



Journal of Innovation & Knowledge

www.elsevier.es/jik



Conceptual paper

Higher education in the fight against poverty from the capabilities approach: The case of Spain



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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 9 February 2017

Accepted 8 March 2017

Available online 10 April 2017

JEL classification:

I24

I25

Keywords:

Poverty

Relative poverty Spain

Higher education

Capabilities approach

Proposals against poverty

ABSTRACT

This article describes relative poverty in Spain in relation to the other States in the European Union, following the European indicator AROPE. The official data provided by the National Statistical Institute of Spain and by Eurostat, refer to the year 2014 (the last one for which definitive data are available is 2015). Given the relative poverty of Spanish population, the failure of conventional economic theories, which conceive social development as GDP growth, is clear, and it is argued in favour of the human capabilities approach as a more adequate option for development, from a theoretical-practical point of view, for the reduction and/or eradication of poverty, as well as the appropriateness of a new conception of Higher Education, structured around central topics of the capabilities approach, to empower citizenship with such objective. The pedagogical proposals discussed here are as follows: (1) the conception of Higher Education Institutions from the approach of capability development, and aimed at social responsibility; (2) the formation of a university community as agents of their lives and communities; (3) the learning by the university community of the values in the capabilities approach; (4) the option of the university community for participation in public affairs in the pursuit of the common good; (5) the primacy of the formation of the university community as agents of sustainability agents.

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La educación superior ante la lucha contra la pobreza desde el enfoque de las capacidades: El caso de España

R E S U M E N

El artículo describe la pobreza relativa en España en relación con los demás Estados de la Unión Europea, siguiendo el indicador europeo AROPE. Los datos de los que parte son oficiales, proporcionados por el Instituto Nacional de Estadística español y por Eurostat, referidos al año 2014 (último del que se tienen datos definitivos, 2015). Ante la situación de pobreza relativa de la población española, se detecta el fracaso de las teorías económicas convencionales, que conciben el desarrollo social como crecimiento del PIB, y se argumenta a favor

Códigos JEL:

I24

I25

Palabras clave:

Pobreza

Pobreza relativa España

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<http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.jik.2017.03.002>

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Educación superior
Enfoque capacidades
Propuestas contra pobreza

del enfoque de capacidades humanas como una opción teórico-práctica del desarrollo más adecuada para la disminución y/o erradicación de la pobreza; así como la conveniencia de una nueva concepción de la Educación Superior, estructurada en torno a tópicos centrales del enfoque de las capacidades, para empoderar a la ciudadanía con tal objetivo. Las propuestas pedagógicas que se argumentan son: 1) la concepción de las instituciones de Educación Superior desde el enfoque del desarrollo de capacidades y para la responsabilidad social; 2) la formación de la comunidad universitaria como agentes de sus vidas y comunidades; 3) el aprendizaje por la comunidad universitaria de los valores del enfoque de las capacidades; 4) la opción de la comunidad universitaria por la participación en los asuntos públicos en la búsqueda del bien común; 5) la primacía de la formación de la comunidad universitaria como agentes de sostenibilidad.

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Introduction

If we look at the meaningful data of poverty indicators¹ handled by the United Nations Development Programme: income, hunger, education, health, access to drinking water and sanitation infrastructures, as well as at gender inequalities, and the poverty situation of the world presented to us by the *UNDP Report (2003)*, as compared to the situation presented by the latest *UNDP Report (2015)*, global poverty has declined in the developing countries. However, the comparison between both reports shows the ultimate failure of the International Community regarding the issue at hand.

In fact, the *Human Development Report (UNDP, 2003)* was devoted to describing the main problems of poverty in the world, analysing their causes and presenting specific proposals to accelerate the eradication of extreme poverty. The *Report* was based on the *United Nations Millennium Declaration of 2000*, adopted by 189 political leaders, the largest ever gathering of Heads of State and Government.

These leaders pledged to join efforts to ensure that, by the year 2015 or before, concrete Goals for development progress and poverty eradication were met. These Goals, as well as

their commitment to fulfil them, acquired by the rich and poor countries, were ratified in the *Monterrey Consensus* that emerged following the *United Nations Conference on Financing for Development* in March 2002 at the *World Summit on Sustainable Development* in Johannesburg (2002), and the launching of the *Doha Round (Qatar 2001)* on International Trade.

The agreement reached between the countries formed the basis for the *Millennium Development Compact (UNDP, 2003: 1–3)*, presented as a political proposal to achieve the following eight Goals: eradicate extreme poverty and hunger; achieve universal primary education; promote gender equality and empower women; reduce child mortality; improve maternal health; combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other endemic diseases; ensure environmental sustainability and foster a global partnership for development.

As we are in 2017, what data do the extreme poverty indicators currently offer? Worldwide, 795 million people suffer from chronic hunger; 11 children under 5 years of age and 33 women die every hour for lack of medical care; about 37 million people live with HIV/AIDS and around 11 million are suffering from tuberculosis; more than 660 million use non-potable water sources; 2.4 billion use unimproved sanitary facilities, and almost 1 billion are forced into open defecation. Around the world, 780 million adults and 103 million young people (aged 15–24) are illiterate. In developed countries there are 169 million children who are functionally illiterate. Worldwide, 250 million children have not acquired the basic knowledge, although 130 million of them have attended school for at least 4 years (*UNDP, 2015*).

These are stubborn facts, which teach us once again that political pacts and international declarations look very good as promises on paper and for political publicity, but they are too often not met. Aware of these difficulties, the drafters of the *UNDP Report (2003)* call for the involvement of civil society, from community-based organizations to professional associations, women's groups and networks of non-governmental organizations (NGOs), to compel governments to maintain the political will to keep their promises:

One of the most significant developments in the last decade has been the growing influence of civil society organizations and networks –at both local/national and global scales– on political change and debt relief.

¹ Just as the Human Development Index (HDI) measures a country's overall progress in achieving human development, the Human Poverty Index (HPI) measures the backlog of deprivations that still exist. Two human poverty indices are used: The IPH-1 for developing countries, and the IPH-2, for OECD countries. HPI-1 addresses the following indicators: longevity, measured along with probability, at birth, of not living to the age of 40; Knowledge, based on the adult literacy rate; and general public and private economic supply, measured by the percentage of people who do not use improved water sources, the percentage of those lacking sustainable access to improved water sources, and the percentage of underweight children. The HPI-2 measures deprivations in the same aspects as HPI-1 plus one: social exclusion. It is based on the following indicators: the probability, at birth, of not living to the age of sixty; the rate of adults lacking functional literacy skills; the percentage of people living below the poverty line of income (adjusted disposable income per household less than 50% of the average net income; and long-term unemployment rate (12 months or longer). Gender measures deprivation in the same dimensions, according to gender difference (Source: Office of Human Development).

Non-governmental organizations (NGOs), community-based organizations, professional associations, and other civil society groups are regularly invited to participate in the design and implementation of poverty reduction strategies (UNDP, 2003: 23–24).

The importance attached to the mobilization of popular support by the drafters of the *Report* is illustrated by the fact that a whole chapter, i.e. chapter 7, is devoted to this topic. Realizing the policies and interventions needed to achieve the *Millennium Development Goals* is seen as requiring the conviction of political leaders but also some sustained political pressure with broad popular support. For such popular mobilization and participatory civic engagement, an open democratic state is needed, one that guarantees political and civil liberties, so that citizens of poor countries can put pressure on their leaders to fulfil their commitments towards the *Goals*. Referenced chapter 7 provides a detailed analysis of several developing countries, showing the benefits of popular participation and decentralization for poverty reduction in several of their indicators.

Participation and civic mobilization should also take place in the citizenship of donor countries, which should monitor and track the volume and quality of aid provided in order to ensure that they are consistent with the achievement of the Poverty Reduction Goals.

In order for this participation and mobilization of citizenship to eradicate poverty, people should be empowered to be agents of their own lives and to govern the processes by which they reach their goals, so that they can be determined to act moved by concepts such as self-interest, sympathy or commitment. The option for commitment is not a possibility but a moral demand that springs from the recognition of people as absolutely valuable beings that have no price but dignity. Active collaboration against poverty is therefore a rational obligation in the moral sense, and not an option amongst others equally rational (Cortina, 2009). In our days we have a prevalent, widespread social awareness, and we believe that it is our duty to put an end to poverty and hunger, and we also have the resources to eradicate them. And yet, we have allowed and continue to allow them to exist, that is why we are morally responsible.

In the empowerment of citizens for the eradication of poverty, Higher Education institutions can and should play a major role in the following areas: (a) functioning as socially responsible institutions; (b) educating their teachers and students in the values, knowledge and attitudes relative to the concept of a decent society according to human dignity and basic social justice, both nationally and internationally; (c) preparing students to be technically competent and socially active professionals as agents of sustainability (UNESCO, 2015).

And, above all, given the failure of conventional economy in the eradication of poverty, we should make teachers and students of Higher Education aware of other approaches proposed by current reputable economists, some of them Nobel Prize winners, who ask for a critical review of the economic theory from several angles and with new perspectives, such as Sen's (2000) welfare economics, Sachs's (2005) clinical economics, Stiglitz's (2015) or Atkinson's (2016) approaches, revealing that

the persistence of poverty and inequality should be at the heart of our economists' main efforts, as they are mainly engaged in issues of lesser importance and, in some cases, of dubious importance.

In this article, we will use the official data provided by both Eurostat and the *National Institute of Statistics in Spain* as primary sources, and, as secondary sources, first-class scientific research publications. We adopt the perspective of what has been termed as *hermeneutic economy* (Conill, 2004, 2009), linked to an ethics of responsibility in the economic and business sphere, which has borne so much fruit to the researchers of the *Etnor Foundation* in Valencia (Spain). The hermeneutic perspective allows us to discover the interpretative character of the economy – of poverty and wealth –, its unavoidable axiological presuppositions and it helps us evaluate its consequences. With regard to educational proposals, we will follow the approach of capability development, especially Nussbaum's.

The questions we ask ourselves, and attempt to answer, are the following: What is the current situation of poverty in Spain in the context of the EU-28? What concept of poverty are we talking about and how does it relate to inequality? Is poverty a social problem without a possible solution? If there are solutions, what are they and who should provide them? Should they be provided also by Higher Education? If Higher Education can contribute to reduce or eradicate poverty, which theoretical approach is appropriate and what pedagogical lines should be developed? Such questions are handled in the general objective as well as in the specific objectives of this article. As a general objective we aim to formulate pedagogical proposals addressed to Higher Education institutions for the reduction or eradication of poverty in Spain; As specific objectives, we aim at: (a) mapping the concepts of poverty and inequality and the relationships between them; (b) describing the situation of poverty in Spain in the context of the European Union; (c) arguing that the capabilities approach, especially from Nussbaum's contributions onward, is a very appropriate theoretical and practical construction for the analysis and eradication of poverty; (d) presenting lines of pedagogical proposals to empower tertiary educational community in the fight against poverty.

Poverty and inequality in Spain in the context of the European Union

Poverty and inequality are very complex concepts that should be further refined and should not be used carelessly if one is to argue clearly and not to create confusion: they refer to different social realities, although closely related to one another, and their application to Spain requires to specify what type of poverty is being utilized and with reference to which inequality or inequalities. The type of poverty referred to is not extreme but relative poverty, since the context from which it is taken refers to the *Europe 2020 Strategy* on the risk of poverty and/or social exclusion which, in addition to a key indicator of household income level, includes three sub-indicators, i.e. the rate of poverty risk after social transfers; the severe material lack of property of persons or households; and households with very low labour intensity; This set of

indicators is what is referred to, in terminology of the European institutions, as AROPE (At Risk of Poverty and/or Exclusion).

According to the *Europe 2020 Strategy*, people living on low incomes (60% of the median of the equivalent income or per unit of consumption)² are considered at risk of poverty and/or social exclusion, as well as the population that is in any of the following two situations: people suffering from severe material deprivation (4 of the 9 items defined)³; and/or people living in households with very low employment intensity (below 20%).

When 60% of the average income is taken as a line or income threshold, as it is officially done in Europe, a kind of income is being defined, that of the poor in relative terms; but if we take US\$4 2010 as the poverty line, poverty is being defined in absolute terms, as it is done in the *UNDP Reports* (Carabaña, 2016).

As mentioned above, when we talk about poverty in Spain, in the context of Europe, we usually refer to relative poverty, which allows us to make direct reference to both Spain and the poverty of the other States in the European Union, according to data taken from the *National Statistical Institute in Spain* and *Eurostat* (a statistical office that aggregates the data provided by all Member States and allows for comparison between them). The data provided below supply information on household incomes in Spain during the year 2014, the latest for which accurate data are available.

According to INE data published in 2015, the poverty threshold in Spain for one-person households stood at 8011 euros. With this threshold, the average poverty risk rate of the population resident in Spain stood at 22.2%. It deserves attention that with people under 16 years of age this rises to 28.8% and in those over 65 years it decreases to 12.3%. As for the economic situation of households: 15.1% stated they had

reached the end of the month with great difficulty, 42.4% could not afford to meet unexpected expenses, and 45% could not afford a vacation away from home for at least a week per year.

If we distribute the Spanish population by quintiles according to their income – in five equal parts, the first quintile having the lowest income and the fifth one having the highest income – and we disaggregate them according to variables such as age, level of education, related activity, nationality and size of the household, we can see that, (a) regarding the level of studies, 9.8% of the population with Higher Education was at risk of poverty, while it was 29.9% of the population who had undergone the first stage of Secondary Education (in other words, 41.8% of the population with Higher Education was in quintile five, or with the highest income); (b) in relation to their activity, 41.5% of the unemployed were in the first quintile or with the lowest income; (c) in relation to nationality, 16.7% of Spaniards were in the first quintile, along with 30.0% of foreigners from countries of the European Union, and 51.7% accounted for foreigners not belonging to countries in the Union; (d) by household size, 36.8% of households with 5 or more members were in the first quintile or having the lowest level of income, while in the fifth quintile (that of highest income), the corresponding figure was 14.1%.

If we compare Spain with the other EU Member States according to *Eurostat* (2015), in six of them, i.e. Romania (25.4%), Spain (22.2%), Greece (22.1%), Bulgaria (21.8%) and Latvia (21.2%), more than a fifth of the population is at risk of poverty. With regard to their professional activity, the unemployed group was the most vulnerable one: almost half (47.2%) of the total unemployed were at risk of poverty; fortunately, social transfers – i.e. universal and free education and healthcare, pension systems, etc. – allow Spain, despite its fairly high unemployment rate, not to be ranked amongst the worst countries; people with jobs had a lower risk of poverty (9.5%), although there were relatively high rates of workers at risk of poverty in Romania (19.6%), Greece (13.4%), Spain (12.5%) and Estonia (11.8%). As for the risk of poverty in households, similar trends occur in almost all EU-28 countries: people living alone face a higher risk of poverty (25.1%) than those where two or more adults live together (11.2%), and the situation improves if one of them is over 65 years of age (10.2%). In all countries, a similar situation was seen in households with dependent children: households comprised of two adults and one dependent child were better off in terms of poverty risk (13.6%) than households with three or more dependent children (26.9%), and households of single persons with dependent minors (32.5%).

Income inequalities (*Eurostat*, 2015) are especially relevant in estimating relative poverty. Large inequalities in income distribution were observed in 2014: a weighted average of the national figures for each of the EU Member States shows that the first 20% of the population (with the highest equivalised disposable income) received 5.2 times more than the last 20% of the population (with the lowest level of equivalised disposable income). This proportion varied from 3.5 times in the Czech Republic to over 6.0 in Lithuania, Portugal, Latvia, Greece, Spain and Bulgaria.

Some reflections on the data provided on poverty and inequality in Spain:

² The median is a value that, by sorting all individuals from lowest to highest income, leaves one half of them below that value and the other half above. Therefore, because it is a relative measure, its value depends on the income level of the population and how the income is distributed among the population. The poverty threshold depends on the distribution of households by consumer units. A consumer unit is a person living alone. A household consisting of two adults constitutes 1.5 units of consumption (second adult is 0.5) and if they are under 14 years old it is estimated in 0.3 for each minor. The poverty threshold is thus estimated for each type of household. Thus, in the 2015 survey of the Spanish National Institute of Statistics, the value of the poverty threshold in Spain is obtained by multiplying 8010.9 euros by the number of consumer units in the household. For example, for an adult household the threshold is 8010.9 euros; For a household of 2 adults it is 12,016.4 euros (or 6008.2 per person) and for a household with two adults and two children under 14 years old it is 16,822.9 euros (or 4205.7 euros per person).

³ The 9 items are as follows: (1) they are not delinquent in the payment of rent or household bills, mortgage, receipts related to housing or purchases in installments; (2) they keep the house at an adequate temperature during the cold months; (3) they can afford unforeseen expenses; (4) they can eat a meal made up of meat, chicken or fish every two days; (5) they go on holiday away from home, at least once a year; (6) they own a car; (7) they own a washing machine; (8) they own a colour television; (9) they own a telephone.

- The risk of relative poverty and social exclusion in Spain was among the highest in the EU in 2014, along with its unemployment rate; the risk of relative poverty of employed people was also high (12.5%). Income inequality in Spain was slightly above the European average.
- Both the risk of poverty and/or social exclusion as well as income inequality are dynamic situations that change over time. There is no 'biblical curse' forcing Spain to rank amongst the worst in terms of risk of relative poverty, inequality or unemployment; these social realities are rather due to international situations, sometimes difficult to control and, above all, to economic policies that depend on the competence/incompetence or ideology and interests of those in power in the countries. [Atkinson \(2016\)](#), probably one of the world's leading specialists in income inequality, has written an excellent work with political proposals for economic action to fight inequalities. When we speak about poverty and inequality, according to the data provided by the primary sources (INE and Eurostat), a snapshot of the year, or of a period comprising 12 months, is provided, but no longer than that.

Professor [Carabaña \(2016\)](#), poses the question directly: How to reduce poverty and inequality in Spain? And he responds that ordinarily two types of policies are opposed: on the one hand, redistribution of wealth, by raising taxes and then transferring the returns thus obtained to the poor; and on the other hand, employment growth and improvement of the human capital of the poor. And he draws the following conclusions:

- Economic growth usually reduces poverty, but not inequality, since it tends to increase incomes of all social classes. Reducing inequality would require asymmetric, biased pro-poor growth.
- Without social transfers, progressive fiscal policies directly reduce inequality, but they only reduce poverty indirectly and under certain conditions, such as reducing the taxes paid by the poor or facilitating the use of public services.
- In order to reduce poverty and inequality to the lowest levels in our history, at least for 3% of the Spanish population in severe poverty (4 euros per person a day), it would suffice to increase taxes by two points of the total income, something that has been done without many difficulties in the last six years, and then redistributing the product amongst the poor, something which has not been done.

We would not like to end this section without referring to the analysis that Joseph E. [Stiglitz \(2015\)](#), Nobel laureate of economy, makes of the Spanish case and its economic depression, which lasted until 2014, when he affirms that a long-recognized principle is that a balanced expansion of taxes and spending stimulates the economy, and if the programme is well designed – i.e. taxes at the top, combined with spending on education, a policy that was deliberately excluded – the increase in GDP and employment can be significant. One of the fundamental obligations of a modern economy is to maintain full employment. Young people deprived of long-term acceptable employment are marginalized. If they end up finding work, it is in exchange for a much lower salary. Usually youth is the time when we acquire and develop knowledge.

Now in Spain our youngsters waste away. The most valuable asset in a society, the capabilities of its members, is being wasted and even destroyed, not by a natural catastrophe but by the harmful policy of austerity imposed by Europe, especially by Germany. The complacency of Spanish politicians towards such policy as well as the electoral interests of the parties with their deceptive promises to lower taxes in order to increase votes add to this context. In Spain, promises to lower taxes, declining education and research budgets, a high unemployment rate, and the emigration of young people, as well as university graduates, clearly reveal the clumsiness of the political steps and this is reflected in poverty and inequality indicators.

The focus on human development and poverty

Income poverty is inevitably linked to a decline in capabilities; if we look at the data provided by the indicators in the previous section, income poverty is associated to either low levels of education or poor quality of work, or insufficient social transfers, or inadequate design of economic policies for redistribution of income, from which the participation of citizens is excluded. In this way there is a hellish circle: income poverty (or rent) is associated with precarious education, health and work, which, in turn, hinders the acquisition of the necessary skills to earn an income and get rid of income poverty ([Sen, 2000](#)). The greater the coverage in education, health care assistance, quality of work and the greater the citizen participation in the design of public policies in general, and of economic policy, in particular, the more likely it is that the poor will have opportunities to overcome poverty. Improving human capabilities tends to be accompanied by an increase in productivities and income-generating power. A fundamental consequence of the consideration of poverty as a deprivation of capabilities, is a new look at the poor as victims of the situation, not guilty of it. The poor have been denied the possibility of acquiring the skills to get out of their bad situation, sometimes by those who blame them.

In recent years, the new buzzword in professional activity is *entrepreneur* or *entrepreneurship*, but the development of human capabilities is not attracting attention to complete what was initially started, as concluded by Professor Carabaña in his excellent book on the country of Spain:

The findings that I least expected were, undoubtedly, those related to the self-employed. The decline in their profits, and in particular the increase in their losses, is due to half of the increase in inequality, more than half of the increase in the very poor and most of the decline in the incomes of the very poor in the two or three first years of the crisis... Without the data I would never have come to think that the poor who grew and became poorer were not only wage earners but also entrepreneurs ([Carabaña, 2016](#): 175–176).

As Professor Conill reminds us, it would have to be made clear that:

a new approach to Economy is needed, since conventional economics has failed because it does not serve to solve the main problems of mankind; or it has impoverished, as it has

lost its original sense of political economy and has become detached from its ethical background (Conill, 2009: 153).

The new approach to economics, in the opinion of many experts, would have to be a developmental view consisting not only in raising profits or incomes, but also in offering people the maximum opportunities, thus strengthening human rights, freedoms, capabilities and opportunities, and enabling citizens to lead a long, healthy, creative life.

Human development is a process aimed at expanding people's opportunities, as they acquire more skills and have more opportunities to use them. But human development is also an objective, so it is both a process and an outcome. Human development implies that people must influence the process that determines their lives. In this context, economic growth is an important means for achieving human development, but it is not the ultimate goal. Human development is the development of people through the creation of human capabilities, for people through the improvement of their lives and for people through active participation in the processes that determine their lives. This approach is broader than others, such as the human resources, the basic needs and the human welfare approaches (PNUD, 2015: 2).

In that UNDP Report the dimensions of human development are conceived in two broad categories: the first one, as a direct improvement of human capabilities, includes a long and healthy life, knowledge, and a decent standard of living. The second one, understood as the creation of the necessary conditions for human development, includes the promotion of equality and social justice, security and human rights, environmental sustainability, and the participation in political and community life.

Is this conception of development more powerful in the fight against poverty and inequality than the conventional approaches to economy as a development of GDP? The answer is yes, despite the economic and technological advances that the world has at its disposal. In conventional economics, the benefits of progress are not equitably shared between individuals and peoples, human capabilities and opportunities do not always thrive, human security is at stake, human rights and freedoms are not always protected, inequality of gender is still a problem, opportunities for young people do not receive the attention they deserve. Thus, the concept of human development takes on new importance as the framework of an economy at the centre of which people and their dignities (UNDP, 2015) are situated in decent societies.

The conception of human capability development and not just as GDP growth has been defended as more adequate to fight against poverty, both by the two emblematic representatives of this approach, Sen (2000) and Nussbaum (2006), as well as by international research groups (Cortina & Pereira, 2009), who contemplate that capabilities provide a set of rich moral objectives for the development of individuals and peoples against poverty and wealth as conceived by conventional economists, who consider people as a statistical average of the income or wealth that corresponds to each of them according to the various States; Likewise, the presentation of a specific list of capabilities allows us to clarify what we are talking about

when we refer to the fundamental rights of people to be and to do what corresponds to their dignity and equal consideration of others.

Thinking in terms of capabilities gives us a point of reference if we really want to secure a right for someone and demand a decent society that provides the conditions for acquiring and putting these capabilities into operation (Nussbaum, 2007, 2012).

There is a question fundamental to the capabilities approach: which of them are the most important ones?, since, ultimately, the answer to that question will serve to position the regulatory law as well as the public policies, thus reinforcing the idea that some capabilities are more important than others. If we further refine the question, and apply it to the basic capabilities, it has to be reformulated as: which of them are indispensable according to human dignity? Human beings come into the world with enough equipment for multiple states of *being and doing*, and some of their capabilities are so valuable that they need to be developed in the form of mature capabilities. If the goal of the capability-building approach is to establish political principles that can serve as a foundation for constitutional law and public policy in a nation that aspires to social justice, then the hierarchy of capabilities becomes crucial.

The notion of human dignity is closely related to the notion of basic capability: it is something inherent in the person who demands to be developed. While there is room for debate about whether innate potential differs among people, human dignity is the same in all of them. In other words, each and every person deserves equal respect from laws and institutions. If people are considered as citizens, they all have equal rights. From this perspective, equality holds a prominent place in the capability-building approach. In general, therefore, the approach to capabilities, as interpreted by Nussbaum, focuses on the protection of areas of freedom so central that their removal makes a life not worthy of human dignity.

Considering the various areas of human life in which people move and act, Nussbaum once again asks: what does it take for a person's life to live up to human dignity? Her answer is that the bare minimum and essential fact of a person's life to live up to human dignity is that it loosely surpasses a level or threshold of the following ten Central abilities:

1. Life; being able to live to the end of a human life of normal length; not dying prematurely, or before one's life is so reduced as to be not worth living.
2. Bodily Health; being able to have good health, including reproductive health, to be adequately nourished, to have adequate shelter.
3. Bodily Integrity. Being able to move freely from place to place; to be secure against violent assault, including sexual assault and domestic violence; having opportunities for sexual satisfaction and for choice in matters of reproduction.
4. Senses, Imagination, and Thought. Being able to use the senses, to imagine, think, and reason – and to do these things in a “truly human” way, a way informed and cultivated by an adequate education, including, but by no means limited to, literacy and basic mathematical and scientific training. Being able to use imagination and thought

in connection with experiencing and producing works and events of one's own choice, religious, literary, musical, and so forth; being able to use one's mind in ways protected by guarantees of freedom of expression with respect to both political and artistic speech, and freedom of religious exercise; being able to have pleasurable experiences and to avoid non-beneficial pain.

5. Emotions. Being able to have attachments to things and people outside ourselves; to love those who love and care for us, to grieve at their absence; in general, to love, to grieve, to experience longing, gratitude, and justified anger. Not having one's emotional development blighted by fear and anxiety.
6. Practical Reason; being able to form a conception of the good and to engage in critical reflection about the planning of one's life.
7. Affiliation. (a) Being able to live with and towards others, to recognize and show concern for other human beings, to engage in various forms of social interaction; to be able to imagine the situation of another; (b) Having the social bases of self-respect and non-humiliation; being able to be treated as a dignified being whose worth is equal to that of others. This entails provisions of non-discrimination on the basis of race, sex, sexual orientation, ethnicity, caste, religion, national origin.
8. Other Species; being able to live with concern for and in relation to animals, plants, and the world of nature.
9. Play; being able to laugh, to play, to enjoy recreational activities.
10. Control Over One's Environment; (a) Political. Being able to participate effectively in political choices that govern one's life; having the right of political participation, protections of free speech and association; being legally protected against searches and detentions that do not have the proper judicial authorization; (b) Material. Being able to hold property and having property rights on an equal basis with others; (c) In work, being able to work as a human being, exercising practical reason, and entering into meaningful relationships of mutual recognition with other workers (Nussbaum, 2012: 53–55).

These central capabilities, although closely interrelated, are different from each other, and each of them has to be guaranteed. They should be directly attributed to each individual person, since each person is an end in itself, and in a derived way they should also be attributed to the groups to which they belong. Setting the threshold to be achieved for each capability is the responsibility of each nation or country according to its history and traditions, but always safeguarding the security of developing those capacities in the present and in the future for the citizens themselves and for the rest of people living in a country. When Nussbaum speaks of 'capability security', she means that capabilities cannot be left to the vagaries of the market system or the interests of the powerful. Due to human vulnerability and current uncertainty, she calls for the security and protection that the Constitution and the laws of the countries can provide: "the capability-building approach insists that all rights involve positive action on the part of the government, who must positively support the capabilities of people and not only refrain from putting obstacles in the path

to them" (Nussbaum, 2012: 86). Nussbaum, in contrast to Sen's capabilities, understood as areas of freedom but without him pronouncing himself on a specific list, defends the need for a list of capabilities as rights of each person that require positive action from governments – policies and public expenditure included – for effective compliance if a minimally just society is sought.

The approach to capability building and Higher Education

As Boni and Walker (2013) illustrate, there are two main views on the role, objectives, and success indicators of universities. The first vision, which is the dominant one, is focused on efficiency and economic competitiveness, as shown by the *Council of the European Union* (2007), the *OECD* (2007000) and the *World Bank* (2002), who perceive Higher Education as an industry to achieve national competitiveness and as a lucrative service to be sold in the world market. Such a vision eclipses other possible representations of the university as the *public good* (the public service, the strengthening of democracies or the defence of human rights), *social good* (the service learning or regional development) and the *common good* (social justice or the strengthening of coexistence bonds).

The second vision claims as its own objectives, and identifies them as more characteristic of Higher Education institutions – as it is stated in the *Preamble to the Charter of European Universities* (1988), the *World Declaration on Higher Education for the 21st Century: vision and action* (1998), and in the *Talloires Declaration* (2005) – the goods that defend a broader perspective of what universities should be and which have produced an abundant literature exploring Higher Education from the perspective of the development of human capabilities (Boni & Gasper, 2012; Boni & Walker, 2013; Walker, 2006, 2009; Walker & Boni, 2013). The point of view shared by all this literature is that Higher Education cannot and should not be alien to the great problems of our time, such as climate change, social injustices, armed conflicts and migrations, human rights violations, poverty, etc., but rather Higher Education institutions should play an active role, both locally and globally, in the fight for a just and sustainable society.

The values of human development, capability building and the strengthening of individuals and peoples as agents of their lives are key concepts to imagine a different vision of the University of the 21st century, one where we do not have to choose between one vision and another, as discussed in previous paragraphs. As argued by Nussbaum (2002, 2010), the development of capabilities contributes not only to life betterment, but also prepares individuals for work. Cultivating reflection and critical thinking is certainly fundamental to maintaining a vigorous democracy. The ability to think adequately about plurality and cultural variety in a global economy is essential to face the current challenges of the world in a responsible manner; the ability to imagine our neighbour's situation is important to sustain the dignity of international institutions, but those capabilities require a solid economy and a healthy business environment. Thus, we are not forced to choose between a form of Higher Education that promotes profitability and/or other education that promotes good

citizenship, although we should always bear in mind that no educational system works well if its benefits only reach the wealthy elites. The distribution of access to quality Higher Education is an urgent issue for all modern democracies.

We should be open to this new conception of University and/or Higher Education from the perspective of the social doctrine of the Catholic Church, as described in the Apostolic Constitution on Catholic universities

A Catholic University, as any university, is immersed in human society; as an extension of its service to the Church, and always within its proper competence, it is called on to become an ever more effective instrument of cultural progress for individuals as well as for society. Included among its research activities, therefore, will be a study of serious contemporary problems in areas such as the dignity of human life, the promotion of justice for all, the quality of personal and family life, the protection of nature, the search for peace and political stability, a more just sharing in the world's resources, and a new economic and political order that will better serve the human community at a national and international level. University research will seek to discover the roots and causes of the serious problems of our time, paying special attention to their ethical and religious dimensions.

If need be, a Catholic University must have the courage to speak uncomfortable truths which do not please public opinion, but which are necessary to safeguard the authentic good of society (John Paul II, *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*, 32).

For a new conception of University education of the 21st century, from the capabilities approach, we would have to focus on the work carried out in the following scenarios: pedagogy and curriculum, research, social responsibility, institutional governance and physical and socio-cultural context, in which Higher Education institutions are immersed. For example, in terms of pedagogy and curriculum, Walker (2012a) has worked on the formation of a professional with a commitment to the common good and the design of curricular dimensions (2012b), as well as the specific list of capabilities considered by him as measurable objectives in the university curricula (2006), Nussbaum (2002, 2006) on capability building for a democratic citizenship and Boni, McDonald, and Peris (2012) on the qualities of the cosmopolitan curriculum.

In terms of research, from the perspective of development, it could be a good scheme to rethink scientific research and knowledge transfer, the core values that justify quality of life of individuals and peoples, citizen participation, citizenship empowerment, sustainability, and all of this is connected with the social responsibility of the university. Regarding university governance, it is interesting to analyze its internal decision-making processes, which we call democratic procedures, and also the kind of policies that affect internal university actors – i.e. teacher selection and training procedures, student admission processes and the performance of Higher Education managers or executives –, as well as policies related to external agents, – i.e. other public or private organizations, civil society, etc.

Pedagogical proposals to eradicate poverty in Higher Education from the capabilities approach to development

The concept of Higher Education institutions from the perspective of capability development and social responsibility

The underlying question in this proposal is whether we can design an institutional concept of universities, and other Higher Education centres, which makes it possible to have agents of justice, human development engines (García-Marzá, 2009). Universities, like any other institution, whether a company or a hospital, are not *natural* bodies in the sense that they can subsist regardless of their social goals or the goals for which they have been created. They are institutions designed and created by people for the achievement of certain goods, and their objective is to satisfy certain social interests. If a higher institution does not fulfil the social purposes for which it was intended, then it cannot longer serve society and it loses its sense and fundamental purpose, its legitimacy. Hence, the responsibility of the higher institution can be graphically understood as having a kind of moral contract with society. In other words, the activity of Higher Education institutions must respond to the expectations generated in the internal and external groups affected by it.

The above has been called Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), and it's shared by higher institutions and companies, which can be understood as *agents of justice* provided that a critical perspective of their legitimacy is adopted as they are freely and voluntarily accepted by all actors involved. The theory of capability development allows operationalizing the normative idea of the moral contract, by relating the capabilities of the institution with the real freedoms it must help to develop in all those involved in its activity (Burdín, Leitez, Salas, & Vigorito, 2009).

Professors Lozano and Boni (2013) conducted a study to establish the similarities and differences between Corporate Social Responsibility in the business world and Social Responsibility of the Universities. As for the similarities, the ideas of Professor García-Marzá, which have been exposed in the previous paragraphs, are accepted. As for the specificity of Social Responsibility in the University, Lozano and Boni point out four interesting scenarios from the capabilities approach: the educational, the cognitive, the organizational and the social scenarios.

As for the educational scenario, the University would have to train students in the values, attitudes and knowledge necessary for their professional development. The fundamental question that a responsible university would have to pose is what kind of professionals, citizens and people do we intend to train and what kind of teaching organization is best suited to achieve this. Second, the university should educate people to expand the freedoms of all who are involved in it and with it. And finally, the educational impact of the university would have to be reflected in the conception and pedagogical strategies it uses in its teachings in order to have active students, equipped with critical thinking abilities, and actively involved in social transformation and so that their learning processes

stem from cooperation and reflect motivation for knowledge acquisition.

From the perspective of a cognitive scenario, a responsible university is one that promotes research as a valuable activity in itself and not simply as a commodity for the market. To do this, three aspects must be considered: coping with market pressures, having integrity in scientific research procedures and ensuring an adequate dissemination of the research results. From the perspective of coping with the pressures of the market, and the power of market and corporations, a responsible university should limit those powers over the basic areas of research. As for the integrity of scientific research procedures, it should establish strict, rigorous procedures to prevent academic fraud and bad research practices, such as plagiarism. And regarding the dissemination of research results, it has to reach out to as many citizens as possible and not only to those who benefit economically from it.

In the organizational scenario, a responsible university should take care of its impact on its workers and on the environment. Workers should be offered decent living conditions and decent working conditions (UNESCO, 2015); and adverse impacts on the ecological system should be avoided or reduced as much as possible. A responsible university should maintain its autonomy from the political, economic and religious powers, and from any other; a university should be perceived as an academic community that works with a high degree of autonomy, and whose governance processes are legitimized by its members, and a place where there is transparent communication. Deliberative dialogue and participation are essential for making decisions that affect the academic community. And finally, its functioning should have a high level of respect for human rights and environmental protection.

In the social scenario, the fundamental question is: how can a university interact with society to effectively promote the development of human capabilities? The answers go in this direction: contributing to forming a reasoned public opinion, to the strengthening of democracy, to the configuration of preferences and lifestyles (in the consumption of goods) in line with respect for the environment; in addition to this, by engaging in public debates on important issues for society, especially in matters affecting the common good and universal citizenship. Finally, it would have to facilitate access to education – also to Higher Education –, scientific knowledge and culture to the most vulnerable and poor groups of society, attending their demands and needs.

Formation of the university community as agents of their lives and communities

The meaning of *agent*, from the perspective of development, refers to the freedom to conduct one's life, that is, the ability to be self-determined. That is the meaning attached by Sen and Nussbaum to what they call *agency*. We assume that people with self-determination are agents; they have an idea of what they consider their own good, and the University has to empower them to try to reach it and also to become agents of the political and economic transformation of their societies.

It is not only that the subject gains in freedom through the performance of actions or that, due to the idea of action, or more precisely, to the composition of the idea of agent in terms of action, we arrive at the idea of freedom, it also implies that the action itself generates an identity; linking the terms of action and freedom with that of identity opens up in turn other epistemological and even ontological interpretations. Through the performance of actions, the subject acquires its own identity. We are nothing until we do something. We are what we do. Actions are not only possibilities of realization but of definition, of what constitutes, defines and makes the subject.

From this perspective, we arrive at the idea of the constructed subject, of the human identity as the product of a construction. The subject is, to a large extent, a result of his or her own activity.

And they are also agents in their political communities. It is therefore necessary to go further from having an informed person at universities, seeking to have people who not only become critical thinkers, aware of unjust situations, of the social, economic and political forces that cause them, of what is happening, it is also necessary for people to develop strategies that allow them to react to situations not as victims or depending on others, but as active citizens capable of responding to their own problems and to the problems of their political communities. Universities should devote their efforts to the development of subjects as free, interdependent citizens, who are critical with unjust social situations and politically active (Nussbaum, 2002, 2010). The author, who “defends the view that higher education is an essential part of the personal fulfilment of every human being” (2005: 53), postulates, for the formation/education of university students, the Socratic method under the following epigraphs: (1) Socratic education is for all human beings; (2) Socratic education must be adapted to the student's circumstances and context; (3) Socratic education must be pluralistic, that is to say, attentive to a diversity of norms and traditions; and (4) Socratic education requires ensuring that books are not transformed into authorities.

From the capability building approach, no person should renounce their right to be themselves. However, education has the duty to train each subject to be able to live according to his or her own image, according to his/her freedom and responsibility, in a world where multiple looks are possible (Ruiz, Bernal, Gil, & Escámez, 2012). This new view of the person as an agent subject assumes that the unity of human behaviour is not imposed by any particular culture or the specificity of any particular society, but by the personal construction of each subject, being at the same time a singular being, unique and bearer of universal rights (Touraine, 2009). Along with the recognition of the plurality of our identities and their different implications, there is a crucial need to appreciate the role of “choice” in determining the importance of particular identities that are inevitably different (Sen, 2007). In all these phenomena of identity construction there is an “individualist” component, since it advocates self-assertion, the right to establish one's own chronicle of the self, the right of every person to establish their rights; but also a “universalist” component, since all the rights of man must be defended on all fronts and in any part of our world.

The learning by the university community of the values of the capabilities approach

The fundamental value in the capabilities approach is dignity. What does dignity mean? Kant, in his work *Groundwork of the Metaphysic of Morals* (2006), distinguishes between two types of beings: those who have value in themselves and those that are worth something other than themselves. People are valuable in themselves. Nobody would suggest that, when they lose a certain characteristic, they are disposable, because their value lies in themselves and, therefore, they cannot lose it. They have an absolute value, not a relative value according to some other use they could have. According to this conception, human life has dignity and not price. It deserves respect, at least in two ways: no one is entitled to do physical or moral harm to a human being and, in addition, human beings must take seriously the goals and targets they set for themselves in life, and they should be helped to achieve them. Dignity, in our view, is what deserves to be respected and helped. According to Kant, people have dignity because: (a) they possess rationality, especially argumentative; and (b) they can direct their life according to their projects; he focuses his idea of dignity on argumentative rationality and autonomy.

The Kantian conception of dignity seems insufficient to Nussbaum for her capabilities approach. Starting from the Aristotelian vision of the human being as a creature in need of a plurality of vital activities, she maintains a unified conception of rationality and animality; Rationality is an aspect of the human animal and it is not the only one that defines its functioning as human. In general terms, the capabilities approach considers that there are many types of animal dignities and they all deserve respect. It is true that the specifically human dignity is characterized by a certain type of rationality, but rationality is not opposed to animality. In addition to rationality, sociability is equally fundamental and equally general in the conception of the human being. And bodily needs, including the need for assistance, form part of both rationality and sociability; and they are aspects of dignity, not something that should be confronted with dignity (Nussbaum, 2007). This involves introducing into the political dimension of the person – from which basic political principles are derived – a recognition that we are temporary and needy animals; we are born dependent and we often end our lives with various forms of dependence that need to be taken care of.

The value of dignity outlines its meaning in relation to two other values: respect and equality. Respect is like a close and important relative of dignity; if one has respect for personal dignity, political institutions should facilitate the conditions to make human lives possible according to that dignity, because, as we know, some factors promote and others inhibit a standard of living adequate to human dignity. True respect for each person's dignity consists of an interest to understand their abilities and help them to fulfil their life plans.

All the nuances of the equality value – i.e. equality before the law, equality of opportunities, and equality of social benefits – are rooted in the same dignity, a fact for which they deserve the same consideration. Political institutions are required to protect what have been referred to as political rights of participation and expression and, above all,

second-generation human rights or economic, social and cultural rights: education, healthcare assistance, work, housing, unemployment benefit, assistance in vulnerability, etc. All those rights that allow each person to live the kind of life that is worth living.

The concept of equal dignity of every person poses difficult questions, such as whether the list of basic capabilities for the mentally deficient has to be different or not from the one of the other citizens. With regard to this issue, according to Nussbaum, the best strategy is to stand firm on a single list of basic capabilities for all human beings, as a set of non-negotiable social rights, and work so that all people reach the same capacity thresholds, although the treatments and the programmes are individualized. As a political goal, it is reasonable to insist on the importance of basic capabilities for all citizens and that their achievement justifies the costs that should be incurred for persons with unusual disabilities. However, the insistence on a single list is not only for strategic or political reasons but fundamentally normative: the respect we owe to all people with mental deficiencies as citizens with the same rights, are able to lead a good life in human terms.

Choosing the university community for participation in public affairs in the pursuit of the common good

Participation has been understood in two ways: as a model of happy life, which citizens must incorporate into public life, or as a means to defend independence, or democratic freedoms, in the societies that have implemented them (Escámez, 2008). The first one is the conception of freedom of the ancient, since it is a variant of Aristotle's political doctrine according to which man realizes his nature fully in a democratic society, whose life enjoys wide and vigorous social participation. Participation, thus conceived, is not only a necessary condition for the protection of basic freedoms, but a privileged environment for a good life or, in other words, participation is an indispensable ingredient for a happy life.

The conception of participation as a guarantor of independence is known as the conception of freedom of the modern or a liberal conception of freedom. For liberal thinkers, the political framework of a society must ensure justice in shared life and, although achieving a fair community requires participation, they do not make participation a way of life. The fundamental notion in political life is freedom as non-domination, and from that point on, it is understood that a political community is free when the structure of institutions is such that none of its members fears arbitrary interference of the powerful in their lives, no matter the mood or disposition they have, nor do they need to ingratiate with them in order to get what is owed to them in justice. It is not that all members of society should continually participate in the decisions of shared life, but that each one knows what to stick to and is not forced to strategically defend the ambitions or whims of those who have political or economic power. Despite their different conception of participation, liberal theorists also insist that if citizens become accustomed to confining themselves to their private lives, the public powers of the State apparatus can rob them of even such array of institutions and of civil and social rights, which constitute freedom of the modern.

Sen (2000), in his analysis of the relationship between the concepts of freedom and development, shows the complementarity of the two conceptions of participation. The notion of freedom adopted by him refers both to the processes that make freedom of action and decision (freedom and non-domination) possible and to the real opportunities that individuals have, given their personal and social circumstances (freedom as an expansion of personal capabilities). According to Sen, freedom has a double aspect; On the one hand, the capacity of individuals to live the kind of life they value and which they have reasons to value and, on the other hand, the ability of individuals to help themselves to live the kind of life they value by influencing the world around them, through their participation in social, political and economic activities.

When people exercise their freedoms through social participation, they participate in the definition or selection of the social priorities that make it possible to establish the conditions to expand their personal capabilities. Participation in political affairs to decide who should govern and with what principles, the possibility of examining and criticizing authorities, the free expression of political preferences as well as the vote to either party are the political rights of citizens, of political citizenship, in the democratic societies that need to be maintained. But the fact of participation itself is a fundamental constitutive element in the formation and expansion of personal freedom or freedom as non-domination.

Moreover, as people who live together, citizens cannot and should not avoid the idea that the problems we see around us are intrinsically our problems. They are our responsibility, regardless of whether they belong or not to others. As competent human beings we cannot avoid the task of judging how things are going and what needs to be done. Such individual responsibility must be broadened not only by recognizing the role of the state but also of other people and of civil society associations and institutions.

The exercise of political freedoms through participation in public affairs, as Sen proves, avoids famine and forces government officials to respond to the economic needs of citizens. There have never been famines in an independent country with a democratic system of government, with opposition parties expressing criticism and a relatively free press. Rulers have incentives to listen to citizens if they have to face their criticism and seek their support in elections. However, there have been famines in ancient kingdoms and modern authoritarian societies, in primitive tribal communities and in modern technocratic dictatorships, in colonial economies ruled by Northern imperialists, and in newly independent countries of the South ruled by despot leaders or single parties.

Primacy of the formation of a university community as agents of sustainability

Following the [UNESCO Report \(2015\)](#), we understand sustainability as the responsible action of individuals and societies towards a better future for all, both locally and globally, that is, socio-economic development that responds to the imperatives of social justice and environmental management. Sustainability is a conceptual, ethical and political vision that transcends respect for the quality of the environment to the

extent that it includes: the disappearance of poverty through its progressive reduction, gender equity, the promotion of health, rural transformation, human rights, cultural understanding and peace, responsible production and consumption, respect for cultural diversity and equal access to Information and Communication Technologies. Sustainability comprises three broad interrelated scenarios: economic development, social justice and environmental care.

International organizations and civil society institutions have come up with proposals for solutions such as the 17 global objectives to eradicate poverty, protect the planet and ensure prosperity for all as part of a new agenda for sustainable development with a view to 2030. Among such objectives, and considering the educational field that concerns us, we would like to highlight “Goal 4: Ensure inclusive, equitable and quality education for all and promote lifelong learning opportunities) ([UN, 2015](#)).

For sustainability management education, the international community ([UN, 2007](#)) developed six principles: (1) developing the necessary capabilities among students so that they can become future generators of sustainable value for both business and society as a whole, as well as work for an inclusive and sustainable global economy; (2) incorporating the values of global social responsibility into academic activities and curricula; (3) creating educational frameworks, materials, processes and pedagogical environments that enable effective learning experiences and responsible leadership; (4) engaging in conceptual and empirical research that advances understanding about the role, the dynamics and impact of companies in creating sustainable social, environmental and economic value; (5) interacting with managers of corporate entities to increase awareness of their challenges in meeting social and environmental responsibilities and to jointly explore effective ways of responding to such challenges; (6) facilitating and supporting dialogue and debate among educators, companies, governments, consumers, the media, and civil society organizations on social and sustainability issues.

These principles invite the creation of educational frameworks, materials, processes and pedagogical environments suitable for sustainability in any of the dimensions of its complex conceptualization. And they also invite conceptual and empirical research that improves understanding of the role, dynamics, and impact of any corporation in the creation of social, environmental and economic sustainable value. In order to do so, universities have to develop critical thinking, independent judgement, problem solving abilities, and basic information and communication capabilities as key competences to develop transformative attitudes with the potential to affect situations.

The essential purpose of education in the 21st century, which includes the management of a sustainable world, also at the university level ([Peris, 2015](#)), has two main axes that articulate this purpose: lifelong learning and inclusion. A humanistic approach to education, such as that of [UNESCO \(2015\)](#), presents two perspectives: (a) the debate on the purpose of education beyond the utilitarian role it plays in economic development, and beyond the human capital approach that characterizes the international discourse on development

to a great extent as an increase in GDP; and (b) the conception that education basically consists in the creation and development of the necessary capabilities to enable all people, without exception, to live the kind of decent life they want to live.

The development of critical thinking is generally not considered as an important component of education for economic growth. Critical thinking in university students is dangerous if it seeks to create obedient professionals with technical training, who carry out the plans of economic elites oriented only to economic growth, even if this generates inequalities among the citizens of a country or among the citizens of different countries. For the advocates of the development model understood as GDP growth, everything is subject to economic growth. The distribution of wealth or social equality, democratic stability or the deterioration of nature, and the equity of gender relations do not matter. Other aspects of quality of life that are not linked to economic growth are not taken into consideration. They do not even care about health, education or political freedoms.

As for the attitudes or affective evaluations to be promoted in university students as managers of sustainability, positive predispositions to universal humanistic values are indispensable. Rawls (1978) already warned that well-ordered society demands a lot from its citizens, because it only allows for inequalities of wealth and income when these are to the advantage of least well-off citizens. He knew very well that people do not act automatically for the common good, but rather they evaluate situations from the perspective of their own interests. Thus, if we want a sustainable world, where the universal humanist values we have been referring to are present, we should develop in our students what Rawls called *public emotions* (Nussbaum, 2014) on what is of interest to all of us. Cultivating emotions requires the adoption of a normative project of coexistence in which dignity of all people, equal respect for all, the commitment to freedom of expression and association of all citizens and a series of fundamental social and economic rights are highlighted. As we all know very well, and we all have extensive experience in this regard, we can cultivate positive emotions towards other projects of coexistence – or rather, of non-coexistence – and economic development, guided by anti-values that generate all kinds of social inequalities and harm to nature.

The specific lines of action of the UNESCO Report (2015) *Rethinking education, towards a global common good?* to implement responsible training in the management of a sustainable world are: (1) “Learning to learn” and the development of competencies; (2) Rethinking curriculum development; curriculum content must be guided by the principles of social and economic justice, equality and environmental responsibility, which are the pillars of sustainable development; (3) Inclusive education also in higher education and gender parity; (4) Quality in the professionalization of teachers; (5) The link between education and employment; (6) Open and flexible systems of learning throughout life; (7) Rethinking civic education in a diverse and interconnected world; (8) Changing the dynamics of international cooperation. This model forces us to think in terms of shared responsibilities when facing a common future for humanity.

By way of conclusion, does fight against poverty make it preferable to speak of “capabilities” instead of “competences”?

The university reform promoted since the Joint Declaration of European Ministers of Education in Bologna, in June 19, 1999, seems to have a touchstone in the fight against poverty that calls for its revision, if indeed universities are to be what it is expected from them in the third millennium. It is indeed stated in this report that:

A Europe of knowledge is now widely recognized as an irreplaceable factor for social and human growth and as an indispensable component to consolidate and enrich the European citizenship, capable of giving its citizens the necessary competences to face the challenges of the new millennium, together with an awareness of shared values and belonging to a common social and cultural space (Bologna Declaration, 1999).

These competencies have often been interpreted as a utilitarian, economy-focused metric, as if the university's only concern were to prepare students for the business world, in order to contribute to production and quantitative development, understood in classical terms.

This is a reductionist approach that, as it has been put forward in this article, will hardly contribute to true human development. Only if competencies are understood from the basic development capabilities perspective, as they appear in the capabilities approach, will we be able to face the challenges posed by the new millennium, among which, without a doubt, the “fight against poverty” plays a central role.

The refugee crisis is clearly showing a fundamental flaw in economic approaches. As portrayed by the recently deceased Zygmunt Bauman (Bauman, 2016), what these populations have raised while knocking at Europe's door is a crisis of general uncertainty, a deep sense of fragility on which our own development is sustained.

If we read well the writing on the wall, and understand the fight against poverty, the approach to capabilities will not only guide our universities – especially our European and Spanish universities – towards solving the problems of others, i.e. of the poor, who are far away, it will also enable us to address the problems of the poor who are close to us, who look at European development with eyes of desire and frustration results. And it will make us radically competent to understand the future of our young people who are in their classrooms; a future whose welfare value can no longer be sustained in purely quantitative approaches that put human dignity and democratic participation aside, which are not committed to articulating a truly human, integral, ecologically sustainable development.

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