Gustavo Fuentes PIT-KN: Elevating the Stories and Knowledge from Underrepresented Lived Experiences

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THE CATALYST

My experience volunteering for more than 10 years — working in vulnerable territories, rebuilding houses after a catastrophe, and developing social projects for rural communities — has shaped my belief that being underrepresented generates a feeling that pushes you to take action. This feeling, many times expressed as anger, frustration, and disappointment, can bring out the best ideas to solve the challenges you are facing.

My experience working on social challenges made a change in my life trajectory as well as my purpose as a professional, and that has driven me to this point — to study more about social entrepreneurship; the circular economy; the green, orange, and blue economy; sustainability; and smart cities. And because of that experience, I’ve been building all my initiatives (I’m leading two organizations) aligned with that trajectory or purpose.

PIVOTING TO PIT

The Vision

As a young social entrepreneur from Chile, I focus the initiatives of my team on solving challenges that are affecting communities whose voices have been marginalized in public discourse. Our initiatives are created by visiting and working closely with people living in these vulnerable and rural communities.
Nexus Between a Problem and the Solution

Our organization’s aim is to teach young students how to identify social and environmental challenges that are affecting their own communities and be able to transform these challenges into a business opportunity in less than four months. We deliver programming to enhance socioemotional and leadership skills, purpose, and a better understanding of how they, as young people, can be a key factor to improve the growth of their own territories. We say that even if we are not experts on every area, we want to be the NEXO+(positive nexus) between the problem and the solution.
The Breakthrough

NEXO+ is a Chilean social startup that aims to democratize innovation and entrepreneurship in vulnerable and rural areas to develop more resilient and integrated territories through the execution of educational programs in high schools.
WHAT WE LEARNED

When we talk about how to elevate the voices of young people from vulnerable or rural territories it means providing a platform that supports freedom of thought, opening new ways of approaching our biggest challenges as a society. That is where we want to go, and if we combine this way of promoting new solutions through the work with people affected by the problem, the Public Interest Technology University Network (PIT-UN) can play an strategic role in terms of how to make these solutions more robust, more integrated, and more connected with the knowledge that can catapult our young people’s efforts.

I truly believe that the work being done by the University of Michigan PIT Knowledge Network team and the broader PIT-UN can not just uplift the work we do as social entrepreneurs, but help share the experience of these young underrepresented leaders and be a safe place of connection and international collaboration for their initiatives.