


Education Review **Reseñas Educativas**
Resenhas Educativas

January 15, 2025

ISSN 1094-5296

**Ivancheva, M. P. (2023). *The alternative university: Lessons from Bolivarian Venezuela*. Stanford University Press.
<https://doi.org/10.1515/9781503636026>**

Pp. 216

ISBN: 9781503634749

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This fascinating volume is definitely worth a careful study by scholars and political activists interested in learning about one of the major reform efforts undertaken in Venezuela following the Bolivarian revolution led by Hugo Chávez and the United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV). Ivancheva, an anthropologist who came of age in Bulgaria and conducted her PhD fieldwork in Venezuela during 2008-2011, draws on documentary analysis as well as her extensive interviews and observations. Her field work focused on the Ministry of Higher Education and at some of the campuses of the *Universidad Bolivariana de Venezuela* (Bolivarian University of Venezuela or UBV) and other decentralized sites (*aldeas*). The higher education reform initiated in 2003 as part of *Misión Sucre* (named in honor of Antonio José de Sucre, a leader of the 18th century independence struggle) dramatically increased access to higher education, particularly among rural and lower-class youth and adults.

Ivancheva describes the goals and accomplishments prior to 2011 of this ambitious reform to democratize and socialize higher education in Venezuela. More than 500,000 students received free access to decentralized higher education sites, free books, scholarships for living expenses, and free food at campus canteens. Ivancheva's contribution is strengthened by examining some of the limitations and contradictions encountered in implementing this reform.

She notes how this reform was resisted by many faculty members, even those who were former politically left student activists, who taught at the traditional universities. She also notes how these academics, whom Ivancheva labels “radical nobility,” also played a part in the system that devalued and denied accreditation of the programs at UBV, reinforcing the dominance of the elements of a neoliberal world system of higher education. The lack of accreditation and the general devaluing of the UBV programs meant that its graduates had extreme difficulties in

gaining access to graduate programs or obtaining jobs, even in the Bolivarian government. Ivancheva also analyzes how at UBV the faculty reflected a two-class system, with the administrators and faculty members with “academic” and “radical” capital dominating decision making about curriculum, student evaluation, and faculty hiring in contrast to the younger members of the staff who did not possess such capital.

One of the major elements of the reform was the requirement that students undertake community projects under the supervision of professors. Ivancheva raises doubts about how much impact these projects had in terms of improving the quality of life of community members, although her data sources are limited to a few such projects. However, she does note how the experiences she reports were a source of learning for the students and faculty members. Ivancheva indicates, moreover, that these community projects, often dependent on the non-remunerated labor of women in the communities, contributed to legitimating the socialist orientation of the Bolivarian government.

The volume ends with an “Epilogue: (De)colonial Silences in the Hierarchy of Knowledge Production,” in which the Bulgarian author explores some issues she encountered during and after her field work in Venezuela. She recounts how few of the faculty members and Ministry of Higher Education personnel in Venezuela seemed interested in what she views as similar higher education experiments in the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe or even in social welfare states of Western countries. Interestingly, she also discusses how her comparative research was not really valued internationally, because she wasn’t a “local” (i.e., Venezuelan) scholar and because she wasn’t recognized as having the academic capital, like those in Western Europe and North America, to be able to contribute to broader theoretical discourses.

I urge readers of this review to make time to learn from Ivancheva’s valuable contribution in which she not only provides insights about a significant Venezuelan higher education reform, but also integrates her findings with an impressive range of social scientific literature.

About the Reviewer



Mark Ginsburg retired in 2016 from FHI360, an international NGO. He is a visiting scholar at the University of Maryland (USA) and was a faculty member at other universities: Aston (England), Houston, Pittsburgh (1987-2004), and Columbia (USA) as well as a visiting professor at George Washington University (USA), Kobe University (Japan), and University of Oslo (Norway), and Universidad de Ciencias Pedagógicas “Enrique José Varona” (Cuba). Mark has traveled to Cuba

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Education Review/Reseñas Educativas/Resenhas Educativas is supported by the Scholarly Communications Group at the Mary Lou Fulton College for Teaching and Learning

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