

RESEÑA DEL LIBRO “DEVELOPMENTAL UNIVERSITIES IN INCLUSIVE INNOVATION SYSTEMS – ALTERNATIVES FOR KNOWLEDGE DEMOCRATIZATION IN THE GLOBAL SOUTH” DE LOS PROF. RODRIGO AROCENA, BO GÖRANSSON Y JUDITH SUTZ

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In an emblematic passage of the book “Waiting for the Barbarians”, Nobel Laureate in Literature John M. Coetzee describes the responsibility of a man that faces the “barbarian practices” of his own people to supposedly prevent the city from a barbarian invasion by using torture methods. His responsibility is highlighted by the knowledge he can no more ignore once he was “shed” by the irreversible light of knowing that somehow compels him to do something.

“(…) I know somewhat too much; and from this knowledge, once has been infected, there seems to be no recovering. I ought never to have taken my lantern to see what was going on in the hut by the granary. On the other hand, there was no way, once I had picked up my lantern, for me to put it down again. The knot loops in upon itself; I cannot find the end”.

The quotation suggests that knowledge brings responsibility. Insofar as one can see things in a different way and, more importantly, has the power to make changes that ultimately improve people’s lives, it is not possible just to turn its head in other direction. If, on the one hand, knowledge gives the possibility to its holders to reproduce the institutions and relations that sustain their advantages and to reproduce inequalities, on the other hand, it can also give the possibility to be turned into a tool to fight them by changing the status quo and the environment inequalities are reproduced. Thus, knowledge is power. Power to concentrate but also power to diffuse. Power to oppress and power to set free. Power to control and power to democratize.

In the global context of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), as important as ending poverty and promoting sustainable economic growth is improving education and health, and particularly reduce inequality. These targets highlight the paramount importance of Sustainable Human Development as a ‘humanistic’ dimension of development. Such dimension brings about not only a well-known discussion of what development really means, but also the need to combine it with the emergence of a new productive structure and capabilities building, aiming overall at overcoming underdevelopment (economic and political) by reducing inequalities hand-in-hand with the democratization of knowledge and freedom.

This volume shows that inequality may be furthered by dominant economic, political and ideological relations that can be fostered by some patterns based on advanced knowledge, which means that inequality is by some means connected with social relations and (use of and access to) knowledge. Therefore, how knowledge is generated and used, and how learning activities are distributed, is of great importance to the distribution of power in society, including innovation capacity once innovation processes are strongly based on social interactions within the innovation system.

In this context, knowledge, learning and innovation play a central role for promoting Sustainable Human Development. Learning opportunities and processes shape social relations concerning inequalities.

This book places knowledge and Developmental University as key elements to the development process in the Global South in a knowledge-based and innovation-driven economy in order to overcome under-

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development as a peripheral condition in the knowledge economy with foreign subordination. Universities are system builders, and the actors that have the knowledge and the power in this system to act over the reduction of inequalities carry a great responsibility in this context.

Stemming from the developmental debate, chapter 2 discusses the concepts of development as related to values and ethical choices so that a normative perspective is required. Such perspective brings out what is desirable and acts as a starting point to what it is desired to achieve (propositional approach), taking into consideration what reality is (factual approach) and making choices on how to act to achieve the purposes yearned (prospective approach). Chapter 3 brings the issue of knowledge as a key element to struggle inequalities and presents the learning divide and asymmetric learning opportunities as perverse mechanisms that ultimately shape the differences between the North and the Global South. Although this latter set of countries may be heterogenous in many aspects and have been able to industrialize, this “new periphery” has not been able to shift to a knowledge-based economy and still has social exclusion as consequence of the inequality phenomenon.

In this context, chapter 4 presents the demand of advanced qualifications and knowledge in southern economies as key elements for economic development. The National System of Innovation is thus seen as the locus where the social process of learning actually takes place and achieves the purpose of creating a Sustainable Human Development where interactive learning and innovation processes may find their purpose to foster a knowledge-based and innovation driven economy.

In this scenario, chapter 5 discusses that knowledge-based inclusive policies may be applied and diffused in the innovation system to benefit all and foster inclusive development. In such context, social demand of knowledge and innovation and knowledge production play a key role in the social process of learning and innovation that goes far beyond the economic growth purpose. Therefore, democratic knowledge policies and inclusive innovation policies are translated into policies that promote a systemic behavior that simultaneously aims at reducing inequalities and increase capacities and opportunities for all, especially for those struggling to be part of the innovation system.

Since learning and knowledge democratization play a central role as a strategy for Sustainable Human Development, chapters 6 and 7 present universities as key instruments to diffuse knowledge and learning capabilities to promote such kind of development. By embracing this task, they are considered Developmental Universities.

In this perspective, developmental universities joint three missions for the purpose of committing itself to Sustainable Human Development: teaching, research and fostering the socially valuable use of knowledge. It must then contribute to building Inclusive Learning and Innovation Systems by cooperating with other institutions and collective actors, highlighting its commitment to social inclusion through knowledge democratization.

By doing so, Developmental Universities play a very different role of Entrepreneurial Universities. On the one hand, the former reduces inequality by perceiving “demands of society as a whole, not only from segments of the population that can articulate and pay for the knowledge they want but also from other segments, particularly marginalized groups with weak or non-articulated demand for innovation”. On the other hand, the latter fosters inequality by the marketization of the academy fostering knowledge-based inequality.

Such potential antagonism accentuates how much the concept of developmental university is intertwined with the idea of autonomous university. Chapter 8 discusses the role of autonomous university and how university system and the academic incentives work are paramount in shaping the dynamics of the innovation system. The chapter shows how research evaluation and the perception of powerful actors are determinant in establishing priorities and the paths academic research are to follow. The idea of connected autonomy and the manner universities forge their pathway as actors in the innovation system are thus presented as an alternative way that at the same time avoids the autarchic particularism and promotes dialogues and recognizes different interests related to social justice and equality. In such

a context, policies with specific aim at fostering Developmental Universities and knowledge diffusion play a particular role in the realm of the propositional approach as far as goals and means of development are concerned.

Finally, stemming from the ideal concept of Developmental University, chapter 9 brings a forward-looking approach regarding the desirable way of organizing what should be done in order to achieve Sustainable Human Development via knowledge democratization. Such prospective approach gives the opportunity to organize an actual systemic and coherent agenda of policies and actions coordinated with the view to promote learning opportunities, knowledge democratization and innovation development to solve the main environmental and social problems in the Global South context.

This scenario brings about the idea that policy making is always related to development choices, forged in a specific society guided by a set of values in which “human development” may be considered the primal goal. In such environment, achieving this kind of development requires making choices and electing priorities based on values and (long term) purposes.

Development is thus seen as a convention based on beliefs shared by a community for, among other purposes, problem-setting and problem-solving. It embodies criteria which specify a “positive agenda”, problems that should be tackled and a set of solutions which should be used to solve such problems. It is a social representation which has a useful objective and leads to the establishment of a reality which is shared by a social set. A convention is then represented by a series of actions proposed to achieve a specific purpose: development.

Development, in general, and Human Sustainable Development, in particular, is a social process based on deliberate beliefs, values, and choices. As a consequence, policy design is guided by the development convention chosen by a society in a specific time and place based on the same set of beliefs, values, choices and priorities toward the social construct of development this society desires to achieve.

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