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TRADICIONES DE GUATEMALA



UNIVERSIDAD DE SAN CARLOS DE GUATEMALA
REVISTA DEL CENTRO DE ESTUDIOS FOLKLÓRICOS

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UNIVERSITY OF SAN CARLOS DE GUATEMALA

CENTER FOR FOLKLORE STUDIES

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GUATEMALAN TRADITIONS

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DOCUMENTS

PREPARED RESPONSES FOR THE RESEARCHERS' MEETING OF THE
UNIVERSITY OF SAN CARLOS DE GUATEMALA

Center for Folklore Studies

NOTE:

The members of the research staff of the *Centro de Estudios Folklóricos* (Center for Folklore Studies), placed by the commission appointed by the *Consejo Superior Universitario* (University Superior Council) within the group labeled Humanistic, wish to clarify, and hereby affirm, that they also belong to the field of Social Sciences, given the nature of their investigations, the methodologies employed, and the objectives they pursue.

1. In general terms, how should research be understood in the field to which you are dedicated?

- Meeting held in the city of Antigua Guatemala on May 19 and 20, 1978.

RESPONSE

1.1 The study, analysis, and interpretation of folkloric phenomena (i.e., cultural manifestations or expressions rooted in the exploited social classes within a class-based society), characterized by their traditional, anonymous, popular, collective, non-institutionalized, functional, historically and geographically conditioned nature.

1.2 These three activities mentioned previously must adhere to the principle of discovering truths through practice, confirming them through practice, and further developing them through practice. In other words, the process must move from sensory knowledge to rational understanding, and from rational understanding to practical action.

The research and studies produced by the Center for Folklore Studies are disseminated through books, journals, and specialized bulletins, including a bimonthly illustrated bulletin (*La Tradición Popular*), a biannual journal (*Tradiciones de Guatemala*), and the following bibliographic collections: **Problems and documents, Monographs, Folkloric projection and Brief.**

Below is the list of published works:

Titles:

Problems and Documents collection

Roberto Díaz Castillo, **Folklore y Artes Populares**, Guatemala: Editorial Universitaria, 1968, 105 pp.

Anónimo, **Lybro de Cocyna**, Guatemala: Editorial Universitaria, 1972, 141 pp.

Celso A. Lara F., **Leyendas y casos de la tradición oral de la ciudad de Guatemala**, Guatemala: Editorial Universitaria, 1973, 217 pp.

Carmen Neutze de Rugg, **Diseños en los Tejidos Indígenas de Guatemala**, Guatemala: Editorial Universitaria, 1975, 150 pp.

Paulo de Carvalho-Neto, **Diccionario de Teoría Folklórica**, Guatemala: Editorial Universitaria, 1977, 230 pp.

Ofelia Déleon, **Folklore aplicado a la educación guatemalteca**, Guatemala: Editorial Universitaria, 1977, 233 pp.

Celso A. Lara F., **Contribución del folklore al estudio de la historia**, Guatemala: Editorial Universitaria, 1977, 254 pp.

Folkloric Projection collection

Celso A. Lara F., **Por los viejos barrios de la ciudad de Guatemala, un ensayo de proyección folklórica**, Guatemala: Editorial Universitaria, 1977, 265 pp.

Brief collection

Antonio Erazo Fuentes, **Sobre la preservación de valores de uso de carácter folklórico**, Guatemala: Editorial Universitaria, 1976, 21 pp.

Roberto Díaz Castillo, **Artes y Artesanías Populares de Sacatepéquez**, Guatemala: Editorial Universitaria, 1976, 716 pp.

Periodical publications

La Tradición Popular (bimonthly bulletin): 15 números y 1 en prensa.

Tradiciones de Guatemala (biannual journal): 6 volúmenes y 1 en prensa

2. Should research in this area be understood as having a scientific character or not, and in either case, what circumstances support your response?

RESPONSE

2.1 It indeed possesses a scientific character because, within this field, science is understood as “the objective and rational explanation of the universe”, a concept under which folklore falls, since it is a discipline concerned with the study of traditional culture produced by exploited social classes.

The following circumstances support this affirmative response:

2.1.1 The science of folklore provides an explanation of the traditional culture of the exploited classes by describing the ways in which folkloric phenomena are expressed and the processes they undergo; by distinguishing the phases involved in the development of such phenomena or cultural forms;

by uncovering their internal linkages and connections with other phenomena and processes; and by identifying the conditions and means necessary to allow human intervention in the course of these processes.

2.1.2 This explanation is objective because it enables the representation or elevation of folkloric facts (which are real and observable) and their related processes into the realm of image, idea, or concept.

2.1.3 Likewise, this explanation is rational because it is composed of judgments and reasoned arguments that are experimentally verifiable and render the folkloric phenomenon intelligible.

2.2 In addition to the above considerations, there are others that relate to the type of culture that constitutes the scientific object of folkloric study:

2.2.1 There are two nations within every contemporary nation, and within every national culture, even in rudimentary form, there exist elements of democratic and socialist culture, for within every nation there are working and exploited masses whose living conditions inevitably give rise to a democratic and socialist ideology. (Cf. Vladimir Illich Lenin, "Critical Notes on the National Problem", cited by Vladimir Shcherbina, "Two Cultures, Two Conceptions," in *El Caimán Barbudo*, (No. 87, February 1975), Havana, Cuba, p. 12).

2.2.2 Folklore is a worldview and a conception of life elaborated by the exploited social classes, standing in opposition to the official values and standards of the dominant classes. The conceptions about folklore are therefore non-systematic, born of the popular masses, and represent an inexhaustible source of counter-values opposed to the imposition of "imperialist values." (Cf. Antonio Gramsci, "Notes on Folklore," in *Antalogía* (Selected and annotated by Manuel Sacristán), Mexico, Editorial Siglo XXI, S.A., 1970, p. 488).

2.2.3 Folklore stands in opposition to the official, to the bookish, and to the institutionalized. It is a product of the socio-economic and historical experiences of entire communities, and it reveals the most specific traits that define them as social entities. Folklore belongs to the people and is created for the people. It is anonymous, empirical, collective, and functional. (Cf. Rogelio Martínez Furé, "Imaginary Dialogue on Folklore," in *La Gaceta de Cuba*, (No. 121), Havana, Cuba, March 1974, p. 12); and Roberto Díaz Castillo, "Folklore and Folklorology: An Ideological Problem," in *Casa de las Américas*, Havana, Cuba forthcoming).

2.2.4 It is possible to gradually eliminate so-called negative folklore (i.e., superstitions, unfounded taboos, idealistic conceptions of supernatural forces governing human life, practices of folk healing, coprophagy, xenophobia,

etc.), while enriching and utilizing positive folklore (all those aspects that contribute to the harmonious development of society, that strengthen bonds of solidarity among people, that celebrate traditions of struggle against oppression, as well as ludic folklore, beneficial empirical pharmacopeia, and all artistic forms that emerged from popular religious conceptions but that contain individualistic cultural value, which can be separated from their idealistic content by assigning them a revolutionary function, such as music, dance, visual arts, oral literature, etc. (Cf. Rogelio Martínez Furé, loc. cit., p. 14).

3. Assuming that research in this area can and should be promoted, what in your opinion are the main factors that have so far hindered or delayed its development?

RESPONSE

3.1 Human Factors

3.1.1 The absence in the country of an institution dedicated to training specialists in the various branches of folklore. (All the researchers at the Center for Folklore Studies are self-taught, and all have had to pursue studies abroad in order to deepen their expertise).

3.1.2 As a consequence of the limitation mentioned above, there is a shortage of specialists in the disciplines encompassed by folklore studies. (All of the work carried out by the Center for Folklore Studies is the result of efforts by only three permanent researchers and one secretary).

3.2 Economic Factors

3.2.1 Scarcity of financial resources for the acquisition of equipment (bibliographic, audiovisual, transportation, etc.) and for the provision of facilities suitable for office-based research work. (Only after many years of operating under severe constraints has the Center for Folklore Studies begun to acquire the appropriate means to the nature of its functions; nevertheless, it still suffers from the lack of photographic, cinematographic, and transportation equipment, items essential to its mission).

3.2.2 Budgetary restrictions that prevent the permanent hiring of qualified personnel to handle activities complementary to the research process (particularly for the photographic studio, the library, the mailing expenses required for publication exchange programs, and correspondence).

3.3 Administrative Factors

3.3.1 Lack of institutional mechanisms specifically designed to address, with speed, efficiency, and continuity, the administrative challenges that academic research units face.

3.3.2 Clumsy and unnecessary bureaucratic procedures required by the university's central offices (for staff hiring, procurement of supplies and materials, authorization and reimbursement of travel expenses, dispatch of correspondence, and the exchange of publications).

3.4 Other Factors

The persistence of prejudices regarding the role of folkloristics as a science and regarding the work of folklorists, as well as widespread ignorance about the current importance that folkloric disciplines have gained worldwide, especially in socialist countries.

4. What conditions or measures would be fundamental to support research in that area, in general terms?

RESPONSE

4.1 Establish the appropriate mechanisms to counteract the impact of the negative factors listed in the previous response and, in addition, create a coordinating body for research within the University that allows for:

4.1.1 The establishment of an agile, efficient, responsive, and effective administrative infrastructure to support research activities;

4.1.2 The safeguarding of academic freedom and autonomy in research across its various fields;

4.1.3 The promotion of multidisciplinary research experiences, without interfering in the specific domains of each academic unit;

4.1.4 The encouragement of research aimed at addressing concrete problems of national reality;

4.1.5 The promotion of exchange and collaboration among the different university research units, especially among those that work in related fields.

5. In this field, what is preferable: full-time professional researchers or researchers who divide their time between private professional practice or teaching?

RESPONSE

In the field of folkloric research, the existence of full-time professional researchers is preferable for the following reasons:

5.1 Methodological Issues in Folkloric Research

5.11 Fieldwork:

Carrying out field research on popular traditions requires long periods of presence in the communities being studied, at least fifteen uninterrupted days each month. This is due to the essential contact the researcher must maintain with reality; the specific folkloric research techniques used (tape recording,

structured interviews, participant observation, life journaling, etc.); and the lifestyle of the informants who provide the fundamental data. Working hours, therefore, cannot be quantified. The researcher must adjust to the time of the subject under study, not the other way around. Certain types of folkloric phenomena (such as festivals, ceremonies, and cosmological aspects) require the researcher's presence in the field, in direct contact with the objective reality, in order not to lose continuity in both the folkloric process and the surrounding social reality. (Cf. Agustín Blanco Muñoz. *Revolución e Investigación Social*. Caracas: Ediciones Desorden, 1972). Experience has shown that brief visits (one or two days, or just a morning or afternoon) yield poor results.

5.1.2 Office Work:

Requires that the researcher, for at least fifteen days out of every thirty, return to the office to continue with the other methodological phase of folkloric research:

5.1.2.1 Evaluate the fieldwork conducted;

5.1.2.2 Create preliminary records of the collected material;

5.1.2.3 Conduct a preliminary processing of the collected material, including at minimum:

5.1.2.3.1 Sorting of tape recordings;

5.1.2.3.2 Sorting of photographic material;

5.1.2.3.3 Sorting of field notes;

5.1.2.3.4 Sorting and evaluating the technical instruments used in the field (questionnaires, surveys, work guides, etc.);

5.1.2.3.5 Procuring new supplies (film rolls, cassette tapes, travel notebooks, etc.);

5.1.2.4 Planning and discussing the next stage of fieldwork.

Both the fieldwork and office research phases require the exclusive dedication of the researcher, especially when reaching the final stages of processing, analysis, and interpretation of the research materials.

5.1.3 Another reason that full-time dedication is necessary is the high level of specialization required in each branch of folklore. For instance, oral literature requires not only collecting material, but also transcribing tape recordings and analyzing those transcriptions. The same applies to music,

dances, and traditional ceremonies, in which, in addition to audio recording, photographs and film recordings must be analyzed.

To all this must be added the time required to theoretically frame the topic under study, formulate the theoretical framework, conduct preliminary bibliographic research, and prepare the technical instruments to be used in the field.

5.1.4 The experience of the Center for Folklore Studies, which has combined research with teaching, has proven instructive. The short course for teachers offered by this academic unit between May and July of 1977 resulted in an almost complete pause of research activities, since the teaching schedule extended through both the morning and afternoon hours.

5.1.5 The results of research must be socially shared. In folkloric research, the investigator should be able to lead seminars, deliver lectures, and participate in panels, symposia, and roundtables to present the results of their work. If necessary, the researcher may teach a course on the subject they are researching within the most relevant academic unit, without this interfering with or detracting from their investigative activities.

Combining research and teaching duties has shown in practice to be detrimental, negatively affecting both the research and the teaching.

While it is true that the researcher has a duty to disseminate and share knowledge, teaching should not absorb the majority of their time, much less obstruct their fieldwork, which is the essence of social, anthropological, and folkloric research. (Cf. Mercedes Olivera de Vásquez, "Some Problems in Current Anthropological Research", in *De eso que llaman antropología mexicana*. Mexico: Editorial Nuestro Tiempo, 1970; Achim Schrader, *Introdução à pesquisa social empírica*. Porto Alegre, Brazil: Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul, 1974).

6. Granted that research at the San Carlos University must be justified on social grounds, in what ways is, or could, research in this area benefit the population, currently or in the future, and more specifically, which sectors of the population? In other words, who benefits from the results of this research?

RESPONSE

- 6.1 Folkloric research directly benefits the popular classes on several hierarchical levels

6.1.1 First level

Within capitalist society, traditional culture is intermingled with elements of very different kinds: cultural, social, etc. (Cf. Rogelio Martínez

Furé, loc. cit.). This is due to the alienating and foreign-imposed influence exerted by the dominant classes through various means.

The first level of usefulness of folkloric research lies in identifying and valorizing the authentic culture of the dominated classes. This implies rescuing the cultural identity and authenticity of the exploited masses.

Folkloric research helps raise awareness among these popular classes about the value of their own culture and the importance of preserving it, so they may recognize their capacity to generate social change. It prepares them to resist imperialist penetration that devalues popular culture and alienates it from local contexts in favor of foreign ones (Cf. L.M. Lombardi Satriani, *Antropología cultural. Análisis de la cultura subalterna*, Buenos Aires: Editorial Galerna, 1975).

In other words, folkloric research helps folk artists value their own culture and distinguish it from the undifferentiated mass of elements imposed by the dominant classes (Cf. Y.M. Sokolov, *The Russian Folklore*, New York: Macmillan, 1950; Milko Matičetov, *El concepto de folklore en Yugoslavia*, Univ. of Chile Reproduction, 1976).

6.1.2 Second level

In the capitalist state, popular culture is exploited by intermediaries who profit from it. Folkloric research exposes this exploitation while simultaneously encouraging folk artists and artisans to assign proper value to their creations. Through folkloric-economic studies, it becomes possible to help establish that value.

Folkloric research provides fundamental knowledge of objective reality and, based on that, helps guide folk artisans to preserve their traditional culture and improve their standard of living.

6.1.3 Third level

Folkloric research enables a scientific understanding of the activities of the popular classes through critical analysis. This approach makes it possible to discern both positive and negative aspects, thereby contributing to social change.

6.1.4 Fourth level

Folkloric research projects into the future of the popular classes, as it makes it possible to rescue the cultural foundations upon which both a socialist society and a national culture can be built, together with the values of a universal revolutionary culture (Cf. Rogelio Martínez Furé, “Imaginary dialogue about Folklore,” in *Gaceta de Cuba*, No. 121, March 1974; “Cuban popular traditions,” in *Revista Alero*, 3rd Series, No. 23, March–April 1977).

Folkloric research gains real meaning when understood within the social domain, as an agent of change. It allows us to understand the mechanisms of popular mentality and the means through which it may be influenced.

Furthermore, folkloric research aims to preserve the cultural identity of the popular classes and to revalue the positive aspects of that culture (Cf. *Conjunto Folklórico Nacional de Cuba*, XV Aniversario 1962–1977, Havana, Cuba: Ministerio de Cultura, 1977; Enrique Ruíz García, *La descolonización de la cultura*, Barcelona: Biblioteca Universal Planeta, 1972; Rogelio Martínez Furé, “Imaginary dialogue about Folklore,” in *Gaceta de Cuba*, No. 121, March 1974; Rodolfo Quintero, *La cultura nacional y popular*, Caracas: University Press of the Central University of Venezuela, 1976). Thus, folkloric research does not seek to freeze or fossilize the activities of the popular classes, but rather to study and understand their current dynamics and orient them toward revolutionary change. In summary, the work of folkloric research, at all its levels, should be directed toward the popular classes, with the primary aim of rescuing the cultural identity and authenticity of our people.

7. Given their level of abstraction and ambition, can we speak of different types of research? For example: highly theoretical research, research on specific processes in nature and society, monographic research, research addressing concrete problems raised by practice, research conducted as part of university degree requirements, or as final evaluation procedures? In which of these, or in other, types of research should the greatest emphasis be placed in your area? If possible, we request a list of priorities or a chart showing the relationship between levels.

RESPONSE

In the field of folklore, research should be conducted at the following levels:

7.1 Research on concrete problems raised by practice

7.1.1 Research aimed at solving problems raised by practical needs is applied in folklore to those requiring urgent solutions. For example:

7.1.1.1 Assisting folk artists and artisans in improving their standard of living, enhancing the technical quality of their work, and preserving the traditional character of their production.

7.1.1.2 Rescuing folk arts and crafts that are on the verge of extinction.

7.1.1.3 Rescuing and preserving traditional patterns in the following areas: music, dance, oral literature, traditional clothing, and other analogous manifestations.

7.2 Monographic research

7.2.1 Monographic research aims to study, analyze, and interpret specific issues within popular culture and address them in a coherent, systematic, and in total sense manner.

In the field of folklore, this includes studies on traditional music, oral literature, cosmology, and folk arts and handicrafts.

This type of research allows for the identification of popular traditions, their valorization, the purification of foreign or imposed elements, and the discovery of their positive content (Cf. L. M. Lombardi Satriani, *Antropología cultural. Análisis de una subcultura*, Buenos Aires: Editorial Galerna, 1974).

7.3 Research on particular social processes given to society

7.3.1 Research on specific social processes given to society, when applied to folklore, facilitates the understanding of such processes and contributes to solving the social problems they generate. For example, following the 1976 earthquake, folkloric research helped to “detect” (and confirm) the existence of traditional conceptions regarding housing and traditional clothing (Cf. Roberto Díaz Castillo, “Folklore and Folkloric Research: an ideological problem,” in *La Tradición Popular*, No. 7, Guatemala: Bulletin of the Center for Folklore Studies, 1976).

Likewise, in the geographic area occupied by EXMIBAL’s mining facilities, a process of deculturation is taking place among the Q’eqchi’ peasant population employed there. One might recall, in this context, the folkloric research carried out in the petroleum regions of Venezuela under similar circumstances. (Cf. Rodolfo Quintero, *Antropología del Petróleo*, Caracas: Central University of Venezuela Press, 1973). The results of this type of research show that it is possible to contribute to the understanding and resolution of major national problems by defending popular culture in line with social change.

7.4 Theoretical research

7.4.1 As for theoretical folkloric research, it is essential for the development of reasoning, judgments, and concepts that arise from fieldwork and are validated by it (Cf. Ramón Medina Franco, *Marxismo y teoría sociológica*, Caracas: Central University of Venezuela Press, 1969; J. Núñez Tenorio, *Introducción a la ciencia*, Caracas: Ediciones Rocinante, 1973).

Moreover, this type of research enables the use of the scientific method and its application to the concrete reality of popular culture (Cf. Sebastiao Geraldo Breguez, “Por uma nova conceituação do folklore,” in *Folklore Americano*, No. 24, December 1977).

Finally, it must be added that this type of research is the necessary complement for configuring the practice–theory–practice cycle that underlies the scientific process of knowledge acquisition (Cf. Y. M. Sokolov, **Russian Folklore**, New York: Macmillan, 1959).

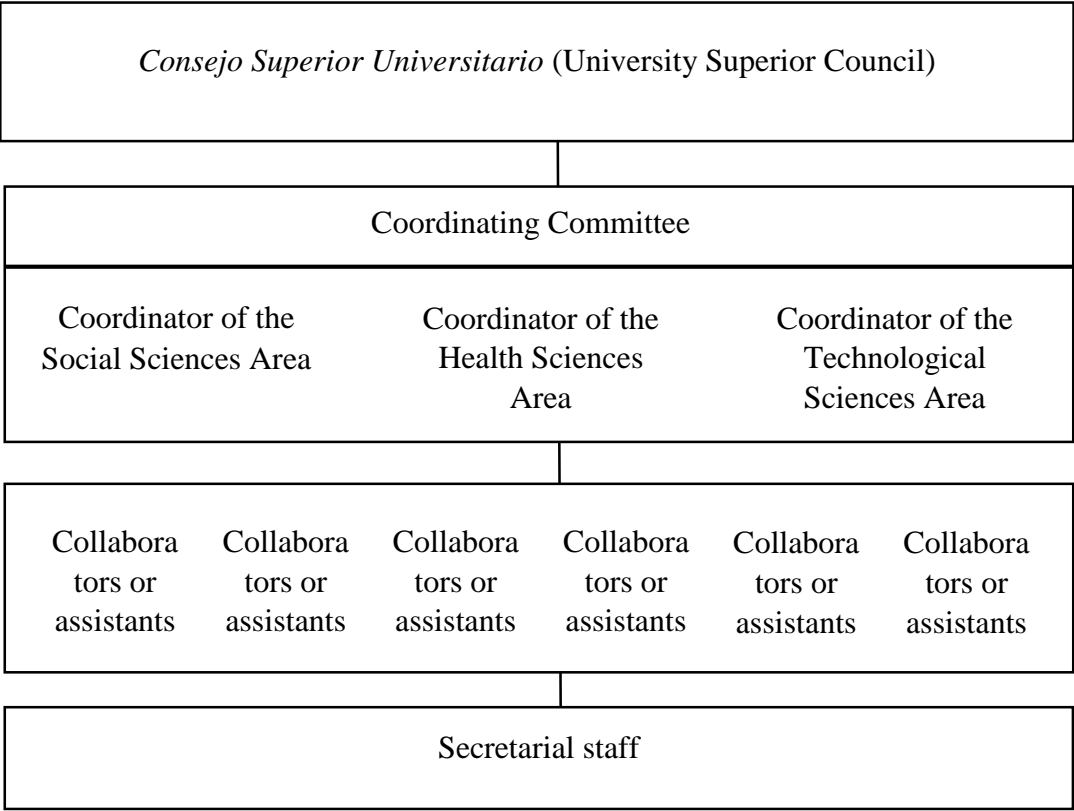
8. Given that university research requires a minimum of coordination in order to integrate and guide it according to established goals, how and with what human resources should the coordinating body be generally composed? What should its structure and functions be?

RESPONSE

8.1 The university research coordinating committee could be composed of a team of researchers who are specialists in each of the main areas of work, as follows: one researcher from the social sciences, one from the health sciences, and one from the technological sciences areas.

These researchers may have as many collaborators as they deem necessary.

Secretarial staff should also be available as needed.



The aforementioned coordinating commission should be informed of the research projects and their outcomes.

8.1.1 Existing and future research units must retain the autonomy they have enjoyed thus far, which should be reflected in their necessary freedom to plan and carry out their work. The committee will limit itself to concentrating and coordinating efforts for the joint action of such units, to “promote scientific, philosophical, technical or any other form of cultural research...” and “contribute to the identification, study, and resolution of national problems from a cultural perspective and with the broadest patriotic spirit” (*Estatutos de la Universidad de San Carlos de Guatemala*, Article 7, Title II, p. 34).

8.1.2 The functions of the university research coordinating committee should be:

Coordination functions:

- Stimulate research activities across the various specialized areas and university institutions;
- Promote and encourage multidisciplinary research within the university;
- Request the collaboration of external research entities, both national and international, that can contribute to the study of the country’s problems;
- Address problems arising in the university’s research institutes, as long as they fall within the committee’s area of competence;
- Create all mechanisms necessary for the comprehensive resolution of the problems referenced above.

Dissemination functions:

- Publicize the research conducted by each unit and its results;
- Publish materials containing the research carried out by the various units.

9. Should the university coordinate its research programs with other national organizations engaged in activities that require research to promote development programs? What limitations should be established to ensure that this model is consistent with the purposes of San Carlos University?

RESPONSE

9.1 We believe that it is necessary for the university to coordinate its research programs with those of other national and international institutions, provided their studies align with the university’s aims. This coordination should be aimed at contributing to the resolution of national problems, as long as such institutions serve the country’s interests and do not undermine either the university’s autonomy or national sovereignty.

9.1.1 To regulate the cooperation between the university and the aforementioned institutions, the following measures are proposed:

- Ensure that the university, as a higher-level research institution, is the one directing the projects to be carried out;
- Ensure that each participating institution contributes resources proportionally, according to the project's needs and the number of participants;
- Ensure that external institutions provide specialized personnel and other necessary resources when the situation requires it;
- Require that each institution involved in a given research project periodically reports on its progress, as well as on the final results.

10. From the perspective of your field, to what extent is multidisciplinary research advisable? We would appreciate concrete examples of possible collaboration between two or more disciplines within the field, including elements of your own:

RESPONSE

10.1 In folklore research, multidisciplinary activity is of the utmost importance, since the involvement of other specialists allows studies on popular traditions to be carried out in a comprehensive manner. This is particularly true considering that folklore encompasses all aspects of popular culture, and therefore, each of those aspects can be studied by one or more specialists. Conversely, the entirety of this culture may be treated as an object of the same framework.

Moreover, folklore requires the assistance of historians, anthropologists, archeologists, literary scholars, economists, sociologists, physicians, dentists, biologists, engineers, psychologists, architects, and others.

For example, in a research project on popular arts and handicrafts from a particular region, in addition to folklorists, archeologists (to trace historical antecedents), sociologists (to study the social group), economists (to examine the economic implications of production, commercialization, and export of the products), and psychologists (to analyze the personalities of the producers), may all contribute meaningfully.

Another example is the multidisciplinary study of popular housing, for which the Center for Folklore Studies has already published some findings (*La Tradición Popular* No. 7, 1976), revealing the need to combine the efforts of experts from other disciplines (architects, engineers, urban planners, sociologists, economists, psychologists, agronomists, veterinarians, etc.) in order to carry out a systematic and comprehensive research.

Regarding the joint experience of the Center for Folklore Studies and the Faculty of Architecture is illustrative. These academic units collaborated in studying the physical layout best suited for the production of traditional ceramics (a workshop led by architect Arturo Guerrero).

A similar case is the study conducted by the Center for Folklore Studies and the School of Psychological Sciences, which addressed superstition and ideology in popular literature (a unit directed by Licenciado Mario Pellecer).

11. What measures could be taken so that even modest research activities, included in the development of academic programs in your area, might help identify and encourage students with a research vocation and offer them better opportunities to pursue research careers?

RESPONSE

Promote supervised student participation in both office-based and field research projects, under the direction of academic units that request it, with proper academic credit being awarded.

12. Given that the University includes research programs conducted by established research units such as institutes, as well as other modalities that include isolated programs, do you consider this structure functional, adequate, and convenient, or would you suggest a reorganization of the current system?

RESPONSE

It is advisable to maintain the research units that have already been established, such as the Center for Folklore Studies, the Contemporary History Research Program, and others whose results are clearly visible, without detracting from the proposal outlined in point 8 of this same document.