



The political economy of higher education in the era of neoliberal globalization: Latin America in comparative perspective

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Abstract. During the last two decades, Latin American universities have experienced intense pressure to abandon the main principles established in the 1918 Córdoba Reform (i.e., autonomy and autarchy). While funding for public higher education has declined, they are pressured to relinquish a large portion of institutional autonomy in order to accommodate to market demands and to a new set of control strategies emanating from the state.

We argue that current changes in Latin American higher education cannot be examined in isolation from larger political and economic changes in the region, which in turn are related to the dynamics of globalization. After the decline of socialist and welfare-state models, neoliberal regimes have become hegemonic in many parts of the world. In most countries, changes in financial arrangements, coupled with accountability mechanisms, have forced universities to reconsider their social missions, academic priorities and organizational structures. Concerns about equity, accessibility, autonomy or the contribution of higher education to social transformation, which were prevalent during previous decades, have been overshadowed by concerns about excellence, efficiency, expenditures and rates of return. The notion that higher education is primarily a citizen's right and a social investment – which has been taken for granted for many decades – is being seriously challenged by a neoliberal agenda that places extreme faith in the market.

Though we focus on the international dimension of university change, it is important to note that global trends are promoted, resisted and negotiated differently in each national context and in each individual institution. In the emerging knowledge-based society, the polarization between North and South is expected to increase even further if the scientific and technological gaps are not narrowed. Latin American universities have a crucial role to play in this regard. The paper is organized in two parts. The first describes the context of university change, focusing on issues of globalization and neoliberalism. The second examines the main features of university restructuring in comparative perspective, with a particular focus on Latin America.

Keywords: higher education, Latin America, neoliberalism, politics and education

The social context of university change: globalization, restructuring, privatization

Pressures to restructure higher education are not peculiar to Latin America, as they are being experienced by institutions worldwide. University struc-

turing, which involves serious changes not only in the ways universities are funded and governed, but also in the logic guiding academic and non-academic activities, is taking a similar path in a variety of countries having different social, political and economic regimes. This striking similarity is largely related to the consolidation of international epistemic communities that seek common responses to common problems. However, epistemic communities do not operate in a vacuum, as the diagnosis of the problems faced by higher education institutions – and the prescriptions to solve them – are highly influenced by international bureaucracies (particularly the Bretton Woods institutions) and powerful business groups. Hence, in our view, an examination of the process of international convergence of higher education systems cannot ignore the dynamics of globalization and the hegemony of neoliberal discourses and policies.

The dynamics of globalization

Globalization has been defined as “the intensification of worldwide social relations which link distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice versa” (Held 1991, p. 9). Held suggests among other things, that globalization is the product of the emergence of a global economy, expansion of transnational linkages between economic units creating new forms of collective decision-making, development of intergovernmental and quasi-supranational institutions, intensification of transnational communications and the creation of new regional and military orders.

The process of globalization is seen as blurring national boundaries, shifting solidarities within and between nation-states, and deeply affecting the constitutions of national and interest-groups identities. What is new is not so much its form as its scale. Since the Bretton Woods conference in 1944, in which the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank were founded, national trade barriers have been eroded, and global economic forces have played a more significant role in local economies. In the five decades that followed that event, international trade has expanded approximately twelve times and foreign direct investment has expanded at two or three times the rate of trade investment (Kellner 1996; Korten 1996; Burbules and Torres 2000).

During the seventies and eighties, a new process of reorganization of the international division of labor and of capital took place. American hegemony began to decline, even after having pushed the Soviet Union to bankruptcy as a result of the arms race. Japan and Germany emerged as powerful economic competitors of the postwar era. International production, trade and investments reached unprecedented dimensions, and the successful experiences of

NICs (Newly Industrialized Countries) based on low-cost production became a model for “latecomers” into the international system (Petras and Morely 1990).

As multinational companies adopted global strategies of production and created a more economically and politically interdependent world, strong pressures emerged to cut back on the value of the labor force and to withdraw from Keynesian economic policies, making the alliance between labor and capital increasingly more difficult within the context of industrial reorganization. New economic orthodoxies, with the predominance of monetarism, “trickle down” economies and market ideologies have permeated social policy in all corners of the planet, including former socialist countries and welfare state models.

In industrial advanced societies, and particularly in those with an extended welfare system, capitalist management was caught in a profit squeeze, with labor fighting to keep wages high, and foreign competition forcing business to keep prices down. As the economy slowed, state revenues failed to keep pace with social expenditures, and taxpayers began to express resentment towards those who benefited the most from state revenues (the state bureaucracy, welfare recipients, institutions receiving state subsidies, etc.). This led to a breakdown of the prevailing social consensus and to a rearrangement of the social relations of production: the state refrained from its role as arbiter between labor and capital, and allied with capital pushing labor into a defensive position.

In developing countries, this has resulted in the last two decades in a marked decline of the State sector, the fall in the fixed gross investment rate, the reorientation of economic policies (production, once geared towards an internal market, is now oriented towards an international market), the growth of the external debt and the growth of a highly differentiated, increasingly stratified, and ever more sophisticated upper middle class linked to the international system alongside the diminishing peasantry and working classes, and an unprecedented expansion of marginal urban sectors and of informal markets in major metropolitan areas. Social and economic policy is to a great extent regulated by the conditionalities expressed in the structural adjustment programs which are part of the loans received from international agencies, including the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. The key aims of structural adjustment programs are a drastic reduction of the State sector and the reorientation of industrial and agricultural production towards exports.

To achieve these goals, those programs include a package of conditions such as deficit control, reduction of public expenditures, strict monetary policies to diminish inflation, devaluations to promote exports, reduction in

import tariffs, liberalization of salaries and prices, and an increase in public and private savings (Bitar 1988). Most of the structural adjustment programs, either self-imposed or encroached by international agencies, have a short-term emphasis, expecting that the debt problem can be solved by reaching balance of payments equilibrium and closing the fiscal gap.

Globalization dynamics are observable in a variety of areas. One of them is the aforementioned increasing internationalization of production and trade. Regarding production, the integration of international economies has reached surprising levels, to the point that it is difficult, for example, to determine the national component of an automobile produced in a plant in Kentucky. In relation to trade, globalization is reflected in the increasing capacity to connect markets on an immediate basis and to move capital around. Currently, 600 major multinational corporations (MNCs) control 25% of the world economy and 80% of world trade (World Bank 1995). Another feature of globalization is the economic integration of national economies, particularly with the creation of regional common markets and trading blocs such as the European Community, NAFTA, ASEAN, Mercosur and the like.

At the same time, there is a departure from the Fordist model of production, characterized by a high degree of rigidity, to a model known as Toyotism, characterized by high flexibility in the use of labor force, stocks, labor processes and markets. The new production model is based on cost-reductions and increased speed in moving products and information from one location of the globe to another, has sharp implications on labor markets (Wilms 1996). Technological improvements and capital-intensive production result in the deskilling or redundancy of large sections of the workforce, creating increasing numbers of unemployed and underemployed. This, coupled with the intensification of competition (and its consequent decrease of profit margins), less protective labor contracts, the replacement of the hourly wage by piece-work remuneration and the institutionalization of "team concept" strategies leads to decreasing capital-labor conflicts, as the power of unions is substituted by a deregulation of labor legislation, and to a polarized labor market composed by a small, highly skilled and well-paid sector, on the one hand, and a large low skilled and low-paid sector, on the other. As industries shift to high-tech production techniques in order to increase international competitiveness, educational policy is increasingly designed for an increasingly segmented labor market, which apparently requires a small cadre of supervisory, system-oriented, managerial personal with flexible skills and comprehensive knowledge, and a large pool of lower-level workers with narrowly specialized job skills. In this context, universities are perceived by the political leadership as sources of innovation, especially in scientific and technological areas that feed high-tech productivity.

In the North, this process is concomitant with the emergence of a knowledge-based society, which is expressed in the rise of new forces of production (industry is shifting from an industrial-mechanical model to one governed by the micro-chip, robotics and automatic, self-regulating machines based on computer and digital technologies) and in an increase in the proportion of the service sector at the expense of agriculture and manufacturing. These dynamics may not necessarily result in higher wages and skills for most workers. While some analysts – prominent among them is Robert Reich – predict that the tide of the ‘knowledge-based’ society is going to lift the general welfare and productivity of the society, others – Jeremy Rifkin among them – expect that uneven tides are going to lead to the proletarianization and deskilling of a wide range of jobs. Both approaches, however, admit that many jobs will be created in high-tech industries, but mostly in clerical and assembly work, which pay below average wages and do not require high skills (Reich 1992; Rifkin 1995; Levin 1998).

Economic globalization is shaped by a business offensive to restore rates of profits. Hence, it is accompanied by a process of deregulation which calls for drastic cutbacks in social spending, environmental destruction, regressive revisions of tax systems, loosened constraints on corporate power, downward leveling of salaries and working conditions, widespread attacks on organized labor, and increased spending on weapons (Dale 1989). Indeed, a major criticism to the neoliberal policies is that while high costs are already being paid in terms of drastic deterioration of wages, cutbacks in spending on education, health and infrastructure, and massive unemployment, the majority of the population have not yet felt the benefits of these policies. It is also claimed that economic restructuring leads to a model of social exclusion that leaves out large sectors of the world population from accessing economic and social civic minimums. Another criticism is that with the implementation of neoliberal policies, the state withdraws from its responsibility to administer public resources and from the liberal premise of pursuing egalitarianism, replacing them with a blind faith in the market and the hope that economic growth will eventually generate enough of a spillover to help the poor and disenfranchised.

Globalization is not only expressed in the economic arena, but also cultural and political realms. In culture, there is democratic dimension of globalization via expanded access to the internet and electronic mail, but at the same time there is a homogenizing dimension product of the unidirectional character of cable TV, by which a few media conglomerates promote the Americanization of taste and values. In politics, there is an ascendance of the power of supranational institutions in prescribing policies and policing its enforcement. A critical perspective has termed the new forms of capitalist

development loosely associated with the historical experience of globalization as institutional capitalism, and this, in turn, has serious implications for the transformation of higher education.

Institutional capitalism

Let us begin with a premise of our analysis. The convergence of higher education reforms in different societies can be explained mostly by the international economic imperative to remain competitive in the global market. From this perspective, reforms are the result of a process of cultural diffusion in which strategies flow from country to country through networks of experts who borrow policy alternatives from a dominant policy agenda. This explanation, diffusion of technical and organizational innovations, if useful as a starting point, assists us only partially in understanding university change. The problem with a comprehensive explanation based on the premise of diffusion is that it assumes that all parties are equal partners in decision-making, and therefore underestimates issues of institutional power. By assuming that diffusion of technical innovations is a natural outcome of systemic dynamics, this approach overlooks the power of specific research planning and policy agendas and institutions. In our view, although international economic imperatives play a major role, an analysis of university restructuring must also consider the context of power dynamics within the world economic system, and particularly the role of corporate foundations and supranational institutions in fostering particular reforms impacting higher education.

In short, our argument is that the simultaneous occurrence of similar university reform packages in different countries, governed by parallel and similar rationales, cannot be explained satisfactorily as, simply, the coincidence and diffusion of a similar research and policy agenda impacting all circuits of higher education in the world – despite of the fact that such agenda does exist –, nor by the fact that they reflect a serendipitous outcome of institutional responses to ‘common’ problems drawing from prevailing business common sense. Without resorting to a “conspiracy view”, we argue that a great deal of contemporary university restructuring is largely the result of the conscious effort of specific interest groups to adapt the university to the new era of flexible accumulation. Interest groups, we shall point out, however, that are not necessarily an intricate part of higher education institutions but a sizable set of exogenous forces. In ensuring that this task is accomplished, pressure is exercised at the international and national level through concrete institutional arrangements. Through the development of a new international institutional consensus, new agendas for research, policy and planning are

being disseminated, a new “institutional common sense” is developed, and new routines, laws and regulations are implemented worldwide in higher education.

Michael Useem (1984), developed the concept of ‘institutional capitalism’ to appraise these changes. Instead of attributing welfare state retrenchment to a rather nebulous upsurge of public disaffection with an interventionist state, Useem argued that state welfare retrenchment was largely the deliberate product of an organizational network linking together most large corporations, a trend that constituted a new stage of capitalist development. Useem identifies three stages in the evolution of capitalism, distinguishing ‘institutional capitalism’ from earlier eras of ‘family’ and ‘managerial’ capitalism.¹ The transition from managerial to institutional capitalism was the result of the formation of an intercorporate management network of ownership and directorships, which in turn was related to evolving markets and bureaucratic conditions.

Considering Useem’s model, four main features characterize institutional capitalism.

- First is the weakening of the alliance between class and culture, and the consolidation of an alliance between business and culture. This trend is evident in the increasing participation of members of the class-wide network of corporate executives in governing boards of cultural institutions such as universities and museums.
- Second is the emergence of a relatively cohesive and organized corporate community that represents the interests of a select circle of companies.
- Third is the increasing political intervention of business and the intensification of the alliance between large companies and the state. Useem contends that one of the most important criteria for promotion of top managers is their acceptance by the inner circle of both the corporate community and its state counterpart. As business becomes better organized to influence the political agenda, private companies openly encourage their top executives to be involved in the governmental and opinion-forming areas, making regular contacts with members of the official party and shadowing politicians of the opposition. The political mobilization of business is perceived by business leaders as crucial to restore company profits and to reduce government spending (precisely because excessive regulation of business activities and its failure to control organized labor was identified as a main obstacle for capitalist accumulation).²
- Fourth, institutional capitalism is shaped by a classwide principle of organization which is “the product of inclusive and diffusely structured networks of intercorporate ownership and directorship linking

ever concentrating units of economic activity. These networks define a segment of the business community whose strategic location and internal organization propel it into a political leadership role on behalf of the corporate community” (Useem 1984, p. 194).

In sum, as the argument goes, the emergence of institutional capitalism and the resulting proliferation of far reaching, highly coherent networks of representatives from business and the state may have provided a new means for dominant political economic interests to assert their influence (Slaughter 1990). The ability of this network to influence or even to develop the kind of public policies most needed for capitalist growth and to communicate them in electoral campaigns, government lobbying, international conferences or institutional behavior has been one of the factors compelling a variety of market-oriented reforms.

Despite its international nature, institutional capitalism has different expressions in core and semi-peripheral and peripheral countries. In core countries, a forceful and mature capitalist class, and a relatively autonomous state attempt to influence university change through a bevy of joint research groups, conferences and fora. In the periphery, where a weak, dependent capitalist class and an indebted state are unable to formulate a university policy compatible with the new economic paradigm, this task is tackled by a network of international agencies led by the World Bank (Samoff 1992; De Tomassi et al. 1996; Mander and Goldsmith 1996; Coraggio and Torres 1997; Tussie 1997).

An example of institutionalized university restructuring in the North is the US “Business-Higher Education Forum”, established in 1978 to link the efforts of corporations and universities in science and technology activities, with the explicit purpose of aligning higher education with the business and corporate sector and of regaining the international competitive edge (Slaughter 1990). From the outset, the Forum – which then received full support of President Reagan – was interested in influencing policy formation and creating ideological hegemony, aligning higher education with the business and corporate sector (Bok 1982; Baron 1983). The Forum has been concerned with creating a national consensus to subscribe to the importance of the private sector in the national economy and in higher education, and to create a favorable ideological climate for business operations. The Forum promoted an ideology of expertise³ based on its contribution to commercial success, and exalted an entrepreneurial culture in which the private sector is presented as reflecting excellence, quality, innovation, independence, creativity, diversity vision and responsiveness to societal demands.

According to Slaughter (1990, p. 194), however, beyond the rhetoric of excellence, quality and diversification, the real aims of the Forum are profit

and control. Appealing to the public support for general welfare, the private sector and the entrepreneurial ideology are presented as essential to the salvation of society by rebuilding a strong economy and raising the standards of living. Hence, there has been a strong effort on the part of the Forum to recast the university's public function mainly as economic development, which includes a wide range of profit options for higher education. In such model, universities must compete among themselves and with industry for the same government research funds. Furthermore, the government itself has created a legion of specialized research institutes which operate independently from universities and, at the same time, the business of private consultants has skyrocketed, partly as a result of the shrinking of state institutions and the transfer of many advisory roles to the private sector through free-lancing activities (Business-Higher Education Forum 1983; Fulton 1986; Johnston and Edwards 1987; Slaughter 1990).

It is interesting to notice that the Forum strategy focuses on faculty and administrators as the main allied groups. Although it broadly publicizes the benefits for the general public, it directs most of its efforts toward the professional-managerial class, paying little attention to the participation of labor and other groups in the university-business partnership. Unlike other agencies, the Forum does not create consent by identifying diverse interest groups and then engaging them in a cultural and political process in order to articulate a new hegemony incorporating elements from the worldviews and interests of allied groups. Instead, it appeals to fear; in order to ensure the alliance of faculty with administrators, the Forum argumentation stresses the possibility that faculty particularly may lose their standard of living and ways of life if global competitiveness is not maintained (Giroux 1981; Slaughter 1990).

This situation is not privative of the United States institutional dynamics. A few years after its inception, The US Forum inspired the establishment of a Canadian *Corporate-Higher Education Forum*, launched in 1983 to harmonize the activities of universities with the market. The alliance that developed between selected business and university leaders was so intense that the chairman of the Forum observed that, during the discussions, it was almost impossible to distinguish who was a university president and who was a corporate president (Newson and Buchbinder 1988). Funding cutbacks have already placed many universities in a position of financial emergency. To this situation, the Canadian Forum answer was that universities had to increase private sources of revenues (which include tuition and fees, royalties, contracts with business, or grants) and streamlining its operation (mainly through downsizing and, in a few cases, mergers).⁴ The Canadian Forum also put great emphasis on institutional competition, coupled with a mechanism to

monitor and analyze the performance of universities and community colleges for the purpose of allocating funds (Cameron 1987, p. 18). This recommendation was combined with an explicit promotion of a model, piloted at the University of Waterloo, in which private corporations provide universities with capital or operating grants in exchange for the right to exercise influence over the direction of research and to acquire exclusive licenses on patentable discoveries made in laboratories (Axelrod 1986; Newson and Buchbinder 1988). As part of the same process, not only the budget allocated to the several centers of excellence in research has been severely curtailed, but these centers are increasingly pressured to move from basic to applied research.

Beyond this specific Canadian example, we argue that in developing countries the role of these Fora is fulfilled mostly by international agencies, particularly the World Bank (WB). In recent decades, the importance of the World Bank in education has significantly increased: while in the 1970s the dominant donors of multilateral official development assistance were United Nations organizations, in the 1980s the World Bank's combined disbursements have been almost double those of the UN and its organizations, not so much, however, due to a sizable increase in World Bank's funding in education but due to a significant decrease in the late eighties and early nineties of disbursements to education by United Nations institutions. Patterns of financing for technical co-operation have also changed dramatically over the same period, and the World Bank has become the most important single source of multilateral technical co-operation and the lead agency in setting the education and development agenda (Samoff 1992; Hennes and Schumm 1992; Ivic 1991).

Although the tremendous power of the World Bank in educational policy-making tends to be attributed to its capacity to mobilize funds and to impose conditions, the quality of its human and material resources should not be underestimated. The World Bank has recently argued that they are an agency of technical advise, commanding impressive expertise, analytical skills and experience of its professional staff, thus with the possibility of influencing all sorts of initiatives in policy formulation. Likewise, its capacity to collect data throughout the world, its considerable library and its proficiency to distribute their documents to key educational and political leaders in developing countries puts the World Bank as a center of reference for educational policy makers. For instance, from 1972–1982, the World Bank supported 272 studies of education, a number that increased to 436 for the period 1982–1989. In this period, the World Bank expenditures on educational research amounted to \$98.5 million (Samoff 1992).

Given its financial power and technical capabilities, the diagnosis of the World Bank of what the most urgent policy problems are, and how they

should be solved, enters centerstage. In World Bank documents, educational problems of developing countries tend to be understood as the result of inadequate investments, poor planning, institutional inefficiency and misallocation of resources. The language of educational reform is eminently technical, without enough conversant historical analysis of the social context of education, the political dynamics, or issues of power. For instance, structural adjustment programs are usually attributed to voluntary decision of governments and not as a condition established by international agencies, particularly the IMF. Just in case we need further evidence, the Asian crisis of 1998 shows the important role that the IMF plays in the global system. Alas, most specifically, the deterioration of the Indonesian crisis showed how some standard prescriptions of the IMF could lead to the aggravation of the crisis.

The increasing leverage of the World Bank raises concern about the concentration of decision making in donor agencies which can set educational agendas at an international scale. Samoff (1992, p. 67), argues that the amalgamation of funding, research and policy formulation in the World Bank as one single agency (a phenomenon that he has called 'the intellectual-financial complex of foreign aid') has several problematic consequences. In his view, this 'complex' influences and constrains the education and development discourse, and more often than not, the tone, direction and goals of local discourses. As well, the blending of financing and research may legitimize weak propositions or flawed understandings by granting them official status as common sense proposals. Consider for instance two standard prescriptions that are found commonly in World Bank documents, the quasi-suprahistorical proposition that investment in higher education in developing countries is always, by definition, a subsidy to elites, or that the social rates of return for higher education are always invariably lower than those for elementary education. In addition, Samoff contends that this agenda may promote theoretical and analytical fads by treating education primarily as technique and administration.

In sum, the leverage of international capital over national states is not only related to the increasing mobility of capital, but also to external political pressures by bilateral and multinational institutions linking research, investment and aid, and to the infusion of a new set of values that appeal to individual self-interest rather than collective rights, all of which produce a framework that restrict quite drastically the range of options available to policy-makers in developing countries. Let us consider the changes in higher education.

Higher education restructuring in the nineties

A brief description of policy initiatives implemented by governments throughout the world reveals the unprecedented scope of university change currently taking place as well as the striking similarity of tendencies taking place in such a wide variety of nations with different social, political, historical, and economic characteristics. Although the pace and the dynamics of this change may vary according to the specific historical conditions and social formation of each country, the direction of the change seems to follow an analogous path (Rodriguez 1995; McMahan 1992; Schwartzman 1993; Kent 1993; Ivíć 1991).

Latin American governments like their counterparts in Europe, Africa, North America, Asia and Australia, have drastically reduced subsidies, forcing institutions of higher education to rely more on private funding and to compete among each other for funding and students. New legislative frameworks to propel university restructuring are being developed, and a wave of government plans, acts, regulations and recommendations are hoisting universities into the marketplace, proposing radical changes in all aspects of academic life, from finances to curricula and to research agendas. With the argument that universities should be competitive, search for excellence and for ways to satisfy the demands and requirements of the business world, in many countries national evaluation systems are being established to provide the basis for funding allocation.

These evaluation systems are based on performance indicators that encourage competition for students and research grants, and could eventually result in the amalgamations of departments at times of fiscal crisis – for instance, due to the shortage of fiscal funds, in 1994 UCLA close down and/or amalgamate eight schools. California State University San Diego proposed to close the Department of Sociology; the University of Chicago in 1997 closed down its Graduate School of Education despite its distinguished tradition. The development of managerial procedures, and the implementation of strategic (result-oriented) planning and conditional funding are also by-products of these new evaluation systems (Aamodt et al. 1991).

In most countries, these new evaluation systems are either promoted by the National Science and Technology Councils, by Secretariats of Science and Technology or by specialized units within the Ministries of Education. One of the first countries to initiate this evaluation was England, where Thatcher's government during the 1980s reduced education budgets, redirected the educational system further towards the 'needs of industry', promoted strong government support to private universities, and attempted to transform higher education institutions into private profit-seeking enterprises (Graves 1988, p. 108; Walford 1991, p. 176). As a result, substantive reliance on alternative

sources of revenue (such as research grants, contracts, or fees) substantially increased. A National Advisory Body was established to act as a planning body for publicly funded universities, and resource allocation became more selective, favoring science, technology and engineering at the expense of arts, humanities, and social sciences.⁵

The government also proposed to privatize certain disciplines, ceasing public funding to these activities, and replacing it by user fees, endowments and contributions from the private sector and business world. At the same time, the government implemented a funding formula to allocate resources for research according to institutional rankings. The criteria used in the evaluations to rank the institutional research output included the number publications, citations in specialized indexes, success in obtaining research grants and student fellowships, peer reviews and institutional comprehensive reviews.

The landmark of Thatcher's university policy was the Education Reform Act, which severely reduced government financial support to higher education, and was thought as increasing accountability for the use of public funds. It required higher education institutions to become consumer friendly, responsive to their patrons and customers or clients, and entrepreneurial, providing the highest quality goods at the lowest price, and competing for students and research projects. As a result of the Act, universities must not only compete among themselves, but also with some polytechnics, which have been granted university status by the Privy Council.⁶ While pressuring universities to attract funding from other sources, particularly the private sector, the Reform Act incorporated members of industry and commerce in governing bodies. Furthermore, it stated that working conditions and salaries of academic staff no longer had to be nationally agreed, and abolished tenure for all new appointments and promotions, replacing it by a "hire and fire" policy.

These measures, together with the reduction of governmental financial support to higher education, may have had a significant impact in the quality of the service. Salaries have decreased in real terms affecting faculty welfare and turning many of them into part-time consultants. Promotion chances have declined, reducing not only the enthusiasm of faculty for their vocation, but the same notion of the academic profession as rewarding, thus deeply affecting the recruitment of new generations of scholars. Support staff has been reduced drastically (yet compensated by advances in technology which make faculty more autonomous and auxiliary personnel less relevant) while teaching and administrative loads have increased (Whitty 1998). As a result of these trends, the academic career has difficulties in attracting the best graduates, libraries can no longer afford to buy but the necessary books and

journals – largely because the cost of scientific journals owned by multinational publishing corporations like Dutch-based Elsevier has quadrupled in the last fifteen years well beyond any reasonable cost recovery scheme –, teacher/student ratios are higher, equipment is falling out of date, and in many countries, including the industrial advanced world with the exception of the key research universities, university infrastructure is deteriorating. To a lesser or greater extent, the path traveled by England is now being followed by a variety of industrial advanced and developing countries, including and perhaps more drastically the former socialist bloc.

Given the leadership exercised by the United States in a variety of areas ranging from military research to economic policies, higher education restructuring in this country deserves commentary. Educational critics in different parts of the world write about the “Americanization” of their national university systems and, by extension, the Americanization of culture and taste – some would argue the Californianization of cultural taste (Ohmae 1995). Guy Neave (1991, p. 68), for instance, suggests that in Europe the neo-Keynesian consensus has been replaced by right-wing conservatism, with forces pressuring many European countries to follow the American model of university system. This model is seen as focusing on the reduction of the role of the state in higher education and its replacement by the market as the instrument for shaping the institution, which must compete with other institutions for funding and students. Despite much truth in this analysis, there are serious gaps and omissions that need to be corrected. For instance, there is no question that funding for public sources (NSF, NHF, Department of Energy, Pentagon and the various research branches of the Navy, Army and Air Force, Department of Education, Department of Transportation and Housing) and many funding initiatives from the Congress redirecting Title VI funds are absolutely decisive for the financial stability of universities, private and public, in the U.S. The Stanford University fiasco in the mid-eighties about overhead calculations and expenditures and the threat at one point of having to return more than \$500 million to the federal government is a telling example of how sensitive the issue of federal, state and local government funding in the U.S. is. No doubt, private funding constitutes to be a critical source for university purposes – Harvard University’s more than \$12 billion endowment is a telling example.

In many countries, public universities began to implement more selective admission policies. In the US, state governments gradually reduced financial support of public universities, leaving a vacuum for the private sector to fill. As a result of it, at the beginning of the 1990s far less than half of the budgets in the leading state universities came from general state revenues. Major public research university like UCLA, receives its funding through a

complex structure of governmental appropriations, grants, tuition and fees, and revenue generated from business activities, patents, and interest earnings, in which government sources consist of only 34.3% of total funding. In the nineties, most revenue in US public universities comes from tuition and fees, endowment income, alumni contributions, and grants and contracts with corporations and the federal government (Yudof 1992, p. A48). This represents an important change from the 1980s, when state governments were a most important source of income for public universities. Conversely, private institutions, which derived only 2% of their income from state governments in the 1980s, are receiving increasingly larger public subsidies. As a result of this, there is a greater blurring of the public/private sector distinctions, with the former seeking more non-governmental support and the latter turning increasingly to public funds for help (Berdahl and Millett 1991, p. 215). This trend is very important, as the US higher education system constitutes a model for Latin American policy-makers (Altbach 1982).

In the US, since the mid-1980s, accountability pressures have escalated, usually expressed in the calls for a permanent assessment of the outcomes of the higher education system, in order to have a greater control in the use of public resources. Moreover, universities have been forced to compete with industry for government research funds (Slaughter 1990). At the same time, salary policies have increased the gap between faculty who receive higher salaries (engineering, medicine, law, management) and those who receive lower salaries (nursing, humanities, education). A more recent development of the US university system is the increasing power of external actors in the definition of the rules and regulations of university life, particularly in matters related to equity and to the ethnic diversity of the student body. Affirmative action programs, for instance, have been successfully challenged by electoral politics, court cases, and business and state leaders participating in university decision-making bodies. Let us now turn to examine the experience of the region that by any standard has one of the highest per capita enrollment in systems of higher education in the world: Latin America.

A focus on Latin American higher education

Latin America higher education systems have not been alien to these developments. In this region, the efforts to model the university system after the American pattern can be traced at least to the Atcon Report in the 1960s,⁷ which is now revived in the documents elaborated by agencies such as the World Bank and the IMF (Puiggrós, n.d.; Petras and Morely 1990; Ribeiro 1971; Atcon 1963). The pressures to implement the "American model" are evident in the increasing blurring of the public-private distinction, the imple-

mentation of tuition fees in public universities, the public funding of private institutions, the partnerships between universities and business, and the new initiatives to create community colleges.

In recent decades, there was an impressive growth in enrollments, together with the multiplication of universities, creating greater institutional differentiation, and increasing regionalization and privatization. The statistics for entire educational systems, especially higher education, are significant: educational expansion in Latin America between 1960–1970 accounts for the highest rates of educational growth in the world. During that decade, the rate of growth for primary education was 167.5%, 247.9% for secondary education, and 258.3% for higher education (Torres 1990). In Mexico, between 1960 and 1980 for example, the student population grew by 700%. Despite this fact, Pablo Latapi points out that between 1952 and 1972 the proportion of students enrolled in higher education grew merely from 2.4% to 3.8%, showing a strong and highly selective mechanism in the system of higher education (Latapí 1982). Another trend has been the rapid growth of the private sector in Latin American higher education: from the 1950s to the 1990s, the private shares in total enrollment grew from an insignificant 7% to almost 40%. This has assisted governments to reduce pressures for accessibility without incurring budgetary increases, or even to decrease expenditures. A case in point is Chile, where, as a result of the growth of private institutions, public expenditure on higher education decreased from \$171 million in 1981 to \$115 million in 1988 (Schiefelbein 1990, 1996).

During the same period, the analysis of the role of the democratic university shifted from an emphasis on the relationships between the university and the state, to an emphasis on the relationships between the democratic university and the dominant model of industrialization in the region. The pattern of industrialization and economic development predominant in Latin America between the forties and up to the eighties, Chilean sociologist José Joaquín Brunner argues, was based on a participation in the international market founded almost exclusively on the exportation of natural resources, an industrial structure oriented to the substitution of imports and the internal market, a model of consumption in the style of the industrialized countries, and a limited valorization of the role of the national business sector (both public and private). For Brunner, this industrialization pattern facilitated a scarce development of the scientific-technological endogenous base, combined with a higher education based on “soft” careers of uneven quality and oriented towards the integration of the masses (Brunner 1988, p. 15, 1990a, b).

More recently, Latin American public universities have experienced a period of budget contractions due to a decrease in state funding, and hence they have been pressured to initiate or expand their private sources of

revenue (including the establishment of the highly controversial user fees in autonomous institutions that traditionally offer good quality instruction at nominal token costs). Many people, particularly student leaders, claim that the introduction of user fees and/or tuition would constitute a de-facto privatization of public universities. At the same time, like in other continents, Latin American universities are being increasingly forced to accept policies and directions determined by the state. This interesting combination of privatization and government control constitutes the trademark of university restructuring.

In Latin America, university restructuring is following a model of privatization probably most advanced in Chile, where the 1981 reform⁸ imposed by the military rule of Augusto Pinochet can be interpreted as the reverse of the Argentinean 1918 university reform which was heralded at the time as a model for the radical democratization of knowledge and access to higher education. Before 1981, Chilean higher education was a one-tier system. Institutions were legally recognized as self-governing bodies, students did not pay fees and financing of universities was protected through public incremental funding. In 1981, the higher education system experienced an institutional diversification, with the establishment of three vertical and hierarchically loosely articulated tiers (universities, professional institutes and technical training centers). At the same time, the institutional power of the two traditional state universities was reduced: they were forced to give up their regional centers, a process that gave birth to 14 new public institutions. Expansion of enrollments in higher education was delegated to private institutions, which proliferated in a context of deregulation and minimal requirements to set up institutions of higher education. Civil servant status for academic staff was abolished, and replaced by a system based on differential salaries.

Simultaneously, public universities were pressured to diversify their sources of revenue through competition for research funds, external contracts and fees. In the late 1980s, public universities received more than 25% of total revenues from tuition and fees, and an increasing percentage of their operating budgets was obtained through contracting with industry. To encourage entrepreneurship, many public agencies fund researchers or research groups directly by-passing established university agencies. As part of the reform, the government established a national system of admissions – based on the best scores – encompassing both public and private institutions, and a new mixed system in which private and public universities compete for public funding (Brunner 1993). The restructuring of the Chilean university is being carefully observed by other Latin American governments as a model to follow. Although the negative impact on equality has been recognized, the

alleged efficiency and rationality of the Chilean system constitute mermaid songs for most government bureaucrats. For instance, managerial procedures and budgetary incentives for cost reductions implemented in several Chilean universities are being considered throughout Latin America, where changes towards the Chilean path are taking place at an accelerated rate but with the idiosyncracies and political peculiarities of each country and major public university.

Restructuring or privatization in higher education? A summary

Public universities are experiencing government financial cutbacks, which put pressure on diversification of revenue sources, cost-recovery programs, and contracts with the business sector. At the same time, the funding is becoming increasingly conditional, with emphasis on accountability. Hence, financing is increasingly dependent upon evaluation according to "criteria of performativity" established by government and market forces. Universities are also compelled to implement self-evaluation processes, which are to be supplemented by external evaluations. The universities have autonomy to decide on internal matters and the means to achieve stated goals (process control) whereas the governments have the power to decide those goals (product control). This system is known as "distance evaluation" (Neave and Van Vught 1991).

In recent years there has been an increase of private participation in public universities (mainly in finance and governance), thus further breaking the division between public and private. Such division has been also blurred by growing state financing and control of private institutions, blurring even further the distinction between public and private. There has also been an increased presence of a corporate rationality in university affairs, ranging from an emphasis on managerial professionalism in decision making (which has led to administrative structures separated from the academe), to mergers among departments, faculties, and institutions. This trend also includes an increasing presence of market values and forces in academia. Professors, departments, and faculties of public and private universities are increasingly engaged in competitive behavior similar to the one prevailing in the marketplace for funding, grants, contracts, and student selection and funding. Academics must develop an entrepreneurial approach. Yet is claimed that tenure inhibits this business spirit and therefore should be eliminated.⁹

There is a general emphasis on efficiency rather than on equality of opportunity, and as a result, students are considered consumers and asked to pay higher fees. The market rationale also includes a demand-driven orientation, introducing short cycles and an emphasis on vocationalization. At the level

of the system, institutions are more integrated into a co-ordinated approach, that encourages differentiation and choice. This leads to a segmentation of the system, with more restrictive admission policies in high quality institutions and more accessible admission policies in institutions at the lower end. The common denominator of these trends is a gradual loss of institutional autonomy, and the increasing power of external forces (namely the state and the business world) to influence the direction of university policies, a process that has been described elsewhere as the shift from the autonomous to the heteronomous university.¹⁰ It is not clear yet whether more or less autonomy will assist Latin American universities in meeting the challenge of the new globalized world and the demands of the knowledge-based economy. Indeed, some analysts have argued that the only choice available to universities in terms of their new mission is the training of symbolic analysts, a subject that we turn our attention to next.

Symbolic analysts and public universities

Milton Friedman has pointed out that nothing is more important for the prolonged economic development of a country than an increase in productivity. One of the origins of the US crisis since the 1970s into the early 1990s has been blamed on the fall in labor productivity. Harvard political economist Robert B. Reich, former Secretary of Labor in the Clinton administration, has pointed out that although productivity in the manufacturing industry has improved slightly given the advances in automation and efforts to reduce costs, taking into consideration the service sectors, global productivity was reduced to 1% a year, from 3% one and a half decades ago. Reich (1988, 1991) argues that a new global economy exists, very different from the old capitalist competitive economy. The old economy was based on high volume and highly standardized production, with few experts or managers controlling the production process from above and a great number of workers following orders in pre-established and standardized operation processes. This is a highly hierarchical and rigid system, with little room for innovation.

Reich seems to agree with Bowles and Gintis' (1976) classic analysis¹¹ that the public educational system was oriented towards the production of youth that could accept instructions and conscientiously implement them. Discipline and reliance on worker loyalty were supreme virtues. This old economy of mass production remained stable and competitive as long as it could systematically reduce its costs of production (including the price of the work force), and when it could constantly change its line of products. The new global economy is quite different, as compared to the old economy, with the advances in transportation and in communications technology, especially

computers, the process of production has been parceled out and fragmented around the world, to wherever the different products can be made in the most efficient and economic manner. Production is for export instead of being directed towards the internal market.

The argument that Reich advanced with respect to the United States is that it can no longer compete solely by means of cost cuttings given the fact that workers exist in other parts of the world willing to produce for lower salaries than their American counterparts. According to Reich, the comparative advantage of the United States lies in its ability to rely on highly qualified workers, with great flexibility, precision and specialization. Given that in the global economy new scientific discoveries and innovations are appropriated globally at a surprising velocity, and are implemented on standardized products, the only factor of production that is relatively immobile is labor. What counts at the level of the international workforce is its competitiveness, vision and capacity to work together collaboratively.

Reich (1992) distinguishes between types of workers or occupations in an internationalized economy: routine production service workers, in person service workers, and symbolic-analytic service workers. The *routine production service workers* are the classic blue-collar worker of enterprises of massive and high volume production, but it also includes supervisors and white collar workers that carry out monotonous activities. The *in person service* workers realize simple and repetitive tasks, are paid in hourly wages, are intensively supervised, generally do not require more than a high school education, except for occasional vocational training. The principal characteristics of this group is to be punctual, reliable and courteous in their treatment of the public. Finally, the symbolic-analytic service workers include all those whom work on the identification and solution of problems, and strategic mediation activities (or brokering). Some examples are scientists and researchers, design engineers, software engineers, financial consultants, tax consultants, specialized lawyers, organization specialists, public relations executives, film directors, producers, editors, production designers, investment bankers, real estate investors, etc. The majority have a university level education, and on occasion a graduate level degree.¹²

What is of importance in Reich's proposal is that only symbolic analysts contribute great value to the internationalized economy. One of the historical reasons for the high concentration of these workers in the United States is the link between industry, protected residential areas and universities of an international category (e.g. Silicon Valley and Stanford University are classic examples of such a link). If Reich is right, a central concern for the development of public universities in Latin America, and certainly a principal element in furthering their own credibility should be, in addition

to performing their traditional roles in science and technology, letters, and humanities, their ability to produce increasing numbers of symbolic analysis.

The production of symbolic analysts in Latin America

Following Reich's premises, it seems clear that the symbolic analysts of Latin America also enjoy the benefits of this globalized and interdependent economy. They send their children to study in the United States or Europe, or support the emergence of dependable private schools and universities of good quality in their own countries. As a general rule they can rely on the majority of infrastructural elements required to realized their work (airports, high security residential areas, fax, computers and telephones) and most probably exercise a great deal of influence on the political elite which develops under the protection of Latin American corporatism – we shall note here that the political feature of corporativism is a major difference not accounted for by Reich's analysis, and therefore his premises may not be entirely useful *pari pasu* in Latin America.¹³

An aspect which need be emphasized is that the Latin American symbolic analysts do not have readily available the duplicate residential area-public (or private yet increasingly publicly funded) university of international quality found in the United States.¹⁴ Therefore, they lack any incentives to support the development of a quality public university. After all, these institutions have not only been massified, but are also in many cases totally lacking in material resources and minimal financial resources to attract other symbolic analysts of international status, and as such are limited in their capacity to produce knowledge that can be rapidly reintroduced into the international production circuit. In addition, public universities have faculty and students with controversial viewpoints and who tend to become involved in political activism.

For this approach, quality of education has declined in the Third World because lack of efficiency of the systems. Then, what is needed is common and comparative standards of learning achievement, the expansion of basic education up to an acceptable minimum, and the reallocation of resources to this end. Indeed, even resources currently spent in secondary and higher education should be allocated to basic education. There is no serious concern that re-assignment of resources in this levels will most likely jeopardize the long-term performance of these levels, and their possible contribution to scientific and technological development. The unspoken assumption is that higher education in the Third World makes no difference in terms of production of science and technology, and is, above all, a subsidy for the elite.

Although it is indisputable the meager scientific and technological outcomes of higher education in the Third World, and that indeed, higher education in many instances is a public subsidy to the private sector and state elites, this approach fails to recognize that even in less than auspicious institutional and political conditions, the University of Buenos Aires, for instance, managed to produce in the last four decades three novel prizes in science – the only three in the region but also a number of scientists originally trained in Latin American universities and now working for US universities have also being recipients of Nobel prizes in sciences or medicine. In addition, it is reasonable to assume that despite the uneven quality in higher education in Latin America a rather large number of Nobel prizes in literature, and a Nobel prize in economics may have also profited from their association with public universities. Rather than writing off from the outset the eventual contribution of higher education to science and technology in Latin America, a better assumption is to postulate a notion of marginal efficiency. With continuous and reasonable investment of resources, serious management and planning, and a clear policy in science, technology, social sciences and humanities, it is not an excessively optimistic view to expect serendipity to work and systematic discoveries to proliferate. In this context, institutions of higher learning can make serious contributions to research and development as well as to critical analysis of development models.

To conclude, it is probable that we are facing a new historical juncture in Latin America, with new mechanisms of incorporation and exclusion of the middle and working class sectors. Structural adjustment policies and structural reform of the State in Latin America have been advanced by neo-liberal governments with a strong market orientation.¹⁵ Within this neo-liberal context, to propose that universities shall be linked as much to the constitution of democratic identities as to the production and reproduction of knowledge for the purpose of increasing productivity, would be considered a romantic posture. And this is so because, for the economics of neo-liberalism and their cultural counter-part, neo-conservatism, democracy is merely a distinctive feature of a political system insofar as it may facilitate a particular political-economic project (Sousa Santos 1998). Otherwise, democratic life will be contingent upon the vicissitudes of capital accumulation and political legitimization as perceived by the dominant sectors, and will not appear as the central characteristic of the political life which these dominant sectors pretend to sustain in the postmodern age. However, the recent electoral defeat of neoliberal and conservative ideologies (the cases of England, France, Italy, United States, the municipal elections in Mexico City and the Argentina's defeat of Menem's peronism in 1999, to name a few) opens new possibilities for progressive change at the dawn of the new century.

In this context, the long-term alternatives for public universities will depend of a complex constellation of factors, including the role of the State and public universities in the post-stabilization period; the strength, competitiveness, diversity and viability of the Latin American economies in the context of the changing world economic system; eventual new political alliances (with contradictory political orientations) having to deal with the social and political by-products of policies of structural adjustment and privatization (such as poverty and urban violence); and the dynamism, strength, and social imagination of social movements and popular protest within fragile democracies.¹⁶

Make no mistake: Latin American public universities cannot avoid the contradictions of capitalism. They are condemned to modernity. Even in the context of, and providing that at least institutional democracy persists, public universities will remain (small or large, massive or elitist) organizations dedicated to culture, science and politics. They will continue to provide a space for discussions, brain-storming, networking, games of power, theorizing, empirical analysis, and political practices, in the context of technological development and humanist or scientific creation. They will continue to be inhabited by people and ideas. They will continue to accommodate the confused intellectual together with the brilliant rethorician. The inspired poet, the systematic scholar and the imaginative scientist, will all walk in the same corridors and sit in the same classrooms or lobbies with the idealist or the cynical student, the opportunist politician, the low-key bureaucrat, and the passionate scholar seeking to produce knowledge in constant effervescence and creativity.

Key actors in public universities should be reminded however, that, as Marshall Berman (1982, p. 29) said, “even in the midst of a wretched present, they could imagine an open future.” Besieged by the “iron cage” of postmodernity and structural-adjustment, even in the context of the globalization of economies and cultures, the vibrancy of Gramsci’s motto of “pessimism of the intelligence, optimism of the will” may still resonate in higher education institutions and actors.

Notes

1. Family capitalism was based on the great family enterprises which emerged during the latter half of the nineteenth century. Kinship, ownership, and control were synonymous, and dynastic marriage was a means of corporate merger. Near the turn of the century, the power of family capitalism declined in favor of corporate rule, giving way to the emergence of managerial capitalism. Upper-class dominance was displaced by corporate interests, while the firm as an extension of the founding family transformed into a new entity with its own internal logic. This transformation permitted the growth of very large

- firms, the creation of new forms of multidivisional structures and administrative coordination, the formation of a professional management and career hierarchy within the firm, and the shift of decision-making power from the family to trained managers (Useem 1984).
2. Given this diagnosis, influence of top corporations on public policies has concentrated in three areas: (a) government reductions in social spending; (b) dismantling agencies that regulate business; (c) scaling back programs beneficial to labor (Useem 1984, p. 195).
 3. Expertise is defined here in a neo-Weberian fashion. It refers to the possession of esoteric knowledge which cannot be easily reconciled with democratic control, accountability and participation, and which, in its orientation of establishing the legal foundations and rationale for policy-planning based on institutional rationality and the scientific foundations of decision making – in turn defined alongside the same epistemological notions of natural sciences models – constitute, in its own right, a strategy of compensatory legitimation in advanced capitalism (Weiler 1985).
 4. An interesting example of a major university merger (because it involves a public and a private institution) is the recent approval of the Regents of the UC system for a joint operation between the Hospital of UC-San Francisco and Stanford University hospital system.
 5. Boys et al. (1988) analyzed nine British universities to explore if higher education prepares its graduates for work and, if so, how do they make their impact. They also wanted to know if there is a shift from the induction of undergraduates into knowledge for its own sake towards the acquisition of knowledge and skills instrumental to economic and social objectives. They found out that official and employer statements did not make reference to the needs of public sector (a huge employer which uses a large proportion of national resources), and that all the language was that of business, commerce or industry.
 6. A good description of university change in Western Europe can be found in Neave and Van Vught (1991).
 7. Rudolf Atcon, an American advisor of Anixio Texeira, played a major role in the transformation of higher education in Brazil in the sixties. For a discussion of the role of Atcon and his proposal for the transformation of the Brazilian university with USAID funding after the coup d'état in 1964, see Roses 1992, pp. 42–51; see also Atcon (1963).
 8. The legislative package was adopted in December 1980, and its implementation begun in early 1981.
 9. Government officials and business leaders argue that tenure, though necessary to creativity in research and scholarship, has developed into collectively bargained job security (Cameron 1987).
 10. For a discussion of the heteronomous university, see Schugurensky 1994.
 11. For a thoughtful commentary relating Bowles and Gintis' analysis to the overall theory of social reproduction, see Feinberg (1983).
 12. Alongside these are other "residual" categories to which Reich (1990, pp. 171–195) pays little attention: farmers, miners and other persons dedicated to the extraction of natural resources, and government workers including teachers, engineers working for the defense industry financed by governmental resources, workers within regulated industries (energy) or medical workers in the health care service sector such as Medicaid and Medicare. One of their fundamental characteristics is that they are protected from international competition.
 13. For a discussion of corporatism in Latin America, see O'Donnell 1982; Morales-Gómez and Torres 1990; Collier and Collier 1991.
 14. The uproar and scandal about overhead reimbursements by the Federal Government to Stanford University in 1991–1992 brought to light the paradox of a prestigious private

university with excellent endowment and fund-raising capabilities that nonetheless, for all practical purposes, heavily relies on public subsidy and federal funds for conducting research and teaching.

15. For a detailed discussion on structural adjustment, see Frieden 1991 and Vial 1992.
16. For an excellent description and discussion of the social movements and politics in Latin America see Susan Eckstein (1989).

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