

Productive and commercial disparities and dynamics at the community level

Brechas y dinámicas productivas y comerciales en el ámbito comunitario

Pablo Dávila*
Diego Mantilla*
Mauricio Balarezo*
Mónica Noboa Reinoso*

ABSTRACT

This study examines socioeconomic gaps affecting productive and commercial dynamics in urban community contexts of Quito. From a territorial perspective, it explores conditions influencing the sustainability of small local businesses. The objective was to identify key productive and commercial weaknesses perceived by community actors. The research adopts a qualitative, descriptive approach, with a sample of businesses collected during university outreach activities. An anonymous survey was applied using EPICOLECT5 and textual analysis was conducted with Voyant Tools. Results reveal structural shortages, high dependency, and limited competitiveness, highlighting university engagement as a strategy for capacity building and inclusive territorial development processes locally.

Keywords: Socioeconomic gaps; Community economy; Local productive dynamics; Community trade; Territorial development.

RESUMEN

Este estudio analiza las brechas socioeconómicas que inciden en las dinámicas productivas y comerciales en contextos comunitarios urbanos de Quito. Desde un enfoque territorial, se examinan las condiciones que

* Msc. Universidad Central del Ecuador, pgdavila@uce.edu.ec
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5741-5405>

* Msc. Universidad Central del Ecuador, dmmantilla@uce.edu.ec
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4826-9784>

* Msc. Universidad Central del Ecuador, mabalarezo@uce.edu.ec,
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5374-1051>

* Msc. Universidad Central del Ecuador, mnoboa@uce.edu.ec
<https://orcid.org/0009-0006-8178-985X7972>

JOURNAL OF BUSINESS
and entrepreneurial
studies

ISSN: 2576-0971



Atribución/Reconocimiento-NoComercial- Compartir Igual 4.0 Licencia Pública Internacional — CC

BY-NC-SA 4.0

<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/legalcode.es>

Journal of Business and entrepreneurial
April - June Vol. 10 - 2 - 2026

<http://journalbusinesses.com/index.php/revista>
e-ISSN: 2576-0971

journalbusinessentrepreneurial@gmail.com

Receipt: 18 February 2026

Approval: 12 March 2026

Page 62-85

afectan la sostenibilidad de pequeños negocios locales. El objetivo fue identificar las principales debilidades productivas y comerciales percibidas por los actores comunitarios. La investigación es cualitativa y descriptiva, con una muestra de negocios recopilada durante prácticas de vinculación universitaria. Se utilizó una encuesta anónima aplicada mediante EPICOLECT5 y un análisis textual con Voyant Tools. Los resultados evidencian carencias estructurales, alta dependencia y limitada competitividad, y destacan la vinculación universitaria como estrategia.

Palabras Clave: Brechas socioeconómicas; economía comunitaria; dinámicas productivas locales; comercio comunitario; desarrollo territorial.

INTRODUCTION

Community projects have emerged as a key strategy for local development and improving the quality of life in communities. These initiatives aim to address social, economic, and environmental issues through the participation of community members, promoting collaboration and citizen empowerment. However, to ensure that these projects meet their objectives and generate positive impacts, it is essential to have appropriate evaluation and monitoring mechanisms in place.

Regarding the evaluation of community projects, its implementation focuses on measuring their effectiveness, efficiency, and relevance in relation to the proposed objectives. Since information is crucial for decision-making and resource optimization, it is clearly a unique feature of the evidence-based approach. In fact, a structured evaluation process allows for aligning achieved results with initial expectations, which in turn simplifies the implementation of corrective strategies and increases long-term sustainability.

Conducting monitoring and evaluation activities allows for the collection of crucial data on project inputs, outputs, and impact, which is fundamental for evidence-based decision-making and for improving the impact on the community. These activities not only strengthen relationships among the various stakeholders but also help identify community needs and demonstrate the positive impact of projects.

On the other hand, monitoring involves the continuous collection and analysis of data related to project implementation. This process helps ensure that planned activities are carried out as intended and allows for timely adjustments to improve performance. Monitoring, for its part, is a fundamental tool for efficient project management, as it provides real-time information on progress and contributes to transparency and accountability toward the community and stakeholders.

This research aims to provide information on the evaluation and monitoring of community projects from a local perspective. To this end, it will analyze the methodological approaches used in various parts of the world, as well as the strategies implemented in Latin America and Ecuador to improve the management and impact of community projects.

It is worth noting that the relationship between higher education institutions and their surrounding communities goes beyond mere revenue generation; it is, above all, a mechanism through which the university contributes to the country's social and productive development (Martínez et al., 2010). In the case of Ecuador, this relationship begins with applied activities—guided tours, training stays, courses, and technical assistance—that enable the establishment of channels for collaboration between academics and local stakeholders. Over time, some of these links mature into development contracts and technology licensing agreements—forms that Martínez et al. (2010) identify as the most significant modalities within the spectrum of university–industry engagement.

It is worth noting that sustained exchange between academia and the productive sector directly influences the quality of goods and services reaching the market. García and Pomar (2021) note that academic collaboration facilitates not only the design of joint projects but also their translation into products and processes with greater competitiveness and higher technical value. When university teams work with companies and communities on the development and implementation of programs, learning takes place that leads to improved production and marketing practices.

Finally, the social dimension of university–industry collaboration must not be overlooked. Beldrán and Ortega (2021) emphasize that a university committed to its community identifies local problems and directs applied research toward relevant solutions. If the social function is properly integrated with research and technology transfer strategies, higher education institutions contribute to producing knowledge that is useful in specific contexts and measurable in terms of benefits for the population. This approach positions university engagement as a bridge between knowledge generation and the resolution of specific needs, beyond merely securing external resources.

Socioeconomic Context of Quito and Training Needs

Quito, the capital of Ecuador, is located in the province of Pichincha, founded in 1534, regarding its socioeconomic context, it has been identified as a city with limited economic freedom according to the results of a study conducted by the Citizenship and Development Foundation; that is, the ability of individuals and families to make economic decisions autonomously is restricted by an excessively interventionist government, as the city is one of the highest tax collectors, has the highest wage expenditures, and hosts the most municipal enterprises.

Furthermore, the Metropolitan Mayor's Office of Quito (2015) notes that access to productive factors is not equitable, thereby marginalizing certain socioeconomic groups and depriving them of access to improvements in their quality of life. This can be improved through education, with children and adolescents receiving a quality education that prepares them to be creative, leaders, researchers, entrepreneurs, professionals of excellence, and good citizens.

According to a report on the economic and business environment presented in 2024, in 2023 the Economically Active Population (EAP) consisted of 72.7% men and 55.4% women, reflecting a gender gap of 17.3 percentage points. Furthermore, women represent the largest group within the Economically Inactive Population (EIP), accounting for 44.6% compared to 27.3% for men. As for young people who are neither studying nor working (NEETs), they accounted for 16.9%, a decrease of 1.6 percentage points compared to 2022. These data suggest the need for training in various areas that can be offered to the population to help them improve or discover the skills and abilities required for a particular activity, which can serve as a pathway to a better quality of life, while also addressing the segment of society that needs to learn and engage in productive activities.

Participatory Approach

Participatory research has been conceptualized as a process through which members of an oppressed group or community collect and analyze information and take action on their problems with the aim of finding solutions and promoting political and social transformations (Balcazar, 2013).

According to Alava and Orellana (2014), the participatory approach constitutes a set of alternative techniques that promote dialogue between academic knowledge and social knowledge—that is, popular knowledge.

In this approach, the subject engages with another subject beyond the traditional relationship between researcher and research subject—the people. In this case, dialogue is fostered and encouraged; questions are posed, which in turn stimulate communication and expression in all their forms.

However, Velásquez et al. (2021) describe the participatory approach as a method that addresses the study of communities from an interdisciplinary perspective using sociological, anthropological, educational, and political criteria without any bias. This is because it has its origins in social struggle with liberating and emancipatory aims, within a multipolar, integrative, and syntagmatic vision.

Selection of target areas

According to Piñeroso et al. (2023), selecting a target area (neighborhoods and markets) for a community engagement project allows for the development of a comprehensive

understanding of that area, using technical and experiential tools; in other words, the aim is to establish or build a tool for planning and social transformation through community participation.

Similarly, Gordillo et al. (2015) indicate that every program or project addresses a problem; in this sense, a project must be planned according to the current state of that territory; within a city, these places generally correspond to neighborhoods or markets with certain potential problems to be resolved that the population cannot address due to the costs typically involved, which is why there is usually a mechanism for ranking or prioritizing based on previously established criteria that allows for selecting which issues to address first.

The Ministry of Education (2021) specifies that to identify a territory and ensure the project can be implemented effectively, processes must first be outlined that link the various aspects, allowing the education sector to engage with the social and/or productive sectors—in this case, neighborhoods and markets.

Design of Workshops and Teaching Materials

From the perspective of Jalo and Albizú (2013), the design of workshops and instructional materials can be approached through a wide range of theories and approaches; however, in the educational setting, their design must encompass key concepts that illustrate and encourage students to acquire knowledge through appropriate materials, as well as the design of tasks relevant to each class.

Rivera (2011) notes that teaching materials serve various objectives, which allow for classification; it should be emphasized that all are aimed at increasing motivation, interest, attention, comprehension, and work performance, and they primarily engage the senses of hearing, sight, and touch. In terms of classification, these materials can be permanent, informative, visual, audiovisual, illustrative, and experimental.

Teaching materials and workshops are conceptualized as the link between words and reality. This link contributes to the development of the teaching-learning process, which is based on observation and experimentation that foster objectivity in the student.

Community Engagement in Higher Education

Community engagement is one of the core functions of higher education institutions in Ecuador, on par with teaching and research, as it bridges academic knowledge with the real needs of local communities and social actors.

The Academic Regulations of the Council for Higher Education (CES) establish that higher education institutions must promote projects and initiatives that contribute to local, regional, and national development, thereby consolidating a model of a socially relevant university.

From a conceptual perspective, engagement is understood as a dimension that establishes a two-way relationship between the university and society, where both parties learn and benefit: academia contributes scientific, technical, and professional knowledge, and the community provides local knowledge, socio-productive practices, and challenges that guide new lines of research and professional training. In this vein, community engagement is not merely social outreach but a systematic process of knowledge exchange that strengthens social development and improves the quality of student education.

Bernal et al. (2023) conceptualize community engagement as a dimension of higher education that focuses on establishing a two-way relationship between the institution and society, allowing the university to contribute to social development and, in turn, benefit from the community's knowledge.

Furthermore, engagement with society is recognized as the set of actions that express the university's mission to dynamically and coordinately project its scientific knowledge and connect all of society with the university. This function comprises philosophical, scientific, artistic, and technical studies and activities through which the problems, data, and cultural values existing in all social groups are explored and gathered from the social, national, and global environments, and seeks to stimulate social development and elevate the spiritual, intellectual, and technical level of the nation by impartially and objectively proposing to the public fundamental solutions to problems of general interest (Quezada et al., 2017)

Both Ecuadorian and Latin American authors recognize it as the "set of actions through which the university makes its scientific, philosophical, artistic, and technical capabilities available to society to identify problems, gather information from the environment, and propose objective solutions to issues of general interest." When carried out in a planned manner, this function helps raise the cultural, intellectual, and technical level of the population and positions the university as an agent of social transformation.

Higher education institutions in the country have expanded this concept into an operational notion of engagement that includes plans, programs, projects, community services, continuing education, consulting, inter-institutional cooperation, and processes for the democratization of knowledge. What is important is that these activities are systematically planned, executed, monitored, and evaluated, ensuring that the university's intervention has social relevance and sustainability.

The Role of Public Universities in Local Development

Since their inception, universities have been important institutions designed to perform essential functions within a social context. Today, society universally expects the university to be a place that contributes not only to the education of students but also

to addressing everyday problems, with the aim of providing well-being, development, and a better future. This has created an unbreakable bond; in other words, the university is an extension of society, with each drawing from the other—people, resources, means, and motivation—for the collective benefit (Council for Quality Assurance in Higher Education [CEACES], 2020).

According to Rojas et al. (2019), the university was created to serve as both a cultural extension and a university extension; the former corresponds to artistic expressions, and the latter to the services and solutions it can offer through research and teaching, respectively. The public university not only conducts research and is not merely a center for technical and professional training, but also encompasses a mechanism that allows these functions to be aligned with addressing the needs of the surrounding environment—that is, society. It is here that engagement plays a crucial role, serving as the link that provides relevance to the public higher education institution.

Quezada et al. (2017) note that the role of the public university through community engagement involves a dynamic dialectical relationship with society. Consequently, there is a need to transform the management of community engagement into a strategy that enables local development in the region where activities are carried out or planned, or where some form of necessary collaboration is implemented to solve a problem.

Importance of Financial Literacy in Low-Income Sectors

A country's financial system represents a fundamental pillar of its wealth, as it plays an indispensable role in the functioning of the economy. While society is organized through mechanisms that allow for individual or collective economic decision-making, families need to possess the necessary knowledge required in a globalized world where all kinds of business transactions can be conducted with a single click from anywhere on the planet. Therefore, economic and financial literacy takes on great importance by offering adequate support to individuals throughout their life cycle—not only in the process of financial accumulation but also by fostering personal and social well-being and quality of life, thereby generating progressive social and economic development.

As Bonilla et al. (2022) state, financial education is of great importance today because it not only enables people to make smart savings and investment decisions, better manage debt, plan for retirement, and accumulate greater wealth, among other things, but also provides essential tools for understanding economic and financial topics that affect the economy from the global to the national level, thereby allowing for a better understanding of social and economic policies to be prepared and avoid macroeconomic shocks.

Similarly, Peña et al. (2020) indicate that the importance of financial education lies in the fact that knowledge in these areas enables people to make informed decisions and thus achieve greater benefits.

For example, understanding the importance of saving, credit management, retirement savings, the effects of inflation, and risk management in financial transactions. Furthermore, it enables greater participation by the population in various products and services offered by the financial sector, which translates into higher levels of financial inclusion, thereby reducing social gaps in this area.

Impact on the Family and Community Economy

According to Quezada et al. (2020), to measure the impact of engagement on the family and community economy, three major variables are taken into consideration, as described in the table below:

Table 1.

The Impact of Employment on Family and Community Economies

I. Impacto en los Beneficiarios de los proyectos de labor comunitaria	
La participación ciudadana	1.-Percepción y aprobación de la gestión 2.-Percepción de la institucionalidad 3.-Satisfacción con los resultados y la puesta en práctica 4.-Integración comunitaria a través de la asistencia y participación 5.-Ausentismo y deserción 6.-Apropiación y disposición social para la participación 7.-Participación en el seguimiento y mecanismos de vigilancia
Desarrollo formativo	1.-Mejoramiento de la capacidad de la formación 2.-Incremento de los indicadores de situación laboral 3.-Competencias profesionales y técnicas
Educación continua	1.-Capacidades y potencialidades de la ciudadanía 2.-Acreditación de programas 3.-Certificación de procesos 4.-Percepción del proyecto de formación y diseño de aprendizaje
2. Impacto en las familias y comunidad	
Bienestar social	1.-Calidad de entorno

	2.-Mejoramiento y diversificación de las actividades sociales 3.-Equidad de género e integración 4.- Naturaleza de conciencia social
Creación de valores económicos	1.-Mejora en las capacidades del grupo familiar 2.-Distribución y diversificación de ingresos 3.-Estandares de vida material y relaciones sociales
3. Impacto en los gestores del proyecto	
Rendimiento de los grupos estudiantiles	1.-Integración estudiantil con los proyectos comunitarios 2.-Percepción de los estudiantes con respecto a la aplicación y puesta en marcha
Percepción del profesorado	1.-Desarrollo académico de estrategias, técnicas y gestión 2.-Aspectos psicológicos, evolutivos y trabajo en equipo

Nota. En la tabla se presenta los niveles de impacto a medir en un proyecto de vinculación

Similarly, Méndez (2021) notes that the participation of faculty researchers in leading outreach projects not only enables the theoretical development of knowledge but also fosters innovation in addressing societal challenges, highlighting a shift in the role of universities and viewing them as strategic allies capable of contributing their resources and, to some extent, their physical spaces in both the public and private sectors, all with the aim of supporting research and the development of new outreach projects.

On the other hand, community engagement generates an impact on the population in various aspects—such as social, scientific, economic, and political—resulting in users largely benefiting from economic growth, since by gaining new knowledge on a specific topic, they can apply it to their businesses or microenterprises, which, when managed effectively and with optimal use of resources, grow and develop, becoming more productive and contributing to the family economy and improved living conditions.

From this perspective, the question arises: How do socioeconomic gaps affect local productive dynamics and community commerce, and how do these processes influence territorial development within the community economy?

In Ecuador, markets serve as the primary venue for the sale of products and, consequently, as the economic hub of certain neighborhoods. In Quito, there are 33 registered markets, where a short supply chain generally prevails, starting with the producer, followed by mobile wholesalers, stationary wholesalers, retailers, and consumers. About 75% of small businesses are run by women, who face risks due to the lack of intervention by government, public, or private entities that could help address various challenges.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

You must describe the type of research, the study sample, the techniques and instruments, and explain how the process is established. The text should be between 1 and 2 pages long.

This study adopts a descriptive qualitative approach, involving an on-site assessment of the productive and commercial dynamics in neighborhoods and urban markets within the Metropolitan District of Quito. The research is based on primary data collected through community engagement activities carried out by university students, who gathered data directly in the study areas, allowing for the capture of community actors' perceptions and needs within their real-world context.

The open-access program EPICOLECT5, developed by the University of Oxford, was used for data collection. This program facilitated the design and implementation of an anonymous survey aimed at identifying the main weaknesses of community businesses, which were considered key response categories for the analysis. This tool allowed for the systematization of data in a standardized and georeferenced manner, ensuring the traceability and consistency of the information collected in the field.

Data processing was carried out in two phases. In the first phase, the obtained databases were cleaned and refined, removing records with blank fields, incomplete, or inconsistent responses, in order to ensure the quality of the analyzed corpus. In the second phase, a qualitative evaluation was conducted using the open-source software Voyant Tools, a tool specialized in textual analysis and basic qualitative data mining.

The analyzed corpus consisted of a consolidated document, totaling 7,494 words and 1,359 unique lexical forms, created on October 15, 2025. The textual analysis revealed a vocabulary density of 0.181, a readability index of 14.755, and an average of 48.7 words per sentence, reflecting a broad and descriptive discourse on the part of the participants. The most frequent words in the corpus were: lack (205), no (124), competition (98), products (96), and dependence (89)—terms that guided the qualitative interpretation of the main issues perceived in community businesses.

This methodological approach allowed for the identification of discursive patterns, semantic relationships, and recurring problem areas, providing a comprehensive understanding of socioeconomic gaps and productive and commercial dynamics from the perspective of local actors.

RESULTS

Qualitative assessment using an IN SITU approach.

For this study, we started with the information provided by students during their outreach internships. To this end, we used the open-source program EPICOLET 5 from the University of Oxford (<https://five.epicollect.net/>). Using this program, we designed an anonymous survey and focused on business weaknesses as responses. In the first phase, we cleaned the provided databases (removing blank spaces and incomplete responses); in the second phase, using the open-access program Voyant Tools (<https://csdh-schn.org/stefan-sinclair-in-memoriam/>), we conducted the qualitative evaluation based on the following corpus:

This corpus contains 1 document with a total of 7,494 words and 1,359 unique terms. Created on October 15, 2025.

Vocabulary density: 0.181

Readability Index: 14.755

Average words per sentence: 48.7

Most frequent words in the corpus:

- missing (205); no (124); competition (98); products (96); dependence (89)

Here, in this detail, we can observe the most frequently repeated words within the qualitative analysis. If we focus on a word cloud, the following matches and repeated words can be observed as follows:

Figure 1

Business diagnosis with word cloud



Note: Taken from:

<https://voyant-tools.org/?corpus=ed4a1203902a73ecff6f3f7de04d747e&view=Cirrus>

In Figure 1, we can observe the following words from the corpus of analyzed phrases that show similarities and concordances in the following order:

i) The word “lack” includes complete phrases such as lack of financing, lack of social media, lack of budget, lack of staff, lack of marketing, advertising, and customer service, lack of financial education, lack of education, lack of capital, lack of market positioning, lack of training in electronic media, lack of inventory control, lack of planning, lack of technology in processes, lack of police presence, lack of access to financial services, lack of knowledge in the use of technology, lack of resource acquisition, lack of reliability from suppliers, lack of product variety, lack of visibility on social media, lack of differentiation, lack of adequate staff and infrastructure, lack of innovation and a customer loyalty strategy, lack of storage, lack of technological infrastructure, lack of cash flow, lack of marketing, lack of trust in teamwork, lack of management knowledge, lack of product variety, lack of updates to the accounting system, lack of solid marketing strategies, lack of legal stability, lack of merchandise, lack of business promotion, lack of electronic payments, lack of modern tools, and lack of brand recognition, among the most common and recurring issues.

The study conducted as part of the project Boosting Economic and Social Development in Neighborhoods and Markets reveals a landscape that, although part of daily life for those working in these spaces, often remains unclear when systematic information is lacking. It is worth noting that several of the identified limitations recur across different businesses and ultimately affect the stability of merchants, particularly when they need to adapt to changes in demand or unforeseen economic fluctuations.

A review of the testimonies and data collected reveals that many owners lack even basic accounting and financial records. This situation suggests that the day-to-day management of businesses is left to intuitive decisions—sometimes successful, but at other times difficult to sustain without proper documentation. Added to this is the scarcity of technological tools and commercial promotion practices, which affects their ability to expand their customer base or improve their visibility in highly competitive markets.

It is worth noting that other aspects of the assessment also point to persistent problems: insufficient infrastructure, poor planning, and a reluctance to organize collective efforts or participate in support networks. Taken together, these elements paint a fragile picture. A brief statement sums it up: business owners work hard, but with limited resources.

In this context, the involvement of the public university takes on a different meaning. It does not merely offer technical support or ad hoc training; it creates a space where merchants can reinterpret their daily practices in light of project management methodologies and previously systematized experiences. This partnership creates a meeting point between practical knowledge and academic tools, opening the possibility of strengthening capacities and building solutions that address real needs.

It must not be overlooked that these processes, when carried out continuously, contribute to improving business operating conditions and, more broadly, to revitalizing the economic life of neighborhoods and markets. The collaboration between the university and the community, in this sense, ceases to be a symbolic gesture and becomes a mechanism for promoting changes that are locally situated and socially valuable.

The word “No” has the following associations: no social media presence, no advertising to attract customers, no social media management, no products the neighborhood needs, no technological knowledge, no access to digital services, not well-known throughout the neighborhood, not well-known on digital platforms or social media, no digital marketing, does not accept electronic payments, lacks payment technology, it lacks cash, lacks digital permits and faces security risks, lacks electronic payment processing, doesn't know all suppliers, has a limited customer base, doesn't manage inventory and taxes well, isn't very organized, lacks security cameras, lacks necessary resources, lacks parking and has limited infrastructure, products don't sell quickly, doesn't maintain inventory control, lacks marketing experience, and faces technological barriers, sales are slow and operating and logistics costs are high, it is not open throughout the workweek and has high operating costs, there is little visibility and a reliance on specific suppliers, there is no product variety, there is no home delivery, there are no process manuals, expensive equipment is not repaired, no credit facilities are offered, it is not safe to work late hours due to crime, the business is not well-known, digital payments are not used, the location is not busy, the customer base is not expanding, prices are not competitive, products are not in stock, there is not much foot traffic, new markets have not been tapped, the large customer base is not being served, it is not located in a strategic spot, suppliers are not diversified, the area is not very busy, and there is not much time to spend with family.

An examination of the statements linked to the term “no” reveals various limitations that directly impact the competitiveness and sustainability of small businesses located in neighborhoods and markets. The lack of digital tools—such as social media, online advertising, or electronic payment systems—restricts their visibility and reduces their ability to attract new customers. Added to this is the lack of technological skills, inventory control systems, digital permits, and marketing strategies, revealing a significant gap in business management.

These deficiencies are exacerbated by insecurity, limited infrastructure, low foot traffic, and dependence on specific suppliers—factors that raise operating costs and reduce profitability. Similarly, the absence of internal organization, clear processes, and access to financial services hinders the expansion or diversification of these businesses.

In light of this scenario, university engagement through training programs and accounting-financial advisory services emerges as a strategic alternative. Through well-planned projects, it is possible to strengthen capacities, bridge technological gaps, and promote economic inclusion. This academic intervention not only offers technical

solutions but also drives social and economic development through a territorial, collaborative, and sustainable approach.

ii) The word “competition” has several contexts; the most common ones are as follows: competition among pharmacies, competition with fast food, competition in the cosmetics sector, competition in the chicken retail sector, competition in refrigeration equipment, competition in perishable goods, competition due to lack of social media management, competition with similar businesses, competition in inventory control, competition in electronic payments, competition for strategic locations, competition affected by insecurity, competition from high prices, competition with street vendors, competition due to rising prices, competition due to higher costs, competition from the opening of new supermarkets, price competition from suppliers, competition for new investments, competition due to staff shortages, competition due to power outages and staff shortages, competition from similar products, competition from high operating costs, competition due to product diversification, competition from large chains with extended hours, competition due to reliance on supplier credit, competition and constant efforts to differentiate, competition over infrastructure, competition for specialists, competition from similar businesses, competition regarding service hours and insecurity, competition due to environmental issues, competition due to strict regulations, competition from lower-quality products, competition from high-quality products, competition from prices of recyclable materials, competition to invest in new products, competition from external factors such as: crises, pests and diseases, technology, new regulatory challenges, competition to upgrade equipment, and delays in product delivery.

The study shows that competition is one of the most significant challenges for small retailers operating in neighborhoods and markets. This manifests in various ways: the presence of large chains with longer operating hours, the increase in similar businesses, the activity of street vendors, and the opening of new supermarkets. Competition goes beyond price, involving factors such as the use of technology, the quality of infrastructure, customer service, product variety, and the ability to respond to external factors such as economic crises, pests, insecurity, or strict regulations.

Many of these businesses struggle to differentiate themselves due to the lack of digital tools, inventory control systems, marketing strategies, and trained staff. This creates constant pressure to innovate, invest, and refine processes in an environment marked by scarce resources.

In this scenario, the management of university outreach projects becomes a key strategy for strengthening local competitiveness. Through accounting and financial training and technical support, continuous improvement, operational efficiency, and the sustainability of these ventures are promoted. Academic involvement provides tools to face competition with knowledge, planning, and strategic vision, thereby contributing to the economic and social development of the region.

iii) The term “products” encompasses the following categories: products with limited availability, products with a wide range of offerings, products without advertising, perishable products, products requiring significant capital investment, products with new brands and franchises, highly competitive products, products dependent on suppliers and brands, products in short supply, high-cost, high-quality products, products with low inventory and sales, products that do not use electronic payment methods, products with inventory control and high competition, substitute products, products with very high raw material costs, high-cost products, products with low sales on specific dates, products with storage restrictions, products with poor training in management, digital marketing, and unfair competition, products with poor inventory control, products with rising prices and high inventory costs, products with price fluctuations, products with low visibility, products with low profit margins, products with poor social media presence, similar products at low prices, products with high operating costs, limited diversification, and competition risks, products dependent on suppliers, products with little market differentiation, products not available in stock, products with high innovation but little differentiation, products with limited production capacity, products that remain in storage for a long time, products with limited supply and lacking advertising, products with occasional supplier delays causing delays, products with supply issues, products with poor tax management, scarce imported products, products with large industrial customers, products with insufficient supply, products with low quality and market competitiveness, high-priced organic products, unsold products with greater variety, products with high transportation costs, products with unstable markets.

An analysis of the expressions associated with the term “products” highlights multiple structural challenges faced by small merchants in neighborhoods and markets. Storage constraints, low visibility, lack of advertising, and weak product differentiation directly impact competitiveness. Added to this are dependence on suppliers, high operating costs, limited availability of imported goods, and price volatility—factors that increase uncertainty in business management.

The lack of inventory control systems, limited use of electronic payment methods, and insufficient training in key areas such as digital marketing and administration intensify these difficulties. High competition and limited production capacity further undermine the sustainability of these businesses.

In this scenario, university intervention through outreach projects emerges as a strategic resource for strengthening product management. Through accounting and financial training and technical support, better planning, control, and marketing are facilitated, enabling merchants to adapt to market demands. In this way, project management driven by academia contributes to local economic development, promoting innovation, efficiency, and productive inclusion.

iv) Finally, the term “dependence” has the following connotations: dependence on local suppliers and brands, dependence on products due to high costs and storage, dependence on inputs and limitations in production capacity, dependence on high staff

turnover, dependence on local clientele and limited space for storage and product display, dependence on cost fluctuations, dependence on seasons and seasonality in sales, dependence on high operating and production costs, dependence on suppliers for untimely delivery, dependence on technical equipment, dependence on tourism and limited operational capacity, dependence on local demand, dependence on schedules and low income, dependence on repeat customers, dependence on traffic and location, dependence on brands, dependence on supplier credit, dependence on electricity, dependence on physical sales channels and parking, dependence on manual production. Dependence on ingredient quality, dependence on a single specialist, dependence on suppliers, risks and accidents, dependence on payment systems, dependence on recyclable material prices, dependence on the weather, dependence on poor social media management, dependence on poor adaptation to technological changes.

The repeated appearance of the term “dependence” in the analysis reveals a structural weakness in small businesses located in neighborhoods and markets. This dependence manifests in various dimensions: suppliers, inputs, local clientele, in-person sales channels, electricity supply, weather conditions, seasons, specialists, and technological systems. This level of dependence limits both the operational autonomy and strategic capacity of merchants, creating vulnerability to external factors such as delivery delays, price fluctuations, power outages, insecurity, or regulatory changes.

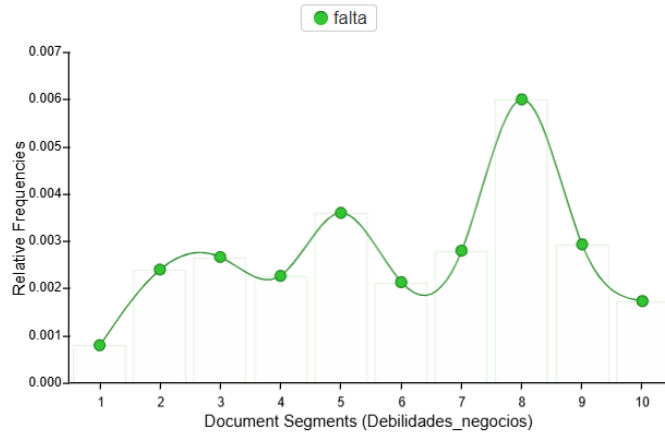
Likewise, the limited diversification of products, processes, and commercial channels hinders rapid adaptation to environmental challenges. This reality is exacerbated by low capacity for technological adoption and the absence of solid strategic planning.

In this scenario, the management of university-community partnership projects emerges as an essential tool for reducing these dependencies. Through accounting and financial training, the strengthening of digital skills, and technical support, business autonomy, operational resilience, and innovation are promoted. Academic intervention facilitates the transition toward more sustainable, diversified, and competitive business models, contributing to local economic development from a comprehensive and collaborative perspective.

Analysis of Trends in Qualitative Data for Community Development and University Engagement

To visualize trends within the qualitative analysis used in various neighborhood businesses, the following can be observed:

Figure 2
 Repetitive word trend: “lack”

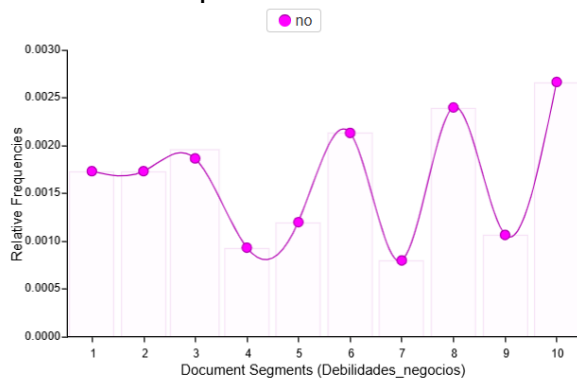


Note. Taken from:

<https://voyant-tools.org/?corpus=ed4a1203902a73ecff6f3f7de04d747e&query=productos>

Figure 2 shows that the relative frequency of the term “falta” within the segments grouped as *Debilidades_negocios* varies widely throughout the analysis. The highest value is recorded in Segment 8, where the frequency reaches approximately 0.006, indicating the highest concentration of mentions of the concept. A minor increase is also observed around Segment 5, followed by a pronounced decrease in segments 9 and 10.

Figure 3
 Trend of the repetitive word “no”



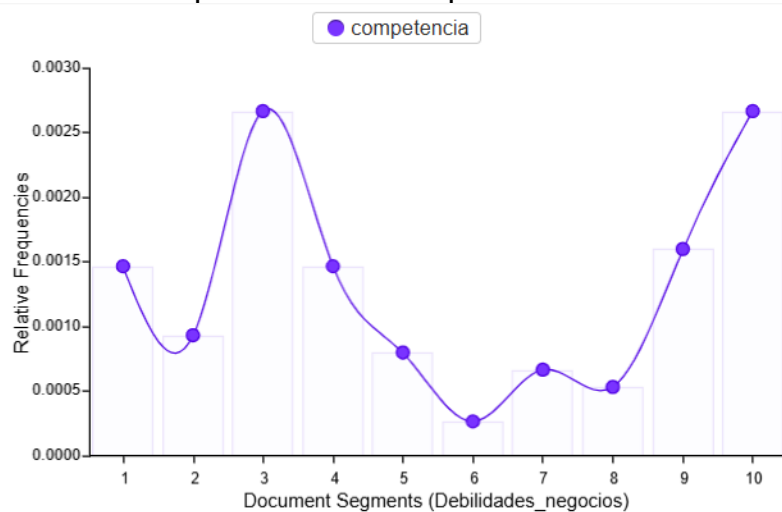
Note. Taken from:

<https://voyant-tools.org/?corpus=ed4a1203902a73ecff6f3f7de04d747e&query=productos>

Figure 3 shows that the use of the negation term “no” follows an irregular pattern. Although its presence is low in the middle segments, with values close to 0.0009 in Segments 4 and 7, the frequency increases significantly in the second part of the analysis. Two peaks stand out: one in Segment 8, where it reaches approximately 0.0025, and another in Segment 10, with a value close to 0.0026. Overall, Segment 8 stands out again, as this is where expressions of absence linked to “no” reach one of their highest concentrations within the corpus.

Figure 4

Trend of the repetitive word “competition”



Note. Taken from:

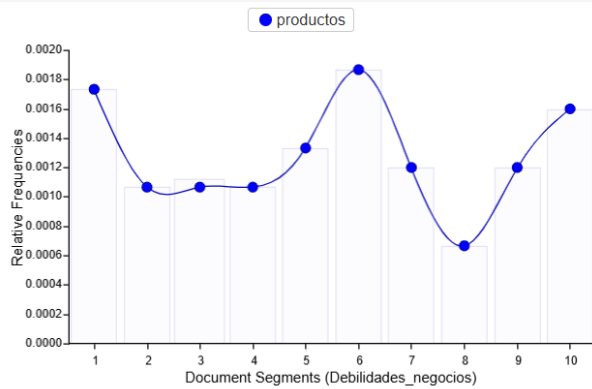
<https://voyant->

[tools.org/?corpus=ed4a1203902a73ecff6f3f7de04d747e&query=productos](https://voyant-tools.org/?corpus=ed4a1203902a73ecff6f3f7de04d747e&query=productos)

An examination of Figure 4 reveals that the relative frequencies associated with the concept “competition” within *Debilidades_negocios* follow an irregular pattern across the segments. The highest value appears in Segment 3, where the frequency approaches 0.0026. After this point, the curve descends until reaching its lowest level in Segment 6, with a reading close to 0.0004.

In the final part of the analysis, the frequency of the term increases steadily once again. This trend leads to a new peak in Segment 10, where the frequency—again close to 0.0026—matches the maximum observed at the beginning, thus marking a conclusion that balances the overall distribution of the concept throughout the analysis.

Figure 5
Trend of the repetitive word “products”



Note. Taken from:

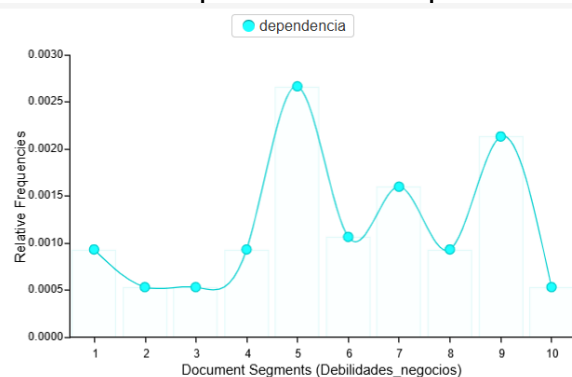
<https://voyant->

[tools.org/?corpus=ed4a1203902a73ecff6f3f7de04d747e&query=productos](https://voyant-tools.org/?corpus=ed4a1203902a73ecff6f3f7de04d747e&query=productos)

Figure 5 shows how the relative frequency of the term “products” varies across the ten segments linked to Business_Weaknesses. The series begins with a high value in Segment 1, close to 0.0016, suggesting that this topic receives considerable attention at the start of the corpus. After this point, the curve shows a decline in the following segments, before beginning a more pronounced uptick.

The subsequent increase leads to the peak in Segment 6, where the frequency reaches approximately 0.0018. In this section, references to products become particularly prominent, becoming the core of the discussion regarding the weaknesses affecting the businesses analyzed.

Figure 6
Trend of the repetitive word “dependence”



Note. Taken from:

<https://voyant->

[tools.org/?corpus=ed4a1203902a73ecff6f3f7de04d747e&query=productos](https://voyant-tools.org/?corpus=ed4a1203902a73ecff6f3f7de04d747e&query=productos)

Figure 6 shows the relative frequency of the term “dependence” across the ten segments comprising *Debilidades_negocios*. The trend is irregular and characterized by pronounced fluctuations both upward and downward. After starting at an intermediate level, the series declines until reaching its lowest values in Segments 2 and 3, where the frequency approaches 0.0006.

From that point on, the curve changes direction and rises sharply until reaching Segment 5. There, the highest value of the entire set is recorded, with a frequency close to 0.0026, the point at which references to “dependence” reach their greatest intensity within the analyzed corpus.

The assessment conducted in neighborhoods and markets in Quito reveals a set of structural constraints affecting the sustainability of small businesses. The constant lack of resources, knowledge, technology, infrastructure, and strategic planning limits their capacity for growth. Added to this are the things they lack or fail to implement: the absence of social media, advertising, inventory control, electronic payment methods, and internal organization, which weakens their market positioning. Competition, both formal and informal, is intensified by the presence of large chains, low prices, similar products, and external factors such as insecurity and economic crises. Regarding products, problems of limited differentiation, high costs, low visibility, poor management, and dependence on suppliers are identified, which generates commercial instability. Finally, dependence on inputs, local customers, physical channels, specialists, and external conditions such as weather and electricity reveals high operational vulnerability. Given this landscape, university engagement through project management emerges as a key strategy to strengthen capacities, reduce risks, and promote economic and social development from a collaborative, inclusive, and sustainable perspective.

CONCLUSIONS

The qualitative analysis conducted in neighborhoods and markets throughout the city of Quito provides a comprehensive understanding of the gaps and dynamics that shape productive and commercial development at the community level. The study confirms that the constraints identified in small businesses are not the result of isolated or temporary problems, but rather form part of a structural web of inequalities that are repeatedly expressed in the discourse of local actors.

The high frequency and variability of the term “lack” throughout the analyzed corpus reflects a persistent perception of multiple deficiencies that permeate the day-to-day management of community enterprises. These deficiencies are not limited solely to the absence of financial resources but extend to deficits in business training, access to technology, adequate infrastructure, and strategic planning. The centrality of this concept highlights that business sustainability is compromised by structural conditions that limit their capacity for adaptation, growth, and innovation in highly competitive urban environments.

Complementarily, the significant frequency of the negation term “no” reinforces the interpretation of a context marked by systematic constraints. The concentration of this expression in certain segments of the corpus points to critical moments in which the possibilities for economic action are clearly constrained. Discursive negation expresses, in this sense, the impossibility of implementing basic management, marketing, or promotional practices, which reduces the room for maneuver of community businesses and accentuates their lag behind larger-scale actors. This discursive dimension illustrates how structural inequalities translate into concrete limitations on decision-making and the implementation of sustained improvements.

Analysis of the term “competition” reveals a constant source of tension in the community business environment. The fluctuations observed across the segments indicate that competition is perceived unevenly but is persistently present. This perception is linked both to the presence of large retail chains and economies of scale, as well as to informal competition and other external factors, including insecurity and economic instability. The difficulty in differentiating products and services intensifies this competitive pressure, placing small businesses at a structural disadvantage that limits their survival and market presence.

Regarding the term “products,” the results show that this constitutes a central theme in the narrative on commercial weaknesses. The identified trends highlight problems associated with limited diversification, high costs, low visibility, and deficiencies in production and commercial management. These limitations directly impact the generation of added value and the ability of businesses to respond to consumer demands and preferences. Weaknesses in product management also reinforce dependence on suppliers and external conditions, increasing the economic vulnerability of the businesses analyzed.

The category “dependence” emerges as a key indicator of the structural fragility of community-based businesses. The concentration of the term in specific segments of the corpus highlights a high degree of subordination to suppliers, local clientele, physical marketing channels, and external factors such as the climate, the availability of electricity, or the stability of the urban environment. This dependence significantly limits the resilience of these enterprises in the face of economic crises, changes in demand, or disruptions in supply chains, reducing their potential for adaptation and sustainability in the medium and long term.

Taken together, the analysis of qualitative trends allows us to conclude that the identified weaknesses stem from a community-based production model operating under structurally unequal conditions. These conditions not only constrain immediate economic performance but also affect the territories’ capacity to build more equitable and inclusive development processes. In this context, university outreach takes on strategic importance by positioning itself as a mechanism that bridges academic knowledge and the real needs of the territory.

The management of outreach projects, grounded in on-site assessments and participatory methodologies, serves as a key tool for strengthening local capacities, promoting social innovation processes, and reducing identified gaps. By integrating students, faculty, and community actors into collaborative processes, the university can make a concrete contribution to the design of relevant, sustainable, and socially inclusive solutions. In this way, university engagement not only fulfills an educational function but also establishes itself as a key actor in promoting economic and social development from a territorial and community perspective.

REFERENCES

- Balcazar, F. (2013, Enero 8). Aspectos conceptuales y dificultades de implementación. Retrieved from www.redalyc.org: <https://www.redalyc.org/pdf/184/18400804.pdf>
- Barros, E., Pesantez, C., Flores, J., Moreno, J., & Meneses, V. (2024, Julio 9). Educación contable de las microempresas en la ciudad de Quito. Retrieved from ciencialatina.org: https://ciencialatina.org/index.php/cienciala/article/view/16082/22933?utm_source=chatgpt.com
- Beldrán, P., & Ortega, L. (2021, Enero 8). La vinculación con la sociedad como motor del desarrollo en el marco de la formación técnica y tecnológica. Retrieved from dialnet.unirioja.es: <https://dialnet.unirioja.es/descarga/articulo/8377988.pdf>
- Bernal, S., Pulla, C., Minchala, W., & Castro, D. (2023, Julio 5). La vinculación con la sociedad como factor clave para acrecentar los niveles de calidad en la universidad ecuatoriana. Retrieved from dialnet.unirioja.es: <https://dialnet.unirioja.es/servlet/articulo?codigo=9059323#:~:text=La%20vinculaci%C3%B3n%20con%20la%20sociedad%20como%20dimensi%C3%B3n%20de%20la%20educaci%C3%B3n,los%20conocimientos%20de%20la%20comunidad.>
- BOISIER, S. (2005). ¿HAY ESPACIO PARA EL DESARROLLO LOCAL EN LA GLOBALIZACIÓN? REVISTA DE LA CEPAL 86, 48-61.
- Bonilla, R., Monteros, A., & Cerezo, V. (2022, Diciembre 2). Educación y bienestar financiero, tarea pendiente en Ecuador y la región. Retrieved from rfd.org.ec: <https://rfd.org.ec/biblioteca/pdfs/LG-331.pdf>
- Burga, M. (2023, Marzo 5). La gestión financiera en pequeñas y medianas empresas. Retrieved from yura.espe.edu.ec: <https://yura.espe.edu.ec/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/34.4-La-gestion-financiera-en-las-Pequeñas-y-Medias-Empresas.pdf>
- Consejo de Aseguramiento de la Calidad de la Educación Superior. (2020). Educación Superior y sociedad ¿Qué pasa con su vinculación? Quito: CEACES. Retrieved from www.caces.gob.ec: <https://www.caces.gob.ec/wp-content/uploads/Documents/PUBLICACIONES/Educaci%C3%B3n%20Superior%2>

- 0y%20Sociedad.%20C2%BFQu%C3%A9%20pasa%20con%20su%20vinculaci%C3%B3n%20%281%29.pdf
- Enemdu. (2024, Septiembre 5). Como vamos en entorno económico y empresarial. Retrieved from quitocomovamos.org: https://quitocomovamos.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/10Factsheet_Economia2025.pdf
- Gordillo, I., Quezada, C., & Brito, L. (2015, Julio 8). Planificación de proyectos de vinculación con la sociedad. Retrieved from Universidad Técnica de Machala: <https://investiga.aitec.edu.ec/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/Planificaci%C3%B3n-proyectos-de-vinculaci%C3%B3n.pdf>
- Gutierrez, E., & Nuñez, S. (2018, Mayo 8). El software contable como herramienta técnica en las microempresas de la provincia de Santa Elena. Retrieved from dialnet.unirioja.es: <https://dialnet.unirioja.es/descarga/articulo/6353057.pdf>
- Hollenstein, P. (2019, Febrero 8). ¿Están en riesgo los mercados y ferias municipales? Aprovechamiento de alimentos, economías populares y la organización del espacio público urbano de Quito. Retrieved from library.fes.de: <https://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/quito/15203.pdf>
- Jalo, M., & Albizú, C. (2013, Julio 6). Diseño de material didáctico: un desafío para la creatividad. Retrieved from www.memoria.fahce.unlp.edu.ar: https://www.memoria.fahce.unlp.edu.ar/art_revistas/pr.6280/pr.6280.pdf
- Mantilla, J. (2021, Abril 5). Evaluación y propuesta de mejora del proceso de vinculación con la sociedad para incrementar el desempeño y eficiencia de la facultad de ingeniería mecánica de una universidad estatal del Ecuador. Retrieved from dspace.ups.edu.ec: <https://dspace.ups.edu.ec/bitstream/123456789/21613/1/UPS-GT003562.pdf>
- Martínez, L., Leyva, M., & Barraza, A. (2010, Abril 2). La importancia de la vinculación en las instituciones de educación superior. Retrieved from www.uaeh.edu.mx: https://www.imef.org.mx/publicaciones/boletinstecnicosorig/BOL_07_10_CTN_CC.PDF
- Martínez, M., Vivaldo, J., & González, C. (2023). Manual de seguimiento y evaluación de proyectos comunitarios. Zaragoza: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México.
- Méndez, J. (2021, Enero 8). Impacto socioeconómico de la vinculación universitaria. Retrieved from scielo.senescyt.gov.ec: http://scielo.senescyt.gov.ec/scielo.php?script=sci_arttext&pid=S2528-79072021000500169
- Ministerio de educación. (2021, Mayo 5). Guía para la implementación del modelo de vinculación entre las instituciones educativas. Retrieved from educacion.gob.ec: <https://educacion.gob.ec/wp-content/uploads/downloads/2021/10/Guia-Modelo-de-Vinculacion.pdf>
- Peña, M. (2016, Julio 5). Integración de los programas de vinculación con el medio externo. Retrieved from www.ucsg.edu.e: <https://www.ucsg.edu.ec/wp->

- content/uploads/acreditacion/documentos-acreditacionUCSG/E-3.12.2%20Vinculacion%20Plan%20Integrado%20Institucional.pdf
- Peña, M., López, C., & Anderson, C. (2020, Julio 4). Determinantes de la alfabetización financiera. Retrieved from www.scielo.org.mx: https://www.scielo.org.mx/scielo.php?script=sci_arttext&pid=S2448-76782020000100005
- Piñeroso, E., Mora, D., & Hechavarría, Y. (2023, Marzo 7). Cartografía social, una herramienta de análisis para el estudio comunitario. Retrieved from dialnet.unirioja.es: <https://portal.amelica.org/ameli/journal/440/4403729009/html/>
- Primicias. (2025, Abril 6). Quito es la ciudad con menor libertad económica, entre 13 capitales provinciales analizadas en un estudio. Retrieved from www.primicias.e: <https://www.primicias.ec/economia/quito-libertad-economica-impuestos-municipio-90796/>
- Quezada, C., Brito, L., & Gordillo, I. (2017, Julio 5). La vinculación con la sociedad y la universidad pública en el Ecuador. Retrieved from investiga.aitec.edu.ec: <https://investiga.aitec.edu.ec/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/Vinculacion-con-la-sociedad-IES-p%C3%BAblicas-Cesar.pdf>
- Quezada, J., Banegas, C., & Castillo, Y. (2020, Julio 5). Evaluación del impacto de la vinculación con la sociedad en el caso de la carrera de Odontología de la Universidad Católica de Cuenca. Retrieved from www.cienciadigital.org: <https://www.cienciadigital.org/revistacienciadigital2/index.php/ConcienciaDigital/article/download/1550/3921/>
- Rivera, F. (2011, Junio 5). Elaboración de material didáctico para mejorar el aprendizaje en el área de matemáticas con los niños del séptimo año de educación básica de la escuela "Daniel Villagomez". Retrieved from dspace.ups.edu.ec: <https://dspace.ups.edu.ec/bitstream/123456789/2415/13/UPS-CT002422.pdf>
- Subirats i Humet, J., & García Bernardos, Á. (2015). Innovación social y políticas urbanas en España. DIALNET.
- Universidad del Azuay. (2022, Septiembre 5). Vinculación con la sociedad. Retrieved from comunidad.uazuay.edu.ec: <https://comunidad.uazuay.edu.ec/sites/comunidad.uazuay.edu.ec/files/public/2024-04/uazuay-vinculacion-informe-final-proyecto-fortalecimiento-habilidades-destrezas-mies.pdf>
- Vallejo, J. (2023, Noviembre 5). La importancia de la educación financiera en las familias ecuatorianas. Retrieved from dialnet.unirioja.es: <https://dialnet.unirioja.es/descarga/articulo/9585726.pdf>
- Velásquez, L., Alvarado, S., & Barroeta, V. (2021, Febrero 6). Investigación-acción-participativa: alternativa metodológica para el estudio de las comunidades. Retrieved from dialnet.unirioja.es: <https://dialnet.unirioja.es/descarga/articulo/9587513.pdf>