

Territoriality and Neoliberalism: the case of the *Universidad Estatal de Aysén* in Chile

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ABSTRACT – Territoriality and Neoliberalism: the case of the *Universidad Estatal de Aysén* in Chile. This article reflects on the experience of the *Universidad de Aysén* as *subversity*. In order to do that we analyze how the University has translated national policies and local community's expectations into institutional practices aimed at materializing the territorial project. First, we explore the impossibility of the University become subversity in light of the tensions ensuing from market-oriented policies. Second, we delve into the possibility of the subversity through the analysis of the *Social Council*. This analysis leads us to conclude that the University has a promise that rests upon the Social Council's capacity of rethinking the foundational principles of the University.

Keywords: Subversity. Territorial University. Social Participation. Market-Oriented Policies.

RESUMEN – Territorialidad y Neoliberalismo: el caso de la Universidad Estatal de Aysén en Chile. Este artículo reflexiona sobre la experiencia de la Universidad de Aysén como *subversidad*. Para ello, analizamos cómo la Universidad ha traducido las políticas nacionales y las expectativas de la comunidad local en prácticas institucionales orientadas a concretar el proyecto territorial. Así, en primer lugar, exploramos la imposibilidad de la Universidad de convertirse en subversidad en función de las tensiones que derivan de las políticas de mercado. En segundo lugar, indagamos en la posibilidad de la subversidad a partir de la constitución del *Consejo Social*. Este análisis nos permite concluir que la Universidad contiene una promesa que descansa en la capacidad del Consejo Social de repensar los principios fundantes de la Universidad.

Palabras-clave: Subversidad. Universidad Territorial. Participación Social. Políticas de Mercado.

Introduction: the constitution of a territorial project

Universities are a social space oriented towards the production and dissemination of knowledge. They are also aimed at promoting the social, cultural and economic development of countries and their territories (Marginson, 2011). This dual nature has been incorporated into the history of Latin American universities, especially in Chile, since the inception of the first university in the 19th century (Bernasconi, 2008). However, the modernization of higher education from the 1990s onwards, mainly through market policies, rethought those founding principles. In fact, it emptied them of any reference linked to national development (Villalobos-Ruminott, 2018), which added to the disruption of educational systems and conservative resistances led to the crisis of the University (Pey, 2006). In 2011 and 2012, the Chilean society challenged that process of modernization. The role of the State and the market were profusely and sharply problematized, and governments were forced to rethink the policies and instruments existing by then. In that context of many challenges and tensions, of heated national debate, of public controversies, one can understand the *meaning* of the *Universidad Estatal de Aysén*. That *public* university arose as a reasonable alternative to the private and neoliberal model of universities, in an isolated and extreme territory (Pey, 2018).

Unlike other state and private universities that came into being as a result of administrative decisions, investments by business groups, or elite groups within local communities (Brunner, 2011), the *Universidad de Aysén* is the first higher education institution in Chile to be created exclusively as a result of a social movement¹. The problems arising from the persistent social and territorial inequality of the region explain to a large extent the power of that mobilization. This movement lasted for months and reverberated throughout the country because of its scope, depth and demands for greater social justice (Pérez, 2015). Likewise, the problems and flaws of the higher education system, particularly those related to regulatory and funding mechanisms, equity and quality, grounded the proposals of the social movement for higher education. Unlike other experiences, such as the popular universities in Latin America, Europe or North Africa², the *Universidad de Aysén* is established by the State. In the case of Aysén, however, this should not necessarily be considered as a lack of activism or dependence on the State. On the contrary, even before the creation of the University the region had already defined its guiding principles through a participatory process that led to what was called “another way of inhabiting the planet” (Comisión Ejecutiva Regional, 2015).

Considering that the university is born to meet a demand of the region, it is relevant to investigate the links between the institution and the local community. This relationship is crucial since it is how the spirit of the *transformative* project endures in the university. For this reason, it is important to speak of a territorial university insofar as the adjective territorial indicates its founding character. However, we

should also refer to its deeper *sense of being*, as was the project on a *national* university at the dawn of the Republic. Moreover, the fact of being a territorial university comprises both a challenge and a promise. It is the contestation of market policies that fail in distinguishing territories and localities, that do not value the diversity of social needs, and that make centralized decisions based on quantitative abstractions (Villalobos-Ruminott, 2018). In some way, it is the challenge to the entrepreneurial university and the prevailing university model in the Chilean modernizing project (Rivera-Polo et al., 2020). In other words, it is the opposition to a modernizing project that is based on a capitalist and colonialist perspective (Santos, 2018). On the other hand, it is a promise in that it seeks to revive the principles of knowledge and development in an isolated and extreme territory. It is the promise of a university that values the surrounding community as the main source of value and knowledge, and that contributes to its social, cultural and economic development. In short, it is the promise of a university that both transforms the territory and is transformed by the territory (Comisión Ejecutiva Regional, 2015).

In this context, this paper challenges the existence of the University as an *(im)possible* (Thayer et al., 2018) and *subversive* (Santos, 2018) university in a highly commodified system. We are mainly interested in reflecting on the mechanisms that allow building the idea of territorial university in the region of Aysén, especially those that define it at statutory level, such as the Social Council (SC). Based on that, the article seeks to understand how the University has faced, translated and articulated the *expectations* of the Aysén social movement, the emerging needs of the region, and the compliance with national policies. We are especially interested in exploring the tensions and challenges engendered by the SC, as a formal element set out in the Statute of the university, and a distinctive element since no other university in the country relies on a council of that nature.

The paper is divided into three sections. The first section describes the context and tensions that gave rise to the University. Secondly, it discusses the idea of the territorial university as a subversity to understand the transformative and challenging character of the *Universidad de Aysén* regarding the rules and policies that gave rise to it. Thirdly, it reviews the many responses of the university to the policies at central (transitory articles of Law 20.842) and regional government levels. This section also addresses the local community's expectations. In this regard, it explores one of the most relevant measures adopted by the university in response to these policies and interactions: the Social Council. It examines to what extent the SC is the element that allows thinking the university of Aysén as a subversity, discussing how the SC contests the university. This analysis provides evidence on the perspectives, challenges and tensions faced by a project on territorial university in face of a highly commodified university system.

The *Universidad Estatal de Aysén*: territorial, extreme and subversive

The Aysén Social Movement and the Higher Education Reform

The development of a territorial university depends to a large extent on the institutional conditions and funding of the higher education system. In Chile, these conditions have limited the ageing of territorial universities, notably those located in the farther areas of the country. The consolidation of the neoliberal agenda from the 1990s onwards (Salazar Zegers; Leihy, 2013) has produced a highly diversified and differentiated system at all levels (Lemaitre, 2019; Van Vught, 2009). This diversity, however, is guided by purely technical criteria that do not distinguish between territories and localities, turning the intended diversity into a risk for the system (Lemaitre; Durán del Fierro, 2013). It is a kind of diversity that, paradoxically, rewards some forms of universities while punishing others. Territorial universities have been precisely those most affected by such definitions.

The higher education model in Chile encourages competition for students, research funds and academics (Ossa, 2016). Under these conditions, regional universities had to make drastic decisions to survive. These include opening campuses and programs in areas with larger populations, in order to obtain resources through the expansion of enrollment (quantitative competition). This, in turn, weakens their territorial project. This has led to the concentration of enrollments in the Metropolitan Region, which in 2020 reached 45.7% of total enrollments (SIES, 2020). Likewise, regional universities had to modify core aspects of their governance and management to fit into the demands of institutional and programs accreditation. In other words, they had to adjust to qualitative competition (Musselin, 2018), which has reduced the diversity of projects, and homogenized the forms of institutional organization.

The region of Aysén was the only national territory that did not have a Higher Education Institution (HEI) after the expansion of higher education through the University of Chile's colleges in the 1960s and 1970s. Then, through different processes, both state and private universities established regional branches with the aim of offering greater study opportunities to the youth and adults in the region (Comisión Ejecutiva Regional, 2015). Nonetheless, the enduring educational inequalities in terms of academic achievement added with the scarce opportunities offered by the institutions at that time, contributed to give meaning to the demand for a public university in Aysén. It is worth mentioning that, by then, the territorial links rested exclusively on undergraduate education (Pérez, 2015). It is also relevant to point out that the region faced - and still faces - challenges regarding energy, health, environment, connectivity, poverty, inequality, relationship with native peoples, among others (Comisión Ejecutiva Regional, 2015).

The power of the social movement is partly explained by the history of the region. Its first inhabitants settled after several explorations in Patagonia. At the beginning of the 20th century, given the isolation of the region, the first settlers decided to found towns, open roads, and exploit the land on their own initiative. The State came into the scene much later, only to rule legal and technical aspects. In other words, the territory was constituted with no help of the State, which explains the territorial identity and autonomy (Comisión Ejecutiva Regional, 2015). This situation of isolation, precariousness and helplessness has characterized the social history of the region. Somehow, it triggered the 2011 revolt, and the resulting demands.

In 2011 and 2012, protests intensified in the region to such an extent that the central government had to negotiate a political way out, and agree on a set of solutions. The creation of a university was among the core points. However, the first administration of Sebastián Piñera rejected the idea of a public university in the region. The reasons given for that were mainly economic: demand was not enough to justify expanding the educational offer in the region. In other words, the market size was not enough to foster competition for quality (Rivera-Polo et al., 2018). The second administration of Michelle Bachelet takes on the commitment to create the university in the region, as part of the Higher Education Reform (2016-2018). In the context of that reform, the government program proposed the creation of two new state universities - one in the region of O'Higgins and another in the region of Aysén. The decision to create the first one was merely administrative, under the principle of equality envisaged in the constitution, which prevents differentiated decisions even if they are necessary. The reason for creating the second, as we have seen, ensued from the demand of the Aysén Social Movement. Despite these differences, a common law creates both universities. In 2015, the government enacts Law 20,842 that creates the two new institutions. Among others, the law established the deadlines for implementation, the criteria for electing their first authorities, and the general form and conditions for defining the statutes.

The territorial university as subversity

One may argue that there is a tension between the neoliberal agenda and the idea of a territorial university. As Rivera-Polo (2018) points out, a territorialized university has unique particularities compared to other universities. A territorial university is developed mainly according to the needs of the territory, and not as a result of the relationship between supply and demand. Moreover, territorial university cannot be merely a teaching university. The promotion and consolidation of social, cultural and economic development of a region or locality rests on the association between teaching and research. Finally, territorial university may be thought as an instance to reduce entry barriers, mainly economic ones, to students, and requires a committed and heterogeneous academic staff. Therefore, one may argue that territorial

universities are important because they promote integral development in the localities in which they are located (Rock et al., 2013).

Taking into account these concerns, the territorial university can be conceived as *subversity* in the terms proposed by Santos (2018). According to the author, subversity is distinguishable in the following areas. First, its audience is broad and heterogeneous, i.e., it seeks to include all social players who have been socially excluded and who have suffered systematic injustices ensuing from belonging to a social class, gender, ethnicity, religion, etc. Secondly, it promotes a pedagogy that recognizes a diversity of sources of knowledge, that is, it sets up learning spaces where *artisanal knowledge* is valued, and creates communities that build their own knowledge. Third, it provides a learning environment and pedagogical strategy closely related to the social struggles. This way, it comprises a pragmatic or conflict pedagogy that seeks to strengthen the social struggle against all types of exclusion and discrimination. At the same time, it aims to promote dialogue between groups that coexist with different perspectives or symbolic universes. Finally, subversity may have its origins in social movements and, for this reason, exists in several sites such as remote valleys, mountains, prisons, and so on. Likewise, the academics of subversity are committed to social struggle and open to *relearning*, rather than seeking academic promotion (Santos, 2006; 2018).

The *Universidad de Aysén*, in some sense, may be thought of as subversity, especially as concerns its origin (social movement), location (isolated and extreme locality), and context (intensely neoliberal Chilean model of higher education). The capacity to become subversity lies in the fact that the first two elements may permanently pressure the internal functioning of the university. In other words, compel the university governance and management, teaching, research and the role of its authorities and academic body. Thirdly, the prevailing model of higher education is in retreat, as it apparently was when the university was created. Therefore, one may argue that both elements - founding energy and locality - may modify the university, and turn it fully into subversity. What is crucial is how these elements are channeled and articulated by the university, changing it and, in turn, changing the territory. As Santos (2018) warns, the configuration of subversity is subject to two converging factors. On the one hand, the expectations of the social movement and of groups historically excluded from higher education. On the other hand, the adaptation of the university to national and global policies. The analysis of such linkage and tensions is the objective of this article. In other words, explore to what extent the university's mechanisms of linkage allow it to recognize and articulate the needs of the territory and, therefore, transform it. It also aims at finding out how the university is tensioned and transformed through that articulation.

Methodology

The main objective of this paper is to review how the *Universidad Estatal de Aysén* has translated national and regional policies, and the tensions that emerge between the local community's expectations and the institutional practices. It investigates how the university has translated the requirements contained in the regulations of the law that created it (Law 20.842) and national policies. The article specifically focuses on reviewing the most innovative response of the university in this context of policies and expectations: the Social Council. It seeks to understand the relationship between policies and institutional responses (Ball et al., 2012). Considering that policies establish general orientations, institutions have room to respond and translate these demands through a wide range of practices. For this reason, although Law 20.842 creates the *Universidad de O'Higgins* and the *Universidad de Aysén* under the same rules, both have translated these prerogatives in different ways.

The study takes on a qualitative approach to respond to the research objective. As literature in this field points out, case studies do not seek representativeness but rather depth and understanding of the object of study, with a view to exploring the meaningful characteristics of the cases (Bassegy, 1999; Yin, 2003). In this sense, the *Universidad de Aysén* was selected as a relevant case since it has been recently created as a result of the social demands of the region, which challenged the political power of the time, and the market policies implemented in the last decades.

Two processes were carried out in parallel to produce information. First, an analysis of the main documents produced since the creation of the University. The objective of this analysis was to investigate the different conflicts and tensions underlying the *Universidad de Aysén* project. Secondly, in-depth and semi-structured interviews were conducted with different individuals bound to the university, from its creation to these days. In both cases, data were analyzed through the technique called thematic analysis (Joffe, 2011). The following table summarizes both levels of empirical production.

Table 1 – Sample of documents reviewed and profile of respondents

Documents reviewed	Respondents
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social movement petition (2012) • Regional commission report (2015) • Law 20.842 (2015) • Minutes of the executive committee for the creation of the university (2016) • Minutes of meetings of the pro-tempore Social Council (2016) • Minutes of meetings of the Supervisory Board (2016). • The many versions of the proposed Statute of the university (2016). • Resignation letter from the Minister of Education to the Dean (2016) • Decree of dismissal of Presidency (2016) • Supreme Court decision voiding the dismissal (2017) • Decree setting basic rules for the Social Council operation (2018) • Minutes of meetings of the Social Council (2018-2020) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Former authorities of the university (2015-2016) • University authorities (2020-2021) • Members of the regional commission of the university that arose from the social movement (2015). • Members of the pro-tempore Social Council (2016) • Members of the current Social Council (2021)

Source: Prepared by the authors.

The (im)possibility of *subversity*: the becoming of the *Universidad Estatal de Aysén* in Chile

Based on the data analyzed, two themes allow us to understand the becoming of the university in relation to the proposed theoretical framework. On the one hand, the *impossibility* of *Universidad de Aysén* to become 'subversity'. On the other hand, the University contains a *possibility*, that of becoming 'subversity' by virtue of the existence of the Social Council (SC).

The impossibility: the Universidad de Aysén in the neoliberal model

The *Universidad de Aysén*, although being a consequence of the social movement of Aysén, effectively is a state university. This implies that it must comply with the regulations of the law that established it, in addition to the current national policies. The University was created in 2015 through Law 20,842, which established the form and conditions for its implementation. Thus, for example, the law defined that the university dean should submit the proposal on statutes to the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Finance during the first year of operation. In addition, the law established that the university should be supervised by another university in order to guarantee its quality (Chile, 2015). Thus, the first year was devoted to drafting the university's statutes, defining the infrastructure, academic, research and quality assurance policies, and creating the first courses and programs.

Based on the documents reviewed during the implementation period (2015-2016), three elements unveil the tensions between the university and the prevailing model of higher education in Chile: 1) the funding system; 2) the admissions system; and 3) university governance³.

Funding: equality versus targeting - The Higher Education Reform (2014-2018) comprised the introduction of a free tuition policy for undergraduate studies. The measure included a set of conditions for students and institutions. In order to have access to the benefits, students should meet a set of requirements, notably regarding socioeconomic status. For their part, institutions should be accredited, participate in the Single Access System (*Sistema Único de Acceso*, SUA) and have policies in place that allow the admission of students from different socioeconomic strata⁴.

In this context, during the university implementation the authorities proposed a student funding model different from that proposed by the government, that is, one of universal nature⁵. It was stated in the second minutes of the Pro-Tempore Social Council, where it is pointed out that “[...] it is being proposed that the scope of free tuition for this university should not be limited to the percentage of the lowest quintiles as is being done at the national level, but that here it should be totally free” [*free translation*] (Universidad de Aysén, 2016a, p. 1). The arguments put forward by authorities at the time attached special consideration to the regional context, insofar as most of the students who remain in the region after finishing high school come from low-income families. In addition, the forecasts prepared by the university suggested that the size of the first cohort would be small, around 300 students. Therefore, the basal funding - assured by the law that created it - allowed it to operate not needing additional income from tuitions (Universidad de Aysén, 2016a). In other words, the *Universidad de Aysén* came into life with a basal budget, which is precisely the form of institutional funding ruled out by the prevailing model in Chile.

Admission: inclusion versus meritocracy - In Chile, all state universities belong to the SUA. This implies that the University must comply with the guidelines and criteria defined by the system, with little flexibility to modify its mechanisms. The main instrument used to select students is the University Selection Exam (*Prueba de Selección Universitaria*, PSU)⁶ that, simply put, evaluates the curricular contents of secondary education. However, figures for those years (students’ academic performance) were not very encouraging for the University authorities. For example, only half of the students who completed secondary education in 2016 took the PSU, and of those who took it, 49% of them obtained an average score below 450 points. In fact, between 2013 and 2016 the average score in the region was 383 points (Durán del Fierro, 2016).

Considering this panorama, the University found it was urgent and necessary to rethink some aspects of the system of access in the region, not necessarily eliminating the idea of merit that grounds it. Thus, for example, in the second session of the Pro-Tempore Social Council, on July 01, 2016, the Dean pointed out that

[...] we are working toward setting up a regular, inclusive mechanism, to cope with the reality that we should address here in the Region, since we are going to select the best students. We, however, do not understand by best students the highest PSU scores, but those who in their schools, comparatively, are the best, even if in that school they have not received all the subjects (Universidad de Aysén, 2016a, p. 3).

It should be noted that Law 20,842 that created the University, establishes that it should “[...] encourage the incorporation of students from the respective regions, considering the specific needs of each area, though, for example, special admission programs”(Chile, 2015, p. 4). The authorities of the time assumed this mandate aware that it was virtually impossible to enroll students based on the criteria used by the other universities in the country. Therefore, the third session of the Pro-Tempore Social Council, dated July 21, 2016, agree as follows:

A letter would be submitted to the Council of Deans of Chilean Universities requesting it to accept the petition for a special admission system to the *Universidad de Aysén*, according to a proposal previously presented by the Dean, which would consider a bonus for students from the Aysén Region (Universidad de Aysén, 2016b, p. 4).

The proposal specifically sought to reduce barriers of access by granting a 20% bonus to students from the region scoring the average PSU score. It was also proposed to modify the weighting of the access system, attaching greater importance to academic performance in secondary education than to the standardized test⁷.

University governance: democracy versus efficiency - In addition to the tensions over funding and admission arising in the first year of existence of proposals from the university authorities, it should be added that the Statute wording also produced displeasure in the central government, to such an extent that they requested the Dean’s resignation, and started a process of dismissal. This process evidenced the impossibility of subversion within the prevailing neoliberal model that this nascent institution had to follow to fulfill the social mandate of territoriality, and to comply with the very law that gave rise to it. The letter sent by the Minister of Education at the time to the Dean of the university is clear in this regard. The letter states the reasons for resignation, among which the “[...] impossibility of reaching an agreement on the wording of the future statutes of the university, inasmuch as the observations repeatedly made by this Ministry were not adequately addressed” (Chile, 2016). The dispute was particularly focused on the structure of the university governance, that is, between the search for efficiency or participation. The Ministry made a series of modifications to the proposal with the aim of making the university implementation more efficient, postponing the constitution of governing bodies committed to the participation of the local community (Cáceres, 2011; Rivera-Polo et al., 2018).

In this regard, it should be noted that the first proposal for the University's statutes - drafted in a participatory manner, as required by law - comprised a Social Council with greater powers than the current one. To meet the legal requirement of participatory drafting, the former Regional Commission was reactivated, although it had stopped working. Thus, it moved from a CS aimed at *facilitating* and *contributing* to the meeting between the University and the regional community (Universidad de Aysén, 2016c) to another whose purpose is “[...] to *keep the University Dean informed* about the actual needs and problems of the region” (Universidad de Aysén, 2018b, p. 1)⁸. Although the central government's intervention about the SC role was not minor, in that it reduced its capacity for action, it did not succeed in eliminating this unique space for participation. The existence of the SC thus opens the possibility of rethinking the territorial meaning of the University. In the following section we consider the possibilities opened up by the SC.

The possibility: the Social Council of the Universidad de Aysén

The foregoing analysis shows that the *Universidad de Aysén*, although being subject to obligations arising from its status as a state university, contains a *possibility* of becoming something different, of thinking differently. As we have argued, this possibility rests on the existence of the SC. The existence of the SC, however, also brings about tensions and challenges that deserve further analysis.

Based on the interviews with the SC members and former authorities, we identified three types of tensions and challenges that emerge from the very existence of the SC. First, tensions arising from the design of the SC, i.e., tensions that could be called *internal*. Secondly, the demands that arise from the territory and that put the SC under stress. And, thirdly, the tensions that derive from the *work* of the SC, and that affect and challenge the university project. The following table summarizes the tensions identified.

Table 2 – Main tensions and challenges deriving from the existence of the Social Council

Directionality	Main tensions and challenges
1. Internal tensions of the SC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Limited powers due to the advisory nature of the SC - Size to ensure representativeness versus operability - The danger of capture by some members (imbalance of influence) - Overwhelming presence of University representatives on the SC - The risk of nullifying the SC contribution due to excessive influence of internal authorities.
2. Tensions from the territory toward the SC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The advisory nature of the SC does not allow for substantive ties. - Low priority and timely response of the university to territorial problems. - Insufficient representation of the society and the territory. - The risk that SC members do not represent their organization or sector, and that they advocate for personal interests. - Abrupt changes of members representing the public sector due to changes in central and regional government. - The SC may also prevent conflicts of interest, channeling them in a transparent manner if they are made explicit.
3. Tensions from the SC toward the university	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The tension between university autonomy versus linkage with the environment. - The tension between production of scientific knowledge as a response to the prevailing model, and recognition of other knowledge originated in the territory. - The tension between an academic profile disconnected from the problems of the territory and the needs of the local community.

Source: Prepared by the authors, based on documentary review and interviews with members of the Social Council of the *Universidad de Aysén*.

Although acknowledging that all these tensions deserve special treatment, we intend to focus on the third point of the table, i.e., on the tensions that burst from the SC toward the university. Three themes (tensions) emerged from the analysis of the interviews. First, the tension between *university autonomy and territorial attachment*. In other words, to what extent the principle of autonomy that defines the modern university project is suspended or questioned at the moment of channeling the territorial project. Secondly, the tension between scientific knowledge and “artisanal” knowledge, i.e., to what extent the production of knowledge under the neoliberal agenda and the modern project are modified by new sources of knowledge. Thirdly, the *role of academia* in the process of reordering and reconfiguring scientific knowledge mentioned above.

University autonomy and territorial attachment- “The territory is the protagonist of the solutions” (University Authority). This statement points out to the efforts made by the *Universidad de Aysén* to define and establish a permanent link with its territory. This will be strengthened and, at the same time, resignified by the existence of the SC, beyond the requirements of national policies of attachment with the environment.

One of the Council members, a representative of civil society, puts it this way:

[...] what is missing is the transversalization of culture in all the courses [...] courses lack the spirit of Aysén (Member of the Social Council).

Thus, it is not only about the university in the territory, but also the territory in the university, that is, what has recently been called bi-directional attachment in institutional accreditation. However, what redefines and challenges the SC is the scope and level of such attachment, which is considered merely instrumental. Based on that, the University has proposed a system of attachment that allows for greater presence of the university in the territory. An example here is the way in which a research problem is defined. This is pointed out by a University professional:

[...] the needs of the region are raised through the work of the Council Members deployed in the different territories of the region (University professional).

A representative of the academic sector states this need as follows:

[...] the needs of the region have been postponed for many years, so I cannot say that I am going to continue working with tomatoes from Angol [another region of the country] or with peaches from Talca [another region] because the demand here is different [...] and that is where research projects are born (University academic).

The same occurs at the teaching level, where it is observed that the university has defined the courses and their syllabuses according to the local community's expectations. In this way, the university has advanced toward a greater attachment by incorporating

[...] into the study plans a section that indicates the attachment activities that they [academics] are going to carry out in teaching (Social Council Member).

All of the above shows an effort to define and deploy territorial attachment in all the functions of the university, for example, through courses attached to the productive sectors. However, this is not the same as "transversalizing the culture of Aysén across all courses", as was stated by the civil representative in the SC.

[...] the courses offered are not relevant [...] why that course again? [...] People expected it would be developed along these lines [greater relevance within the territory] and courses were very traditional [...] the same with the curricula, they do not contemplate the singularities of the Aysén region (Social Council Member).

Here we observe the tension between an instrumentalized attachment - originated by the pressures imposed by institutional accreditation - and a territorialized attachment. Some SC representatives understand this last as ensuing from the characteristics of the region where the university is located.

On the other hand, an attachment understood as a renouncement of autonomy or academic freedom in pursuit of greater territorial attachment is at odds with the view of some academics, particularly in the production of knowledge. On the one hand, one scholar points out that

[...] although the attachment to environment is very important, especially in this region due to the isolation, the newness of the university, the fact of doing research with the region is more important than elsewhere [...] those of us who are doing basic research, i.e., who are exploring or working with patients, need another type of funding [...] because the experiment that one does is different, and that is not rewarded [...] (Member of the university's academic staff).

On the other hand,

[...] the fact that the university is new allows more freedom to choose themes of research, although the issue of regional needs is always present (Member of the university's academic staff).

In the same line, academic freedom is persistently mentioned as a condition for knowledge generation.

One of the most important tools is freedom of thought, that is what minds the most [...] (Member of the university's academic staff).

This tension has been particularly profound since the ability to *territorialize* the university depends on the *suspension* of this form of autonomy and academic freedom. It is no longer about the needs of the central state or the market, but about the needs of the territory, of the local community. In short, the SC has reinforced the need to halt the concept of autonomy of the modern university. The SC dispute becomes evident when one thinks of the content of bidirectional attachment. It is not only a matter of deploying the university in the territory, but of the territory being deployed in the roles and practices of the university.

Scientific knowledge versus artisanal knowledge - In the context of the current way that knowledge is generated, i.e., through competitive funds, some representatives of the university's academic body point out that internalizing certain epistemic and methodological strategies to respond to such demands is what minds more.

[...] this forced knowledge [applying to competitive projects], allows one to win a project in the coming years [...] this analysis that one makes in the doctorate, in four or five years, many of my colleagues are doing it in a very hasty way, and incorporating it almost organically, from questioning the objective in the light of applicability to the understanding that the project reviewer may have, which is not taught in the doctorate [...] (Member of the university's academic staff).

In this sense, the need to apply scientific method, i.e., the deployment of scientific practices that allow shaping a research project, is also highlighted.

In my case, the main factor [to apply for a project] comes from the old school, my coordinating professor used to sit next to me, [...] and ex-

plained me you cannot apply for a project without first putting the idea into play [...] go to the laboratory first, observe, but observe, do not look, because we look every day, observe what is happening, and have your preliminary data and then point to the project [...] (Member of the university's academic body).

However, some SC voices warn of the need to recognize other types of knowledge, practices, virtues and experiences, beyond those coming from scientific knowledge. A kind of knowledge rooted in the culture of the region and that still endure through multiple practices. As a member of the SC suggests, this is mainly due to the history of the region, because

[...] since colonization, Aysén has always been self-reliant with respect to the State; things were done and then permission was requested from the State. People were always before the State. People then try to validate with the State what they have done. The same with the University. People already knew how they wanted the university (Member of the Social Council).

Therefore,

[...] in the Aysén region there is knowledge of non-traditional medicine that is still in force, and that can be integrated (Member of the Social Council).

Thus, the need to apply another type of view, of observation, of practices, i.e.,

[...] to look again at the natural history of Aysén [...] One generation ago, bones were glued by bonesetters, births were attended in the field... there is a remnant of non-traditional medicine that is still in force and that may be incorporated (Member of the Social Council).

This perspective has been reflected in the university's SC minutes, where the need to incorporate the history, culture and spirit of Aysén in different areas of the university has been insisted upon. Thus, for example, in the minutes of the first session it is stated that "*The Social Council can propose to the University to place topics with intellectual content, political independence, and help to think about the region*" (Universidad de Aysén, 2018a, p. 4). In the third session, the need to "*rescue the ancestral traditions and customs*" (Universidad de Aysén, 2019, p. 3) that survive in the territory is reasserted.

This requirement does not imply abandoning knowledge produced through scientific method, but rather opening up to this other knowledge, *recognizing* it in its own merit. That is what Santos (2018) highlights as "artisanal knowledge", i.e., that knowledge that comes from different cultures and translates into a variety of practices, but which has something in common: these are types of knowledge produced closely with the community.

That was at the basis of the proposals on access to the University, as discussed above. The territory questions the university's capacity not only to recognize knowledge but also other life experiences, very differ-

ent from those of the remaining regions of the country. This is clearly established in the words of a former university authority.

[...] the youth living in this extreme region of Aysén has life experiences, school and training opportunities different from the rest of the country, because the skills to study, intelligence, willingness and effort are homogeneously distributed in society, but knowledge, as well as the mere training to answer the admission exam is not, and this has generated gaps that are unbridgeable and unfair (former university authority).

Based on the above, one should ask to what extent this knowledge and experience are *recognized* by the university. According to Santos(2018), the endurance of these types of knowledge “depends on the effectiveness of such knowledge in strengthening concrete struggles and resistances against oppression, i.e., the way in which such knowledge contributes to maximizing the possibilities of success of such struggles and resistances”(Santos, 2018, p. 43). This definition, while laudable and worthy of further debate, does not include those experiences and knowledge that come from cultural practices not oriented to social struggle, but rather to the well-being of people and territory. For example, in Aysén there are social struggles aimed at protecting the privatization of access to lakes, and counteracting mining exploitation. Beyond these distinctions, this type of knowledge puts in tension the epistemic virtues, such as objectivity and neutrality, which are at the basis of scientific knowledge(Agazzi, 2014; Reiss; Sprenger, 2014). And that is precisely the impact that CS has on the university, i.e., it reveals the limits of these concepts and practices.

The role of the academy: productivity versus territorial commitment

- One may observe a tension between the search for individual performance and territorial commitment in the academy. The production of knowledge requires the fulfillment of certain levels of productivity, which are evaluated by institutional accreditation processes and the disciplinary communities themselves. This situation is described as follows:

Science is very mechanized, it is to produce, produce, produce [...] (Member of the university's academic body).

It is interesting to note how the accreditation system defines some academic practices, as described below.

[...] I am consistently thinking about what is proposed for research and what is creditable [institutional accreditation process]... I have it incorporated [...] if this is creditable, then let's do it [...] (Member of the university's academic body).

Some members of the academic body, for example, use strategies to respond to the obligations derived from productivity.

[...] we need to have the continuity of a Fondecyt, so I am protected for six months to come up with an idea... because in the laboratory I am the only one with a doctorate degree [...] We help my coworkers with their curricular development training, so that when they apply for their doc-

torate they already have lines of research in place, projects that can be applied for, and they work on their scientific productivity. We in the laboratory have created this network [...] always having accreditation in mind (Member of the university's academic staff).

The challenge posed by the SC, at least as a possibility, is exactly that of *suspending* knowledge or, more precisely, redefining the relationship between knowledge and individuality, given that

[...] One of the problems is the arrogance of knowledge [...] (Member of the Social Council).

Or, as Santos puts it, to promote the capacity of academics "to relearn, to remember in a different way" (Santos, 2018, p. 154). A member of the SC puts it this way:

[...] academic degrees are no guarantee that [academics] have the willingness to be open to other topics beyond their lines of research; we must *relearn*. Here [in Aysén] everything is different, it is a region that was unknown to the country [...]. It is very different in terms of culture (Member of the Social Council).

In this sense, what this position highlights is the need for an academic body that *territorializes* their knowledge and experience. Not in the sense of deploying or communicating the knowledge produced, which is something rather unidirectional, but of *living* bidirectionality. This is what Santos considers to be a fundamental aspect of subversity, and which leads to rethinking pedagogical practices from a new attitude, that of unlearning in order to relearn. The words of a representative of the university's academic body are clear in this regard:

Does this machinery of scientific production always respond to the needs of the human being? In the context of Covid, this is an analysis that science is making today. We have realized that in Chile, research is at the forefront [...] but we need to be a little more human, and not only respond to the scientific world in a square way (Member of the university's academic body).

Here the word *human* seems to indicate a consideration that goes beyond scientific productivity. Here again, it is useful to recall what Santos points out:

[...] they [academics] should strive to think of themselves without degrees, certificates or diplomas, and feel the aura of the university as a burden rather than an advantage, and relearn to distinguish the authority of knowledge from the authority of the institution that reproduces it (Santos, 2018, p. 284).

The *aura*, which is often lost in the infinite reproduction of knowledge, as Benjamin(2005), rightly warned, here, it seems, emerges and reproduces itself in the territory.

Some conclusions: the subversive becoming of the territorial university

In this article, we have tried to critically consider the role of the *Universidad Estatal de Aysén* and, at the same time, think about the possibility of subversity in that territory. In particular, we have been interested in analyzing how the university has responded simultaneously to the regulations, national policies and expectations of the local community, as well as what kind of tensions the existence of the SC brings about. We have tried to point out some tensions that emerge from this relationship, and how they challenge the university's territorial project.

The territorial significance of the university indicates that it *thinks* and *constitutes* the territory. Unlike the mercantile logic, which lacks universal referentiality or reactivates them in such a way that they lose their social meaning and construction of the common, the territorial university advocates the construction of an epoch, which here is *the constitution of a territory*. Such constitution, however, does not imply returning to the normative principles, or to certain universal references of the modernizing and neoliberal project. Rather, it implies resuming the radicalization of locality and temporality in which such constitution occurs. For this reason, the word territory (place and time) acquires a double connotation: it is contested and, at the same time, constituent. The territorial university, then, is not a mere mailbox of social problems and needs to which it must respond in a timely manner, as promoted by national policies. Its mission is to be distributed in the territory in such a way that it *becomes a territory itself*.

In this sense, the university actors suggest that the SC has the potential to become the space of contestation, of *imagination*, of new ways of *doing university*. Thus, it seems relevant to us to conceive of the SC as the public sphere that allows the university's territorial project to become a reality. It is the place where the different voices of the local community come together to discuss the needs of the region. However, this space should not be conceived as a public sphere that seeks agreements based on the deployment of a communicative rationality (Barnett, 2008). On the contrary, it is a space that must be thought of from the perspective of conflict, i.e., a place that is at the same time opaque, hierarchical and fragmented. In other words, a participatory and deliberative place, of agreements and disagreements, which rests on unequal relations of power and which, for this reason, embodies the conflicts of social life (Komporozos-Athanasidou et al., 2019). These assumptions are not simple to translate since what the neoliberal agenda has produced, or rather, what this agenda has taken away from universities is exactly their capacity to think. The homogenizing practices of accreditation (Morley, 2003) - for example, the idea of attachment to the environment - have suspended the universities' capacity to deliberate.

Considering that, the SC runs several risks that should be carefully considered. One of them, as mentioned above, is that it may be subsumed under the logic of accreditation. Another risk is more inter-

nal. Given that the SC navigates between the external (the territory) and the internal (the university itself), it runs the risk of being viewed as an external entity within the university. Thus, it seems relevant to rethink the binding and advisory nature of the SC insofar as the way in which *itself being territory* (the university) implies a more substantive articulation between the SC and the university.

Bearing in mind these considerations, one may conclude that the *Universidad de Aysén*, together with the Social Council, bursts in to challenge and displace the market in higher education, but also the premises of the modern university (for example, autonomy and objectivity). What the university implementation shows is that one cannot sustain a university with these characteristics, which is territorial and faithful to the social mandate, under the market mechanisms, and even less with the intervention of the central or regional government. This is what the exercise shows in an extreme territory such as Aysén. Results are extensive to all territories, since the same problems and impediments that are concentrated there, appear ubiquitous and in a diffuse form in other places. The territorial project is only possible within a public sphere that needs to be thoroughly examined and analyzed. This consideration is fundamental in the Chilean higher education system, where it should start with a deep process of decommodification. The experience of the *Universidad de Aysén* in the analytical framework we have proposed, may serve as a relevant example to think and imagine.

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Notes

- 1 “Aysén Social Movement: Your problem is my problem”.
- 2 For example, the first popular university in North Africa was established in Alexandria, Egypt, under the initiative of Italian and Greek anarchist workers. In Latin America, the first university of this type was created in 1921 in Peru, the *Universidad Popular Gonzáles Prada* (Santos, 2018).
- 3 That is clearly evidenced in the letter submitted by the Ministry of Education to the Dean of the university, where the main reasons for requesting the resignation are leveled (August 2016).
- 4 The law prevented the advancement of free education beyond the seventh decile, binding it to the GDP growth, and maintained the granting of the benefit on an individual basis, in the form of funding to the demand instead of funding to the institutions.
- 5 The proposal was not submitted to the Ministry of Education. The authors had access to the internal reports prepared to support the proposal.
- 6 The PSU is being transformed, based on the evaluation of curricular content of high school until the evaluation of core competencies to take higher education. In 2020, the Transition Exam was applied for the first time.
- 7 It is worthy of notice that beyond the tensions, resistance and rejection of that proposal of inclusion in 2016, similar elements were recently introduced in 2019 to favor inclusion in the so-called extreme regions.

8 It is worth pointing out that, by virtue of the internal discussion in the SC and among the University authorities, the latest operating regulations of the SC include “[...] to be a propositional instance that allows recognizing the needs and problems of the region, enhancing the relationship between the university and its local environment in the strategic areas defined by the university [...] and maintaining close relationship between the regional community and the *Universidad de Aysén*” (Universidad de Aysén, 2018b, p. 2).

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