

Higher education and the Sustainable Development Goals: the case of the intercultural universities in Mexico

TRISTAN MCCOWAN (UCL)

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Universities in the Post-2015 Agenda

Higher education's return to favour

- Recalculating returns to higher education
- The knowledge economy
- Forming professionals for public services
- Research for development / solving grand challenges (e.g. environmental)
- Open society, democracy and strong institutions

New international cooperation programmes

Measured endorsement in the SDGs



1. End poverty everywhere
2. End hunger, achieve food security & improve nutrition
3. Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being
4. Ensure inclusive and quality education for all and promote lifelong learning
5. Achieve gender equality and empower women & girls
6. Ensure available and sustainable management of water and sanitation
7. Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable & modern energy
8. Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, with decent work for all
9. Build resilient infrastructure & promote sustainable industrialisation
10. Reduce inequality within and among countries
11. Make cities inclusive, safe, resilient & sustainable
12. Ensure sustainable consumption & production patterns
13. Take urgent action to combat climate change
14. Conserve and sustainably use marine resources
15. Protect, restore & promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems
16. Promote peaceful & inclusive societies
17. Revitalise the global partnership for sustainable development

SDG4: TARGETS

4.1 By 2030, ensure that all girls and boys complete free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education leading to relevant and effective learning outcomes

4.2 By 2030, ensure that all girls and boys have access to quality early childhood development, care and pre-primary education so that they are ready for primary education

4.3 By 2030, ensure equal access for all women and men to affordable and quality technical, vocational and tertiary education, including university

[Indicator: 4.3.1 Participation rate of youth and adults in formal and non-formal education and training in the previous 12 months, by sex]

4.4 By 2030, substantially increase the number of youth and adults who have relevant skills, including technical and vocational skills, for employment, decent jobs and entrepreneurship

4.5 By 2030, eliminate gender disparities in education and ensure equal access to all levels of education and vocational training for the vulnerable, including persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples and children in vulnerable situations

4.6 By 2030, ensure that all youth and a substantial proportion of adults, both men and women, achieve literacy and numeracy

4.7 By 2030, ensure that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including, among others, through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture's contribution to sustainable development

4.a Build and upgrade education facilities that are child, disability and gender sensitive and provide safe, non-violent, inclusive and effective learning environments for all

4.b By 2020, substantially expand globally the number of scholarships available to developing countries, in particular least developed countries, small island developing States and African countries, for enrolment in higher education, including vocational training and information and communications technology, technical, engineering and scientific programmes, in developed countries and other developing countries
[Indicator: 4.b.1 Volume of official development assistance flows for scholarships by sector and type of study]

4.c By 2030, substantially increase the supply of qualified teachers, including through international cooperation for teacher training in developing countries, especially least developed countries and small island developing States

Dominant approaches to innovation in HE

Technology, unbundling and MOOCs

Affordability and funding schemes

New providers (for-profit sector)

Work relevance and employability

Learner-centred pedagogy

Innovation in means or ends?

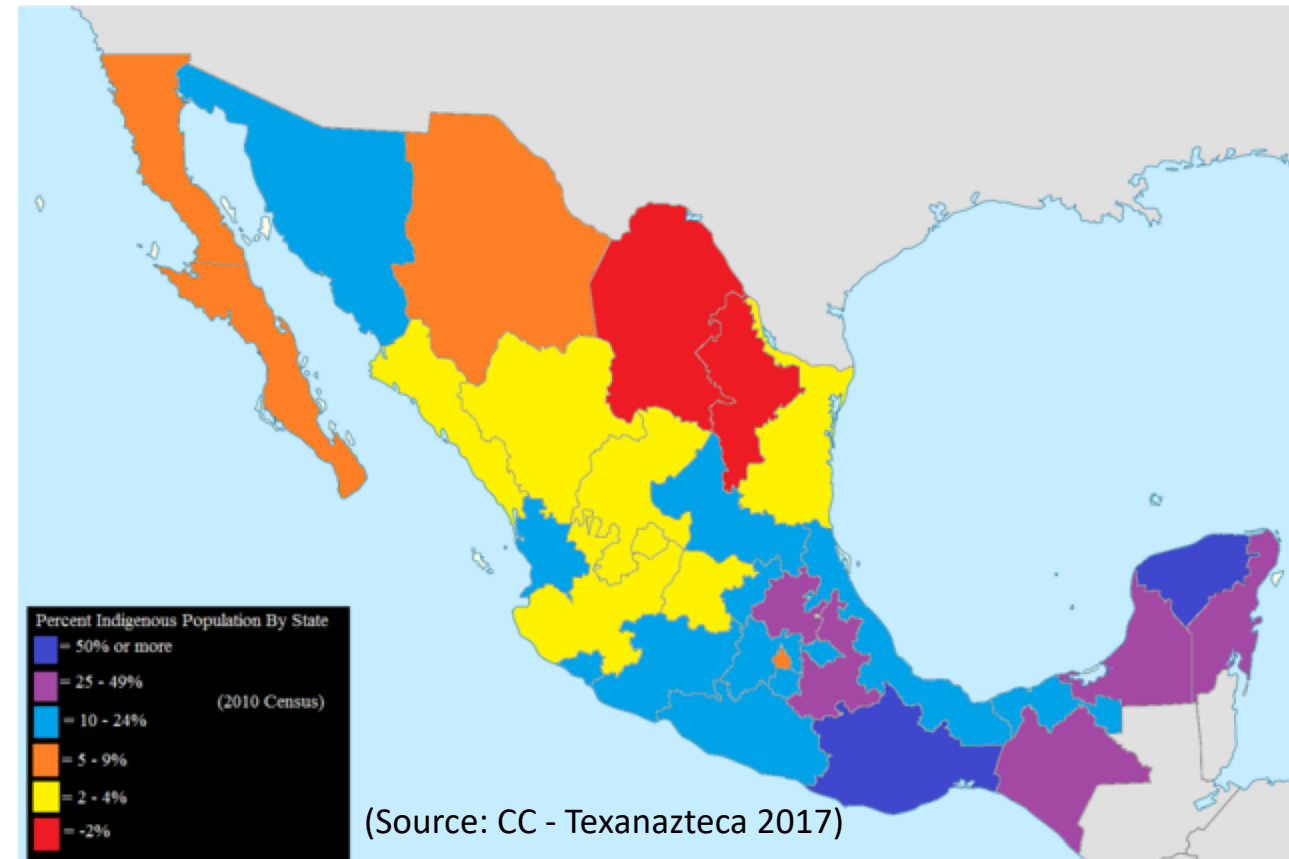
The developmental university



University for Development Studies,
Tamale, Ghana

The intercultural universities in Mexico

- Indigenous population in Mexico
- Inequalities and the Zapatista uprising
- From 2003 a system of 12 public and 5 private intercultural institutions
- Objectives:
 1. Access to bilingual and culturally pertinent education
 2. National populations acquire information and knowledge about indigenous cultures
 3. Make decisions about their own educational systems (Schmelkes 2009)



Research study

IOE seed funding scheme (with Cristina Perales Franco, Simon Marginson, Vincent Carpentier and Aline Courtois)

What are the contributions of the Universidad Veracruzana Intercultural (UVI) to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals amongst local communities?

Questions of 'emic' and 'etic'

Case study - atypical



Universidad Veracruzana
Intercultural

Research study

Fieldwork in Xalapa and one rural campus
(August 2017)

Courses:

Intercultural management for development
(pathways in sustainability, rights, health,
language and communication)

Interviews with senior management,
researchers, lecturers, students, alumni and
community members (total 23)

Documents, observations and statistical data



Key characteristics

Community-
based research

Governing
councils

Recovering
pride in
indigeneity

Locally-based
freelance
employment

Relations of
care

Services for
community

The conventional university is working with abstractions, with subjective scenarios and the intercultural university works more with empirical realities that are very concrete, with hunger, they see directly what hunger means, it is not a concept, they know it, they live it and they have it there next to them.

(Interview with researcher)

Contributions to the SDGs

Access to HE

Livelihoods

Environmental
protection

Healthcare

Food
sovereignty

Gender
equality

“Of course, one thing is coverage and another is pertinence. The quality criteria always had that contradiction and keep on having it. When the UVI dean goes to Mexico City, and the Undersecretary of Higher Education asks her “how many students do you have?”...“Any online system is cheaper than the four people in the Zongolica mountains”, meaning that it does not have an impact. But on the other hand we see a strong local and regional impact, because now there are professionals that are former UVI students in all the local councils, and in practically all the NGOs [...] And there are governmental institutions that used to outsource professionals [...] now in the campaign against hunger, the national population census, the preparation of elections, all of it at a local level would not be possible without the UVI alumni [...] So, from the official point of view, the UVI has managed to impact in certain quantitative indicators, and they act as intermediaries. But we see it [...] more at a micro level, there is also another type of impact that is much more at an individual and family level.”

(Interview with researcher)

“So I believe that to a greater or lesser extent, depending also on each context, yes UVI has had an impact on the community.... Many of the youngsters who are studying were part of the family workforce....They used to help in the fields, sowing seeds, in the kitchen, for example, the girls are now going to study, they’re not staying there. Or for example, I realise that maybe women’s empowerment isn’t the principal objective of UVI, questions of gender, but it does happen. Or questions of sexual diversity, also many of the people who were there, they become confident enough to express themselves.”

(Interview with graduate)

Challenges and tensions

Recruitment

Tensions over
staffing

Ambiguities over
employability

Recognition within
mainstream
system

Doubts over
community
understanding of
UVI

Political
manoeuvring

So there are other lecturers who have a vision that's more open to these notions of development in the more mainstream sense, "to produce, we've got to teach these kids to be productive, and just productive projects, productive projects" ... You also need the student to be able to adopt a historical position of healing the colonial debts and wounds. But also that they can be employable, which is important, but you can't go to the other extreme and get rid of any more critical ethical position....

(Interview with Lecturer)

Reconceptualising poverty and status

Because they say that what they're seeing is that UVI doesn't take them out of poverty. But... poverty, for them is speaking Náhuatl, not knowing Spanish... carrying on practising their roots....

(Interview with graduate/teacher)

At home my father said “why are you going to that university? I made a mistake to let you go there... I thought you were going to come back and you weren't going to clean the fields any more. Why are you speaking with someone who speaks Náhuatl? You should be speaking with educated people...”

(Interview with student)

Researcher: And you don't think that going to uni gives you a different status?

Student2: Maybe when we had just started uni, it's like one wants to move up, but then you realise it's not like that, things are not like that. One changes that way of thinking, and here we learn to be the same as the rest of the people, not above, and not below. We don't lose what we have learned, but we have to mediate, we have to respect this person and the other.

Questioning the SDG framework

Culture, language
and identity

Counterhegemonic
views (e.g. *buen
vivir*)

Ecology of
knowledges

“So look, I can criticise the first [SDG], the end of poverty. Well, I don’t know what for them poverty is. Because I had read that the Secretariat of Health or Social Development says that whoever doesn’t have a stove, sewerage, a fridge, flooring more than anything else, is poor. But here it’s different. So maybe people here don’t have flooring, but they have lands, they have space to sow, so they have their food, they’re not poor.”

“Which viewpoint is poverty seen from? Because for example where we were working, in the beginning I saw like, they’re poor, no kidding. But in reality they don’t feel poor, so it’s where you see poverty from, what’s development for one person and what’s development for another.”

(Interviews with students)

Implications

Promoting the developmental model:

- Access for marginalized populations
- Challenging limited imagination on innovative teaching
- Public good through research and community engagement
- The importance of place-based HE

Beyond the developmental model

- Interculturality and ecology of knowledges
- Autonomous spaces
- Questioning modernization