



EDITORIAL

Editorial

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Territory and sustainability in the framework of Chilean state universities²

What role should Chilean State Universities play in their territories? The social uprising, Covid-19, along with natural disasters like the 2010 earthquake, remind us that global phenomena have serious repercussions on the local sphere and that it is on this scale where security and resilience to change need to be generated to overcome major catastrophes, to face the challenges of our cities, and to provide local endogenous development and quality of life for those living there.

Specifically, the Law on State Universities, 21.094 of 2018, reminds us that these institutions must contribute to the sustainable development of the country and the progress of society in the diverse areas of knowledge and culture. This law put on the table several challenges for the comprehensive transformation of Chilean universities. Among them, is that of strengthening their role as generators of knowledge and human capital, to contribute to the local development of their territories from the perspective of sustainability. This challenge implies rethinking, first, what the current society, with whom we have to jointly generate the transformations, is like, and second, what the local and nationwide challenges to target are, always from a sustainability approach.

The paradigm of knowledge society, which changes from focusing on the production of material goods to focusing on the production, acquisition, and exchange of new knowledge, emerges at the end of the 20th century. This new society demands that universities, as generators of knowledge and human capital, play a more relevant role in the transformation and local development processes of the territories where they are based. The territory thus ceases to be a physical support to become an active agent with which to interact. On one hand, it receives the knowledge generated internally, serving as a real laboratory. On the other, it gives feedback on the classic missions of the university, namely teaching and research. The result is the territorialization of universities at a local level and the extension of their activities beyond their university spaces.

In this context, the *third mission* of the university appears, which aims to apply, use, and exploit knowledge generated by the university to increase social welfare and contribute to the social and economic development of the territory. This third mission, materialized in Chile in the three areas of technology transfer, outreach, and engagement with the environment, is called knowledge transfer in the specialized literature and articulates global thinking in the local sphere. In this way, it covers multiple dimensions - technological, social, and cultural - and involves interaction and consensus with the different actors of the territory. Its orientation can target the generation of companies, from a utilitarian perspective, or be more oriented to social responsibility, from a humanistic perspective. A *committed university* is one that incorporates the problems of society into the university agenda in an interdisciplinary way and takes these on as a challenge, contributing to local development and the generation of public policies through knowledge.

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2 This text contextualizes to the Chilean reality the theoretical contributions of the PhD thesis: Arcos, Maribel (2019) Universidad, Territorio y Desarrollo Local. Un análisis de la Universidad Autónoma de Barcelona, Barcelona: Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona.

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Figura 1, 2 Vista aérea Nonguén, Collao. Fuente: Pepe Leniz, 2022

This third mission must strengthen its relational dimension with the territory by generating links with all the actors that are part of the local transformation and dynamization through the quadruple helix model. In this model, the university, as a generator of knowledge and human and intellectual capital, must reach out to the citizenry, as a beneficiary but also a producer of knowledge; to the public administration, as a creator of regulatory frameworks and public policies; to the local productive sectors, as potential recipients of innovation, but also as potential financiers of research. In short, this relational model should form a collaborative governance whose purpose is to analyze, anticipate, and cooperate in the management of the future territory project.

The crux of the question is what should the approach be for the university to enhance this bidirectional relationship with the territory. In the current context, marked by the climate, environmental, and energy crisis, it is inescapable that sustainability is the direction that guides teaching, research, and its transfer to the territory. The goals set by the UN on a global scale, such as the Millennium Development Goals or the New Urban Agenda for 2030, are the frameworks that universities must adopt to respond to local-scale challenges.

For some decades now, European and American universities have begun to incorporate sustainability as an overriding dimension in their daily work, from its integration into teaching and research, the management of their campuses, and the internal culture, to the definition of their relationship with the territory. Diverse methodologies have been created in each geographical setting to guide their transition, evaluate the implementation, provide green stamps and seals, and classify them based on their sustainability criteria. In the Latin American sphere, there is an evaluation tool called RIES, developed by the Sustainable Campus Network, which aims to act both as a roadmap to facilitate the transition of Ibero-American Higher Education institutions, and as a methodology for evaluating the performance of sustainability policies. It has five categories, including governance, sustainable culture, academia, campus management, and engagement with the environment. This last category analyzes the efforts made by universities to contribute to generating a fairer, more equitable, more diverse, and gender-sensitive society inside and outside the university.

From the perspective of the institutionalization of sustainability, this must not only be integrated in a transversal way in each state university, but it must permeate the entire national university system in an integral way. This implies that it needs to be promoted from higher institutionalized settings so that they have a bottom-up influence on public policies, and a top-down one on the real transition of its group of universities through different formulas such as evaluation, seals, or rankings. In Spain, the Conference of the Rectors of Spanish Universities (CRUE) has been working since 2007 on the dimension of university sustainability, evaluating the level of contribution to the environmental sustainability of Spanish universities to know their strengths and weaknesses and to guide university policies. However, in Chile, today it is a private association, the Sustainable Campus Network, whose affiliation is voluntary, which brings together the debate and discussion on sustainability at the university level, being completely independent of the Council of Rectors of Chilean Universities (CRUCH) and the State Universities Consortium (CUECH), which are the current space of discussion and proposals on the quality of Chilean university teaching and performance.

Therefore, it is essential to outline a radical transformation of the Chilean university system which, freed from the bureaucratic constraints and ideologies imposed by the neoliberal system, assumes sustainability as its flag, and promotes its transversal integration not only internally, but especially outside its buildings and campuses, aiming to solve urban challenges, to strengthen the sustainable development of its territory, and to advance the quality of life of the people living there.

