

# Chapter 6

## Social and Cognitive Justice: The Social Relevance of the Higher Education in Latin America

Alejandra Montané López, Judith Naidorf, and António Teodoro

### Introduction

Latin America, characterized by being a multicultural and multiethnic region, has become in these early years of the new millennium a demonstration of creativity and social innovation while a laboratory of experiments in privatization and marketing raised to the degree, product of neoliberal policies that plagued the state from the Chilean coup of 1973 onwards. Currently the region is drawn through the coexistence of the worst social inequality with self-organization of complex social justice experiences carried out both by minority groups as movements that have arrived to state power.

The development of renewable forms of democracy present in Latin American countries strengthened since the second half of the twentieth century and the processes of integration of countries in the region that, since the end of this millennium, have taken more autonomous courses while being integrated are demanding forms of social justice to expand and reach those sectors that still lag behind.

The report *The Social Panorama of Latin America 2008* (CEPAL, 2008) noted as positive elements in the region a significant and continuous rise in economic growth

---

A. Montané López (✉)  
Department of Teaching and Learning and Educational Organization,  
University of Barcelona, Barcelona, Spain  
e-mail: smontane@gmail.com

J. Naidorf  
Faculty of Arts, Educational Sciences Area, University of Buenos Aires,  
Buenos Aires Province, Argentina

A. Teodoro  
Sociology of Education and Comparative Education, Lusophone University of Humanities  
and Technologies, Lisbon, Portugal

since 2002, a strong reduction in poverty in the region since 1990, as well as a slight improvement in income distribution from the first decade of 2000. The same report notes that there are still significant groups of the population which remain in poverty or who have entered in new forms in which it is manifested and that the region remains the most unequal in the world, although not the poorest.

These inequalities affect social cohesion defined as the dialectic between established mechanisms of social inclusion/exclusion and responses, perceptions, and attitudes of the citizenship against the way they operate (CEPAL/EUROsociAL, 2007: 13) and is built on three pillars: gaps, institutions, and relevance (CEPAL/EUROsociAL: 39).

Historical gaps for reasons of ethnicity, gender, and territory are aggravated by inequalities in education, social protection, and productivity. In Latin America, there are currently 522 indigenous peoples ranging from Patagonia and Easter Island to northern Mexico through different geographical areas such as Expanded Chaco, the Amazon, Orinoco, the Andes, the Pacific Coastal Plain, the Continental Caribbean, Lower Central America, and Mesoamerica.<sup>1</sup> Mexico, Bolivia, Guatemala, Peru, and Colombia consist of 87 % of indigenous peoples of Latin America and the Caribbean.

In rural communities there are the highest rates of poverty and extreme poverty and the highest rate of illiteracy; they have less social protection and restricted access to justice and politics. Territorial inequalities are also reflected in urban segregation, given that poor neighborhoods are precarious and have restricted access to services (schools with the greatest needs, crowded environments, increased exposure to violence, less job offers, precarious jobs, poorer health services, and less access to social welfare and security).

The persistent inequality in Latin American societies instills in the population such perceptions that the production system not only produces inequalities, but the institutions themselves incorporate its principles and its practices, the unequal treatment as a criterion at the expense of the weaker. The feeling of exclusion and loss of adherence to such institutions and principles which are determined by the

---

<sup>1</sup>Bolivia, Guatemala and Belize stand out as countries where indigenous people represent higher percentages of the total population, with 66.2 %, 39.9 % and 16.6 % respectively. In contrast, countries like El Salvador, Brazil, Argentina, Costa Rica, Paraguay and Venezuela record a low percentage of indigenous population (between 0.2 and 2.3 %). However, in most Latin American countries the indigenous population ranges from 3 to 10 % of all citizens. Mexico, Bolivia, Guatemala, Peru and Colombia gather 87 % of indigenous population in Latin America and the Caribbean with a population that ranges from a maximum of 9.5 million (Mexico) and a minimum of 1,300,000 inhabitants (Colombia). The remaining 13 % of the indigenous population resides in 20 different States. Five indigenous towns, as the most numerous among them, are the Quechua, Nahua, Aymara, Yucatec Maya, and Ki'che ', and six, the Mapuche, Maya Qeqchí, Cakchiquel, Mam, Mixtec and Otomi, with populations between half and one million. According to official censuses made between 2000 and 2008 the total identifiable indigenous population in Latin America is 28,858,580, while in Latin America there live 479,824,248 people. This is an identified percentage of indigenous population of 6.01 %. However, the publication highlights that the number of indigenous people in Latin America is usually set at 10 % of the total population, according to estimates made in 2004 by the United Nations Program for Development (UNPD).

*Plan for Equal Opportunities* (2008) of, for example, Bolivia is determined as “internal colonialism”<sup>2</sup> stating that “these new settlers will build their structures of privileges as part of an illusory modern nation-state which did not reach the whole territory or the Bolivian society.” Internal colonialism, besides enriching the coffers of multinationals and the oligarchies with the product of the cheap labor of workers without benefits, also daily subsidizes the low cost of agricultural products coming from the work of peasant communities (*Plan for Equal Opportunities*, 2008: 7). And it is precisely Bolivia, one of the contemporary leading laboratories for social justice in Latin America, that proclaimed in the Constitution (2008) *a Unitary Social State with Community Pluri-national Law, free, independent, sovereign, democratic, intercultural decentralized and with autonomous regions. Bolivia is based on plurality and political, economic, legal, cultural and linguistic pluralism within the integration process of the country.*<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>2</sup>The definition of *internal colonialism* is originally linked to phenomena of conquest, where native populations are not exterminated and are part of, first, of the colonial state, and then of the state that acquires a formal independence, what initiates a process of freedom, of transition to socialism, or recolonization and return to neoliberal capitalism. Peoples, minorities, or colonized nations by the nation-state suffer similar conditions to those that characterize colonialism and neocolonialism at an international level: they live in a territory with no self-government and are in an unequal position facing the elite of the dominant ethnic groups and the classes within them, their administration and legal and political responsibility concerning the dominant ethnic groups, the bourgeoisie and oligarchies of the central government, or the allies and subordinates of the same; their inhabitants do not participate at the highest political and military positions of the central government, except as “assimilated”; the rights of its people and its economic, political, social, and cultural development are regulated and enforced by the central government; in general, the colonized within a nation-state belong to a “race” other than the one that dominates the national government, which is considered “inferior” or, at best, is converted into a “liberating” symbol that is part of the state demagoguery; most of the colonized are part to a different culture and speak a language other than the “national” (González Casanova, Pablo. *Colonialismo interno. Una redefinición.* [www.bibliotecavirtual.clacso.org.ar/](http://www.bibliotecavirtual.clacso.org.ar/)).

<sup>3</sup>*Article 1.* Bolivia is a Unitary Social State with Community Pluri-national Law, free, independent, sovereign, democratic, intercultural, decentralized and with autonomous regions. Bolivia is based on plurality and political, economic, legal, cultural, and linguistic pluralism within the integration process of the country.

*Article 2.* Given the precolonial existence of nations and peasant indigenous population and their ancestral domain over their territories, their self-determination within the framework of the unity of the state is ensured, which consists in their right to autonomy, to self-government, to their culture, to the recognition of their institutions, and to the consolidation of their territorial units, under this constitution and the law.

*Article 3.* The Bolivian nation is made up of all the Bolivians, nations and peasant indigenous peoples, the intercultural communities, and Afro-Bolivian which together constitute the Bolivian people.

*Article 4.* The State respects and guarantees freedom of religion and spiritual beliefs, according to their worldviews. The state is independent of religion.

*Article 5. I.* The official languages of the State are the Castilian and all the languages of the nations and peasant indigenous peoples, which are the Aymara, Araona, Baur, Besir, Canichana, Cavineño, Cayubaba, Chaacs, Shaman, Ejja, Guarani, Guarasu’we, Guarayu, Itonama, Leco, Machajuyai-Kallawaya, Machinerias, Maropa, Mojeñotrinitario, Mojeño-Ignatian, Moré, Masetén, Movima, Pacawara, Puquina, Quechua, Siriono-Tacana, Tapiete, Toromona, Uru-Chipaya, Weenhayek, Yaminawa, Yuki, Yuracaré, and Zamuco.

The current challenge is to find integration strategies that respect the local values and redeem them and that different Latin American institutional forms continue to reflect on them without imposing exogenous models in order to recover its rich history as well as to transform the education policies that lead to a fairer society and find ways to integrate, which based on rigorous social research, and propose new forms of engagement with the society to be. The present social and innovative experiences in Latin America have the potential to be key contributions to the renewal of social theory: the access of workers to the presidency, indigenous leaders, creation of multiethnic and multinational states, female-headed presidency, among others.

Although as stated by the writer Julio Cortázar in 1983 with the power of his words until today, “the reality of the southern hemisphere countries is not uniform: in every Latin American country nuances are so great that uniform comparisons are a failure. As the attempt to export models A in the country B are a failure.” The “not uniform” study we are part<sup>4</sup> and the respect and appreciation of diversity allow us to understand the common (social cohesion is by us understood as a joint project) and think we can do it within the desirable future.

## Higher Education and Social Cohesion in Latin America

The very democratic development in Latin American countries, as already mentioned, reinforced from the second half of the twentieth century led to a significant development of higher education in Latin America.

As happened all over the world, the welfare state and social policies that expanded the so-called medium “layers” of society led to a growth in enrollment in higher education product of the expectations placed upon this institution as a form of social advancement.

Between 1975 and 2005, enrollment in higher education in Latin America practically quadrupled exceeding 16 million students. At the beginning of the century, higher education systems in Latin America continue to expand at annual rates that go from nearly 3 to 7 %, with the exception of Brazil which grows at a rate close to 12 % (Higher Education Report in Latin America, 2007).

This spectacular development, completed with new and innovative social practices and closer to models of educational development, coexists with high levels of exclusion, poverty, and inequality that act as barriers that limit access to opportunities for progress and facilitate more people in improving the material conditions that emerged in the last 60 years.

Basic imbalance of equity tends to increase the selective nature of universities and other institutions of higher education (Report Higher Education in Latin America, 2007)

---

<sup>4</sup>The authors of this chapter are members of the Ibero-American Network of Educational Policy Research (Red Ibero-Americana de Investigación en Políticas Educativas – RIAIPE).

and produce undesirable effects on the redistribution of knowledge increasingly necessary for the performance of responsible citizenship.

In a general way, we can determine that the various problem areas in relation to higher education are determined by the inequalities and can be grouped into the following:

1. Access to higher education is distributed differently in the various regions and within Latin American countries themselves. There is a trend in higher education institutions to persistent problems of access for vulnerable groups (women, indigenous population, the poor and urban vulnerable groups) to a higher education of quality at universities in Latin America.
2. The permanence as indicated in Report on *Higher Education in Latin America and the Caribbean* (IESALC, 2001–2005) that the process of abandonment (dropouts) of college students, especially at the end of the first years of the course is a priority issue of concern to all stakeholders in the system. Social exclusion is detected in vast majorities who cannot stay in the university system.
3. The mobility of students and researchers in Latin America is clearly insufficient, so higher education does not integrate fully at the international level. According to the report “Education in Latin America 2007,” Latin America offers enrollment for just 3 % of the world’s mobile students studying abroad and contributes 7 % of mobile students to study outside their country of origin.
4. Current processes of transformation of higher education in Latin America are conducted by a regional coordination between higher education institutes (HEIs) to stimulate social development and more balanced and equitable development of the region.
5. Higher education institutions in Latin America have built an internal operating logic which in some cases separates them from the solution of real problems of society, so that the vast majority does not have impact on the overall development of societies where they are located.
6. Traditional curricula and associated educational practices of Latin American universities tend to offer programs that do not always meet the needs of the region and support the development of communities. There is the need for greater relevance of its mission and functioning with society. In this sense, the curriculum becomes a relevant field of negotiation of equity and social cohesion.
7. The potential development of a common area of higher education in the HEIs should promote their role and be proactive in their participation in policy.
8. Policies and practices should respond to a territorial logic placed to overcome the unequal progress of inclusion, participation, and greater equity. This means that terms of reference have to do with the expectations and goals of the societies in relation to what they expect from their universities and the role they should play in supporting the development of their societies.
9. While there are HEIs in LA which have built good relations with society and enhance the development of the societies in which they are embedded, there are still areas in which universities in the region, public and private, are disconnected from social issues. The crisis is manifested in terms of the existence or

lack of viable options and educational opportunities for people seeking access to the HEIs. Unfortunately, it is the more vulnerable populations that ultimately cannot afford higher education studies of high quality in many Latin American countries.

10. The exclusion of indigenous peoples and their knowledge of higher education is a matter to be resolved. Indigenous peoples have suffered exclusion at all levels and dimensions and have erupted in recent decades in regional politics with just demands for an intercultural higher education, based in principles of autonomy and relevance.<sup>5</sup>

## The Power of Theory Applied to Specific Practice Settings

Education, its practices, and specific theories have relevant characteristics when thinking about building a continuous theory of social justice as stated in Bogotch et al. (2008). On the way to the establishment of a theory of social justice in education, the specific practices that are currently performed in some institutions in Latin America (also called by some groups the *best practices*) are an important input almost never taken into account when programming educational policy measures for the region. The failure of constrictor recipes that are “recommended” through loans from international organizations as well as the best intentions by foreign institutions is an important object of analysis and reflection for future judgments and statements of education policy. A theory of social justice in education yet to be defined should definitely fix those errors from a new perspective to build conceptual and analytical tools that compose it.

Among the best practices for social justice in universities, we can highlight *the color policies* in Brazil and the practices linked to the social commitment that some Argentinian universities have made with renewed features after the 2001 crisis, such as re-centering of the extension policies they had opened around 1918. Other examples are found in the Aymara indigenous university “Tupac Katari,” the Quechua university “Casimiro Huanca,” and the Guarani indigenous university “APIAGUAIKI TUPA” included in the Bolivian national educational system or Intercultural Indigenous University which through its operation network covers the 22 member countries of the Indigenous Fund, although at an early stage they have been structured with universities in nine countries: Bolivia, Chile, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Guatemala, Colombia, Mexico, Nicaragua, and Peru.

In this context and from the identification of problems and specific issues of higher education in LA, we have discussed the meaning of the conceptualization of social cohesion.

At the international level, the analysis of the role of higher education in social cohesion implies that “Higher Education plays a vital role in driving social cohesion

---

<sup>5</sup>Examples: Certain higher education experiences in Ecuador, Colombia, and Bolivia; Kallawayá medical school in Bolivia; the project KawsayUnik of indigenous peoples of the Andean countries.

and Economic Growth” (James et al., 2008) has taken special relevance. This requires a special conceptualization in the context of social justice thinking.

*Social cohesion* as a topic of study is developed from the 1980s of the last century until finally joining the interests of political, social, and research agents. Globalization and global crises have revived the need to refer to social cohesion in all aspects within the framework of a social theory that supports it.

CEPAL/EUROsociAL (2007) states that in Latin America and the Caribbean, there are strong mutations linked to globalization and technological revolution. In this context, social cohesion is becoming increasingly important, given that its foundations can be eroded by new forms of exclusion, which must be addressed. In fact, several phenomena have been threatened during the neoliberal era, such as the social cohesion in the region, the deepening of the social gap, the economic and cultural trends towards the weakening of the public, and then the exogenous intervention that aims to support the “governance” of states as is the case of Haiti as well as the “better management” of natural resources (water, forest).

Social cohesion is not easily defined, observed, or measured. Andy Green, with Germen Janmaat and Christine Han, in his text *Regimes of Social Cohesion* determines various characteristics related to the difficulty of determining the nature of the concept of social cohesion. First, including both a “normative” dimension and the limits that this normative regulation involves in the analysis<sup>6</sup> adding to the difficulties of assuming social cohesion is always “a good thing”.<sup>7</sup> Second, they note that in many cases the term is used synonymously with what is socially desirable, such as tolerance, trust, and citizenship, generating an unjustified isomorphism cannot substitute the rigorous analysis of the concept. Third, they note that social cohesion cannot be defined by its causes (e.g., social equality) or its effects (e.g., greater human development).<sup>8</sup>

The relationship between higher education and social cohesion must be based upon a conceptual determination of the second. We choose to discard the definition of social cohesion associated to forms of consensus and seek to understand it by its

---

<sup>6</sup>It is almost always used in a normative fashion – that is to say as a signifier for a positive condition for which we ought to strive. This, as with all normative terminology in social science, creates problems for objective analysis, even within a critical realist epistemology that recognizes that subjective beliefs and ideological forces are constitutive of the reality which we seek to understand and which exists independently of our perceptions of it. On the one hand, where social cohesion is defined in a particular normative fashion, according to the political preferences of the researcher or policy analyst, this preempts analysis of the whole phenomenon, including the different forms of social cohesion which may exist in the real world (Green, p-5).

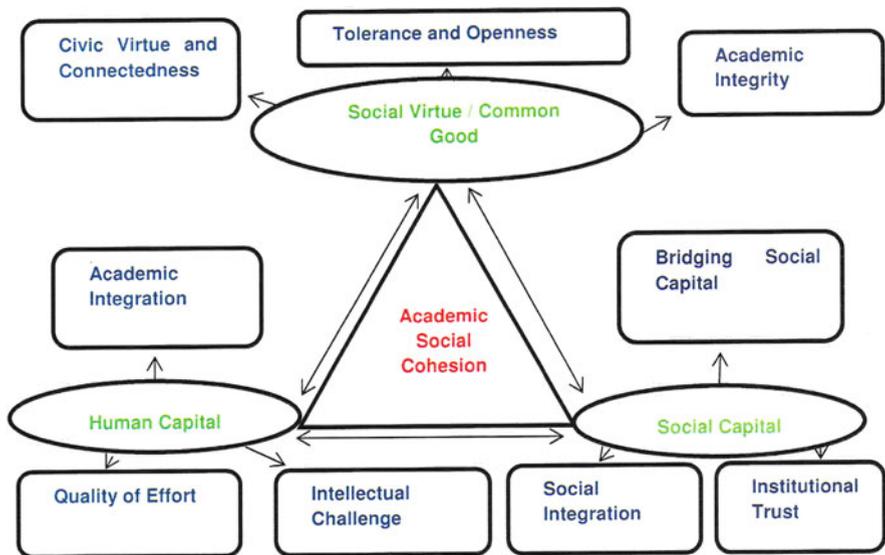
<sup>7</sup>Too much cohesion can, arguably, lead to social insularity and backwardness (Banfield, 1958), economic sclerosis (Olson, 1971), or to a failure to address substantive injustices in society (cf Marx on religion as the “opium of the people” in his “Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Rights,” 1973).

<sup>8</sup>This is problematic not only, again, because it narrows the range of phenomena that may be analyzed as possible incidents of social cohesion but also because it then prevents any analysis of the causes and effects which are already endogenous to the definition. Including causes and effects in the definition amounts to arguing by definition – a logical fallacy which philosophers call “petitio principii” (Durkheim, 1982).

quality of perception belonging to a project or common situation. The determination of the dimensions implied involves judgments. As already stated, the dialectic established mechanisms of social inclusion/exclusion and its responses, perceptions, and attitudes of citizenship against the way they operate defines social cohesion (CEPAL/EUROsociAL, 2007: 13).

The World Conferences on Higher Education (WCHE) since 1998 to 2009 gave a new thrust to UNESCO’s higher education program at a time when a need for change and adjustment to a new paradigm in higher education was strongly felt by decision makers. In the different World Declarations on Higher Education for the Twenty-First Century, they provided an international framework for action both at the systems and institutional levels. A particular focus was placed on broadening access and strengthening higher education as a key factor of development; enhancing quality, relevance, and efficiency through closer links to society and the world of work; securing adequate funding resources, both public and private; and fostering international cooperation and partnerships. One spin-off of the World Conference was the UNESCO Forum on Higher Education, Research and Knowledge, an open platform forum encouraging research and intellectual debate. Within these general orientations and delivery mechanisms, research on trends in higher education remains at the heart of UNESCO’s preoccupations, along with the question of higher education and social cohesion (Burnett, 2007: 287–289 en Mendes, 2011).

Within the broad discussion on social cohesion, some authors have opted for the academic analysis of social cohesion in higher education, as is the case of Heuser (2007) who proposes a synthesis model that highlights the main dimensions in the academic social cohesion within higher education.



Source: Heuser (2007:295)

Academic social cohesion in higher education

This model responds to a mono-logical perspective, which gets a great review for the inclusion of the term “social capital” as determined by Somers (2008). They refer to market models.<sup>9</sup>

From our perspective, higher education policy requires a proposal of analysis based on justice and social relevance that is connected to frameworks for social cohesion. Cohesion policy in Latin America could only start from a series of social pacts that enable equity and governance (Machinea & Uthoff, 2005). Along these lines, proposals for a social cohesion covenant are framed which provide four pillars: macroeconomic, labor market, social protection and education, and social cohesion contract (CEPAL/SEGIB, 2007, p. 135), which aims to “seal the deal” and the political commitment around that goal and have the economic resources, political, and institutional resources that make it viable. In the latter case it is to legitimate social cohesion as an object of public policy and promote the institutional conditions necessary for its achievement (CEPAL/EUROsociAL, 2007).

### **Grammar of Debate: Social Justice and the Relevance of Higher Education – RHEs (Pertinencia de la Educación Superior – PSEs)**

The ability of higher education institutions to improve social cohesion in the region, which includes the various mechanisms of inclusion and the perception that they have on their people and that determine their sense of social “belonging,” is called *social relevance*.

The term *relevance* was introduced by UNESCO (World Conference on Higher Education 1995, 1998, 2009) in the glossary of higher education, science, and technology policy from the claim that the relevance of higher education must be evaluated in terms of the *appropriateness* between what society expects of institutions and what they do. Special attention must be paid to the roles of higher education to serve society and more specifically to activities aimed at eliminating poverty, intolerance, violence, illiteracy, hunger, environmental degradation, and disease, and activities

---

<sup>9</sup>Mendes (2011) critique of the concept of social capital as a public good and its underlying assumptions was put forward by Margaret Somers (2005, 2008). Somers argues that the equation “social + capital” equals the evacuation of the social. Social capital refers to the economic value produced by social relationships. To achieve the practices and institutions of trust, communication, and reciprocity convened in the concept of social capital requires abandoning its constitutive postulates of localism, acquisition, individualism, the market model of efficiency, the marketization of the social, and the radical autonomy from power and politics (Somers, 2008: 235).

aimed at promoting peace through an interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary planning (UNESCO, 1998).

In this analysis the RHEs is thought of as a formula that exceeds the established conception of the adaptation of higher education to market requirements and is conceived within the framework of systemic thinking and from the complexity of the needs of all sectors of society and in particular the requirements that apply to the most disadvantaged sectors.

Therefore, the conceptual relevance of the term starts from the consideration that social justice in all its dimensions affects the functions of higher education as a social institution.

To approach the concept of social justice as a key dimension of the RHEs through the definition of inequity and inequality, HEIs work together in their identification, based on a review of different conceptions of social justice to then settle the concept of relevance of higher education.

First we highlight the distributive conception of justice that equates social justice as redistributive action and reallocation of assets and resources, mainly economic, and whose main representatives are John Rawls and Ronald Dworkin. This concept is built on three pillars: the *principle of equal liberty* (where all fundamental freedoms are guaranteed), the *principle of fair equality of opportunities* (equal access chance regardless of social background), and the *difference principle* (referring to the social structure). In the context of this third axis of distributive justice model, we find the justice of “recognition” that involves more than one axis while for some authors it is a true paradigm. This recognition paradigm that has its origins in the phenomenology of consciousness recovers the notion of recognition, as stated by Fraser (2008) of the Hegelian thesis, often considered opposed to liberal individualism.

In a simplified way, we can say that the redistribution paradigm focuses on injustices that have a socioeconomic basis; the recognition paradigm, as we said, is one of the axis of the distribution paradigm which focuses its attention on the injustices primarily interpreted as cultural rooted in social patterns of representation, interpretation, and communication (mainly through the analysis of cultural domination, ethnic, racial, gender differences, sexuality, or generally what happens with other stigmatized groups). Marion Young insists that a redistribution policy that emphasizes the focus on differences also can reinforce injustice, giving more power to dominant groups (Fraser 2008).

From critical social theory, Fraser (2008) and others have advocated the need to integrate in a coherent way redistribution and recognition, understood as primitive and irreducible dimensions but interdependent of social justice with equal impact on sociological approach. Thus, we believe that analyzing the forms of injustice, complaints, and possible actions from the intersection of the two perspectives particularly in relation to the axes of subordination associated with gender and race (considered “bivalent collectivities,” “hybrid categories,” or “two-dimensional social differentiations”) in turn subordinated to the social class inequalities. Moreover, this two-dimensional explanatory approach involves the following aspects: (a) understand the ways that injustice is conveyed, (b) assess the justified claims that are reported,

and (c) identify and generate effective solutions in accordance with the normative criterion of participatory parity.

The concern for distributive justice simultaneously with the importance of recognition is a relatively new aspect that some authors link with the era of globalization. The emergence of social movements, the claims of minorities, multiculturalism, and feminist movements in the center of gravity were the ones which forced the recognition of the importance of both aspects of a common problem. The displacement of the national framework for the territorial causes that the thinking about justice transcends national claims requiring a “critical theory of justice in the era of globalization” (Fraser & Honneth, 2003).

They will not have the ability to be heard, to be taken into consideration, and to make the appropriate claims as members who may have enough strength to make their voices be heard, that is, subjects who are not adequately represented in accordance with the procedures that structure public processes of confrontation and decision-making mechanisms, matters concerning the political sphere of justice and representation forms.

From this perspective, what makes a group of people to become subjects of justice is not geographic proximity, but their co-nesting in a common structural or institutional framework, which sets the basic rules that govern their social interaction, “thus setting their life chances as patterns of advantage and disadvantage” (Fraser, 2008: 55).

## **Cognitive Justice as a Privileged Form of Social Justice**

We have referred to the importance of the recognition of *otherness*, the struggle for inequality within the framework of respect for differences that can be done by HE daily practice, its role as a builder of theories that have as a goal social justice within the framework of cognitive justice, and the need to recover critically the category of social relevance and responsibility to rethink the future of the HE.

There are objectives that logically the HE cannot accomplish without appealing to other institutions that would meet the objectives related to the coverage of basic needs in a short and long term. But there is an endogenous aspect, not less, in line with major objectives of social justice that can be addressed within HEIs, and that is the link to cognitive justice as recognition and equi-potency given to the old and new knowledge that has never been able to enter the HEIs and that causes real injustice.

Latin America, overflowing with wealth of this old and new “alternative” knowledge became a prime setting to explore new paths that also lead to regional solutions and dialogue with those who want to work with these institutions.

The real ability to exercise cognitive justice practices is also the way to find its own path, linked to local needs with local responses, consistent in their creation of knowledge (primary function of the HEIs) that departs from real bases, concrete,

and also identified by members of the HEIs as an exercise of democracy, which society values.

Higher Education Institutions can and should give priority to recognize the sources of injustice and test solutions in addition to being an example of social innovation and propose to build explanatory theories and looking for a more just society.

## About the Commitment of Higher Education and the Concept of Relevance

The inclusion of the key dimension of social justice in developing the concept of relevance involves some debate about the social responsibility of HE. This term, used by the business sector as noted by Dupas, “dilute the public and political references in an attempt to reduce social injustice.” These practices are unable to resolve the serious problems of social exclusion and also depoliticize (Dupas, 2005: 121 and 123). But from our perspective, the social responsibility means to produce socially significant knowledge and training professionals with citizen awareness and contribute to the culture and the transformation of reality in which educational institutions are active.

That is why we must rethink the institutions from within, not only from a work of bureaucratic and administrative reorganization but from the deep ongoing reflection on their meaning and their role in the construction of the civilizing process in these new contexts.

The relevance must have a dimension that includes social justice as a dimension that compromises HE and which also permits setting new quality standards. The quality is not understood as an exclusive value, or *for a few* as it was the attempt to redefine it in the 1990s, it needs to recover a social, public commitment to the communities in which educational institutions are inserted. Consequently, the processes of assessment and accreditation in Latin America and the Caribbean should give primacy to uncontested indicators of relevance and social relevance as well as policies and actions that create more equality and prosperity for all (Dias Sobrinho & Goergen, 2006).

Although the social relevance is a misleading category (Naidorf, 2007), our analysis aims to highlight the aspects related to the social function of the university and equal opportunities which potentially have to increase not only the access to higher education level to which we referred but also to enrich society through the specific contribution of the university as a space for creation and dissemination of socially relevant knowledge.

And for higher education to be a practice of freedom, universities must be thought as public goods. And the notion here of public implies four questions, as rightly put by Craig Calhoun (2006): (1) where does the money come from? (2), who governs? (3), who benefits? And (4) how is knowledge produced and circulated?

On the other hand, the thought of Amartya Sen (1999) concerning social justice is essential to understand the “skills” in the sense of *agency or empowerment*, of

individuals introducing an ethical conscience in the economy and a new concept of human development based on freedom. Justice is based at the same time in the coverage of basic needs which are also basic skills that must be met in a short term with other needs or skills that, when absent, also involve injustice in long-term consequences.

## Proposals for the Analysis and Reflection on the Relevance of the University

The idea of justice as an essential component of social relevance is necessary to consider the public sense of higher education, despite the pressures posed by the current marketing and its own structures. In this context, it is where a theory of social justice makes sense that takes into account both redistribution and recognition (the inequalities and differences) with an axis in higher education as a privileged arena for attention to both challenges.

Higher education as a public asset		
Relevance of higher education based on Social justice	Distributive justice	(a) Financial, social, and cultural resources (b) Equality of access (c) Equality of survival (d) Equality of output (e) Equality of outcome
	Recognition justice	(a) Curricular flexibility (b) Transfer of knowledge (c) Research and extension (d) Inclusion (e) Collaboration between universities (indigenous, etc.)
	Cognitive justice	Recognition and inclusion of local knowledge (languages, customs, nondominant cultural codes)
	Institutional links	(a) Institutional strengthening (b) Networking (c) Cooperation

Considering the inequality and exclusion as determinants of the tendency of equity and inclusion policies in higher education in the region of Latin America, it is necessary to address the issue with a view *from inside the national higher education systems* to focus the eyes on inclusion policies in higher education institutions, systems of governance, relevance of university programs, mandatory projects, and the need to maintain a high degree of collaboration between HEIs to recognize the different dimensions of the problem such as lack of a common agenda for equity, common policies, and standards but adapted to each context, the implementation of parallel thematic diagnostic activities, and the collaborative forms aimed at

achieving social objectives defined by the institutions themselves in dialogue with society. Overcoming inequality and exclusion as a strategy to reach the road to sustainable development of societies is the most urgent and important challenge of our time for countries, and HEIs in LA have a role in this challenge.

It should contribute to institutional strengthening and regional or subregional integration, through skills development, institutional learning, improving of processes, and increasing not only the link with the sectors that can provide additional resources as a counterpart (link to companies) but mainly to increase the links to the most disadvantaged sectors organized most of the time over what should inspire the revision of its function. It will aim to reinforce the actions and activities aimed at promoting linkages and joint activities between universities and with other sectors of the societies to those where the universities provide their specific contribution in terms of achieving more just societies.

Regional and interregional integration oriented to sustainable development and reducing social inequality has been taking various renewed impulses through new forms of social integration supported both by spaces such as MERCOSUR, Latin American goals of exchanges and cooperation, which tend to join forces in a broad-based but possible target of achieving the common good for the majority.

Promoting social cohesion cooperation among universities in Latin America and other parts of the world, from a distant link model of “transplanted recipes” and to others applied vertically, allows creating a space for communication and discussing strategies that promote institutional actions aimed at social development equitable integration and collaboration.

As one of the objectives for the achievement of social equity, expanding access should simultaneously pursue the successful conclusion of the studies, while ensuring that the time spent at university is an ideal opportunity for civic education with social meaning, expanding horizons, creation and recreation of knowledge, respect for differences, and also of social cohesion as mentioned above, i.e., far beyond the individual career to achieve accreditation.

This effort should include appropriate financial and educational support for the students who come from poor and marginalized communities (UNESCO, 1998) in as many positive actions as possible so that it allows at least one common initial base in the access and support for those with unfavorable conditions for the classic courses established by the universities.

The former is a way to redefine previous institutional objective, but at a long term it should not *level from below* in order to be a university best suited to the needs of Latin America, as it is supposed to be.

Among the issues concerning justice and a true recognition, cognitive justice at the university cannot be kept away knowledge that for almost 500 years has been disregarded in the educational systems of Latin America as the Aboriginal habits and traditions and the not Aboriginal, but local, born and developed in this region of the world that has not been considered as valid knowledge to be studied by the educational system in particular and by Latin American culture in general. It has been known as folklore sometimes pejorative or disregarded in their value, while white culture, Western or European culture, was presented as the one to transmit,

integrate, and disseminate. A cognitive act of justice to which the education system can contribute at a high degree of impact and success is to recognize in their universities what Boaventura de Sousa Santos called the ecology of knowledge (De Sousa Santos, 2005).

Surely cognitive justice is a form of social justice while also recognizing other cultural codes of the dominant code (Bernstein & Cook-Gumperz, 1973; Bourdieu, 1991), while the HEI as a privileged laboratory for experimentation and institutional and social laboratory recognize other codes being also valid (Fraser 2008).

## Bibliography

- Altbach, P. G. (2007). *Tradition and transition: The international imperative in higher education* (pp. 49–66). Rotterdam, Países Bajos: Sense Publishers.
- Altbach, P. G., & Balán, J. (Eds.). (2007). *World class worldwide: Transforming research universities in Asia and Latin America*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Bernstein, B., & Cook-Gumperz, J. (1973). The coding grid, theory and operations. In: Cook-Gumperz, J., (Comp.), *Social control and socialization: A study of social class differences in the language of maternal control* (pp. 48–72). London: Routledge.
- Bogotch, I., Beachum, F., & Blount, J. (2008). *Radicalizing educational leadership: Dimensions of social justice*. Rotterdam, The Netherlands: Sense Publisher.
- Bourdieu, P. (1991). *Language and symbolic power*. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press.
- Breilh, J. (1998). La inequidad y la perspectiva de los sin poder: Construcción de lo social y del género. In: J. Breilh. (Eds.), *Cuerpos, Diferencias y Desigualdades*. Bogotá, Colombia: Utópica Ediciones.
- Calhoun, C. (2006). University and the public good. *Thesis Eleven*, 84(7), 7–43.
- CEPAL/EUROsociAL. (2007). *Un sistema de indicadores para el seguimiento de la cohesión social en América Latina y el Caribe* (LC/G.2362). Santiago de Chile, Chile: CEPAL/EUROsociAL.
- De Sousa Santos, B. (2005). *La Universidad en el siglo XXI. Para una reforma democrática y emancipadora de la universidad*. Buenos Aires, Argentina: Miño y Dávila-Laboratorio de Políticas Públicas.
- Dias Sobrinho, J., & Goergen, P. (2006). Compromiso Social de la educación superior. In J. Tres & B. C. Sanyal (Eds.), *La educación superior en el Mundo 2007. Acreditación para la garantía de la calidad: ¿Qué está en juego?* Madrid, Spain/Barcelona, Spain: Global University Network for Innovation (GUNI/UNESCO), Ediciones Mundi-Prensa.
- Dupas, G. (2005). *Atores e poderes na nova ordem global. Assimetrias, instabilidades e imperativos de legitimação*. São Paulo, Brazil: Editora UNESP.
- Espinosa, O. (2007). Solving the equity–equality conceptual dilemma: a new model for analysis of the educational process. *Educational Research*, 49(4), 343–363.
- Fraser, N. (2008). *Scales of Justice: Reimagining political space in a globalizing world*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Fraser, N., & Honneth, A. (2003). *Redistribution or recognition? A political-philosophical exchange*. London: Verso.
- García Guadilla, C. (2003). Balance de la década del 90 y reflexiones sobre las nuevas fuerzas de cambio en la educación superior en: Mollis (comp.) (2003). *Las universidades en América Latina ¿reformadas o alteradas?. La cosmética del poder financiero*. Buenos Aires, Argentina: CLACSO.
- Green, A., Janmaat, J. G., & Han, C. (2009). *Regimes of social cohesion*, published by the Centre for Learning and Life Chances in Knowledge Economies and Societies at: <http://www.llakes.org.uk>

- Heuser, B. (2007). Academic social cohesion within higher education. *Prospects*, 37, 293–303.
- Llomovatte, et al. (2008). Escribir sobre el vínculo universidad sociedad. Llamar a las cosas por su nombre es complejo. *Revista del Instituto de Investigaciones en Ciencias de la Educación* n 26, UBA, Buenos Aires.
- Malagón Plata. (2003). La pertinencia en la educación superior. Elementos para su comprensión. *Revista de la Educación Superior* N 127. México
- Mendes, J. M. (2011). Equality, democratic citizenship and solidarity: Is there a role for higher education in the framing of an alternative paradigm? *Revista de la Asociación de Sociología de la Educación*, vol. 4 núm 2. Valencia, España.
- Montané, A. (2010). *Del elitismo a la internacionalización: Desafíos, recorridos y cambios en las políticas de Educación superior en España*. En Teodoro, A. (Org) (2010). *A educação Superior no Espaço Iberoamericano*. Lisboa, EdiçõesUniversitáriasLusófonas.
- Montané, A., & Sánchez de Serdio, A. (2010). Sujeto a reforma: la transformación de la identidad docente en la educación superior. *Revista de la Asociación de Sociología de la Educación*, vol. 4, n-1. Valencia, España.
- Naidorf, J. (2007). *La pertinencia social de la universidad como categoría equívoca*. *RevistaNómadas*. Bogotá, Colombia: Universidad Central.
- Naishtat. (2003). Universidad y conocimiento: por un ethos de la impertinencia epistémico. *Revista Espacios de crítica y producción*. Facultad de Filosofía y Letras, Universidad de Buenos Aires, Argentina.
- Rawls, J. (1971). *A theory of justice*. Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.
- Rawls, J. (2002). *La justicia como equidad. Una reformulación*. Buenos Aires, Argentina: Paidós.
- Santiago, P., et al. (2008). *Tertiary education for the knowledge society. OECD thematic review of tertiary education: Synthesis report*. Paris: OECD.
- Sen, A. (1992). *Inequality reexamined*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press. (Trad. Alianza Editorial, 1995).
- Sen, A. (1999). Democracy as a universal value. *Journal of Democracy*, 10(3).
- Sen, A. (2000). *Desarrollo como Libertad*. Madrid, Spain: Editorial Planeta. pp 3–17
- Teodoro, A. (Org). (2010). *A educação Superior no Espaço Iberoamericano*. Lisboa: EdiçõesUniversitáriasLusófonas.
- UNESCO. (1998). Conferencia Mundial sobre la Educación Superior. La educación superior en el Siglo XXI. Visión y Acción.
- Young, I. M. (1990). *Justice and the politics of difference*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Young, I. M. (2004). Structural injustice and politics of difference. In A. Appiah, S. Benhabib, I. M. Young, & N. Fraser (Eds.), *Justice, governance, cosmopolitanism, and the politics of difference*. Cambridge, MA: Du Bois Lectures, Harvard University.