

Empowered or disempowered? The effects of the Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program in Mexico

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Abstract

This text opens with a critical analysis of the main problems facing Mexico's penitentiary system. Next it considers educational opportunities for incarcerated people in Mexico to focus on the specific case experienced by the authors of this article through the Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program in the *Reclusorio Metropolitano* in Puente Grande, Jalisco during the first semester of 2017. The text ends with reflections regarding the possible reach of Inside-Out in Mexico and the general importance of education to reduce the high rates of recidivism and the context of delinquency that favors crime.

Key words: prison education, Mexican penitentiary system, recidivism, corruption, Inside-Out.

Introduction

After an analysis of the current state of the Mexican judiciary system during the first seminar of the Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program, conducted at the Reclusorio Metropolitano in Puente Grande, Jalisco, students were asked if they felt empowered or disempowered. When they explored issues of public security, guaranteed rights and reinsertion into society, some of them felt empowered by the knowledge learned and the broadening of their views of the problems faced in this field. On the other hand, there were those who felt disempowered or despairing at the high level of corruption, impunity and inefficacy of the system. With a group made up of eight university students and ten incarcerated people (IPL), the dialog and debates on how the State responds to those who break the law leads to deep insights that would not be achievable in other academic spaces.

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This article opens with a depiction of the current context of the penitentiary system at the national and state levels, addressing some of its main issues and how the authorities have responded to them. Then we describe the educational offer for incarcerated people in Mexico, following with a presentation of the specific case experienced by the authors of this article: a course of the Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program at the Reclusorio Metropolitano in Puente Grande. We close with some reflections on the possible reach of Inside-Out in Mexico and the importance of education in general for an effective reinsertion of incarcerated people into society.

The context of the penitentiary system in Mexico

Mexico's penitentiary system is currently undergoing an interesting process of change due to the introduction of the new system of criminal justice, which is expected to help alleviate a large extent the problems of penitentiary centers. Certainly, the correct application of the new system will indeed help eradicate some negative situations that afflict our prisons, but there are others, such as self-government, corruption, and infrastructural problems that will not improve unless the authorities involved intervene in an effective and forceful manner. We will now address some of the main flaws in the system pointed out by the Inter-American Commission for Human Rights (CIDH) in the National Diagnosis of Penitentiary Supervision (DNSP): the overpopulation of IPL and the lack of a classification by criminological profile, self-government, corruption and mistreatment, as well as the lack of resources.

The National Diagnosis of Penitentiary Supervision (DNSP)

This diagnosis, conducted every year by the CNDH through continuous visits to Mexico's penitentiary centers, assesses and makes recommendations to penitentiary centers on five key aspects:

- I. Aspects that guarantee the inmate's physical and moral integrity
- II. Aspects that guarantee a decent stay
- III. Conditions of governability
- IV. Social reinsertion of the inmate
- V. Groups of inmates with specific requirements

These aspects serve to point out problems that are specific to each center and to generate the statistics considered in the assessment. The CNDH gives each one of the aspects a grade from 0 to 10, which makes it possible to make comparisons between different penitentiary centers in Mexico.

The DNSP gives the state of Guanajuato the highest grades in the country, with an average grade of 8.02 making it the only state with a grade above 8. The state of Nayarit gets the lowest grade, an average of 4.11. What stands out in this diagnosis is that thirteen states got an average below 6, twelve states were graded between 6 and 7, and only six states had a grade over 7 (CNDH, 2015). These results clearly show the problems of Mexico's penitentiary centers and evidence the level of abandonment of our penitentiary system.

As for the average grade obtained by the five centers evaluated in Jalisco and shown in Table 1, the state got an average grade of 6.90. Although Jalisco was ranked in the eighth place in the DNSP, it is noteworthy that the three worst centers evaluated in the state are within the Puente Grande penitentiary complex, and that these are the largest in the state. We even find that the center for convicted inmates had a failing grade due to its poor level of governability and the almost nonexistent guarantees of physical and moral integrity of its IPL.

Table 1: DNSP grades for penitentiary centers in Jalisco

Center	Grade (0 to 10)
Comisaría de Sentenciados del Estado de Jalisco	5.96
Comisaría de Prisión Preventiva de Jalisco	6.21
Comisaría de Reinserción Femenil	6.88
Reclusorio Zona Sur, Ciudad Guzmán	7.70
Reclusorio de Puerto Vallarta	7.72

The evaluation details widespread problems in the Centers for Social Reinsertion (CERESOS) of Jalisco, among them overpopulation, overcrowding, lack of programs for social reinsertion and detoxification, deteriorated infrastructure, shortage of staff, lack of classification of IPL, human rights violations, lack of oversight, and illegal behaviors.

The consequences of overpopulation in prisons

Overpopulation in prisons is caused mainly by the incarceration-based approach of our legal system. Until the recent enforcement of the new system, any criminal or antisocial behavior, and even an administrative violation, was punished with prison terms. Added to the slow pace of judiciary processes – in which a person could have to wait years to be sentenced – this led to a population explosion in most of Mexico's penitentiary centers. In 1992 there were 85,000 IPL in Mexico; by 2011 this population had trebled, reaching more than 240,000 people in prison (Carbonell, 2012). According to the Decentralized Agency for Social Prevention and Re-Adaptation (*Órgano Administrativo Desconcentrado de Prevención y Readaptación Social*), by 2015 the number of IPL nationwide was 250,539. These data may not seem too alarming by themselves, but if we take into consideration the fact that Mexico's penitentiary system has a maximum ca-

capacity of 206,379 people, it becomes clear that our prisons are filled over their capacity, which leads to other problems.

The enforcement of the new criminal justice system, as well as the alternative means of justice, has the potential of decreasing the population of incarcerated people over the next few years. However, there is a cultural problem that hinders the efficacy of this system. Mexico's penalizing culture has led people, especially those who have been the victims of a crime, to believe that the only way to make amends for the damage or what has been lost in a crime is to see the criminal behind bars; that is, to see the person who hurt them locked up generates a feeling of revenge or satisfaction.

This desire for revenge is linked to the citizens' collective fear fostered by the mass media. Rossana Reguillo argues that the media's obsession with crime has made fear evolve from an emotion produced by concrete threats to an "omnipresence" that cannot be controlled (2002: 199). For this reason, it is increasingly necessary to put a face on the source of the fear or threats. The face that the mass media usually gives them is that of a poor, dark-skinned young man, the most common features found among many of Mexico's IPL. In other words, the violence reported by the mass media "pathologizes the poor as the dangerous 'others', legitimizing the zero-tolerance incarcerative repression in the name of public security and moral retribution" (Karandinos, *et al.*, 2015: 69).

Identifying "the others" as a threat has functioned as a political strategy to get votes; they function as the faces that are the cause of insecurity, and the sense of fear generated by these faces can easily turn into hatred. Along with this hatred, we feel solidarity with the victims of the alleged aggressors. As Reguillo (2002) explains, this sense of community solidarity breaks the dichotomy of victim-aggressor and generates a tertiary relationship.¹ The self-identification as "possible victims", dominated by a sense of fear and hatred towards the "other", enmeshes people even more in the social tissue of crime.

Even though Mexico's norms include alternative means of justice such as mediation and meetings for restoration or community conferences, these are seldom used (Perez & Zaragoza, 2011). There is also a saturation of pending cases in courts, such that a large number of IPL have not been sentenced, especially those who cannot afford a private attorney. Nationwide, less than 60% of IPL have been sentenced (Azaola, 2009). Moreover, 25% are imprisoned for minor theft (less than 1,000 pesos), and only 4% of the IPL is considered to be "highly dangerous" (*ídem.*). Thus, we could argue that Mexican prisons are full of poor people, while most dangerous criminals walk free.

For years now, Mexico's penitentiary centers have been filled over their capacity, a situation that seems to be of little concern for the State, so any solution to this problem appears still dis-

¹ Reguillo's approach has its source in Spinoza's seventeenth century philosophy, which describes emotional forces as "pre-existing subjects" (Reguillo, 2002: 200).

tant in the future. In Mexico prisons' "overpopulation is, on average, of 40%; however, in some states number of the incarcerated people exceeds their capacity by more than 100%" (Ídem: 111). The new criminal justice system may help to alleviate the problem, albeit at a very slow pace.

Overpopulation leads to severe overcrowding in our penitentiary centers, where cells can hold up to ten times their maximum inmate capacity, generating unhealthy conditions, fights for privileged spaces, payments to obtain a better place to sleep, and that inmates wishing to get a better place join criminal groups inside the prison, all of which hinder a proper reinsertion into society (*La policiaca*, December 17 2012).

On the other hand, there is often no separation of inmates according to the crime they are accused of; that is, within the same population, and even in the same dormitory, there are sometimes people under legal process and people who have already been sentenced, people who have committed homicide and people who committed robbery. Thus, people who are clearly involved in organized crime and people who committed crimes of negligence may share the same spaces every day. This coexistence often makes it harder, or even impossible, for those who committed minor crimes to be reinserted into society, because they begin to learn about new crimes and how to commit them. As a survival strategy, people who have been incarcerated for minor crimes frequently associate themselves with members of the cartel that runs the center's self-government and with other inmate leaders. Such relationships tend to result in commitments and links for their involvement in organized crime when they leave the prison (Pérez & Zaragoza, 2011).

This problem may have different causes: to a lesser degree, it is due to the poor training of the penitentiary's staff, who fail to determine correctly the dangerousness of an individual for a proper classification. But the most important cause is the lack of spaces for imprisonment: it is difficult to separate inmates properly because they are assigned to a penitentiary center, a module, and a cell, based more on the space available than on the inmate's classification.

Self-government, corruption and mistreatment

Self-government is one of the scourges that afflict and subjugate our penitentiary system. It is a known fact that Mexico's penitentiary centers are partially or totally controlled by members of drug cartels who, when they learn about the incarceration of a new inmate, decide where he will be located in order to help him or do harm to him. They are also able, according to the inmate students of the Inside-Out course, to request that inmates be moved from one penitentiary center to another, and even to control court decisions to reduce or extend an inmate's stay in prison.

A video received recently by the newspaper *Milenio* shows a "Narcoparty" of the self-government in Puente Grande's Reclusorio Preventivo, with three musical bands from the outside, al-

coholic beverages, a banquet, and the total absence of guards.² The power of cartels continues to surpass the capabilities of Mexico's government, not only in the penitentiary system but also in justice and public security issues. There seems to be no way to eradicate prison self-government because cartels are supported by their business outside the prisons. First it would be necessary to gain some control over the activities of organized crime outside the prisons, and then weed out the self-government that controls many of the penitentiary norms in the country.

The problem of corruption is closely linked to self-government and drug cartels, since it is they who subjugate the system to their way of running penitentiary centers. The staff in these centers is in a difficult predicament, because the cartels often threaten their lives or their families' lives to create terror and obtain the benefits and power they want. For a guard, allowing a forbidden action may entail either getting an economic gain or losing his life, so his response to such a request is predictable.

A case that may be illustrative of this predicament appeared in the news on June 15 2017. According to the newscast, around 12:30 p.m. four guards of Puente Grande's CEFERESO (Federal Center for Social Reinsertion) were shot while buying groceries at a store near the penitentiary (Luna, June 15 2017). One of them was reported to have died, two were seriously injured, and one was in stable condition. The aggressors were reportedly driving a white car with license plates from the state of Nayarit, and used high-caliber weapons in the attack (*idem*). The investigation of this attack will have to start inside the CEFERESO. If high-caliber weapons were used, it may be the case that a cartel may be involved in the attack, and if the attack was aimed at a maximum security prison staff, the reasons behind it may have to do with some disagreement between the guards and those who run the prison's self-government.

Actions like these, directed against public officials, generate fear and doubt among the penitentiary's staff about how they conduct their work and whether they follow their superiors' orders. These stories illustrate how deep corruption runs in Mexico's penitentiary culture, inside the prisons but also reaching beyond them to the courts, the prosecutors, and the tribunals.

As for the mistreatment of the IPL, it responds to a large extent to the beliefs in Mexican society about the need to punish alleged criminals severely, as we have observed with the limited acceptance of alternative justice means in the Metropolitan Area of Guadalajara (ZMG), as well as the cases in which alleged criminals identified by citizens have been brutally beaten and even killed (see for instance *El Universal*, October 27 2015; *Jalisco Rojo*, May 22 2017), generating a false sense of wellbeing in society by believing that they have rid themselves of some evil.

Out of 76,469 criminal complaints in Guadalajara in 2016, over 28% were about issues that could be mediated through the Alternative Mechanisms to Solve Controversies (MASC) (Zepe-da, 2017). The MASC are particularly relevant in Jalisco, one of the four states in Mexico with the

2 <http://tv.milenio.com/con_puig_a_las_diez/fiesta-puente-grande-milenio-noticias_3_952734790.html>

highest level of saturation of the Ministerios Públicos³ (MP), who receive an average of 645 cases a year (*idem.*). However, and perhaps driven, as we have mentioned, by feelings of revenge, few victims accept the suggestion that their case be treated through the MASC. It would be interesting to analyze why we have come to the point of justifying violence in these situations, and why people seek revenge rather than reparations for the damage, which goes against Mexico's laws and the international agreements signed by our country.

Mexican society is ill-informed about individual guarantees and human rights. In regard to the IPL, there should be greater divulgation to raise awareness in society about the fact that being imprisoned for having committed a crime only deprives a person of two rights: the right to free transit and the right to vote. Every other right remains intact and must be enforced. It is regrettable that Mexican society accepts the idea that being imprisoned deprives a person of all rights, and that an inmate can be treated as others see fit. The limited scope of institutions which look after the rights of the IPL turns bad treatment of these people into a common practice, not only by guards in prisons but also by policemen who arrest them, judiciary policemen, *ministerios públicos*, process policemen, and those who guard them in prison. Campaigns are required to defend the rights of the IPL, to exert pressure on and call the attention of authorities to these problems, as well as to train policemen and law enforcement officials on human rights issues.

Lack of budget, lack of commitment

In Mexico's government institutions, speaking of money has always been a problem. In regard to the budget given to the penitentiary system there has been a huge setback, because the amount destined for it has been decreasing since 2015: the budget for this year was 19,374.8 million pesos, 18,308.9 million pesos in 2016, and for 2017 the amount assigned to the penitentiary system was 16,615.3 million pesos (Hernández, 2016). With the lack of basic provisions for the IPL,⁴ widespread corruption, and lack of transparency in the use of these funds, it is not difficult to come to the realization that our penitentiary centers are in risk of economic collapse or of falling completely under the control of cartels, which contribute large sums of money to the maintenance of penitentiary centers (*El Observador*, February 12 2016).

An alternative to mitigate the repercussions of this decrease in the budget of penitentiary centers would be to create self-sustainable prison institutions that function as both industries and places for work. With this model, the IPL work to make money for them and for their families and also raise money for the prison (Matthews, 2011). While there are some exceptions such as Punta de Rieles in Uruguay (Porciuncula, 2017), many private prisons are notorious for their poor conditions and severe human rights violations (Wessler, 2016).

3 The agencies that receive and investigate criminal complaints. The phrase is also commonly used to refer to the officials who head those agencies.

4 For further details about these shortages, see Azaola (2009).

Although prisons in Mexico are under the control of the Executive branch of government, who would be the first one responsible for the situation in which people live there, the Judiciary branch has faculties that it could use to put pressure on penitentiary centers to improve the IPL's condition. There is a precedent in California, where a court concerned about the conditions in that state's prisons sent an ultimatum warning that unless there were improvements in their centers the court would start granting freedom to IPL with shorter sentences in order to drastically reduce the number of inmates (Carbonell, 2012). What would happen if courts in our country started to release minor infractors? Since half of the IPL in Mexico are in prison for theft valued under \$6,000 pesos (Azaola, 2009), we can only imagine the effect this would have on the penitentiary system and society in general.

Education in Mexico's penitentiary system

Article 18 of the Mexican Constitution states in its second paragraph that education is one of the main axes for reinsertion into society. Education should therefore be accessible to all penitentiary inmates. However, nowadays education in penitentiary centers seems to be a privilege for some rather than a right. Access to education is limited due to the scarcity of programs and resources in most centers, as well as to the overpopulation of IPL. Here it is important to insist on how Mexican normativity points out that when they enter into the penitentiary system the IPL lose only two rights: the right to free transit and the right to vote. Hence, it is necessary to promote the view of education "as a right, not a 'benefit', and make the prison [...] a social space that does less damage on those who inhabit it" (Scarfó and Aued, 2013: 90).

In Mexico there is only one program of face-to-face higher education in the penitentiary system, which operates only in Mexico City prisons. The Higher Education Program for Mexico City's Social Re-Adaptation Centers (PESCER) was the result of an agreement between the Autonomous University of Mexico City (UACM) and the Mexico City Government (GDF), signed in December 2004 (Bidault *et al.*, 2006). PESCER is "the first and only program nationwide that offers penitentiary inmates face-to-face higher education classes, as well as cultural divulgation and university outreach activities" (*idem*: 323). The project began with two pilot groups in 2005 – one at Santa Martha Acatitla's Centro Femenil de Readaptación Social and the other at Penitenciaría del Distrito Federal – and now operates in several penitentiary centers in the Metropolitan Area of Mexico City (ZMCM), offering three Bachelor's Degree programs: Law, Political Science, and Urban Administration and Literary Creation, "with Law being the one in most demand, 84% [...] An understandable percentage considering the students' legal situation" (*idem*: 324).

In general, prisons offer basic and middle education, often using more educated IPL as counselors for Jalisco's Institute for the Education of Youths and Adults (INNEJAD) and other open education programs, thus reducing faculty costs. Such is the case in Jalisco's penitentiary centers, except for the Inside-Out pilot project.

A school for crime?

Although we know that in most prisons in our country there are criminal groups that influence decision-making within the centers, we must also recognize that the power of these groups also contributes to make penitentiary centers into schools for crime. Frequently, those who are in prison for the first time, known as *primodelincuentes* and charged with minor crimes, are recruited by members of cartels to work for them either inside or outside the prison, since they will be out soon. For the *primodelincuente*, accepting this offer means a good stay in prison, economic benefits, and protection, but sometimes they have little choice when they are threatened with harm either to them or to their families (Pérez y Zaragoza, 2011). As an inmate student with a position of high command in the main cartel of the state said in one of his reflection essays for the first seminar of Inside-Out in the Reclusorio Metropolitano, "Life in prison [...] is like going to a [spiritual] retreat. The phrase that calls prison the 'University [of Crime]' says it very well. It is like a boarding school away from your place of origin. You go there to learn more about what you know and to perfect other personal characteristics and business you did not know before".

Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program

Inside-Out is a model that combines formal education with an experience of socio-pedagogical exchange between university students and penitentiary system inmates. Guided by a qualified teacher, external students and IPL study together as classmates, making it possible to reduce social barriers as well as promote transformative learning experiences and academic progress in both groups.

Nowadays, Inside-Out operates in more than 100 universities and prisons in 41 states of the United States, as well as in Canada, England and Australia. Since 1997 more than 22,000 students have participated in the program, and more than 600 teachers have been trained to put into practice a model that has been awarded several international prizes and recognitions.

Puente Grande, in Jalisco, is the first penitentiary system in Latin America to offer the Inside-Out program, which began to operate in Mexico in 2016 at Jalisco's Centro de Readaptación Social Femenil with students from the Bachelor's degree program in Educational Intervention of the National Pedagogic University (UPN) in Guadalajara, a student of the Bachelor's degree program in Psychology of the Western Mexico Technological and Higher Studies Institute (ITE-SO) and a teacher from the University of Guadalajara (UDG). Since then, the Inside-Out program has been replicated every semester with the UDG teacher and students of several social science majors (González, 2016).

The course "Crime, Justice, and Social Inclusion" ("*Crimen, justicia e inclusión social*"), given at the Reclusorio Metropolitano with the support of Guadalajara's UPN, was conducted once a week from February 8 to June 1 2017 with ten IPL in this center and nine students and teachers from the UPN, the Free College of University Studies (CLEU), and the Latin American Council of Social Science (CLACSO).

Puente Grande's Reclusorio Metropolitano and Inside-Out

Inaugurated in February 2013 with an investment of 1,700 million pesos, Reclusorio Metropolitano is the most modern and costliest penitentiary center in Jalisco. It is located at the penitentiary complex of Puente Grande, in the municipality of El Salto. The center was built with the aim of reducing the overpopulation of the state's prisons, which by 2013 was in excess of 67% of the IPL according to figures given by Luis Carlos Nájera, former Public Security Minister of the state of Jalisco (*El Informador*, February 19 2013).

This prison has the technology to work in a more automated way than other existing CERESOS. Innovations include over 4,000 electronically controlled pieces of equipment: 900 completely automated doors, 500 video cameras, X-ray scan at the entrance, card scanner, coded barrier and bollard system, intercom system, and electronic device detection system (*ídem*). Any electronic device, including cellphones and tablets, must be left at the guard house before entering the prison's parking lot.

The prison has a capacity for 1,700 high-to-medium dangerousness inmates, but it currently houses around 370 IPL, divided into processed and sentenced. For the sentenced inmates there are "special" cells, with a population of around 70 people.⁵ The first generation of Inside-Out at the Reclusorio Metropolitano included 10 inmates from this group.

Reclusorio Metropolitano houses inmates who committed high impact crimes linked to organized crime; most of them have been sentenced to more than 20 years in prison. Another salient feature of this prison is that its inmates do not wear the typical beige uniform of the other prisons, but an orange uniform similar to that worn in prisons in the United States.

It is important to point out that this prison follows both Mexican norms such as the National Law of Criminal Enforcement (*Ley Nacional de Ejecución Penal*) and the Mexican Constitution, as well as international statutes, since it is the only penitentiary center in Jalisco accredited by the American Correctional Association (ACA), which demands compliance with its 137 norms for such accreditation (Pelayo, 2017).

Among the technical areas of this penitentiary center for the proper social reinsertion of IPL are the area of Criminology, Medical Care, Psychology, Social Work, and School, which conducts the Inside-Out seminar. The "Crime, Justice, and Social Inclusion" seminar was held over 15 weeks, every Thursday from 3:30 to 6:00 p.m. in one of the classrooms of the School area. The penitentiary center's policy forbids contact between the different groups of IPL, so the remaining spaces of the school are vacated during the sessions of the seminar.

⁵ Data not quoted in this section were obtained by inmate students participating in the Inside-Out course and observations made during the semester.

Significance of Inside-Out

Worthy of mention about the Inside-Out program is the issue of labels and how this program raises awareness about the importance of eliminating them. An opportunity to confront these stereotypes directly arises at the beginning of the course. External participants arrived with these ideas, partly because of what we heard when we mentioned that we would attend a course inside the prison: “Really? But there are only drug dealers, kidnappers and murderers there!”, “They are all highly dangerous criminals”. Certainly, comments such as these generated concerns in external students about their own security, because we did not know how we would interact with inmate classmates, and under which conditions. In the first session we even tried to guess which crimes each one of them had committed. We listened to how they spoke, wondered how strong they were, if they were aggressive, etc. The semi-anonymity policy of the program prohibits using last names during the course, which ruled out the possibility of answering our questions by googling their names after recovering our electronic devices when we left the prison.

Inmate students also had preconceptions about external students. They said that at the beginning they thought that the university students, especially Criminology students, had joined the course in order to “study them as criminals”. They associated this idea with students’ visits to the CERESOS in which most of the inmates had participated before being transferred to the Reclusorio Metropolitano. These visits sought to help students understand the functioning of penitentiary centers, but for most of the inmate students they felt like touristic trips of visits to a zoo, making them feel that the IPL were the main attraction. In this new experience, expressing the inmates’ stereotypes of the external students helped to overcome them.

The first sessions with the two groups of integrated students (inmates and external) revolved around activities designed to break the ice, with the aim of overcoming labels and stereotypes and seeing the other participants in the seminar as humans and classmates, first and foremost. Group dynamics helped us to realize that both external students and inmates shared tastes and experiences and we were more alike than we thought we were, which to a large extent undermined the labels and stereotypes we had of each other.

The speed with which the prejudices disappeared reflects one of the strengths of the program. With the direct conversation between students and the activities in groups of three or four people we began to see each other more as classmates, as persons, as though these group dynamics had brought about a humanizing process in all of us. Even when some decided to share with the group the reasons why they were in prison – which was not recommended by the program, but not forbidden either – the labels were not used again; we continued to see them as people like us, without focusing on the mistakes they had made. Eliminating the labels among us helped us to value what all the classmates said about their experience with the justice system, which in turn generated some trust and openness to discuss without the current problems of the penitentiary system without any censorship.

Regarding the significance of Inside-Out for inmate students, in several cases a significant change was noticed in the way they saw their own case and their possibilities of an effective social reinsertion. This is reflected in their collaboration on the Insights Booklet (*Cuaderno de Reflexiones*) handed out at the end of the semester. In the words of one of them:

Inside-Out was a great opportunity to learn about an important problem that afflicts us today in this country, which requires finding a solution to improve a situation that is increasingly out of control. I mean a solution to reduce crime, reduce overpopulation in prisons, reduce violence, offering better opportunities for young people and adults that keep them away from committing crimes, better laws that benefit everyone, even those who are incarcerated. This course was for me something that interested me from the first day I attended it, because it is a very important issue. I thank all the participants, both inmates and external, for being part of this, but mostly for allowing me to be and to learn from this.

The program contributes to raise awareness among its students about all issues linked to the penitentiary system, the enforcement of sentences, and alternative justice. A very important issue is society's view of inmates and the social labels attached to them during and after their imprisonment. Another classmate wrote:

Inside-Out taught me that there are people who struggle disinterestedly to promote the human rights that have been devalued for us in prison. Thanks to programs such as this we see the penitentiary system from a different perspective. We see that there can be respect and coexistence between us and the system, and we can become people who contribute something to the society to which we belong.

One of the issues addressed in the course that was of great interest for inmate students was that of alternative justice and restorative justice. The inmate students themselves said that these types of justice might be of great help to dissuade minor crime and thus reduce the large number of people imprisoned for this reason. Alternative justice can teach those who commit such crimes that their behavior, besides being wrong and hurting the victim directly, has collateral effects that cause harm to their environment. Alternative and restorative justice have the potential of making them aware of their mistakes and stopping them in time before they become involved in a life of crime.

Besides that, other issues that were important for inmate students were the enforcement of sentences, social reinsertion, and the reparation of damage as a means of compensation. As one of them put it during the ceremony to close the course:

It made me become aware of the fact that when we hurt others by committing a crime we never realize what the victims go through to recover a part of what has been taken away from them. Understanding this definitely made me recover some of the humanity I had lost.

The group of external students in this seminar agreed that Inside-Out represented one of the most enriching experiences in their life, especially because of the opportunity of being part of a pilot program in Latin America.

Among their most important experiences was being able to analyze the penitentiary system from the different perspectives of such a diverse group, the fact that Criminology students were able to share viewpoints with Educational Intervention students, sociologists, a psychologists and several inmates with Bachelor's degrees in Law or Business Management. The most enriching part, however, was their conversation with incarcerated classmates about their experiences inside the penitentiary system. In the words of one of the external students:

The Inside-Out experience was unique for my education because it broke down many social and personal barriers about being a student, collective work within the classroom, and my perspectives on prison and education. Sharing a classroom with people so different from me widened my view of the issues and of justice that I had. After this experience it's hard for me to think of education with homogeneous students. I believe that including such different people in different contexts is one of the keys to think of a different and more promising educational system.

A fundamental element of the Inside-Out pedagogy is the use of the circle. We always sit in a circle, which helps to reduce hierarchies and differences perceived in the group. Of course it was difficult not to notice the orange uniforms contrasting with the black clothes required for external students, but after some time the difference between the two groups became less striking. The diversity in approaches in the group generated debates with such different viewpoints that one was often led to question the validity of one's own opinion. In short, one of the benefits of Inside-Out is sharing different ways of thinking and reaching well founded conclusions or delving into the complexity of the issues.

One of the deficiencies of many social science programs is to found education strictly on academic texts without making sure if the real context corresponds to the authors' arguments. Especially in the major in Criminology, the study of antisocial behavior is based specifically on the assumptions of researchers who are often from other countries, which does not guarantee that their premises match the current reality of our society. Having explored the issues in this course in an academic space where we shared the opinions and contributions of people who have broken the law enhances enormously the students' knowledge, promoting the adaptation of researchers' assumptions to our current issues.

Listening to the experiences of inmate classmates as victims of the penitentiary system – as well as some of their experiences as aggressors in the crimes they committed – makes it possible to have a more profound learning that cannot be achieved any other way. For Criminology students, this experience was very important both in a personal and in an academic sense because criminology's main subject of study is the criminal and his or her environment, which has led to a dehumanization of criminals, who are seen as inanimate objects, and to a perceived separation between the human being and the criminal behavior. This leads us to become desensitized and to forget that we are studying people. Spending time with our "study subjects" and seeing how they themselves contribute their own experiences and perception of different issues helps us to acknowledge the need to analyze situations originated in human nature in one case, before studying such behavior as acts against society.

Inside-Out is a tool that gives voice to those that the system has muted. Throughout the sessions, the issues were greatly nourished by the inmates' accounts and led external students to wonder how their academic training experience would have been without this program, limiting themselves to studying what someone else researched, accepting someone else's assumptions and, most of all, studying criminal behavior without having the opportunity to listen and ask questions to these people, before graduating with a Bachelor's degree in Criminology. Without a doubt, Inside-Out is an excellent complement for any Bachelor's degree program in social science.

Another key issue in this course, and one that caused great commotion in most of the students, was an analysis of the justice enforcement system in all its levels: police, *ministerio público*, state attorneys, judges, and legislators. In this activity we formed groups with inmate and external students; each group analyzed one of the parts of the system and tried to explain the current situation, its pros and cons, what they did right and what they did wrong, their significance, resources, etc. The most interesting part was that when each group presented their part and we put together what had been analyzed we found alarming situations in which most of the justice enforcement system is not working, especially when enforcing the new criminal justice system. Police agencies work without resources and their training is very limited; *ministerios públicos* do not have the capability to properly investigate crimes; state attorney seem to be accomplices of *ministerios públicos*, oblivious of their responsibility as defenders of the indicted; sometimes the judges are apathetic and decide not to get involved in or not to analyze correctly the cases on which they will pronounce their decision, and our legislators forget that in order to legislate about an issue it is necessary to learn about it first and try to compensate for all the effects of this new law. Contemplating such an inefficient system can make any citizen feel distrustful of the authorities, and decide not to denounce a crime, take justice in his own hands, or even entrust his or her security to criminal groups instead of the police.

We closed the last session of the course by asking ourselves “Are you empowered or disempowered?” “How do you feel now that you know that our justice system has so many deficiencies, that there are people who are in prison not for having committed a crime, but for not having had the resources for a good defense, that some were imprisoned for stealing something to alleviate their hunger while so many who commit more serious crimes go unpunished thanks to their connections?” This exercise in analysis and reflection made most of us feel disempowered and distrustful of our authorities. Since then, we have given a great deal of thought to how we reached such high levels of corruption, impunity, and selfishness. We have seen how in our own neighborhoods the distrust of the authorities is so great that the local leader of the “plaza” (a word used by organized crime to refer to “their” territory) becomes some kind of Robin Hood to whom neighbors go when they have problems with crime. Now it seems as though these local *capos* have as much power as the authorities, if not more. We now wonder if big drug cartels, with all their power, have become a fourth branch of government in our country.

To conclude, we would like to highlight two strengths of the Inside-Out program that are worthy of mention besides the contributions of the experience mentioned above.

Face to face with crime

Besides propitiating an interaction between students and teachers of different majors and incarcerated people, Inside-Out allows external participants to meet face to face with people who have committed crimes. Thus, a crime acquires a face and a name, and ceases to be just a statistic or a file to become people with whom we can have a conversation without restrictions or pressure. At first we saw the crimes committed by the inmates as something bad that inspired fear or concern; however, once they have a voice and a face they become easier to understand. The crime becomes a person, we set aside the antisocial behavior in abstract form and we can spend time and talk with a person who, in these circumstances and thanks to the program’s pedagogy, provides clear knowledge about the crimes committed. As criminologists, we have the opportunity to share experiences, questions and concerns with the main actors in the phenomenon of crime, which is only possible through Inside-Out.

Humanizing process

Although we mentioned above that it is possible to see face to face these classmates who committed a crime, we all underwent a very interesting humanizing process, originated in the time spent together and the personal, small groups and full group discussions. Halfway through the semester we reached a point where we began to generate mutual empathy, which made the relationship among all of us closer and turned us into true classmates, without labels of inmates or external, seeing each other as equals. We suddenly forgot that we were in a penitentiary center and even inmate classmates said that for those two hours they forgot they were incarcerated.

The external students began with the expectation that this course would give us an opportunity to learn about the Reclusorio Metropolitano and inmates who had committed high impact crimes, and we ended up meeting great human beings, people like any other people, with much to contribute to society and willing to overcome their situation. Finishing the course was somewhat sad, not being able to share with those classmates and thinking that we might never meet again. It is truly an experience that cannot be easily forgotten. We recognize now that that difference that has made such a mark in our lives can be reduced to the fact that their wrong behavior is classified as a crime by law, and ours is not.

Final thoughts

Education is one of the fundamental pillars in the development of a human being, so it must be part of the plan of activities for IPL. Besides learning about justice, crime, and social exclusion, the Inside-Out course creates awareness in the group about our participation in the phenomenon of crime. As one of the classmates quoted above explained, the course helped the IPL to recover the humanity they thought they had lost. It also helped external students to recognize and confront stigmatizing labels. The program of the course – which unmask every aspect of the justice system, crime, victims and aggressors – makes it possible to understand the effect of their actions and of everything that is generated by antisocial behavior. The awareness generated through Inside-Out is, without a doubt, a tool of dissuasion for future crime.

Beyond this effect, education is a human right that must be guaranteed for all IPL in Mexico's penitentiary centers. In the words of Scarfó and Aued, "Education has an aim of its own as a human right: the comprehensive development of the individual. We must understand that the person deprived of his or her freedom is a subject of rights, and that the State must guarantee their effective enjoyment" (2013: 92). The effect of good educational programs such as Inside-Out on the statistics of recidivism is another reason to promote education as a main axis of social reinsertion.

Inside-Out uses a pedagogical model that not only allows us to analyze social issues from the perspective of the IPL, but also helps to overcome stereotypes, eliminate labels, and contribute to the humanization and social inclusion, with a transforming awareness, of its participants. Rather than studying our justice and penitentiary systems, this program brings with it an impressive humanizing process in which the "criminal" acquires a real face and name; before being a criminal, he or she is a person. This helps to remove labels and begin to see IPL as equals. You become more human in regard to their situation: you understand them, they understand you, and a link is created from one human being to another, without insecurity or discrimination.

The Inside-Out model is currently operating in two penitentiary centers in Puente Grande: at the Centro de Readaptación Social Femenil, and at the Reclusorio Metropolitano, which in-

cludes approximately 40 participants each semester. For the first time, in the second semester of 2017 the course at the Reclusorio Metropolitano will be offered in the modality of a Diploma Course by the UPN in Guadalajara. Thus, the certificate awarded to those who complete the program successfully will have greater curricular value, both for inmate and external students.

Teachers at several universities in the Metropolitan Area of Guadalajara, as well as a colleague from the Universidad Iberoamericana de Torreón, have shown interest in being certified as Inside-Out instructors. For the time being, we are raising funds to offer training in Mexico and translate the course materials to Spanish. There is no doubt that the value of Inside-Out for our society will continue to be recognized by more people connected to universities and the penitentiary system, and will thus transform life in Mexico and the rest of Latin America in favor of the security of their citizens and their social equality.

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