

# INTEGRAL EDUCATION IN HIGHER EDUCATION AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF NATIONS<sup>1</sup>

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## ABSTRACT

*How to generate well-being, peace and prosperity for a nation is an old and still fundamental question to almost the whole world. In this early 21st century, higher education has acquired a major relevance to the development of nations as it is directly related to educating both competent professionals and citizens with critical thinking. However, with economic purposes, governments are increasingly prioritizing the acquisition of practical training and skills. Considering this tendency, in this article, we seek to demonstrate by means of deduction that integral education and general knowledge in higher education can make a key contribution for nations to develop not only in terms of democracy and social inclusion, but also of economic growth itself.*

HIGHER EDUCATION • INTEGRAL EDUCATION • DEVELOPMENT •  
ECONOMIC GROWTH

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**H**OW TO GENERATE WELL-BEING, PEACE, PROSPERITY AND WEALTH FOR A NATION? This is a fundamental question to the whole world. Researchers in various areas of knowledge have long been trying to find an explanation for the significant difference in degrees of poverty and prosperity between peoples from various regions of the world. In the 21st century, while Western Europe and some of its colonies have grown, developed and become rich, many countries, particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa continue dismally poor or penurious.

Given this worldwide context of inequality, researchers have been trying to find sufficient conditions or create “recipes” to realize economic growth. To that end, in the 18th century, the Scottish philosopher and economist Adam Smith (1776) was probably the first to propose strategies to generate “The Wealth of Nations”, suggesting free market and labor specialization as key aspects in this challenge. Later, in the second half of the 20th century, the Austrian economist and political scientist Joseph Alois Schumpeter (1934) suggested another well-known formula, now based on technological innovation and constant renovation of production methods as the “engine” that drives capitalism. The so-called Washington Consensus, formulated in the end of 1989 by economists at the IMF and the World Bank, meant another effort to create a series of prescriptions to be applied in a generalized way to induce trade and economic growth. This proposal recommended measures that included fiscal balance and a more realistic exchange rate, and induced the so-called “minimal state”. Later, this series of

prescriptions as a whole turned into a synonym with neoliberalism and became known not only for failing to achieve that purpose (SANDBROOK, 2000), but also, in some cases, being harmful (STIGLITZ, 2004; OSTRY; LOUNGANI; FURCERI, 2016). In this perspective, although some of these hypotheses and proposals of strategies to generate wealth did have a major repercussion, none of them was consensually recognized as sufficient or definite.

However, in this trajectory, besides advancing towards the recognition of the relative idiosyncratic and cultural nature of development, potentially conditioning factors were also identified, such as a population's broad access to education. Today, there is practically a consensus that knowledge – replacing physical capital – is becoming the main source of wealth creation and, therefore, the source of economic growth and competitiveness. Thus, considering the recent emergence of the so-called knowledge society and/or economy, higher education began to play a strategic role to the projects of nations. The perception of countries about intellectual, cultural and human capital is increasingly related to the expansion of access to national systems. According to international estimates, there are now approximately 150 million higher education students around the world, which represents a 50% increase in relation to 2000, while an expansion to impressing 250 million graduates is projected for 2025. The Paris 2009 World Conference on Higher Education's final report clearly highlighted the relevance of higher education to the world's development:

At no time in history has it been more important to invest in higher education as a major force in building an inclusive and diverse knowledge society and to advance research, innovation and creativity. (UNITED NATIONS EDUCATIONAL, SCIENTIFIC AND CULTURAL ORGANIZATION - UNESCO, 2009)

In this context, based on the justification of the need to expand nations' economic competitiveness, several governments,<sup>2</sup> particularly in the West, are implementing policies and reforms in higher education which prioritize professions and knowledge connected to their economic frameworks and which narrow the idea of education, turning it, chiefly, into training and acquisition of practical and technician skills and competences. Examples of these tendencies can be seen in various countries, both developed and developing ones, such as the United States – where the former-president Barack Obama declared that “you folks can make a lot more, potentially, with skilled manufacturing or the trades than they might with an art history degree” –, Europe – with emphasis on the Bologna Process for employability – and Brazil – with the exclusion of teachers and students in areas connected to humanities,

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According to Zygmunt Bauman (2016), although the power may have become global, policies remain local, and emerging global phenomena continue to be treated in 'parochial' terms, since democratic institutions were not designed to conduct situations of interdependence.

social sciences and arts from the great Science Without Borders project for international mobility, among others.

This tendency can, in the long term, separate higher education from the public mission of educating individuals – who, besides competent professionals, are also citizens with critical thinking<sup>3</sup> – and separate universities from the role of strengthening democracy. In addition, higher education organizations are international links to science, culture, politics and the frontier of thought, building knowledge bridges between different peoples and for future generations. In this perspective, integral and cultural education, which allows a broad worldview and the observance of ethical principles and moral values for all areas of knowledge, plays a central role in reflecting on and overcoming the main global conflicts, such as human coexistence, the relationship between human beings and the environment and even the crisis of representative democracy.

Therefore, in this article, we argue that all professions and areas of knowledge should include disciplines of general knowledge so that higher education can more effectively contribute to nations' development. In this perspective, we try to evidence, by means of deduction based on the intersection between the literature of the areas of education, sociology, economy and psychology, that integral education is key to constituting critical citizens, consolidating democracy and inclusive political and economic institutions<sup>4</sup> and, therefore, developing nations not only with regard to social inclusion, but also economic growth.

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In this article, 'critical thinking' does not evoke an ideological or negative meaning of being against something or somebody, but, rather, individuals' ability to analyze and problematize from plural perspectives, to question everything, including the very idea that everything should be questioned so they can subsequently have an autonomous opinion.

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In this article, the term "institution" is employed in a broad and general sense and does not refer to higher education institutions (HEI), academic institutions, such as universities, university centers, colleges, etc., but, rather, to broad and diverse political, social, cultural or economic organizations or mechanisms that control the functioning of societies and even individuals, such as governments, market organizations, educational systems, the media, etc.

## HIGHER EDUCATION AND THE EDUCATION OF CITIZENS FOR DEMOCRACY

The emergence of higher education dates back to the beginning of the second millennium in medieval Europe. In those days, universities dedicated themselves to teaching general knowledge to the elites, particularly through the disciplines of theology, philosophy and arts. The significant cultural, social, political and economic changes the world went through over the centuries, such as the ones resulting from the Enlightenment, impacted on and generated crises in universities. However, higher education showed a great resilience and, just as the society and the state changed, higher education also took on new forms and missions, yet without neglecting the broad cultural and moral education of youths.

In recent decades, however, higher education systems have been dedicating themselves excessively to the challenges of economic competitiveness. With the emergence of the phenomena of economic globalization and neoliberalism, as well as crisis scenarios, higher

education reforms have taken on a central role in governments' agendas. Because higher education prepares and holds a significant part of the "human capital", systems have come under pressure to serve purposes related to urgent economic challenges. According to Michael Peters (2003), the focus of policies on higher education have been reflecting a growing macroeconomy consensus that the "driving force" of endogenous economic growth is technological change and improvements in the knowledge of production processes and information flow levels. In this context, there was, on the one hand, the expansion of utilitarian and productivist approaches to educational systems, and, on the other hand, an atrophy of the cultural dimension (SANTOS, 1994), as well as a reduction of the concept of education, making it a synonym with practical training and the acquisition of practical competences focusing on the productive world (SLAUGHTER; RHOADES, 2004; BALL; YOUDELL, 2007; BROWN; CARASSO, 2013). Thus, the conception of education has been changing at system level, impacting universities, courses and curriculums themselves. The idea of a broad education, originated in pedagogical proposals based on experiences like the Greek *paideia*<sup>5</sup> and the German *bildung*,<sup>6</sup> was progressively disregarded and, in some cases, interpreted as inappropriate. However, this tendency can be significantly negative both for individuals' adequate education and for the stability and consolidation of democratic societies. The literature explicitly demonstrates such risk.

The connection between education and democracy, particularly with regard to the process of education of autonomous citizens with critical thinking, is nothing new. Among the relevant authors who approached that connection in the past, it is worth highlighting the remarkable Swiss philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1762/1995), who, in the 18th century, approached that relation in his work *Émile ou De l'Éducation*, as well as the renowned philosopher and pedagogue of the American progressive school John Dewey (1916), who, approximately a century ago, stressed that democracy was inseparable from education, in his work *Democracy and Education: an Introduction to the Philosophy of Education*. During the 20th century, much was written about the relationship between education, citizenship and democracy (MCCOWAN, 2011), particularly in the context of basic school, although this approach has been more recently implemented also in higher education, with an emphasis on the link between graduates' integral education and the consolidation of plural, democratic and tolerant societies (MCMAHON, 2009; BOK, 2013; DELBANCO, 2013; SIMPSON; KELLY, 2014).

In their book *Human Development and Capabilities*, the higher education researchers Melanie Walker and Alejandra Boni (2013, p. 24-25) argue and emphasize that

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The idea of *paideia* referred to a process of education in which students were submitted to a program that sought to cater for all aspects of man's life. Among the subjects approached was geography, natural history, grammar, mathematics, rhetoric, philosophy, music and gymnastics.

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The term *Bildung* refers to the German tradition of self-cultivation, wherein philosophy and education are linked in a manner that refers to a process of both personal and cultural maturation. This maturation is described as a harmonization of the individual's mind and heart and in a unification of selfhood and identity.

[...] teaching is one sure way to reinstate the public good and to advance the social good [...] This is the space in which we might educate, form and shape engaged public citizens, as critical reasoners and democratic citizens who understand their obligations to others.

Likewise, in his book *Beyond the University: Why Liberal Education Matters*, Michael S. Roth (2015), the president of Wesleyan University, stressed that only an education that invites students to think for themselves is capable of educating citizens who can see through political contradictions and who have the competence to defend individual and collective rights in the face of injustice and inequalities.

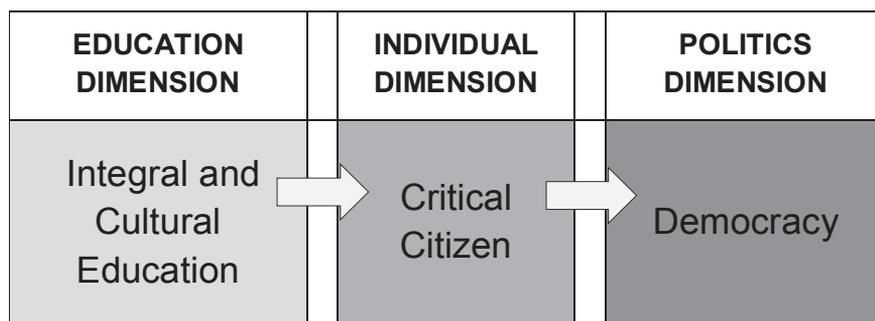
Studies that seek to demonstrate empirical relations between education and democracy, regardless of their complexity level, have also been implemented. In this methodological line, the psychologist Heiner Rindermann (2008) sought to evidence, through an exhaustive statistic effort, the relationship between intellectuality and democracy. Using an international database, the author demonstrated that a country's educational level in a given period foretells its level of political prosperity in a later period, and also that intellectual aptitude (i.e., the one involving abstraction competence), foretells democracy more significantly than the number of school years. In the same empirical line, the educators Melanie Walker and Monica McLean (2013) reported on the situation of education and competences developed in five professions in South African universities. The authors found evidence that, in higher education, an education concerned with the public good can provide students with founding, characteristic principles of democratic societies.

In line with these findings that an integral education can condition a democratic society, the psychologist and linguist Steven Pinker (2011), who is considered one of today's main scientists, affirmed that the type of reasoning that is relevant for moral "stature" is not intelligence in the sense of the brain's basic potential, but, rather, the form of intelligence that allows understanding the principles that found democratic governments and civil society, the competence to evaluate leaders and their policies, the awareness of the existence of other groups with a cultural diversity, and the awareness that one is part of a community of citizens who are instructed to share the same understandings. With regard to developing awareness about the condition of others and society, Pinker (2011) suggests literature as the main cause of the humanitarian revolution, which began in the Age of Reason, in the 17th century, and followed through to the late 18th century, with the Enlightenment, ending many barbaric practices such as human sacrifice, public superstitious executions, slavery and cruel

punishments. According to the author, the most comprehensive change that the humanitarian revolution left in common sensitivity, namely the reaction to the suffering of other living beings, stemmed from the growth of reading and writing, which may also have formed in people the habit of leaving their limited point of view and generated new ideas around moral and social values.

There are vast references in the internationally recognized literature in different areas of knowledge indicating the importance of education to the consolidation of democratic societies. In this perspective, according to the evidence reported above, including the empirical works cited, an education that covers general knowledge and moral values and principles fulfills a key role in educating emancipated citizens with critical thinking; moreover, such evidence makes it plausible to affirm that integral education in the various professional areas taught in higher education are a determinant factor of societies' level of democracy (Figure 1).

**FIGURE 1**  
RELATIONS BETWEEN INTEGRAL EDUCATION, CITIZEN AND DEMOCRACY



Source: The authors' own elaboration, based on Dewey (1916), Rindermann (2008), Pinker (2011) and Walker and Boni (2013).

Therefore, it is necessary to recognize, in view of today's worrisome context of economicistic and utilitarian educational reforms, the importance of

[...] educating the human being in his entirety and with diverse points of view, boosting the development of all capacities without contempt or exclusion of any of them. The education of the student with a view to his or her commitment to a responsible citizenship capable of living in a plural and interconnected world, needs to go well beyond a training based on the maximization of profit and the ideal of successful life that uses money and power as the sole criterion of success. (DALBOSCO, 2015, p. 127)

There is no doubt that a narrow education fails to provide the bases for facing questions that are broader, more abstract and systemic, yet essential to guide decision-making in complex contemporary societies. In this perspective, building and consolidating a society with wealth distribution in the economic sphere, recognition in the field of individual and collective rights, and representation in the political dimension (FRASER, 2009), relies heavily on integral education in higher education, i.e., on the education conception that allows individuals to develop the ability to put themselves in the other's place, to commit to the common good and to recognize democracy's intrinsic value.

## INTEGRAL EDUCATION AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF SOCIAL INCLUSION

Over time, prominent intellectuals from different places have dedicated noble and relevant efforts to education and university, citing goals that comprise from individuals to the broadest interests of societies and nations. In the 18th century, for example, Benjamin Franklin, a representative figure of the Enlightenment and one of the leaders of the American Revolution, defined as education's main mission the search for "true merit", which consists of "an inclination join'd with an ability to serve mankind, one's country, friends and family; which ability [...] should indeed be the great aim and end of all learning" (apud DELBANCO, 2013, p. 1). In the middle of the last century, Karl Jaspers (1959), an important German philosopher and psychiatrist, defined the mission of the university in an expanded way, i.e., as the one place where, by concession of state and society, a given epoch may cultivate the most ludic possible self-awareness. Today, there is practically a consensus that one of the main missions of higher education is to contribute to the development of nations in important social aspects.

One of the latest, most recognized theories on development which highlights social aspects beyond the economic dimension was elaborated by Amartya Sen (2001), an Indian writer and economist who won the Nobel Prize in Economics in 1998. In his book *Development as Freedom*, the renowned writer conceptualizes development as the "removal of various types of unfreedoms that leave people with little choice and little opportunity of exercising their reasoned agency" (SEN, 2001, p. xii). In this sense, the expansion of freedoms is understood as constitutive of development, and viewed as its primary end and its principal means.

This approach to human freedoms contrasts with narrow visions of development in which it is identified with the growth of Gross Domestic Product (GDP), the increase in per capita income, industrialization and technological advances. Although he considers

these economic aspects important for expanding the freedoms enjoyed by people, Amartya Sen (2001, p. 3) stresses that freedoms “depend also on other determinants, such as social [...] arrangements [...] and civil rights”. Thus, the vision of development as an expansion of substantive freedoms directs the attention to the removal of the main sources of unfreedom, as the author explains:

Sometimes the lack of substantive freedoms relates directly to **economic poverty**, which robs people of the freedom to satisfy hunger, or the opportunity to be adequately clothed or sheltered or to enjoy clean water or sanitary facilities. In other cases, the unfreedom links closely to the **lack of public facilities and social care**, such as the absence of epidemiological programmes, or of organized arrangements for health care or educational facilities, or of effective institutions for the maintenance of local peace and order. In still other cases, the violation of freedom results directly from a **denial of political and civil liberties** by authoritarian regimes and from imposed restrictions on the freedom to participate in the social, political and economic life of the community. (SEN, 2001, p. 4, emphasis added)

To Amartya Sen, social opportunities such as education and health care complement individual opportunities of economic and political participation, in addition to promoting initiatives to overcome unfreedom. Therefore, there are empirical, mutually reinforcing relations between different types of freedoms which, as they feed back into each other, make individual agencies<sup>7</sup> the fundamental driver of social inclusion and, therefore, of development. According to the author,

Indeed, individual agency is, ultimately, central to addressing these deprivations. On the other hand, the freedom of agency that we individually have is inescapably qualified and constrained by the social, political and economic opportunities that are available to us. There is a deep complementarity between individual agency and social arrangements. It is important to give simultaneous recognition to the centrality of individual freedom *and* to the force of social influences on the extent and reach of individual freedom. (SEN, 2001, p. xi-xii)

Therefore, in this perspective, we can see that individual agency is a fundamental prerequisite for achieving social inclusion, political freedom and economic prosperity, and that it is also a prerequisite for the constitution of inclusive institutions with democratic values. Hence, it is vital to ask: how to turn individuals into agents so they

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With the recent developments in the field of sociology, “individual agency” was extended to all individuals, regardless of their status or position in the social pyramid. In this work, however, we understand a higher or lesser degree of reflexivity and individual agency as a level of consciousness, reflection, autonomy and capacity to produce effects that is conferred on subjects. In this respect, using the concepts of Garfinkel (1967), the scope would be delimited between the poles by the concepts of “cultural idiot” and “lay sociologist”.

can act according to their dispositions and make their own choices in an independent way? Amartya Sen himself, in referring to social opportunities – such as education – as instrumental freedoms that contribute to people living more freely, can help us find the answer to this question. In this perspective, the author explains that illiteracy can be an insurmountable barrier to participating in economic activities and that incapacity to read newspapers and communicate with others can make political participation inviable (SEN, 2001). In other words, education is a fundamental aspect to realize individual agency.

More than two centuries ago, in his famous work *Émile ou De l'Éducation*, Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1762/1995) already advocated the need of an education with a broad form and broad contents with a view to educating individuals with agency capacity in the political world. According to the pedagogical architecture presented in *Émile*, political education – the fifth book – should be preceded by natural education – first, second and third books – and moral education – fourth book. The author viewed the individual as a human being who needs to be adequately educated so he can live in the democratic republic. To Rousseau, natural education should make the individual capable to “provide for himself” and master himself, ridding himself of character vices. Moral education, in turn, would problematize the virtuous education of the will, establishing justice and mutual respect as the sources of morality. Thus, the education of the human being, as a virtuous education, should precede the citizen’s education, as before entering the political world – which is the republican way of life that Rousseau aimed at –, the fictitious student *Émile* would need a stout moral character to avoid letting himself be corrupted by the vicious appeals of the public sphere (DALBOSCO, 2016). Therefore, we can say that Rousseau had warned a long time ago that, somehow, adequate individual agency in the context of society and politics would become viable through education, which was to be carried out in a broad education process, initially covering natural and moral education, and being completed with education for citizenship.

Today, if we consider that among higher education’s functions is integral education and general knowledge, which make individuals aware of the importance of citizenship and civic commitment, we will certainly conclude that an excessively practical education that limits itself to training and individual actions will be an insufficient education. Therefore, professionals in all fields and functions depend on a broad education to acquire agency in processes that require reflection about the abstract, complex and collective problems of societies. About that condition, we can find in the literature references to the strong relationship between a broad culture education and individual agency capacity.

In her book *Not for Profit: Why Democracy Needs the Humanities*, for example, the philosopher Martha Nussbaum (2010) warned in a striking way that if the trend of emphasis on utilitarian and practical capacities in higher education continues,

[...] nations all over the world will soon be producing generations of useful machines, rather than complete citizens who can think for themselves, criticize tradition, and understand the significance of another person's sufferings and achievements. (NUSSBAUM, 2010, p. 2)

To the author, one of the most read American intellectuals in the world, because of education narrowing, the world is beginning to experience a silent crisis in education which, over time, can become much more harmful for democratic societies than the much-publicized economic crises.

In the same line of thought, in his book *In Defense of a Liberal Education*, Fareed Zakaria (2015), who is considered one of the most influential experts in foreign policy in the United States, advocates integral education, affirming that in the undergraduate courses that lack a broad approach,

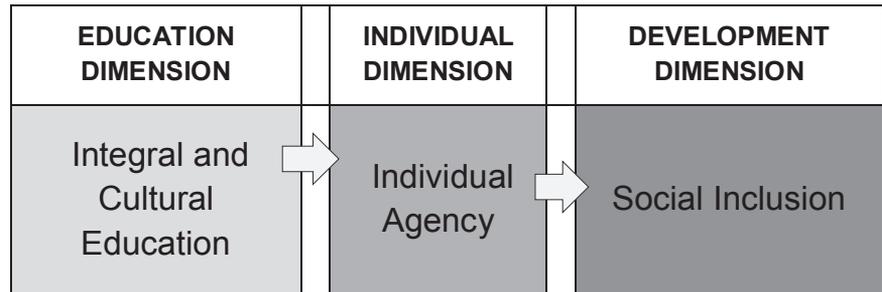
[...] even the best students – and sometimes especially the best – are limited in crucial ways. [...] they are achievement-oriented automatons, focused on themselves and their careers. They do not seem interested in delving deep into the search for inner knowledge, giving reign to their passions, or developing a character. (ZAKARIA, 2015, p. 151)

In his work in general, Zakaria warns that an education that covers the humanities and general knowledge is more than just a path to a profession, it is an exercise of freedom that nourishes the human being's most basic desire of knowledge, just like literature and the arts provide people with the most valuable abilities, regardless of the profession they may choose.

The authors cited, as well as their reflections on the vital role of a broad education for the adequate, effective participation in social, political and collective questions, allow establishing a determinant relationship between integral education in higher education and individual agency. In other words, they make it plausible to infer that integral education potentizes proactive individuals who reflect and decide autonomously. This is an agency process, i.e., a fundamental prerequisite for reaching the development as freedom that was proposed by Amartya Sen.

Therefore, considering the literature presented, we can infer that establishing individual agency depends on a conception of higher education with integral education and broad culture that allows the active, conscious participation in society by professionals in all functions and areas of knowledge. Consequently, it is also plausible to relate such integral education – by means of individual agency itself – to the possibility of determining and contributing to social development, particularly in the underlined aspect of social inclusion (Figure 2).

**FIGURE 2**  
RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN INTEGRAL EDUCATION AND SOCIAL INCLUSION



Source: The authors' own elaboration, based on Rousseau (1762/1995), Sen (2001), Nussbaum (2010), Zakaria (2015).

In the context of higher education, a conception of education that values practical training excessively will certainly mitigate the time and space of the educative dimension that approaches individuals' acting on public spheres and spaces and prepares individuals for acting on them. It is fundamental for nations' and societies' social development and social inclusion that professionals in all areas of knowledge also exercise their citizenship. In this perspective, it is important to recognize that individuals who are proactive in valuing ethical stances, and who seek to positively influence organizations in the public and private sector, guide the society towards a standard of transparency, honesty and inclusive political and economic institutions, which are vital for nations' development.

## INTEGRAL EDUCATION AND ECONOMIC GROWTH

When Adam Smith published his work *The Wealth of Nations*, in the 18th century, the term development of countries acquired practically the same meaning as economic growth. Over time, that understanding changed progressively, and today many recognize that GDP growth, increase in average individual income and industrialization are not enough to identify the occurrence of development. Nevertheless, a consensus continues to exist about the fundamental role of economic prosperity to make advances viable in a country, including in development dimensions related to social dispositions (SEN, 2001). Therefore, it would

obviously be a huge mistake if national higher education systems were to completely ignore the private sector, the businesses and industries that contribute to economic growth. However, to recognize that higher education should have economy as its horizon of contribution should not mean a consequent submission to the interests of markets and the business sector.

The free markets in which businesses operate are an important tool for organizing a productive economy, but they are not “almighty” so as to freely and adequately regulate all spaces (SANDEL, 2012). Justice, health care and education itself are examples of sectors in which markets that are not regulated or supervised by the state can rather do harm than contribute for the common good. Moreover, although today the goods and services exchange systems – the markets – play a fundamental role in coordinating the actions of billions of individuals, those systems have a grave problem as they recognize neither limits nor moral (PIKETTY, 2013). Therefore, higher education should avoid excessive interference by competitive markets in the management, formation and production of knowledge. In other words, the university must constantly seek to preserve one of its most important historical characteristics besides collegiality: autonomy. It is evident that if economic growth is fundamental to nations’ development, then, to people and communities it will also be positive that companies prosper, that productive chains grow stronger and that businesses be competitive, obviously as long as there is respect for moral limits and the greater interest of societies.

Therefore, if on the one hand, higher education must keep its autonomy in relation to market agents and forces, on the other hand, the economy cannot be neglected by higher education systems, not least because the possibility of exchanging is part of the instrumental freedoms that help promote one’s capacity. In this perspective, Amartya Sen (2001, p. 6) reinforces that

[...] it would be a mistake to understand the place of the market mechanism only in derivative terms. As Adam Smith noted, freedom of exchange and transaction is itself part and parcel of the basic liberties that people have reason to value.

To be *generically against* markets would be almost as odd as being generically against conversation between people.

Thus, if higher education does not dedicate itself, to some extent, to the economy and its markets, i.e., to what many economists point to as the conditions to generate the “wealth of nations”, it will be working in a counterproductive way to societies and, ultimately, universities would be separating from the public interest. It is not a

matter of submitting to economy, but, rather, the extent to which, and how, higher education can contribute to the important economic growth of nations.

At this point, we should ask: can universities and undergraduate courses contribute effectively to economic growth without submitting to the economy itself and the markets? In the literature of education economics, there is consistent evidence that education, in a general sense, is related<sup>8</sup> to workforce improvement and economic growth (BARBOSA FILHO; PESSÔA, 2010), that long-term economic growth is correlated to a population's cognitive skills, i.e., to a nation's "knowledge capital" (HANUSHEK; WOESSMANN, 2015), and that the main difference between countries concerning quality of living is rather owing to their "human capital" than their physical capital (ASLAM; RAWAL, 2015). However, studies and publications about the relationship between, on the one hand, integral education in higher education – the object of the present work – and, on the other hand, nations' growth and wealth are virtually nonexistent or, at best, incipient. Thus, there are no consistent answers yet to the following questions: what would the role of integral education (the one that covers, for example, disciplines like arts, philosophy and literature) be for economic growth? Could integral education not be an obstacle to economic growth, as it takes time and space from technical, practical or technological disciplines of interest of businesses and markets?

To contribute in constructing the answers to these important questions, we can resort to the book *Why Nations Fail*, by the American scholars Daron Acemoglu and James Robinson (2012), which is a major input concerning knowledge of economic growth. The book, which presents what might be called a Theory of Inclusive Institutions and has been considered the most complete answer on how to generate wealth in a nation, brings evidence that it is the political and economic institutions (governments, education system, judiciary power, legislative power, financial system, markets, the media, etc.) which are behind nations' prosperity. Using historical and contemporary examples, it demonstrates that nations with "inclusive" institutions become developed, while the ones with "extractive" institutions, even if only in the long term, failed. According to the authors, institutions are inclusive when they allow all the various social groups and stakeholders to participate in political and decision-making processes, create incentives to and reward innovation, and allow everyone to participate in economic opportunities. In turn, institutions are extractive when they serve the interests of privileged, hegemonic groups and exclude most of the population from political and economic spaces.

The Theory of Inclusive Institutions revolves around the link between political and economic institutions and prosperity. Inclusive

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Although they suggest, on the one hand, a correlation between education and 'human capital' improvement and economic growth, on the other hand, education economics studies do not consistently demonstrate a causal link between education and nations' economic growth. In other words, a high schooling level is not the only determinant factor of economic growth, i.e., education is important but not sufficient. As proof of such limitation, there are examples of countries with high schooling levels which show no economic growth, such as Argentina in the 19th century (ACEMOGLU; ROBINSON, 2012) and Cuba today.

economic institutions are supported by their political counterparts, while also providing support to them. On the one hand, inclusive political institutions that promote a broad distribution of power in a plural way and manage to reach a certain degree of political centralization enable the establishment of law and order and found property rights. This allows the consolidation of an inclusive market economy. On the other hand, industrialization, technological advance, social innovation and GDP growth can collaborate significantly to expand human freedom in terms of access to civil rights such as the participation in public discussions (ACEMOGLU; ROBINSON, 2012). In this double perspective, Amartya Sen (2001, p. 10) had warned that “there is strong evidence that economic and political freedoms help to reinforce one another, rather than being hostile to one another (as they are sometimes taken to be)”.

According to Daron Acemoglu and James Robinson (2012), in a context of extractive institutions, however, in order to enable their transformation into inclusive institutions, it is necessary for the society, in a prior stage, to organize and mobilize to carry out political change, not with the purpose of taking hold of power and control over institutions, but, rather, to make them inclusive. Such change depends on a process of empowerment of a large segment of the society, since pluralism, which is the cornerstone of inclusive political institutions, requires political power to be broadly distributed in the society. In turn, societies’ empowerment capacity is certainly related to their concept of education.

Although there is no consensus on the meaning of empowerment, we can say that the term is generally used to refer to a process of capacity building of groups in an adverse situation so they can articulate their interests to reach citizenship rights, defend what concerns them and influence the state’s decision making. In this perspective, according to important authors from the past and present, academic organizations which overcome the technicist and alienating approach are privileged spaces for the empowerment process. Since the 1970’s, when Paulo Freire, a remarkable Brazilian educator and philosopher, proposed an innovative pedagogical method dedicated to underprivileged and popular contexts, many studies have linked education and empowerment from various perspectives and in various contexts of emancipation and development of groups, such as in health care (WALLERSTEIN; BERNSTEIN, 1988), women’s movements (MURPHY-GRAHAM, 2010; MURPHY-GRAHAM; LLOYD, 2015) and the evaluation of policies, programs and projects (FETTERMAN, 1994; BOJE; ROSILE, 2001).

According to Paulo Freire (1979), in the area of education of vulnerable groups, it is possible to develop a process to encourage individuals’ potential so they can improve their living conditions, which,

through a differentiated relationship between teacher, student and society, enables self-sustainable development and the empowerment of the communities they are part of. According to the author, empowerment involves a process of acquiring consciousness, the shift from naïve thinking to critical consciousness. Although critical study in the classroom is not enough, since “only political action in society can make social transformation”, changing our understanding and consciousness occurs “to the extent that we are illuminated in real conflicts in history” by means of a “liberating education [which] can change our understanding of reality” (FREIRE; SHOR, 1986, p. 207). Thus, from the perspective of Paulo Freire’s proposal, an education for emancipation, which develops students’ critical consciousness, i.e., an education that is largely similar to an integral education presented in this work, can be a valuable instrument in projects and actions dedicated to empowering subjects and their communities and, therefore, in the context of the theory of Daron Acemoglu and James Robinson (2012), contribute to turn extractive institutions into inclusive ones.

Ratifying this link between integral education and empowerment, Fernando Reimers (2012), a Venezuelan who lives in the United States and runs the *International Education Policy Program and of the Global Education Innovation Initiative* at the *Harvard Graduate School of Education*, has affirmed that innovative education means new forms of empowering individuals so they can expand their freedoms and become more effective citizens in their communities. In publications approaching not only basic, but also higher education contexts, the author has been discussing how we can educate students so they can learn by themselves (REIMERS, 2015). Thus, along with Paulo Freire’s remarkable work, Fernando Reimers’ recent publications point out that a relevant part of the empowerment requisite for building inclusive political institutions can be realized in the sphere of higher education by means of an integral education which, in addition to technical approaches specific to each profession, encompasses social and cultural approaches.

Besides the idea of empowerment, the Theory of Inclusive Institutions of Acemoglu and Robinson (2012) also refers to another concept that can provide a contribution to integral education in higher education which, in turn, is important to nations’ economic growth: innovation. In the context of the knowledge society, innovation and its consequent creative destruction have been considered essential aspects to economic prosperity in the context of the so-called knowledge economy. Establishing innovation processes depends, however, on individuals who can think differently, who break with patterns and create new processes, goods and services, which makes the educational system a central element in this challenge. It is obvious that just a training or even a course are not capable of educating innovative individuals

par excellence, however, it is quite likely that a broad education, with multidisciplinary approaches and knowledge plurality can contribute more significantly to processes of creation and unprecedented thinking than an education limited to technical skills.

In this perspective, in his book *Teaching in the Knowledge Society: Education in the Age of Insecurity*, Andy Hargreaves (2003) affirms that education needs to prepare students to the knowledge economy. And in so doing, he points to the integral education of the human being, in learning to be, to do, to live together and to know, as the possibility for the student to transcend the strictly rational, cognitive and systemic. According to the author,

[...] our future prosperity depends on our ingenuity; our capacity to harness and develop our collective intelligence in terms of the central knowledge-economy attributes of inventiveness, creativity, problem-solving, cooperation, flexibility, the capacity to develop networks, the ability to cope with change, and the commitment to a lifelong learning. (HARGREAVES, 2003, p. 200)

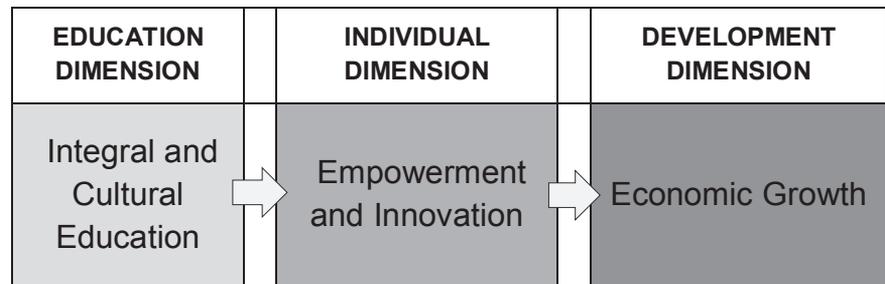
Paradoxically, instead of encouraging students' shrewdness towards the new and the different, as demonstrated earlier, several works have indicated that educational systems are becoming increasingly limited and restricted in terms of curriculum and getting entangled in excessively standardized regulation. In this respect, Peter Thiel, one of PayPal's founders and an investor in various startups such as Facebook, warns in his book *Zero to One* that today's higher education is dashing the dreams and plans of youths graduating from secondary education and putting them in a limited, fierce dispute with colleagues for conventional careers (THIEL; MASTERS, 2014). In the same line of thought, Andrew Delbanco (2013) stresses that, in some parts of Asia, governments are beginning to worry about the youths who enter the job market with an adequate technological education, but facing difficulties in reflecting and problematizing beyond their specific areas or, as is commonly said, thinking outside the box.

The phrase "thinking outside the box" has the connotation of thinking free from "conventional chains", as in seeing things from a perspective that is completely different, unfiltered, impartial, open to suggestions, and with a positive disposition towards other views, while also ready to "swim against the tide" and think of what nobody or few have yet thought of. The ability to "think outside the box" requires, most of all, creativity and the capacity to change perspectives or "points of view". Taking on another point of view usually allows looking at problems differently, thus increasing the possibilities of solution alternatives. Obviously, in order to contribute to develop

creativity and point of view change, as well as the ability to innovate, education must expand its approaches, overcome limits specific to the areas of knowledge, and promote inter- and multidisciplinary, thereby integrating different areas of knowledge.

Thus, considering this connection between an expanded education and the innovative profile, it is plausible to say that an education that contributes to develop creativity, with the ability to “think outside the box”, can be a valuable instrument to expand individuals’ innovation capacity. Therefore, just as integral education can contribute to building inclusive political institutions through empowerment, it can also collaborate to consolidate inclusive economic institutions through innovation. Therefore, according to the Theory of Inclusive Institutions, we can say that integral education can fulfill an important role in making nations’ economic growth viable (Figure 3).

**FIGURE 3**  
RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN INTEGRAL EDUCATION AND ECONOMIC GROWTH



Source: the authors’ own elaboration based on Freire (1979), Hargreaves (2003), Acemoglu and Robinson (2012) and Reimers (2015).

Another evidence that integral education can contribute to economic growth lies in studies that begin to demonstrate that employers are no longer valuing only technical competences in recruitment. In this perspective, a study conducted with employers at companies of various sizes about their perception of the adequate profiles of professionals with a higher education degree to occupy positions was surprising in that it questioned the traditional model of employability that highlights only skills, competencies and attributes. The analysis of responses allowed to infer that characteristics potentially developed by integral education, such as values and social engagement, are also becoming part of the criteria considered by employers in recruiting (HINCHLIFFE; JOLLY, 2011).

Thus, by considering the reviewed literature in the field of economy, we can see that the path for countries to prosper economically certainly involves building inclusive political and economic institutions, to which an important contribution is provided by individuals’ empowerment, innovation and creativity, which certainly depend on an integral education with general knowledge in higher education.

## CONCLUSION

After centuries of unsuccessful searching for the “secret” that might inexorably lead nations to prosperity and wealth, the recently formed conception that only the economic growth dimension is not enough, and that inclusive political and economic institutions are determinant, enabled a major advance towards a better vision of the “path” to development. Thus, gradually and progressively, economics and other areas of knowledge advanced towards a relative consensus that to generate broad, sustainable development there must be quality institutions in line with the guidance of price systems and with the attention to income distribution, in a balanced relationship between state and market.

Given these facts and the emergence of the knowledge society and economy, which demand increasingly educated individuals, national higher education systems took on an unprecedented role in terms of relevance in facing the challenge of nations’ development. However, recently, with the purpose of preparing more qualified “human capital” to increase economic competitiveness and generate more wealth, national governments began to implement reforms in higher education to turn it into technical competence training. Therefore, integral education with general knowledge, which was historically provided by universities to students, began to lose space and time in the curriculum of all fields and professions.

Given this tendency, we sought to demonstrate in this article that these educational policies and reforms which reduce the idea of higher education are a serious mistake on the part of governments. The most consistent theories on nations’ economic and social prosperity indicate that there is an evident relationship between the individual characteristics/profile necessary to boost countries’ development and integral education, which higher education in particular can provide. By means of deduction, based on the intersection of the relevant international literature in different areas of knowledge, we sought to evidence here the relationship between, on the one hand, individuals with critical thinking and individual agency, and, on the other hand, the challenge of development as freedom and social inclusion, as well as the relationship between empowered, creative and innovative individuals and the economic growth dimension of development.

Thus, it was possible to infer that integral education in higher education has a key role in building a critical mass (e.g., government members, leaders, workers, business people, etc.) that can recognize and commit to consolidating inclusive, pluralist institutions which allow both economic conditions of freedom and social conditions of equal opportunities. Building and developing a nation takes not only professionals with practical skills and competences, but also citizens

with critical thinking, freedom, autonomy, moral principles and democratic values.

Given the contemporary concept of development, which covers both economic growth and social inclusion, the university and the other academic organizations need, perhaps more than ever, to consolidate an adequate balance between educating for “knowing to do” and “knowing to be”. Therefore, as long as higher education is developing an integral education with general knowledge in courses in all fields of knowledge, it will certainly be contributing more effectively to nations, from the strengthening of democracy to development with social inclusion and, paradoxical as it may sound, also economic growth.

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