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Opinion – Sou Ciência: Urgent issues for Higher Education and Science and Technology

In last week's article, we presented the objective of resuming pressing themes and proposals of the SoU_Ciência Study Center for Higher Education and Science, with a view to rebuilding the country. We have been working since July 2021 on surveys and analyzes with the purpose of contributing and subsidizing policy planning for the sector.

We know that the next government will have many difficulties, especially with regard to access to data, and their updates, in all strategic areas for the advancement of Brazil. In order to store some information, SoU_Ciência has worked tirelessly, since its foundation, in several directions, to guarantee the preservation of data, such as, for example, the Inep microdata, which were removed from the air and later modified by the MEC, recently , as well as data from the budget and from Higher Education and Science and Technology Institutions.

In addition to having a repository with official data, which is available to researchers, science promoters and the media, we have made public the results of studies from different lines of research, showing the impacts of the expansion of private Higher Education, the change in the profile of students, the importance of affirmative policies, the fate of graduates and their contribution to social and economic growth, society's perception of science and research, the role of universities in solving the country's major problems, such as the pandemic, in addition to unprecedented analyzes on the financing of the sector.

As we also mentioned in last week's article, we are going to present in more detail some of the proposals formulated from the works of SoU_Ciência. Initially, the focus will be on funding/investment in Federal Public Higher Education and Science.

In order to think about Science and knowledge production in the country, it is important to consider and strongly promote the integration of the sector. Research institutes and development agencies that are linked to the Ministry of Science and Technology (CNPq and Finep) and other Ministries (see the SoU_Ciência panel with an analysis of 21 budgetary units) need a strong dialogue with the 68 federal universities (IFES) and the federal institutes of technological education (IFs). In addition, it is also necessary to link CAPES, which is a fundamental body for the organization and promotion of the postgraduate system and for training young Brazilian researchers in training.

Another equally fundamental body is Emprabii, linked to the Ministry of Science and Technology, an important channel for articulation between universities, institutes and the private sector focused on technological development and innovation.

All the important actors currently involved in Science and in the production of knowledge are unanimous in stating that the priority measure is the resumption of investment in Science and Technology (S&T). Some signs need to appear in the first 100 days of the next government. With that and with the integration between universities and institutes, the available resources will certainly be optimized. For this, a strong national coalition for the solution of the great questions and needs of our country must be organized.

Here are some of our proposals:

1. Revocation of MP 1136/2022, which amends the National Fund for Scientific and Technological Development Law;

2. Immediate end to the FNDCT's loss of 44 billion reais over the last 10 years, as shown on the SoU_Ciência panel. To recompose the fonts of resources for Science, it will be important to repeal MP1136, as well as unlock FNDCT resources;

3. Despite contrary to the extensive use of fossil fuels, while pre-salt exploration is not interrupted and the energy matrix is ??replaced by clean sources, we are in favor of guaranteeing its allocation to the areas of education and health, and 25% to science and technology, ensuring that they have social application. The use of the FNDCT must foresee the carrying out of research and new technologies aimed at the preservation of water and forests, and research and development for the transition to a non-polluting, socially fair and renewable energy matrix, to guarantee the future of current and future generations to a solidary and sustainable country;

4. Realization of multi-year plan with the participation of civil society and representatives of the sector, aiming at increasing investment in S&T to 2% of GDP in 4 years;

5. Based on the budgetary sources cited above, recomposition of the budget aiming at the continuity of the public higher education project that was interrupted, guaranteeing infrastructure, study and research grants with readjusted values, hiring qualified personnel as well as expanding student permanence. SoU_Ciência created a Financing Panel showing the drop in the budget of several budgetary units of education, science and technology.

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The graph below, for example, shows in the historical series the drop in resources from other current expenses of Federal Universities, in values ??corrected by the IPCA of September 2022:

Our institutions faced the period of the Bolsonaro administration with a brutal loss of resources, in addition to vilification and persecution, including deans and managers. They lived through a pandemic and demonstrated enormous capacity to solve the emergency and present solutions for the population.

With the budget recomposition and the creation of interministerial structures capable of articulating the sector, our public universities and research institutes will work towards a new cycle of knowledge production and sustainable development strategies. These institutions have been essential locus for the production of knowledge, in addition to training people in all areas. They are ready to collaborate and help to overcome enormous challenges, which already present themselves today.

Brazilian science and our research institutions have not left anything to be desired in times of great need, and it was no different in 2020, when the pandemic began, which produced unexpected and devastating effects in a very short time. In the face of urgent demands to combat Covid-19, scientists had quick and effective responses. In Brazil, universities immediately organized themselves, modified structures, began to develop and carry out projects to meet society's demands for the treatment, understanding and cure of Covid. This, despite the large losses arising from the lack of investment. Brazilian researchers produced a huge range of actions, equipment, studies.

The clear lesson of this pandemic period was that our universities and research institutes need stable funding. Only in this way will it be possible to continue offering the bases for the development of solutions in different sectors. Brazilian scientists are thirsty, they want to continue developing their work in search of general well-being, for the reduction of social inequalities and for there to be, in fact, socioeconomic growth, better working conditions, health and education.

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Veículo: Online -> Site -> Site News Bulletin 24/7

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