Human Identities and Nation Building: Comparative Analysis, Markets, and the Modern University

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The purpose of this article is to discuss the dilemma of the multi-university in sustainable education, research, and outreach by addressing some of the ways in which universities, must generate actions that seek to address these challenges, develop strategic relationships, and maximize their potential in the areas of teaching, research and service to society. Significantly, we examine how sustainability is experienced by nations—in our case Mexico—by analyzing higher education and its mission in developing citizens and economic sovereignty. The author's goal is to establish a new paradigm by which practitioners and researchers can collaborate to produce the ideas that stimulate sustainable development.

Given the challenges posed by the global market, which in many cases run counter to the core values required for sustainable development, universities are being required to develop dynamically different tasks to meet their teaching, research and service. This paper builds on Clark Kerr's (2001) notion of the "multi-university" from both the impact on the individual faculty, international comparisons, and curriculum. First, a new understanding that a "multi-university" takes time to develop through relationships and strategies that facilitate creation and flow of knowledge for populations and nations with diverse economic, political and social systems, and who are equally articulating issues of sustainability (Callejo Perez, Fain, & Slater, 2011).

For us, sustainability becomes key to the development the multi-university, requiring categories of research and collaboration with various sectors and agencies both nationally and internationally. Of course these exchanges pose new challenges and opportunities for ways in which the university sees the same traditional tasks and which require curricular changes, specially the creation of educational models that are appropriate for the development of scholars

and students under the paradigm of sustainability. The purpose of this article is to discuss the dilemma of the multi-university in sustainable education, research, and outreach by addressing some of the ways in which universities, must generate actions that seek to address these challenges and to also develop strategic relationships and maximize their potential in the areas of teaching, research and service to society. Significantly, we examine how sustainability is experienced by nations—in our case Mexico—by analyzing higher education and its mission in developing citizens and economic sovereignty.

In 1990, Ernest Boyer penned *Scholarship Reconsidered* for the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, launching a new debate on what counted as scholarship and research. Levine (2000) observed that within higher education the competition for fewer monies, taxpayer accountability, questioning of the university by the professions, and the dominance of university politics and money by the professional schools emphasized that higher education be measured in new terms. Historically universities have valued both human and economic development as part of their mission; but as Clark Kerr (2001) and Derek Bok (2003) point out that is more of a rarity today with emphasis on economic development and job training as part of a larger paradigm of prestige within a broader marketplace of the public and politicians who measure success through international publications and measurements, economic impact, and high tech economic development. As the authors of *In Pursuit of Prestige* emphasize, "higher education is an industry in which consumers are often underinformed in the sense that they cannot objectively evaluate the quality of service before they actually purchase it" (Brewer, Gates & Goldman 2001, p. 19). Ben Wildavsky's (2010) *The Great Brain Race: How Global Universities are Reshaping the World* examined the phenomenon of the contest to win notoriety as the best university—not only driving the US market—but the emerging Asian, Latin American, and African markets, as well as the established European markets around free-market competition in higher education to find a niche within an uninformed consumer culture that asserts themselves as experts on the product they are purchasing.

All said, it is time to start a public conversation about how universities can recover their foundational role and set a new paradigm to both influence and affect society and citizens. Simply put, we hope to establish a space where practitioners and researchers can collaborate on research to produce the ideas that try to engender the public and to build sustainable development.

Human development and Higher Education

In 1774, J.J. Rousseau wrote *Discourse on Inequality* (2010), which claimed that inequality is not the outcome from a "natural process", but that it is caused by the development of social ways of life that entail a complex system of relationships that serve as the idea of the idea of private property. This key idea of "private property" would be the foundation of the social organization as a civil society, from which a large list of misfortunes came as expressed also by Rousseau:

> The first man who, having enclosed a piece of ground, bethought himself of saying This is mine, and found people simple enough to believe him, was the real founder of civil society. From how many crimes, wars and murders, from how many horrors and misfortunes might not any one have saved mankind, by pulling up the stakes, or filling up the ditch, and crying to his fellows? Beware of listening to this impostor; you are undone if you once forget that the fruits of the earth belong to us all, and the earth itself to nobody. But there is great probability that things had then already come to such a pitch, that they could no longer continue as they were; for the idea of property depends on many prior ideas, which could only be acquired successively, and cannot have been formed all at once in the human mind. Mankind must have made very considerable progress, and acquired considerable knowledge and industry, which they must also have transmitted and increased from age to age, before they arrived at this last point of the state of nature (p. 76).

Rousseau argues that when a civil society evolves humankind loses a privilege and "ideal natural state." Although, later, in *The Social Contract* (1968), Rousseau emphasizes the idea of recovering an ideal equilibrium through the construction of a "legitimate civil organization". In order to achieve such legitimacy, as in a *Civil Society*, a democratic social synchronization among the population is necessary. As a result of a common covenant, then a group of laws will take the form of a Constitution that will guarantee the rights of each member of such society, and particularly their right of freedom. Is there an inescapable paradox in the social organization that leads to the development of a *Civil Society*? Is the *Civil Society* the origin of such terrible outcomes that Rousseau recounts as "many crimes, wars, murders, horrors and misfortunes"? Or

to the contrary, will the democratic organization achieve the "new ideal state" from which the people would enjoy their freedom? Perhaps we need to examine Rousseau's ideas about the "very considerable progress, and acquired considerable knowledge…" from where we could explain different outcomes such as "misfortunes and horrors", but also the development of a society in which the possibilities of transformation and change, would give to their citizens the opportunity of meaningful and happy lives in which their capabilities could blossom.

From the *Discourse on Inequality* to *The Social Contract*, Rousseau changed his argument so deeply that it is crucial to appreciate the paradigm shift. Instead of considering human wealth as the welfare derived from the possession of mere objects and about how well wealth is distributed; he believes the main idea of welfare, for all humans, should be something more essential such as the possibility of exercising their freedom. In particular such freedom should be instantiated through the understanding and personal commitment that each citizen will have when investing within the authentic society.

During a long period of our recent history, the main criterion to judge the progress of nations emphasized the perspective of measuring the welfare through the goods acquired for each country in terms of the Gross National Product (GNP) *per capita*. Somehow this perspective was in accordance to Rousseau's ideas about inequality in terms of the way in which goods are distributed, but particularly this perspective was pointing all the political concerns towards the aim of improving their economic indicators, since this was as a trusted way to achieve the desire national grows. However, the turning point towards considering human freedom as a more valuable outcome than economic wealth was the construction of the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) in 1990. In 2010, to celebrate the 20th anniversary of the UNDP, they published *The Real Wealth of Nations: pathways towards human development*. In this report the paradigm shift is emphasized to distinguish human development from economic development. This Human Development Report stated:

> Income is of course crucial—without resources, any progress is difficult. Yet we must also gauge whether people can lead long and healthy lives, whether they have the opportunity to be educated and whether they are free to use their knowledge and talents to shape their own destinies (United Nations, 2010, p. iv).

It is clear that material goods are fundamental but as means to develop our freedom. And our freedom is real as long as we can "use our knowledge and

> talents to shape our destiny". In this regard valuing health and educational levels is more important than assessing the richness of nations just by considering economical indicators such as the GNP *per capita*.

The work undertaken by the United Nations Development Program has been influenced by Amartya Sen's (1981; 2002) work, which promotes the capabilities approach as the basis to design the ways to evaluate human development. Sen's approach suggests that we should gather the available information about health, education and work opportunities in order to consider the strategies that are followed in the places where more people are achieving better standards in the development of their freedom. From this approach we should consider that education is a way to enjoy the opportunity of increasing our knowledge and to develop our capabilities, in order to perform professionally in the area that we like the most. In this regard education is meaningful as a way to achieve higher levels of human development, instead of being a way to "create human capital". The idea of education as a means to transform humans into "human capital" is perverse because it subordinates education as one part of the economical chain, in which we are valuing money or "capital" as the maximum goal instead of human freedom.

It is critical to make a change in the way in which we value "capital" and "higher education." Capital must be subordinated as a mean to foster opportunities for human development. Human development should be the maximum goal of higher education to allow students to achieve higher levels of freedom and commitment with their own ways to be creative and to engage in the kind of life that they value the most and to give back to their own society and to the world.

The feasibility of higher education systems in some of the more economically developed countries is based on private financing, which is dependent mainly on student fees. In the case of Mexico, because of the pressures to meet minimum requirements of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the preparation of college students today looks primarily to ensure student development around job skills or competencies that will enable them to integrate into the workplace. In conflict to Rousseau and Sen, the curriculum is structured according to what is required to adequately prepare professionals who will promote the sustainable development of the economy. However, like most countries seeking increased economic and wealth market share, education in Mexico is not seen as a good in itself. As

Mexican Universities move toward the utilitarian model, faculty and students feel the pressure of becoming data related to economic growth factors. We examine Mexico's attempts to bridge the gap between the utilitarian use of education as nation building and the aesthetic of education as a good for a civil society, we as if there are other national models of sustainability that differ from these paradigms? What kind of university can be built by following either approach, and can this inform the economic growth of research universities as well as the welfare of citizens in Mexico? What can be a model of multi-university to develop principles of sustainability in the various tasks performed such as research, teaching and commitment to regional development? In so doing, we consider the idea of a sustainable education in the context of both the economic development and human paradigms built on the arguments above (Rousseau and Sen), while understanding the importance of higher education in the current market driven economies.

Bridging the gap: Reforming contemporary university and the Mexican challenge towards 2036

We cannot talk of sustainable development without talking about environmental education. As we discuss environmental education, there is an understanding of "sustainable" environmental policy with a vision, which also provides a relevant link to various disciplines, issues, and paradigms—"what is sustainable" implies an amplitude that impacts the distribution of wealth of a country, the fight against poverty, optimization of resources, better citizens, among others. The Mexican case, dating back to the 1980s, opened possibilities for teaching, research and practice to critically rethink the role of universities in this social structure. Far more than rhetoric or fodder for political speeches, it was actively recognized that political-pedagogical and humanist teaching would lead to a new individual who least would have a harmonious integral consciousness of their personal environment. It provided the ability to rethink the possibility of critical consciousness in each of our actions as the nation promoted the entry of the individual into the market. Hence the paradigm and the problem created the possibility for sustainable development education.

Thinking of unemployment as a category of analysis in contemporary educational problems, and at the same time considering the subject of food security for the coming decades is an indispensable exercise for the design of contemporary higher education. This entails a risky critique because it aims to reconsider the relevance and the critical analysis of the goals of contemporary educational reforms around the world. The objective of this section of the article is to outline some ideas about both topics—unemployment and food security—with a simple

focus—a vision of the future—in a specific context—public higher education in Mexico in the case of the National Polytechnic Institute.

The tensions underlying the simple and ancient relationship between education—which shapes better human beings—and the position of the State in this relationship, deserves a reexamination directed towards social benefit and with a vision for the coming decades. In other words, we must look at the direction we are now giving to the future scenario of higher education and its place in social transformation. If we observe what is happening in today's societies, educational administration, and, above all, the curricular design that we will have in the coming decades, we realize that these reflections are at the core of why unemployment is a global concern.

Higher education in Mexico faces a great challenge in the design of educational policy for this and the next decade, particularly with a large youth population studying in secondary and higher education (INEE, 2011 and 2012; OECD, 2012), and with an increase in youth unemployment. For this reason, Mexico encounters an unavoidable question: What does it mean to have young people with professional skills and without employment, a growing matriculation and, therefore, the expectation of a number professional graduates that is greater than the labor market? For some sectors this concern refers to how global unemployment jeopardizes one of the main foundations of the current economy: consumption. However, it is worth asking the question: Do we want to shape better consumers or better human beings? This is a concept that we need to seriously consider in public higher education in Latin America.

Unemployment entails an inherent tension. A paradox runs through the free market and unequal systems of creating wealth: unemployment. Inasmuch as a negation of buying power, unemployment means a decrease or absence of consumption. Without consumption, production passes through a contradictory circle capable of putting in crisis the future of production for consumption and, therefore, the flow of capital that renews the cycle (Dussel, 1985) and puts into motion the mechanisms that maintain consumers active. If this vision concerns economic systems in general, the educational system is concerned about shaping human beings and, consequently, the approach to unemployment must be critical. The seriousness of unemployment in this fixed situation is augmented by an even deeper triple crisis: youth unemployment, a food crisis in the coming decades, and environmental imbalance. These are all increasing, as is

outlined by global figures presented in different analyses (OECD, 2008, 2013, 2014; OIT, 2013 y 2014; CEPAL, 2002; McKinsey et al., 2013 and 2014).

There is another point underlying this paradox. The generations of youth of secondary and higher education age, or of young adults, graduated or not, that have been exposed to models and practices of unnecessary and technologically sophisticated consumption will have difficulty sustaining these practices without the income provided by employment. As a consequence, the paradox becomes concrete: a structure that promotes consumption but that, in its own unequal structure, impedes it. The result is not as innocent as the simple act of not buying something; it has a social impact that, without foreshadowing millenarianisms, would condition our behavior, or in other words, our way of inhabiting the world (Martínez Ruiz, 2013a). On the one hand, we have the threat of a crisis of food security previously mentioned and, on the other; the great dissatisfaction of not being able to acquire that has been prefigured. In other words, the mechanisms that promote consumption are incessant and, if unreal for a person, create discouragement and generational frustration (Martínez Ruiz, 2013a). That is to say that both the risk of food scarcity in the future and the generational frustration create tears in the weave of society and have the power to condition our ways of relating represented by the illegality of income and the systematic and spontaneous violence used to obtain it. These are latent and are now part of the challenges for institutions of higher education in Mexico reflected in some surveys. For example, (IIJ-IFE-UNAM, 2011) a sector of the population of Mexican youth has more confidence in public universities to contribute to and prevent the breakdown of the social weave, but at the same time opts for more radical mechanisms of imparting justice.

The school-employment relationship is very complex, but it is urgent that we give it attention with a focus towards social benefit. Public higher education in Mexico, as in the case of the National Polytechnic Institute, is a factor of social mobility and improves the expectations of economic income, but this is not the rule in every country or in each of its entities. In the study, *Getting it right: A strategic plan for the reforms in Mexico* (OECD, 2012), the authors noted that "in 2012, Mexico was the only country with a higher unemployment rate among people with university education" (p. 130). If indeed the educational system is one of the keys for education to be meaningful and function towards social mobility and employment, the necessary effort to achieve this is not only the responsibility of educational institutions, but also depends on a more complex mechanism that involves the commitment of at least three main actors: 1) the state, at

all its levels; 2) an authentic social responsibility on behalf of the companies, not determined by the imbalanced intention of creating wealth; and 3) citizen participation.

The figures in recently published international studies (e.g. International Labour Organization in 2013, *Global employment trends for youth* 2013: *A generation at risk*) portray a scenario in which the increase in the number of graduates of institutions of higher education and the increase in professional unemployment of these graduates signals a simple and but disquieting gap between education and skills for employment. In another study by McKinsey et al. (2013), Mourshed, Farrell, and Barton synthesize a common reflection relevant to various educational systems. They posit that while employers, institutions that provide education, and the youth exist contemporaneously, each understands the same situation in different ways. The image is didactic and subsumes three concepts central to the problem of unemployment. Mourshed, Farrell, and Barton (2013) support their declaration by stating that less than 50% of employers recognize that a graduate is sufficiently prepared for the first job. What is happening with more than 50% of graduates that states the contrary? Here we have our current educational challenge. For example, the jobs that are being created require higher levels of skills, technological sophistication, and intercultural relationship abilities. The challenge faced by youth, above all by recent graduates, is the broad disconnect between the skills provided by curricular models and those required to adapt to their first work experience. This lack of disconnected parallel system is in no way new, but has been constantly recurring through both the end of industrialization and post industrialization. The different approached to bridge this gulf will need to regard youth employment as a priority.

The Mexican Challenge to 2036: The case of National Polytechnic Institute

As Noam Chomsky (2011) mentioned in the Syracuse Peace Councils 75th Anniversary, the Mexican case has examples of higher education as a public good in which, in addition to not paying tuition, students view these institutions as the possibility for social mobility. Two examples are the National Autonomous University of Mexico and the National Polytechnic Institute, among others that could be mentioned throughout the country. Unfortunately, space only permits some references to the case of the second institution. On the one hand, it's common to find studies that confound the situation of private education in Mexico with that of public education; on the other hand, it is the narrative of international studies on education that permits

the contextualization of the impact of public higher education in the solution of regional and global problems. Mentioning the balance between regional reality and its global connection permits a glimpse, as of now, of associated issues. Rethinking our time and looking toward the future are debts that today's adults have towards future generations.

The challenges of heterogeneity and social inequality are in the very fibers of any critical revision of an educational model. Dealing with both challenges requires taking into account mainly aspects: rethinking the place of higher education systems with a vision towards the future in relation to a more equitable social transformation; and focusing this revision in the context of social and economic inequality in which today's youth live: dietary poverty (INEE, 2011, p. 60), the lack of matriculation options in secondary education, the absence of motivation to study and not abandon this educational level (SEP, 2012, p. 14), the unavailability of sustained technological and economic support and, above all, the lack of real expectations to learn skills that are relevant to labor insertion, as is reflected in recent studies in other regions (Mourshed, Patel, and Suder, 2014).

An example of this future vision is found in the National Polytechnic Institute (IPN) in Mexico. Indeed this vision lies in its very foundations, but in March of 2012, it was enlarged thanks to the design of education policies of social impact with a view towards 2036. This forward-looking vision is not just a teleological reference, but rather an approach on the path being constructed by an institution that Mexico will need in the coming decades (IPN, 2013). The recommendations to measure both concerns for the future are summarized in the following way.

1. Consider statistical information and demographical data that pinpoints specific causes of social inequality with respect to the unbreakable pairing of access of youth to public education and their continued attendance. This is a current concern in Latin America, given that 80% of the youth that enter and finish secondary education studies have higher incomes (CEPAL, 2007) and possibilities to finish higher education studies. The demographic changes of each country will need to be considered prospectively and internationally for the upcoming two decades because of labor relevance and the mobility efforts that can be designed today. In other words, it is not the same to prospectively measure the case of Mexico compared to countries with serious contractions of matriculation in higher education, such as Japan since 1992 or South Korea since 2005

(OCDE, 2008), with classrooms with few students where the minimum matriculation is at risk.

2. In addition to the previous point is the interdisciplinary attention required to the central problem of academic dropouts in Mexico, an issue that has generated diverse responses. In the case of the IPN, more attention to scholarships, tutoring programs, activities that require social and creative interaction, and academic projects, among others, has resulted in a way to detain this issue. The problem also affects 37% of Latin American youth, as is presented in the study *Social panorama of Latin America 2000-2001* (CEPAL, 2002). Having said that, the initiatives to retain students will have to consider the impacts that this will have on the access to higher education in terms of expansion of matriculation, range and diversification of the educational offer in order not to generate a greater imbalance that will manifest as social discontent and affect the life plan of the youth population.
3. In countries like Mexico there is no expectation, in the medium term, of contraction of matriculation as in the previously mentioned cases of Japan and South Korea (OCDE, 2008). On the contrary, if the Mexican educational system meets its goals of mandatory high school by the end of this decade (*Presidencia de la Republica*, 2012), we will have to consider allocating more resources and having a vision of a kind of training that will allow facing migration to certain countries in the next decade. This could be a strategy that will help create the education and labor spaces that will be needed. It also demands the rethinking of a scenario in which there will be more women attending higher education institutions (OCDE, 2008). We cannot forget the relevance that China and India have and will continue having in the coming decades in terms of the Latin American possibilities of mobility and exchange. The study cited above mentions that "a small increase from 10.1% to 11.5% in the rate of entrance to higher education in China and India can result in a figure equal to the human capital that currently exists in North America and Europe" (OCDE, 2008, p. 118).
4. The design of the instructor and directorial training in institutions of higher education is key to understand and manage the three thematic groups outlined above. The directorial administration cannot be effective if it is guided by improvisation and does not have a prospective vision or an approach of academic leadership (Barber and Mourshed, 2007).

Towards a conclusion

If anything is revealed by the worldwide education crisis it is the necessity to rethink and seek a more human education that reduces socioeconomic inequality. The prospective vision mentioned above is based on two simple practices: generosity and self-examination. This means that visualizing and working for the future demands the generous practice of constructing something in the present for the following generation, above all, by means of the critical exercise of the present (Martínez Ruiz &Rosado Moreno, 2013). This self-examination takes place in the dynamic of a regional and global context and implies staying alert to and self-critical about what we are shaping as our present. The intention that underlies all these actions is to achieve a regional impact through a prospective vision and to promote employment that prevents the migration of talent (Cave, 2013).

As educators, we should be concerned with the role of higher education in our nations. We also need to understand our citizens, and "their own personal biographies, struggles, and realities in the context of the contradictions of education and economic development". We also should strive to help reconsider the educational mythologies of education as a social good that is an apolitical activity". Universities should attempt to become actively engaged in promoting social change within their nations. Social class pervades our educational systems in terms of our use of economic and political hegemony to control the oppressed classes through the magnification of their perceived and constructed shortcomings and failures. We should also understand that politics and economics drive higher education, leading to a conflict between individuals who, through the hegemony of the state superstructure, oppress individuals who do not have access to the tools of agency, mainly language and historicity.

Our article is provocative and raises questions for the audience that forces them to critically examine examples and possibilities that 1) develop structures, policies, and institutional rituals that will disrupt the panoptic nature of universities and build an institutional community with a rich and meaningful sense of purpose; 2) envision, create, and sustain multiple organizational spaces in order to mitigate intensification, develop a comprehensive system of professional support, through the development of operational spaces to focus on the intellectual nature work and positively impact outreach that promotes innovation; and 3) how to provide spaces where all stakeholders have the most to contribute, and be the most engaged.

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