

A Review of the Anglo-Saxon Concept of Public Engagement and its Functional Equivalence to the ones of *Extensión* and *Vinculación con el Medio*

Una revisión del concepto anglosajón *public engagement* y su equivalencia funcional a los de *extensión* y *vinculación con el medio*

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Abstract

The relationship between universities and society has a long history in Chile, through the function of *extensión* and more recently, through *vinculación con el medio* (public engagement). Despite having a long tradition at the practical level, this function has rarely been developed as an area of academic research. In addition, when looking for publications on this topic in the English literature, the obstacle is the absence of linguistically equivalent concepts, which hinders the dialogue between both contexts. Through a literature review and a discussion of the translation process, this article argues, firstly, that it is not possible to establish a conclusive distinction between the concepts of *extensión* and *vinculación con el medio*. Secondly, that the English language concept of community or public engagement is functionally equivalent to those of *extensión* and *vinculación con el medio*. It thus aims to contribute to the debate and reflection on the meaning and importance of this university function in Chile and Latin America, as well as including these experiences in the international debate about the “engaged university”, bridging a dialogue between the Latin American and English language context.

Keywords: public engagement, community engagement, civic engagement, university extension, Latin America

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Resumen

La relación de las universidades con la sociedad tiene una larga historia en Chile, a través de la función de extensión y más recientemente, de la vinculación con el medio. A pesar de una vasta experiencia a nivel práctico, este tema ha sido escasamente desarrollado como un área de investigación académica. Por otra parte, a la hora de buscar publicaciones referidas a esta materia en la literatura anglosajona, se encuentra el obstáculo de no existir conceptos lingüísticamente equivalentes, lo que dificulta el diálogo entre ambos contextos. A través de una revisión literaria y una discusión acerca del proceso de traducción, el presente artículo argumenta, primero, que no es posible establecer una diferencia concluyente entre los conceptos de extensión y vinculación con el medio. En segundo lugar, que el concepto anglosajón *community* o *public engagement* (compromiso público o comunitario) es funcionalmente equivalente a los de extensión y vinculación con el medio. De esta manera se espera contribuir al debate y reflexión sobre el significado e importancia de esta función universitaria en Chile y Latinoamérica, así como incorporar estas experiencias al debate internacional sobre la “universidad comprometida”, tendiendo un puente de diálogo entre el contexto latinoamericano y anglosajón.

Palabras clave: extensión universitaria, vinculación con el medio, compromiso público, compromiso comunitario, América Latina

In Latin America, the concept of *extensión* is familiar to anyone linked to higher education, as it is widely recognized as one of the three fundamental missions of universities, along with teaching and research (Jiménez, Lagos, & Durán, 2013; Menéndez et al., 2013). Despite having a long tradition at the practical level, *extensión* has been rarely addressed as a research topic, since it is an activity that is carried out with little theoretical guidance despite its importance (López, 2016).

In addition, in the case of Chile, at the beginning of the 2000s, the concept of “*vinculación con el medio*” was introduced as one of the criteria used to accredit universities, and since then the concept has propagated rapidly. Many universities have rechristened their directorates of *Extensión* as *Vinculación con el Medio*, while others have opted to use both concepts. Of the 25 universities on the Council of Rectors of Chilean Universities (CRUCH) that are currently in full operation, more than half have officially adopted the concept of *vinculación*¹, but have not stopped using the concept of *extensión*. However, this process has been conducted at the level of institutional policy, without having been accompanied by a critical review of these concepts at the level of academic research.

The coexistence of the concepts of *extensión* and *vinculación con el medio* can cause confusion regarding their meaning, while the lack of empirical research makes theoretical reflection difficult. In this regard, this paper addresses the call made by the last congress of the Unión Latinoamericana de Extensión Universitaria regarding the need to deepen the theoretical reference points of university engagement (Balsinde Herrera, 2015).

In order to do this, we first conduct a review of the concepts of *vinculación con el medio* and *extensión* through academic literature and public and institutional policies, examining the meaning that is given to these terms and their evolution over time. Second, we review the concepts used in the English language context to refer to similar activities and the possibilities of translation, in order to expand the theoretical framework and help establish a dialogue between the Latin American and English-language contexts. Finally, a discussion is offered that identifies the strategic importance of this topic and its potential for development as an area of scientific research.

Through this review, the paper also seeks to contribute to breaking the territorial limitations in the development of the concept of “public” or “community engagement”, since the majority of the literature

¹ Based on a review of the website of the universities on the Council of Rectors up to January 2016, 9 institutions have vice-rectories or directorates of *extensión*, 14 of *vinculación* and 2 of *extensión* and *vinculación*. In the case of the directorates of *extensión*, 7 use the concept “*extensión*”, one uses that of “*extensión cultural*” and another that of “*extensión académica y cultural*”, in various cases accompanied by another concept, such as “*extensión y comunicaciones*” or “*extensión y relaciones internacionales*”. As regards the directorates of *vinculación*, 11 use “*vinculación con el medio*”, 4 “*vinculación*” and 1 “*vinculación con sociedad*”, and, in some cases, it is accompanied by another concept, such as “*vinculación y comunicaciones*”.

in this area has been produced in the northern hemisphere (McIlrath, Lyons, & Munck, 2012) and studies cases of developed and English-speaking countries (Correa Bernardo, 2012). At a time in which the “engaged university” is considered by some to be the new paradigm of higher education (Watson, 2012), this paper seeks to include the case of Latin America and its rich tradition of university-society relationships in the dialogue.

Methodology

A literature review was conducted for the Latin American context drawn from the ISI Web of Science and Scielo databases, using the keywords *extensión*, *extensión universitaria*, and *vinculación*, with the subject filter Education and Educational Research and English and Spanish language filters. After noting the scant presence of Chilean cases in these texts, a review was also conducted of the Latin American Redalyc and IRESIE databases, with the keywords *extensión + Chile*, *vinculación + Chile* and the Education subject filter, as well as the concepts *extensión* and *vinculación* with the Education subject filter and Chile country filter. All of this produced a total of 449 articles, although more than half of them were repeated in the various searches. A first selection was carried out by reviewing the titles and abstracts to eliminate any that were repeated and those that were not related to the topic (many of them used the concepts in reference to other subjects, for example “*vinculación de los estudiantes de noveno grado en clase de educación física*” [engagement of ninth grade students in physical education classes] or “*extensión de las jornadas de trabajo*” [extension of working days]), arriving at a total of 63. These papers were then reviewed in detail, discarding on the basis of content any focused solely on the description of a case without including a general reflection on the topic or specifically focused on one aspect of the relationship to the environment, such as engagement with companies or the development of skills in students. Texts that were not based on empirical studies or a detailed literature review were also discarded due to methodological approach. We thus arrived at 18 papers that were included. In a second stage, the references contained in those papers were followed, adding another 11 publications.

A review was also conducted of institutional texts and those from national and international organizations. In order to do this, references in the literature were followed, as well as the websites of bodies with university accreditation and university consortia in Latin America and Chilean universities, adding another 22 publications and thus producing a total of 52 texts in Spanish.

For the English language context, the first approach was carried out based on the papers available on the website of the United Kingdom’s National Co-ordinating Centre for Public Engagement (NCCPE), and following the bibliographical references that they contained. More than a hundred papers and books were reviewed, of which 37 were selected to include in this paper. The selection criterion was that they should include discussions of the meaning and/or history of the concepts and not merely the analysis of specific cases. Once this process was complete, a search was conducted to update the review to the last five years in the ISI Web of Science database, with the keywords “public engagement” + “university”, “community engagement” + “university”, “civic engagement” + “university”, “outreach” + “university” and “third mission”, with the filter Education and Educational Research. This search produced a total of 495 publications, of which the titles and abstracts were reviewed to rule out those that were not related to the topic or which had already been included. Given the large number of texts available, only those that were focused on the discussion of the meaning or history of the topic were chosen. Therefore another 15 papers were added.

A review was also carried out of institutional and public policy documents, mainly of those mentioned in the literature, and those from international organizations or national higher education institutions agencies in the United States or United Kingdom, thus adding another 13 documents, giving a total of 65 texts in English.

The review of all the documents was focused on the search for definitions or descriptions of the functions of *extensión*, *vinculación con el medio*, and *compromiso público*, their meanings, objectives, and limitations or difficulties, as well as their evolution over time. The analysis here presented is exclusively based on the previously mentioned revision, with the limitations that this implies.

Vinculación con el medio

Vinculación con el medio is a concept introduced to Chile at the beginning of the 2000s by the now-defunct Comisión Nacional de Acreditación de Pregrado (CNAP), the predecessor of the current Comisión Nacional de Acreditación (CNA). Up until then, it has had few development at the level of scientific research. Although some similar concepts can be found in the literature, such as “*vinculación con la sociedad*” in Argentine (Rofman & Juan Manuel Vázquez, 2006) or Ecuadorean texts (Cedeño Ferrín, 2012), it was not formulated as a term that had a specific definition or to replace the term *extensión*, but rather as a phrase to describe it. In the case of Mato (2015), “*vinculación social*” is used to encompass the activities that different institutions define as extension, action research, volunteerism, service learning, dialogue of knowledge, and university social responsibility. Beltrán Llevador et al. (2014) use the same concept to refer to university relationships with society from a perspective of belonging and responsibility. At the practical level, it can be observed that similar concepts have been introduced in other Latin American countries, such as *vinculación con la colectividad* in Ecuador (Reuvic, no date) and *actividades en el medio* in Uruguay (Universidad de la República, n.d.). In terms of institutional accreditation, there are various approaches. The concept of *extensión, producción de tecnología y transferencia* is considered as an area of evaluation in the case of Argentina (Comisión Nacional de Evaluación y Acreditación Universitaria, 2016), *pertinencia e impacto social* in Colombia (Consejo Nacional de Educación Superior, 2014), *vinculación social institucional* in Paraguay (Agencia Nacional de Evaluación y Acreditación de la Educación Superior, 2015), and *vinculación-extensión* in Mexico (Consejo para la Acreditación de la Educación Superior, 2015), to name a few.

Introduction of the concept of *vinculación con el medio* took place in Chile a few years after the appearance of the concept of “engagement” in the United Kingdom and the United States, which proposes the promotion of a two-way relationship as a new way of linking the university to the community (Kellogg Commission, 1999). In its regulations, the Comisión Nacional de Acreditación defines *vinculación con el medio* as:

The set of links established with the disciplinary, artistic, productive and professional technological environment, in order to improve the performance of institutional functions, to facilitate academic and professional development of the members of the institution and its renovation or improvement, or to meet corporate objectives (Comisión Nacional de Acreditación, 2013, p. 11).

It is interesting to observe that the focus of this definition is placed not on the benefit of the community, but on that obtained by the university through interaction. However, the criteria for assessing this function within the same rules mention that it should impact both the external environment and the institution itself and should be linked to teaching or research.

There is another CNA definition that is referenced in the policies of various universities, but it is a document that is not currently available on the website of the organization:

Vinculación con el medio is an essential function of higher education institutions in Chile, a substantive expression of their social responsibility, integrated transversally across the set of institutional functions.

Its purpose is to contribute to the comprehensive, equitable, and sustainable development of individuals and territories of the country, through two fundamental roles:

- a) A significant and permanent interaction of mutual benefit with the main public, private, and social actors, of a horizontal and bidirectional nature, conducted in shared regional, national, or international spaces corresponding to its local environment, and
- b) To contribute to the meaning, enrichment, and feedback of the quality and relevance of the teaching and research activities of the institution, in relation to their respective subject area (CNA, 2010, as cited in Universidad Tecnológica Metropolitana, 2013)

In addition, CNA provides a perspective in a book published in 2009, in which Von Baer proposes *vinculación con el medio* as a new focus for the relationship between the university and society, based on the co-construction of knowledge and bidirectionality. According to the author, the traditional manner of *vinculación* is in crisis because it was based on trusting relationships with between the university and

elite groups, and on a unidirectional relationship. In this sense, he calls for *vinculación con el medio* to be assumed as the third mission of universities; a strategic mission of equal value to teaching and research and which contributes to their development to ensure their quality and relevance (Von Baer, 2009).

While based on these definitions it could be concluded that the concept of *vinculación con el medio* could replace the term *extensión*, various universities have understood it to be a broad concept that includes the latter. For example, Universidad de Santiago considers that *vinculación con el medio* covers cultural and academic extension, social-productive extension, institutional communications, and outreach, and inter-university or international relations (Universidad de Santiago, 2013). To Universidad Austral, it includes university extension, provision of services, national and international relations, university-company relations, publications, development and training, social responsibility, and outreach (Universidad Austral de Chile, 2009b).

The Chilean forum of Higher Education Aequalis has proposed to define requirements for the *vinculación*, such as bi-directionality, feedback with teaching practices and research, institutional recognition, its presence as part of the institutional project, the connection with the regional and national strategy, accountability and the stable and differentiated funding. In this way, by establishing these requirements, the activities that are not related with *vinculación con el medio* are defined as the cooperation between partner institutions, marketing, advertisement and sale services, settlements, counseling and the participation on activities of the accreditation process (Lemaitre & Durán, 2013)

Extensión: altruism, self-funding, and revaluation

The concept of *extensión* has existed in Latin America for more than a century. Unlike the case in the English-speaking world, Latin American universities were created with the explicit mission of contributing to the development of the newly independent republics (Gómez, 2011). For example, Universidad de Chile was conceived with the mission of serving the social needs of the country and, in this regard, it was assigned a practical utility (Jaksic & Serrano, 1990). This social mission was consolidated in the concept of *extensión*, which expanded from the University Reform Movement that began in Córdoba (Argentina) in 1918 to the whole region (Tapia, 2012).

The Córdoba Reform led to a university model “of” and for the nation (Gómez, 2011), which was expressed in the postulate “link the university to the people “ (Tünnermann, 2000, p. 100). It is because of this that it is recognized as the most important milestone in the formation of the Latin American university model, which has a strong emphasis on its social function (Rofman & Juan Manuel Vázquez, 2006). This nascent concept of *extensión* was marked by social change as a fundamental principle, through the commitment to sharing culture and knowledge with those who were socially excluded (Serna Alcántara, 2007). It also advocated greater democratization of universities and broadening of the critical conscience of students regarding social problems (Cedeño Ferrín, 2012).

Serna Alcántara (2007) identifies four moments in the evolution of *extensión* as a concept. At the beginning of the 20th century, an altruistic model was predominant, which favored selfless action by the university in service of the deprived. The second moment, starting in the 1950s, led to an informative model, related to taking science, culture, and technology to those without access to university education. In the 1960s and 1970s, a conscientization model appeared, which understood extension dialogically, in order to raise social awareness and transformation. The Brazilian educational theorist Paulo Freire is recognized for his influence in this period, with his critique of the banking concept of education, where the teacher deposits content into the minds of those considered to be ignorant. Freire believed that all individuals have valuable knowledge that should nurture the learning process. So teacher-student differences are overcome and two-way learning, based on dialogue and communication is encouraged (Freire, 1969, 1970). The second Conference of Extension in 1972 echoed these notions, questioning the paternalist and unidirectional perspective of *extensión* with a new definition:

University *extensión* is the interaction between the university and society, through which it assumes and fulfils its commitment to participate in the social process of cultural creation and the liberation and radical transformation of the national community (Unión de Universidades de América Latina, 1972 p. 344).

Just one year after this declaration, a coup took place in Chile, followed by 17 years of military dictatorship, and similar situations occurred in many other Latin American countries. As a result of this, the dictatorships intervened in the universities and the debate about the relationship between universities and society was abruptly halted (Cecchi, Perez, & Sanllorenti, 2013).

The fourth moment identified by Serna Alcántara is related to engagement with companies, which began to emerge in the 1980s. The aim was to attend to the needs of companies, and the universities began to provide paid services. This is explained in a context in which democracies had returned to Latin America with a neoliberal bias (Gómez, 2011), the university system expanded dramatically, and public institutions experienced severe cuts in state funding. On the one hand, this favored the expansion of sales of services as a means of self-financing the universities (Lemaitre, 2004), but on the other, it made it difficult to construct institutions with a social vocation (Cecchi et al., 2013). The conceptual debate on the meaning of the term *extensión* was replaced by a more pragmatic approach, with a heavy emphasis on continuous education and artistic-cultural activities (Donoso, 2001). For example, in the case of Universidad Católica de Chile, Bernasconi (2005) states that under the new perspective of the entrepreneurial university, the role of *extensión* was completely subverted, losing its social function and becoming a business unit that provides cultural, recreational, and educational services for the upper echelons of society.

To the four moments identified by Serna, it is important to add that, during recent years, critical discussion about the meaning of *extensión* has resumed in the Latin American context. One good example of this is the case of Argentina, where one can see a trend towards its reappraisal (García Delgado & Casalis, 2013; Mato, 2015). Thus, the Consejo Interuniversitario Nacional Argentino defines *extensión* as an integrated function of teaching and research, with a pedagogical, dialogical, and transformative purpose (CIN, 2012), and in Brazil there is a national policy of university *extensión* that defines it as a process that promotes interaction between universities and society based on the indivisibility of research, teaching, and *extensión*; and characterized by dialogical communication, understood as the exchange of knowledge (Fórum De Pró-Reitores De Extensão Das Universidades Públicas Brasileiras, 2012). Along similar lines, Universidad de Chile defines *extensión* as a function that seeks to promote processes of interaction, integration, and feedback between the university and the community, in order to contribute both to the development of the country and its own development (Universidad de Chile, 2014), while Universidad Austral de Chile understands it to be a two-way endeavor, in accordance with the social role of the university, that facilitates the relevance of teaching and research (Universidad Austral de Chile, 2009a).

Current definitions of *extensión* in the academic literature

Given its limited theoretical development (Boscán, Pereira de Homes, & Suárez Amaya, 2010), there is a lack of clear definitions about the meaning of *extensión* (Moreno de Tovar, 2005), as well as indicators and details of the activities it involves (Cedeño Ferrín, 2012). For example, López (2016) concluded that, in the last three conferences held on *extensión* in Argentina, the presentations related to *extensión* had a very low level of theoretical material: almost a third had a total lack of references and only 12% contained a bibliography related to university *extensión*. Although there is not a single model of *extensión* (Cedeño Ferrín, 2012), it is possible to find agreement between most of the authors:

In terms of its purpose, *extensión* is defined as a function through which the university develops its social role (García Guadilla, 2008; López, 2016), participates directly in social processes (Cedeño Ferrín & Machado Ramírez, 2012), and is attuned to society and its needs (Corado et al., 2015). Meanwhile, a vital function for the relationship between institutions and their environment and as part of the knowledge generation process is closely linked to teaching and research (Álvarez de Fernández, Rivera & Rojas, 2006; Corado et al., 2015; Rodríguez de Mello, 2009). Various authors cite as a reference the concept of “relevance” coined in the United Nations Declaration on Higher Education in 1998, in reference to “the fit between what society expects of institutions and what they do” (Unesco, 1998, p. 1). They also consider that *extensión* represents the commitment of the university to the country (Coro Montanet, Valverde Bravo, Afre Socorro, Montanet Aventaño, & Vinent, 2009; Moreno de Tovar, 2005).

As regards its form, *extensión* is understood as a dialectical relationship with society (Coro Montanet et al., 2009; Moreno de Tovar, 2005). It is assigned a transformational and empowering role for critical conscience through which the university participates in solving community problems (Zambrano van Beverhoudt & Rincón Perozo, 2008). It is emphasized that *extensión* should go far beyond the literal interpretation of the concept, to be an two-way and dialectical activity in which university and society give each other feedback (Ortiz-Riaga & Morales-Rubiano, 2011; Rofman & Juan Manuel Vázquez, 2006) and generate transformative synergies and mutual improvement (Cedeño Ferrín, 2012).

Finally, regarding its limitations, from a critical perspective it is acknowledged that there are universities that restrict *extensión* to the provision of services and outreach activities with a one-way approach that is disconnected from social needs (Rofman & Juan Manuel Vázquez, 2006). It is often organized in a fragmented manner, from a purely philanthropic perspective (Boscán et al., 2010) restricted to the transmission of culture (Cedeño Ferrín, 2012), and is not linked to teaching and research (Véliz, Pérez Díaz, Nuñez López, Hernández Ávila, & Torres Sotolongo, 2015). Similarly, in general there is a diagnosis that it is a downgraded function whose importance is not valued sufficiently highly (Mato, 2013; Moreno de Tovar, 2005; Ortiz-Riaga & Morales-Rubiano, 2011) and for which there are few institutional incentives (Boscán et al., 2010). There are also authors who have focused on developing the concept of University Social Responsibility as a perspective that can enrich all university duties, including *extensión*, to which some attribute a crucial mission as the social conscience of the university (Beltrán-Llavorador, Íñigo-Bajo, & Mata-Segreda, 2014), while others criticize it as they consider it to be a unilateral and purely declaratory commitment of solidarity (Vallaeys, 2008).

As can be observed, the concept of *vinculación con el medio* has very little theoretical development compared with that of *extensión*. The available definitions of the concept of *vinculación con el medio* emphasize bidirectionality and the relationship with teaching and research. However, these are elements that are also found in current definitions of *extensión* and therefore do not necessarily imply a differentiation between the two. This situation, characteristic of the novelty of the concept of *vinculación con el medio*, calls for the work being done by universities to define and assess these concepts at the level of institutional policies to be accompanied by their development in theoretical and empirical research. In order to contribute to this process through comparative experience, a discussion of equivalent concepts in the English-speaking world is provided below.

The problem of translation

Translation is a fundamental part of intercultural research (Wong & Poon, 2010), as not all the concepts in one language have an equivalent in another and, even if they did, they may not have exactly the same meaning, resulting in different patterns of response (Peña, 2007). Thus, for example, the literal translation of *extensión* in English (extension) does not have the same meaning to an American reader as a Latin American one. This is because different frames of reference may signify that apparently identical concepts have different meanings and, therefore, assuming similarities can be misleading for research (Shah, 2004).

In the literature review it can be seen that Latin American and English language bodies of literature on *extensión*, *vinculación*, and *compromiso público* do not dialogue with one another, because in the vast majority of the texts in Spanish there are no references to the texts in English, or vice versa. Exceptions are a book from Aequalis regarding higher education involvement with regional development, in which there are references to international experiences from a report issued by the OECD (2007) regarding local university commitments (Rock, Rojas, Puentes & Durán, 2013); and also a text from Von Baer (2009) that references the same report and other international documents. Nevertheless, both articles quote the Spanish version of the report and therefore it does not include a discussion of the translation of the concepts. When translating the concept of *extensión* into English in their abstracts, authors have various alternatives. *Extensión* can be found translated as “extension” in most papers (e.g. Álvarez de Fernández et al., 2006; Boscán et al., 2010; Corado et al., 2015), but some also translate it as «extracurricular activities» (Coro Montanet et al., 2009), «social welfare» (Rofman & Juan Manuel Vázquez, 2006) or «outreach» (Mato, 2015). Meanwhile, *vinculación* appears in only three abstracts: one of them translates *vinculación social* as “social reach” (Mato, 2013), another as “social linking” (Mato, 2015), and a third as “outreach” (Beltrán-Llavorador et al., 2014). However, “engagement” does not appear.

These translations reveal the concepts that the authors or readers would use to seek comparable experiences and, as is explained below, they are not necessarily the most appropriate.

Extensión has a literal translation in English (extension). The emergence of this concept is attributed to the universities of Cambridge (Bibiloni et al, 2004, as cited in Perez, Lakonich, Cecchi, & Rotstein, 2009) and Oxford (Cedeño Ferrín, 2012) in the second half of the 19th century, in relation to training courses for adults, such as those provided by the Delegacy for the Extension of Teaching beyond the Limits of the University (University of Oxford, n.d.). The concept has now fallen into disuse in the United Kingdom and only appears as an historic antecedent of continuing education. Meanwhile, it is still used in the United States, but specifically for agricultural extension based on the tradition of the Land-Grant universities (Christopher S Collins & Mueller, 2016). These institutions, created based on the 1862 Morrill Act, challenged the paradigm of the universities at the service of the aristocracy, with a mandate to generate research and teaching to serve the development of the nation, particularly in the agricultural and mechanical arts (McDowell, 2003). This model understood extension to be a way of placing university knowledge at the disposal of the community, taking scientific development to the rural world to increase agricultural productivity and contribute to overcoming poverty (Christopher S. Collins, 2012). It was only at the end of the 1950s that the concept of “urban extension” emerged in the United States. One emblematic case is that of the new University of California, Irvine, which attempted to transfer the mission of the Land-Grant universities to the city through the social sciences, with the aim of serving urban needs and influencing the development of the city (Schrum, 2013). However, the concept did not prosper beyond the 1970s, when it was concluded that the different reality of the city and the more theoretical nature of the social sciences meant it was not possible to transfer a model created for the rural environment (Geiger, 2013).

Meanwhile, the concept of “outreach”, sometimes used as a translation of *extensión*, is a literal translation of *alcance* or *proyección*, generally associated with a social service (Galimberti Jarman, Russell, Styles Carvajal, & Rollin, 2008). Outreach is understood as the “translation” of scientific content for the general public (Ecklund, James, & Lincoln, 2012). At universities in the English-speaking world it is usually used to refer to the relationship with schools and the promotion of access to higher education (e.g. see Clark et al., 2016; Marquez Kiyama, Lee, & Rhoades, 2012; McInerney, & Hinchey, 2013). In this regard, although outreach is related and can form part of *extensión*, it is a more limited concept than that developed in Latin America.

Another concept that may be relevant is that of the Third Mission. The Green Paper from the European project E3M defines it as a university mission that is linked to research through innovation and technology transfer, with education through continuous training, and with social commitment through public activities, consultancy, and voluntary work (E3M Project, 2012). While some have treated it as being equivalent to the concept of engagement (Barker, 2015; Correa Bernardo, 2012), its theoretical development has been focused mainly on the relationship of the university with industry, technology transfer, and commercialization of innovations based on the perspective of the entrepreneurial university (Etzkowitz, Webster, Gebhardt, & Terra, 2000; Kretz & Sa, 2013; Sam & Van der Sijde, 2014).

Meanwhile, “public” or “community engagement” is defined as “the myriad of ways in which the activities and benefits of higher education and research can be shared with the public” (NCCPE, n.d.), and it is associated with a model of the university committed to the needs of society (Watson, 2012). Although it is defined as a mutually beneficial relationship for the university and society (Carnegie Foundation, n.d.), it is currently used to cover all types of links between the university and the exterior (Chikoore, Proberts, Fry, & Creaser, 2016; Grand, Davies, Holliman, & Adams, 2015). Thus, “engagement” seems to be the most appropriate concept to refer to those activities that are currently considered to be part of the area of *extensión* and/or *vinculación con el medio* in Chile.

Therefore, the literature in Spanish on *extensión* does not consider the experience in the English-speaking world, and the literature in English does not dialogue with the Latin American concept either. Although it is worth noting the strong influence of the ideas of Paulo Freire in the critical literature on higher education (e.g. Giroux, 2010; Lambert, Parker, & Neary, 2007), and in some texts that advocate a critical perspective of public engagement (Fear, Rosaen, Bawden, & Foster-Fishman, 2006; Rosenberger, 2012), there are no specific references to the Latin American reality or the university-society relationship in the Latin American context.

The sole exception is found in three books that refer to the concept of “public”, “community” or “civic engagement”, which include Latin American experiences (McIlrath et al., 2012; Unesco, 2015; Watson, 2012). In these texts, although there is no consistent solution for an appropriate translation, the concept of “extension” is used recurrently to cover community engagement activities in Latin America. *Higher Education and Civic Engagement* includes a chapter on the history of engagement and experiences of service-learning. It states that community engagement has traditionally been important in the region and it has been carried out through extension secretariats or service programs (Tapia, 2012). *The Engaged University* states that Latin American universities commonly host university-community collaboration programs in extension offices (Babcock, 2012), but also in departments of community service or development, university social responsibility, volunteerism, social outreach, student welfare, or service-learning, depending on the institution. The Chilean RSU Universidad Construye País network is mentioned as one of the networks with a focus on civic engagement at international level (Watson, 2012). Finally, the new book from Unesco on university-community partnerships places the concepts of “extension” and “outreach” in parallel to differentiate them from the concept of engagement. It states that the former two terms imply a one-way relationship, while the second is two-way. However, the same text also recognizes that throughout the world there is a great variety of terms to refer to university-community research partnerships, including the term “extension” (Unesco, 2015).

As we can see, the linguistic translation of *extensión* as “extension” is not appropriate and, therefore, a functional translation is necessary that ensures that the words used, although different, refer to the same construct and provoke similar responses (Peña, 2007). Assuming that the validity of a translation depends on the purpose and epistemological foundations of each investigation (Wong & Poon, 2010), in this paper it is argued that “public” or “community engagement” is actually the closest English-language concept to the terms *extensión* and *vinculación con el medio* for two basic reasons: they have similar definitions (emphasizing the two-way relationship and the link with teaching and research), and they are used to encompass the same types of initiatives (service-learning, partnerships with the community, public activities, participatory research, among others).

The limitations of translating “engagement” as *compromiso* should certainly be taken into account. Although they deal with similar concepts, “engagement” has fewer meanings than *compromiso*. While both refer to an agreement or an agreement or arrangement, *compromiso* also includes a sense of obligation or responsibility, for which there is another English word: “commitment” (Galimberti Jarman et al., 2008). Therefore, although this study uses the word *compromiso* due to being unable to find a more appropriate translation, it should be noted that this word has more meanings than “engagement”.

Public engagement and its evolution in English language academia

The relationship with the community is not a new thing for universities in the English-speaking world, but its academic application and use for the formulation of university policies has been taking place for no more than 30 years (Charles, Benneworth, Conway, & Humphrey, 2010; Fear et al., 2006). At the end of the 1990s there was a turning point where this topic reemerged internationally, with the United Nations Declaration on Higher Education and its principal of relevance (1998), the emergence of the concept of university engagement in the United States (1996-99), and the recommendation of the Dearing Report to British universities to engage with their communities (1997).

In the United States, in 1862 the Land-Grant universities were created, as mentioned previously, whose prime mandate was focused on improving agriculture in the nation (McDowell, 2003). Meanwhile, the concept of engagement only began to take shape toward the end of the century when, after the economic depression of the 1980s, discussions began on how the universities could contribute to addressing local problems in the social, environmental, and economic spheres (Moore, 2014). In 1985, the national university coalition Campus Compact was formed with the objective of supporting higher education institutions in creating community service structures. The concept of “engagement” was coined in 1995 by Ernest Boyer, then-president of the Carnegie Foundation, who made a call for universities to connect with social needs (Boyer, 1996). In 1999, the Kellogg Commission on the Future of State and Land-Grant Universities published the report “Returning to Our Roots: The Engaged Institution”, in which it concluded that “it is time to go beyond outreach and service” and move toward a perspective based on a two-way relationship with the community (Kellogg Commission, 1999, p. 9). This document formalized

the concepts of “engagement” and “engaged university” and sparked a discussion of this topic in the United States (McDowell, 2003). Campus Compact currently has more than 1,100 member institutions, a large proportion of US universities have a community engagement department, and this function is evaluated by initiatives such as the Carnegie Foundation ranking.

Meanwhile, in the United Kingdom, universities have traditionally been considered “ivory towers”, separate from their communities and focused on the creation of knowledge with a world impact (Chatterton, 2000). Nevertheless, the so-called civic universities, such as Sheffield, Leeds, and Manchester, were founded in the 19th century specifically to contribute to the industrialization of their cities (Goddard & Vallance, 2011). It was in the competitive postwar higher education market that this engagement was lost and the institutions became separated from their cities (Charles et al., 2010; Goddard & Puukka, 2008).

The concept of public engagement appeared at the end of the last century as a way of refocusing attention on local needs. The first official call for British universities to engage with their communities was in 1997 through the Dearing Report, which recommended converting local and regional involvement into “active and systematic engagement” for the mutual benefit of universities and localities (National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education, 1997 sección 12.7). In 2007, Research Councils UK, the Higher Education Funding Councils, and the Wellcome Trust established a nine million-pound initiative to promote public engagement through six collaborative centers (K. Mason O’Connor, Lynch, & Owen, 2011). That same year the National Co-ordinating Centre for Public Engagement (NCCPE) was formed, which has become the main center of reference on this topic in the United Kingdom. In 2010 the NCCPE created a Manifesto for Public Engagement, which has been signed by most of the universities and research councils (NCCPE, 2010).

Public engagement has received a boost with the recent inclusion of “impact” as one of the criteria used by the Research Excellence Framework (REF) to assess the quality of research by universities since 2014. Impact is defined as “an effect on, change or benefit to the economy, society, culture, public policy or services, health, the environment or quality of life, beyond academia” (Research Excellence Framework, 2011, p. 26). Engagement is considered to be a pathway way towards impact (Research Councils UK, n.d.) and, therefore, is something to which all universities are increasingly paying attention.

This practical situation where the higher education system is being pushed toward deeper public engagement (Ward, Buglione, Giles, & Saltmarsh, 2013), has had a parallel in the development of engagement as a research area, allowing progress towards the current state of broad academic recognition (Sandmann & Kliewer, 2012). Around the world, a trend can be seen in which the new paradigm of the engaged university is replacing the ivory tower (Watson, 2012).

Key points of the concept of public engagement

Defining public engagement is a challenge. In the literature there is widespread recognition of the lack of a consistent definition of concepts such as public and community engagement, as there are various approaches and overlapping terms to refer to them and their use depending on the context (Barker, 2015; Hart & Northmore, 2011; Humphrey, 2013; Mahony, 2015; C. Mason O’Connor, McEwen, Owen, Lynch, & Hill, 2011). This is why some authors talk about public engagement (NCCPE, n.d.-b), others about community engagement (Carnegie Foundation, n.d.; Inman & Schuetze, 2010), and others discuss civic engagement (Checkoway, 2013; McIlrath et al., 2012). In addition, some of the related literature is based on the concept of community-university partnerships (Morrell, Sorensen, & Howarth, 2015). There are also some authors who have specified their geographical proximity as regional engagement (Charles, 2007; OECD, 2007) and others who have referred specifically to engagement with socially excluded communities (Benneworth, 2013). Similarly, there are some who contribute to the concept of “civic university”, as that which operates on a global scale but is strongly committed to its local environment (J Goddard et al., 2012). As different concepts are used to describe the same practices (Ward et al., 2013), it is not possible to differentiate clearly between them.

Meanwhile, the community is not merely called different things, but is also understood dissimilarly. The OECD has developed an exclusively local focus for community engagement, oriented towards the

region (OECD, 2007). However, the NCCPE in the United Kingdom uses “public engagement” to define relationships with the local and national community (NCCPE, 2010). Meanwhile, the United States-based Carnegie Foundation considers that community engagement includes the international arena (Carnegie Foundation, n.d.).

Just as the definition of public is not clear, the concept of engagement can be understood in many different ways, as its nature depends on each context and it is shaped according to each institution (Charles, 2007). However, it is possible to identify two fundamental elements that characterize it in most of the literature.

First, it is a function ingrained in teaching and research. In this regard, the perspective of engagement challenges the concept of “third mission” for two reasons. Firstly, because the word “third” immediately relegates it to a peripheral role in comparison with teaching and research, and secondly, because to be effective, engagement does not have to be an added function, but should be seen as an essential element, embedded into the other functions of the university (Inman & Schuetze, 2010; Public Engagement NE Beacon, 2013).

The Manifesto for Public Engagement signed by many UK universities indicates that both research and teaching are enriched by being carried out from the perspective of engagement. The interaction with the community challenges and broadens academic thought, research projects carried out with the community have greater impacts and relevance, and teaching is enriched by generating civic skills among students and preparing them for their integration into the labor market (K. Mason O'Connor et al., 2011; NCCPE, 2010).

The second element is its orientation toward mutual benefit. The concept of public engagement goes far beyond a vision where the university confers knowledge upon the community, as it has the objective of creating a partnership of co-creation and co-use of knowledge with the community (Hart & Aumann, 2013). This is why mutuality is a key characteristic in most of the definitions of public engagement, as an element that differentiates it from service (Carnegie Foundation, n.d.; Kellogg Commission, 1999; NCCPE, n.d.-b). The basic idea of mutuality is that in a university-community relationship, both parties benefit (Hart & Aumann, 2013). At the teaching level, one example is the Service-Learning projects, defined as a “a form of experiential learning that combines academic coursework with voluntary service in the community” (Deeley, 2010 p 43). In these projects, the community benefits from the service provided by the students, and the students have a valuable learning experience. As regards research, an example is participatory action projects, where members of the community are involved as co-researchers (Kindon, 2007).

Limitations

The concept of engagement has run into limitations similar to those described in the literature on extension. On the one hand, although the definitions indicate that there should be a reciprocal relationship between the university and society, when listing the activities covered, they cover all kinds of relationships with the public, not including solely partnerships or co-creative activities, but also presentations, work with schools, and academic appearances in the press, among others (Chikoore et al., 2016; NCCPE, sin fecha-a). Similarly, it has been found that the majority of academics do not consider the public outside of academia to be the prime beneficiary of their research (J Goddard et al., 2012) and they frequently identify the concept of engagement with dissemination activities (Grand et al., 2015). This is why the movement toward engagement has been criticized for not changing the one-way relationship between the university and society (Saltmarsh, Hartley, & Clayton, 2009), and some have proposed to assume this limitation with a more general definition of the concept, which covers all interactions between the university and the community (Grand et al., 2015; Moore, 2014).

There is also a lack of clarity on whether engagement replaces or adds to the older functions of service. On one hand, according to the British literature, engagement should be embedded in the functions of teaching and research (Public Engagement NE Beacon, 2013; Williams & Cochrane, 2013). On the other, the texts from the United States or international organizations emphasize that engagement should have an impact on teaching, research, and service (Morrell et al., 2015; OECD, 2007). Therefore, although the

original definition sought to differentiate engagement from the idea of outreach or dissemination (Kellogg Commission, 1999), this objective has not been achieved (Westdijk, Koliba, & Hamshaw, 2010).

Finally, in terms of recognition, it has been found that institutional incentives are not focused on encouraging academics to carry out these activities (Marquez Kiyama et al., 2012), which constitutes a constraint for public engagement to be embedded as a substantive role of the university (Smith, Else, & Crookes, 2014).

Discussion

This paper has provided a review of the concepts of *extensión* and *vinculación con el medio* and their closest equivalents in the English-speaking context. It has thus sought to assess the importance of this university function and its potential for development as a topic of academic research, and to provide a theoretical framework for this development based on the revised literature, both in the Latin American context and English-language spheres.

First, the concepts of *vinculación con el medio* and *extensión* were reviewed and it was concluded that neither bidirectionality nor the relationship with teaching and research are necessarily elements that can differentiate them, not considering the interpretation and definition that each particular institution may make of them. In this regard, the challenge remains open for researchers in education to address this matter and contribute to the discussion.

Secondly, a review was conducted of the concepts used in the English-language context to refer to this function. Ignoring the theoretical development of this area in other contexts signifies missing an opportunity for dialogue and mutual learning, particularly considering the flourishing theoretical development achieved in this issue in English language literature. It has thus been argued that although the English concept of public engagement, the Latin American concept of *extensión*, and concept of *vinculación con el medio*, used in a Chilean setting, may be broad and have different interpretations, are functionally equivalent. At the conceptual level, the elements that characterize public engagement – mutual benefit and the relationship with teaching and research – are also present in the definitions of *extensión* and *vinculación con el medio*. On a practical level, these concepts are used to combine similar activities, such as service-learning, participatory research, and activities that are open to the community. These are also concepts that have similar limitations, such as the lack of recognition in terms of academic promotion and the difficulty of achieving their goal of building two-way relationships with the community.

Based on the review conducted, it is possible to reflect on the relevance of the subject addressed. The manner in which the university engages with its environment is related to the model of institution that is sought and therefore has the capacity to define the role that each institution proposes to fulfill in society. The Latin American concept of *extensión* comes from a legacy of the university linked to the development of the nation, with a strong social emphasis, and it has even been conceived as a dialogical and transformative mission, and this is why its heritage and the meaning it has acquired in the current context should be critically evaluated. In an era in which the model of the entrepreneurial university is in the ascendance, in which institutions face the dilemma of how to balance their social role, their function of knowledge generation, and their need to finance themselves, it is particularly naïve to relegate the importance of public engagement. Instead, this may be a critical sphere in which to define the role that each institution defines for itself in society. It is thus hoped that this text may be of interest to a range of audiences.

For university communities, a perspective of public engagement is offered as a strategic element that leads to a profound view of the mission of the university. In this regard, the importance of processes to define policies or conceptual changes in reference to these topics should not be underestimated without weighing up the implications that they may have on the university model that is sought.

For the community in general, especially those organizations that seek to interact with universities, it is hoped that this paper can provide certain references for the critical analysis of what type of relationship they are trying to establish, the role they expect to play in that relationship, and the objectives pursue.

For the local scientific community, the aim has been to contribute a theoretical frame of reference for the current discussion on the definition of policies or indicators of public engagement, as well as to assess the importance of addressing this as a topic of research. Critically analyzing policies and initiatives in reference to the model of the institution to which they relate, studying specific projects and the type of relationships that they construct, and comparing different perspectives of public engagement developed by the universities are just some of the options. As well as deepening the revision of the developed definitions for the concept of *vinculación*, this being social, academic or related with the environment, among others in different countries of Latin America.

For the international scientific community, the hope is that this text will highlight the Latin American tradition of the university-society relationship as a relevant precedent for the discussion of the concepts of public and community engagement. Considering the experience in the English-speaking world with that in Latin America opens up possibilities for a vast number of research topics. Contrasting the experiences of the two realities according to their respective higher education systems, creating joint research projects, or comparing initiatives in both contexts are just a few of the opportunities generated by discussing the concepts of *extensión*, *vinculación con el medio*, and *compromiso público* – public engagement. There is no doubt that, to continue building these bridges, producing publications in English on Latin American experiences of *extension* and *vinculación con el medio* and relating them theoretically to the literature on public engagement is the next step.

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