Confidence and legitimacy: an analysis of civil society's perception of universities in Córdoba and Florianópolis.

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Resumo

Trust can be considered one of the values of democracy and therefore it is imperative in today’s contexts, especially in relations between institutions and civil society. The university is a social institution responsible for the formation process and fundamental in the development of social awareness and political formation, directly influencing both the decision-making processes related to public policies and the definition of agendas. Their legitimacy and prestige in society come from the reliability of information and knowledge generated by them and their performance in social reality. In this sense, the objective of this work is to identify the perception of representatives of civil society in relation to the university in terms of the trust and legitimacy attributed to it. The cases of Córdoba and Florianópolis, two university cities, demonstrate the significant impact of the university on the city, in economic, political and social terms. Through interviews and observation with representatives of civil society, some similar and divergent characteristics were identified among the cases. It is unanimous among the interviewees that the university's presence in civil society actions adds greater legitimacy and trust, both for the movement and for the institution itself. However, the universities still show little openness or interest in participating in civil society actions and the existing actions in some cases are not institutionalized.

Keywords: University. Confidence. Legitimacy. Civil society.

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Introduction

Universities are social institutions responsible for the production and propagation of scientific development, whose practices are based on the public legitimacy deriving from their attributions (CHAUÍ, 2003). University is structured on principles, rules and internal systems that gives it autonomy, recognition and legitimacy before a democratic society.

However, for the university establish itself as protagonist in its field of action, it is not enough that there is only efficient management. As university is inserted within a sociocultural context, it has to create bonds with civil society itself, and this is done through the transmission of values and deriving from its decisions regarding matters of public interest. The political role of university is evident when we analyze the idea of participation in the public sphere.

Moisés (2005) warns of the important role of institutions in a democratic regime. Democratic institutions are responsible for making decisions based on the sharing of power with the community, ensuring the participation of citizens in the evaluation and judgment that underlies the decision-making process in order to satisfy the public interest.

Therefore, one of the discussions that involves the debate about democracy is the lack of confidence of civil society towards the institutions. According to Moises (2005), the high discrediting of institutions contributes to both the rejection of the system and the questioning of the legitimacy of democracy in a country. For the author, these results reflect great difficulties for the functioning of institutions and compromise the capacity of political leaders to coordinate government programs.

Universities have a key role in this context. Their legitimacy and prestige in society comes from the reliability of information and knowledge generated by them. Scientific knowledge is not unique, but fundamental to civilizing progress. Associated with other forms of knowledge, it broadens the possibilities for discussion and implementation of public policies, qualifying the democratic process.

According to Scherer-Warren (1986) as well as internally reverberating problems of the surrounding society, university internally has a social position that reflects divergent economic, political, cultural and ideological interests. The author adds that "in order for the university to be also one of the agents of the production of democracy, it must assume its forum of debate on the substantive question of
democracy both internally and externally on the campus” (Scherer-Warren, 1986) and internally constantly questioning the fate of knowledge produced and the real meanings of teaching, research and extension. For this, confidence is fundamental, especially in the relationships between these institutions and society.

In this sense, this article aims to identify the perception of representatives of civil society in relation to the university under two dimensions of analysis: the confidence and legitimacy attributed by civil society. For this, it starts from the understanding of university as a social institution and mediator of political culture since this concept can not be dissociated from the model of political behavior present in participatory democracies.

The study in two Latin American cities brings out the process of redemocratization that these countries are going through. These are processes that, according to Dagnino (2002), Avritzer (2002) and Hernandez Quinones (2011), aim to build a democratic order, highlighting the relevance of civil society in the process of construction of this order. The redemocratization of the 1980s influenced the emergence of the democratic governance agenda with the strengthening of Latin American civil society and a change in the pattern of relationship with the state and with institutions. With democratic openness, the centralized pattern gave space for organizations and social movements to claim greater participation in political institutions (DAGNINO, 2002).

However, the consolidation of democracy in Latin America is still challenging. The demand for democratic consolidation goes beyond the formal dimension, and includes the reduction of poverty and social inequality. These aspects require a new political design that increases social productivity through public management oversight (BAQUERO, 2008; p.406).

The process of re-democratization of countries has not been able to eliminate old vices from politics and the elaboration and execution of public policies in these countries has been challenged by the environment of distrust due to the distancing, indifference and lack of reciprocity between institutions and civil society. Such an environment hinders the strengthening of a democratic political culture. According to Baquero (2008, p. 388), "the fragility of representative institutions suggests an ambivalent commitment to democracy, both by elites and, above all, by the majority segments of Brazilian population."

In addition, there is an inconsistency between the economic model
implemented and the yearnings of society. The focus on productivity, competitiveness and international insertion, typical of an economy based on market logic, meets the societal demands. Such a situation has weakened an active citizen political culture.

The hybrid culture, characteristic of the Latin American countries, especially Brazil, mixes formal and informal dimensions, of historical tradition that lead to the discrediting of political institutions (BAQUERO, 2008). In this sense, understanding the citizen's perception of the country's reality and the level of institutionalization of values is paramount in identifying a possible solidification of democratic construction.

In this sense, the university, insofar as it is considered a mediator in the formation of a political culture, must guide its actions in the trust attributed to it by society. According to Moisés and Carneiro (2008), institutions are not neutral and should be structured in such a way that citizens know, use or intervene in their ultimate goals.

**Formation of political culture and trust attributed to institutions**

Political culture is imbued with the subjective values, cognitions, interpretations and beliefs of the social actor about their understanding of the political sphere, and can affect institutional structures and democratic models. Political culture, therefore, refers to a subjective orientation towards a particular political system (KUSCHNIR, 2007). For Secchi (2016 p.153), political culture is "the set of internalized collective predispositions that legitimize the political behavior of actors in a political process".

The formation and dissemination of civic culture and active political life precedes democracy and is intrinsically linked to the values of interpersonal trust and participation (NETTO, 2016). "Contemporary democracy requires an active citizenship that is involved in the political arena through discussions, deliberations, referendums and plebiscites" (BAQUERO, 2008, p.381).

Houtzager et al (2004) raises one of the priority issues in democratic governance to be answered: who participates? And, more importantly, what drives these guys to participate? According to the authors, the answer to the first question is only amenable to full formulation if one understands the factors that encourage ordinary citizens and collective actors of civil society to engage in institutional arrangements for participation in the public sphere.
This participation can take place through formal and informal means and add legitimacy to the democratic construction. Rennó (2001) reiterates and points to the need for high levels of interpersonal trust, as well as characteristics of equality of duties and rights among citizens, and the link is maintained by horizontal relations of reciprocity and cooperation. The author also adds attributes such as solidarity, tolerance and trust as pertaining to the political culture.

The notion of trust refers to social cohesion considered indispensable for the functioning of modern, complex and differentiated societies (MOISÉS, 2005). Modern democracies consider institutions fundamental in distinguishing the democratic regime from other forms of government (MOISÉS, CARNEIRO, 2008), since they are considered a means by which citizens expose demands and interests. Confidence is, therefore, one of the central themes with respect to discussions involving the values of democracy and is especially essential in relations between institutions and civil society.

The formation of a political culture and the consolidation of confidence in the institutions by the population represent, in a certain way, a level of maturity of democracy in the country, considering that the actors begin to fulfill their role.

According to Baquero (2008), since civil society is not very participatory, citizens resort to other mediators in detriment of traditional political mediation institutions, such as political parties. It is, according to the author, a reciprocal causal relationship between disabled institutions that do not produce democratic predispositions and the citizens, in a scenario of distrust and discredit.

Participation can be considered a contingent result, produced in a network of relations between collective actors located in a preexisting institutional terrain that represses and / or facilitates particular forms of action (HOUTZAGER et al., 2004). Institutionally engaged actors, or as Houtzager et al (2004) suggest, institutionally embedded, are those who establish links with political actors and who have the capacity to reach out and engage in new institutions of citizen participation.

The role of the university in the formation of political culture

The relationship between university and society can be thought of in the sense of reciprocal influence and shared knowledge. According to Santos (2011), the construction of new academic practices presupposes the conception of a university as a social space, aimed at building knowledge that can leverage transformations for the
benefit of society as a whole, in social, environmental, economic, technological, scientific, educational and cultural. The author's proposal is consistent with a humanistic and transformative perspective of the university and society. However, such a view depends on the historical, political and cultural context in which it is inserted and can be hampered by the dominant culture of the university institution and by the distance between university and society.

Bourdieu (2013, p. 16), in "Homo Academicus" places the university as a "socially recognized institution, which enjoys all legitimacy because of its rational character and which is seen as "magical" for achieving objective objectification and universal. "The author suggests that there are two poles of the same structure that oppose each other: a pole of knowledge, represented by academic freedom and a pole of power, related to social responsibility. The competences developed by these institutions are inseparably theoretical, technical and social.

The university is sometimes seen as a closed institution, with bureaucratic characteristics, inaccessible to minorities. Knowing this, it has the task of making viable means of communication in society approaching it, changing the stereotype of ivory tower. The university is an institution with an important meaning in what concerns the diffusion of knowledge in society since it is a place of interconnectivity and means of communication. There is, therefore, a need for a more communicative model of university (DETLANTY, 2001). In this sense, Delanty (2001) presents three possibilities of communicative interconnection: (1) new links between university and society; (2) new connections between the sciences; and (3) change in university-state relations. This is because the public space needs more communication, more transparency, more accessibility.

The necessary creation of interconnections with society and government is also based on the trust given to these institutions by civil society. This is because the university legitimizes itself in the production of knowledge, but its social role includes the capacity to influence the civic formation of the population. The educational function of the university is not limited to its institutional walls or to the courses related. It includes the formation of political culture of a democratic society.

The role of the university is, therefore, a mediator between the actors and agents interested in politics. This is because the current economic and productive model has shown knowledge and information as the most important factors in detriment of others as productive capital or raw material. Precisely for this reason, universities have
demonstrated themselves as strategic institutions in the development and training of citizens (TAVARES, 2013), since they are legitimate in the production of knowledge.

Santos (2011), however, warns of the need for internal and external democratic deepening of these institutions. External democracy consists of the opening of the university to society, beyond the democratization of access, seeking the creation of organic political links between university and society. External democracy empowers and is enhanced by internal democracy among teachers, researchers and the entire academic community.

Based on Kuschnir (2007), understanding the university as a mediator of political culture means recognizing that this mediator enjoys a privileged social insertion. Its strategic role is based on the ability of its decisions to interfere and to influence the life and prestige of those who are in its field of action, its contemporaries. For the author, the mediator establishes bridges of communication between the universes through which he travels.

**Methodology**

It is important to recognize that the research object can be constructed with the development of the research process (DESLAURIERS; KÉRISIT, 2008). In this sense, research questions, insights, new ideas and reflections must be taken into account that allow the construction and deconstruction of knowledge. In this way the qualitative and interpretative character of this research is justified.

This work is under construction and is part of an extension project. It seeks to associate literature review with field research still in construction. The research in the city of Córdoba began in 2015 with the objective of identifying the social role of universities in the city. The research aimed to identify and analyze the participation of universities in initiatives of civil society, such as networks of social movements for fair, democratic and sustainable cities. In the opportunity were identified gaps that could be better explored when approaching important concepts, such as the question of trust and legitimacy. More recently, in 2018, these concepts were taken up in studies on political culture and universities, seeking a comparative analysis between the cities of Córdoba and Florianópolis.

The choice of the cities studied was due to its characteristics as "university cities" that have in these institutions urban references and of social, political and
cultural impact. In addition, because they are Latin American cities, they naturally bring the history of the redemocratization process and the problem exists in this context. Institutions, especially universities, play a strategic role in cities and can therefore be studied in various dimensions.

In the city of Córdoba, interviews were conducted with the then rectors of the National and Catholic Universities of Córdoba, professors and researchers, city officials and civil society representatives, in particular members of the Coordinating Group of Red Ciudadana Nuestra Cordoba and Avina Foundation in Córdoba. In Florianópolis, in addition to the contact with professors, researchers and employees of universities, representatives of civil society were interviewed, such as the Public Policy Forum of Florianópolis, Rede de Ação Política pela Sutentabilidade – RAPS and Instituto Comunitário da Grande Florianópolis – Icom.

Qualitative-descriptive research, conducted through interviews and observation with some civil society and university actors, allowed us to link the theoretical reference on trust, political culture and university to the practices of the university-society relationship. The experience in the routine of the universities, especially Florianópolis, also allows to observe the perception of actors.

It should be noted that the proposal was to initiate a debate around these concepts in a conflicting social context. The Latin American reality exposes the constant need to improve the democratic process that involves all social classes, institutions and government and universities are challenged in this process.

**The perception of civil society about the university in Córdoba**

Rafael Velasco, former Rector of Universidade Católica de Córdoba - UCC and a reference as a leader, reflects on his management at the university and on the social role of these institutions. The UCC began to incorporate the reality in the academic and teaching scope from the principles of academic quality and social commitment, worked in parallel. For Velasco, the social role refers to the ability and effectiveness of a university to respond to the transformational needs of the society in which it is immersed. In order to do so, the functions of teaching, research, social projection and internal management must be aligned with the promotion of justice, solidarity and social
equality through the construction of successful responses. On the objectives of his management in the University, Velasco says:

La idea siempre consistió en que esto no fuera una chantada, ni un voluntariado aislado. Nuestra misión era que la comunidad educativa participase del conocimiento con impacto social. Además, nuestros esfuerzos siempre estuvieron dirigidos a involucrar a la UCC en los grandes debates públicos. Es una política central de esta universidad, que no depende de quién esté al frente.

At a Seminar held in Deusto-Loyola in 2013, Rafael Velasco cites some practices institutionalized by the UCC during his term. According to him, the integrative mission that responds to social commitment is associated with teaching, research and social projection (extension). Teaching means thinking real experiences that can then be reflected by students. That they are not voluntary experiences, but incorporated in the curricula and come to intervene in a community to work with a certain problem. Regarding research, Rafael Velasco suggests that the university should think about what areas and problems should be researched, under what perspectives, with what methodologies and with what resources. They must begin to think the knowledge applied to reality. According to the former president, there are five problem areas that must be produced: marginality, decriminalization and human rights, sustainable development and the environment, population health and prevalent pathologies, applied technologies and institutional practices and public policies.

The interviewee, Rector of UCC, Afonso Gómez, who replaced Velasco in management since 2013, highlights the primary function of generating public incidence, collaborating with society. According to the priest, “the university has the capacity to quantify proposals better through studies” and contribute to the social. The UCC's Social Projection Secretary, Griselda Ibaña, explained that Jesuit universities, such as the UCC, understand that the university should focus on public policies through the concept of advocacy, that is, giving voice to those who do not have visibility in the public space. And yet, this advocacy mission is important insofar as the university wants to make social projection, or to focus on public policies. For her, public advocacy presupposes quitting inertia, becoming more reflexive, more participatory and with more dialogues and participation in civil society initiatives.

The former Rector, Franscisco Tamarit, of Universidade Nacional de Córdoba-UNC, adds that it is difficult for the interior of the academy to make researchers accept

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5 In an interview with the daily La Voz Del Interior.
that they must should have answer questions asked by other actors, since, in general, they just like to respond to academic questions. It is, in Tamarit's view, a cultural struggle. And he concluded by saying that "no country produces science to produce", to innovate means to apply the knowledge produced improvement of some process, in some product. This product, he said, may be social, improving municipal management, collaborating with a neighborhood, with a city. Pablo Vagliente, national official of the Avina Foundation in the Political Innovation team, states that especially public universities have a tradition of extension, dealing with community, but in Cordoba would be an exceptional case with the participation of Catholic University - UNC. According to him, the National University - UNC always had a greater direction, in the historical struggles, as in the Cordobazo, in the alliances with unions. But in the Catholic case, Pablo points out that it is an exceptional case, because after the leadership of Rafael Velasco, considered the great personal variable, there was the concern of the continuity of this social concern. And, according to him, the current rector, Father Gómez, shows that it is an institutional initiative, even if there are differences in leadership profile, institutional commitments remain.

Carlos Jornet, Director of La Voz del Interior newspaper, one of the main media in the city, affirms the credibility given to the initiatives of civil society with the participation of the university. For him, the university has a lot of accumulated knowledge and a potential to generate much more. At the same time, they need to be closer to reality. Jornet adds that university involvement opens the door to the academy and seeks to bring equally valuable knowledge, not only from a theoretical point of view, but also with a concrete practical application that surely creates more knowledge for the future.

Virgínia Romanutti, Executive Coordinator of Red Nuestra Córdoba, says that "the presence of university in the network is fundamental because it guarantees the network's seriousness". However, according to her, there are many social organizations that also produce knowledge and can take advantage of the knowledge of universities, with scientific methods, for example. "It is important that the university places this knowledge at the service of society." The university can not keep closed, but seek solutions to problems in society. Virginia observes that dialogue is not easy, since those who are not from the academic world see the university students as "those who know". However, according to her, there is always something to share. "The university must be open to other types of knowledge that may be useful. It's a very interesting learning."
Marcela Mondino, regional representative of the Avina Foundation in Argentina, emphasizes the political role of the rectors, with the institutionalization of the initiatives through the research programs and the economic investments by the Universities. In his view, the political role of rectors in the process is key. Mondino adds that "in the academic space there is a lot that we as a movement are interested in and Cordoba [Red Ciudadana Nuestra Córdoba], in this sense, was the first Latin American movement that incorporated from its essence, from the birth, the University [...] ".

Interviewed Paola Ninci, Head of Parliamentary Information and Access to Information of the Deliberative Council of Córdoba, explains that participation of universities, especially the most prominent in the city - UNC and UCC - is decisive for the action of social movements. She reports that prior to the universities' participation, there were some experiences with civil society organizations, but without the strength or technical reference of a university. She emphasizes that the universities produce indicators, assisted in the elaboration of the goal plan and enabled different thematic groups.

Paola Ninci also refers to the legitimacy of political and technical institutions' entry into the institutions of civil society, as they are important companies in Argentina and Latin America. In his view,

At the political level, [universities] are a reference; and on a technical level, give solidity to the arguments of the movements to define their agendas. They provide technical and empirical foundations on the discussions [...] The manager gives more importance to discussions when the university is present than when it is not. He's an actor. It gives technical solidity.

In addition, Paola emphasizes the importance of the intersection between academic research and the concrete problems of the city. According to her, through the universities there are very rich discussions that subsidize the thematic groups of the movements, which are formed by university people, researchers, citizens who want to participate and bring knowledge acquired from another place. Paola Nince adds that "the university is a reference and a key actor in the city".

For Silvana Raquel López, professor and researcher at UNC and representative of the university in the Coordinating Group of Red Nuestra Cordoba, the university plays an important role in the city by encouraging participation and knowledge. Once involved and supporting spaces for discussion, they end up encouraging the participation of the more active, more dynamic population, with participatory potential,
informed and involved with these ideas, especially the students. This is due to the 
degree of credibility that universities have.

Silvana Lopez highlighted a recent Argentine media report that reveals that the 
public university is the most reliable institution for 71% of Argentines. Second are the 
churches. According to her, this fact reveals that the university constitutes a valuable 
social actor, whose prestige must be conserved and expanded.

The perception of civil society about the university in Florianópolis

Some convergence points are observed in Florianópolis with the observations 
made in Cordoba, especially regarding the recognition of the role of universities in the 
context in which they are inserted.

Cíntia Moura Mendonça, Coordinator of the Public Policy Forum of 
Florianópolis, recalls the difficulty of initiatives by civil society working without the 
support of public authorities or other institutions. She points out that, like the Forum, 
many civil society organizations seek support in the sense of legitimizing their actions.

According to Cíntia, the initiatives of civil society must make a great effort to 
mobilize people and institutions that give due protection to their actions. For her, "civil 
society is part of an unequal power struggle, it has neither the knowledge nor the 
technique (...) it will only work if it has support, advice and training." In this sense, it 
highlights the fundamental role of universities, of which they always lack participation.

Anderson Giovani da Silva, active leadership in several initiatives of civil 
society, especially in the Network of Political Action for Sustainability - RAPS 
comments that the participation of universities in civil society is very strong through 
teachers and researchers, in isolation. He notes that these people are well engaged, have 
good ideas in the disciplines that teach classes in order to promote a rapprochement 
between academia and society. He cites some names of teachers with whom he has had 
direct contact and contributed much to initiatives of which he was a part. He cites in 
particular the Universidade do Estado de Santa Catarina, which includes many activist 
teachers. He adds that some teachers dedicate themselves, expose themselves and strive 
for this to happen.

Anderson asserts, therefore, that there is no institutional involvement on the part 
of the universities and he completes saying that "the institutional relation is a means to 
be able to realize things that started from the emprendorismo of the professors".
Cíntia Moura reiterates that the participation of universities in civil society initiatives adds greater legitimacy and confidence to the movements. And with respect to the university, trust, she says, comes from practice. That is, "practice can not be dissociated from the university". In the same vein, Anderson Giovani states that "the university always has an aura of 'place that knows things'. I have no doubt about the advantage of being close to the university or bringing it into civil society." For him, actions gain legitimacy if the university is together.

Anderson suggests that it is in the unconscious of people that the university is beyond suspicion. It even helps to reaffirm the legitimacy of a project, which would be an indicator that it is an institution with a recognized reputation. And he adds:

"So if we have projects that will need to mobilize private resources, for example, if this project is in conjunction with the university, the chance is greater." The conversation flows more easily, from a practical point of view, this is a reality, lends legitimacy, lends credence to civil society actions. It is a good indicator that society has confidence."

The interviewee also points out that the university's resources are little used and could be better exploited by the community. Empty rooms, little used equipment, could be made available.

Cíntia cites an example of an opening space at the Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina, through the Nucleus of Studies in Social Work and Popular Organization - NESSOP. This Nucleus has promoted a course of political formation open to the community. According to the Coordinator, the university could collaborate in the conduct of qualified research, data generation, presentation of fundamental themes for society, etc. And remember that sometimes some teachers, in an isolated way, support the movements, but still sporadically and when requested. This participation helps the initiatives to gain a voice with the public power since they guarantee the legitimacy with their participation.

Anderson Giovani clarifies that the university is in the market, in the government and in the community. According to him, "university is an institution that circulates among these dimensions". Despite this, he adds that the university can not assume responsibility for the formation of political culture alone, because just a very small part of the population has access to these institutions and this does not represent the reality of the Brazilian people, which is subjected to daily routines which discourages them from participating. In this sense, according to him, the university is outside the day to day of the Brazilian and must create other spaces, besides the
traditional ones that foment the participation and civic culture of the citizens, in a creative way.

Conclusion

Analyzing the cases of Córdoba and Florianópolis, called "university cities", it is perceived that universities are relevant actors for their context. It could be observed that the perception of civil society and other actors of the city attribute prestige and reliability to these institutions. In both cities there is recognition of the role of the university beyond the promotion of education. In addition, it is unanimous among the interviewees that the involvement of universities in civil society initiatives adds legitimacy and credibility to both the initiatives and the institution itself.

In Córdoba it is observed that universities have not only a technical role, but also a political one through their rectors who, historically, represent true leaders in the city. Projects and actions related to civil society were institutionalized in the universities and the latter began to invest, including financially, in the development of studies and research aimed at these initiatives.

It should be noted that the history of the city of Córdoba is confused with that of the universities, especially the UNC. Perhaps this is a determining factor in the recognition of these institutions in the city.

In Florianópolis there is no institutional involvement in initiatives of prominent civil society, not even in active organizations, despite the recognition of the importance of the university in society, as highlighted by the interviewees. The university rectors in this city can not be considered as active leaders. The actions of the universities in this city are personified and occur in an isolated way on the part of teachers, researchers, through specific projects that seek the application of knowledge to society. There is, therefore, no culture in the sense of institutionalizing social actions, and projects with civil society are limited to some disciplines or people.

The reliability attributed to universities in both municipalities is based on the legitimacy attributed to these institutions and on the recognition of the knowledge produced. However, the difference between the two cities lies in the institutionalization of actions aimed at society and the role of the leaders involved.

In addition, it must be considered that the current national context in which cities are inserted reflects in the institutions. The distrust attributed to institutions in Brazil is
evident and, despite the recognition of universities as legitimate producers of knowledge, there are still many ideological issues that surround them.

Finally, considering these institutions as political culture formers, it is necessary to question the extent to which they are responding to the demands of society and contributing to the participation and effective exercise of citizenship. What tools do they have for this training and to what extent do the trust attributed to these institutions influence the legitimacy of their projects?


