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## **PRO-SUSTAINABILITY ORIENTATIONS IN THE SUBSTANTIVE FUNCTIONS OF THE PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES IN PICHINCHA - ECUADOR**

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The study aimed to assess the pro-sustainability orientations in the organizational culture in the public universities of Pichincha - Ecuador; from the perspective proposed by Schein, considering strategic planning and substantive functions: teaching, research, and community outreach programs. This study employed the questionnaire designed by University Leaders for a Sustainable Future, the tool evaluates the environmental, social, and economic dimensions within universities. This is a qualitative method to assess the Universities' performance considering seven variables included in educational, research, and community outreach management. The primary data were obtained by analyzing the pro-sustainability orientations present in the formal documentation of strategic planning and substantive functions. The critical factor weighting matrix suggested by David Fred was used for the assessment. In the second phase, an analysis of in-depth interviews was conducted with seventeen informants from three public universities. Results show that the pro-sustainability orientations present in formal documentation of strategic planning and substantive functions have a strong tendency to use texts related to the social dimension; while texts with orientations towards the environmental dimension were less utilized in substantive functions; with the interview's common perceptions within the organizational culture related to a traditional university culture that assumes a lack of knowledge and interest in students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, when in reality, the lack of interest from faculty and authorities stems from their own biases regarding the capabilities of their students and their limitations. Along the same line, it is mentioned that the individual culture brought by each university community member influences its organizational culture.

### **Keywords:**

Institutional sustainability, University substantive functions, Education

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## 1. Introduction

Definitely, the environmental events occurred after the industrial revolutions; the social and economic crises took place as a consequence of irresponsible consumption and excessive ambition, undoubtedly caused changes in the behavior of society; it was necessary to look for another type of development; in Latin America, the theory of dependency was strengthened, and awareness of social injustice, inequality and lack of freedom - understood as the deprivation of access to social and economic resources- was born, causing extreme poverty in several countries (Freire, 1965).

In this context, the World Commission on Environment and Development – United Nations (UN) prepared a report that proposed a new paradigm shift in development, suggesting that humanity should ensure sustainable development by satisfying current needs without compromising the satisfaction of future needs, it was named sustainable development (United Nations, 1987).

This new paradigm cannot be viewed from a single dimension but as a complex system where social, economic, and environmental dimensions interact to form a balance. Therefore, understanding the underlying symbiosis in the system allows us to conceive that development should be holistic and integral, with a systemic approach (Barbier, 2017; Fernández & Gutierrez, 2013; Gallopín, 2003).

In the same way, it is essential to consider that sustainability should be treated as a living system, it will never remain fixed over time; it involves processes of renewal and destruction of its components, which will inevitably lead to adaptation to changes and coevolution with them (Gallopín, 2003). On the other hand, the impact of institutional systems, in terms of the rules and policies that regulate their actions, should be recognized. These systems promote the principles of rights, respect, and responsibilities associated with each dimension. In other words, the main objective is to manage the interrelationships and interdependencies that can occur within the system (O'Connor, 2007; Sotelo, Tolón, & Lastra, 2011).

Education is the engine of development in countries, Paulo Freire advocated for an education for freedom, an education that treats individuals as subjects rather than objects of domestication. He emphasized the importance of fostering critical consciousness and creating changes and transformations in society (Gerhardt, 1993).

The UN in 2003 proclaimed the decade for education in the field of human rights to promote stable relations between communities and foster understanding, tolerance, and peace among members of society, proposing the decade from 2005 to 2015 (United Nations, 2000).

These efforts have made it possible to design many strategies to reorient the plans' study including sustainability issues in the study curriculum, which contains principles and values that motivate students to have healthy lifestyles, equity, human rights, and protection. environment (UNESCO, 2012) (UNESCO, 2017).

At the world education forum held in Korea in 2015, the Incheon Declaration entitled "Education 2030: Towards inclusive and inclusive education" was signed for equitable,

quality, and lifelong learning for all", which considers that education is one of the main engines of development, peace, tolerance, human fulfillment, and sustainable development (UNESCO, 2015).

High Education for sustainable development implies that education should be comprehensive, ensuring operational facilities to achieve sustainable development goals, promoting governance policies, and the capacity to build and contribute as partners with community associations and institutions. It suggests creating a curriculum framework for teaching and learning that includes sustainability topics. Lastly, education should be a center where there are facilities for operation in the achievement of objectives related to sustainable development (UNESCO 2017).

To evaluate sustainability in higher education institutions, particularly in Universities, some instruments have been created to measure the sustainability parameters since the substantive functions of the University; one of them is the Sustainability Assessment Questionnaire (SAQ), which was developed for the University Leaders for a Sustainable Future, the objective was to create an instrument that would allow the evaluation of the environmental, social and economic dimensions in the University (ULSF, 2015). This instrument analyzes seven variables, mentioned as follows.

**Table 1.**

Variables	Variable categories
Syllabus	This variable evaluates whether universities prioritize sustainability in academic disciplines, curricula, and professional profiles, promoting a sustainable future through the design of content related to the environment, social justice, and responsible consumption or similar.
Research and study scholarships	This variable analyzes the university's efforts in the development of research on different topics related to sustainability, prepared by the students and teachers of the institution.
Operations	This variable evaluates whether universities have environmental projects such as the reduction of water and light consumption, and recycling practices, among others.
Personnel and rewards development	The knowledge and commitment of the members of the institution in sustainability are evaluated, as well as the rewards offered by the University.
Access and services (linking)	It is evaluated whether the University promotes local or global associations to promote sustainability in nearby communities, through agreements with national or international institutions
Opportunities for the student	This criterion verifies whether the institution promotes opportunities for students to maintain a firm commitment to sustainability issues through scholarships, internships, professional development, and community service, among others.
Strategic planning	All strategic planning of the university, mission, vision, objectives, institutional, and political values, among others, should be aimed and committed to the fulfillment of the different sustainability criteria.

*Source: Author's own work*

Many authors mention that culture is a prominent theme in development as a part of social

capital in the society, it is a silent qualitative factor that articulates its ecosystem and constitutes the capacity for synergy in its development Sen & Kiliksberg (2008). Culture is built through education, the media, and reference models (Bourdieu, 2002).

Schein (2010) considers culture as a pattern of basic assumptions shared and learned by a group when solving problems of integration and external and internal adaptation, which has worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think and feel about those problems. In other words, the basic assumptions shared by members of an organization are the essence of culture and they can be viewed and felt through as an organizational behavior.

The goal of the study was to analyze the existence of pro-sustainability dimensions as a basic presumption in the organizational culture of the university community of the public universities of Pichincha, Ecuador

## **2. Methodology**

### **2.1 Research Design**

The study had a qualitative approach. The goal of the qualitative method was to have a detailed understanding of people's perspectives on the subject matter, through their spoken or written manifestations and observable behavior (Taylor & Bogdan, 2000), which allowed for generating grounded theory from empirical data obtained systematically (Bryman, 2012; Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

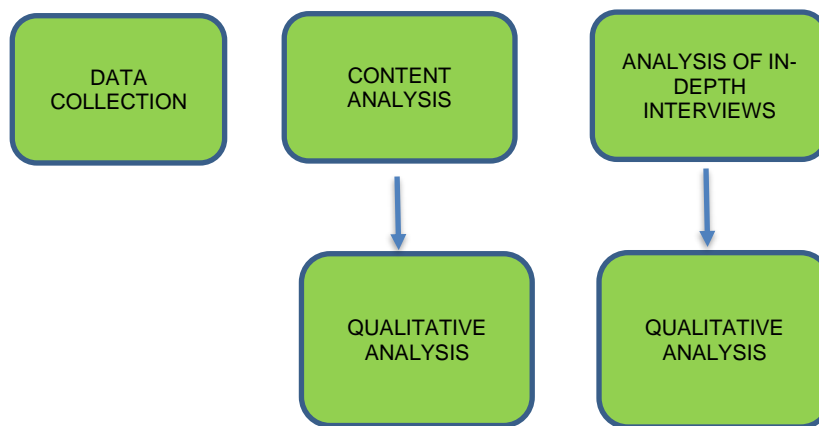
The study analyzes the manifestations described in the formal documentation, in the interviews with referents, as well as in the behaviors of the communities of the universities under study, regarding the concepts of sustainability, university social responsibility, and organizational culture.

To analyze the pro-sustainability orientations in organizational culture from the perspective proposed by Schein (2010), considering the dimensions of strategic planning and substantive functions, the analysis was divided into two blocks.

In the first block, the pro-sustainability orientations present in the formal documentation provided in the strategic planning and the substantive functions were analyzed. The critical factors weighting matrix suggested by Fred David (2003) was used for the rating.

In the second block, an analysis of the in-depth interviews performed with the informants of the faculties that work in the careers of the three universities under study was carried out, to investigate if the dimensions pro- Sustainability are basic assumptions shared in the organizational culture of the careers under study.

**Figure 1.**



Source: Author's own work

### Participants of the Study

The participants of this study were seventeen interviews; Vasilachis (2009) mentions that quality studies value the credibility of knowledge more than the possibility of generalizing characteristics.

**Table 2.**

University	Faculty
Central University of Ecuador	Economy
	Administrative Sciences
National Polytechnic School	Administrative Sciences
Armed Forces University	Economic, Administrative, and Commercial Sciences.

Source: Author's own work

## 2.2 Instrumentation

The primary data were obtained using the Sustainability Assessment Questionnaire. The secondary data includes the formal documentation provided in the strategic planning and the substantive functions of the universities.

## 2.3 Data collection procedures

The researcher received approval to collect data at the respective universities; in the case of the Armed Forces University - ESPE, it received the approval of the director of the Department of Economic, Administrative, and Commercial Sciences; in the case of the National Polytechnic School, it received the approval of the Rector of the institution and in the case of the Central University of Ecuador, it received the approval of the direction of the Faculty of Economics and Administrative Sciences.

It is important to mention that to preserve the identity of the universities, there are used numbers for the university in the tally.

## 2.4 Data Analysis

The data obtained were tallied and treated using the following tools:

1. The critical factors weighting matrix suggested by Fred David (2003).

**Table 3. Assignment of relative weight to each dimension of the sustainability**

Dimensions of sustainability	Pro-sustainability Orientations	The relative weight of each dimension
<b>Environmental dimension</b>	Environmental Protection; campaigns, incentives.	0.5
	**Reduce, reuse, and recycle	0.5
<b>Total relative weight</b>		1
<b>Social dimension</b>	Social inclusion	0.25
	Equity	0.25
	Ethics	0.25
	Social Responsibility / Art and Culture / Health	0.25
<b>Total relative weight</b>		1
<b>Economic dimension</b>	Responsible consumption	0.33
	Wealth distribution	0.33
	Popular and solidarity economy	0.34
<b>Total relative weight</b>		1

Source: Author's own work

**Table 4. Variables analyzed in Substantive functions of the university**

<b>Substantive functions</b>	<b>Sustainability variables analyzed in interviews</b>
<b>Teaching</b>	Subjects related to sustainability
	Courses related to sustainability
	Linking sustainable processes in education
	Opportunities for teachers and students to improve their understanding of sustainability
<b>Research</b>	Sustainability Research
	Scholarships for sustainability studies
	Community members conducting or interested in sustainability-related research
	The motivation of students to carry out sustainability studies
	Programs related to sustainability
<b>Community Outreach</b>	Voluntary participation of teachers and students in linkage programs related to sustainability
	Inclusion of sustainability in the programs
	Community outreach programs benefits

Source: Author's own work

**Table 5. Variables analyzed in the administrative management of the university**

<b>Administrative management</b>	<b>Sustainability variables analyzed in Interviews</b>
<b>Strategic planning (mission, vision, goals)</b>	Formal statements Program or sustainability policies Strengths in terms of sustainability Weaknesses in terms of sustainability Key factors Resistance factors
<b>Operations /processes</b>	Buildings Energy conservation Waste reduction Sustainable foods Water conservation Sustainable landscaping Sustainable transport Responsible purchases Sustainability evaluations

Source: Author's own work

For tabulation of the interviews, the Atlas ti 8.0 software was used; the perceptions of informants from each university were separated and finally, a general table of the main perceptions of all the informants from the universities was included.

### 3. Results and Discussion

The expressions of pro-sustainability orientations registered in the formal documents of strategic planning of the universities under study were related to these general concepts:



Compliance with sustainable development objectives, human development, and development of society.

It should be noted that there is a greater tendency to include texts related to the social dimension.

**Table 6. Pro-sustainability orientations observed in the strategic planning of public study universities**

<b>Sustainability dimensions</b>	<b>Pro- orientations observed in the strategic planning of public universities</b>
<b>ENVIRONMENTAL</b>	Commitment to the planet, respect for the environment, university performance with environmental responsibility, environmental conservation, and environmental protection.
<b>SOCIAL</b>	Inclusive training, formulating projects in biological and social situations; Programs for the improvement of the Human Development Index, programs in which it is integrated with the National Plan of Good Living; Innovation to achieve sustainable development objectives; That human ingenuity is used to build a fair, democratic society, that solves poverty and inequality problems. Professionals with ethical awareness, solidarity, and critics who contribute to the well-being of the community. Transmit knowledge with social responsibility; transparent the actions of the university; Responsible autonomy with equity.
<b>ECONOMIC</b>	With popular and supportive responsibility, transparency, equitable redistribution, distribution of wealth, and responsible consumption.
<b>GENERAL CONCEPTS</b>	<b>Compliance with Sustainable Development Goals, Human Development, and Society Development.</b>

Source: Author's own work

In the same way, it is observed that the mentions referring to the pro-sustainability orientations included in the substantive functions are related to the social dimension.

It should be noted that the texts included in the substantive function called teaching are related to human development; while in the substantive function called research, the texts are related to the economic and social dimension, but there are no texts that are related to the environmental dimension; and finally, in the substantive function of community outreach, the texts included mention the promotion of social projects, none that promote environmental projects.

**Table 7. Pro-sustainability orientations observed in the substantive functions of the public universities under study**

<b>Pro sustainability orientations</b>	<b>Pro- sustainability orientations in teaching</b>	<b>Pro- sustainability orientations in Research</b>	<b>Pro- sustainability orientations in community outreach</b>
<b>ENVIRONMENTAL</b>	Respect for the rights of nature, and sustainable use of resources.		Propitiate an ecological culture
<b>SOCIAL</b>	Train professionals with ethical consciousness that contribute to the development of society; professional humanistic, participatory, inclusive, and critical training; Respect for human rights; In search of the common good. Train professionals committed to truth, justice, equity, solidarity, ethical, and moral values. Inclusive institution.	Research programs in biological and social situations; projects with social responsibility; High-quality research that contributes to the development of society. Investigations with transfer to society; Development of technologies for inclusion.	
<b>ECONOMIC</b>	Facilitate social integration, human development	Projects that solve problems such as poverty, social inequality, absence of justice and democracy; Find solutions for problems that afflict mass markets.	Projects that consider economic and technological inclusion
<b>GENERAL CONCEPTS</b>	<b>Human, and social development</b>		

Source: Author's own work

The description of pro-sustainability orientations presented in the planning and the substantive functions, allows us to observe a strong tendency to include texts oriented to the social dimension, as can be seen:

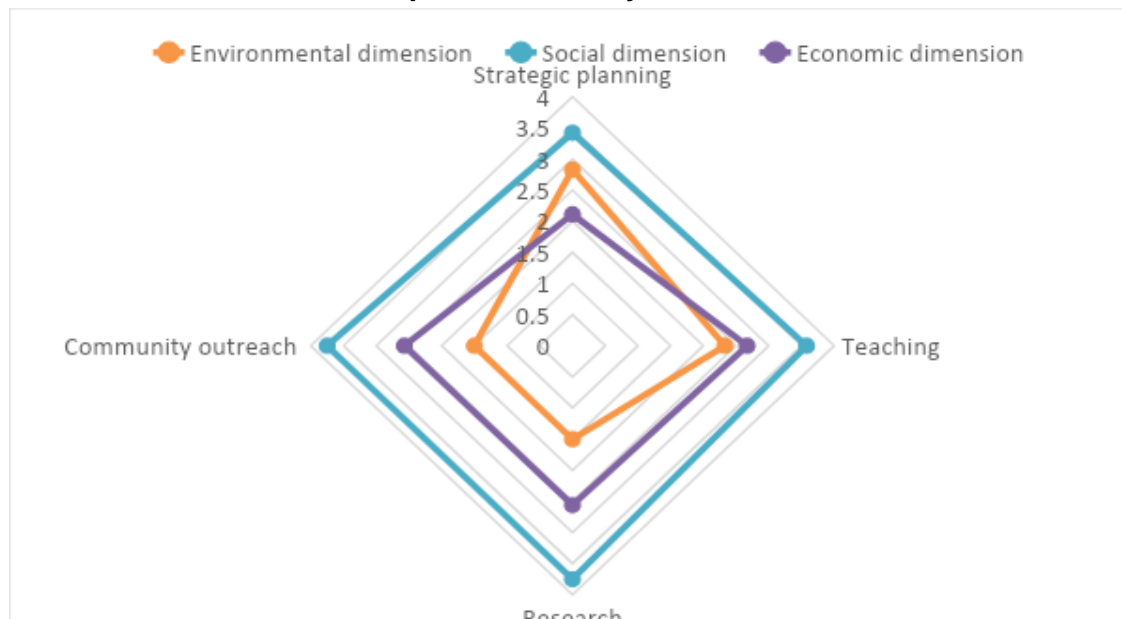
**Table 8.**

<b>Pro-sustainability Orientations</b>	<b>Strategic Planning</b>	<b>Teaching</b>	<b>Research</b>	<b>Community outreach</b>
Environmental dimension	2,83	2,33	1,5	1,5
Social dimension	3,42	3,58	3,75	3,75
Economic dimension	2,11	2,67	2,56	2,57

Source: Author's own work

The environmental dimension is mostly described in formal texts related to the strategic planning of universities, but there is less utilization of texts for the substantive functions of research and community outreach.

**Figure 2. Pro-sustainability orientations included in strategic planning and the substantive functions of the public university**



Source: Author's own work

Making the analysis of the appreciations of the pro-sustainability dimensions in the organizational culture of University 1, it can be seen that ignorance, the traditional approach education, as well as desires, are the main factors that could indicate that these dimensions still are not part of its organizational culture.

**Table 9. Global appreciation, University 1**

Incidence elements	Main appreciations	Mentions
<b>IGNORANCE</b>	The ignorance of teachers, students that there is no predisposition to get involved in sustainable issues.	<b>14</b>
<b>APPROACH TRADITIONAL</b>	It is expressed that education currently has a traditional approach and that transversality does not exist, that the technical approach prevails, and that no idea of sustainability is included. The university is not a reference in sustainability issues. There is a lack of teachers on sustainability. A change of mentality is needed.	<b>11</b>
<b>DISINTEREST</b>	It is observed that, even with several efforts that the University has made to create mastery programs with a sustainability approach, there is no interest or reception by the population to study these masters; Precisely because there is no knowledge or training in grade students. Even when there are garbage dumps with waste typification, there is no interest in using them properly, there is misinformation. As it is not mandatory, no greater interest is lent.	<b>7</b>

<b>PARTICULAR EFFORTS</b>	The linking of pro-sustainability dimensions in the chairs are particular efforts of some teachers.	<b>6</b>
<b>TRANSVERSALITY</b>	Not subject to sustainability, it is considered that the dimensions may be included in a transverse sense. There is currently no transverse approach.	<b>6</b>
<b>CULTURAL</b>	It is expressed that sustainability issues are linked to individual culture, depending on each person's awareness of sustainability issues.	<b>5</b>
<b>ECONOMIC, NON - SUSTAINABLE THEME</b>	In universities, acting with sustainability is more due to an economic issue than by a subject of sustainable consciousness. On the other hand, the need for the allocation of a budget to direct the effort toward sustainability is linked.	<b>2</b>

Source: Author's own work

In University 2, the principal factors that show the pro-sustainability dimensions are not yet part of its organizational culture are: recent inclusion of them by law, lack of interest, and traditional approach education, where the important is to teach the technique in the subjects.

**Table 10. Global appreciation, University 2**

<b>Incidence elements</b>	<b>Main appreciations</b>	<b>Mentions</b>
<b>MANDATORY THROUGH THE LAW</b>	Sustainability, when considered mandatory through CES, is being linked to curricular meshes, so surely in the future the results will be seen; It is starting with the process.	14
<b>DISINTEREST</b>	Although subjects were implemented in one of the faculties as part of the specialization, it had no greater reception; Therefore, they had to join them, put them as mandatory. There are garbage dumps with waste typification, there is no interest in using them properly, and there is misinformation.	13
<b>TRADITIONAL APPROACH</b>	It is expressed that education currently has a traditional approach, only the technical part is taught, and sustainability issues are not included A change of mentality is needed.	9
<b>POVERTY</b>	Poverty is considered as an element that does not allow students to direct their efforts to sustainability issues for the concern of seeing their basic needs satisfied first; Comparisons are made with students from other universities that already have basic needs covered, so it is considered that for them it becomes much easier to operationalize sustainability issues.	9
<b>CULTURE</b>	It is expressed that sustainability issues are linked to individual culture; which depends on each person's awareness to act positively on sustainability issues.	8
<b>PARTICULAR EFFORTS</b>	The efforts are particularly, of some teachers who link sustainability issues in the subject.	6
<b>ECONOMIC, NON-SUSTAINABLE THEME</b>	The university is considered to take more actions to reduce waste or recycling, more for an economic issue than by a subject of sustainable consciousness.	4

Source: Author's own work

In University 3, the main factors that show, the pro – sustainability orientations aren't yet part of its culture organizational are: the approach traditional education, lack of interest, and

individual cultural theme.

**Table 11. Global appreciations, University 3**

<b>Incidence elements</b>	<b>Main appreciations</b>	<b>Mentions</b>
<b>APPROACH TRADITIONAL</b>	The university is aimed at having a only technical approach, does not include sustainability issues, and is not a reference to sustainability issues. There is a lack of teachers on sustainability. A change of mentality is needed. The university can have primitive behavior, it is not interested in conserving water, electricity, etc.	18
<b>DISINTEREST</b>	Despite the existence of garbage dumps with waste typification, there is no interest in using them properly, there is misinformation. As it is not mandatory, no greater interest is lent.	fifteen
<b>CULTURAL</b>	It is expressed that sustainability issues are linked to individual culture, depending on the awareness of each person applying sustainability issues.	12
<b>IGNORANCE</b>	The ignorance of teachers, students that there is no predisposition to get involved in sustainable issues.	10
<b>PARTICULAR EFFORTS</b>	The linking of pro-sustainability dimensions in the chairs are particular efforts of some teachers.	6
<b>TRANSVERSALITY</b>	Not having its sustainability matters, it is considered that the pro-sustainability dimensions may be included in a transverse sense.	6

*Source: Author's own work*

Making a resume of this analysis, it can show that pro-sustainability orientations are not part of the organizational culture university yet. Factors that influence this situation are lack of interest and approach traditional education.

Two criteria are observed, the first is related to the fact that the Universities procure to establish technical and economic educational guidelines considered as fundamental for professional life since teachers and authorities perceive that students value them as fundamental factors that should guide their profession (Bourdieu, 2002).

The other criteria suggest that organizational culture can become a tool for cultivating beliefs and values in order to achieve objectives or strategies (Smircich, 1983; Rodríguez, 2009), which is why authorities, teachers, and students give priority to the technical part to guide it towards the fulfillment of its mission.

#### **4. Conclusion**

##### **Diagnosis of pro-sustainability orientations in the organizational culture of public universities**

There is a strong tendency to include texts oriented to the social dimension in the three

universities, while there is a low tendency to include texts oriented to the environmental and economic dimensions; this inclination is observed both in strategic planning and in substantive functions. Also, It was possible to observe in the interviews with teachers and authorities of the three universities, that the concept of sustainability is linked solely to the environmental dimension.

Based on the findings, the researcher concludes that pro-sustainability dimensions are not shared basic assumptions underlying the organizational culture of the universities under study. This statement is evidenced by the answers given in the interviews with authorities and teachers who reported the existence of inconveniences in implementing the dimensions of sustainability in the university.

## 5. Recommendations

Based on the results and insights gathered, it is important to consider the following recommendations:

- 1 Create a culture of sustainability, establishing the inclusion of sustainability dimensions in the substantive functions of the university, teaching, research, and community outreach; creating multidisciplinary work teams that generate research projects and links in these lines.
6. Insert a subject on sustainability in the curricular meshes or micro curricula in all careers in the universities in the studio.
7. Encourage the university community to get involved in activities of cultural, spiritual, and ethical development, through active participation in clubs. It is also suggested to provide information through campaigns, establish conversations about it, and create spaces in social networks.
8. Organize conversations about consumption responsible, popular and solidarity economy, fair trade, circular economy, and the integration of this theme in the substantive functions of teaching, research, and community outreach.
9. Promote the creation of internal policies that allow adequate management of waste, recycling management, water, and light consumption, and at the same time establish measurement parameters in these three dimensions.

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