

Letter from the Director

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Research and doctorate degrees are increasingly recurrent issues in the academic scenario, and with every reason. It seems that after a long lethargic period, we came to realize the gap in, and the lack of, doctorate degrees and consequently, the nonexistent or scarce research in Colombian universities.

Through many years, we faced that slogan of “let others do the research” stated once by the famous chancellor of the Universidad de Salamanca.

According to recent data, Colombia has 90 doctorate programs, a number undeniably dominated by public universities, that is, Nacional de Colombia, Antioquia and Valle, a circumstance that evidently favors Bogotá, Medellín and Cali. This situation reflects, in turn, the country’s scarcity of doctorate-level graduates, estimated in 2.3 per million inhabitants in Colombia. And if one wonders about the magnitude of such reduced number, the case of Brazil can serve the purpose of comparison. This country graduated 9 thousand doctors in 2007, while Colombia only reached 56 in the same period.

There is another relevant item: in Colombia, research in human and social sciences dominates by far that of hard, exact sciences. Every day, we learn about new discoveries in biology, chemistry, physics and their applications on medicine, genetics, new pharmaceutical products, electronics, new materials, and the related effect on patents, quality of life and the economy in general.

Somehow, more developed countries link the number of doctorate graduates with high technological levels, based on scientific knowledge.

Regarding patents, I.B.M. alone registered more than 25.000 patents between 1993 and 2003. Closer to us, México presented 173 patents in 2007, while Colombia only did 31, and a more aggregated figure indicates that over 39 years –1968 to 2007– “it was found that 711 patents had a Colombian owner”. (Google, Patent search).

Mr. Jaime Restrepo Cuartas –Member of the Chamber of Representatives and former chancellor of Universidad de Antioquia–, pointed out recently that “Colombia displays in general an incipient

development because we have a commodity-based economy. Here we grow bananas, plantain, flowers, among others, but we do not add value to any of these products, because there is no research. That is why vast poverty and inequity prevail”.

And Mr. Felix Londoño, Director of research and teaching at Eafit, states: “one country is described as more developed than other, and the question is: What is the difference? The answer is that one has created more knowledge than the other, has more patents and, thanks to them, has created more products and developments”.

A deeper analysis into Colombia’s research situation –knowledge creation–, shows that only around 30, of the 90 current doctorate programs, do research on hard sciences, the ones that actually generate technological development.

Thus, research displays a distinctive imbalance toward human and social sciences, though their importance is not in question.

Research in human and social sciences strengthens values, sets social criteria, destroys prejudices, offers guiding principles to society. Without the deep understanding of humanism, the best discoveries and developments would turn into counterproductive solutions for society.

We find the best example in genetic engineering’s developments, which without a profound knowledge on ethics will end up leading society to an unknown abyss.

Therefore, while acknowledging the importance of this type of research, we still miss more balance in applied knowledge, to solve the many problems related to competitiveness, efficiency, technological development, and even quality of life.

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