



DISCUSSANT RESPONSE

by

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to papers by **Luis Romo and Orlando Albornoz**

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The two papers presented in this session complement each other to provide a realistic description of the latinamerican Universities. That is quite an achievement, due to the highly heterogeneous condition and variable development of these institutions in the region.

In fact, we have different types of Universities:

State National Universities, usually the older ones.

State Regional Universities.

Private Universities supported by the State and other institutions.

Private Universities non supported by the State.

All these institutions face common and special problems derived from their structure, location and dependency.

I agree with Dr. Albornoz when he says that, "except very FEW cases, the academic resources of these institutions are very limited and the institutional management is rather poor. As a consequence, their teaching activities are deteriorated and research is seldom an important part of academic life".

Dr. Albornoz paper reflects J.J. Brunner statement when he said that "our universities are not sure about their present roll in the society, nor they clearly know how to face the future".

As a consequence, a major part of Latin America has no clear image of the University as an institution efficient and capable to cope with the fast change of the modern world.

The pattern of evolution of the university system has been very similar in the different latin american countries, although there are differences in the degrees of development they have been able to achieve.

As an example, to illustrate the problem, I would like to describe the situation in Chile. In this country, the oldest university is the Universidad de Chile, now commemorating its 150 anniversary. Nevertheless its roots can be traced back to the colonial Universidad de San Felipe, founded in 1738, 80 years before the country became politically independent.

After the Universidad de Chile, seven other universities were created during a period of 114 years.

These universities are:

Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile, 1888.

Universidad de Concepción, 1919.

Universidad Técnica Federico Santa María, 1926.

Universidad Católica de Valparaíso, 1928.

Universidad Técnica del Estado, 1947.

Universidad Austral de Chile, 1954.

Universidad Católica del Norte, 1956.

So, at the end of the fifties, Chile had 8 Universities distributed as follows:

Two State National Universities, three Catholic Universities, three non religious private Universities.

All of them received financial support from the government which, nevertheless, provided and respected their autonomy to develop academic activities.

The main purpose of these universities was concentrated in training the different professionals required by the society. This task was done with good results due to a policy of academic activities open to the participation of foreign professors from european countries (Germany, France, Poland, Spain, etc.)

Scientific research, as an institutional concern, was at a very preliminary stage.

This picture began to change during the sixties.

The Universities became more aware of their socio-political function. At the end of the fifties, this was traduced in a strong political activism of the students, who considered the University a sort of testing ground for their capacities to become political leaders of the country.

It was under these circumstances that the Leftist Revolutionary Movement (MIR) was founded at the Universidad de Concepción. Other organizations of this type were created later on with an unrestrained quest for power that degenerated in terrorist activities.

This atmosphere triggered in some way the University reform of 1968, which was oriented towards co-government, more autonomy and the creation of academic units dedicated to train scientists and to develop scientific and technological research as a tool to solve the problems of the society.

The reform made clear that the aspiration to modernize the universities required a balance of the teaching tasks with a major effort in scientific research in order to cope with the major problems of the society.

Between 1960-1980 the chilean Universities experienced a high degree of massification. The student enrollment increased 600% and of course, they were not prepared for this sudden increase.

Many students became disenchanted and being interested in science and technology, went to the northern hemisphere to get more advanced degrees (M.Sc., Ph.D., etc.).

Upon their return, they tried, with a very limited success, to influence Universities policies, specially those related to orientations of research and training. Nevertheless the heavily politicized academic life contributed a great deal to produce the brain drain for political or economic reasons.

No matter how difficult this period was, research groups and graduate studies were organized in some universities. Their main support came from international organizations (Foundations, UNDP, OAS, etc.) and also from the government, which also created its own research institutes to cope with some of the problems presented by different areas of the economy.

In 1973, the University autonomy was broken by the military intervention that designated Rector Delegates with the mission of performing a better administration.

The whole university system was reorganized in 1980, expanding it with the creation of 15 new institutions derived from the two National Universities and opening the possibility to organize new private universities. The Universidad de Chile was reduced to 1/3 of its student body.

During the last decade more than 40 additional universities have been created. Nevertheless, the development of the new institutions tried to followed the same pattern of the older institutions. In fact, they tried to compete with the traditional Universities in their training programs, indicating a lack

of imagination to prepare human resources according the needs determined by the fast change of our times.

At present the Universidad de Chile has 18.000 students with around 10% of the student body in graduate programs. It also perform 50% of the research done in Chile and may be compared to an average university in the U.S. or Europe.

In Latinamerica there are other universities in a similar situation or perhaps better.

At the same time we have other national universities following a similar patterns of development, but with a lag of 30-40 years behind.

The undergraduate curriculum continues being inflexible and, as such, the academic offer does not satisfy the needs of the modern society.

Under these circumstances, the traditional universities have a major responsibility to orient their own schemes of development and to influence those of the new institutions.

The challenge that the universities in Latinamerica are facing goes beyond the achievement of an improvement of their specific tasks. They also should be capable to catalyze a real cultural change in the different strata of our societies. These new adjustments should first pass through our minds, and produce, hopefully a change in our attitudes.

Fortunately, new trends are bringing a promissory interaction between the University, the enterprise and the community. There is a real great task in this area, in which of course we are behind the experiences of some of the best Universities in the northern hemisphere.

In this respect, I would like to close these remarks making a proposition to contribute in a more practical way to solve the problems of the University in Latinamerica; especially those concerning a poor management.

This is to evaluate the possibility of organizing an international university according what we may consider a better model to respond to the needs of the region, and with a capacity to forsee the future changes of our societies in the next 50 years.

FOUNDATION OF AN INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY IN LATIN AMERICA
A PROJECT FOR ICUS PWPA

A preliminary proposal
by
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In Latin America there are, approximately, 1000 universities, and the number is constantly increasing. Many of these "universities" are still far from achieving the status of true higher education institutions. Their struggle for survival is dramatic. With a few exceptions, their teaching standards are, at least, stagnant; their research activities are almost unexistent and their contributions for the development of the societies that support them are very limited. This situation has been analyzed in many seminars, conferences, etc. in which the lack of perspectives of the efforts and resources employed in their work has been demonstrated.

The problem is aggravated by the low probability to succeed in the introduction of reforms. The strong traditional ways of the latinamerican Universities to conduct their activities; their institutional isolation within the community and in relation to more advanced or modern centers of higher education, the permanent impact of the brain drain and the lack of regional coordination to attack common problems with a similar strategy make the reform effort very difficult, at least in the near future.

On the other hand, the new cultural revolution and the tremendous advance of science and technology are catalyzing impatient demands by new generation of students. Looking for guidance for their future, they question the validity of what these Universities are able to offer. As a consequence, university students are a very fertile material for political ideologies that exploit dissatisfaction without offering real solutions to the problems they confront.

The situation is recognized as a high priority problem. Local authorities and international organizations have been doing efforts to cope with it. Financial organizations, such as the World Bank, the Interamerican Bank, private foundations have invested significant amounts of resources in university physical infrastructure (buildings, laboratories, campuses, etc.) and, to some extent, in training programs. The results have been positive, but insufficient for the magnitude of the problem.

One of the shortcomings is that the effort has failed in providing a capable cadre of managers for institutions in need of adaptation to a very fast changing society. As a consequence, a large number of the best trained scientists have had to take responsibilities in the university administration, a job for which most of them have not been prepared. Honest mistakes have distorted university

development, creating problems very difficult to correct and producing a lack of confidence of national authorities in the capacity of the university for self-administration.

Most of the criticism has been focused upon state or national universities. As a derivation, many new private universities have been started. This new trend, far from solving the problem, has aggravated it, producing a chaotic situation in which students are disoriented.

Several examples illustrate how expensive and difficult is to remodel our institutions of higher education. Besides, the process may last for many years, and the results achieved have a very high possibility to be outdated by the fast change of the society. Under these circumstances it may be more suitable to consider the creation of a new university as a model that may irradiate inspiration to be imitated by other institutions.

A new type of institution.

Latin America is very much in need of a new type of University: a modest size institution organized with a long-range planning, with an efficient management, powerful in knowledge, values and ethics; effectively connected to other institutions of higher learning in the rest of the world. A new university that may serve as a source of attraction for the intellect, not only from the region, but also from other continents to provide a melting pot for cultures and traditions, a real ICUS laboratory.

This new university should have emphasis in:

- a. Graduate studies, in the fields of Humanities (Education, Philosophy), Science (Basic Science), Economics, Informatics, Planning & Administration of university activities.
- b. Research relevant for the development of economies based, predominantly, in the exploitation of renewable natural resources. In this respect, programs related to research in Biotechnology and Informatics may be important contributions for development.
- c. Associated with the new institution, a university press should be organized to produce journals, textbooks and didactic material in Spanish; something very much needed to enhance the level of education in Latin America.
- d. A center for international studies of different aspects of modern societies (political, economic, philosophical, etc.) to stimulate contributions and ideas for the solution of global problems. These activities will contribute a great deal to make the new institution a real UNIVERSITY.

This type of institution is possible to create, if there are some favorable conditions to achieve minimum goals that may enhance the prestige of the new university when compared with other institutions. After this initial prestige is achieved, the new university may have a better chance to attract significant support from the local community, from the government and international sources.

Human resources.

A reasonable economic support is necessary to hire a team of outstanding professors (20 - 25) that may serve as a nucleus for the initial activities. Besides, the new institution should count with the participation of visiting professors from PWPA chapters. This number may be gradually expanded according to the needs of development of the new institution. The potential of this source of support is overwhelming and may be gradually modulated.

Students body.

The initial number of students should not be large (200 -300). Graduate students should conform around 60% of the total student body. Undergraduate students should be selected carefully. Tuition and fees must be charged.

Location.

Although it is possible to foresee the need of several of these universities in Latin America, it is very important to select a suitable location for the first one, with the best conditions possible to achieve success with a minimum of difficulties.

A quick analysis of the present circumstances in Latin America indicate that only few countries provide suitable conditions for this venture. It may be possible to create an institution with 2 or 3 centers located in regions where it may be easy to attract students of different countries.

The problem of distance can be easily overcome under the present conditions; even for the transportation of students that, in this way, will have a better attitude and disposition to look upon regional and global problems.

It is possible to indicate that in some countries, the initial local support for infrastructure may be easier to get, but human resources and other needs may be more available in others, reducing, significantly, the cost of starting the activities, etc.

Follow up.

This preliminary proposal needs to be analyzed in depth with the participation of other persons. It is suggested the convenience of setting a small committee to work out the whole project and to consult it with the International Cultural Foundation, in order to achieve the most feasible recommendations.

A modest support is necessary for the work of the Committee (transportation, lodging, secretary,

etc.). These funds may be allocated by I.C.F. as a part of the budget for PWPA activities in Latin America.