

# ΣΟΦΙΑ—SOPHIA

Editorial

## **The university: Is it for professionalizing or for cultural development?**

According to the Colombian Political Constitution of 1991, university education is a right of the people and a public service with a social function; in principle it must train for cultural, scientific and technological improvement in a framework of environmental protection. To do this, it establishes commitments for moral, physical and intellectual formation, ensuring access and permanence within the system for citizens. Among the main novelties and contributions, it can be mentioned the development of institutional autonomy; and four types of institutions are defined, higher technical, technical and universities. The National Council of Higher Education (CESU) was created as an inspection and surveillance body; and the National Accreditation System to guarantee high quality requirements, defining as fields of action those of science, technology, humanities, art and philosophy.

The conjuncture on which the National System of Tertiary Education (SNET, for its initials in Spanish) emerges, beyond its central planning that revolves around the unification of technical and technological training for work with higher education, sparked the debate on the relevance of a professionalizing university, as nobody knows exactly what it is, or what it is for. We suppose that it is for the cultural, scientific and technological improvement, as well as for a physical, intellectual and values formation. Clearly, our education system has failed to meet these commitments, and it has gotten involved in failed reforms in the sector, increasingly distant from the need of citizens, unable to create new scenarios, with smaller budgets and decreasing coverage. In the debate on current education, an aspect becomes increasingly relevant, if it is enough for a society a university that prepares its students for productive work or if, on the contrary, it should be for the pursuit of cultural development, even if it is increasingly eager to close the development gaps? Unfortunately this debate occurs only among specialists and intellectuals who are interested in the future of education, since what we see today in the university is an



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overvaluation of the students' interests, who are really more seduced by contemporary hedonism and their life social, and who do not understand the diverse university interests, in which didactic practices are gradually incorporated to get adapted to the generational impact. Paradoxically, education continues to focus on the valuation of fixed knowledge and technique, giving too much importance to authority, especially of the teacher who is the source of knowledge, which is rarely questioned; but who it is also observed in knowledge itself, the source of truth. Of course some order and authority in the classroom are needed, and a knowledge that must be shared and communicated by the teacher, but when education is only based on these circumstances, conformism is cemented not only in students and teachers, but it also radiates into society, the great absentee in this educational process, which is why this situation is reproduced, for example at work, where authority and discipline are becoming routine, causing fears, arbitrary pressures and hopes of rewards, considering these as necessary and valuable, and cultural development becomes irrelevant.

We have a university that in some way we share with other educational and social systems, in what can be called a global university project, which presents some similar characteristics that have had an echo in the Latin American educational system, specifically in the reception related to the design of curricula based on competence, a traditional type of content transmission, the increasingly frequent use of digital media, an educational research focused on the operational issues and a teaching applied to a socio-productive context.

The aforementioned inclination emerges as a fundamental part in the academic and work performance, which is deployed within the quality process directed from the training by skills in higher education; in this way, teachers' skills generate a fundamental process that does not contribute in the construction of a contemporary university inspired by humanistic values and real well-being in society.

However, in the 1990s and starting from the application of Law 30, emanated from the Political Constitution, the university focused on the search of quality and internationalization; it was created an educational system of higher education that leaves behind the methods based on rote memorization and data transmission to a university education focused on the resolution of problems, within a research field fundamentally linked to the productive apparatus. The university was then put in the spotlight of the global market, which determined that within it a number of strategies were woven, from

which it is difficult to separate, and any analysis first involves understanding the forces that influence its government.

In this sense, the education that takes place within it is not alien to the dynamics of the market; on the contrary, it shakes it up, due to the institutional pressures to establish an instrumental leadership that goes through the development of the higher education system, based on the dissemination of the official parameters of Science, Technology and Innovation. These are the bases of the public policies induced by an economic development that determines the creation of a market of university services. In this regard, we are in agreement with Boaventura Da Sousa, who says:

“The affirmation of the autonomy of the universities occurred at the same time with the privatization of higher education and the increase of the financial crisis of state universities,” which outlines the generalized opening of its commercial exploitation. (Da Sousa, 2007: 25)

This transformation defines a different type of education, and by inference a different type of teaching, in which students become consumers and the university knowledge is predominantly professionalizing, coming from the needs of the mode of production, and it remains relatively decontextualized from the needs of the social fabric and self-realization. In this way, a deep fracture of social and cultural identity is created, translated into tactical disorientation, reflected above all in a certain paradoxical attitude of resistance to change in the name of university autonomy and academic freedom. The instability caused by the impact of these conflicting pressures has created an impasse where the demand for greater changes becomes evident, evidencing that the supposed quality of the constitutional guidelines is a chimera.

In conclusion, the global system that we could describe as neoliberal in the contemporary world, raises a type of education that serves the productive apparatus, but not the creation of solutions to its crisis, it is not aimed at generating people committed to their society. On the other hand, the educational system presents a planning of tasks that also gives rise to the curricular approach, as an institutional guideline that determines in advance what could be expected from the different educational courses. This way of developing the educational process has had a place in a large number of higher education institutions, assuming that the majority of students must achieve the desired or proposed objectives, and it is logical to assume that the teaching methods are also shared, leaving very little space of pedagogical maneuver to the professors.

What we really find is an educational inertia, in which one element is programmed and another very different is what is being done in the academic space, where different learning rhythms are found and the expected contents tend to differ from a student to another, or from one course to another; in concrete terms, what is programmed is not what really happens; in addition, the heterogeneity of the students cannot be calculated in the same way than the objectives are; as a result, both teachers and students make it impossible to understand the reality.

As a consequence, the evaluation processes do not yield the expected results for the content acquired by students, and therefore, they do not offer reliable information regarding the promoted quality processes or their context, a reality that should be the focus of the debate. On the contrary, we have proposals that emerge from outside sectors that promote conceptual mixtures on the classification of educational institutions, without any referent; which don't make any contribution to cultural, scientific, or technological sustainability; neither, therefore, to the productive apparatus that they pretend impact.

## References

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