able to choose what they value and pursue their own goals. These main human capabilities are: life, body health, body integrity, senses, imagination and thought, emotions, practical reason, affiliation, taking care of other species, play, and control over their own environment (both political and material). The evaluation of policies, or the social processes on behalf of people, requires researching about the obstacles that prevent participants from widening their capabilities and benefiting from their freedoms. To study the social limitations that influence and restrain the outcome or the social impact of an action or policy, in this case community engagement also provides inputs for decision-making. Therefore, it is necessary to analyze the personal, social and environmental conversion factors that exert influence on people so they can turn opportunities (or freedoms) into real ways of functioning. According to Robeyns (2013), the personal conversion factors are related to a physical and psychological condition such as values, attitude and skills. The social factors are related to the framework of political, institutional and social regulations; for example, a legal framework, budget, and institutional incentives. Finally, the environmental factors are linked to geographical aspects and environmental, cultural or security conditions, such as the distance between communities.

### 3.2. Sen's Capability Approach and Higher Education

Public universities in countries of the South, such as South Africa, have a significant role in society. This role requires that the university accomplish a permanent engagement with the knowledge of external partners (Erasmus and Albertyn, 2014). Through teaching and researching, the development of knowledge is promoted; and through community engagement the participants discuss, interact, and work together on behalf of the academical processes to converge with the social reality and contribute to meet the requirements of the communities.

Communication and interrelation function with society are closely related to Nussbaum’s (2002) idea of contributing in order for all the members of society to have opportunities to develop the main human capacities, as part of the shared responsibility that all public organizations need to assume with the most vulnerable people. This dialogue and bidirectional relationship of knowledge exchange that results from community engagement encourages local development, through new learning, and nurtures the university. It is based on complementing scientific knowledge with popular knowledge, with the participation of students and professors11.

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9 For example: "Taking part in a discussion with partners, critical thinking about society, being informed, having an ethical disposition, having good friendships, being able to understand the plurality of perspectives about a subject" (Boni, Lozano and Walker, 2010, p. 3).

10 Even though we will not examine agency, this term is key and is related to the ability of being an agent of change. Robeyns (2003) explains it as that kind of personal well-being (including help to other who help us feel well with ourselves), which is added to the commitment of an action that is beneficial for the person being developed (that is, to other people).

11 A few examples can be described in the development of participatory research projects applied to specific social issues, local diagnosis and planning, retrieval of popular history and identity, tackling socio-economic and environmental issues, and the creation of new methodologies for social management, among others.
According to Boni (2013), education has a relevance of a multidimensional character and cannot be reduced only to the development of useful competencies for the job market. Therefore, a contribution needs to be made to widen the set of capabilities the students have, to favor self-esteem, understanding, and participation levels, which can be promoted through a dialogue process with the community. On the same dimension, Walker and McLean (2013) consider that universities need, during the educational process of the professionals’ transformation, to achieve disposition, knowledge and skills to perform and develop actions in the interest of people who live in poverty.

The main contributions to the comprehension of the capability approach and the universities, which are used in this research, were proposed by Walker and McLean (2013). It was developed from the combination between the capability approach and literature on the ideal type of professionalism. In this research, various representatives from non-governmental organizations (NGO’s), students, teachers, and agents of five professional fields from three universities in South Africa participated through interviews and discussions. This allowed us to obtain an index that will facilitate the discussion concerning the way in which universities create transformations in their students and manage them to develop actions on behalf of the poor (Walker and McLean, 2013). According to the authors, this index provides an evaluation space to analyze the public good of education and professional practice through eight desired professional capabilities (Chart 1), as goals of professional education, considering the set of educational arrangements. According to this, history and the sociocultural, political and economic context are factors that constrain or potentiate the development of the targeted functioning and the professional capabilities.

Chart 1. Capabilities index for desired professionals, with values, knowledge and skills to provide services to the society

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Professional capabilities</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Informed vision: comprehension on how the historical and socioeconomic context of cultural and political structures influence people’s lives and the practice of their profession.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Knowledge and skills: to apply specialized knowledge on the professional field based on informed vision. Human, cognitive, intellectual, and project management skills, among others.</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Affiliation: successful social work in building relationships with people with different profiles. Equal respect, social transformation and empowerment of people.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Resilience: Cope with sufferings from the past; overcome daily obstacles, create ideals, motivation and persistence to achieve success in time.</td>
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<tr>
<td>6. Emotional reflexiveness: personal change to obtain the work skills to promote social transformation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Integrity: Ethical and honest behavior. Have the courage to uphold what is correct.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Security and confidence: about his/her professional role, his/her ability to widen the agency and contribute with change.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Educational arrangements

- **Department level**: transforming curriculum, appropriate pedagogy, and an inclusive department culture.
- **University level**: to have a transforming environment and culture, to be critical, deliberative and responsible, socially committed.

Source: Developed from Walker and McLean, 2013

Boni and Walter (2013) emphasize that higher education should become a teaching and learning space that creates a real difference in the life of young people from all origins and to create opportunities for women and members of the working class. In addition, universities need to integrate, as much as possible. Soussa Santos (2010) calls the university role of to contribute to the construction of national projects and the creation of long-term critical thinking. Therefore, we consider essential that some of the contributions of the university on the basis of social engagement are clarified, in order to increase their value and become stronger in time.
4. Methodology

This research is positioned from the constructive-interpretative paradigm, oriented towards the comprehension of relationships between the university and society on the basis of action, significance and interactions with the various actors involved. In addition, it is descriptive and explanatory, seeking the comprehension of the contribution of the UFS, on the basis of community engagement, to the human development of the participants. We want to understand, based on the capability approach, how the practice of interaction and dialogue with the community is a benefit for people, and reveal some of the main factors of its development. To achieve the objective we ask two research questions: First, does service learning contribute to broaden the capabilities of the persons involved? And, what are some factors (personal, social, and environmental) that contribute to or limit the development of service learning and its contribution to human development?

In order to develop a critical comprehension of the contribution of community engagement from the capability approach, the qualitative approach was taken into consideration as a means to pick up and analyze data. According to Babbie and Mouton (2001), qualitative data are useful for studies that are intended to understand the opinions and perceptions that are significant for people in a specific area. A case study applied to the UFS was carried out, through the review of documents and through interviews and observations.

According to Corbetta (2007), both the interview and the participative observation allow data collection by asking questions or watching the subjects, in order to know their perspective. To obtain empiric data we use these techniques, seeking to know the individuality of the person, their way of seeing the world and understanding the social reality, and the mental categories which they use to interpret, perceive, feel, and act regarding what is being studied. What we wanted was to “access [on previously selected persons], if not the deep psyche, at least the emotions and feelings world [...] , to their most genuine thoughts” (Corbetta, 2007, p. 361).

The research was developed in four stages, as shown in Chart 2. The first one was the review of documents and participative observation in different activities at the Nursing, Humanities, and Occupational Therapy Schools, at the Faculty sessions and in discussion groups at the CRHED. In the second stage we applied semi-structured interviews, and finally, in the last stage, we tabulated and analyzed data, and then presented and socialized the results. In order to encrypt the information a deductive process was followed, based on theoretical criteria, once the capabilities of the desired professional were stated. The last stage of results analysis included the research socialization in congresses related to studies of development and human development.

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12 With the Nursing School, we went to Springfontein to attend three sessions with the community as part of an activity on the first year of the course, where we shared with a family of black people made up by an adult woman, an elderly woman, and a 6-year old boy; with significant socio-economic constraints. We shared with them in three activities carried out by the Nursing and Occupational Therapy Schools along with the ROC Trust, and one activity intended to address school problems by the Humanities students at marginal schools located in the surrounding areas of Bloemfontein. While five activities were recorded, each one includes a number of work sessions and evaluation processes and the reflection of the students about the processes in the classroom.

13 Before developing this research, as a starting point, we carried out a basic reflection about the ethical considerations and the personal bias of the research.
5. Summary of Results and Discussion

5.1. Findings in Reports and UFS Specific Policy
At UFS, one of the central pillars for operationalization and development of community engagement has been the approval of Policy 06.1, in 2006. This policy was created in order to achieve the combination of the academic experience and the UFS resources to mutual benefit services for the community (UFS, 2006). Through these actions, the UFS intends to contribute to South Africa’s development, recognizing the need to have the appropriate open systems and forms of knowledge. This is about a well-defined, specific regulation, which allows them to have access to the conceptual, methodological support and the management strategy, as well as the development of community engagement. The transformation of higher education as related to the society is valuable for the UFS. And along with this policy, their purpose is to reach it through democratic participation and diversity, as ways to eradicate inequalities, keep an ongoing search of answers from research, teaching, learning, and study plans to face the socio-economic challenges and an increasingly cooperation in partnerships with society (the community, as well as the public and private sectors).

Regarding the 2011–2013 reports, UFS has annually developed an average of 60 service learning modules, with the participation of 77 professors and more than 3200 students, reaching approximately 80,000 active service hours related to NGO’s and communities. This service provides a number of opportunities in order for all the participants to broaden their possibilities or options to increase their knowledge, values and skills to carry out the life they really want to live.

Both the texts of the policy and the reports show words, phrases and descriptions and a broad range of services, activities and actions that echo the ideas of human development and that can be related to the values of well-being, participation and empowerment, equality and diversity, and sustainability. However, in the last UFS two five-year strategical plans, the community engagement subject is almost completely absent, reflecting a gap and a contradiction the UFS has in certain areas.

5.2. Contribution to Broadening Professional Capabilities
This study finds a great richness in the contribution of service learning to potential capabilities (freedoms) for the participants. These findings related to the professional capabilities identified by Walker and McLean (2013) are the following:
a) Informed Vision
The professors reflect about the teaching-learning process and the relevance of knowledge linked to social reality. This experience allows the students to understand the relevance of knowledge when developing communication with society. We found that they accomplish acquisition of knowledge and learning tools from the social reality and make decisions in a sensitive and informed way. In the service learning module, students start a research that includes dialogue and active listening intended to achieve a common objective from their studies and their community. In Springfontein, a number of activities and a close and horizontal communication with people are taking place. The students achieve the analysis of ethical and legal issues in their area, the understanding of the priorities of the families and the creation of options to solve basic needs problems for the population. In addition, links with other organizations and institutions are promoted in order to integrate new actions to address the needs, and this allows to increase their ability to convey their messages through games, songs, dances, and outdoor dynamics. This also encourages the participants to generate identity, ownership and group cohesion, and to broaden and increase the flexibility of their points of view regarding teaching/learning. They also achieve progress intellectually, through the production of publishable documents.

b) Knowledge and Skills
The promotion of learning that encourages the acquisition and strengthening of skills is one of the capabilities mentioned by all the people interviewed. Service learning creates for the students a series of freedoms that benefit their academic and humanistic preparation to occupy social roles in the future. The potential of the acquisition and strengthening of values that encourage the integrity of people is increased. In order to successfully complete the service learning model, they should be able to take over tasks and encourage values such as responsibility, solidarity, tolerance, justice, service, respect, cooperation, empathy, initiative, punctuality, communication and planning, among others. The interviews highlight the significance of developing coordination skills, organization, and community activities management.

After 7 years of joint work with the ROC Trust, its employees value mainly the updating processes as enriching capabilities for the work and personal scope, which also encourages the organization to carry out their mission in the best way possible.

c) Affiliation
Some concerns for the participants are the loneliness of homes, schools and communities, the lack of real possibilities to change their life condition, and the reduced social support that poor people experience. They understand the relevance of promoting actions that arise from the members of the community. From the academical sector, this engagement space with society is considered a mechanism for students to develop sensitivity towards those who are most vulnerable. Once the affective links with communities are created, the students feel a great commitment, and they strive for actions to arise, and communities are thus able to fulfill their expectations. A genuine interest and a great satisfaction for contributing with their knowledge is noted.

d) Resilience
This is one of the capabilities that became more difficult to identify in the statements of the persons who were interviewed. However, we established its relationship to other abilities. In the service learning process, the student broadens, mainly, the informed vision, that fosters critical analysis of reality with the use of theory and the understanding of social challenges. We have also seen how the knowledge and researching and communication skills are increased, and this allows them to strengthen confidence and to become aware of their weaknesses and strengths. By being capable to discuss with other people, share knowledge, train and learn, they are also able to improve their self-help abilities. Some, for example, strengthen their values, their self-esteem and the determination to overcome their own fears and tear down their own barriers in language, communication, and leadership. We find statements such as these:

e) Social and Collective Struggle
Through the creation of affective links, students are able to decrease social inertia, as well as to acknowledge the call to serve and to contribute to society on the basis of their knowledge. Some of them even develop activities to provide an answer to social needs. Their commitment causes their action to go beyond the academical objectives, and they ask themselves why are there so many reports and a very tight schedule, resulting in not having enough time. The community is also satisfied with the outcome of the students’ participation and how the aspirations of the NGO’s that interact with them are renewed.

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14 For example, access to good quality food, health, work, education, decent housing and entertainment.

15 The official languages in South Africa are: Afrikaans, English, Ndebele, Sesotho, Sesotho Saleboa, Setswana, Suazi, Tsonga, Venda, Xhosa and Zulu.
f) Emotional Reflexivity
Some of the achievements that are easily seen from the students are related to personal conviction, sensitivity and confidence to contribute towards social transformation. Their inner personal encounter with emotions, with affectiveness and the valuable learning balance for the community are also highlighted in the interviews. Facing the local reality also promotes inner changes concerning the unknown conditions, which will not be accepted without having a previous experience.

g) Integrity
Although the students wish to finish their course to occupy a job position and earn a salary that will fulfill their needs, service learning promotes the development of generic competences they need to exercise their profession from an ethical, more social, and more human perspective (Professor_5). They are a means of promotion to nurture their sense of responsibility, service and solidarity with other people and serving in a more balanced way. It is also an opportunity to differentiate an ability-generating process in the participants from efforts based on assistentialism, charity and generating dependancies. Professors emphasize the creation of an honest and clear relationship with the community. They even warn the students so they do not feel motivated by emotions to provide assistentialism or to create false, unsustainable expectations among the groups and families they are working with.

h) Security and Confidence
Regarding the ability for security and confidence, we found that the students value applying the knowledge acquired during their courses. In this regard, they recognize the value of the experience of interacting with the communities in order the achieve communication and the application of knowledge. According to the evidence, it is possible to state that service learning benefits the actors who are involved, in order for them to obtain and strengthen their confidence and values for an accountable citizenship and more concerned for their own and others' welfare.

5.3. Conversion Factors Linked to Community Engagement
The techniques used allowed us to identify some factors that favor or limit the capabilities and forms of functioning on the basis of service learning. We will refer to some of them in this section. The personal transformation factors are very heterogeneous and their analysis requires a deeper study. In the case that was analyzed, we found the relevance of its socialization and communication abilities that determine the level of rapidity to achieve dialogue with the communities. Their capacity for applied analysis is increasing. They are able to draw theoretical information and adapt it to the context according to what the community demands and, given South Africa's reality, the mastery of local languages is vital. There are multiple factors linked to the intra- and interpersonal aspects that are also decisive, for example, the ability to interact with others, their own emotional life, values, the level of sensitivity towards other people’s problems, confidence and self-esteem, among others.

Regarding social factors, we found that the UFS establishes to a large extent the achievements in this area. The availability of the policy and the institutional budget allow the relationship with the community through financing service learning, providing human resources, infrastructure, technology, transportation, logistics, etc. The academic basis of curriculum, disciplinary integration, reflection at the classroom, and research have a great influence on the actions, as well. The community establishes factors that determine rhythm and synchronization in relationships, with its traditions, social standards, acceptance and openness to enhance dialogue between popular and scientific knowledge. There are institutional arrangements to integrate the community and fulfill social requirements, such as the creation of partnerships with NGO’s. Students claim the need of a pedagogical dynamic that allows them to develop their creative ability with actions along with the communities 16. They consider that the tightness in the schedule for research reports and the short time to interact with the community during the module limits their possibilities to act and to work with the community. The professors also state their interest to broaden the time for interaction with the community, but budget restrictions prevent this.

There are other factors involved, also linked to the institutional culture 17, related to the comprehension and weight of community engagement in the educational process and institutional objectives, that determine the way and the presence of the UFS in the community. Regarding environmental matters, they strongly interfere with culture and the security conditions where the processes take place, the distance of the communities they are working with, the access restrictions and the availability of conditions, spaces and time for its development. Although language is an obstacle to communicate in the classroom, where English is the most used language, having mastery of the local languages is a

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16 From the discussion group observed on August 14, 2015 and all the field observations.
17 Organization culture refers to “the habits and practices of the organization, its rules (written or not) that influence the behavior of the people of the organization and from those who relate to them” (Lozano, 2012, p. 79).
strength for some students, since this allows them a better communication with the members of the community and the understanding of their problems, which benefits mediation when seeking a solution for their problems.

A variable that weakens the relationship between the university and society is the limited academic comprehension of the scope and possibilities of service learning towards the society. Schalkwyk and Erasmus (2011, p. 64) describe it this way: “Although a broad consensus has been reached that the service provided by the students must be relevant and significant for their community, their main concern still tends to gravitate towards the achievement of specific learning results for the students”. These same authors have found that the community has been exposed to negative situations, produced by the feeling that they are not able to communicate on the same level with the teachers and students (verticalness) and find, in turn, attitudes of impatience or irritability.

The community also expects from the students that they have a full mastery of theory. One of the difficulties with first-year students is that they do not yet know many of the concepts and do not have any experience. On the other hand, the time spent with the community is a factor claimed by both the students and the community. The concern for staying with the community is also related with the terms of the projects with external financing, which are usually short (Preece et al., 2012).

The lack of information and the assistentialist culture have taken root in the communities; people have the expectation that the university will provide grants, houses, infrastructure and material help. They are not aware of the internal limitations the universities have, or their inability to provide transportation services, causing the students to travel in their own cars, with their own resources. To this one must add the challenges they face to reach the communities, such as distance, rural roads in bad conditions, and insecurity, especially in some communities with restricted access.

6. Conclusions and final reflections

This research allowed us to find a series of evidences about the positive contribution from service learning to human development of the participants and the academic and social relevance for the universities to include it in their curriculum and their actions towards the community. The capability approach has allowed the development of the analysis of the results of service learning, and to make visible the potential of the positive impact on the mid- and long term, towards the creation of opportunities to generate capabilities and the potential broadening of the participants’ functions. This approach has made it possible to document and understand the potential of the service learning contribution to beings (values, principles, desires, affection, and emotions) and doings (knowledge, skills, abilities, and actions) of the students and the community. There is an institutional legal framework that supports it, and the relationships with society show a close engagement with the human development values.

If individual freedom is a basic principle in the capability approach and we link it to the UFS, on the basis of community engagement, we will find a wide set of opportunities of being and doing (freedoms) in the participants. However, in the end, the participants will decide which opportunities (skills, knowledge, and spaces) they will use in their life (ways of functioning), it is important that the university provide this possibility. This is particularly advantageous, due to social justice, for those community actors who have not had the opportunity to study at the university and for the new generations who wish for higher education levels in the future. Adapting Robeyns’s (2003) statements to our area of study, it is imperative for the participants in community engagement to maintain the possibility of broadening their set of freedoms or valuable opportunities (capabilities) in order to live the kind of life they want for themselves, to be able to do what they want to do, and to be the person they want to be. Once the participants actually have these meaningful opportunities, they can choose the options they value the most.

This research also finds strong arguments about the social and academic potential of service learning. This mechanism has been achieved by including community engagement in the curriculum, through academic credits included in the degree study program, which allow the integration of teaching and research with services and dialogue activities with the community. This process promotes the academic learning of the students through the care of needs identified in the community and the reflection and critical understanding of social reality. Individual results are heterogeneous, broad and diverse, where the common thread is related with personal awareness and the development and strengthening of knowledge, skills and social values.

According to the analysis, there are outstanding arguments about the contribution towards the eight capabilities of the desired professionals, stated by Walker and McLean (2013). Both the conditions in which the community engagement policy was approved and its development through service learning provide a series of evidence that allow to state that the third function can significantly contribute to human development.

In the institutional scope, the UFS has important challenges. Some of them are the result of the pressures exerted on the university, which are experienced by the professors and the leaders who
allow the relationship with the community. Some factors that undermine its exercise are a result of the lack of institutional priorities, the marginalization of the third function regarding the other two functions, and the low acknowledgement and academic valuation of this function. This is an obstacle, to a large extent, to the impact and potential contribution to the human development of the participants. Regardless of the limitations, in the UFS the third function remains in force and with mid-term consolidation expectations. The service learning action is highly qualified and is a significant benefit to broadening the freedoms and the achievements of all participants, and it is therefore a true example for higher education worldwide.

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