

UNESCO

World Higher Education Conference 2022 (WHEC2022)

"Reshaping Ideals and Practices in Higher Education to Ensure

Sustainable Development of the Planet and Humanity"

UNIÓN DE UNIVERSIDADES DE AMÉRICA LATINA Y EL CARIBE (UDUAL)¹

Presentation

In the view of UNESCO's call to the World Higher Education Conference 2022 (WHEC2022), with the theme "Reshaping Ideals and Practices in Higher Education to Ensure Sustainable Development of the Planet and Humanity", the Unión de Universidades de América Latina y el Caribe (UDUAL) presents its point of view of the current situation of Higher Education (HE) in the Latin American

¹ First versions of this document were developed by a committee of deans, selected by the UDUAL's Executive Council, coordinated by Rodrigo Arim, rector of the Universidad de la República, and Miriam Nicado, rector of the Universidad de La Habana. This committee counted on the participation of Rossana Valéria de Souza e Silva, Executive Director of the Grupo de Cooperación Internacional de Universidades Brasileñas (GCUB); T. Flores de la Universidad Tecnológica Metropolitana, Chile; and A. Sánchez, from the Universidad Autónoma de Sinaloa, México. Furthermore, the document was enriched with distinguished university members' contribution, gathered in working sessions, in which they follow the five principal topics proposed by UNESCO. The first session, about visionary models of learning in higher education, was attended by M. Guerrero, from the Universidad de la Sabana, Colombia; M. Morocho, of the Universidad Técnica Particular de Loja, Ecuador, and F. Cervantes, former rector of the Universidad Internacional de La Rioja, in México. In the second session on priorities and opportunities for 2030-2040, the participants were: A. L. Gazzola, of the Grupo Kairós; M. Knobel former rector of the Universidad Estatal de Campinas, Brasil, and F. Tamarit, former rector of the Universidad Nacional de Córdoba, Argentina. Third session, regarding to the new lifelong learning communities, was attended by D. Mato, of the Universidad Nacional de Tres de Febrero, Argentina; M.A. Hermida, rector of the Universidad de Cuenca, Ecuador, and D. Fernández, Executive Secretary of the AUSJAL. Fourth sesión, on the roadmap for the new stage of higher education, was attended by: D. Montoya, president of the UDUAL and rector of the Universidad Nacional de Colombia; H. Jensen, expresident of the UDUAL and former rector of the Universidad de Costa Rica; H. Vant'Land y G. Marinori of the IAU; E. Vera of the Universidad de Chile and C. Hernández of the Universidad Nacional de Colombia. Fifth session, about the role of young people in the university of the future, had the following attendees: D. Gálvez of the Universidad Autónoma de Guerrero, México; M. Mora of the Universidad Nacional de Colombia; J. Piña from the IPN, México; A. Cisneros of the Universidad Autónoma de Guerrero, México, and L. Vázquez, professor of the UNAM, México. R. Escalante, UDUAL's General Secretary, and O. Delgado, UDUAL's Internationalization Coordinator, participated in all sessions.

and Caribbean (LAC) region, with a proactive approach. The aim is, thus, introducing our position at the World Conference, and, even more importantly, proposing to the Latin American and Caribbean universities a path to face together a future with multiple difficulties, limitations, challenges and opportunities.

This work consists of four parts: the first one presents our situation in relation to the UNESCO's five major topics in this World Conference. In the second part, we describe the economic, social and higher education panorama of the region, and show the UDUAL's work trajectory. Third part is about risks to be overcome to confront in a better way the future of higher education in Latin America and the Caribbean. In the fourth part, we set forth a series of proposals that, under UDUAL's judgement, would make it possible to improve higher education situation in our region.

1. UNESCO's call for the World Conference, Barcelona 2022

Higher education worldwide has been profoundly affected by pandemic, which, it is worth remembering, emerged at a time when we were facing another systematic crisis, derived from an exclusionary and predatory civilizational model that concerned our universities in different ways. Campuses of all the world had to be closed to prevent infection in our communities. Undergraduate and graduate activities, researching and administration were paused and suffered changes. Management spaces also had to be taken to the virtual field, delaying substantial activities of university life. In addition, environment work in which our communities were committed was affected. University governance had to be transformed, adapting itself to the new circumstances.

The pandemic has not ended. The resumption of face-to-face activities in our universities is taking place slowly, with different modalities. It is clear that we will not be able to return to the classrooms, laboratories, administrative offices, stadiums and theaters to perform what we used to do before. Perhaps we will have had important losses, but also there will be significant gains. What is certain

is that the post-pandemic Latin American and Caribbean university will be not the same.

Within this difficult situation, UNESCO has convened the World Higher Education Conference 2022 (WHEC2022) to be held in Barcelona from May 18 to 20, 2022. The main theme is “reshaping ideals and practices in higher education to ensure sustainable development of the planet and humanity”, to which is added the Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development formulation, especially its objective “leaving nobody behind”.

This conference establishes five goals: opening the door to new, innovative, creative and visionary models of learning at higher education levels; highlighting priorities and opportunities for the next decade; anticipating and preparing young people to fulfill their role in the society of the future; paving the way for future learning communities that is inclusive and lifelong; defining a roadmap for a new stage of higher education systems.

Based on the five goals, 10 main topics constitute the conference:

- 1) Impact of COVID-19 on higher education
- 2) Higher education and the sustainable development goals
- 3) Inclusion in higher education
- 4) Quality and relevance of programmes
- 5) Academic mobility in higher education
- 6) Higher education governance
- 7) Financing higher education
- 8) Data and knowledge production
- 9) International cooperation to enhance synergies
- 10) The future of higher education

UNESCO suggests that the WHEC2022 should set the path that higher education has to follow in order to produce a sustainable future. The topics are relevant, but central concerns for universities in Latin America and the Caribbean must be specified. That is why we have included regional interests in each of the

five goals. This approach reflects a point of view shared by academics from all the Latin American and the Caribbean region, as well as by universities, university networks, cooperation organizations and thematic networks that make up UDUAL.

1] Visionary models of learning in higher education

Any reflection on future learning has to consider that higher education must be for all and for life. New models of teaching and learning demand learning from those who learn and also from those who teach. In this process, accelerated by the pandemic and from different perspectives, it has been proposed to build a cybernetic learning community, understanding that new technologies, especially artificial intelligence, are important. However, new technologies are not necessarily sufficient to fulfill the HE purposes in our region, particularly in the countries with the greatest lags. This proposal, which recognizes existing global trends, must be adapted to the contexts, needs and purposes of the South, particularly Latin America and the Caribbean.

An unavoidable issue is that these technologies and new teaching models must be inclusive, which requires the incorporation of pedagogical and social contents that go beyond the merely technological field. Therefore, broadband Internet access, and electronic devices required by students and teachers in these modalities, should become global public goods. If we could start from that basis, the requirements for financing the new teaching models would be significantly reduced, making them affordable for practically all national governments.

It is essential to learn from the pandemic lessons. First, accepting that there is a before and an after: the global spread of distance work—which has widened the already significant digital gap—the emergence of major mental health problems, and the gradual adoption of hybrid models point to difficulties that we have to face. These issues, and several others, must be addressed in their specific dimension. Bridging the digital gap is an urgent task, while mental health challenges must be analyzed in their new context in order to attend to them

adequately. Hybrid models must be strengthened in the view that they will be there for a long time.

Another urgent task is to understand that the graduate profile of all undergraduate and graduate training programs has changed in response to new technological environments, changes in the patterns of social coexistence and the functioning of civil society organizations, whether in the private or public sphere. New skills have been arisen, which may be relevant in emerging fields of work. The new pedagogical models derived from online learning must be enhanced, taking advantage of the positive lessons of confinement. Among the modifications that could be incorporated are the reduction of courses duration, the introduction of pedagogies based on improving the interaction time between teachers and students, and a greater emphasis on students' autonomous work. Virtuality implies, among other alternatives, short courses oriented towards relevant competencies in the new conditions, so that graduates can be better inserted in the labor market. In addition, these new pedagogies allow a more efficient use of spaces, which, in turn, have positive effects on increasing coverage, an issue that needs to be addressed in Latin America and the Caribbean.

All of the above areas are relevant for thinking about innovations that enhance the capacity of higher education to improve the citizens' labor performance throughout their life cycle. However, there are reductionist risks and threats, which associate education as an exclusive provider of productive space skills. By definition and construction, higher education should support expanded capabilities, leverage different life projects, recognizing human diversity in the broadest sense. At this level, the democratization tools derived from technology and inherited from the COVID-19 experience must be applied to allow access to general, diverse and cosmopolitan training standards that broaden the horizons of our young people, and build culturally richer and more diverse societies. Higher education and innovations that operate within it are at the service of general welfare, including the labor dimension, but avoiding reductionist schemes.

At the same time, technological platforms and virtuality are not substitute for face-to-face interaction, for the construction of community and identity inherent to the university experience, for enjoyment and learning in exchange and encounter, for fluid dialogue among students, and students and teachers. Being aware that higher education is being, and must continue to be, transformed does not imply assuming that face-to-face attendance is an obsolete dimension. Both in disciplinary terms, in which there are training spaces that are not transferable to virtuality at no cost —clinical training, interaction with biological systems, laboratory practices, artistic and cultural creation— and in community terms, the question is not how to advance in digitalization, but how to resize face-to-face activities to give them a deeper and more innovative meaning, enabling technology to become a democratizing instrument without abandoning the social aspects associated with belonging to a learning and research community.

In summary, it is essential to consider not only technological aspects, but also other elements of learning, more of a concept and pedagogical nature, aspects that promote collaborative learning, a more constructivist and creative teaching, oriented towards research and, as far as possible, towards work on problems of the context. We recognize the importance of technological innovations, but we point out that they must be accompanied by novel pedagogical elements. For this reason, we propose the need for technological innovation accompanied by social innovation.

We must also re-evaluate the concept of quality in higher education. The current criteria for accrediting quality correspond to the way in which the various processes of university governance and substantive functions were managed within the framework of its missionary objectives. The post-pandemic university differs from the pre-pandemic in central issues, which must be incorporated into new criteria to be evaluated, consistent with the graduate profile that has been proposed. In the same vein, internationalization must be rethought globally in its constituent aspects, responding to new learning models that demand collaborative processes in the world. Our experiences have highlighted the

importance of results, not just processes. This focus must be taken so that universities can adapt themselves to the new conditions in the coming years.

With regard to quality, it is not surprising that there is a growing concern about social impact of institutions and their academic programs. Universities of Latin America and the Caribbean have an inescapable responsibility to the societies to which we belong; we must contribute to the understanding and solution of national and regional problems with the academy tools. Our research, extension work and actions of our students and graduates must have an impact on improving the living and working conditions of the communities with which we interact. Emphasizing this impact does not imply weakening the basic sciences and humanities, which provide support for the critical perspective that we must assume. Nor does it mean ignoring the importance of links with international academic communities. The important point is to be aware that our actions must be aligned with social needs and with our values and purposes.

II] Priorities and opportunities in 2030 perspective

“Opportunities” in some sectors refers to investments, to the purpose of getting into profitable markets. However, in Latin America and the Caribbean, these opportunities refer to educational possibilities, to new and expanded training processes, to different ways of influencing the societies in which our institutions are located in a spirit of solidarity. This is the framework in which we discuss the changes of the technological revolution that impact higher education. These changes, moreover, refer to structural problems that have not been overcome: growing inequalities in a markedly unequal region, backwardness, low quality of basic education, very low coverage of higher education, high dropout rates. It is not, therefore, just a matter of seeking technological solutions. It is about incorporating the notion that the problems of higher education are closely linked to social difficulties of a structural nature, to which we have confronted for a long time. What is more, we have to face these challenges with differentiated university systems, so, we must ask ourselves if we have done what is necessary

to take advantage of the lessons that the pandemic has been posing to higher education.

Some universities in our region work for the market logic, to which we must add that governments frequently do not join universities in their efforts to build a cooperative, inclusive, supportive and sustainable social fabric. Universities must contribute to the transformation of the productive matrix, but we must do so while facing contradictions on various fronts. At the same time, it is important to vindicate that, in Latin America, we have demonstrated a capacity for a communication consistent with shared historical trajectories. This condition facilitates the outlining of a university policy for the region, in which government participation is desirable.

That policy should be based on the principle of university autonomy, founded on the understanding that universities produce and appropriate useful and important knowledge for society and humanity; therefore, it cannot be limited by a government or a particular ideology. In this sense, it is a matter of defending the general interest, the public one, over the private interest of an individual or a group.

Public universities depend on the economic contribution of the State, which is, ultimately, society's contribution. The support that higher education requires for its operation and development must be ensured in a State policy; it cannot depend on who, at any given moment, is part of the government. Higher education policy in general and the access of public universities to the resources they require must have the necessary stability for their continuous improvement and to guarantee the right of citizens to access to a quality higher education.

This university policy must truly advance in the conformation of a common Latin American and Caribbean university system, which could begin with Latin American courses taught by shared professors, in a perspective in which we could move to shorter courses and more generalist undergraduate programs that allow broad exchanges of students and professors. Although this strategy might seem to be a replica of the Bologna plan, it is not, insofar as at the heart of education must be the purpose of linking it to the reality of the region and the

commitment to build more inclusive and equitable societies. In Latin America and the Caribbean, we must move forward by creating inter-university spaces in different countries of the region in which scientific, technological, innovative and networking capabilities can be combined to contribute to our regional integration process.

The university of the future cannot be considered in general. We have to do it from the perspective of the southern countries, specifically those of LAC. Therefore, we distance ourselves from the predominant visions in which, for us, the fundamental point is to narrow digital gaps, making progress in the solution of structural problems focused on inclusion. Latin American universities gained relevance during the pandemic; this allows us to propose to society an agenda of structural transformations necessary to achieve the common good.

As we have pointed out, university systems in our region are heterogeneous, so it is not possible for all universities to join a common strategy. For this reason, we believe it is necessary a differentiated strategy with distinct tasks for institutions of various levels and characteristics. The first element would consist on clear actions and shared projects by some university institutions of recognized regional relevance in order to apply the integrated strategy on them. In the second stage, it would be necessary that another union of universities join the seminal group in undergraduate and graduate programs in which they have greater strengths. To the extent that these processes achieve the proposed goals, they should continue to expand.

III] The role of young people in the society of the future

It is essential to recognize that the pandemic generated complications in many students' mental health, which has been added to the already existing economic, social and cultural problems. In this sense, new psychological issues must be inserted in the broader context of social, economic and cultural situation. In addition, courses that had to be developed virtually did not necessarily meet the minimum academic requirements to be approved. This fact, widely recognized in various studies on academic performance in the pandemic, both on the side of students and professors, could produce a generation of students who will

graduate with significant professional deficiencies, which will further complicate their insertion in the labor market.

On the other hand, the experience of remote education allowed professors and students to recognize the conditions of marginalization and lack of access to the media that affected the performance of many young university students. The pandemic highlighted the need to work for equity and inclusion in society. In this sense, it has had a formative value.

Undoubtedly, young people who will be professionals in the future will have to be flexible and resilient; they will have to update themselves throughout their lives and be creative in order to build their own projects and spaces for action. But it is equally important for them to show solidarity and be socially responsible. The leadership they will exercise will produce social change if it is a collective and transformative leadership. They must be able to promote and respect the leadership of the communities with which they will interact, and besides using technological innovation, they must be committed to social innovation.

Contemporary pedagogies serve this purpose. Learning based on problems, projects and challenges proposes an active relationship with knowledge and recognizes the value of questions; it brings to teaching dynamics typical of research such as problem formulation, group work, use of previous knowledge to produce new knowledge, and collective analysis of results. Collaborative learning recognizes that interactions among students are important, that group work allows us to learn from each other, to learn among peers. It teaches respect for differences, attentive listening, the willingness to be understood, the importance of sharing ideas and seeking consensus. Situated learning makes it possible to draw on the students' experience, to know the context and to face its problems. It makes it possible to recognize the importance of interactions with communities and the personal enrichment of collaborating with them in the search for solutions to improve their living and working conditions. Introducing contextual problems into the curriculum requires strengthening research on the needs and potential of the environment and

expanding, as far as possible, the extension or linkage tasks that make it possible to learn about these problems and give appropriate solutions.

These pedagogical proposals make it possible to harmonize teaching with research and outreach, and to recognize the formative value of the three mission functions. They also help to recognize the value of knowledge for life and to discover the joy of learning and the pleasure of helping others. This pedagogical change can serve the purpose of forming caring and socially responsible citizens.

In order to advance in this training, it is important the work of teachers gathered in learning communities that reflect on pedagogical strategies and the problems of the context, as well as the formation of groups of students who meet to work on particularly difficult subjects or topics with the support of peer-tutors who may be teachers or more advanced students.

The cultural and economic gaps, which create situations of inequity, exclusion and injustice, require thinking about the possibility of introducing activities for developing competencies such as critical reading, argumentation, problem formulation and resolution, and collaborative work into the curriculum academic. Well-rounded education needs spaces to learn about local, regional, national and international contexts, and to unveil and discuss problems related to the urgency of caring for the environment, strengthening social ties and working for equity, justice and nation building based on difference. It also requires spaces for encounters with art.

Comprehensive student welfare, which combines academic support with economic support to assist inclusion, overcome cultural inequalities of gender and social status (indigenous, Afro-descendants, minority human groups in general) and disability, and guarantee the permanence of students from the most vulnerable sectors until graduation, should be a priority for HE institutions in LAC, especially public universities.

IV] Lifelong learning communities

Our region has incorporated the rights of indigenous peoples and Afro-descendant communities in various legal systems. However, the fulfilment of this purpose is far from being achieved. Latin American and Caribbean universities must explicitly consider, as recognized in the Declaration of the Regional Conference on Higher Education, held in Cordoba in 2018, incorporating the rights of indigenous peoples in our constitutive charters and actively overcome lacerating inequalities.

Of course, the pandemic highlighted, with a dazzling intensity, colossal challenges: climate change, brutal inequality, dismantling of the public sphere. Facing these challenges, along with others we have already mentioned, demands a different university, one that responds to the social imperatives exacerbated by the pandemic, proposing substantive equality. This different university will have to be profoundly egalitarian, recognizing that we live with absolutely generalized gender discrimination. The new university will have to be based on shared tasks between the different genders, balancing the relative weights at all levels of government through affirmative actions that guarantee this balance.

Facing these challenges, and others we have already mentioned, demands a different university, one that responds to the social imperatives exacerbated by the pandemic, proposing substantive equality. This different university will have to be profoundly egalitarian, recognizing that we live with absolutely generalized gender discrimination. The new university will have to be based on shared tasks between the different genders, balancing the relative weights at all levels of government through affirmative actions that guarantee this balance.

We must confront the *epistemicidal* tradition with new learning models aimed at promoting intercultural dialogue and responding to the strategic interests of our peoples: strengthening the creation of indigenous and intercultural universities and, at the same time, ensuring that our universities become intercultural, plural and inclusive and, of course, diverse. We propose to lead processes of construction of an epistemological justice that, based on

indigenous matrices, take advantage of knowledge from research on traditional cultures, incorporating indigenous languages in a plural linguistic policy; to open spaces for vulnerable populations, including other sectors of society, including those marginalized by class conditions. In this purpose, while combating the patriarchal culture that remains in force in many university spaces, we must openly face the challenges of the transgender population, the Afro-descendant population and, of growing importance, the elderly university students.

In this task, Latin American and Caribbean universities can contribute to centuries-old universities the culture of inclusion in different sectors of society. The proposal consists on considering inclusion not only as a policy to favor those who need it, but also as a way to strengthen and enrich universities themselves. To this end, we must recognize and do what is necessary to counterbalance the many universities that align themselves with the interests of markets, not with those of their societies. The curricula, therefore, must move away from the priority satisfaction of professional needs, orienting themselves towards inclusive transversal curricula in various areas: interculturally, in human rights, in environmental sustainability and in the search for renewed and inclusive options for social organization. Consequently, we have to modify the graduate profile we propose.

V] Roadmap for the new stage of higher education

In order to be able to trace a path for higher education in the coming years, we have to confirm the notion of higher education as a public good and a social right that must be guaranteed by the State. Consistent with this definition, we maintain the affirmation that Latin American and Caribbean universities must be comprehensive, with a clear commitment to social construction, to the creation of Latin American citizenship in a global framework, committed to the highest levels of human knowledge.

The pandemic led us to modify the way we face teaching and learning processes, but it did not alter our fundamental commitment: social responsibility, to which we respond from our missionary values. Our path is not the same as

that of universities in other regions. For us, the central priority is the construction of fair, inclusive and equitable national communities. Therefore, it is about to propose that diversity must be respected, different capacities of national resilience, so that we are able to contribute to the strengthening of endogenous capacities to face the enormous challenges of the present.

Evidently, recognizing diverse routes to reach what could be a common goal implies accepting that the recognition of the quality of universities has to be understood in terms of different contexts. Universities of today, in order to become the universities of tomorrow, must accept that they see the world in different ways, that they incorporate different voices, opening spaces for a better understanding of diversities. Our proposal, then, is based on learning from what we are and proposing what we want to be. In this sense, we postulate that we want graduates who are builders of society in the broadest sense of the term and not just business leaders. The university of the future has to be rebuilt as a university focused on collaboration and solidarity. The processes of teaching and learning, together with those of research, have to propose the transformation of the social, together with the transformation of the universities themselves.

Our route crosses spaces in which we will have to build academic, scientific and social programs that contribute to national and regional integration, programs that focus on the creation of public values from the universities, in which it matters what the universities can contribute for the common good, for the welfare of all. Faced with the predominant interest in training in private values, universities must emphasize social values, those of all. Among these, of course, is the strengthening of democratic structures and the reconstitution of the social fabric, strongly diminished by years of predominance of a markedly individualistic consumerist philosophy.

The didactic tools at our disposal, including digital ones, must be inserted in a pedagogical model that seeks to increase shared goods and develop cooperative reflections that are adapted to the priority purpose of social creation, social values and common goods. In these times, in Latin America and the

Caribbean, the priority should not be to maximize profitability, but to socially distribute the profits produced in the private part of our mixed economies. We reiterate, for the fulfillment of this purpose, the need for the Internet to be a public good, recognizing that its creation resulted precisely from public efforts that, nevertheless, have been privately exploited. It is, then, imperative to recover what we understand as a social good, granting it the character of a public good, that is, a good freely available to all humanity.

In short, what we postulate is that the production of knowledge should be associated with the construction of social values and that its results should be shared with all social groups. They should serve the formation of new leaderships whose purpose is social development. We emphasize, therefore, South-South and South-North dialogue in which we can face together the challenges posed, proposing to use digital technologies for the service of equity, justice and democracy. In this sense, we think in regional but also national terms and, from this perspective, we reason about *globality*. The long-term commitment of our universities involves the university integration of our region, together with other regions going through similar complications, building a future based on diversity and not on homogeneity.

2. The economic, social and education landscape. UDUAL's trajectory

One of the most serious crises since the 20th century has hit humanity since 2020. The COVID-19 pandemic, which, as we have pointed out, exploded in the midst of an already existing systemic crisis, has affected the entire planet taking millions of people's lives, has also brought very serious economic, social and health impacts, highlighting the important weaknesses of the great world powers and aggravated the condition of vulnerability to which millions of people in different parts of the planet are subjected. In the developing world, Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) was the region most affected by the COVID-19 crisis. With a trajectory of low growth in the decades leading up to the pandemic, LAC faced, as of 2020, the worst economic crisis in 120 years.

As in the rest of the world, Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in LAC kept their buildings almost completely closed for many months, which had serious implications for undergraduate and graduate education, research, governance and the relationship between HEIs and society. With differences between countries, education was maintained on an *ad hoc* basis through digital platforms. In addition, the gradual resumption of activities in the remote modality did not occur at the same pace or with the same level of quality in the countries of the region or among HEIs in the same country. Despite this general panorama, whose medium, and long-term, consequences are uncertain, it is important to highlight the central role of the university system in LAC as an important support to face the dramatic contingency, contributing scientific knowledge in different areas, which made it possible to mitigate the negative impact of COVID-19.

Historical problems affecting HE in LAC, long before the pandemic, worsened. The dropout or dropout rates in HE and the sharp reduction in enrollment, especially those related to the most vulnerable social groups, are evidence of the serious consequences, present and future, of the health, social and economic crises caused by the pandemic, which may have impacts in the region for many decades to come.

It is true that COVID-19 does not distinguish between countries, ethnicities, ages, sex or social status, but it is also a fact that the consequences of the pandemic affect the most socially vulnerable groups the most. Consequently, after transitioning to remote classes in LAC, thousands of young people were unable to continue their university courses. The reasons, although diverse, have the same explanation: the economic situation of the student and his family, crucial elements for the continuity of university studies in a context of global disaster caused by the pandemic. To this framework of inequality, we must add the response of governments, which in most cases were weak in mitigating the effects of the pandemic. The efforts of universities in the region to counteract the problem of the distribution of devices and connectivity, the expansion of student tracking systems, and others, did not have a solid correlation in other areas of public policy.

As mentioned above, it is a fact that, worldwide, higher education and its institutions will be different when comparing the pre-pandemic and post-pandemic periods. It is also true that the strategies employed to solve the problems will not be the same, as societies are different and have dealt with the consequences of the pandemic in different ways, mainly due to economic and political factors. Moreover, with respect to HE there is no single path to overcome the crisis, since educational processes are plural in terms of approaches and paradigms and mainly because HE takes place in specific societies. However, it is necessary and urgent to adopt specific measures aimed at regions where social vulnerability indicators were already severe and were pushed to their extremes by the pandemic.

Despite its natural wealth and immeasurable cultural heritage, LAC faces serious and diverse problems such as the constant destruction and predatory exploitation of the region's natural resources; the high level of social inequality, in comparison with other regions of the planet; high unemployment rates and the increase in precarious work; growth of migratory movements caused by extreme deprivation and poverty; escalation of hunger; the prevalence of child labor and even, in some regions, the persistence of slave labor and authoritarian political tendencies. This complex social and economic scenario is compounded by high levels of insecurity and the presence of organized crime, problems associated with climate change, political crises and institutional shortcomings that support the permanence of structural injustices, such as the low representation of women in decision-making spheres.

At the higher education level, the threat to university autonomy is constant in the political scenario. The scarce provision of resources and the difficulties in ensuring access to a quality higher education for the entire population persist as deficient features in our region. All this has a strong impact on HE and its low indicators of enrollment rates, number of high impact research and publications, number of PhDs and doctoral courses in the region, as well as on technology and innovation indicators. These difficulties, which undoubtedly weaken the universities, have pushed them towards the logic of the market, seeking support

from banks to compensate for resources not provided by their governments. It is precisely in the struggle to overcome these difficulties that some HEIs have forgotten that higher education is fundamental for society.

For this reason, it is worth recalling the experiences of LAC in various historical battles for autonomy and for the recognition of HE as a public good, as a social human right and as a responsibility of the States; battles in which the importance of the public university and the expansion of enrollment were recognized. These Latin American values were affirmed at the 2008 CRES held in Cartagena de Indias, Colombia, a preparatory meeting for the World Conference on Higher Education held the following year, and were confirmed at the CRES 2018 held in Córdoba, Argentina, together with the celebration of the centenary of the autonomous deed of the students of Córdoba.

Therefore, it is worth recalling the experiences of LAC in various historical battles for autonomy and for the push for the recognition of HE as a public good, as a social human right and as a responsibility of the States; they were battles in which the recognition of the importance of the public university and the expansion of enrollment was won. These Latin American values were affirmed at the 2008 CRES held in Cartagena de Indias, Colombia, a preparatory meeting for the World Higher Education Conference held the following year, and were confirmed at the CRES 2018 held in Córdoba, Argentina, together with the celebration of the centenary of the autonomous deed of the students of Córdoba.

These Latin American and the Caribbean conferences have served to confront ideological tendencies, transformed into governmental decisions, which have proposed the commercialization of higher education, passively linked to the requirements of labor markets. In our opinion, it is necessary to point in another direction. Higher education must be able to become an area capable of leveraging endogenous research, connected to the world, but articulating multicultural research agendas anchored in the needs of our countries. Higher education must create knowledge accessible to the entire population, breaking the prevailing mercantile logic; it must generalize access to advanced knowledge,

avoiding simplistic approaches that place its role exclusively in the formation of competencies; it must migrate conceptually and instrumentally from a paradigm of private good, increasingly widespread, to the vindication of higher education as a public good capable of leveraging general welfare and social equity.

It is essential to think beyond, to reinvent today's higher education under other paradigms, so that the HEIs of the future can contribute in an even more consistent manner, to guarantee the preservation of all types of life on the planet and of their own existence. Furthermore, professional training, research produced in HEIs, management and the relationship with society must be based on the public and social good, on the appropriation and defense of universal values and on the formation of citizens with local, regional and global vision and concerns, whose concerns are not limited to individual and local problems, but extend to the social problems of all humanity and the entire planet.

The World Higher Education Conference 2022 (WHEC2022), with the theme "Reformulating the ideals and practices of higher education to ensure the sustainable development of the planet and of humanity", may represent an opportunity in the search for a better balance in quality and access to HE, in the five continents and in their different regions. Furthermore, it could represent a valuable record of the relevant role of HE in the sustainability of the planet and humanity. To this end, our views, reflections and proposals must be inclusive and respect economic, social and human diversity. Only then can we truly leave nobody and no region behind.

The history of Latin American and Caribbean higher education has been marked by innumerable conflicts with governments and privileged economic sectors. It is always worth remembering the historic deed of the students of Cordoba who in 1918 achieved recognition of the autonomy of their university. That conquest was soon incorporated into the demands of students from many Latin American universities who, at different times, managed to get governments to recognize university autonomy. Despite this governmental recognition, expressed at constitutional levels, governments have often intervened to try to

prevent university students from participating in the defense of social rights, supporting the demands of important groups of workers and vulnerable social groups.

At present, these values of autonomy, ideological plurality, and the exercise of criticism have been consolidated not only as university rights, but also as social rights. The contributions that universities make to society are valued and defended by communities. In this context, UDUAL has managed in its more than 70 years of history to bring together multiple efforts of communities of scientists and academics who, through the creation of new knowledge, provide possible solutions to social problems of our communities.

With these purposes, UDUAL develops a broad portfolio of projects related to the social relevance of our academic work. Virtual education, evaluation and accreditation of university education quality management; issues related to the fulfillment of the SDGs; linkages based on a dialogic practice with the environment; the rights of women, indigenous communities and sexual diversity; and the broad dissemination of reflection on the challenges of higher education in the region, are examples of the pillars on which the UDUAL bases its existence and daily work.

But the effort does not end there. UDUAL, together with universities, HEIs, regional scientific and trade associations, thematic networks, rectors' councils and many other associated actors, has promoted seminal values relevant to the needs of the region; however, it also looks to the future in order to participate in the design of the future of higher education, in line with what is happening in the world, precisely in response to what is happening in the world. We promote the values developed over decades, but also the awareness of what the future demands.

3. Risks to overcome in order to better face the future of higher education in Latin America and the Caribbean

In recent decades, it is possible to distinguish worrying trends at the regional level, which are added to the effects that the pandemic has had on higher

education in Latin America and the Caribbean. These include the impact of the production model on HE in the region; the crisis of university autonomy; the climate of insecurity and violation of human and social rights; the stratification of HE; the differences in quality and development between HEIs in Latin America and the Caribbean; and the conception of higher education as a commercial service.

I] The impact of the production model on Latin American and Caribbean higher education

In Latin America and the Caribbean, some economic development models in unfortunate condition have been implemented: their negative impact on nature. For decades, throughout the region and in all productive sectors and activities, practices have been carried out that affect the balance of ecosystems, alter the climate, devastate large areas to the detriment of human communities and put biodiversity at risk. In addition, health of populations is being affected by the impact of air, water and soil pollution; droughts and floods are being generated, while the temperature of ocean waters, the poles and cities is rising, leading to the multiplication of hurricanes that severely affect the nations of the subcontinent.

Despite the intensive nature of this economic model, it has failed to translate into a substantial improvement in the generation of jobs or in collective well-being and prosperity, since only very limited sectors of society have benefited from it. In LAC there is a shortage of investment and decent jobs, of salaries that guarantee a decent life for workers and their families and close the gaps between social groups. All this has repercussions on higher education in LAC and is reflected in the low enrollment rates in many countries, and in the high dropout rates, especially after the pandemic. Of course, the social inequality is manifested in all its nuances in HEIs.

If development models do not take into account sustainability and equity continue, the region will be compromising its present and future. Likewise, if development models capable of stimulating productive, socially and

environmentally responsible investment are not designed, we will be moving towards situations of environmental devastation, extreme poverty, social polarization, greater migration and an environment of insecurity. In addition, we will be reducing the welfare expectations of young people, who see higher education as an opportunity to get into the labor market that should be dynamic, competitive, formative and challenging.

II] The crisis of university autonomy

One of the values most cherished by universities in Latin America and the Caribbean is autonomy, attribute that involved struggles throughout the region, costing lives and the freedom of students, academics and university leaders in various nations. This history is now more than a century old and, despite the express recognition of the constitutions of all the countries of the subcontinent in favor of autonomy, today there are intermittent attacks on it.

This inherent characteristic of universities is fiercely defended, since it is the way to exercise academic and managerial freedom, to develop teaching, research and the dissemination of culture, without dogmas that detract from the natural course of the generation of scientific and humanistic knowledge. However, more and more autonomous HEIs are being threatened by national or subnational governments, both from the executive and legislative branches, and by economically and politically powerful sectors that try to influence the universities in various ways. Examples are multiple and growing: budget cuts, conditioning for the delivery of resources, imposition of rectors and high-level officials, raiding of facilities, local legislation approved with their backs to the university communities, recurrent audits and auditing exercises, often outside the regulatory framework, and imposition of educational models.

This situation creates uncertainty in HEIs, which are exposed to the sway of political signs, the ideologies of the moment or the economic models of the moment, limiting their capacities and distracting their efforts in actions of defense in the face of abuses and threats. If threats to the autonomy of universities in LAC continue, they will generate an environment of distrust among their communities

towards the authorities, which will inhibit planning and halt efforts to expand coverage, raise quality, guarantee equity, and promote internationalization and other substantive missions. These limitations will jeopardize the spirit of the future, since the uncertainty generated by the pandemic will be compounded by permanent harassment by governments.

III] Climate of insecurity and violation of human and social rights

Another problem that affects the Latin American and Caribbean region is the high levels of insecurity. The incidence of crime is one of the highest in the world; of the 50 most violent cities in the world, 42 are in our region. This is explained by the presence of ever-expanding organized crime organizations, which causes insecurity, fed also by inequality and inequity. In addition, there are high levels of corruption and impunity due to serious weaknesses in institutions. This phenomenon is extremely exhausting for any society and even more so when the vast majority of the victims or perpetrators are young people who could be pursuing university studies.

In this context, there is also a growing violation of human rights: vulnerable groups are victims of abuse or negligence by the authorities, by the agencies in charge of imparting justice and/or by the institutions responsible for enforcing them. There are many sectors that suffer from this situation: migrants or groups of migrants, children and adolescents, women of all ages, older adults, LGBT+ communities, indigenous or Afro-descendant groups, and people with disabilities or living in poverty. In addition, the number of people living in situations of social vulnerability in the region is alarming and continues to grow. Basic social rights such as food, health, education, housing with basic infrastructure, security and employment are far from being guaranteed for most families in LAC.

If insecurity in the region does not stop, the aspirations of students will be negatively impacted. In order to reverse the trends of insecurity and violence, one of the most effective strategies must be education, where higher education plays a decisive role as it is the space in which citizens and professionals are integrally trained, who must be endowed with principles and values that keep them away

from addictions, violence, corruption and crime. By having integrally trained professionals, with the necessary skills for quality performance and the attitudes and values of a good citizen, the social fabric will be strengthened and the population will be in a position to demand the enforcement and respect of all their rights.

IV] Stratification of Higher Education

Social stratification is produced by the existence of social inequalities which, in turn, are the result of historical patterns in the social structure that establish inequalities and exclusions in access to material or symbolic rewards. It is a social differentiation that produces a hierarchization, since it implies an inequitable allocation of resources and social and political positioning. This stratification can be recognized in higher education in Latin America and the Caribbean, when comparing HEIs within different countries, as well as when comparing between countries.

Three aspects of global stratification in HEIs can be distinguished. The first takes place inside each national higher education system. In many countries, regulation encourages student competition and resources among HEIs. In all systems there is competition for prestige and research resources. However, intensity of this competition varies, producing a polarization between elite HEIs and mass education HEIs within the systems.

The second aspect is the stratification within global systems in higher education and university research. These global systems include the particular global exchange of university research outputs and the acceptance that scientific publication must be in English language; global comparisons and university rankings; a commercial market for cross-border education that incorporates some countries; global consortia and other cross-border university networks; and the interlocking protocols for the recognition of HEIs, people and qualifications.

The third aspect comes from cross-border relationships between separate, but increasingly porous, national systems. Global flows of messages, ideas, organizational models, people and money, including cross-border imitation, play

a considerable role in higher education and research. As global systems, cross-border flows drive parallel evolution and convergence between national systems around the world. The resulting processes of global homogenization are not culturally neutral. They correspond to a dominant model of higher education, standardized by global ranking instruments, and exemplified by a small group of leading Anglo-American scientific universities.

Based on the points above, it is possible to point out two risks in this area, within the HEI systems of the Latin American and Caribbean region. Given the situation of structural inequality that has been accentuated, it is foreseeable that, within each country of the region, the differentiation between mass universities and elite universities will crystallize. This implies the reproduction of existing social differences between the different strata that have access to one or the other type of university. In general, mass universities are attended by young people who belong to the first generations of their respective families to enter higher education. The elite universities are attended by young people belonging to hegemonic families in their respective countries.

On the other hand, the existing differences in higher education between countries that occupy leading positions, according to world university rankings, and the countries of the Latin American and Caribbean region, have been accentuated. These rankings ignore the historical structural conditions that differentiate one country from another. It is an imposed logic from the advanced countries that responds to the globalization stage of capitalist development. It is also important to consider the worsening of national, regional and global stratification phenomena, generated by the economic crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, and its social consequences of unemployment and poverty.

V] Differences in quality and development between HEIs in Latin America and the Caribbean

In direct relation to the stratification of HEIs within the Latin American and Caribbean region, we find ostensible differences in quality and development in the countries. While some characteristics are at the top of the international

rankings and stand out for their teaching levels, their graduate programs and their research results, others are in a worse situation. These show shortcomings in the training and competencies of their academic staff, in the scarce relevance of their undergraduate and graduate training proposal, and in their irrelevance in Research, Development and Innovation (RDI).

These deficiencies are even more extreme in those countries that do not have integrated quality assurance systems for higher education at the national or federal level. The differences in quality and development among HEIs in the region, if perpetuated, will influence the reproduction of existing situations of inequality. Many entities by themselves will be incapable of carrying out an institutional development in accordance with the needs of the country, which will result in deficiencies in the quality of the training of their professionals, in weaknesses or deficiencies in the generation of advanced knowledge within their respective countries, and in the absence of technology transfer and outreach to the communities and citizens of their respective countries. Moreover, the scarce postgraduates, especially PhDs, will end up being attracted by universities in rich countries, where they will find more attractive opportunities for academic development and remuneration, in the absence of an adequate academic ecosystem with the necessary incentives.

Brain drain, and deficit in many HEIs, results in the perpetuation of poverty within each country and the region as a whole, even more, in the underdevelopment situations.

VI) Higher education as a commercial service

It is necessary to stay alert to the existence of interests surrounding the global higher education market, expressed in the pressures of the World Trade Organization to approve the notion of higher education as a commercial service. This threat has already been pointed out in CRES 2008 in Cartagena de Indias and in CRES 2018 in Córdoba.

4. Proposals

Based on the reviewed elements, and under the Latin American and Caribbean perspective, UDUAL proposes the following points to contribute to, and improve, the current regional higher education situation, taking into account a better quality, equality, inclusion and productivity in the development:

1. Governments shall guarantee the possibility of access and free connectivity for all students and teachers at universities.
2. Higher education policy should be a state policy to make sure that universities count on permanent sources of funding, avoiding dependence on the will of governments.
3. Governments should be proposed the assurance of multi-year budgets that offer certainty to higher education institutions (HEIs) in the medium term.
4. Financial incentives should be offered to HEIs, based on their progress in academic quality, coverage, equity and social impact actions, including funding for Sustainable Development Goals research.
5. It is necessary to promote initiatives so that States allocate resources to research made in HEIs.
6. It is essential to promote international cooperation within Latin America and the Caribbean, and with other regions of the world, in order to strengthen synergies with which we can achieve better results in technology and innovation fields.
7. It is necessary to create intergovernmental initiatives in favor of improving the quality of higher education.
8. It is important to encourage the production of high-quality information and knowledge that meets the needs of less developed regions, that offers solutions to the enormous social problems, such as poverty and inequality, and that is useful for our societies and well-being.

9. Within the framework of networks, it is necessary to generate national and regional research programs that support knowledge production in critical areas for the present and future well-being of our societies.

10. Within the framework of integration and cooperation in the region, we need to create an agency for the higher education development and its linkage with society. This agency would be financed by regional governments and managed in a tripartite way by HEIs, social organizations and governments.

Our proposals for universities are the following:

11. Universities should promote the use of technology for learning and knowledge as an ally of the education process, avoiding the imposition of models governed by electronic platforms, without losing sight of the social aspects of education.

12. Higher education institutions in Latin America and the Caribbean must integrate content related to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in the university curriculum and encourage developing actions to them.

13. Universities must encourage SDGs research.

14. It is important to create solid and inclusive strategies that favor intra-regional and inter-regional academic mobility.

15. Knowledge provided by technology and innovation should be used to expand international collaboration and cooperation.

16. Mechanisms to increase the enrollment of people with special educational needs must be created to guarantee their adequate insertion in all dimensions of higher education.

17. It is important to support regions with the greatest needs for the incorporation into higher education of more women, indigenous people, Afro-descendants and other vulnerable groups, so that no one is left behind and no region is discriminated against or excluded.

18. It is necessary to update the concept of quality in HE in order to adequately consider the social impact of universities and the new developments emerged with distance education.
19. It is urgent to develop inter-university work schemes that evaluate bianual progress and promote the close of gaps between programs, institutions, nations and regions.
20. It is important to defend university autonomy from international bodies.
21. We must prioritize the generation of useful socially knowledge that addresses problems such as poverty, health care, discrimination and inequality.
22. From the scientific and technological point of view, along with cutting-edge learning, it is essential to promote education for the future that includes universal values: empathy, respect of differences, solidarity and cooperation; that teaches caring of oneself, of others and of the environment, and that reinforces the principles of education for world citizenship.
23. It is important to value and expand the networks operations, and among HEIs networks and research centers, in order to advance in international cooperation.
24. Actions that make possible opportunities for access to higher education for migrants and refugees should be encouraged.