Another social research is possible

From the collaboration between researchers and social movements

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Abstract
The article presents an overview of the relationships between higher education institutions, researchers, and social movements in Colombia. Based on a periodisation of the different modes of alignments or gaps between these 3 social actors, the study focuses on two significant experiences of collaborative research between researchers and social movements. First, an experience with peasant movements from the Atlantic Coast led by Orlando Fals Borda from La Rosca Foundation in the 1970s, and which originated Participatory Action Research. Then, a project conducted by the Subjects and New Narratives in Research and Teaching of the Social Sciences research group at the Universidad Pedagógica Nacional focused on the systematisation of practices with popular organisations and their inputs to the field of critical research. Finally, a balance of the current situation of joint research between social movements and collectives of researchers linked to higher education institutions is presented.

Keywords: Knowledge production, university, social movements, participatory research, systematization.

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Resumen: El artículo presenta una mirada de conjunto sobre las relaciones entre universidades, investigadores y movimientos sociales en Colombia. A partir de una periodización de los diferentes modos de articulación o distanciamiento entre estos 3 actores sociales, el estudio se detiene en dos experiencias significativas de investigación colaborativa entre investigadores y movimientos sociales: la liderada por Orlando Fals Bordad desde la Fundación La Rosca en la década de 1970 con movimientos campesinos de la Costa Atlántica y que dio origen a la Investigación Acción Participativa, y la llevada a cabo por el grupo de investigación Sujetos y nuevas narrativas en investigación y enseñanza de las ciencias sociales de la Universidad Pedagógica Nacional en torno a la sistematización de prácticas con organizaciones populares. Finalmente, se plantean algunos
Introduction

The production of knowledge on social movements has been associated with what has been done by specialists in higher education institutions and research centres; inquiries carried out with or by its own protagonists has been less frequent. In Colombia, there has been a tradition of participatory research, initiated half a century ago, which gave rise to what is referred to as Participatory Research and other collaborative methodologies such as Collective recovery of history and Systematisation of experiences.

In this historical research trajectory with social organisations, the role of the Higher Education Institution has varied. Colombian higher education: heir to colonial higher education, has barely had a relationship with civil society movements. The accelerated capitalist modernisation that took place during the second half of the 20th century, triggered social conflicts in the rural areas and the city; it also brought about the establishment of the social sciences in the country. However, institutional obstacles and the radicalisation of the political environment limited the possibility for researchers to interact with these processes; this led some of them to leave the higher education institution to conduct their research and also to build the first participatory methodologies.

Since the 1980s, the most significant research on social movements was conducted by Non-Governmental Organisations; only in the next decade, were these topics gradually incorporated into higher education institutions. This “late” interest coincided with changes in the country’s social movements; together with the struggles led by peasants and wage workers, others became visible, led by urban inhabitants, women, youth, indigenous peoples, and the LGBTI population. At the beginning of the new century, the Colombian social overview evidenced the consolidation of these movements, as well as their interest in conducting their own research, proposing another type of relationship with researchers and higher education institutions: establishing agreements to jointly develop research projects.

This article presents a joint overview of the links between higher education institutions, researchers, and social movements, focusing on two significant moments in these relationships. The first one refers to the work of Orlando Fals Borda and La Rosca Foundation in the 1970s, and the second one, to some collaborative research experiences conducted by the Subjects and New Narratives in Research and Teaching of the Social Sciences research group of the Universidad Pedagógica Nacional during the first decade of the 21st century. Building on those research experiences, a set of methodological criteria for the collaborative production of knowledge between professional researchers and social movements is presented.