



## “Higher Education as a Generator of Knowledge and Innovation”

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From 1990 the European Union and its member States have had significant presence in the region of Latin America and the Caribbean and from then on a firm partnership has been created on the basis of shared values, a relationship that led to the creation of the European Union-Latin America and the Caribbean Foundation (EU-LAC Foundation). The Central American University Confederation, made up of the 24 public universities of Central America and the Dominican Republic, by means of the Central American Higher Education Council (CSUCA), greatly values the opportunity given to us by this Foundation, so that the universities of the eight countries which are members of it can develop and fulfil their role in the society of the region. By this means various different projects have been initiated, thus reinforcing the internationalisation of higher education in the region and contributing to the development of systems of higher education, as representatives between member institutions and their respective governments.

This is why I wish to share with you some reflections and criteria I consider relevant because of their essence and content, which enable us to have a general view of the current regional and world scene in the various social, political, cultural and environmental orders; where universities play a substantial major role in the journey towards the transforming mission of social thought and human activity, since as ECLAC pointed out in 2016, in Latin America and the Caribbean, one of the necessary foundations for social and economic change is “to guarantee education that is inclusive, fair and of high quality”. Its essential contribution lies in the development of skills that

will enable the region, its countries and its citizens to act with relevance in complex scenarios and to take part effectively in a global dynamic based on knowledge, where internationalisation must advocate international cooperation based on a firm relationship between equals.

Slow economic growth world-wide, social inequalities and environmental damage are characteristics of our current reality and present unprecedented challenges, yet at the same time they represent opportunities to work in a collaborative and inter-institutional way for the regional and international community. We are indeed facing a new era: the option of continuing with the same models is no longer viable, meaning we must transform the current development paradigm into one that will take us down the road of inclusive, sustainable development, with a clear view of the short, medium and long term.

We must recognise that knowledge is the product of the intellectual and experiential heritage of humanity, this being a common asset and one generally in the public domain. The epistemic breakdown referred to implies that we need to recognise the strategic role of culture in the process of producing knowledge with social commitment.

It is therefore relevant to reconsider the social function of science and knowledge in guaranteeing environmental sustainability, peace, liberty, cultural diversity, democracy, human co-existence and the reproduction of life. The priority is to generate knowledge and democratise access to it and its use and benefit as a shared public resource.



This means that higher education is the joint creator of knowledge and innovation, turning these, as knowledge linked to social practices, into tools of intellectual independence, social transformation and the construction of fairer, more equitable and supportive political structures (this is the over-riding rationale of the Sustainable Development Goals).

We might say that our societies are today experiencing and being affected by countless conflicts that afflict us, which have acquired such importance and magnitude that humanity has begun to perceive that the real wealth, the authentic capital, of the twenty-first century does not reside in its financial capacity, nor in the possession of resources, but in knowledge and the construction of collective thinking. "From this point of view, knowledge in general and specifically its generation, transmission and application, constitute the best investment for the whole of society, as this holds the key to its development, mobility and stability". Education therefore acquires a transcendent and absolute role in any national project, because of the values it nurtures, the horizons it opens up and the growth it encourages.

From the field of activity of the CSUCA and its corresponding Fourth Plan for the Regional Integration of Higher Education in Central America and the Dominican Republic, PIRESC IV, relating to the integration programme of the substantive functions of university and the University-Society-State relationship, there are major objectives, lines of action and indicators, inviting us to carry out systematic and collaborative work within and outside of the universities. For example, we must formulate and execute a plan of action with goals and indicators, starting from a baseline to take decisions in terms of the internationalisation of higher education, beginning with reinforcing the international relations offices of each university, so that they can contribute in an effective, efficient and appropriate way. International and intercultural skills must likewise be defined and incorporated into university curricula, encouraging university mobility, creating and developing regional and international academic networks to facilitate such exchanges; defining and promoting innovative strategies of internationalisation.

In conclusion, we can say that for CSUCA to work jointly with the EU-LAC Foundation constitutes an important tool to

transform higher education, strengthen its communities and promote quality and relevance in teaching, research and outreach. This also favours the training of citizens and professionals who will respect cultural diversity, be committed to intercultural understanding and a culture of peace, and be able to live and work together in the local and global community.