

## Workshop Report

**“Good practices to reduce inequalities in education and strengthen links between universities and society: Contributions of Universities in Latin America and the Caribbean and Europe to the achievement of the SDGs”**

**EU-LAC Foundation and CLACSO  
10 June 2022 in the framework of the**

**9th LATIN AMERICAN AND CARIBBEAN SOCIAL SCIENCE CONFERENCE  
Mexico City, Mexico, 07-10 June 2022**



### Introduction

On 10 June 2022, the **EU-LAC Foundation** and the **CLACSO Working Group on Politicised Social Science** organised the **Workshop “Good practices to reduce inequalities in education and strengthen links between universities and society: Contributions of Universities in Latin America and the Caribbean and Europe to the achievement of the SDGs”** in the framework of the 9th Latin American and Caribbean Conference on Social Sciences, which took place in Mexico City from 7 to 10 June 2022, at the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM).

This workshop was convened based on an understanding that one of the fundamental functions of universities has been to address global, regional and local challenges and the co-production and/or transfer of viable solutions to society, the economy and the environment. The objective

was to generate an exchange about good practices, tools and methodologies developed by Higher Education institutions in the European Union and in Latin America and the Caribbean, and to promote the creation of knowledge and practices that derive positive impacts in the framework of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Through guiding questions, the EU-LAC Foundation and CLACSO aimed to foster an inter-subjective and inter-institutional dialogue in order to recognise relevant experiences, discuss challenges in implementation and the potential transferability of these experiences, as well as share lessons learned.

The Workshop was organised in a hybrid way, at the UNAM premises and via live streaming, and consisted of an opening session with **Adrián Bonilla**, Executive Director of the EU-LAC Foundation, and **Judith Naidorf**, Independent Researcher at CONICET, Sociologist of Education, Higher Education and Pedagogy at the University of Buenos Aires (UBA); a keynote lecture given by **Daniela Perrotta**, CONICET Researcher at the University of Buenos Aires (UBA) and Secretary for Institutional Development and Linkage at the National University of the Arts (UNA) and **Axel Didriksson**, Researcher at the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM) and representative of the Global University Network for Innovation (GUNI) for Latin America and the Caribbean. In addition, three sessions were held in which practices and tools were shared on (1) governance and institutional commitment for the integration of the SDGs in university strategies; (2) learning and teaching to implement the SDGs in universities; and (3) knowledge transfer and outreach activities of universities with their environment.

The following representatives of bi-regional, regional and sub-regional academic and university organisations and networks from the European Union and Latin America and the Caribbean took part in these three sessions: **Sergio Martínez Cruz** – Director for Academic Cooperation of the National Association of Universities and Higher Education Institutions (ANUIES), **Óscar Domínguez** – Executive Director of the Colombian Association of Universities (ASCUN); President of the Latin American and Caribbean Higher Education Area (ENLACES), **Roger Armando Arias** – Representative of the Consejo Superior Universitario Centroamericano (CSUCA); Rector of the Universidad de El Salvador, **Beatriz Peluffo** – Coordinator of the Reflection Group “Science, Technology and Innovation” of the Permanent Academic Forum on Latin America and the Caribbean and the European Union (FAP-ALCUE); Dean of the Faculty of Education Sciences, Universidad de la Empresa, Uruguay, **Celso Garrido Noguera** – Secretary of the University-Business Network (FAP-ALCUE); Professor UNAM-A; Department of Economics; Founding Member and Coordinator of CLACSO's International Group on Businessmen and the State in Latin America, **John Barimo** – Creator and responsible person for the "SDG Toolkit", researcher at the Centre for the Integration of Research, Teaching and Learning, University College Cork; Representative of OBREAL Global, **Cliona Maher** – International Affairs Coordinator, University College Cork; Representative of OBREAL Global, **Aldo Blanco** – Coordinator of Concertation and Strategic Alliances, Organisation of Ibero-American States (OEI), **Félix García Lausín** – Coordinator of the Ibero-American Knowledge Space, Ibero-American General Secretariat (SEGIB) and **Roberto Escalante Semerana** – Secretary General of the Union of Latin American Universities (UDUAL).

The different sessions of the workshop were moderated by **Anna Barrera Vivero** (EU-LAC Foundation), **Ivanise Monfredini** (Pontifícia Universidade Católica de São Paulo), **Xochtil Castañeda** (University of Guadalajara), **Melisa Cuschnir** (University of Buenos Aires), **Mauro Alonso** (University of Buenos Aires, Argentina) and **Ricardo Pérez Mora** (University of Guadalajara).

This report summarises the presentations and interventions made at this workshop by the above-mentioned panellists.



## Opening

**Adrián Bonilla** opened the workshop by thanking the representatives of associations, organisations and networks from the European Union (EU), Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) and their commitment to share their experiences, challenges and options for transferring knowledge and practices that would have a positive impact on universities and the societies in which they were located in the framework of the Sustainable Development Goals. Adrián Bonilla reflected on the fragmentation of the interaction capacities between different actors in Higher Education institutions and their environments - societies, public institutions and private actors - and highlighted both the existing systemic asymmetries and the importance of questioning how we conceive the role of Higher Education and the regulation of the production and transfer of scientific knowledge.

**Judith Naidorf** mentioned that several scientists felt a certain tension regarding their capacity to intervene in public policies and actions to generate the social transformation required in today's world. In the same vein, she brought up the dichotomy that exists between dedicating oneself to science, on the one hand, and working in the areas of social transformation through militancy and politics, on the other. From their perspective, we should seek to bridge the two paths, through “politicised science”, that is, a science that is non-neutral, purposeful, non-conformist about inequalities and aims to contribute substantive input and evidence, and to establish a dialogue with both academics from other latitudes and non-academic actors, with a vision of a true co-production of knowledge.

## Keynote lectures

This session was developed with two presentations to generate trigger elements for the debate on the role of the university in the 2030 Agenda. Different dimensions were presented in order to mainstream the 2030 Agenda in universities, as well as to conceive universities as spaces to territorialise the agenda in each locality, country and region.

**Daniela Perrotta** offered a contextualisation of the negotiation, adoption and implementation of the 17 SDGs, and spoke of the important role of universities in “leaving no one behind” to achieve

sustainable development. She highlighted that universities can and must contribute to the process of building alternatives to achieve the SDG targets and generate better living conditions for our peoples. She clarified that the 2030 Agenda enables Higher Education Institutions (HEI) to take action on three levels: (i) Planning: How do we contribute to sustainable development? (ii) Narratives: How do we explain our actions based on the 2030 Agenda?; (iii) Dialogue: How do we talk to others about sustainable development? From Daniela Perrotta's perspective, “we cannot think that the 2030 Agenda is built from individualities”, and the university is precisely the institution that allows us this inter-acting dialogue. In summary, the importance of universities lies in their contributions in the field of knowledge (training, research) and in the articulation to generate alliances (linkage, transfer).

**Axel Didriksson** provided a summary of the Global University Network for Innovation (GUNI) Report “New Visions for Higher Education towards 2030”, which was presented during the Third UNESCO World Conference on Higher Education, held in Barcelona from 18 to 2022 May. The Report analyses the progress made by HEIs around the world to innovate and strengthen their role in promoting sustainable development, in fostering global and regional analysis and in producing knowledge for institutional action and public policy formulation, based on the experiences accumulated by the members of the GUNI Network. In a LAC regional context characterised by trends of change and inequality, he highlighted the necessary perspective of convergence between governmental and other institutional efforts. In this regard, he mentioned the example of the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM), which has an office that registers how the institution itself, through its research, is involved in each of the 17 SDGs. In this regard, he recommended the use of an interdisciplinary, cross-cutting perspective that is linked to national problems, so that the SDGs can be effectively achieved. Finally, he emphasised the need to transcend the aspects of internationalisation and to engage in inter-regional dialogue, without overlooking the opportunity to recognise networks as the bodies and spaces where knowledge is currently being built.

From these interventions, different university and institutional experiences of approaching the 2030 Agenda were presented in the dialogue between the participants of the workshop. All the panellists agreed in highlighting, from LAC and the EU, the importance of thinking about sustainable development in the face of global challenges in economic, social and environmental terms. This is why conceiving of the university as a human right and a public and social good is an important first step.

### **Session 1: Governance and institutional commitment for the integration of the SDGs into university strategies, policies and plans and capacity building on the SDGs**

With regard to the reflection on experiences in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda in university institutions, the representatives of bi-regional, regional and sub-regional academic and university organisations and networks from the EU and LAC who participated in the Workshop agreed on the following points:

- It is necessary to appropriate the SDGs as a central strategy for deploying all the university's missions. Universities should not lose sight of their regional and local identity, building a sense of belonging and future horizons with the communities in which they are located.

- This ownership should be coherent in institutional policies: it is not a matter of isolated efforts in certain axes or elements of university strategies, but of integrating objectives with missions in the framework of consistent policies.
- There are challenges for the articulation of the SDGs in university institutions, such as weaknesses in university management; questioning the legitimacy of universities in contexts marked by "fake news" and parallel audiences in media and social platforms; cultural barriers; and the low dissemination of the SDGs.
- Just as the SDGs articulate social, economic and environmental sustainability, it is imperative for Latin American and Caribbean countries to deploy a different economic and social growth path that does not generate and deepen inequalities.
- On this path, an “exercise in realism” should be undertaken; this implies acknowledging that the pandemic has set back some of the progress that had been made and must also include greater transparency about where we stand and how far we are from reaching the various targets.



## Session 2: Fostering learning and teaching to implement the SDGs in Higher Education Institutions

During the dialogue between workshop participants on experiences with teaching and learning for sustainable development, the following aspects were highlighted:

- The relevance of internationalised curriculum that comprehensively addresses the 2030 Agenda was highlighted.
- It was deemed necessary to prioritise inter- and transdisciplinarity in the classroom; the incorporation of the SDGs as a cross-cutting theme in all academic courses at undergraduate, graduate, and postgraduate level.
- The professional development of teachers and their training on the SDGs should be complementary and go hand in hand with the promotion of scientific research and the production of innovations.
- The question of how we relate to learners, and then how do we transform them, was raised. There was a call to promote transformative sustainable learning and to adapt learning programmes to the acquisition of values, extending the approach to groups such as future generations, indigenous peoples, among others.
- It was emphasised that learning methodologies were often found outside the classroom, and that both formal and informal learning should be taken into account.

- The importance was emphasised of incorporating into the curriculum the experience of what in Latin America and the Caribbean is conceived as “university extension”, anchored in a strong social and community commitment.
- Citizenship-building processes should be strengthened at different levels, where the global is incorporated as part of a (trans)regional or environmental citizenships.
- It was recommended to replicate activities that link representatives of universities, the productive sector, citizens, public institutions and international organisations, so as to encourage joint initiatives in which the SDGs are materialised, research, training, and dissemination of the SDGs.
- Emphasis was also placed on the systemic nature of the subject matter, which is closely linked to the changing times: beyond the acquisition of competences, the process should be conceived as a transformation of the very meaning of higher education. In this sense, attention was drawn to the need to recode the “what we educate for”.



### **Session 3: Knowledge transfer and activities linking universities with their environment (society, private sector, environment).**

In the framework of the third axis of the workshop, on knowledge transfer and outreach, the participants agreed to recognise these complex and polysemic activities as a fundamental part of the social function of the university and the higher education system. In this way, all of them enunciated diverse options for linkage and transfer practices, such as the production of patents, the creation of start-ups, spin-offs, participation in the territory, contribution to the design of public policies, etc. Given the complexity of the definition of what is understood by knowledge transfer and networking, the panellists highlighted some challenges and pending issues to be addressed in order to promote the development of greater spaces for university-society interfaces:

- Need for precision on these activities and actions: It would be desirable for each institution to be able to define what kind of activities it carries out and for these to be recognised as such, so that both the development and promotion of these activities

have a bottom-up criterion that is derived from the concrete actions that the institutions carry out.

- Need for appropriate evaluation criteria: In close dialogue with the above, the need for these practices to be ranked in the hierarchy must be accompanied by recognition for those who carry them out, in terms of the evaluation of the careers of academics and institutions. Certainly, this is still a challenge for the institutions in our regions.
- Need for specific funding: One of the most significant challenges in the development of outreach and transfer actions is the funding required for their development. Given that these actions involve more complex processes as they derive from the necessary participation of agents outside university faculties, access to specific funding to sustain this type of practice over time is a significant constraint.

## Summary

Based on the interventions and presentations of the representatives of bi-regional, regional, and sub-regional academic and university organisations, associations and networks from the EU and LAC the Workshop “Good practices to reduce inequalities in education and strengthen links between universities and society: Contributions of Universities in Latin America and the Caribbean and Europe to the achievement of the SDGs” allowed to articulate reflections, advances, and replicable practices with a view to linking universities with society and their potential to generate systemic transformations, favouring sustainable development, addressed in its different dimensions in the 2030 Agenda. Despite a difficult context, marked by the Covid-19 pandemic, structural inequalities in our societies and an increasingly palpable impact of climate change on our societies, it was made clear that universities are extremely important actors in achieving the SDGs, taking into account that education is a *sine qua non* tool to transform lives, promote social mobility and build citizenship; that one of the key functions of universities is to generate relevant knowledge; and that one of its key competencies resides in the generation of ing partnerships, i.e. to fulfil SDG 17. It was also stressed that governments in both regions need to recognise the contributions of universities to the SDGs and the need for stable and solid sources of funding to continue with this mission.

**Link to Conference website:** <https://www.clacso.org/clacso2022/>

*The EU-LAC Foundation and the CLACSO Working Group on Politicised Social Science would like to express their gratitude to the participants and their contributions to this Workshop, which was convened in the framework of the 9th Latin American and Caribbean Conference on Social Sciences, at UNAM, Mexico City.*

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