

Uncertainty, an opportunity to change the world

Scientists around the world agree that the viral threat that we confront feeds on our lifestyle. The environmental depredation has caused a substantial reduction of wild fauna; therefore, the virus has been able to propagate through the zoonotic jumps from animals to humans, due to the inevitable closeness between species. Notwithstanding the vaccination and medication for dealing with the health crisis, it is probable that we will never defeat the COVID-19 illness. We will have to learn to live with this particular virus and the next ones.

The current new type of coronavirus implies one more reason to question and reflect on our lifestyle. We must arrange our own conception of the world and change how we interact with other humans and the planet. We are just one of the more than nine million living being species that inhabit the Earth. We need to stop being bad neighbors.

We live in a compulsion to the increment and an ambitious, excessive and endless accumulation. Our lifestyle establishes a problematic and pathologic relationship with the world. The infinite economic growth to which we aspire is not rational, if we consider the planet and our life's limits. This compulsion has taken us to the various global emergencies that the pandemic emphasizes: economic crisis, democracy crisis, ecological crisis, physical and mental health crisis, and, for certain, a deep social crisis. The pandemic has revealed to us what was evident even before it occurred: the great and global inequity, inequality, exclusion, discrimination and marginalization, which have been turned into a tragedy in our Latino American region, since people survive with the least vital, social and dignity resources.

In Latino America and the Caribbean, the COVID-19 has been a catalyzer for inequality in our nations. Today, in spite of the pandemic worsening in Colombia, for instance, people leave their houses and go to the streets due to the lack of solidarity and opportunities, and the rise of violence that the State has not attended adequately in decades, owing to having not planned and constructed a national future scenario as a project that benefits to all, with inclusion, equity and peace. Our responsibility with us, next generations and all the inhabitants of the planet, is related to searching and implementing proactive, creative, cooperative and ethical solutions to build an ideal future. We must, consequently, question a lot of certainties and place ourselves in an uncomfortable, but profitable, space of uncertainty that will allow us to grow, not in the accumulation, but as better human beings and neighbors in a restricted planet, growing with liberty, creativity and solidarity to be happy in community.

My years of scientific work have made me understand that uncertainty is our great opportunity to improve, considering that creation and management of knowledge yield results based on the non-certainty situations. When uncertainty makes us innovate, creativity is most powerful and possibilities of reality more diverse. I am convinced that collective leadership in knowledge management is the opportunity to change the way we see the world and how we interact with others and nature. We must engage in a new conversation as human beings that want to overcome crises together, based on high-quality education and creation and management of knowledge and cooperation.

We, universities, must be leaders in this project of a new conception of the world, where uncertainty encourages cooperation, empathy and solidarity to achieve collaborative and inclusive welfare that enriches our lives as citizens who participate in the construction of the community and promote a sustainable and respectful life with other inhabitants of the planet. The work of our universities must be based on a future vision, aimed at the search of our harmony, as responsible citizens who are committed to the ethical transformation of our reality. We must also seek harmony between humans and the planet so that we, as species, will be able to live in an environment of sensitivity, creative connection and community.

Universities, which promote national unity based on their diversity, must manage the necessary convergences to build a better society. Facing the challenges of the contemporary world, what must we change to continue meeting them? Through education and the creation and management of knowledge, we must drive cultural changes that enhance people's collective and transformative leadership capabilities. These cultural changes involve internal and external actions and processes in our institutions, aimed at improving creation and communication flows within university communities, and at strengthening our ability to relate to the environment. Some main aspects of these cultural changes are:

Inter-campus model university as a commitment to equity and excellence. By sharing experiences, each university campus turns into a channel through which the strength of integral knowledge circulates in all its areas, and which contributes to join regions, based on the recognition of the biological and cultural diversity of territories.

National academic leadership in a global environment. This aspect should allow universities to maintain and strengthen their impact on the social transformation of countries. Through a collective and transformative leadership, we must continue to contribute to the national systems of education, science, technology, innovation and competitiveness, joining forces with other higher education institutions. I am aware that the commitment to our region and consolidation of programs and strategies of cooperation and exchange of knowledge is essential for the construction of a Latin American and Caribbean identity, which will allow us to shape a new vision of the world and overcome the common challenges of our nations. Thus, we must hold our commitment to the construction and consolidation of the Unión de Universidades de América Latina y el Caribe (UDUAL).

Institutional digital transformation. This is a process of cultural change in which technology is barely a tool to undertake pedagogical and research innovations, as well as fundamental changes in the way the universities relate to their country and the world territories. The digital transformation allows us to consolidate more decentralized, flexible and light forms of organization; carry out decision-making in more horizontal and democratic ways; and get access to more efficient and effective ways of working in processes.

An academic model for comprehensive training. Taking into account the permanent self-evaluation of our institutions and the contemporary needs of training in communicative, affective, critical thinking and logical-mathematical reasoning competencies, we must guarantee the comprehensive development of citizenship attitudes and cognitive aptitudes in all academic programs. We must apply a new pedagogical model within the harmonization framework of the missionary functions of teaching, researching and working with the communities, assuming the "campus as classrooms" concept, in which the set of university experiences, with an open and flexible curriculum, contributes to the comprehensive formation of students.

The pandemic has taught us many and varied lessons about learning within universities. We recognize that being distant from our campuses and from the invaluable way of sharing with others have left us an emptiness. The worth of the face-to-face experience in learning is indisputable. However, we must adapt and integrate the best of both worlds into our conception of university: the virtual and the face-to-face, since our physical space must expand towards *hybrid campuses of knowledge and university experience*. In this new conception, technological connectivity will allow us to extend towards a greater and better cognitive and emotional connectivity between us, as university communities, and between universities, society and nature.

The reconceptualization of welfare as part of comprehensive formation. We must assume university welfare as the scenario for the construction of the best conditions for academic development and human development. This implies, among other things, proposing new referents of participation, promoting collective leadership, overcoming sexual and gender violence, and all types of discrimination. Comprehensive welfare or *well-being* must be a guarantee of *good being, good doing and good living in community*.

As a whole, this great cultural change aims to transform our way of interact with each other and the world; to make us recognize ourselves in humanity as beings who need the environment and life in community, beings in love with knowledge and learning, beings who flourish thanks to the prosperity of their natural and cultural environment, beings aware of the limits of their planetary home, and who protect the common interest of all species that inhabit it.

Thus, I am certain that convergence, thanks to the management of the scientific, humanistic, artistic, technological, political and ecologic knowledge will lead us towards new ways of understanding ourselves as interdependent beings, intertwined with the destiny of others. Through convergence in knowledge, we must find what connects us and build systems of solidarity to get more livable futures.

We cannot emerge from the pandemic without having learned the most important thing: *we must change the way we feel about the world, how we see it and how we feel in it, so that the world changes and revives for the sake of all who are and will be here.*

Dolly Montoya Castaño
President of the Association of the Universities of Latin America and the Caribbean
Rector of the Universidad Nacional de Colombia