

### **Un panorama de las ciencias sociales en México**

(Overview of the Social Sciences in Mexico)

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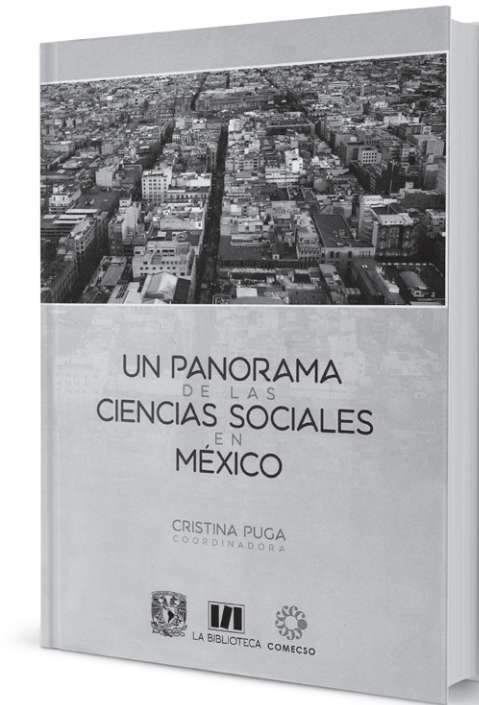
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In an attempt to reconcile their methodological, theoretical, and historical diversity, social scientists seek to cover a series of complex problems and constantly reflect on their own practice. The article “El manifiesto por las ciencias sociales” (Manifiesto for the Social Sciences), by Calhoun and Wieviorka, published by *Revista mexicana de ciencias políticas y sociales* (Mexican Journal of Political and Social Sciences) and mentioned by the author,<sup>1</sup> debates the possibility of improving conditions for society and individuals and their ability to have a positive impact on collective life. For that reason, the social sciences have the purpose of revealing trends, pinpointing absences or positive results, and demonstrating when none of this is possible.

This book’s eight chapters contribute to a general overview of the social sciences in Mexico. They are the result of collective work by the Mexican Council for Social Sciences (Comesco) and carried out by researchers from different universities financed by the National Council for Science and Technology (Conacyt). The objective was to gather up-to-date information about issues involving the social sciences as well as teaching and research, and accentuate the characteristics of the region where they occur.

The book brings together significant results about social science students, teachers, schools, and research centers over the last two decades, in addition to reflecting on the research, internationalization, links to public policies, theo-



retical production, and teaching in different institutions.

The disciplines have been constantly expanding, with an increase in the number of majors offered nationwide, in the number of graduate students in the field, of journals and books produced, and the recognition of authors and their works. Despite this, in the same period, we must recognize that some issues are still pending, since the fields have not expanded evenly. Several authors take up this point in their chapters.

The first chapter, “La expansión desigual de las ciencias sociales en México” (The Uneven Expansion of Social Sciences in Mexico), by Óscar Fernando Contreras Montellano and Cristina Puga, contributes important data about the strengthening of undergraduate majors and graduate studies and research. However, it also points out the heterogeneity of those advances, creating vacuums in analyses and in the solution of social and economic problems in different regions.

The authors also underline increased social science training in private institutions of higher learning, oriented mainly by demand, not by

the desire to acquire new knowledge. They underline the challenges presented in the attempt to foster positive, up-to-date science that will provide opportune data about the situation in the country.

To this aim, they present the results of a survey by students from several universities through a data base about the country's social science institutions and academic bodies. These results offer important information about the way the field is taught, researched, and how the results are disseminated. One outstanding feature is the existence of specialized publications, links with other institutions, and the diverse academic personnel, all of which are strong indicators of the consolidation of academic communities, institutional commitment, and the maturity of their academic bodies.

Alfredo Hualde Álvaro and Miguel Ángel Ramírez Sánchez's contribution is the article "Ciencias sociales y desarrollo económico: un ejercicio de interpretación en perspectiva regional" (The Social Sciences and Economic Development: An Exercise in Interpretation from a Regional Perspective). The authors analyze the factors that would produce a favorable outcome in the study of the social sciences. Presenting statistics, they look at how the quality of higher education and socio-economic inequality affects the entire production of knowledge.

The chapter shows how universities have an important function in growing the economy of areas where they are located, since they act as an example of competitiveness and social well-being. The idea is not that they should be financially focused, but rather that they should be concerned about their impact on society and improving its well-being.

The third chapter, "Ciencias sociales en México: producción de conocimiento, formas de organización y relación con la sociedad" (The Social Sciences in Mexico: Production of Knowledge, Organizational Forms, and Their Relationship with Society), is by Rosalba Casas Guerrero. The author describes how the production of knowledge is irregular due to inequal-

ity among the regions where it is produced, in addition to its relationship with society.

She mentions that among the causes of the slow advancement in research is the low investment in institutions as well as their lack of coordination with those in charge of disseminating scientific knowledge. She observes that it is necessary to analyze how knowledge is produced, disseminated, and utilized to be able to reflect on the development of the social sciences. She also deals with the changes that have occurred with regard to forms of production and organization of academic work and its relationship with society.

Casas Guerrero also explores two ways in which scientific knowledge is produced and evaluated: the first ranges from basic to applied research, touching on experimental development and innovation. The second involves contexts of application, where the problems are not defined in the framework of a discipline. She notes the negative results that can result from confining oneself too strictly to either of these roads. She also discusses different issues that influence results, for example, whether the forms of doing research favor the production of quality knowledge and its links to society, pointing out that all of this is reflected in economic growth.

In the following chapter, "Las ciencias sociales en el sureste mexicano: una aproximación panorámica" (A Panorama of the Social Sciences in Mexico's Southeast), Esteban Krotz describes academic life in that area. He hones in particularly on social science students and academics' difficulties, taking into account their socio-cultural traits and statistics about certain aspects of their activities that condition their education, academic production, and research.

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Roberto Peña Guerrero's chapter, "La internacionalización de la educación superior: un proceso en construcción" (The Internationalization of Higher Education: A Process under Construction), aims to understand internationalization, which has sparked an important debate due to the need to include this dynamic in teaching and research. However, he warns that student exchange programs are not the most important aspect of this, and that, rather, what should be done is to increase curricular content to include international issues. He reflects on the confusion involved in the topic and attempts to understand it, relating it to public policies and situating it in the world context.

The sixth chapter is "Las ciencias sociales en la solución de problemas públicos: una mirada desde las políticas públicas" (The Role of the Social Sciences in Solving Public Problems: A Look from the Viewpoint of Public Policy). Author Gloria del Castillo Alemán puts forward proposals about how to link up the production of social sciences to public policies, since both activities involve society and issues that affect it like inequality, poverty, and insecurity. This is why the social scientists seek to rethink their proposals for solving these public problems. The author describes the challenges posed in these disciplines with regard to their links to politics, such as the contributions of both dimensions to public production processes from the point of view of a commitment to society.

In the following chapter, "¿Ciencias sociales para qué?" (Social Sciences, What For?), Sylvia Maribel Sosa Fuentes and Rodolfo René Suárez Molnar explore the sociology major in the UNAM School of Political and Social Sciences. They reflect on how the curricular content has evolved through the years in step with changes in the country, showing how the social sciences deal with the problem of incorporating themselves into the globalized world.

The last chapter is by Alfredo Andrade Carreño: "Planteamientos teóricos y metodológicos emergentes en la sociología mexicana contemporánea" (Emerging Theoretical and Methodo-

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logical Considerations in Contemporary Mexican Sociology). It presents a study about Mexican society today, since it is reflected in the ways knowledge develops to achieve better social conditions. The author also studies certain social practices linked to experiences of social change in resolving learning problems and how they link up to contemporary society.

To conclude, it should be emphasized that the social sciences are constantly being redefined, as several of the book's chapters mention, based on changes in society itself. That is why the explanations of different social phenomena rapidly become outdated and require significant updating and enrichment with new proposals that take into account technological changes, variations in public perceptions, and new connections and influences among new actors.

The importance of this publication resides in the constant debate about the deepening of social sciences in Mexico. Its articles deal with the issue broadly, including the analysis of all the specificities of the topic, not only underlining the problems but also emphasizing their achievements. They propose hypotheses about the ways our disciplines can be linked to a society that demands explanations, answers, and concrete actions for improving the country's social science. ■■■

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**Notes**

1 Craig Calhoun and Michel Wieviorka, "Manifiesto por las ciencias sociales," *Revista Mexicana de Ciencias Políticas y Sociales* vol. 58, no. 217 (January-April, 2013), pp. 29-59.