



**THE LATIN AMERICAN UNIVERSITY FACING THE 21st CENTURY**

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The Latin American university is entering the 21st century facing new problems and new realities. The need for economic and social development is still a top priority in the region but the operation of their educational systems is not as effective as desired. This is quite true at the university level. Contrary to widespread believe the university in Latin America is a new and recent expansion, that happened after 1945, in spite of the fact that university institutions were created in the Spanish speaking area some centuries ago. One the leading countries of the region, Brazil, is a late comer to this expansion and the diversification and growth of the university took place in fact after 1970. The university in the region then is a new institution, many of them unable to cope with the academic efforts that are characteristics of such an institutions. On the other hand, some Latin American universities are fine institutions and these are developing the research capacity in order to become key institutions for the development in the region. In general, the academic resources are under stress, in the region; the level of the institutional management is rather poor, the research facilities are limited to very few of the Latin American universities and the quality of their teaching is affected by many factors, among them the irregular quality of the teaching staff. The demands of the next century are such that Latin America have to overhaul their universities, no doubt about that.



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### Introduction: The Latin American University, a World View.

The university has become one of the great institutions of the modern world. In the United States and in Europe the university is a crucial and central institution in the conduct of national life. In spite of the existing contradictions the university creates and reproduces knowledge, which is in fact essential in defining the goals of mankind. The university is the most advanced institution we have to promote knowledge and research. However, this paper deals with the future of the university in a region of the world where this educational agency is more devoted to teaching duties than to what we could call knowledge responsibilities. That is to say, that if we look at the university on a worldwide scale we may say that the quality gap still exists between the developed and the

developing world, with the first world having universities attending to all the institutional functions attributed to it, while in developing countries the university is mainly an institution devoted to training human resources for the professions.

No one would deny that Latin America is a continent in transition. The question remains, however, which direction will take this transition. More than that, it will be the focus of this paper to emphasise the fact that Latin America is a very ambiguous concept. Indeed, Latin America evokes a variety of impressions. Speaking about the regional university, this institution is accessible only to those living in the modern cities of the region and to those in the middle and upper classes of the society. In general terms, let us anticipate some argument, the university in the region is very much an urban and a privileged affair, because training for the professions is part of a very simple social process through which the middle and upper social classes in Latin America legitimise their role as the ruling class. Still, the university in the region is not only a waiting room for those who expect to receive the blue-print for social status. It is also an institution where knowledge is being created and in spite of the fact that the quantitative contribution of the Latin American to world knowledge is still much lower than the contribution of

developed countries -which produce most of the knowledge created in the world, it is also true that at the end of the XX century there are some academic centers in the region that are trying to change themselves from the traditional teaching model of university to the research oriented institution. This is not an easy process and in fact there are very many obstacles in the process. At different moments comments are made concerning the lack of funds for research, the extreme politicization of the public universities, the absence of interest in research at the private universities, interested as they are more in a teaching model than in creating new knowledge; the distance between pure and applied research; even the fact that the research agenda in the region is quite influenced by that of the developed countries, where most of the researchers have done their graduate studies, a fact that does not facilitate the development of an indigenous research agenda. However, regardless of the obstacles the Latin American university is looking forward to the next century at least open to the fact that a new model of university should be developed, the research oriented university and a number of steps have been taken in that direction, particularly in the most powerful institutions in the region and around industrial centers which are also being developed (1).

Much of the current discussion about the role of the university in Latin America and the Caribbean is related to the ought to be, since the lack of quantitative research about this institution does not really allow us to analyse the is, meaning to be able to explain in those quantitative terms the working role of the parts. It is the case of the students role at the university in the region, ordinarily explained in terms of the political role, more than in the ways they learn during the schooling process. Or the case of the faculty, which is analysed and scrutinized in American universities in order to measure their performance, while at Latin American universities this evaluative approach is in the embrionary stage. For these reasons the arguments about the role of the university in Latin America, as we approach the 21st century, rely upon qualitative analysis, specifically about the model and models of the university in the region, which is precisely one of the main points of this paper, to dispell the notion that there is a single concept of what the university is in the region. Indeed, there is not such a thing as the Latin American university but a plurality and institutional diversity. Meaning that a comprehension of the institution in this part of the world has to begin with an understanding of the different historical development of the university, because there has been a parellel development of the institution in the region according to the different models taken by the different subregions in Latin America. For this above mentioned reason

it would be quite difficult to say what would be the role of the Latin American university in the next century and there is no doubt that whoever speaks about the Latin American university, in general, is making a limited analysis, because we are not refering in the region to a single university model but to a number of them, generated in the region according to the colonial model taken into consideration. The purpose of this paper will be accomplished if we are able to make ourselves understood as to the fact that facing the next century the Latin American university is a not a university with a common concept through the region but that perhaps the situation should be approached in a country by country analysis, in as much as in terms of social variables, the ethnic, linguistic, educational and religious structures vary considerable from country to country. But this would not be relevant within the limits of this paper. So we should try to point out the general patterns and tendencies of the current Latin American university, in general, in relation to the expectatives of this part of the world in the next century.

Perhaps we should mention, briefly, that no understanding of the Latin American university is possible without a proper analysis of the unequal social structure in these societies, many of them far away from democratic social patterns; in fact in some societies in Latin America and the



Caribbean there are profound ethnic differences, that allow for little room at the universities for those coming from the ethnic minorities and social classes of low income. On the other hand, it should not be ignore the close relationship between the university and the political system. In countries like Cuba, for instance, the control of the State may be an impediment for the free interchange of academic ideas and in other cases, like in Peru and in Venezuela, just to mention two countries in South America where political turmoil in 1992 is affecting university life, this unstability at the political level has a considerable negative effect on academic life. And again, we should insist on the fact that the Latin American university is a rather new institution, contrary to the belief that they are old institutions which opened their doors early during the Spanish and Portuguese colonial times. They did, at least in the Spanish area of concern, but we must say how the Latin American university is a modern institution, which really begin to expand but only after 1945, with the heavy influence of the American culture, which has been present in the Caribbean since the beginning of the century but not begin to affect events in Latin American academia but after the USA became a world power. I could add that the organize influence of the American academic world in Latin America only took place in the 60s. (2).

The diversity of the university in Latin America .

The diversity of Latin America is remarkable at the level of the university. In the case of the Caribbean we find quite an interesting mixture of university models and historical traditions. In one hand we find the case of Cuba, where the State is in full control of the institution and a university still based upon the marxist model of the former Soviet Union (3) We also find the Spanish colonial tradition, in countries like the Dominican Republic and the profound American influence of the American model of higher education, in Puerto Rico, a Caribbean country where the American model was not preceded by the Spanish colonial university. We also find the French model in Haiti, the British model in Jamaica and Trinidad and the Dutch model in Curacao, to mention but a few examples. In fact the Caribbean is quite a laboratory to study the different university models, particularly if we take the Cuban model, a university very rigid on the lines of the marxist academic environment and the American model in Puerto Rico, where higher education was actually brought by the Americans, when they took over this Caribbean island, which allows us to point out the very early American influence in the creation of the Latin American university, much before this influence was to become stronger, after 1945.

In the Spanish speaking Latin America we find the strong influence of what to insiders is the Latin American model of university, the model that emerged of the Córdoba Movement (1918) and that we will examine later on in this paper. The Spaniards brought the university with them, as they did with all their institutions. In such a case Spanish colonizers opened some kind of higher education in all their more important colonies, being México, Perú and Santo Domingo the main sites for universities in the new continent. And then we find the latest comer into the field, Brazil, which came into light much later than their Spanish counterpart, having, however, built in the last three decades which is perhaps the finest university system in the region. It would be proper to do a detailed historical analysis of these academic influences in Latin America, to understand the shape that this institution has taken in the region. However, we may do some comments on what it is call the Latin American university, created in Argentina in 1918. To that we now turn.

The Latin American university at the beginning of the XX Century: The Córdoba Movement and the emergence of the Latin American Model of University.

The university in Latin America, as elsewhere, is the product of many influences. One the main arguments of this paper, which tries to analyse how the university in this part of the world will face the challenges of a new century, is that there is not a unique Latin American university, but a diversity of models operating at the same time. We have a number of pattern of control, for instance, like the public and private universities; the different foreign influences, from the Spanish and the Portuguese, to the recent American and Soviet influences, including those of the former British, French and Dutch metropolies. Of course they vary in size and location, though the university in the region is mainly a metropolitan experience. We have the traditional institutions, most of them created in the XVII and XVIII centuries, and we have quite an expansion that took place after 1945 and above all after 1970. So it would wrong actually to speak about the Latin American university. However, thre is a Latin American model that emerged in the so call Córdoba Movement (1918), in Argentina. This movement had a very limited influence but is recognized through the university rethoric in the region as the closer you can get to an indiginous model of university. At this opportunity we should state that in spite of the very great number of universities that are working in the region, very few of them are what we could call full universities, with graduate studies and scientific research of co.mpetitive quality, world wide. Most of them are very

modest institutions, having perhaps as the only unifying factor their academic underdevelopment.

By the end of the nineteenth century a pattern of Latin American universities has emerged. The background was provided by the religious foundations, but superimposed upon this were the secular institutions. Law, the most useful professional qualification for the sons of the oligarchic, has ousted theology as the main subject of study. Scientific research had not a chance to evolve as a university function, however, given the lack of emphasis on scholarship and the turbulent conditions of the age. At the time it was generally accepted that the main purpose of higher education was to prepare students for the professions, not to do scientific research, a trend that somehow has survived through the years up to the present. With the onset of the Twentieth century university education was to be reshaped under new pressures and influences. This took place in 19918 in a provincial city in Argentina, Córdoba. The so call Córdoba Movement emerged to change the traditional university. Before that the institution was strictly devoted to the sons of the elites, was a non-residential type of institution, devoted entirely to the teaching model and not to scientific research, staffed by part-time teachers and normally located in the capital of the country, with weak contacts with international university life. The early

format of the university in the region was that of a loose federation of professional schools. The University Reform tried to change all this, though many of these characteristics has persisted to the present day, already at the end of the century.

— The Córdoba Reform is part of the mythology surrounding Latin American universities. There is hardly any speech about the history of the Latin American university that does not mention either of two important questions: first the fact that they are old institutions, founded in the XVI century -not recognizing the fact that most universities in the region are new institutions, opened in the XX century, and second to honour the Córdoba Reform -not acknowledging that its influence was rather limited and that in a way it has stopped the modern development of the university. Tunnerman (1978), in the Prólogo to his book 60 años de la reforma universitaria de Córdoba is a very good example of the rethoric which generates la reforma:

"El Grito de Córdoba, que se instaló en la garganta de los jóvenes latinoamericanos resonando por todo el Continente, fue la rebelión contra los últimos resabios coloniales enquistados en nuestras universidades. La Reforma fue también el primer cotejo entre la sociedad y la universidad: con ella se inició el proceso de democratización de nuestras

universidades, aun no concluído; contribuyó a crear una nueva conciencia universitaria y social; trató de volcar la universidad hacia el pueblo y de dar un sentido distinto al quehacer universitario en esta parte del mundo; la inspiró una indiscutible aspiración de originalidad, afirmandose en los valores propios de América Latina y, desde su postura profundamente americanista, denunció el imperialismo y las dictaduras criollas, sus fieles sirvientes".

The Córdoba Reform was a proposal to create a new university, away from the pattern inherited in the Spanish speaking America after the Independence. That is to say, there is a long period of the Colonial university, that took place until 1830, then a National period until 1918 and from then on what Latin Americans appreciate as their university model. The university suggested in Córdoba stated that the institutions was to be autonomous, in all respects; the authorities were to be elected by the community, including the students, in such a way that students, members of the faculty and those who have obtained degrees at the university, were to be represented in the co-government of the institution; attendance of classes was optional; members of the faculty were to be chosen by entrance examination open to all those interested; schooling was free of any fee; new academic careers were to be opened, in order to be able to attend the demand for new professional studies; students

were to obtain social security and access to the university was to be democratized; new links were to be established to the other levels of the educational system and the university was to become active in the Latin American integration and the struggle against imperialism.

This Córdoba Reform did not extend to the largest Latin American country, Brazil. In fact, the development of the university in this country follows a different historical pattern, which is of interest to point out, above all because the universities and higher education in general seems to be quite advanced in this South American country, much more than in the rest of the region (4). The model of the Latin American university that emerged from Córdoba is still thought as the model of the Latin American university, but at the end of the century this institution is a different one from the Argentinian proposal of 1918. Nowadays more than often the university is a private institution, far from the political role envisioned by those leaders of the Córdoba Reform, the students seem to be interested in vocational behaviour, the institutions oriented toward practical ends and in general almost no one expects the university, per se, to generate development in the region much less be the leader in the struggle against imperialism. Autonomy seems to be these days a concept under revision and co-government an obstacle for the efficient



management of the university and even the largest public universities are apparently accepting these new realities. One element to be reckon with is the fact that perhaps for the first time in Latin American history most countries in the region are governments elected in free democratic elections and this situation has a profound effect at the university, in as much as the fight for academic autonomy is relevant when the university is under siege from authoritarian political pressure. At the end of the century there are new problems, for the Latin American universities, above all the financial capacity to attend a growing demand for access to the institutions. The private universities have a limited role to play in that respect and most students still expect to be able to enter the public institutions, which are not only free of any tuition but in most cases offer academic careers that are not available in the private institutions, unable as they are to enter the academic market in those careers which are very expensive to organize, like the health professions, for instance. However, public funds are very tight these days, of huge external debt and critical financial situation in the region. For these reasons the universities are unable to expand at the same rate, creating a lack of equilibrium that affect the institutional success of the university, particularly when the cost of higher education is being increase very rapidly, world wise, plus the fact that the new knowledge technologies are being diversified and are

quite costly to obtain. On this line of thought there seems to be noway to avoid in the region a cost-benefit approach to planning and programming higher education, in the region. But this goes against well established institutional pattern but the simply true is that Latin American universties and their national governments have to relaise that the model of the university that emerged in Córdoba has to give ways to new institutional definitions, facing the 21st century.

#### Reshaping the Latin American university.

One of the major discoveries of the 1980s was that higher education institutions like any other economic enterprises respond to financial incentives. In Latin America, this a new approach to university life. As pointed out by Levy (1975) there is a challenge from the private sector to State run higher education and this will be a pattern in the future, the demand for universities to respond to the forces of the market, though this does not mean at all the disappearance of the State in Latin American universities affairs. In fact, at least at the beginning of 1992, the only country were higher education is the total responsability of the State is Cuba because in the rest of

the region both the State and the market compete for control of the university.

In the 21st century Latin American universities will have to face the following challenges, in order to be able to compete with the universities of the modern world:

1. To realise that the university is a economic enterprise that respond to financial incentives.
2. That is to say, they have to enter the stage of the estado evaluativo, meaning to accept the accountability age (5).
3. The establishment of institutional partnership in mutual beneficial ways with public and private enterprises in such a way as to ensure that the resources of both the university and the industry are fully respected.
4. To create more links in the international academic arena, not only with the university in developing countries but also with universities in other LDCs, because they are trying to accomplish the same objectives concerning the future, that is to say to become modern universities. International organization like UNESCO, International Association of Universities and their regional counterparts, are excellent

ways to do so. However, bonds between say Latin American and African universities, should be developed independently, for as long as this is possible.

5. To pursue closer working relationships with the elementary and secondary schools, aimed at maximizing the effectiveness of the entire educational system, from preschool through postdoctoral levels.

6. Be more accountable politically, which does not mean any kind of political correctness.

7. Advance to create in the region the cognitive complexes which are common in developed countries (Parsons and Platt, 1973) and also to go beyond the universities and create a "new republic of the intellect", as it is the case in also in developed countries (Hague, 1991).

In the meantime, once again, Latin American is in transition. This time in urgent need to over-haul their universities in such a fashion that they come into the next century with a certain capacity to be creative institutions beyond their professional role and able to put themselves in a position in which their ability to produce new knowledge of world wide interest. In a very obscure comparison many people in the region still believe that the Latin American

universities are able to stimulate the so called tropical imagination of García Marquez and not the cold and severe outlook of Borges, but this is only a metaphore. At the end of the XX century the ideological framework has changed dramatically in Latin American, as elsewhere, of course. The ideological orientation of the extreme left, dominant in many campuses through the region, at the public universities, is almost gone. The old icons of the socialist revolution have become a tragic curiosity. The new wave of ideas appealing to the future are based upon an approach consistent with neoliberalismo and pragmatism. In the case of the universities the current expansion is in the private sector, with new universities being created to please the market demands. In this case the universities are speaking about "clients", "services to society" with a strong preoccupation with cost, accountability and even profit. In a way it could be said that the current Latin American university is becoming anti-intellectual and intensely interested in practical solutions to social problems, more than scholarly endeavours. Another consideration has to do with a very important political factor, the fact that the new role of the United States in the world political arena means that Latin America will see their dependence to American influence increased in the years to come. The desintegration of the Soviet Union and the ill fated reputation of socialism has left Latin America without any alternative and so the universities in the region have

apparently given up the role they designed in 1918, at Córdoba, Argentina.

The Latin American university which is facing the next century is attuned to the pressure of the market forces, more than to the State control of former days. The new slogans refer to concepts like services to the industry more than academic activities, practical competence of American inspirations more than the obstructive abstractions of the European, especially the German influence and so on. Public university monopolies have been broken; in fact in some countries they have operated like a university cartel and with governments playing a very important regulatory effort. In the next century the tendency is quite the contrary, with deregulations being more important than State control and the universities seen as competitors in an open market, interested in offering their services to whoever is able to buy their academic and professional know how, without much ideological preoccupations. The search for knowledge is out of fashion. That might be a tragedy in terms of academic development. Perhaps in the same way that marxism as a ideological stand took over during at least two or three decades as the political orientation of the main public universities in the region, nowadays marxism is over and the new approaches are consistent with the recovery of capitalism as the dominant mode of production (6).

It seems safe to say that in the next century the Latin American university will be more an equilibrium between the State and the private university. But of course, diversity is still the institutional pattern and there is no way to generalize about a single type of either State or private university, in Latin America. The new private university, created after 1979, follows the American model of university. The private religious university is returning to the basic principles of the Church, as expressed in the Apostolic Constitution issued by the Pope John Paul II in 1990, Ex Corde Ecclesiae, tries to form a bond between faith and the search for truth. But it also tries to tight the Catholic university to a search for meaning, in as much as the "Christian inspiration enables it (the Catholic university) to include the moral, spiritual and religious dimension in its research (and teaching)", since "If need be, a Catholic university must have the courage to speak uncomfortable truths which do not please public opinion, but which are necessary to safeguard the authentic good of society (through) the dialogue between Christian thought and the modern sciences". The State universities, for their part, are trying to respond to the new demands, while at the same time keeping in mind their obligations with transcendental truth and the respectable tradition of university autonomy and academic freedom, which

can not be impaired by fashion or pragmatic pressures, no matter how important they seems to be at a given moment.

These are the dilemmas that are at the heart of the matter, for Latin American universities, when they face a new century and the opportunity to redefine their role in this part of the world. For many universities in the region, working within a very traditional model, the new century does not offer any challenges. They will remain isolated and bound by the teaching model they have taken. But for many others there is a necessary new role in society, a responsibility to train professionals but also to produce new knowledge, assuming the responsibility to understand knowledge as a universal duty beyond immediate and often circumstantial pressures. To do so would be to fall into the trap of the debate about political correctness at the university, in a different way in comparison to the American situation. Bloom (1987) has discussed this in his book The Closing of the American Mind. If what is political correctness is defined in the United States by cultural forces, generated in the different cultural interest that try to find a voice and a place in society, in Latin American political correctness is a very undefined but equally dangerous threat to academic life (7). That is to say, the university has to organize one equilibrium between their responsibility for truth and the need to provide



services for the social demands of the society. However, not always truth is a commodity, neither pleasant to listen to. If the university allows the forces of the market to define their limits in the search for truth the institutions lose their main function and become another agency providing services to the market, become just another competitor for profit (8). Once in a while, of course, it is necessary to discuss the limits of the university as a service agency and their specific functions which can not be omitted except to risk the alienation of the institution.

Clark (1983) has written about the components of higher education systems. In the Latin American case, a vast region with a number of national higher education system, some very simple, some very complex, the dilemma seems to be between knowledge and authority, meaning that the university generates in the region quite a well organized power system, which is paralell to the academic system per se. This is not the place to do such an analysis but in most Latin American universities the struggle for political power obscures the academic goals that should be the basis for university life. The search for meaning, as the Catholic Church has suggested, corresponds to what Clark calls the role of values in university life. But the new ideological perspective affecting university life in the region calls for a highly pragmatic approach under new values and so

those traditional values of the university, the search for truth, becomes secondary to the idea of the university as a direct service to society, obeying the circumstantial interest of either the market or the State. In which case power becomes more important than knowledge. The Latin American university faces a number of challenges, for the next century and in my opinion this happens to be one of the most important, how to preserve the search for truth and universal values under the pressure to be an agency for political power and a institution with direct responsibilities to society, in this case a model of society where the State is being diminished by the pressures of the market. Not only that. In some cases in Latin America authority takes the form of the guild which ordinarily generates an intense bureaucratization of the university stating work conditions that impose many limitations on academic life. A guild at a university, at the level of the members of the faculty, creates quite difficult and strenuous circumstances for academic activities, though it also creates the job security which is necessary for academic stability. However, in some Latin American cases the role of the member of the faculty is defined not by its academic obligations but by the rules as defined by the guild.

The university system in Latin America does not seem to be fulfilling its economic and social roles with any degree of success, in spite of the many examples of fine academic achievements, both institutional and personal, found through the region. We can find, indeed, lagunas de excelencia, as defined by Scherz García (1964), like those centers of first academic quality found in the area of Sao Paulo, the industrial capital of Brazil, or in Monterrey, the Mexican counterpart, and so examples of this can be found in at least the larger countries of the region, like in Argentina, Colombia, Chile, not to mention Venezuela, my own country. But the average university in Latin America still follows a pattern closer to their traditional historical roots than to respond to the demands of a modern and competitive society. Indeed, the heart of the matter is that in the next century Latin America will have to compete in a totally different scenario. Japan, South Korea, Taiwan and other Asian countries, are entering the world stage, the European universities are improving their performance in order to adapt themselves to the new realities in that part of the world and in the United States there is no doubt that they have a fine, first class type of university, a fortunate blend between teaching and research which is an example to the contemporary world. The big question is if the social and political conditions will allow the Latin American university to be competent enough to respond to these new challenges that are being discussed all over the

world, at the end of the twentieth century and at the beginning of the next. It is said that in the twentieth century human society progressed more than in the whole history of the world, in technological terms. The new century might prove even more stimulating in this sense. What role Latin America will have in this new era might depend very much on their universities. This is indeed the real challenge. World wide we are in the middle of an unprecedented crisis. The university has to adapt fast enough to the consequences of technological change and to new academic and social responsibilities. The Latin American university is faced with the necessity to innovate in response to internal needs and external pressures. No innovations whatsoever can go beyond the essence of the university, however, and in this I see the major dilemma of the present Latin American university, how to become entrenched into the needs of the society of the next century, without abandoning their duties with the search for knowledge, with independence and autonomy. In other words, how to be accountable without losing their integrity. This is not, of course, a Latin American predicament but the realities of university life, anywhere and at any time.

If the Latin American universities are willing to improve their quality and international standard in the years to come they will have to follow the policy

adjustments suggested by the World Bank (1988): improve quality; increase efficiency; constrain output, especially in those fields that do not directly support economic development; and relieve the burden on public sources of financing by increasing the participation of beneficiaries and their families. But these are suggestions which are some times not feasible and in fact they can threaten the mere essence of university life, in Latin America, where recruitment is still very much restricted to those affluent enough to pay for their studies. It is true that in public universities no fees are charged to the students, but there is also limited assistance for their expenses, so the cost of their education still relies upon their own possibilities, leaving the room open for those able to pay that university education. On the other hand if it is true that inefficiency is quite widespread in these universities, it is also true that inequities mean that those who are more likely to be excluded from university schooling are those unable to pay, perpetuating inequalities which are contrary to the democratic principles that should guide the access to knowledge. It must be said that measurement of efficiency and institutional assesment in Latin American universities is in the early stages and no clear cut conclusion can be made on the efficiency of say private and public universities. In fact some of the more inefficient institutions in the region are private universities, though it is true that in general they can operate with a more

precise criteria about their budget and of course they come out quite high in efficiency if cost is taken into account (9), leaving aside the concept of social efficiency, in which case many public universities would rate quite highly in terms of their efficiency, given the fact, for instance, that they are the university institutions where most of the scientific research in the region is done, though many centers of research are funded by combining the public and the private sector, with both national and international interest supporting this type of activity through Latin America, in the last case via international organizations and private foundations.

### Conclusion

We may end this paper by saying that the Latin American universities are facing the next century through quite a number of different perspectives, since there are several Latin American universities, following different styles and concepts. No generalization is possible and any argument for the universities in the region has to be qualified. However, we have tried in this paper to find a common pattern, in this large and complex area which is known as Latin America, as it enters the 21st century. We should not forget that Latin America is still the Third

World. In this respect den Bor and Schute (1991) have clearly said what many believe is close to the essence of the problem with universities in Latin America:

"...the average Third World university is not merely a status symbol, even if the government would like it to be. National support for universities is often so weak and the internal difficulties so manifold that it would be difficult for the university to adorn the bow of the ship of State. At best, the university can be used as a symbol of domestic consumption, a kind of abstract intellectual utopia for young people who want upward mobility. But even in this capacity the university has failed irretrievably in many countries. Students realize that the university in its present form is not likely to offer them the rewards of meaningful employment, let alone true intellectual development".

So Den Bor and Schutte ask the very final question, "Are Third World universities, then, to be considered as instruments for development? ...the answer must be no. Many universities are not yet in a position to exert a substantial impact on national development, simply because they themselves still need to be developed". This I find quite a truthful statement. University development is still

a requirement in most Latin American institutions and for that very reason they are in no position whatsoever to help Latin American development, not to mention the contribution in scientific and technological terms to worldwide development. Again, this is not a phenomenon to be found only in Latin America but also in the other regions of the Third World. Certainly a few Latin American universities are fine higher education institutions, like those large metropolitan universities granting degrees at the highest level and conducting meaningful scientific research, but the majority of them are small isolated institutions, unable to go beyond a traditional model of the teaching university and even if they are called modern and innovative -when they were created in the last ten years or so, they are often just small universities -mainly financed by the private sector, which are just training professionals for the local industry and fulfilling the expectations of the market, when offering their services, without directing their students and their faculty to the mentioned "intellectual development", which means the critical capacity of the university student, which would allow him or her to see society in a different light.

The dilemmas of the Latin American universities, at the end of the century are manifold and there are very few reasons to believe that in the short run they are going to



change dramatically, simply because we are entering another century. However, the presence of Latin America in the world economy seems to be tied up to the future role of the university. The world focus is shifting from the remnants of the Cold War struggle to new economic realities, where the new Pacific is playing quite an important role, imposing upon Latin America new challenges, in world economic competition. The need to overhaul Latin American universities is not only a rethorical demand but a very concrete and objective need. For this reason I have argued somewhere else that the cognitive complexes that Parsons says exist around knowledge in developed societies have to be created in these areas of the LDCs, in spite of the fact that some sites in Latin America are closer to the developed world than to the LDCs. The crude fact is, however, that Latin America has become less important in the world economy and this is reflected also in the participation of Latin American universities in their quota in the world production of knowledge. Knowledge is a commodity and we have to realise a number of inequities in the production process through which knowledge is created and distributed. Latin American universities seem to be on the side of the consumer, more than on the side of the producer and that is a fact. That is to say, the production of knowledge throughout the world has become a frenzied activity and Latin American universities are left behind, most of the time producing professionals in their countries

and just giving them the symbols of the dominant status in their societies but not the capacity to create knowledge that can become a commodity. Of course, developed universities and their research centers have what could be considered a monopoly in the production of knowledge. The chances of this monopoly opening to new participants are quite slim but the question is for the universities of the Third World to become partners in this international process of knowledge production, because otherwise they will be unable to face the future with any hope at all. Perhaps in this respect the performance of the Latin American universities, as a whole, has projected a depressing picture. New institutional policies are needed, to increase the chances of academic development, in Latin America. The chances would be greater if these Latin American countries would try to integrate themselves, at least at the level of the universities. The current policies do not seem to allow us to predict rapid changes, because in relation to universities most countries follow orthodox strategies, some of them, in fact, quite counterproductive, in order to achieve an independent intellectual and academic development (10). Interesting enough, facing the next century for Latin America still means fighting and struggling between dependence and independence. This sounds indeed like an old story.

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1 To those with some knowledge of Latin America a much more convenient term to define the region is the one used by UNESCO: Latin American and the Caribbean. However, in this paper we will use the term Latin America, most of the time. Whenever speaking about the university in this part of the world one should be aware of the fact that seen from within the region there does not exist an entity called Latin America. The concrete experience of every person in the region is the national identity, plus the fact that there are diverse cultural and geographical regions that define different concepts, like being a person from the Caribbean, the Andean subregion, Central America or Brasil. This situation affects the definition of the university, which in Latin America is mainly a national institution. There is not the Latin American university, but a plurality of innstitutions through the region. Links among them are growing but the international relationship of the Latin American university is mainly with Europe and the United States. Any way, outsiders are accustomed to thinking of Latin America in terms of unity and people tend to think that Latin Americans are roughly alike in looks, dress, in speech, and in social and political habits. Insiders, for their part, knows the dramatic differences in national

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perspectives, from say Argentina to Venezuela or Brasil to Guatemala. The university follows these differences, in spite of the fact of the uniformity of the institution as an educational agency. In fact, the differences between the states are often more important than the similarities, and contrasts are often more revealing than comparisons. Nevertheless, most of the states in Latin America have things in common and it is these which give the continent its distinctive characteristics, and this applies to any given institution, in this case the university or actually education, in general. The reader should be aware that whenever we speak about Latin America we have to think about three different subregions: the Caribbean, with a multiple and recent colonial past, the Spanish America and Brazil. We will follow this concept while speaking about the university. Latin America, though, while a distinctive part of the world as a whole, is still made up of many states which are as different from one another as are the countries of Western Europe or those in Africa, between Arab Africa and Black Africa. And each one moves at a different pace along the lines of educational and university development.

2 For an explanation on this question see by Rudolph P. Atcon, The Latin American University (Bogotá: Revista de la Cultura de Occidente, 1966, bilingual edition, English and Spanish). This book appeared first in 1958 as a mimeographed Outline of a Proposal for U.S. Policy Concentration in Latin

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American on University Reorganization and Economic Integration. Of course, the expansion of the university is not a new phenomenon. On the contrary, it is a logical step of the foreign policy of expanding countries. See, for instance, by A. M. Carr-Saunders, New Universities Overseas (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1961), to find out about this process, which has taken place in Latin America and the Caribbean since 1945 to the present. I may add that with the demise of the Soviet Union and the socialist world this influence of the American academic world will still be more powerful in the years to come, due to the fact that options has been eliminated, for Latin Americans. On the influence of American universities in Latin America and the Caribbean see, for instance, by Mario Wschebor, Imperialismo y universidades en América Latina (México: Editorial Diógenes, 1973).

3 The case of Cuba is one of the most interesting in Latin America, since they first had a colonial university created under the Spanish Empire. Then later on at the beginning of the century, an American influence took over and finally after 1960 the Soviet influence was felt quite strongly. It is difficult to foresee what lies ahead for Cuban universities, but if political changes take place in Cuba in the near future, as expected, there will be, no doubt, many changes in their universities. Chile is another interesting case. They were under the social Christian government, under

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President Frei, then during three years they were under the influence of a socialist coalition, lead by President Allende. After the military coup in 1973 they were under the radical dictatorship of General Pinochet and now finally they are again under democratic rule, with the government lead by President Alwyn. This is but one example of the fact that the university is under pressure, whenever changes in the political arena take place, a fact that has to be taken into consideration when judging Latin American universities. It is the case of Venezuela where universities have had some stability only since 1958, when the democratic elected government took over. Otherwise turbulent times have hampered the development of the universities. Just to give an example: during the dictatorship of Juan Vicente Gómez (1909-1935) academic life was under pressure and in fact during ten years (1912-1922) the universities were closed, with quite negative effects on academic life in this country. It is the case that the main universities in Venezuela, the so called autónomas, are constantly under political pressure, both from inside and outside the campus. Private universities, for their part, are free from these pressures and can devote themselves to their academic work, without these obstacles. No full understanding of the Latin American universities is possible without taking into consideration this relationship between the institution and political life. For more details in the Venezuelan case see

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my paper "Venezuela" in the International Higher Education, an Encyclopedia, edited by Philip G. Altbach (New York: Garland Publishers, 1991). See also the paper by Juan Carlos Navarro "Venezuelan higher education in perspective", Higher Education, Vol. 21, No. 2, March 1991. A final point on this question is the fact that Brazil, for instance, which has perhaps the best higher education system in the region, has been somehow free from the tragic disruption of activities that took place in Argentina under the Onganía military regime or in Chile under the military regime of Pinochet. México, also, is a country where political stability has helped the development of the university, in spite of the fact that they are still far from the international level required to compete in qualitative terms with the universities of developing countries.

4 On the development of the Brazilian university see the book by Luiz Antonio Cunha, A Universidade Tempora (Rio de Janeiro, Brazil: Francisco Alves, 2da. edição, 1986).

5 On the concept of the estado evaluador see: Orlando Albornoz, La universidad que queremos (Caracas: Ediciones de la Biblioteca de la Universidad Central de Venezuela, segunda edición, 1991, first edition in 1986), Guy Neave, "On the cultivation of quality, efficiency and enterprise: an overview of recent trends in higher education in Western Europe, 1986-1988", European Journal of Education, 1988),



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José Joaquín Brunner, Educación superior en América Latina (México: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1990). See also my essay on "Latin America", in the International Higher Education, an Encyclopedia (New York: Garland Publisher, 1991). I must add that empirical research on performance in Latin American universities is quite difficult to do. Evaluación is always seen as an intrusion of the rights of the person and on many occasions members of the faculty refuse to answer questions about their effectiveness. I am presently conducting the first large scale research in Venezuela, on the question of faculty performance and I can testify for the many obstacles found when doing scientific research on academic life, in this region, however necessary they may be, in order to offer a rationality of the planning stages in the life of the university.

6 During many years marxism was the only and dominant thought, at the public Latin American universities. For a detailed analysis of the Venezuelan situation see my book La formación de los recursos humanos (Caracas: Monte Avila Editores, tercera edición, 1990). As it is known this influence has been heavier in countries like Cuba, or Chile under the Allende government or Nicaragua under the Sandinista regime. With the desintegration of the Soviet Union and the socialist block the situation has changed dramatically, at least for the time being.

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7     The debate about political correctness is quite important, in Latin America, particularly because it is my impression that many universities have taken views which are irrelevant concerning the goals and essence of the university. If it is true that the stalinistic extreme and dogmatic positions were quite popular in some State universities in the region, it is also true that some universities took the opposite position, that is to say anti-marxism also in a very dogmatic view. But while the first universities have slowed down considerably their stand the others have been strengthened by the resurgence of the conservative political position which is now acceptable. I accept the criteria that behind this anti-marxism lies a strong anti-intellectualism, particularly in institutions devoted entirely to the so called new professions, mainly computing, system analysis, management, accounting and the like. On this question of political correctness see the essay by Robert Hughes, "The Frying of America", TIME, February 3, 1992. I could add that the question of multiculturalism in the USA, which have given birth to this post-modern discussion of political correctness, might be totally irrelevant in Latin America, where ethnic and racial minorities are far behind in their human rights. In Latin America it could be said that the role of minorities in university life " is unbelievable, almost criminal", as a South African Rector said referring to the disparities

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between white and black institutions (Edward Pratt, Rector of Hewat College of Education, The Chronicle of Higher Education, December 11, 1991). In Latin America most universities are integrated; that is to say, there are no females or black or jewish universities -there are in fact religious universities, Catholic, but the point I would like to raise is that native Latin Americans ("indians") or people from African stock have very little chance of entering the university, particularly the elite private institutions, in those countries where natives and blacks are minorities. In the "white" universities in mixed country populations like Perú, for instance, it is unimaginable that a "cholo" -a person from the native stock, could enter any of the new private elite universities created in Lima or a person from African stock to enter any of the elite private universities opened in Venezuela in the last ten or fifteen years. In those two cases the disparities are "almost criminal", indeed. So political correctness is not even debatable, in Latin America, in the terms of the concept given in the United States. A "cholo" in Lima or a "negrito" in Caracas is simply unheard of, in one of the elite private universities, forget about how politically relevant he or she can be. And this is an important factor in the efficiency of the university that should not be lost in the discussion about the university in Latin America.

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8 I could comment on the examples of some private universities in Latin American, created after 1970, where the main preoccupation is not with the search for truth but with two objectives which are regulated by the market: on the one hand to train professionals tailored to the specific needs of the market, and on the other hand to search for "clients" in the open market and to omit any conflict between the academic interest of the university and the concrete interest of the "client".

9 For instance Juan Carlos Navarro says, in relation to the Venezuelan case that private universities are more efficient than public institutions and he compares a public institution (Universidad Central de Venezuela) with a Catholic university (Universidad Católica Andrés Bello), but this comparison does not allow any generalization. In fact, perhaps the most inefficient university in the country might be a large mass private university, where administrative corruption makes this institution an example of many of the negative aspects of academic life in the region (Universidad Santa María, a proprietary university).

10 The extraordinary academic dependence is in fact being increased, in Latin America. There are very many examples of this. In Venezuela, for instance, the Government is supporting a program to train students abroad, in developed universities, while abandoning opportunities to improve

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their own. A programme called Galileo is being implemented in this direction. Through it young Venezuelans are recruited and sent to universities in advanced countries, to study professional careers that are available in the national educational system. No contact is done to universities in other LDCs but only to countries that will increase scientific and technological dependence. Actually dependence is a total fact of life, in Venezuela. I must say that at present people in this country, can have their breakfast with cereals imported from the United States, drive cars imported from all four corners of the world and simply dream to come and live in Miami, the new meca of Latin Americans. So it is only natural that Venezuelans consider training their youth abroad acceptable in accordance with this manner of dependence.