

Public university: autonomy and democracy

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Abstract: Public universities, as institutions of the Mexican state endowed with academic and administrative autonomy derived from the 3rd constitutional article, section VII, represent the consequence of a collegiate ideal in favor of progress to fulfill a socio-cultural function, which must be guided by axiological values and principles, which form the university's *raison d'être*, supposing a number of responsibilities for those who benefit from said universities. Thus, the collegiate democracy is a relevant topic, since the possession of autonomous governing bodies in these institutions is a right conferred by the Supreme Law, with the possibility that the internal government, and consequently the election of its directors, is ruled by a structure and mechanisms of operation appropriate to and in accordance with collegiate life, without these mechanisms being lent to popular choice and demagogues who dilute the spirit and goals of these institutions.

Key words: university, autonomy, democracy, government, public university, law.

Resumen: Las universidades públicas, como instituciones del Estado mexicano dotadas de autonomía académica y administrativa derivada del artículo 3º constitucional en su fracción VII, representan la consecución de un ideal universitario a favor del progreso al cumplir una función sociocultural, que debe ser orientada por valores y principios axiológicos que fundamenten su razón de ser, suponiendo un conjunto de responsabilidades para quienes se benefician de ellas. De esta forma la democracia universitaria es un asunto relevante, ya que el autogobierno en estas instituciones es un derecho que confiere la Ley Suprema con la posibilidad de que el gobierno interno y, por consiguiente, la elección de sus titulares se rijan por una estructura y mecanismos de operación propios y afines a la vida universitaria, sin que estos mecanismos se presten a sistemas de elección populistas y demagogos que diluyan el espíritu y fin de estas instituciones.

Palabras clave: universidad, autonomía, democracia, universidad pública, derecho.

Introduction

The present article aims to state the origin and meaning of the Mexican public university, to establish accurately the historical guidelines that enabled its autonomy and to reflect on its democratic processes which allowed the free election of its authorities and determine its destiny as society's critical conscience.

Public Universities are institutions of the Mexican State provided with academic and administrative autonomy, fulfilling the function that the Constitution assigns to it as a guidance of the education of the country, recognizing, respecting and promoting, due to this autonomy, a free, creative and critical spirit. They are endowed with public resources provided by the society through their representatives in an explicit act in favor of education; this is done since these are laic and public spaces that promote science and culture, offering educational options for the Mexican youth, they also are a primal element for social mobility to transform the country.

Public universities have their origin in different historic moments, from the oldest instance, such as the Real y Pontificia Universidad de Mexico in the colonial period, the National Autonomous University of Mexico (Universidad Nacional Autonoma de Mexico, UNAM) founded by Justo Sierra and the always valuable Scientific and Literary Institutes of Oaxaca and Toluca in the XIX century, institutions wherefrom the public universities would be born.

Their presence in the Mexican juridical system arrives with delay to their practical existence, since, in fact, higher education institutions fulfilled their mission on a free, and semi-independent environment, even before the explicit concession of autonomy on the third article of the constitutional text, having as an antecedent the autonomist movements that made the 1929 National University law possible, and which served as a model for a struggling process in favor of autonomy for the rest of them, which were slowly endowed with this principle, due to a decision made by federal and local legislations, respectively.

Autonomous universities by law, represent the consecution of an ideal in favor of progress by accomplishing a socio-cultural function: building the values, principles and aspirations that a society expects to achieve through education, and produce professional individuals, researchers and academicians, endowing the social context with highly qualified practitioners.

Universities make a substantial and practical contribution to society, by generating and disseminating knowledge, with which they contribute to produce and reinforce the analysis and criticisms towards nature, society and State, promoting attitudes of support, inquiry, dissidence and rejection according to the cultural, social, economical and political demands of our times.

Public university assumes the claim of imparting universal, free of charge and mandatory education, as a right for everybody with no distinction of beliefs, race or economic position. Education is conceived as a condition that promotes freedom, allows access to superior forms of employment, income, wellbeing and productivity, opening channels for social participation and access to public spaces.

The public university: a cultural phenomenon

Few institutions have manage to survive so strongly to the convulsions that agitate human life, few have persisted with a certain, clear and primal purpose; surviving through revolutions, obstinacies, conflicts – internal and external-, divisions and now lack of resources, prestige losses, massification and many operational difficulties. Let us consider the universities as the central institution of educational life in Mexico; its fruits and generations have forged the national life.

To think of the university is to locate a common space for hundreds of thousands of Mexicans, who participate inside their university communities, in an active or passive way, on a national or local level, constantly, through education, research or dissemination of culture, a vision that has its origins in the medieval past, which enters into modernity and expands its possibilities, facing the significant changes the world experienced, up to our days as a bastion of freedom and pluralism.

The university genesis, written on the life of the very countries, transits as an invaluable fountain of freedom, creation and community. Forging a neutral space, privileged places and headquarters of knowledge, which gather every vision, proposal and action for a collective benefit. To think about said campus is to look back at the ancient *studium generale*, which was understood as a space with proper facilities to study, and which brought together students from different parts of the world.

Such an idea of corporation, called *universitas*, which agglutinated a determinate number of members to achieve certain purposes, sees in *universitas magistrorum* and in *universitas scholarium* the most fructiferous and perdurable medieval corporation (Tamayo,1987:110), obtaining a predominant place in history.

The development of universities across Western Europe after the Enlightenment century configures two general models of organization: on the one hand the Anglo-Saxon, which builds teaching centers as a product of a private initiative and subject to market rules, apart from the State sphere; and on the other hand, the Napoleonic system, in which university functions are part of the State as another gamut of the services the State provides, subject to certain control and with a peculiar relationship between university and State.

The original model with worldwide projections incorporates into our continent with adaptations, adjustments and movements proper to it; it becomes a part of society and culture, developing a particular history with its own modalities and particular capacities. This model unifies in the same vision both State and university, sharing a higher purpose: the education of society.

The university is born as a conscience space which can very well be defined as an idealized field where progressives, scientists, creators and dreamers, who project the concept of an ideal community based on freedom, tolerance and reason, have a place. "It is conceived and acts according to an educational ideal or *paideia*, an emancipating spiritual power. It is assumed as the headquarter of reason, of the pursuit of truth for a culture community" (Kaplan, 2002: 152-153).

According to Alain Touraine, we call university an establishment which protects and integrates three functions: production, transmission and utilization of knowledge (Touraine, 2002: 535), such institution has the mission of designing the learning and teaching processes of a society, educating its generations becoming a space for research which creates and organizes the proposals of the community; an entity where professors, researchers and students coexist in an space of tradition and constant renovation.

Regulated by the State which emerges from the popular will through legislators, it is a particular organization with its own schemas, methods and rules, which articulates its internal life and legitimates it in order to achieve its purposes; moreover, it represents a peculiar community, due to the fact that it synthesizes social diversity in the name of a higher project with the spirit of improving society, promoting: a) the production of knowledge through research; b) the instruction of scientific knowledge through the development of professionals; c) the application of science through actions of social benefit; and d) dissemination and outreach as elements that unite and identify it with society.

University autonomy: a process of fight and conquest

The definition of autonomy implies some matters of juridical, economical, academic, social and political order. Autonomy does not only imply the "power which inside the State, municipalities, provinces, regions or other entities can exercise, to rule peculiar interests of their internal life, through norms and government organs of their own" (Diccionario de la Real Academia, 2007: 201). This generic conception translates in specific determination when considering the normative context in which it is applied, such as the ambits to which it materially, personally or territorially relates; therefore, it is usual to talk about autonomy of will, municipal autonomy, action autonomy, and the autonomy of the Federal Electoral Institute (*Instituto Federal Electoral*, IFE), among others (Rodan, 2002: 250).

Autonomy is originated in the juridical exercise of an entity, which demands the central power to delegate functions, attributions and responsibilities, instances molded in positive law that creates and articulates it. It comes from an ample, complex and not free of contradiction process, starting with the idea that, even when it originates in law, its practical application was marked by the figure of administrative decentralization, still being considered as auxiliary organisms of the State.

The idea that university must be governed and regulated by itself is the essence of university autonomy. Autonomy is the faculty possessed by universities to govern themselves, to have their own norms in the frame of their organic law, to designate their own authorities, and to determine their own plans and programs inside the principle of freedom of teaching, research and to freely administrate their patrimony. These ideas can be summarized in words by Dr. Carpizo: “The idea of autonomy has its foundation on the fact that culture cannot be developed but in the sphere of freedom” (Carpizo, 1982: 647-648).

Among the antecedents of university autonomy in Mexico, we find decree 2, dated on October 5th, 1917, which recognized some autonomous aspects to Universidad Michoacana de San Nicolas de Hidalgo and, likewise, decree 106, 1923, from local legislature in the case of the Autonomous University of San Luis Potosi, even though such decrees were not integrally fulfilled. A significant fact is the endowment of autonomy to the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM) in 1929, which marks a substantive step in the university education life in Mexico.

The peak of the fight for autonomy, which allows us to determine the autonomous role of universities in a constitutional way, takes place on 9th July 1980 when the principle of autonomy was raised at constitutional level, adding a fraction to the third article of the fundamental law, which points out the purposes of universities and higher education institutions: educate, research and disseminate culture, and this proposes must be fulfilled according to the principles established in the same article, this is to say, in a democratic, national way, with social conscience, according to human dignity, promoting love to the nation and international solidarity conscience regarding independence and justice.

In this constitutional article autonomy is recognized, and in its application and scopes through laws which create and regulate universities. A higher education institution will be autonomous or not according to what the law decrees, which supposes the existence of universities that enjoy total autonomy, such as the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM), Metropolitan Autonomous University (*Universad Autonoma Metropolitana*, UAM), the Autonomous University of

the State of Mexico (*Universidad Autónoma del Estado de México*, UAEMex) and other educational centers which, as decentralized organisms, will depend heavily on the governmental sphere. Another example of this would be technological universities which have had a considerable increment over the last few years.

It is important to stop in the university autonomy postulates marked by the fundamental law – fraction VII of the third constitutional article-, given that the possibilities of this norm derive from the attributions conferred to higher education institutions. Said fraction establishes that those universities, to which autonomy has been granted, will have the faculty and responsibility of self-government, achieving their own educational, research and cultural dissemination purposes according to the principles (general purposes)¹ and criteria,² respecting –as a mandatory condition- academic freedom, research, free examination and discussion of ideas.

Prior to the constitutionalization of university autonomy are the ordinary laws, such as the *Universidad de San Nicolás de Hidalgo* Michoacán in 1917, and on its moment the law which provided with autonomy to the National University in 1929. Nevertheless, their redefinition on the juridical ambit is presented in the reform to the third article of the Federal Constitution in 1980, which establishes a new form of organization for the management of functions in autonomous organs.

For the university, autonomy implies a series of diverse-ambit affairs, which might change according to the circumstances of the place where it is located, historical heritage and instrument towards the future from different optics, for instance, Dr. García Maynez (quoted on García Ramírez, 2005: 3), pointed out that there are two natural inclinations to understand university autonomy: the ethical one as an attribute of desire, and the juridical one as a subjective right, i.e., as a dimension of values and aspirations of the university being, which at the same time is an endowed right with juridical consequences.

According to Carlos Monsivais (2004: 10), autonomy has had determined definitions according to certain moments of crisis: a) capacity of self-government; b) formal or real independency before the State; c) extra-territoriality by rejecting the entrance of police and army to the university campuses; d) academic and research freedom; e) foster of academic, artistic and cultural freedom, which proves the amplitude of the term connotation.

¹ Contained in the second paragraph of the 3rd article: develop harmonically every faculty of the human being; fomenting love to the nation, independence and justice; fomenting international conscience and solidarity

² Located in the second fraction, based on the results of scientific progress, national democracy and that it contributes to the improvement of human coexistence.

It has also been wrongly considered as the constitution of a State inside the State, the imposition of a determined group over the common interest. This is the perspective of some groups, which understand it, according to Guevara Niebla, “as an isolation and separation, where the only concern is the free intervention of external forces, especially those of the government”, generating, therefore, a confusion between autonomy and extra-territoriality, expressed on a perspective of “a separate world, without any responsibilities, either with society or the State” (Guevara, 2007: 9).

Let us consider autonomy as that capacity of self-government, understood as a guarantee for freedom and intellectual creativity in order to guide and vitalize culture. This implies a particular capacity and a distance facing the external impertinence regarding internal life, it is a guarantee where the autonomous subject, the public university, can demand, exercise and protect its autonomy and its power of decision and conduction (Garcia Ramirez, 2005: 111). It is an attitude and a conviction opposite internal factors that could aspire to the uniformity, control over the direction or the elitist monopoly of university destiny. Autonomy is defended before alien powers that could limit the exercise of its primal functions.

From the constitutional framework, autonomy is understood as a right of the university and as a social guarantee of the citizens, it is a principle that must guide the attitudes, values and behaviors of the university community, supposing a combination of responsibilities from the part of those who are benefited from it. It means a total respect for the State towards the forms of organization and particular governments, and the fulfillment of its supreme values, such as academic and research freedom, creation and patrimony administration; it is, in the end, a tacit agreement among the university people in order to live with freedom and responsibility.

Autonomy means a “part of the battle of the Mexican people to achieve its scientific liberty, to be able to form professionals, technicians and researchers that their development require, and to preserve, renovate and enrich their culture, extending it to broader sectors of the population” (Soberon, 1979), representing an space for freedom of thought, which qualifies the very essence of the university.

To lose autonomy by subordinating before some groups or interests, political culture or ideology, is, in the opinion of Dr. Garcia Ramirez (2005) a limit to freedom. The behavior of teachers or students as for expression, information and criticism must be wide, since subjection to a unilateral ideological orientation in educational matters signifies the factual suppression of the effective exercise of freedom and rights, guaranteed by the law.

As pointed out by former UNAM president De la Fuente (2004:54), “universities are the best counterbalance we have for *pensée unique*, and they constitute the best instrument from which we dispose to attack the, increasingly concerning, fundamentalisms, either they are, economical, ethnical or religious”. For the university community assuming its historical commitment of defending autonomy, which is at the same time to defend the public autonomous university represents the possibility of conserving the university values that give us an origin, direction and sense.

University Democracy: a road, where to?

The idea of democracy is present in the essence of society, in its nature and echoing are recurrent subjects for thinkers and writers; historically, it means “the group of regulations, whose observance is necessary in order to have an effective distribution of the political power between the largest portion of citizens and on the other hand, the ideal by which a democratic government should be inspired, which is that of equality” (Bobbio, 2000: 39 and 40).

We understand democracy as the form in which society is politically articulated, which gives it meaning as a government form. In the same way, for Sanchez Bringas and Carbonell (2002) it supposes the existence of certain institutions, arrangements and minimal practices that build an ideal model upon which political power is achieved.

For Sartori (1999: 4) there is a normative democracy and an ideal democracy, in the former the indispensable frameworks for political coexistence are established, and in the latter, the ideal by which society should be guided; this means, on the one hand, ideals and on the other, facts. For Alejandro Goic from the University of Chile, democracy “implies an agreement of the members of society on the bases upon which common life must rest”, understanding it as “a way of effective civic and secular faith in freedom” (Goic, 19998: 2).

We can distinguish two general types of democracy, a formal democracy and a substantial democracy; the first one is associated with a political structure and a juridical regime- the government from the people and for the people; and the second one possesses a broader sense, joined by ideal motives to conduct and orient life in society, before which we can say that democracy is not limited to a matter of electoral urns pure and plain, but it represents a *set of principles* that articulates personal life and provides a guarantee for social development in the collective life of the individuals.

Democracy must be a system of life that goes beyond confrontation of citizen participation in the urns, confrontation of parties and the celebration of elections; in the university environment it must be treated from the substantial point of view, without disregarding the fact that the idea of a university, based on the interest of society, must respond not to political interests, but to the “economical, social and cultural improvement” which is established by our (Mexican) third constitutional article.

In universities, democracy must not be understood solely as electoral criteria, where, perverted by the traditional political forms, power is pursued inside the classrooms or extinguished in the exercise of the mere popular election; it corresponds to a decisional sense of a higher extension and possibilities than those of the elective, since it is a greater responsibility in virtue of pursuing higher purposes than the political representative, namely teaching, researching and disseminating knowledge and culture.

Democracy and autonomy at university should not be seen as the inclusion of the institution into the dynamics of political ideologies. That would mean the contamination of the academic world of the ideological positioning and the postulates of the parties; it would be perverted by systems and mechanisms of power distribution. Breaking the balance between professional and scientific affinities, which serve as the foundation of internal relationships in the teaching centers, by new alliances of an ideological or political type pursuing power.

The growing importance of public universities makes them a target of political interests, being the field and object of ideological and political competition, where it is seen as a battle field and loot for particular interest for those groups with power, or those who aspire to attain it.

Allowing this would mean the insertion of the university into the public debate arena as merely another element, and not from the privileged position it has as an actor respected by society and indispensable for its development, which seeks to provide answers (positive, negative or alternative) to society, where groups and institutions can go to the *alma mater* to state problems and receive proposals and solutions from it, giving academic and eminently scientific opinions.

The institution cannot isolate itself from the problems of society, many of them of political and conflictive nature. Doing this would be turning its back on society, we cannot understand autonomy as an argument to abstract ourselves in crystal castles. – As said by Raymond Aron-, cloistering ourselves in a sphere of neutrality and indifference for these problems.

Due to its own nature, the public university is an atypical institution among political organizations, given that its purposes and objectives alienate it from the traditional environment of struggles and conflicts generated; this allows it to study, ponder and debate scientifically in its core the phenomena that impact social reality. Nonetheless, the university is an institution that must not produce militants, partisans or sect members, but it should be a social space which makes an effort to endow its members with the best theoretical and scientific instruments which will allow them to appreciate the world with total tolerance and unite creatively and with tolerance in the socio-cultural diversity.

Even before the democratic waves of the late XX century the university exerted a high level of intern democracy, which was reflected in the university movements looking for autonomy, the constant battle for academic freedom, the aperture as a space for cultural dissemination and even for the struggle against authoritarianism during the turbulent year of 1968, all of the above are expressions of an aspiration for democracy beyond a simple agreement and allotment of power.

These struggles are the best symbolism to understand our public universities as nurseries of democracy, by allowing freedom of speech and plural concurrence of ideas. Democracy is an aspiration that is practiced in everyday life, heeding superior principles that are common to us, in the same way as a body that fraternally accomplishes its purposes, without the need of confronting or segregating the opposer.

The capacity of consent, agreement and denial that has made the development of knowledge possible is based upon the democratic postulate, which authorizes every integrant of the community to assume, with responsibility, and in the exercise of their rights, the commitment of qualified higher education, aiming their energies, not towards the struggle, but towards transformation and creation.

The university is an institutional space, unique in its type, where the functioning dynamics have introduced into its structures participation models, in which every sector of the community is part of its governing structures; which is demonstrated in the constitution of the fundamental components of the university authority, by collegiate bodies (University Council or Government board) and the debate and approval of a considerable part of the fundamental decisions.

Considering the current problems in the agitated political life of our country; the public university is the representation of a particular model of democracy. An instance that does not belong to any regime, political party, social class or economic group in the pursuit of political domination, its purposes are considered, in the university life consent as an instrument at the service of society. It is an institution

that represents the spirit of society to accomplish, by means of study and reflection, better courses for development. Because of this, its functions imply criticizing of those excesses in the exercise of power of governments and political parties, and to stand by the dearest interests of society.

University democracy is a relevant issue since the idea of self-government of autonomous public universities is decreed by the law as a constitutional right which grants them the possibility of an internal structure with government faculties and the consequent election of their representatives, and, at the same time, it is a guarantee, because it preserves autonomy by limiting the access of external agents as for decision making.

Democracy in public universities must be understood as a process that supposes “a rational articulation, constructive harmony, not free from discrepant stances” (Zavalza, 2002: 74-75), subject to quotidian plebiscite –beyond elections- from the university community, to conduct academic and administrative life, where the internal government is ruled by their own structures and mechanisms.

From the formal point of view, democracy, as an instrument for the exercise of power, aiming to procure a common well, based upon popular sovereignty to define their political destiny through citizen participation in political decisions through vote, with the consequential election of popular representatives, who are periodically replaced. It integrates at the same time, the separation of powers, freedom of speech, association and formation of political parties, elements which according to our juridical ordainment, structure the actual sense of democracy.

The end of the “political society” is the welfare of the collectivity, where education plays a transcendent role, which in a certain way is aimed at the university as a specific target, in order to cultivate, transmit and disseminate knowledge and culture; which leads us to infer that in such a strict sense, the particular function of the institution does not consist in articulating policies destined to satisfy social needs, as it is performed by the State, however its educational product contributes to it, which constitutes the difference between what the “political society” and the “university society” pursuit.

Regarding the “university society”, understood as a total entity, the attainment of its purposes is exclusively related to the educational spectrum, a way through which it contributes to the education, with the formation and generation of knowledge, which in consequence has social effects.

This past reflection is supported by Garcia Ramirez (2005: 115), when he refers to this university society as “a product and guarantee of the internal social pact between the integrants of the very community, which at the same time is a part of the external social pact, between the national community and the university

community”, dividing the university into two fields: first, that of the educational purpose itself (highest principle), and second, that of social responsibility.

Unlike “political society”, “university society” is constituted by clearly defined elements, which possess rights and obligations, corresponding to the academicians, students or workers, as everyone of them takes up a role and a responsibility, according to their rights and chores, something that is not appreciated in the “political society” due to the plurality of objects and interests.

Another important characteristic of the “university society” is the eminent academic character of the integrants of the community, who are linked by a conviction to the activity in their house of studies, with a definite vocation and an belonging spirit, to which the characteristic of temporary permanence of the students is added.

In order to achieve this mission, the institution practices “knowledge democracy”, through which it organizes its internal life subjected to academic criteria, based on experience, intellectual and docent capacity, ethical values and creating practices, based upon rules established by itself, which exalt antecedents in performance and productivity and are judged by their peers, i.e., by the community itself. In essence, this process is democratic, as it was originated from the sovereign collectivity, which determines the requirements and conditions of eligibility, determined by qualitative and intellectual criteria, and not by race, beliefs, wealth, social status or ideology.

These considerations – intellectual qualities and dispositions– vest the university in a series of characteristics, different from those of the general model of political society, given that in the latter every citizen has the right to political participation, to elect or be elected in equalitarian voting. In the university community, not every member has a similar hierarchy or the same responsibilities and obligations, or possesses the same right to elect or be elected.

In academic life it is not necessary to practice electoral rights through the mediation of political parties, or agents that represent and lead the opinion of the university community and thereby aspire to political power. Here the concept of participation is wider and more substantial than the simple right to vote, since, every member practices their rights with absolute independence from their peers, those who represent and those who exercise authority. There is an implied mutual agreement in favor of knowledge, culture, intellect and morals over ideological preferences or beliefs of its members, looking for the conquest of knowledge, not the conquest of power.

By forming a part of the community, university people must, up until certain point, give up their political activism while in the house of studies, which means

to abandon ideological preferences. This way, in the exercise of their autonomy, public universities, as decreed by the law, must generate the highest participation around them, guaranteeing transparency, at the same time as their government is exercised by academicians, according to what the law itself establishes, with the intention of protecting the fulfillment of its purposes and principles.

The pursuit of harmonic coexistence between the members does not imply that the concept of popular sovereignty should be abolished, through universal vote, nor the particular modalities of participation of the political society. It must not be limited or considered with a different status to the other members of the community, or to isolate a certain group from the responsibilities of university conduction. Thanks to the collegial and representative vision based upon attitudes and knowledge, the government of universities is on the hands of people in the university with trajectory and pertinence, and are capable of synthesizing in concrete projects the aspirations of their community.

The knowledge community cannot be regulated by demagogical and populist formulas; the power of decision must rest upon those who are already formed as academicians. In the national public university spectrum the populist forms of election have been relegated in their laws and statutes. These formulas only lead to underdevelopment and degradation of the purposes for which the universities were created. Only four universities in Mexico still resort to universal suffrage for the selection of their uni-personal authorities: Antonio Narro Autonomous Agrarian University, Benito Juárez Autonomous University of Oaxaca, the Autonomous University of Coahuila and the Autonomous University of Guerrero.

According to Gilberto Guevara Niebla (2007: 8), philosophy professor at UNAM and leader of the 1968 student movement, to talk about autonomy is not a political but a deontological matter: “true university autonomy is that which is founded on the operations of self-regulation, but rejecting neither the market nor the State”, this is why the foundations of autonomy should not be looked for in the law or regulations, but in the attitudes, values and behaviors of university students”(Guevara Niebla, 2007: 8).

This vision is re-enforced by UNAM former president, Pablo Gonzales Casanova, when he affirms that university members (himself included) must struggle “for the organization of the university self-government according to its universal and national objectives, proving autonomy to its groups of work in the scientific and humanistic, technical and artistic areas, in order to achieve the highest level of creation and intelligence”; this, according to the distinguished university member, “without mistaking discipline for authoritarianism or university democracy for the democracy from the few, with the few and by the few, but with respect from

every university member for the law, they have established themselves in order to achieve the objectives of the university” (Casanova, 2004).

We ask ourselves if maybe changing the election system would be better for the interests of the institution, because traditionally it has implied a tiring, expensive (in terms of internal division), intense, because during the campaign process, resources and attention are neglected. In the end everybody losses because of the divisions it generates and the payment of bills, where the winning candidate is subject to the interests of those who supported him. Wouldn't it be more pertinent to create a trio and submit it to the Honourable University Council to analyze the pertinence of one or another candidate who may develop the government plan of each academic organism? In fact this is not a new procedure and has been applied in many high-standard universities.

We can observe that universities such as UNAM or UAM prescribe in their rules, certain representation mechanisms, in an indirect way and which decision is taken by notable groups (Government Board or Academic Panel), who propose to the rector or their principal bodies, in a responsible way, and academic hue, the ideal applicants to direct these autonomous entities. There are some cases, such as that of UNAM, who practice re-election in order to prevent the university from devoting much attention to the internal election processes, which have been seen in national results, are not the correct way for the quality of these *sui generis* institutions. This the reason why we underline that the national tendency should be directed towards the proscription of granting privilege to access these responsibilities of the academic tendency rather than the political one. Universities, in their current dynamics must enter into to processes which include quality, competitiveness and pertinence, and do not intermingle in false panaceas that in the last sixty years have been offered by the so-called “popular universities”. It is precise to observe the phenomenon that recently occurred with the transformation of the law of the Autonomous University of Sinaloa, an institution, which, observed for several years, a “democracy” model, and after recently modifying their law, must take on the challenge of a modern and university feasible in national environment?

Due to the central role that public university plays, it attracts the interests of those who with the purpose of fulfilling their particular objectives, mostly political, conceive it as an space for confrontation, which could produce negative effects such as limiting academic freedom and research, the practice of reason, thought and knowledge; in a way that our universities would lose part of their moral and spiritual authority before society, values which constitute the base of its prestige, and the highest guarantee of autonomy.

The university is an academic institution, not a political institute, where academic life has its own rules and values; if these are lost or mixed, creation finishes; we the people in university rather than confronting each other over power, must occupy ourselves in the pursuit of academic excellence, the negotiation of more public resources and the creation of new financial sources, in views of modernizing our infrastructure and endowing our community with greater and better educational services.

The ultimate aim of the Mexican university, according to Justo Sierra, must be to study the Mexican problems and necessities and contribute to solve them. By and large, higher education is referred to in economical terms, and ethical communities rarely exist, and when they do exist, they are seldom concerned about maintaining the validity of principles such as freedom, honesty, dialogue, self-demand and national commitment. That is why we must reflect on the values, principles, attitudes and purposes that the university has; by defending its autonomy, we defend its *raison d'être*.

Let us concentrate our energies in consolidating university life, improving the conditions of the academy and research, opening more spaces for cultural dissemination, fostering innovation and creativity, promoting internationalization and cooperation. Let us obtain a quality public university that struggles against the deterioration of our image, that avoids the flight of talent and that stands up before what threatens them now a days.

Let us devote to this; making the opposite would mean the disfiguration of university, turning it into a battlefield for the conquest of power, therefore breaking the moral, ethical and spiritual consensus that allows the development of knowledge and university formation, which are, together, the greatest contribution of the public university to the nation.

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