

## Editorial

On May 7-9, 2014, the Humanities Department at the Universidad Santo Tomás hosted the XIII International Conference, which was focused on the theme of "Living Communities and Alternative Developments." This event sought to promote reflection about the focus of human, sociocultural, and environmental development, in order to enable professionals in the humanities to understand the role of their work in building a society and a civilization that respects and promotes life.

In terms of our global context, this conference is quite timely, since 2015 marks the year when the U.N. will begin pursuing the sustainable development goals that its working group has developed as part of its Rio+20 agenda (UN Open Working Group on Sustainable Development, 2014). This agenda keeps a focus on people as the priority of sustainable development, and thus is still oriented largely toward the eradication of poverty. But it also clarifies that the processes through which poverty eradication should be pursued include sustained and inclusive economic growth, social development and environmental protection.

The themes of the Santo Tomás conference were four. They raise important questions that can help us evaluate these goals and the theoretical framework that holds them together.

First, how can development take into account both humanistic and ecological perspectives? What would a development that promotes and protects life look like? This is particularly important since traditional frameworks for development promote a reductionist principle economic growth, which in many cases is actually opposed to the care and preservation of life, meaning, and health. Although a more humanistic and life-friendly kind of development seems to be the intent of the Rio and Rio+20 agendas, it is still the case that economic growth and the flourishing of humans and nature do not easily go hand in hand. This is why we must pay attention to "alternative" voices and wisdom, which can open up other ways to understand our relationships with both "development" and "the environment."

Josef Estermann, in his inaugural lecture, opened the conference with an analysis of the Western philosophical paradigms behind common economic frameworks for development. These paradigms are problematic, both because of the deep divide that they posit between humans and nature, between mind and matter, and because of the way that they create metanarratives of progress that are overly linear and overly hierarchical. In this sense, the androcentric logic of Western thought deeply limits our possibilities for thinking development in ways that do not simply mean unbounded growth, a goal that is ultimately more cancerous than life-giving. In order to create and sustain development that is truly about living well (el "vivir bien"), we need a more global, inclusive conversation about development that takes into account non-Western and philosophies about time, relationships, and meaning, including the riches available in Latin American indigenous worldviews.

Second, how can our societies promote health and quality of life? The right to health is guaranteed by many democratic states. This means that our institutions have an obligation to engender it for all citizens. This obligation, however, is difficult to fulfill when it is not clear exactly what health is or how we can promote it. What does health mean, and how is human health related to both economic development and to the health of the environment? The ways that bodies develop in time through interactions with their environments mean that health is a particularly fragile good that necessitates lot of attention and care. Certain bodies are more vulnerable than others, and thus the promotion of the right to health requires discerning policies that can attend to particular needs of populations at risk, such as women, children, and victims of environmental and social crimes, including victims of armed conflict.

This brings us to the third issue, which is the role that the construction of peace plays in development. The Rio Declaration and the Rio+20 agenda recognize that conflict undermines

citizens' economic development as well as their health and well-being. In the case of Colombia, the armed conflict presents significant challenges for democratic participation, education, and the health of both citizens and the environment. How can we integrate a need for peace and the construction of a peaceful democratic society into our development goals and practices? What will be the role of women in post-conflict Colombia? What kind of alternatives to violence can we imagine and create? Various theoretical frameworks are waiting to be explored that can enable us to move toward humanistic, dignified development oriented toward fomenting a culture of peace. In this task education takes a central role.

Finally, education takes a central role in any form of development, since it is itself by nature a process that takes as its goal human development. Education is itself a development process that, in its best forms, promotes growth, health, and peace. In this sense, education must be focused on life. How can we conceive of a bio-centric education? What are its goals and methods? A complex education that can meet the needs of today's citizens living in global and technologized societies must draw on a rich variety of philosophical and methodological resources, both ancient and new.

The articles in this issue of Temas take up and address these questions from a variety of disciplinary and methodological approaches. They draw our attention to the way that democratic participation, medias and technology, education, peace-building, gender and public health all play a role in promoting development that is truly oriented toward the promotion and protection of life.

They draw on a wide variety of resources, including thinkers as diverse as Bohm, Dewey, Dussel, and Thomas of Aquinas. They highlight the roles play by the media and technology in shaping our social worlds and opening up possibilities for new ones. They draw our attention to victims of social, cultural, and institutional violence that is deeply interconnected with armed conflict in both Colombia and Afghanistan, and remind us that a truly just, developed society must begin by listening to the perspectives and addressing the needs of these victims. They argue that education and health care must respond to the diverse needs of today's societies in new and innovative ways, through holistic, relational, and egalitarian epistemologies that put life, both human and non-human, at the center of our gaze.

This agenda requires a renewed understanding of the relationship between humans and their environment, one that does not see the two as competing spheres. Instead, we need to amplify our understanding of ourselves as living beings to see that our very life is enabled and sustained by the environment; we are indeed part of the environment. For this reason, is very appropriate that this XIII International Conference of the Humanities Department at la Universidad Santo Tomás called us to focus our investigations on the relationship between development and living communities. For all of life is a community, or rather many communities also bound into one.

Truly equitable development will respects the rights of and provide for the needs of all the members of the community, both present and future. To create this amplified sense of development we need to take into account the voices and the perspectives of all members of the community, and especially those whose voices tend to be marginalized: the voices of women, of victims, of ethnic minorities, of the children, whose needs and rights are the true goal of sustainable development. The reflections and investigations in this edition of Temas provide us with a rich panorama of innovative proposals directed toward this kind of holistic, dignified, and life sustaining development.

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