

EDITORIAL

ABOUT THE SOCIAL RESPONSABILITY OF UNIVERSITIES

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Given the arrival of the fourth industrial revolution, according to a recent report by the World Economic Forum (2016); it becomes urgent to, from the universities, thoroughly reflect upon the role and impact of Higher Education in the contemporary society, regarding the evolution of its social and economic systems. Such an analysis must face critical aspects as the pertinence and quality of the educational offer, the teaching and learning methods, the social relevance of research and its transference, the funding systems available to satisfy the needs and expectations of the interest groups, as well as those of society as a whole.

Concurring with the need to re-think education, another circumstance arises; the key principle that gave its title to the UNESCO report lead by Jacques Delors (1996), *L'Education. Un trésor est caché dedans (Learning: the treasure within)* has produced the question on how to access that treasure after the progressive changes in the funding of the educational system (Brunner and Miranda, 2016); given the fact that most of the students –specially in Latin America, where the private Higher Education system is bigger than the public one– must finance that education –with the uncertainty of it leading to them getting a job– through monthly payments and for many years (Martí Noguera, Martí-Vilar, Vargas Villamizar y Moncayo Quevedo, 2014). In this scenario, from a normative perspective, the universities fulfill their part in the responsibility of providing educational services, developing research studies adequate for publishing in indexed journals and

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extension and outreach activities; that way, they satisfy the indicators established by the Ministry for their certification, without going further into the impact of their missions in society through expansive and cross-disciplinary research studies.

In the current socio-economical model; in some countries, the companies, as employment providers, have become the motivator and guarantor of the former welfare society, while in others they have become development promoters by generating qualified employment. In this system, the need for Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) beyond what is established by law was suggested, so that they do not consider the impact as job providers as their sole contribution to society. In the claimed innovative society of knowledge, the universities' social development might well mean going further than just abiding by the law. Referring to that, Martí Noguera (2011) says "*la responsabilidad social aplicada a la institución universitaria, conlleva la adopción e incorporación en su funcionamiento, y por ende a sus labores formadoras e investigadoras, de la reflexión sobre las personas que la integran*"¹ (p. 61), and that they, as they perform their jobs, have the due relevance in society. If this is compared to the CSR, it leads to say that the universities should not settle on graduating students and competing over international academic rankings, but aim at contributing to the local knowledge through the appropriation of the generated knowledge.

This disquisition arises as the Higher education institutions, in fulfilling with their missions, generate some shades of gray. In the case of the education, it is not frequent in Ibero-America to have available information allowing to analyze if there is a concern or a responsibility about educating with a perspective of access to the job market. As a reflective example, the unemployment rate in 2015 of Spanish with a college degree (Instituto Nacional de Estadística [INE], 2017) was of about 13% from a 35,1% average of population with Higher Education (INE, 2014).

Even if data should be considered from different perspectives, it could seem that almost half the population with Higher Education is unemployed. In this aspect, a study by Yamada (2015) highlights that, even if the countries need people with degrees for their development, the analysis of different contexts demonstrates that the increase in the number of professionals without planning leads to unemployment and overqualification. Yamada thinks that with the available data and comparisons, this situation could be regulated by the government, with all the pro and cons this can imply in the constant dilemma of increasing coverage and quality. It also confronts the universities into knowing if they are aware of the results of their job. In Spain (Parellada, 2015) and Colombia (DANE, 2016), for example, the increase in the access to Higher Education has generated incompatibilities with the job market that translate in unemployment or access to jobs that did not require that level of studies; so far, no major measures have been taken, other than the increase in fees to optimize financing and performance.

¹ The social responsibility applied to the Higher Education institution leads to the integration and adoption in their functioning, and therefore in their educational and research activities, of the reflection about the people who integrate it.

In the case of research, following with the example of Spain; it is interesting that, in the Doctorate studies, from the total of doctoral dissertations defended successfully in 2014 –11.316–, 86,9% got *cum laude* (Ministerio de Educación, Cultura y Deporte, 2014), not meaning that the given quality of those dissertations guarantees in any way the continuity of the research trajectory or a contribution to the country, beyond increasing the number of doctors who usually emigrate to Latin America with a market demand and production excess logic. The responsibility of educating neglected the responsibility of why educating and how much of the resources have been destined to that education.

In the scenario of this confrontation between limiting to the legislation demands and the social responsibility, the academic employability itself presents shocking questions when analyzing in depth the working conditions of teachers. It is concerning that the data regarding the salaries earned by full time or adjunct professors in private Higher Education institutions is not easy to find, which can mean they are very well hidden or that the figures corresponding to the teaching services in Higher Education are not transparent. However, this situation does not leave public institutions untouched, as the contracts for adjunct professors or associate professors are fastly growing, at the same time that the salaries of university presidents are at the same level to those of corporate CEOs, who are in charge of adjusting expenses and aiming at the increase of the organization's profit (Hinckley, 2015).

¿When...?

In his novel, *Conversación en la catedral*, Vargas-Llosa (1969) asks through Zavalita: “¿en qué momento se jodió Perú?”² (p. 2). The sense of the question can be applied to the university. As an institution, it is the product of the historic circumstances; that's why, except for some voices of members of the university community tied to a past that reminds the monastic seclusion from the problems of the world, thinking about thinking, it is not surprising hoy lost the Higher Education institutions feel facing the change in the way research is conceived from a reference of past, present and future knowledge to a tool in the ruling socioeconomic machine in which the immediate cost/benefit is quantified. The University, contrary to what UNESCO preaches, does not graduate responsible citizens, it rather produces professionals with competences to serve a system which is dominated by purchase and sale values and offer-demand laws. Curiously, their main financing source is not the ones profiting from the educated professionals, but the tuition money paid by the students (Barro, 2015) –specially in private institutions and progressively in the public ones– in a paradoxical mechanism in which the slave pays to be enslaved, following the tendency to get in debt in a circle of oppression.

² “At what precise moment had Peru fucked itself up?”

The warning signs about Higher Education being adrift are not recent, just to name one of the references, Lyotard (1986) had already warned about the path the knowledge transmission was taking, and Meller (2004) about the commercialization of Higher Education. However, as one of the characters from the novel *Ensayo sobre la ceguera* says: “creo que no nos quedamos ciegos, creo que estamos ciegos, ciegos que ven, ciegos que, viendo, no ven” (Saramago, 1995, p. 438)³ and the people involved in the Higher Education institutions and the society in general, continue to ignore the numerous warnings. Given this scenario around knowledge and the Higher Education institutions, where educating with judgement and critical thinking to take on the social challenges in different environments should be held, the basic responsibility can be to adopt *Il nome della rosa*'s Guillermo de Baskerville scientific attitude (Eco, 1980): using methodologies and intuition to get to a point of understanding what we can expect from the Higher Education system and the pending reflection towards what the current society wants –equally responsible of the progression of universities-.

Regarding...

In Ibero-America, the USR has been studied from different perspectives in an ample spectrum of actions and definitions (Aldeanueva Fernández et al., 2015). For this article, according to the literature, the USR is understood from two complementary approaches; a perspective that addresses the analysis of the management of Higher Education institutions as organizations, which is connected to the features of the CSR to not to limit to fulfilling a blurry legal framework and a sometimes misunderstood and misapplied autonomy (Bermejo Barrera, 2009); and another one focused on the result of the development of its functions, that would affect the social transformation through the exercise of its core functions, both from an immaterial point of view as promoters of thought, as from a tangible one in the way of responsible citizenship, competent in the content areas and caring about their contribution to the world.

In this sense, efficient management in the Higher Education institutions demands to generate knowledge and people who know how to use it, instead of aiming at something as abstract as to generate professionals for the “job market”. From a USR perspective, the administrators in the universities, as well as devoting to the internal objectives, should relate to their interest groups (Gaete Quezada, 2015); there should be a dialogue between the society and the universities, demanding to the latest a commitment to reinvent themselves to give, from the education and research, the necessary knowledge for a generation that faces the corresponding challenges of a change of social model in the so-called fourth industrial revolution. It is necessary to react to add value to be able to face the professional development in a changing environment, with a very short time range to contribute to the inclusive and sustainable greater good.

³ I think we got blind, I think we are blind, blind who can see, blind who, seeing, don't see

The comparison between the performance of the CSR with the USR is not accidental, some of the practices that are criticized in the companies, actually happen in the universities; that is why it is necessary to work harder on the transparency and not to fall, among other examples presented here, in the increase of inequality through short term hiring, while the salaries of the administrators are raised. Given that the main funding system is tuition money, it is critical that the alumni have the knowledge on how, through research and relationships with interest groups, to understand what to learn to get to social agent positions, victims of a system that offers them to generate minimal salaries to cover the bank credits that allowed them to get their title.

Universities have the chance of educating businessmen, educators, consultants... every kind of person that because of the system requires a title to achieve positions of maximal relevance in society; if Higher Education is limited to getting a title to then get a job, the warning signs can be set off when, for example, studies developed by businessmen highlight that the graduation profile does not correspond to their needs (“College vs. Business Training...”, 2016).

Regarding that aspect, the USR expected from a knowledge center would be that to apply to the context the strategic intelligence, that is supposed to come from interdisciplinary research and the work with interest groups, towards the environment, to analyze the possible scenarios un which the society can be strengthened from learning. They should educate those who would face old and new challenges as technologies open the scenarios that even movies predicted earlier. The USR must lead to a revolution in which, as it has been commented; the *cum laude* doctoral dissertations are not generated through chains of favors among professors, and certainly implies to tear down the power structures in public universities, where the privileges lie between a distance from personal interests and the needs of the current moment; where there is no moral shame on recognizing that something is missing when the education that is achieved learning by heart does not provide the tools for the students or the solutions to society; and in which holding MBA programs leads to practices that affect the sustainability of the organizations.

The ideas about the current path of Higher Education institutions and how that can lead to their disappearance as we know them today, is already reflected in a document by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (Miller, 2003), in which eight scenarios for the future of education were presented. The USR requires to start from an effort to research and develop what to understand as university in the 21st century; together with the citizens put together into nations, corporations or any type of organizations, while the understanding of socio-economical human relations acquire new names as collaborative or circular economy. The people who belong to the Higher Education institutions should clarify if they would become leaders for society or be one more part in the productive-destructive system –characterized by achieving an increase in the human life expectancy, at the same time that they destroy the hope for a better future- in

a buy/sale market in which they would be absorbed by a more efficient system of education in competences through audiovisual material and in which research would be part of a system based on economic results.

Higher education has become a market service that for many countries represents the only possibility of social mobility –being subjected to situations as the ones that caused the world financial crisis based on a speculative market on mortgages-, as with the academic education a speculation process appears, in which the person pays a higher amount of taxes for believing in a higher return on investment through a well-paid job, when it is no longer like that. USR is currently a kaleidoscope being built and can, or should, evolve to be the reflection-action that sets the bases for the society immerse in its fourth industrial revolution; that is already suggested by worrying symptoms as the automatization of jobs by robots and software. This scenario might generate a level of uncertainty that could well be solved if instead of optimizing accounts and balances, the research activity were oriented to achieve a concept of *greater good* to converse about and to face the challenges of human development; on the contrary, the Higher Education institutions would be partly responsible for a future in which, in the words Guzmán (2017), the society would be supported by a universal rent and would become consumers of products developed by machines. The contribution of Higher Education to the society has been spectacular for half a century, the question is, how should it adapt to the current environment? And the answer must come co-responsibly with the society that gives it sense, and that should participate in the changes that need to be faced as an institution.

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