

European and Latin American Higher Education Between Mirrors. Designing possible futures

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Abstract

This paper discusses some of the analyses and proposals presented by a large network of European and Latin American researchers that developed a broad programme on institutional equity and social cohesion in higher education institutions, between 2011 and 2013. The impact of higher education expansion and diversification has been felt and questioned differently in the various countries, due to their history and place in the world system, to their education systems, to their organization, or their ability to react, to mobilize resources and to implement relevant policies. The article has Europe and Latin America as privileged locus of analysis, but acknowledges that many of the characteristics and issues described are part of a global agenda. It is assumed that neoliberalism has failed as a model of economic development, but it is recognized that, as policy for culture, it is (still) in force, derived from having become a common sense that shapes the actions of governments and education policy-makers. The University, as well as higher education policies, may have another sense and give an important contribution to the construction of fair societies, fighting for equality among human beings, fully respecting their differences. This is the sense of the nine proposals for a radically democratic and Citizen University the paper ends with.

Keywords:

higher education; academic networks; Europe; Latin America; citizen university

Ensino superior europeu e latino-americano entre espelhos. Projetar futuros possíveis

Resumo: Este artigo discute algumas das análises e propostas apresentadas por uma vasta rede de investigadores europeus e latino-americanos, que desenvolveram um amplo programa de I&D sobre equidade e coesão social nas instituições de educação superior, entre 2011 e 2013. O impacto da expansão e diversificação do ensino superior foi sentido e questionado de modo diferente nos vários países, em função da sua história e lugar no sistema mundial, da organização dos seus sistemas de educação, ou da sua capacidade para reagir e mobilizar recursos para implementar políticas relevantes. O artigo tem a Europa e a América Latina como locus privilegiado de análise, mas reconhece-se que muitos dos problemas e análises descritas fazem parte de uma agenda global. Assume-se que o neoliberalismo falhou como modelo de desenvolvimento económico, mas reconhece-se que, como política de cultura, está (ainda) em franca afirmação, derivado de se ter transformado num senso comum que molda as ações dos governos e dos policy makers. A Universidade, assim como as políticas de ensino superior, pode ter um outro sentido e dar um importante contributo para a construção de sociedades justas, capazes de unir a luta pela igualdade e o respeito pela diferença. Esse é o sentido das nove propostas para uma universidade cidadã radicalmente democrática com que o artigo termina.

Palavras-chave: educação superior; redes académicas; Europa; América Latina; universidade cidadã

Enseignement supérieur européen et latin-américain entre miroirs. La conception de futurs possibles

Résumé: Cet article traite de certaines analyses et propositions faites par un vaste réseau de chercheurs européens et latino-américains, qui ont développé un vaste programme de R&D sur équité et cohésion sociale dans les établissements d'enseignement supérieur, entre 2011 et 2013. L'impact de l'expansion et diversification de l'enseignement supérieur a été ressenti et posé différemment dans divers pays, selon leur histoire et leur place dans le système mondial, l'organisation de leurs systèmes éducatifs, ou leur capacité à réagir et à mobiliser des ressources pour mettre en œuvre des politiques pertinentes. L'article a l'Europe et l'Amérique latine comme une source privilégiée d'analyse, mais on reconnaît que bon nombre de problèmes et d'analyses décrites font partie d'un plan d'action global. On suppose que le néolibéralisme a échoué comme modèle de développement économique, mais on reconnaît que, comme politique de culture, est (encore) en franche affirmation, dû au fait de l'avoir transformé en un sens commun qui façonne les actions des gouvernements et des policy makers. L'Université, ainsi que les politiques d'enseignement supérieur, peut avoir un autre sens et donner une contribution importante à l'édification de sociétés justes, en mesure de rejoindre la lutte pour l'égalité et le respect de la différence. C'est le sens des neuf propositions pour une Université citoyenne radicalement démocratique avec lequel l'article se termine.

Mots-clés: enseignement supérieur; réseaux académiques; l'Europe; l'Amérique latine; université citoyenne

Educación superior en Europa y en América Latina entre espejos. Diseño de futuros posibles

Resumen: En este artículo se discuten algunos de los análisis y propuestas presentadas por una extensa red de investigadores europeos y latinoamericanos que desarrollaron un amplio programa de I&D sobre equidad y cohesión social en instituciones de educación superior, entre 2011 y 2013. El impacto de la expansión y diversificación de la educación superior fue experimentado y cuestionado de modo diferente en los distintos países, en función de su historia y el lugar que ocupan dentro del sistema mundial, de la organización de sus sistemas educativos o de su capacidad para responder y movilizar recursos para implementar políticas relevantes. El artículo tiene a Europa y América Latina como lugar privilegiado para el análisis, aunque reconoce que muchos de los problemas revisados forman parte de una agenda global. Se asume que el neoliberalismo ha fracasado como modelo de desarrollo social, pero admite que, como política cultural, está (todavía) en franca afirmación, derivada de haberse transformado en un sentido común que moldea las acciones de los gobiernos y de los hacedores de políticas (*policy makers*). La universidad, así como las políticas de educación superior pueden tener otro sentido y contribuir de manera importante a la construcción de sociedades más justas, capaces de unirse a la lucha por la igualdad y el respeto a la diferencia. Ese es el sentido de las nueve propuestas para una universidad ciudadana radicalmente democrática, con las que el artículo termina.

Palabras clave: educación; redes académicas; Europa; América Latina; universidad ciudadana.

Introduction

The creation of institutional networks has contributed decisively to the processes of construction and strengthening of the social sciences, as a whole, and education, in particular. These processes can be explained within the scope of the so-called knowledge society and social reflexivity. Both phenomena – the configuration of a network society and the growing access to information – are the product of a time when producers of social networks and knowledge live simultaneously with the specific experiences that allow the construction of those networks and that shared knowledge.

Manuel Castells devoted the first volume of his trilogy on the contemporary world to the characterization of the *Network Society* (Castells, 1996). According to the Spanish sociologist, the concept of network society characterizes the social structure emerging in the information age, gradually replacing the society of the industrial age. The network society is global, but with specific features for each country, according to its history, its culture and its institutions. The *network society* does not arise because of information and communication technologies (ICT), but without ICT it could not exist. In the last twenty years the concept started to characterize nearly all social practices, including sociability and the social-political mobilization based on the internet and mobile platforms.

Anthony Giddens, when attempting to explain contemporary social phenomena, developed the concept of social reflexivity (Giddens, 1994). According to the British sociologist, reflexivity concerns knowledge disseminated outside what is commonly known as “expert systems”, precisely through information and communication networks which came to be established thanks to the development of computing technologies and the internet. In other words, thanks to these new communication media, information, even that which comes from expertise, become accessible to the set of internet users, going beyond the limits of the universes of the initiated (researchers and scientists).

We know that access to the information does not automatically produce a social network by its users. It is necessary that, apart from access, there is the appropriation of the information by the network agents.

The enlightened vision of the dissemination of knowledge was a one-way street: it went from its producer (researcher, scientist, thinker, intellectual) to the receiving mass. If, on the one hand, 18th century Western thinkers developed rationalist optimism – the ability to know and change everything through knowledge – as well as encyclopaedic optimism – it only takes knowing everything to control and transform everything – on the other hand, they also developed a

kind of gnoseological pessimism and, in this way, the epistemological elitism commonly known as “vanguardism”.

Paulo Freire, in several of his works (e.g. *Politics and Education*, 1998) mentioned the evil of “vanguardism” but also warned against the perils of its counterface, “basism”. Not everything which is devised by the intellectual elites solves the problems of mankind, but not everything that comes from the social base is necessarily better, or is alternative knowledge to hegemonic knowledge, also because for the most part the masses “host” what is dominant and read the world from its perspective.

The social networks of knowledge have restored the possibility of gnoseological democracy, already insinuated in the concept of reflexivity, and then amplified in the concept of “dialogic democracy” (Giddens, 1994). In a more reflexive and globalized social order there is the need to foster more radical forms of democratization. Dialogic democracy is part of a process to democratize democracy, consisting in the creation of a public arena where controversial issues may be sorted out through dialogue, and not by pre-established forms of power (Arendt, 1959; Habermas, 1989[1962]). Both in daily activities and in social organizations, or even in the formal political sphere, individuals weave social practices and act together to find alternatives and overcome their problems and shortcomings collectively and reflexively.

Other concepts may emerge when we talk about social networks: shared knowledge and experiences, participative democracy, interlocution, alliances, collective action, ties, communicational process, entwining, culture of compromise, among many others. The common undertone to all of them is unity in diversity, in thought and in action, in theory and in practice (Freire, 1998).

It is then possible to define a social network as a set of connections, involuntary or voluntary, of people or groups, the boundaries of which are not the same, but which are presented as a structure which, in particular contexts, acts aiming for common goals. The social network is something of a response to social fragmentation, asserting itself sometimes as alternative and other times as mediation between the State and society, between the public sphere and the private sphere. In all social networks norms of complementarity and reciprocity are defined, norms that are not always explicit, but which are implied in the common contextual interests. Just as in communication, besides the sender, the receiver, the common code, the channels and the message, the interaction of social networks evidences the different competencies that complement one another and the various interests that are realized by the action of the other. Hence the pacts, the agreements and the adjustments regarding network access and permanence, so that the types of expertise, different and mutually

complementary, mediatized by the challenges of reality, may overcome those challenges.

Networks emerged in the sociological literature in the 1980s, especially when the political coordination of Western societies started to shift to the market. Networks arose as a kind of response to that shift, since the market cannot aggregate social interests. Most often, social networks respond to a deficit in representativeness and political coordination, previously hailed as assigned to the State and to which the market cannot respond with efficiency, not even with efficacy. To a certain extent, social networks, as social fabric armed in the mesh of daily life and expressing ideas, concepts, doctrines, collective aspirations and projects, end up becoming instruments of active citizenship and of participative democracy.

In 2006, a set of social scientists (and activists) of different fields – education, sociology, anthropology, political science, economics – and from different countries (Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Spain, Mexico, Paraguay and Portugal) formed the Ibero-American Network of Research in Education Policies (RIAIPE), within the scope of funding from the Science and Technology for Development Programme (CYTED), which exists in the Organization of Ibero-American States (OEI). In that first stage, the main goal of the RIAIPE network was to coordinate research in the field of the education policies of the countries researchers belonged to.

In 2010, this network expanded and started including researchers from other countries in Europe and Latin America (besides those already mentioned, Bolivia, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, France, Guatemala, Honduras, Italy, Netherlands, Peru, United Kingdom, Uruguay); it obtained funding from the Alfa III programme, of the European Commission, for the years 2011 to 2013, with the purpose of fostering cooperation among Higher Education Institutions (HEI) of the European Union (EU) and Latin America (LA), favouring the process of regional integration in LA and developing its synergies with the university system of the EU¹. We started by acknowledging the need to uphold a high degree of collaboration among the network participants, which allowed the group to identify decisive causes and factors in the existing situation, and present (as well as carry out) some proposals aiming to overcome processes and mechanisms which exclude from attendance (and success) in higher education whole populations (indigenous ethnical groups, of African descent, the poor, impaired people, people in situations of disability, minorities).

The present paper gathers some of the ideas and proposals presented within the scope of this immense collective work. As is the case with all collective work, it implies the establishment of platforms and compromises resulting from

many hours of discussion and common work, and its objective is to contribute to a radically democratic university and higher education, attended by students from all social classes and strata, and from all ethnical and cultural groups, where conditions can be created for the dialogue of knowledge types and cultures.

Europe: the Bologna process, the crisis of sovereign debts and the hard consequences in higher education

In the first decade of the 21st century in Europe, changes in higher education have fundamentally been associated with the implementation of the Bologna process. The goal was to establish a European Space for Higher Education which would allow an increase in competitiveness, attractiveness and comparability of European higher education. To this end, various objectives were defined: the creation of a system of easy comparison and reading of the degrees of the education system; the establishment of a transferrable credit system; the promotion of student, teacher and researcher mobility; and the construction of quality assurance systems according to European recommendations and guidelines. These changes were reinforced by the Lisbon Strategy and the European modernization agenda for universities.

The assessment of the results and the consequences of the Bologna process depends on the perspective of those who conduct it. On a political level, it is easy to conclude that the Bologna process was a success, since it allowed for greater integration and harmonization among the different systems from 46 countries that participated in it. However, on an institutional and local level, what dominates is a cautious answer, resulting from a wide diversity of contexts. On the one hand, the objective of achieving greater competitiveness and attractiveness of the European universities is yet to be empirically verified. On the other hand, different studies point to critical analyses of the processes and consequences observed in different national spaces². The present dynamics of the European Space for Higher Education and for Research are characterized by a simultaneous tendency to convergence and to diversification, as well as by the tension between cooperation and competition.

Several authors have underlined the neoliberal rationale underlying the Bologna Process, based on the decrease of the social responsibility of the State and on the idea of education as a private asset, favouring the constitution of a European higher education market. Amaral and Magalhães (2004) question the possible contribution of the Bologna Process to the decrease in autonomy of the higher education institutions, the marketing of education, the development

of a centralized European bureaucracy and a decrease in diversity of the higher education systems.

The importance of the social dimension, aiming at the equality of opportunities in access, participation and completion of studies has been reinforced as regards educational policies for higher education within the scope of the Bologna Process. In 2012, at the Bucharest meeting, the Ministers reiterated the objective of broadening access to higher education, increasing participation and approval rates for under-represented or disadvantaged groups, so as to reflect the diversity of the population of Member states. Also, the Europe 2020 Strategy defines as one of its objectives the completion of higher education for at least 40% of adults between the ages of 30 and 34 (European Commission, 2010).

Nevertheless, despite the policies aiming to promote participation, there subsist important inequalities in access, success and results. Growing competitiveness in attracting publics and financial resources has fostered stratification and inequality in higher education systems. Also, the neoliberal and meritocratic rationale which constitute the basis of the policies for broader participation do not seem to favour the development of an inclusive higher education system, committed to social justice.

Moreover, the end of the implementation of the Bologna process and the first years of the 2010s coincided with the debt crisis in several Southern European countries (Greece, Portugal, Spain, Italy) but also of Ireland, the United Kingdom, Slovakia, Holland or even France. This crisis has led to strongly authoritarian policies, with profound consequences in higher education policies. In the United Kingdom, the conservative government implemented a strong rise in the fees paid by the students, with predictable consequences in the access to higher education by the social layers with lower incomes. In Greece, the external intervention of international creditors, represented by the troika, European Commission, European Central Bank and IMF, has forced thousands of teachers and researchers to be fired from universities and led to a contingency budget, where many of the universities' basic functions have all but disappeared. In Portugal and Spain, the radical cuts in universities' budgets have led to regression in such areas as research and scientific development.

Throughout the European Union, the ideal of European construction, of a united Europe of solidarity, constituted by different peoples, rich in their diversity and history, has suffered several setbacks; national egoisms and the directory of the strongest once again prevail. Europe has become the world laboratory of the responses that neoliberalism, in its ordoliberal version, is giving the crisis it caused in 2008.

Latin America: the (difficult) transition to post-neoliberalism

In Latin America, the time contexts were different. Latin America was the first region where the neoliberal policies were implemented after Pinochet's military coup in Chile in 1973, which overthrew Salvador Allende's legitimate government. Later, in the 1980s, as a result of the crisis of the external debts in several countries (Argentina, Mexico, Brazil, just to mention the largest, geographically), the World Bank and the IMF intervened, through their "letters of intentions", with a view to restructuring their economies and reducing the fiscal deficit, following the traditional orthodoxy of these institutions: devaluation of the currency, privatization of public companies, elimination of customs barriers, sharp cuts in public expenditure on education, health and housing (Espinoza, 2002). In education, the policies carried out meant privatization of the educational supply (particularly in higher education), decentralization, assessment and accountability (Arnove, Franz & Torres, 2013; Gazzola & Didriksson, 2008).

The end of the 20th century was, for Latin America, what several authors called "lost decades" (e.g. Didriksson, 2008): a long period of economic stagnation (and, in some cases, contraction), with a severe decrease in per capita income, the rise of social inequalities and the sharp reduction of public resources for universities and other higher education institutions. At the same time, there was a commodification of the basic and secondary education supply for middle and high classes, the trans-nationalization of the higher education supply in many countries, after the purchase of universities and the multiplication of distance programmes, and a new common sense was built based on the criticism to the State's inefficiency and the defence of the virtues of creating markets in areas so far protected, such as education and health (Ginsburg, Espinoza, Popa & Terrano, 2005). Thus, in many Latin American countries, enrolling in private higher education institutions exceeded 60%, most of which were commercial in nature and of very low scientific quality – known as "garage" universities or "*patito*" universities (Fernandez Lamarra, 2010).

The 21st century brought about important changes in this landscape. The election of progressive governments in some Latin American countries, in general connected with social and ethnical movements with strong representation and long-standing tradition in fighting and resisting neoliberal policies, allowed for the development of policies of wealth redistribution and satisfaction of basic needs of the more disadvantaged sectors of the populations. At the same time, in countries with strong indigenous communities, there was recognition of the cultures of those peoples and the development of intercultural policies (for the case of Bolivia, see Teodoro, Mendizabal, Lourenço & Villegas,

2013). Universities and education in general once again received more public resources, and in some countries there was affirmative action policies aimed at populations historically removed from higher education (of African descent, indigenous communities, poor students). It is not without meaning that it was in Latin America, where the first neoliberal experiment was carried out, that the search for alternatives to neoliberal policies and the construction of other rationales started (e.g. Alcântara, Llomovatte & Romão, 2013).

Some policies of institutional experimentation deserve special reference. In Brazil, the action of Lula's and Dilma's post-neoliberal governments (Sader, 2013) also focused on the creation of *popular* universities (Santos, Mafra & Romão, 2013), evidencing differentiated profiles and responding to specific goals of political action. Some, like the Federal University of the Southern Border (Universidade Federal da Fronteira Sul), resulted from a strong connection to social movements, especially peasant movements. Others, like the University for the International Integration of African-Brazilian Lusophony (Universidade da Integração Internacional da Lusofonia Afro-Brasileira - UNILAB), or the Federal University of Latin American Integration (Universidade Federal da Integração Latino-Americana - UNILA), from the options of geostrategic nature of the Brazilian foreign policy. Others still, like the Federal University of Southern Bahia (Universidade Federal do Sul da Bahia), involved profound changes in the curricular structure, in the organization of teaching hours and in the connection to the public school and to the region's poorer and more marginalized social sectors (*quilombola* communities, indigenous populations, poor peasants without land).

Despite these policies, in most Latin American countries, including Brazil, private universities have grown more than state-owned universities, and have the largest numbers of enrolled students, which means that on the regional level it has not yet been possible to revert the privatization and commodification process of higher education that began in the 1990s.

Social Justice and the relevance of Higher Education

The adequacy of higher education to society, globally speaking, while it presents new challenges it also enables us to reflect on how we can make universities more committed to social justice. Considering higher education, and especially the university, as *public good* is being systematically brought into question. Its social function and its purpose of rendering service to society have led the way to an idea of university understood as a company carrying out an activity in the free market. Thus is placed the first dilemma related to the *social function* of higher education.

In the context of the neoliberal trend, it is necessary to question the business terms that currently dominate the educational discourses (and practices), in the face of the multiple problems of a social and environmental nature, or before recent phenomena such as the increase in university enrolment fees, the process of covert elitism, or even professional precariousness, intensified by austerity policies which discard the democratic conception of university.

This questioning is what allows us to reformulate the concepts: first of all, understand the contradiction that derives from implementing business rationales associated with such concepts as quality, efficacy and efficiency, while aiming to preserve the academic ethos connected to the public interest and the common good; and, secondly, identify the constant de-legitimization of the university as public institution by means of a managerial discourse which leads to the radicalization of its discourses on *quality*, *efficacy* and *efficiency*, leading to a business rationality of its institutions.

The assumption that higher education (and specifically the university) is a public good implies that it cannot be predominantly subject to the dictates of the market; its relevance lies in its contribution to the development of a fairer society, as defended by De Ketele (2008), transcending the demands of the productive system; in other words, it determines its purpose as the construction of public citizenship of democratic, sustainable and fair societies (Sobrinho & Goergen, 2006).

The mission of the university is stated in such documents as the *World Declaration on Higher Education for the 21st Century: vision and action* (UNESCO, 1998), where it is postulated that "higher education institutions must educate students so that they can become well-informed and deeply motivated citizens, provided with critical sense and capable of analysing society's problems, seek solutions for those problems, apply them and assume their respective social responsibilities". More recently, in Guadalajara, representatives from 1,009 Ibero-American universities (and from other countries outside this region) approved a Declaration entitled: *The committed university: the University's social dimension* (UNIVERSIA, 2010), where they emphasize the universities' firm commitment with social cohesion and inclusion, biological and cultural diversity, indigenous cultures, the promotion of economic and social development, progress and well-being, and with the resolution of the serious problems of inequality, poverty, gender discrimination, and the sustainability of societies in vast Ibero-American region.

The Declaration signed in Guadalajara insisted on the idea that the responsibility of today's university is based on acknowledging that education and knowledge are the most powerful tools for transformation, development, assurance of equality of opportunities, social cohesion and mobility. The Agenda drawn up

in that meeting defined five working axes, where universities must act so as to fulfill their responsibilities: (i) the committed university – the social dimension of universities; (ii) the university without borders – mobility and internationalization; (iii) the training university – teaching quality and renovation of teaching methods and contents; (iv) the creative and innovative university – research and knowledge creation; and (v) the efficient university – good use of resources.

Accepting these proposals on the social function and mission of higher education, and reclaiming the need to place social justice first, a new dilemma is presented around the *social responsibility* of higher education, which implies the participation of a part of society in the definition of development projects with a view to achieving a better fit to social needs. However, the dominant discourse and guidelines basically seek the participation of instances of economic power, and in many cases there is an underrepresentation of groups with great social importance, such as unions and associations that defend the rights of various sectors of the civil society, traditionally discriminated for reasons of gender, ethnicity, skin colour, economic level, or migratory origin. Although this situation often derives from the need to seek financial support or infrastructure, in the context of an understanding of universities as public good we can only speak of true participating democracy when social groups are represented that were traditionally excluded from higher education, so that their interests and needs can be presented and considered within the university.

Generally speaking, the manifestation of social responsibility is connected with the re-contextualization of the concepts of *pertinence* and *quality*, presented as a formula that transcends the adequacy of higher education to market dictates. Both concepts are ambiguous and ambivalent, and comprise a challenge: university, in order to fulfil its mission, must have as common denominator social justice, that is, its affiliation with social ends (Naidorf, Giordana & Horn, 2007).

We acknowledge that there are serious warnings as regards the use of the phrase *social responsibility*, widely used in business and political sectors. Its use has de-politized public references of fighting social injustice, proving unable to solve the serious problems of social exclusion. Nevertheless, the social responsibility of higher education institutions implies producing socially significant knowledge, training professionals with a social conscience and contributing to culture and to the transformation of the reality they integrate. In other words, social responsibility is directly related with relevance, thus constituting the means that allow the quality of an institution to be assessed.

For this, the quality so often mentioned today can only be assessed in all its dimensions when it is *relevant* to the issues and the contexts it integrates

and develops. And that *relevance* implies, for universities and other higher education institutions, a participation in the search for answers and solutions to the social complexity of today's injustices, which takes us back to the social, cultural and economic dimensions, the possibilities of integral and sustainable development for a dignified and fair life. The relevance must therefore be based on social justice and the basic rights inherent to the human dignity. The concept of quality, traditionally disembodied of all contextualization (and politization), is conditioned by social relevance, which implies recovering the social, public, value of the commitment to the community. In this context, it may be considered that *there is no quality without social justice*.

Social justice, referred to fundamental notions of equality of opportunities and human rights, transcends the traditional concept of formal justice (Montané, 2013), which gives rise to a new dilemma, that of establishing socially fair criteria to determine the social and public value of the collective asset that is higher education.

The challenge of considering *justice as equity*, while part of the social relevance, responds to a distributive concept of resources built upon three axes: (i) *the principle of equal freedom*, where the fundamental freedoms are ensured for all; (ii) *the principle of equitable equality of opportunities*, where equal access possibility is provided to all regardless of their social and economic origin; and (iii) *the principle of the difference*, where differences in gender, skin colour or ethnical origin, sexual orientation, or religion are respected. Distributive justice stems from a moral principle that establishes how *human beings* must be treated, protecting the individual freedom and the working needs of the State.

In this second decade of the 21st century, the right to education is assumed as a human right, not merely regarding basic education but on every level, including higher education. This position brings to the fore the dimensions of equality of access, permanence, academic success and job opportunities for young people of lower economic means, of cultures that are distant from the highbrow cultures of the school (or the university) or faced with greater difficulties in accumulating cultural capital. This implies adopting policies of positive discrimination and changes in curricula and in pedagogic methods, which highlight the diversity of experiences, life paths, cultures and knowledge types.

In this context, Amartya Sen's position is strongly supportive of our view when he claims that it is not *enough* to think of ideal models of justice based on the distribution of economic resources, but also proposes a *distribution of capabilities* (Sen, 2009). According to Sen, the axis of analysis must shift to people's ability to achieve certain situations considered fair, which implies generating

possibilities for freedom which enable them to choose between different ways of living.

The notion of capabilities has been fundamental in the approach to *human development* ("capability approach"), which values the increase in wealth of human life and the amplification of their options, thus allowing them to face the perspective of economic development based on the theory of human capital. This notion was expressed in the creation of the *human development index* (HDI) which, under the mandate of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), has generated reports that have positively influenced authorities responsible for preparing public policies.

The concept of human development put forward by Amartya Sen (2009) and Marta Nussbaum (2002), or by other authors in the field of higher education, such as Boni (2011) or Walker (2012), lead us to uphold the idea of a *transforming university*. Boni and Gasper (2011) suggest a list of dimensions, such as well-being, participation and empowerment, equity and diversity, or sustainability, so as to allow a different way of understanding the university's quality and responsibility, and analyse university functions and activities, from teaching to researching. Tickly (2011) defends that the notion of quality and educational relevance, which underlies the approach to human development, may provide a new model to think the university.

Thus, quality education will be that which allows all students to be aware of the capabilities they need to be economically productive, develop sustainable means of living and contribute to the construction of peaceful, democratic societies, assessing social justice and the quality of life in terms of human capability.

The distributive justice of resources and capabilities take us to a sense of relevance which involves: (i) financial, social and cultural resources; (ii) equity in higher education access; (iii) equity in higher education permanence, avoiding early drop-out; (iv) equality in results; and (v) the possibility to develop capabilities (Montané, Naidorf & Teodoro, 2014).

Democracy in higher education is expressed both in expectations, mandates and perceptions of society regarding the university, and in the commitment and social responsibility that the university assumes before society and the social players.

This perspective opens up a new dilemma: by considering that the relevance of higher education must contemplate that inequalities do not arise merely due to a question of distribution of resources or capabilities, but are also a social issue, of conviviality and of alterity, that they manifest by means of cultural

dominance in terms of difference in ethnicity, gender, or sexual orientation, it also assumes including the paradigm of *justice as acknowledgement* (also known as relational or cultural justice). The feminist scholar Nancy Fraser, starting from studies in the fields of gender and difference (Fraser, 1997), speaks of a type of claims for social justice that stem from a set of injustices she interprets as *primarily cultural*, rooted in social patterns of representation, interpretation and communication. Fraser later expands her contributions to include a political dimension, defending a *radical democracy* which allows the acknowledgement of all groups in the public sphere (Fraser, 2008).

The recognition of all social groups and, especially, those that throughout history have been silenced, made invisible and oppressed (Estermann, 2008), as well as their inclusion in the public sphere, involves the recovery of other non-colonial epistemologies from the perspective of colonized subjects, or, using Frantz Fanon's phrase, of the "wretched of the earth" (Fanon, 2004 [1961]). There is no law in Physics which prevents the world from being represented in reverse, as Estermann reminds us (2008). In our imagination, the South has always been below and the North has always been above; this archetype, perhaps of Platonic or Parmenidean origin, deepened and consolidated throughout the Middle Ages and modernity, has us believe that what is above is superior to what is below; the North would then be hierarchically superior to the South and this, for the reverse reason, inferior to the North. It was this archetypal and conventional idea, based on a dualistic, ethnocentric, androcentric and colonial view of the Western thought that organized our whole way of thinking, knowing and interacting with the world, with the others, and with other cultures, and at the same time conditioned the intercultural dialogue between the North and the South, and which, above all, has prevented Southern cultures from asserting themselves on an equal footing to the Eurocentric cultures self-entitled as superior which have globally asserted themselves from an ethnocentric perspective.

Overcoming the Western ethnocentrism and androcentrism as well as the coloniality of knowledge (Quijano, 2009) implies acknowledging other cultures, with other visions of the world and of life, and confronting their respective cultural othernesses. No culture can be self-designated superior and more important than any other, or consider itself as bearer of a single, true vision of the world. The possibilities and potential of the human being and the diverse ways of telling the world and life are not concentrated on a single cultural vision: «no culture, no philosophical *tópos*, can comprehend each and every possibility for mankind» (Estermann, 2008: 27). The breadth of interrogations that philosophical and epistemological questioning can comprehend largely exceeds modern

rationality, «with its areas of light and shadow, its strengths and weaknesses» (Meneses, 2008: 5).

Hence, the issue of modernity and the participation of non-European peoples in the movement of modernity raises some reflections. E. Dussel (1998) and W. Mignolo (2000) prefer to speak of trans-modernity to express the exteriority of the victims vis-à-vis the modern movement, the alternative provided by the victims as resistance. Santos (2006), in turn, prefers to call it alternative modernity. Whatever the concept to be adopted, there is the acknowledgement of other rationalities in the South, promoters of other epistemologies; they are silenced reasons that open up space for an epistemological pluralism capable of giving other senses to the world, life and education. Latin American and European authors committed with the South have worked other reasons considered to be subordinate by the dominating reason, and suggest other concepts with differentiated ontological densities which point to other epistemologies: *hybrid reason* (Canclini), *external reason* (Dussel), *border reason* and *liminar thinking* or *gnose* (Mignolo), *crossbred reason* (Darcy Ribeiro and Gruzinski), *in-between place* (Silviano Santiago), *silenced reason* (Boaventura Santos), *oppressed reason* (Freire), *d-enunciated reasons* (Eustáquio Romão).

From the unveiling of the hegemonic reasons bearing a kind of “epistemological myopia”, one must recover other epistemologies with a view to building a new geopolitics of knowledge, from the acknowledgement of various types of knowledge and the plurality of their places of enunciation. The rescue of the epistemologies of the South may lead to a global alliance of *invisibilized* epistemologies and the persons and groups that are aware of their colonized situation and of coloniality: indigenous peoples, people of African descent, women and the elderly, “indignants”, “occupy”, “altermundists”, etc. The vision of another possible world, of equity and global cognitive and social justice, and of a democratic radicality presupposes the ability to see the world in another way and a break with a violent epistemology that must be confronted with epistemologies of globalized solidarity.

A Citizen University in the 21st century

The future is a collective construction which takes into consideration the past and the present, but which also takes into account our aspirations, or our “viable unknowns”, to use the phrase coined by Paulo Freire. The conceptions and challenges that were equated in the debates and workings of the RIAIPE network integrate this goal of influencing the construction of that future, the possibility of building a *citizen university*, where the ideals of equality, social

justice and freedom are the guiding principles of all the changes and reforms to be adopted in this vast sector of higher education.

The approach to a radically democratic and citizen higher education gives rise to some important challenges in education policies and in university practices, which are briefly presented below, as an utopistics³ (and not an agency orientated).

Considering higher education as a public good for the construction of a fairer society. As prerequisite to the debate on the model of society and the relevance of higher education as social justice, it is upheld that this be considered a public good at the service of society and a right for all, a social good that explicitly seeks to educate free, autonomous and independent citizens, capable of making political, economic and social decisions aiming for a better and fairer development of society. The debate on this issue is not trivial, since if higher education is considered a service that is performed under a market rationale, the responsibilities that States and public powers must respond to will be different. As public good, higher education must be permanently subject to public scrutiny and citizen participation, so as to be able to respond to its economic, social, scientific and cultural purposes. To build a participative, inclusive, perfecting and renewing type of management, capable of responding both to local requirements and the global challenges of knowledge is a crucial challenge for universities in the 21st century.

Thinking universities and higher education outside the rationality imposed by neoliberalism. Neoliberalism was not just an economic doctrine. It is a whole new rationality (Laval & Dardot, 2010) based on the idea that the market is omniscient and that competition is the only human action generating innovation and progress; on this assumption, this new rationality has penetrated deeply in universities and in higher education policies. Locating the assumptions and consequences of this rationality and building other rationalities constitutes one of the missions of thinkers, scholars and political agents invested in overcoming one of the most dangerous periods in mankind's recent history.

Building the relevance of higher education based on social justice. Considering education as a public good, social justice becomes an ethical, political and legal imperative, which is implemented first and foremost in the field of social and educational policies and in the ethics of relations (Montané, 2013) and is directly linked with the social relevance of higher education and the adequacy of its functions. The reflection on this concept related with distribution, recognition and representation leads to the need to redefine its meaning, assigning it a dimension that lays the emphasis on development and social emancipation. The traditional vision, that quality in higher education depends on its relevance, must include, as relevant, the debate on its contribution to social justice, in its

more radical view, which articulates the distributive view with recognition and cognitive justice.

Relevance of knowledge and empowerment. The definition of what is relevant knowledge is related to how this is understood: *a public good or a competitive advantage? A personal shared construction or a commodity acquired through the purchase of a service?* There is a vast bibliography, especially from international organizations such as the OECD or the World Bank, progressively transformed into think tanks, which build the new rationalities later transformed into common sense on the role of universities in the “knowledge economy”. Alternatively, we propose the development of the ability to think the university as a community of practices, open to change and innovation, capable of including and allowing empowerment, or awareness (*conscientização*), if we favour Freire’s concept, of a growing number of youth and adults who, without discrimination of gender, class or ethnicity, seeks and accesses university education. Little by little, the university has stopped being a space for “the chosen ones”, where through violent meritocratic selection, the most violent and effective forms of reproduction of inequalities and symbolic violence, as Pierre Bourdieu so clearly showed us, hid (and continue to hide). The recognition of the importance of knowledge and the role of HEIs in its generation and socialization is an imperative of present times.

Revising the governance modes in universities. In the last decades we have witnessed in many countries profound changes in the governance modes of universities, taking as model and bringing it closer to business management modes. As a direct consequence of the application of new public management theories, the modes of collective participation (of professors, researchers, students) in the definition of scientific and training policies were considered to be ineffective and replaced by the concept and influence of stakeholders, by definition external to the university. Deans were then chosen like CEOs of companies and acted according to their standards of efficiency. In other countries, these changes were not implemented and the governance of universities went on being done according to the ancient modes of corporate domination, based on the decisive influence of professors and the student body organized in parties. The challenge presented is to think a **citizen university**. Is there an alternative to this dilemma: either a university based on the corporate weight of its teaching staff and student body (those that are in), or a company-university, where the dominating criteria are those of efficiency and efficacy measured by its economic outputs?

How to combine competition and cooperation? The main regulation mode for the policies in these times of neoliberal competition is done, above all,

by international (and national) comparisons established from large statistical studies. These are tests similar to PISA (its extension to higher education has been announced to happen in the near future), rankings of universities, schools, states and countries, "academic productivism". Quality and excellence, on the individual and institutional levels, have (almost) always been regarded as the result of competition systems and rarely (or never) of cooperation. Excellence is, in general, considered to be the opposite of massification. The question that needs asking is this: *is academic excellence possible in a mass-based, universal and radically democratic (higher) education?*

The regulation modes of higher education, and the role of the State, the market and the community. Recent trends indicate a withdrawal (sometimes apparent) of the State, assigning regulation to accreditation and assessment agencies presented as "independent", and to a presence, which is sometimes overwhelming, of the market in the regulation in public policies. Is it possible to have modes where the three regulation pillars (State, market, community) are in balance, particularly highlighting the community pillar, all but absent from the dominating regulation modes?

The internationalization of universities. In present times, it is the world class universities that act as hegemonic models of organization and of training. This being a little debated issue, it is important to analyse the consequences of the affirmation and dissemination of teaching and research models, especially to countries in the periphery or semi-periphery of the world system. The internationalization of the university activity must be seen as the university's response to *knowledge without borders*. To this end, it is stated that the organization of research networks and the mobility of teachers and students constitute the best response to the challenges and impacts of mundialization, restoring the possibility of a gnoseologic democracy and assuming *cosmopolitanism* as a natural vocation and part of the university *ethos*.

Knowledge types and the dialogue between epistemologies. Scientific knowledge is not the only way of knowing. The radical divide between valid knowledge – science – and other types of knowledge, reduced to local, traditional, indigenous experiences, attributes to the former the universal monopoly in telling true from false, which has led to deep contradictions at the centre of the contemporary epistemic debates (Santos, Nunes & Meneses, 2004). The challenge faced is that of converting universities into cosmopolitan centres capable of building bridges between different cultures and types of knowledge in a process of epistemological decolonization.

Conclusion

We are living times of transition and times of fighting, of *crossroads*. In many ways, these times appear to be chaotic, but from them a “new order” will most likely arise. As stated by the American social scientist I. Wallerstein, talking about the structures of knowledge, a statement which can nevertheless be extended to all the forms of human action, *that order is not determined but determinable*: “we can only have *fortuna* if we seize it” (Wallerstein, 2003: 123).

The set of analyses and proposals presented are part of that purpose of acting by “a new order”, an *order* that has in *education for all* a tool of cohesion and social justice. And, since there cannot be social justice without cognitive justice, higher education plays a privileged role in this historic process of building fairer and more human societies, “rounder and less edgy” societies, as Paulo Freire liked to put it.

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Notes

- ¹ The website www.riaipe-alfa.eu has large amounts of information on the activity carried out and the products of the work done.
- ² For example, the European Educational Research Journal entitles its special issue on the Bologna Process as “help or hindrance to the development of European higher education?” (vol. 9,1, 2010), and in it its editors question: “how much can we actually talk about a European higher education?” (Ursin et al. 2010: 30).
- ³ “Utopias? Utopistics? Is this just a play on words? I do not think so. Utopia, as we know, is a word invented by Sir Thomas More, and it means literally “nowhere”. [...] What I mean by utopistics, a substitute word I have invented, is something rather different. Utopistics is the serious assessment of historical alternatives, the exercise of our judgment as to the substantive rationality of alternative possible historical systems. It is the sober, rational, and realistic evaluation of human social systems, the constraints on what they can be, and the zones open to human creativity. Not the face of the perfect (and inevitable) future, but the face of an alternative, credibly better, and historically possible (but far from certain) future. It is thus an exercise simultaneously in science, in politics, and in morality” (Wallerstein, 1998, p. 1-2).

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