

INNOVATION AND THE CHALLENGE TO LATINAMERICAN UNIVERSITIES

In the current knowledge economy, innovation represents a strategic asset for enterprises in order to perform in a context of constant global changes, to insure their survival through the generation of value and, furthermore, to respond to the requirements posed in their surroundings. This situation is even more critical when we look at innovation from a regional perspective.

In this context, innovation, besides contributing to the generation of competitive advantages within the enterprises, can foster the necessary synergies for the development of the territory, where the coordination with the diverse actors becomes fundamental in view of a joint work. Here, the role of higher education institutions, particularly the universities, stands out since due to their complex nature they are in charge of training advanced human resources. These are key to participation and management of innovation processes, as well as of the creation, transference and application of knowledge.

The knowledge created in the universities, thanks to the research carried out by their professorial bodies, can be the driving force of innovation processes in the regions; particularly when they succeed in transferring them to firms and institutions of the area, a situation that leads to the coordination of the actors within the innovation system and impacts on the number of businesses that innovate.

Therefore, for universities, which declare in their mission to contribute and catalyze regional development, it becomes a fundamental challenge to be conscious of the importance of building a bi-directional relationship with the different groups of interest of their surroundings. Such relationship goes beyond the training of advanced human resources and knowledge creation. It also has to consider the requirements of continuous personnel training and updating, both in the industry as in the regional institutions. This situation is particularly relevant in the context of a regional innovation system, given that it is a phenomenon with systemic characteristics where varied actors and resources interrelate and contribute to innovation.

In the knowledge society universities not only provide for the development of the nation, but also to their immediate environment, through the establishment of the capacities needed for the innovation processes. To this end, it is indispensable

that they generate spaces where the interactions between the diverse actors involved materialize and, exchange interrelations, effective technology transfer processes and joint work in mutual benefit are facilitated. These are fundamental since said exchange is the central point of the networks that potentiate innovation.

In consequence, at the interior of the regions of the country a permanent dialogue should be encouraged between university, industry and society so as to energize the regional innovation systems. Each of these actors has a different work to do but they are complementary. It is then fundamental for universities to define strategies that allow them to converge the duties inherent to its academic chores, particularly linked to teaching and research, with the knowledge demands of the interest groups of the region. Such exchange interrelations should not leave aside the need, in some cases, to make elements belonging to the public sphere compatible with those of private organisms.

Also, the university should consider the call to be the organism capable of feedback about public policies that are defined at the level of government. It is imperative to underline the importance of considering the regional factor when defining the resources intended for the promotion of research and national development. According to the OECD, the percentage of the GIP defined as public expense in research and development was in Chile barely 0.39% in 2013, a low value compared to the median for Latin America and the Caribbean (0.82%) and in countries like Argentina (0.61%) and, in marked contrast with Brazil, that allocates 1.24% of the GIP to this end.

It thus becomes crucial to emphasize that, in order to be able to look at innovation as an effective opportunity for development in the regions, there be a consistency, both at the level of discourse and in practice, that will allow the support of regional innovation systems. This requires the definition of policies that make possible the collaboration between university and industry.

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