

UNIVERSITY UNDER IMPACT: THE CHALLENGES OF CHANGE

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The approach proposed here has a private and confessional university as a reference in Brazil. For this reason, it is considered a fact that in the first place, it is a place of human beings, followed by knowledge, then the market and finally, of Christian confessionality.

The University as a place of human beings

Even though it is commonplace, it is always good to remember the origin of the university as a human community of students and masters. In its different historical and geographical models, in one way or another, this reality remains a principle of thought. As a human community, the people, the relations, the structures and the interactions should be considered. The condition of each concrete human being, whether a student, professor or employee, is a constituent of the *universitas*, with the permanent safeguard of not being just any community, but one of teaching-learning. However, as in any other community, the objectives-aims are implied in the existence of people, being affected by their way of living, their world, their pains and their well-being. This existence is constituted in the cultural broth of university life, reflected more or less, according to the circumstances. Consider the situations of sickness, traffic, changing family models and so on. There are additional demands that pass by unnoticed, but that are implied in the sense of community. PUCRS today has a high expense with the security issue, for example: more than 100 specialized employees, vigilance cameras, a communication system and other additional measures of preventative procedures. The alteration of the external context enters the campi and becomes an elevated burden, with such *estranho* aos objectives-aims, but interfering in them as a possibility condition. A university without the sensation of safety substantially impairs its mission.

The current university is far from being a real, direct community. In fact, the multiplication of courses dealing with the complexification of the real, no longer permits a sufficient proximity to guarantee the experience of ties of belonging. To the extent to which it is of interest, one can search for a community of communities, that is, small internal structures can exist in community dynamics, always anchored in the principle of its purpose: research and study communities, though with the necessary spaces for coexistence. From the administrative point of view, the risk of internal bureaucratization has been accompanied by unequal homogenizations. For being a human community, the university possesses its own dynamics of *estruturacao* and organization, which are not always interchangeable between its component parts. The flows and processes need permanent adjustments to be constructed participatively, without, nevertheless, obstructing the totality of the institution. As an educational and formative space, the university socializes knowledge and can implement pacific coexistence.

The University and knowledge

Probably one of the most powerful instruments of knowledge today is that of communication. If until the year 2000, approximately the heart of the University was the library, today, certainly, the infrastructure of its communicative network is the condition of the survival of its brains. The realization of advanced research would be infeasible without an infrastructure of integration with research groups around the world. Similarly, learning, without cosmopolitization would be stunted. The classroom or laboratory is merely a knot/node in the network. From the student point of view, there is a double precociousness. One arrives to the university “before” his time, in a certain way surprising the institution thinking for later on. The other precociousness is that of information. The availability of resources facilitates access and requires a managerial competence, much more than informational, on the part of the faculty. The most fundamental difference between the faculty and the students is not in knowing or not knowing, but in the identification of paths for the elaboration of knowing.

A second challenge in relation to knowledge consists of the competition with other production agencies. It seems fundamental here to distinguish between business and university. Certainly a university is a business, but a business *sui generis*, which has as a consequence the non-identification. The concept of entrepreneurialism itself, in principle, should be put under suspicion. The concept of university is associated with the search of knowledge for knowledge and not for utility, much less for profitability. This dimension, as in cosmology, can be compared to *radiacao de fundo*. It serves to identify the history and the ultimate nature of this institution, in transformation (expansion?), but unmistakable compared to others. Despite it all, investigation in basic research is maintained as a reserve, hardly replaceable by the production of immediate results, applied research. The risk of entrepreneurialism consists of producing results in the short term and lowest cost, without considering medium and long reaching variables, with the impact on human beings, life and the environment in general.

It should be noted here as well the difference and the price of the difference in the face of university centers, and other independent institutions of work-hand preparation and intellectual training. In all cases, it seems fundamental that the university accept the challenge of being a nonlinear institution of human training, accepting the complexity of the real, not to mention the paradigm of complexity.

The university and the market

The university has always been involved with the market. The current change is that the market has changed. Two essential changes should be noted for the University: the direct demand is different: the aim is technological production. On the other side the university participates in the market as a source of income. The competition to which it is exposed, is no longer merely the quality of teaching, but also the cost of its services, which are not always considered in terms of the benefits. The price to pay for a determined service does not include its quality. The cost-benefit relation is dissociated. This generates the necessity to offer products of lesser quality to pick up a lowered layer of the market. The courses of extension and specialization, particularly in the distance modality, are part of this transforming strategy. The big question, from the point of view of quality and responsibility, regards the limit of this banalization of teaching. It is not strange to find self-help courses as extension university courses.

The integration with the market can represent an anchoring of economic resources, a facility for professional insertion, but also a risk of oligopolization, that is,

the involvement of the university structure with determined groups can generate a dependence on determined technologies, with the reduction of the competition. For example, reflect upon the representativeness of determined brands of software in the University and you will have a high risk idea of dependence and its limitations from the point of view of efficiency and of technological development, of infrastructure demand, next to the high cost of training for the resulting instability. It would be undesirable if the university had sovereignty to choose the most adequate components from multiple providers according to the specific demands of each sector.

The increase of course offerings has facilitated access to higher education courses. But the increase in quality, by means of research incorporation, has increased the costs of learning. This outlines a university double reality: that of quality and research and that of classes. At one extremity is the demand for low investment for the obtainment of academic levels and at the other, the elevation of research costs. The administration becomes an administration of shortage. A first measure will consist in the optimization of resources; followed by the availability or use of alternatives, with technological innovation. At any rate, method and procedure flexibility is imposed. The biggest challenge is in minimizing damages, identifying the least relevant economizable positions for the objectives of the university as a whole. A permanent risk of these transformations is the overload on the implicated people, without there being a corresponding return of productivity.

The University and Christian confessionality

By definition confessionality only makes sense if all dimensions of a University are included. Maybe the most arduous task is that of overcoming the schizophrenia between a verbalized confessionality and the practice of the university existence, deforming itself, frequently in peripheral manifestation or parallel to the uncompromised university life structures. In many institutions confessionality translates into imperatives external to behaviors or initiatives: norms, celebrations, an elevated number of specific classes of catholic initiation and course offerings in the humanist area. Now, the challenge of a large/important institution is to maintain confessionality as an existential. People, structures, actions, symbols, positions should reflect the coherence of the affirmed principles. In the case of the entrepreneurial and innovative University, this means that in the form of management, in financing, in the interaction with the market, in obtaining resources, in professional qualification, in research and development, they need to carry out the professed oriented criteria.

A first consequence derived from this assumption is the disposition for revision and criticism from all the dogmatisms to which the Institution is seduced in its contact with reality. One hopes from a confessional university the capacity to evaluate the world in which it lives, including the market, parting from a coherent vision of its faith, serving itself from the instruments of recognition employed in itself.

Suppose the competence in the field of social sciences, to raise awareness of the contradictions of reality and to carry out the structural criticism of society; of the natural sciences, one hopes comprehension of the immediate implications, the medium and long term research and knowledge made available; for the human sciences it is enough to elaborate criteria and reasons for the recognition of the human being; from the health and life sciences one can hope for the preservation and sustenance of life and of its conditions in view of the future.

Entrepreneurialism as well as innovation, similar to that which occurs with research and development, to be coherent with confessionality, they should search for a

relation with what can be called social demand. Rehearsals and laboratories of social reconstruction, identification of infrastructural needs of the population, partnership with institutions of assistance and social promotion, research and study of the alternatives aimed at social inclusion, social medicine, public policies, debate with the sectors responsible for public power, realization and publication of research, all these are forms of dealing academically with the demands of the majorities unconsidered by the predominant technology.

In this sense, confessionality becomes a way of being a university, translating into a way of living and doing science with excellence. Professors as well as students and employees, lack the specific formacao e capacitacao to account for this responsibility, but it is essential and should not be omitted. It is basically about a different viewpoint to be taken into account in day-to-day academic life, also being realized in the search for a true sociopole and not just a technopole.