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Toward a planning model for the Peruvian University system as a competitive strategy

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Abstract

University education in Peru is based on models of teacher-centered teaching and a conception of knowledge which is closed and static and under the dominance of an information model now overwhelmed by multiple factors hastened by international change. The world's most prestigious universities have chosen cultural diversity as a sign of quality and are hence interested in the mobility of teachers and students through exchange and cooperation with foreign educational institutions. These universities respond more effectively to pressure from the international business sector, better satisfy training demands, introduce new information and communication technologies into education and research and have improved administration and management structures. While there is progress, the university system in Peru is a planning model defined "as a discipline that seeks to respond to the needs of an organization defined by new cultural and social models" (A. Cazorla, et al 2007). This paper studies the non-Euclidean thinking of planning and development of John Friedmann (2001). Based on the four domains of social practice, it proposes a planning model for Peruvian universities that meets international requirements.

Keywords: Planning Model, university education.

1. Introduction

The creation of the European Space for Higher Education, which has been fundamental in order to foster and accelerate change in the university culture in Peru, proposes a comparable degree system, with the implementation of comparable degrees using the European diploma supplement, instituting a European credit system (ECTS), adopting a three-cycle system (bachelor's degree, master's degree and doctorate), promoting mobility programs among students and faculty, promoting academic interdisciplinarianism to ensure a level of quality and establishing comparable methodologies. (Sierra, Cabezuelo, 2009).

The Tuning Project is an effort by more than 175 European universities that since the year 2001 have worked on consolidating the search for common ground, convergence and mutual understanding in order to facilitate understanding of educational structures, with the objective of creating the European Space for Higher Education as a response to the challenge established by the Bologna Declaration. It has sought to identify reference elements necessary for recognition of degrees throughout Europe. Tuning was exclusively a European experience until late 2004 when the Tuning Project – Latin America began in a context of intense reflection on higher education at both the regional and international levels.

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The Tuning Project – Latin America is one of the most serious efforts seeking to initiate dialogue for the purpose of exchanging information and improving collaboration among institutions of higher education, fostering the development of quality, effectiveness and transparency.

2. Scientific basis

When planning is discussed in the public domain, in the majority of non-intellectual forums, classical planning or planning referred to by some authors as policy analysis is discussed. The epistemology of this planning is based on decision making by political authorities with regard to a problem, a need or an opportunity before it arises. “Decisions first, then action; that was the basic model” (Friedman, 1986).

The model for this type of planning implies a political structure that, with loosely defined criteria and objectives, seeks to implement an action. Within that political structure, a technical team is placed in charge of designing the programs to be undertaken and the team provides a set of alternatives, based on which the political authorities make a decision. Once actions corresponding to a given alternative are undertaken, a retrospective look can be taken to confirm whether these actions were taken according to the criteria and objectives established. Evidently, this is a type of design planning that does not fulfill the expectations of the population that will benefit from these actions because they were simply not involved. Perhaps, analyzing the situation from a positivist point of view, some of the population’s demands have been satisfied due to its being the foundation supporting the political authorities. The model outlined unavoidably corresponds to a process for making political decisions on criteria and objectives subjected to political analysis. “Analysis is a posture, not a technique; no set of operations can be taught as the essence of analysis.... There is a model, a structure of resources and objectives, with a criterion for choosing among alternatives” (Wildavsky).

Therefore, planning in a classical public domain is based on top-down planning “that uses technical reasoning to design the possible courses of action to be taken” (Cazorla, 1994).

One of the unknowns presented by this classical model is the action put off for the future; therefore, the political authorities’ knowledge or perception is not linked to it. It could be argued that, actually, the action met criteria and objectives that were not communicated by the players themselves; that is to say, the beneficiaries of the action.

Therefore, the problem posed is how to resolve the time dimension if the action is not linked to the decision-making process. Normally, analysts operate in real time, disregarding past experiences, evaluating the variables operating at the time and preparing statistical forecasts as a panacea to the completion of their work. However, reference to the past, the introduction of an unanalyzed variable or the imprecision of statistical models can disrupt the entire decision-making process. In fact, statistical forecasting models, which are increasingly popular, tend to have major errors (Morgenstern, 1963); (Lee, 1973); (Meadows et al, 1982). However, on occasion, politicians have to make decisions because of uncertainty among the electorate or because of an unusual occurrence; politicians cannot expect quick answers from the scientific community, so relying on what they can (previous studies, similar cases in other administrations, etc.), they decide upon a response.

Planning in the public domain as social learning is an alternative that has been proposed. The fundamental difference lies in the fact that this begins and ends with action. To some authors, social learning means linking knowledge with action; that is, the entire theoretical planning process is limited to concrete actions. If actions form part of the process, the agents of change must act and doing so implies acting early on. The agents’ participation in political decision making is nothing other than a learning process. Firstly, social learning is typically a tacit and formal way of learning (Polanyi, 1966). Secondly, it involves the agents of change in planning. “In order to be effective, agents of change must develop a relationship geared toward mutual learning” (Schein, 1960).

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