

Cuban universities are not made of chalk

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Cuban universities are not the sum of classrooms where the lines of chalk on the chalkboard define borders.

"Today, the role of the University in the government management system based on Science and Innovation is tangible," says President Miguel Díaz-Canel.

It happens that, as highlighted in the 2021 work review of the Ministry of Higher Education (MES), the interconnections of these higher education centers with the productive sector for goods and services and also with the public administration, have been strengthened.

An example of the new organizational forms emerging from university talent and innovation are the science and technology parks as well as Interface companies, which not only reduce time in the implementation of solutions but also contribute to the financing of scientific activities.

At the Hermanos Saiz Montes de Oca university, in Pinar del Río, for example, the link with local companies has gained a singular strength, especially from the innovative work of that educational institution.

As a result, valuable projects have come to light, such as the one named **"Food Sovereignty with more science,"** which consists of digital platforms to facilitate knowledge about certain crops and to use the potential of each territory in an increasingly better way.

The project *Ciudad Inteligente* also excels, which enables citizens to know, also through digital

platforms, about services, production, the demographic situation, as well as the main resources of each territory.

It is just one example amongst hundreds, but when commenting on innovation, science, and universities, the contribution of students, professors, and workers in general from these campuses during the prevention and fight against Covid-19 cannot be ignored. Social commitment and humanism of the Ministry of Higher Education rarely shone so brightly before.

Entities from this educational system were involved in the project and the patent of the Vaccine Candidate **Soberana 02**, in the creation of chemical synthesis labs, and in mathematical modeling, among others.

But, in addition, all the vaccines made in Cuba, which have saved so many lives, even beyond our borders, as well as the care protocols and the entire fight strategy this nation has followed, are based on, in one way or another, a garnered knowledge that has in the university its foundation, which also led to voluntary contribution during the darkest hours of the health crisis.

Interdisciplinarity and intersectionality paved the way — from a manifest political will — for these and other contributions from the universities, where, together with the sciences, ethics and values ??are also apprehended.

From the classroom to the neighborhood

University professors and students contribute today in the creation of public and legislative policies.

For example, the project of the new Family Code owes a lot to the contribution of these academicians, who have not only offered their collaboration on a strictly academic level by advising, proposing...

They have also been spread their knowledge from very varied communication spaces — on TV, radio, and both printed and digital press.

It was university professors Patricia Arés, Yamila González and Leonardo Pérez Gallardo who, together with other personalities, were directly involved in the Parliamentary Public Hearing "**Cuba lives in families**," on the Family Code bill. And students, represented by the president of the University Students Federation, Karla Santana, accompanied the process.

In the coronavirus check-up and control meetings, which the Presidency of the Republic systematically holds, well-known figures from the university field have also taken an active part.

One of the best examples is Dr.Sc. Raúl Guinovart Díaz, dean of the Faculty of Mathematics and Computing of the University of Havana. The people of Cuba have followed with particular attention every graphs, designed with the data provided by epidemiologists and this way, they have learned about the forecasts in the course of the pandemic.

But although not all of them have the visibility of the media, there are many who, from Higher Education, contribute to the quality of life of Cubans in the broadest sense of the term.

Last August, more than 3,400 university students, young professors, and professionals from various sectors were part of the Youth Brigades of Social Work (BJTS), an initiative fostered by Cuba's Youth Communist League to help in the transformation of neighborhoods in need.

They visited the homes of people to learn about the problems affecting each family materially and spiritually.

And this contribution to the neighborhoods has not stopped since, in the middle of last year, the government launched an initiative to foster the transformation of the so-called vulnerable or disadvantaged communities.

The university community has played a decisive role in cultural and educational projects, collecting statistics and also providing solutions to the specific economic and social problems of the neighborhood, always based on what the neighbors propose.

In construction and cleaning work, students and teachers have been seen shoulder to shoulder with the inhabitants of neighborhoods such as El Fanguito, La Timba, Lawton, just to mention a few in Havana.

And now, from the beginning of the new academic year, they intend to better organize the participation of students and teachers in accompanying governments and community economic actors.

“In the transformation of neighborhoods, universities can support us, especially in the initial stage, where it is necessary to carry out diagnoses and anthropological studies, which allow us to build socialism with our own efforts and the involvement of all,” Díaz-Canel pointed out during the MES work review.

The university is also responsible for continuing training the human resources there, who are, no doubt, the ones in charge of promoting local development in every neighborhood, community, and municipality.

There is no doubt that they will succeed. How not to achieve it if last year, while the US blockade tightened and the pandemic hit mercilessly the production of goods and services, basically our entire economy, the Higher Education managed to advance despite so much headwind.

By merging creativity and commitment, professors and students ended up the academic year proving the feasibility of distance learning in certain circumstances.

And so was praised by the Cuban president who, when exchanging with young university students, highlighted a truth that continues to be a benchmark in our universities: *“You have contributed to the way in which we have to design the processes, to the comprehensiveness with which we must project tasks, and you have also given us many ideas about social work, about public policies, care for the vulnerable, the reconstruction of the State-Government-Party-People relationship, about how we seek greater involvement, how we achieve more democratic mechanisms.”*

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