

How far away from the society of knowledge are we?

Colombia's GNP has grown from an average 4.8 % growth-rate during 2003 to 2006 to 7.5 % during 2007 to 2008. Such growth in GNP has been mostly produced by increased investment representing 29 % for 2008. On the other hand, significant national efforts have been made by all actors seeking to increase research resources, research groups and institutional capacity during the last two decades.

However, the country's economic growth has not been dynamised by national scientific and technological development and the aforementioned investment levels have not substantially modified investigation in science and technology. The country's recently sustained growth in these conditions has suggested that some of the deeper problems hindering science and technology have become synchronised with Colombia's development, or vice versa.

Indeed, Colombia continues occupying a place lagging behind in terms of all scientific and technological development indicators (investigators and PhDs per thousand inhabitants, indexed publications, percentage of graduates in sciences, patents, etc.), even when compared to countries such as Brazil, Chile, Argentina and Mexico. Likewise, investment in Colombia by all actors in science, technology and innovation during 2005 reached 0.52 % of GNP; however, investment in Research and Development only accounted for 0.18 % of GNP. This means that, in spite of all efforts, the level of investment in R&D continues being very low if it is to become an effective motor of productive and social transformation.

Such complex situation merits further comment.

- The current development model promised (in its particular moment) to open up a new way forward for economic and social transformation, based on policies such as the open market, industrial reconversion and structural reforms. The neoliberal model must theoretically overcome the Cepaline model's financial difficulties and pave the way forward towards growing development centred on knowledge and innovation. This has not happened and the neoliberal model has hardly proved friendly towards national science and technology, just like the Cepaline model. Only 2.3 % of Colombia's manufacturing companies can consider themselves to be innovators; most of them prefer to buy technology abroad before involving themselves in being creative or assuming risks in assuming technological transformation.

- The private sector plays a poor part in financing R&D within such structural context, in spite of a large part of national industry requiring profound technological transformation.

- National science and technology policy has not been supported by efforts, resources and institutional capacities for overcoming the development model's financial difficulties. Weak positive interaction between structural problems and policy has hampered the functioning of the virtuous circle involving the state, the academic world and the business world.

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