

## EDITORIAL

### Challenges and roles for higher education

Higher education is both a public good and a strategic imperative for nations, since it constitutes the fundamental base for research, innovation and creativity. For sure, the main source of the competitive advantage of countries, organizations and individuals resides in knowledge, which is generated from the impacts that flow from higher education to the society as a whole.

Advanced knowledge symbolizes, on one hand, the consolidation of the higher cultivation of arts, letters, sciences and humanities, in search of an increasing integral and vigorous formation; on the other hand, such advanced knowledge represents the foundation of the economic value and the collective and individual productivity in society. Certainly, the base of growth and social and economic development is generated starting from the stock and flows of knowledge used or applied in a nation.

Consequently, nations require increasingly of people showing continued education, ability of adaptation, good work practices and new models of interaction in organizations. Such aspects make evident the relevance of higher education for society. Nowadays the flow of knowledge needed for to operate with social efficacy is high and thus a prolonged educational process is required, in order to respond to social and labour demands.

In this context, UNESCO-2009 World Conference on Higher Education<sup>1</sup>, has recognized that the essential and inherent challenges and roles for higher education in the knowledge society are the following:

- ***Social Responsibility***

Higher education must progress in the understanding of multifaceted problems that society faces, which involve social, economic, scientific and cultural dimensions. Tertiary education must generate the capabilities to face and solve such problems, promoting critical thinking and active citizenship, thus contributing to sustainable development, peace and social wellbeing

- ***Access, Equity and Quality***

Increasing participation rates in higher education is a reality in a majority of countries. Nevertheless, significant disparities in the access prevail, which are mainly explained by the social and economic conditions of the families of the applicants. Thus, a significant gap remains to be closed, with the purpose of favouring not only the access, but also the successful academic participation and the effective student welfare.

- ***Internationalisation, Regionalisation and Globalisation***

Higher education must reflect the international, regional and national dimensions in education as well as in research. Within this frame, international cooperation must contribute to the creation of local capabilities in the countries involved, with the purpose of strengthening the possibilities for creating and applying knowledge at a regional and global scale.

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<sup>1</sup> P.G. Altbach, L. Reisberg and L.E. Rumbley. "Trends in Global Higher Education: Tracking an Academic Revolution". A Report Prepared for the UNESCO 2009 World Conference on Higher Education.  
URL: <http://www.uis.unesco.org/Library/Documents/trends-global-higher-education-2009-world-conference-en.pdf>

- **Formation**

Teaching and the formation of advanced human capital enables increasing the productivity of people and the growth potential of countries, generating social mobility and territorial consolidation. This formation process must be developed in an environment of freedom for teachers and students, in which the conditions for an effective and permanent learning exist.

- **Research and Innovation**

Research and Innovation constitute unavoidable tasks for the higher education institutions, which by means of joint initiatives from multiple co-participants among public and private sectors must render the creation of new products, services and the creation of economic and social value. On their turn, higher education institutions must look for the equilibrium between basic and applied research, considering the high levels of investment required by basic research and the challenge that is represented by the fact of linking the global knowledge with the local problems.

The above roles and challenges must be developed within a frame capable of guaranteeing satisfactory quality levels, in order to efficiently reach the impacts that the society demands from the higher education institutions.

Thus, quality must be evaluated and it is necessary to show, in front of third parties, that whatever is done is correct, adequate or at least sufficient. In this way, the internal feeling is not enough, but it is essential to include the external view and critical evaluation of peers, students, employers and the society as a whole.

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