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Brazil: Opportunity and crisis in higher education*

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Abstract. The current situation in Brazilian higher education is discussed in the context of (i) its historical background; (ii) the 1968 reform and its unintended consequences; (iii) the recommendations of the 1985 Presidential Commission on higher education. The implications of these recommendations in terms of the introduction of inter-institution differentiation and greater autonomy are explored with particular reference to the part played in the eventual shelving of the proposals by pressure groups in the Brazilian system. Though pressure groups may block radical changes, continuing debate on the issues raised can form the background to piecemeal and incremental changes in the desirable direction.

1. Opportunity and crisis

In many ways, higher education in Brazil looked as if it could escape the traditional pattern of highly bureaucratized, politicized, massive, and low quality universities which dominate most of Latin America and other Latin countries (Levy, 1986). It is a highly differentiated system, with two major public sectors, the Federal and the one of the State of São Paulo, and a large private sector. A reform law in 1968 abolished the traditional chair system and allowed the establishment of graduate programs, research institutes and full-time teaching; this reform, and a public concern with scientific and technological development, has led to the development of a significant graduate and research capability, the largest in the third world after India. Although the Brazilian system has had its share of political mobilization, it never got polarized along party lines. Finally, it has so far resisted the pitfalls of open and unqualified admissions, which has allowed for quality preservation and improvement in many institutions and programs.

There are also serious problems. Enrollments exploded between 1965 and 1980 – from 150 thousand to 1,350 thousand in fifteen years. This expansion followed an international pattern of broadening access to higher education, and coincided with a period of military government which has always mistrusted and in many cases acted against students, teachers and scientists.

The management of such a large and complex system, in a country with limit-

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ed resources, is in itself a difficult task. The crisis which faces Brazilian higher education in the eighties, however, is not a simple question of management or resources: it is a crisis of values and ideas, with direct consequences on questions of management, financing, and so forth.

The civilian government which came to power in Brazil in 1985 had great promises for higher education. Free from the restrictions imposed by the military authorities, the expectation was that the universities would blossom, and all difficulties would eventually be overcome. In fact, this feeling did not take into account the profound contradictions that lay behind the consensus that "something" had to be done.

As it happened, President-Elect Tancredo Neves was taken ill on the night before his inauguration, and never recovered. His Vice-President, José Sarney, read his inauguration speech, in which it was announced that a high-level commission would be established to examine the state of higher education in the country, and to come up with suggestions for immediate implementation.

The Commission was appointed by Education Minister Marco Maciel and its work was formally inaugurated by President Sarney on May 2, 1985, with a mandate to present a final report in six months.* The way this commission was instituted, the proposals it put forward and what happened with its recommendations can be seen as case study on the conflicting values and objectives which

Table 1. Brazilian higher education institutions, 1983.

	Type of institution			
	Universities and federations*		Isolated schools	
	units	enrollment	units	enrollment
Governance				
Federal	35	328,044	25	12,074
State**	10	98,371	69	48,826
Municipal	3	22,245	111	67,129
Private	20	244,232	539	416,695
(Federations)			(56)	(201,376)
Total	124		744	

* Federations are schools controlled by the same authority, but without university status. From a legal point of view, each school is considered as an isolated unit.

** 46,643 students in state universities were in the three universities of the State of São Paulo; the second largest state system is in Paraná, with 20,568 students in three universities; and then Rio de Janeiro and Ceará. State universities in other states do not exist or are negligible.

* The author was one of the designated members and the Comission's final rapporteur.

coexist in modern higher education systems and on the limits placed on governmental intentions of reform. Before doing so, however, a brief incursion into the history of Brazilian higher education, is needed (Schwartzman, 1979).

2. Background: a Napoleonic model?

Brazilian higher education is often said to be a copy of the French model. The first engineering school was called after the French *Ecole Polytechnique,* and started as a military establishment. Later, however, it evolved into a standard professional school under government supervision, and by the 1930s there was very little, except administrative centralization, to remind one of the highly selective *Grandes Ecoles* (there are two outstanding exceptions to this. One is the "Instituto Rio Branco", ruled by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to train their career personnel; the other is the "Instituto Tecnológico da Aeronáutica", a high quality teaching and research complex ruled by the Air Force. There have been other attempts in the same direction, but none as successful).

Only in the 1930s did the Brazilian government pass legislation creating universities in the country, together with a brandnew Ministry of Education (Schwartzman, 1979; Schwartzman, Bomeny and Costa, 1984). Inspiration came mostly from Italy, although not as directly as it did for the reform of secondary education a few years later. The first two main Brazilian universities are barely fifty years old, and were conceived as loose federations of the traditional professional schools – engineering, medicine, dentistry, pharmacy – and a new "School of Philosophy, Sciences and Letters" that was supposed to be more academic and scientifically oriented, but also doubled as teacher colleges.

The system put in place in the thirties came to its limits in the sixties, and was transformed in 1968 by a sweeping reform (Veiga, 1985). At the time, there were about thirty federal universities scattered throughout the country, very unequal in size and quality; one single significant regional system in the industrial state of São Paulo, which included the country's largest and best academic institution, the University of São Paulo; and a network of Catholic universities had also developed. A large number of independent, often isolated higher education institutions also existed, some of them public, but mostly private. Universities were supposed to be autonomous, while isolated establishments were supposed to come under the supervision of a government appointed Federal Council of Education. However, the universities were bound to curricula established by legislation for their professional degrees, and the federal establishments' budgets were strictly controlled by the Ministry of Education; their professors came under the civil service statutes. The Chair system assured that professors could not be fired and could freely teach without interference, and in each school a Congregation formed by chairholders had the final say on all matters which did not collide

with Federal rules and regulations. The Congregations also drew lists from which the government appointed the schools' directors, while University-wide councils drew up lists from which the government appointed the Rectors. In such a system most of the power remained with the schools, while the Rectors had mostly a ceremonial role.

This system enrolled in 1968 about 278 thousand students, below 5% of the 20–24 age cohort (the total Brazilian population for that year was estimated at around 87 million). Fifty-five percent of the students were in public, non-paying institutions, most of them belonging to a university; the remaining 45% were in private etablishments, most of them isolated schools without university status. The degrees provided by universities and isolated schools are equivalent; both are considered "university" degrees. The only differences are institutional: universities are supposed to be freer from ministerial supervision, and can have larger bureaucracies. About 25% of the isolated establishments were in "soft" fields like humanities, literature and the social sciences (mostly in the Faculties of Philosophy, Sciences and Letters), about 20% in Law, 10% in Medicine and another 10% in Engineering. Admissions were done through public exams provided by each institution and open to high school graduates. There were 2.4 applications for each place in 1968, with much higher ratios for the traditional professions in public universities.

3. The 1968 Reform: unintended consequences

As new legislation was introduced in 1968, applications were rising, and it was impossible to keep the system so small. This was also a time of intense street demonstrations against the military authorities in power since 1964, which gave rise to several years of student-based urban guerrillas and violent government repression, including tight political control over political activities at the universities. The 1968–78 decade was also a period of rapid economic growth, with new jobs being created and intense social mobility. When combined, these factors led to a complete revamping of the country's higher education, not necessarily in the directions prescribed by the 1968 legislation.

The 1968 Reform adopted basically the ideas developed in the mid-sixties by the University of Minas Gerais, which were in turn based on the experience of the University of Brasilia in the early sixties, and responded to the aspirations of highly educated groups seeking to bring the Brazilian universities close to the American research university model: the departmental structure, which led to the elimination of the traditional chair system; the credit system, which did away with serialized, year-by-year course programs; research institutes; graduate programs providing M.A. and Ph.D. degrees; and a "basic cycle" in the universities, which was meant to provide some kind of general, college-like education in the

first two years of school. All higher education institutions were supposed to evolve to this model, with no room allowed for institutional and role differentiation or specialization.

Implementation led to unanticipated results. In the old system, power resided mostly with the schools' "congregations", with the old professional schools as the only real institutions from a sociological standpoint, within universities or in isolation. The new system tried to transfer power to departments and research institutes, and transform the old professional courses into just a sum of credits to be obtained by the students in different departments. In fact, the stronger and more traditional schools were able to resist this change, and only implemented the department/institute system within their walls. New and weaker areas were more open to innovations, but their very weakness led to power being concentrated in the Rector's office. In general, one could state that those schools which were able to keep their institutional integrity were the ones which best managed to maintain or improve their quality in the years to follow.

The basic cycle and the credit system had also dubious results. Students finishing the equivalent of high school had to enter competitive examinations for the career and school of their choice, and those admitted were immediately earmarked to their careers. The basic cycle became sandwiched between the entrance examinations and the vocational courses, and was perceived by most as just an annoying waste of time. The credit system ran against the fixed and regulated contents of most careers, and collided with the limited resources the institutions had for offering course choices. Both innovations became, at best, a new and more complex way of doing the same old things, and, at worst, administrative and pedagogic nightmares.

The reform was much more successful with the creation of academic departments, research institutes and graduate programs, even if for reasons not quite perceived at the time. For many years some Brazilian institutions, foreign foundations and governments had been sending people to study abroad, and institutions like the universities of São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro, Minas Gerais and Rio Grande do Sul had already in the sixties some research tradition and competent groups which could benefit from the new organizational formats. Small, high quality graduate courses, which practically did not exist before as an organized endeavor, were fairly easily put together by these institutions.

Legal and budgetary conditions were also created to allow the universities to hire full-time faculty. In the past, university salaries were low since professors were supposed to draw most of their income from their professional practice. As the universities expanded, new and non-traditional courses were introduced, graduate and research programs were created, and a new stratum of full-time faculty started to emerge. In part, they were appointed to staff the new graduate programs. But there were not many with the appropriate qualifications to work at this level, and the new basic cycle, coupled with the expansion of enrollments,

required a large number of new teachers to be admitted without delay. The end result was that, in a few years, the faculty of the Brazilian public universities went from part-time to full-time, without necessarily increasing its academic qualifications. The new legislation required that faculty could only be hired and promoted if they had the appropriate graduate degrees, and the universities were stimulated to create and expand their graduate programs. An agency within the Ministry of Education, CAPES (an acronym for Coordination for Improvement of High-level Manpower), which pre-existed the reform, was in charge of providing fellowships for faculty and graduate students within and outside the country, and eventually developed a successful evaluating procedure for the graduate programs.

This trend was reinforced by new sources of money and institutional flexibility brought about by the entrance of economic planning agencies in the field of science and technology. The amount of money suddenly available for science and technology far exceeded the country's ability to expend it. New, flexible and modern agencies were created to handle these resources, and they worked free from the bureaucratic and budgetary limitations typical of the Brazilian civil service.

The strategy adopted by these agencies was to identify what they considered to be good or promising research groups, and to provide them directly with support, very often bypassing the established procedures for labor contracts, accounting procedures and decision-making at the receiving end. They went after tangible results, and preferred to invest in productive companies, rather than in universities. It soon became clear, however, that the universities had the best qualified people and could generate the most convincing research and training projects (Schwartzman, 1985). For academic researchers, there was now a market which was sensitive to their qualifications and aspirations. For the universities, it meant that new resources were available, but they were mostly out of their administrative control. Well equipped, well staffed and well paid departments and research programs had to exist side by side with poor ones, the first more concerned with research and graduate education, the latter bound to the traditional undergraduate schools and courses.

The result was that, while in 1970 there were 57 doctoral programs in Brazilian universities, in 1985 they were more than 300, with another 800 providing training at the M.A. level. About 90% of these courses were in public universities, and they were graduating about 5,000 students at both levels each year (Paulinyi, 1986). On all accounts, Brazil had thus started to build a fairly significant scientific community.

There was only partial overlap between the policies of the education authorities and those of the agencies. The premium placed on academic degrees led to a rapid proliferation of graduate programs throughout the country, and in this process quality usually suffered. The Federal Council of Education, which was

supposed to provide them with accreditation, was extremely slow and usually not very qualified for the job. The agencies supported the programs of their liking, mostly in the basic and technological fields. According to the evaluations provided by CAPES, only about one fourth of the new graduate programs were of significant quality or had chances for improvement (Castro and Soares, 1985).

Thus, a stratification ladder was established among the graduate programs and between institutions with and without advanced degree and research programs, a development which ran against the notion that all higher education institutions were to move towards the research university model. This assumption was also eroded by the rapid increase in enrollments and the expansion of the private sector. The 1968 reformers did not expect that, in Brazil as elsewhere, higher education was entering a period of rising demands, which could not be accommodated between the walls of existing institutions. The goverment reacted to the building pressures by disregarding the intentions of the 1968 reform. First, the public sector was forced to increase as much as possible the number of first year admissions in the public sector, without a corresponding increase in resources; at the same time, the requirements for the establishment of private, non-university institutions became very lax. In a few years the number of students enrolled in private schools far outweighed those in public institutions, while the number of non-university, degree-granting schools also increased in relative terms.

In the seventies Brazilian higher education drifted far away from the unified university research model prescribed by the 1968 reform. By 1985 it had become an extended, complex and highly differentiated system, with the following main features:

- a small elite of about 14,000 faculty with doctoral degrees or equivalent titles (sometimes known as the "high clergy" of Brazilian education) and about 40,000 students in M.A. and Ph.D. programs in the best public universities, mostly in the southern states. Professors in this segment are endowed with reasonable salaries and can complement them with fellowships, research money and better working conditions (in spite of declining resources in the eighties); students are selected from among the best coming from public universities, do not pay tuition and get a fellowship for two or more years.
- about 45 thousand full-time teachers with relatively low academic status (sometimes known as the "low clergy") serving about 450 thousand students in free, public universities throughout the country. Hired initially on a provisional basis, without formal procedures or evaluation, most of these teachers are now tenured, and can be promoted up to the assistant professor level by seniority. Courses and facilities at this level are uneven, with the best in the Center-South and in the traditional professions, and the worst in the public universities of the Northeast. Faculty is mostly full-time (or at least paid on a full-time basis), and seldom has more than a B.A. degree. Students have

access to almost free restaurants and a few other facilities, but lodging is very unusual, and physical installations, laboratories, research materials and teaching aids are scarce. Thanks to loans provided by the Interamerican Development Bank, most Federal Universities built their brandnew campi in the outskirts of the cities where they are located. There were, however, no provisions for housing, since the government was affraid of too much student concentration, and in any case Brazil lacks the tradition and resources to move students to different places to study in a large scale. Today most of these campi are poorly maintained, and inconvenient to use. Students usually come from the best, private secondary schools (which means middle to high-class families) and often go through special cramming courses to prepare for the university's entrance examinations. As the educational system expands, these students are faced with increasingly serious problems of unemployment.

- around 60 thousand teachers serving about 850 thousand students in private institutions. Most of these teachers work part-time, are not well qualified, and have to accumulate a large teaching load in several institutions – or a combination of jobs – in order to survive. Some have full-time appointments in public universities, and moonlight in private schools where courses are usually given in the evening. They are not well organized, and do not have the protection of the teachers' associations which prevail in the public sector. Tuition fees are low and government-controlled; however, the students can still barely afford them. Facilities and teaching materials are minimal or nonexistent. Students tend to be poorer and older; courses are mostly in the "soft" fields. Most students are already employed in lower middle class or white collar jobs, and look for education as a means for job improvement or promotion; they are usually more interested in credentials than in knowledge or skills.
- a profound regional imbalance, contrasting the southern states, and more specifically the state of São Paulo with the rest of the country. São Paulo is Brazil's biggest and most industrialized state, encompassing about one fifth of its population, and one third of its graduate enrollment. This is also the region where the dual nature of Brazilian higher education is developed more fully. There is proportionally less enrollment in public universities than in other regions, but the universities are far better than in the rest of the country, while the private sector is much more complex and differentiated. There are no federal universities in São Paulo, only a couple of high quality professional schools. This contrasts with the country's poorest region, the Northeast, where more than 70% of the students are enrolled in federal universities whose academic standards are usually lower.

Table 2. Geographical differentiation in higher education.

	% in the State of São Paulo	% in all other states
Enrollment in graduate programs	43.5	56.5
Faculty with a Ph.D. degree	42.9	57.1
Enrollment in private institutions	42.5	57.5
Enrollment in state institutions	38.2	61.8
Enrollment in technological and biological areas	33.2	68.6
% of total enrollment (1983)	31.4	68.6
Enrollment in universities	19.9	80.1
Full-time teachers without graduate degrees	17.5	82.5
Enrollment in federal establishments	1.2	98.8

Source: Calculated from Serviço de Estatística da Educação e Cultura, *Sinopse Estatística da Educação Superior 1981/1982/1983.* Brasília, Ministério da Educação, 1985.

4. 1985: the making of a Presidential Commission

The establishment of the 1985 Presidential Commission was an attempt to respond to the political rather than the substantive problems facing Brazil's higher education. The economic depression of 1982–1984 had exacerbated the frustrations of all sectors and the new climate of political freedom was expected to bring them to the fore. The teachers' associations in public universities were organized, vocal and willing to paralyze their institutions at will; the students had a history of political militancy, which was expected to get stronger; the private schools exerted strong pressures for public subsidies, while their students would not permit increased tuition fees; scientists and researchers complained about deterioration of their working conditions; applications for university places were running at an all-time high of about 5 candidates per available place, with large concen-

Table 3. Geographical distribution of scientific production in Brazil.

	State of São Paulo	all other states	Total
Articles published in international journals (1982)	45.5%	54.5%	1,970
Articles listed in *Current Contents*, 1973–1978	59.7%	40.3%	3,296

Source: Calculated from Cláudio M. Castro, "Há Produção Científica no Brasil?", in S. Schwartzman and C. M. Castro, eds., *Pesquisa Universitária em Questão*, São Paulo, Unicamp/Icone/CNPq, 1986, p. 204–205.

trations in some fields and institutions; a freeze imposed on the creation of new, low quality private institutions in 1978 was getting very difficult to sustain, in spite of signs that unemployment and under-employment among diploma-holders were on the rise. Finally, there was the widespread notion that the quality of higher education had decayed in recent years both in public and in private institutions.

Given the heterogeneity and contradictions of the sectors involved, it was clear from the onset that any policy to be suggested would bring strong opposition from some sectors. Since the government did not have a clear policy of its own, the option was to create a body with a large number of places – 25, to be precise – to be distributed according to all perceived or manifest interests. The Commission's Presidency was given to a member of the Federal Council of Education, a body made up mostly by political appointees which tended to respond mostly to the interests of the private sector and those of the more traditional careers such as law and medicine. Other slots were given to student, business and trade-union leaders, to members of private, Catholic (both conservative and liberal) and Protestant schools, to university bureaucrats, members of teachers associations, and persons identified with the full range of ideological preferences from Communists to the conservative military. Finally, some places were given to persons involved with scientific research and graduate education, or who at least had had a complete academic education. There was no formal interest or sector representation and each person was nominated to the Commission individually; but the links were present and usually acknowledged. The wonder was that such a Commission could work at all, much less come up with fairly coherent suggestions and proposals after six months of work.

The Commission's work showed how little members of outside groups really understood or cared about the problems of higher education. The business and trade-union members participated very little in the discussions, and, more significantly, never put to the Commission the demands or aspirations of their constituencies. They expressed some diffuse notions prevailing in their communities – that public education was poorly managed and could benefit from a more businesslike approach, on one side, or that more equity and easy access was needed for less privileged groups, on the other. But it became clear that neither the business nor the trade-union communities had ever applied a great deal of thought to these matters. It was also impossible to translate the educational issues in terms of strictly ideological or partisan commitments: to be a Communist, a neo-Marxist or a conservative did not seem to have a direct bearing on how questions of higher education were perceived, except when ideology was used as a screen for pursuing the short-term interests of some group.

The most active actors in this process, both within and outside the Commission, were the teachers' associations (led by the Associação Nacional de Docentes do Ensino Superior, ANDES). From the beginning, the associations

challenged the Commission's legitimacy, and proclaimed themselves as the only true representatives of higher education interests. Their stand was a combination of political radicalism and educational conservatism. Politically, they pressed for total autonomy in the election of university authorities by teachers, students and administrators; educationally, they opposed any suggestion that could lead to external evaluation of academic performance or the introduction of institutional differentiation; they were also strongly opposed to any form of public subsidy to the private sector. Their concern was not limited to eventual recommendations which could come from the Commission; they were also fighting for the notion that policy should be decided at the grassroots, which, in this case, were the mass meetings and elections of teachers in the public universities.

Members of public university bureaucracies and employee associations were also quite articulate. These are essentially "realist" groups. They have a precise knowledge of legislation and the government's budgetary practices, and do not believe in sweeping changes or transformations. They know exactly, however, which pieces of legislation should be changed to give them more freedom or benefits and very often their concern for extracting short-term concessions from the government brings them into an alliance with the much more militant teachers' associations.

The third strongly organized interest sector is the private one. This is a highly diversified group – elite universities and week-end schools, conservative and Liberation Theology Catholics, lay and Protestant, community-oriented and barely disguised profit-making operations (the Brazilian legislation does not allow for proprietary, profit-oriented educational institutions). They have one common demand, government subsidies, and one common argument, the alleged inefficiency of the public universities as contrasted with the public service they provide. There are no organized teachers' unions, student associations or administrative bureaucracies in the private sector; they are solely represented by the schools' owners, who are usually able to appeal directly to prestigious politicians for the support they need.

The students, finally, revealed themselves as much less articulate and politically active than one would expect from past experiences. Their demands were a kind of shopping list of short-term objectives – free meals, free lodging, evening courses, sports facilities, no fees – combined with the endorsement of the more political issues as put forward by the teachers associations. For those who had gone through the experience of the student movements in the sixties, this was a remarkable change.

The academics – those related with the graduate and research programs, either in public or in private institutions, who, supposedly, represent the spirit of university education – were in fact in the best position to make suggestions and come up with more or less coherent views on the issues, but their willingness or ability for organized political action seemed rather limited. The end-result

of the Commission's work in a way reflected this situation: the more academic group was able to put most of their ideas forward in the Commission's final report, but could not translate them into policy.

5. Recommendations: issues and non-issues

The Commission's final report was a 140 page document made up of three parts. The first, called "Towards a New Policy for Higher Education in Brazil", expressed the prevalent views among the academic group, and consisted of a fairly coherent proposal for change. The second part was a collection of isolated "recommendations" formulated by different working groups and voted by the Commission as a whole. The third part was a series of four dissenting votes (there was also an appendix dealing with short term financial problems) (Comissão, 1985).

The thrust of the recommendations can be summarized in two points: institutional differentiation and autonomy *cum* evaluation. The first meant that the government should abandon the assumption, central to the 1968 reform, that all institutions should evolve towards the university research model, and replace it by the acceptance of different goals and institutional arrangements. The second meant that higher education institutions should take over as much responsibility as possible for academic, administrative and financial matters; but that they should be subjected to an increasingly competent and legitimate system of peer review evaluation and follow up. In other words, it meant a change from the tradition of *a priori* and formalistic control to a system of more freedom and *a posteriori* evaluation. This evaluation was not to be limited to academic matters, but, for institutions working with public money, should also deal with questions of cost-effectiveness. For small, isolated institutions who did not qualify for university status, the Commission recommended that they should come under the academic supervision of neighbouring universities or newly created accreditation and supervising boards.

The Commission reaffirmed the role of the State as the main provider of higher education; however, it recommended that good quality private institutions should also receive public support. The problems of equity of access to higher education were to be addressed mostly by improving the quality and extension of public primary and secondary education, since that is where social discrimination takes place; by the creation of nonconventional forms of continuous, remedial and "open" courses; and by fellowship programs for underprivileged students. There was an explicit recommendation against lowering the admission standards for public institutions, and also against the indiscriminate increase of first-year places.

Given the highly internal and external differentiation of teaching institutions,

the Commission recommended that research and graduate education support should be provided by CAPES directly to qualifying institutes, graduate programs and research groups, so as not to dilute the research money throughout the university central administrations. This agency could also provide direct salary incentives to academic personnel actually engaged in full-time research.

Implementation of these recommendations could not be done simply through changes in legislation, but some institutional rearrangements were required, if nothing else to signal the commitment to a new policy. The most significant would be the replacement of the Federal Council for Education by a truly inter-university, peer-review body which could take up the responsibility for the evaluation processes. CAPES, the agency which traditionally dealt with graduate education and research, was to be strengthened in its role. In the long run, the Ministry of Education should evolve from an agency of bureaucratic control and budget allocation to a center for supporting, promoting and stimulating evaluation mechanisms and pedagogic and educational innovations.

6. Controversies

One would expect the central issues of higher education in a country like Brazil to be those related with access, equity, quality of education, development of research, the adequate use of public funds. Most of the discussions during and after the Commission's report, however, dealt with an altogether different set of questions.

Two issues dealing with university autonomy drew much of the debate, one related with governance, the other with differentiation. In terms of governance, teachers, students and employees insisted that democratic principles required all public university authorities to be elected by the university community – teachers, students, employees through direct and universal suffrage. In practice, several universities were already promoting elections for executive posts, and the government had been routinely appointing the elected ones. This principle was contradicted by those that thought that academic and teaching institutions were public institutions with a task to perform, and that academic autonomy should be tempered with external evaluation and some forms of governmental supervision and ability to intervene when needed.

The issue of differentiation polarized in exactly the opposite way. The same sectors that demanded full autonomy in governance opposed the notion that different academic institutions could have different objectives and adopt different procedures. More specifically, they refused to acknowledge that some universities are more research-oriented, while others could be more teaching-oriented; and that they could have separate policies for faculty hiring, promoting and payment. The argument was that, once differentiation was adopted in principle, dis-

crimination would follow. Equality – and its unavoidable corollary, central control – should therefore prevail, although in combination with full political autonomy. The Commission was able to recommend that governance in public universities should emerge from lists derived from the university community according to their own rules, with final names selected by the authorities; and that differentiation should be introduced both in goals and in salary scales, within certain limits. These conciliatory suggestions did not really please anyone.

Also controversial was the issue of education financing and, more specifically, of public support for private education. Results of a study carried out at the Commission's request, which showed that public institutions are much more expensive and bureaucratized than the private ones, were excluded from the final report due to strong opposition from some members. The reasoning was that some of this inefficiency comes from the fact that private institutions often work with part-time teachers who draw their main salaries from public institutions; and also that the public sector is the one that takes care of the more expensive fields (like medical education) and research. In reality, these two factors do not explain the widely different costs incurred by institutions performing similar teaching tasks, nor the large number of full-time teachers who work just a few hours a week and are not engaged in research nor administration or extension work. The true reason against exposing the facts was the concern that they could constitute a strong argument against public education and in favor of the private sector – which they certainly did.

The notion that students, or their families, should bear the costs of their education, was never seriously considered by the Commission. There were enough studies demonstrating that these costs would be too high to all but a handful, and that this would increase dramatically the social bias in access which already exists. If the students could not pay, supporters of private education argued that the government should subsidize their institutions; while supporters of public institutions concluded that, if the state was to pay, there was no reason for the private sector to remain private. The state should increase the public sector so as to provide a place for all who wanted it, and allow the private institutions and their patrons to bear the full cost of their activities.

The introduction of cost considerations and some level of tuition fees could have positive effects, however, even if the costs could not be fully covered by tuition fees, and allowances were made for those who cannot pay: it would increase their efficiency and accountability, provide their administration with a significant elbow room, and make the students more selective and discriminating in their decisions to make use of public educational resources. It was considered, however, that these benefits would not compensate for the unavoidable political and administrative costs of the implementation of such a policy.

In retrospect, it is remarkable how little the Commission responded to the external environment except in very general terms, or when referring to financial

issues (even here, however, it was clear that it would be impossible to change substantially the level of public financing in the short run). While the political debate on internal governance and external evaluation consumed most energies, questions of equity of access and opportunity, the corporatist nature of the professional and educational legislation, and the actual needs of society for educated persons, although present in the final report, were almost ignored.

Problems of equity are closely related to the way the primary and secondary education system works, and the way school teachers are trained and socially treated. Brazilian legislation requires public and free education for all children until the 8th grade. In fact, although schools are usually accessible for the first grade, there are extremely high rates of evasion from the first to the second grade (around fifty percent overall), and then again at the end of fourth grade. Primary education is supposed to be provided by local and state governments, and its quality is usually quite low (although somewhat better in urban than in rural areas, and from São Paulo down to the South than in other regions). Those who can afford it usually go to private schools. Secondary (9–12) education is predominantly private, and there is a strong correlation between being in a private secondary school and having access to the most prestigious courses in public universities.

This situation is made worse by the way school teachers are formed. Teacher education from kindergarten to 4th grade is still provided by "normal" schools at the secondary (9–12) level. In the past, these were highly selective public institutions granting some kind of terminal degree for middle-class girls. Today, they tend to be just another course for girls who cannot go to the secondary schools and into the universities. Teachers for grades 5 and above, and those engaged in administrative and advisory tasks, are supposed to get a university degree. Given the low salaries and prestige of teaching as a profession, teaching courses and careers in education at university are usually second or third choices, or are sought by elementary school teachers wanting to move up and away from the classroom. Most of the teachers employed by public schools get their degrees in private and presumably less prestigious higher education institutions. This situation could only be reversed by profound changes in the salaries and social esteem for the school teaching function, and also by the improvement of teacher education in public universities. These problems were identified in the Commission's report but there were not many practical recommendations that could be made within its recommendations.

Higher education in Brazil is also conditioned by a corporatist tradition which places a severe limit on the autonomy the universities can enjoy. All professional activities are to be regulated by law, and supervised by a professional council. Regulation means that there is a minimum core of knowledge that all holders of a given legally valid diploma are supposed to have. The possession of this knowledge should guarantee to its holder a given niche in the labor market

(where those without this diploma cannot work) and, in some cases, a minimum wage for professional work. Members of a regulated profession are required to affiliate and pay dues to their professional council and vote for its office-holders; these councils are public entities and work under the close supervision of the Labor Ministry.

The need of nationally valid diplomas leads to the need for uniform curricula. Originally, the notion was that legislation would establish the minimum requirements, and the universities would be free to add to them. In fact, the more courses one follows at professional school, the more legal entitlements for work are open. The pressure to add new subjects to the minimum curricula has led, in many cases, to formal straight jackets leaving very little space for curricular innovation and experimentation.

Another consequence of this system is the strong credentialist bias it generates. Today not only the traditional professions – law, medicine and engineering – are regulated, but also all the new ones – pharmacy, architecture, journalism, psychology, economics, statistics, business administration, library sciences, nursery, social work, to name a few. Each of these professional groups work to extend their niche of the labor market, and in the process conflict with each other; they press for mandatory employment (a pharmacist in each drugstore, an accountant in each firm, educational advisers in each school, a data-processing specialist in each computer center, and so forth) and for minimum professional wages. If resources are available or the market can bear it, professional privileges are maintained at the expense of the general public and there is no limit to the expansion of the educational system. Diplomas, rather than the knowledge associated with them, is all that matters. When economic conditions do not allow for it, the result is professional unemployment and useless diplomas, and the first to suffer are the graduates from the less prestigious schools and careers – precisely those who fight harder for their vanishing professional privileges.

The Commission had the merit of calling attention to the negative implications of this tradition, but did not spell out the obvious measures required to redress it: the end of most of the governmental control, supervision and regulation of professions; elimination of legally established curricula; and the establishment of accreditation mechanisms for degrees and courses by voluntary, eventually competitive, and non-regulated professional associations.

There was also no attempt to base the Commission's recommendations on the human capital, or manpower approach. It is often assumed that educational institutions should be somehow "adjusted" to society's needs; the expectation is that education experts could make the necessary projections and put forward the appropriate recommendations. One reason why the commission did not try to follow this path was that several of its members were too familiar with the pitfalls it entailed (Fulton and others, 1982). The fact that economists linked with the military regime had used human capital theories to explain away the prob-

lems of income concentration in the early seventies contributed to its disrepute (Langoni, 1973). Most important, however, was probably the fact that the human capital approach is usually put forward by actors who are outside the educational system – government authorities, planning agencies, business groups – and who try somehow to influence its course. Given the conditions in which the Commission worked, these external pressures were simply not there.

7. Implementation

As the Commission proceeded with its work, it was closely watched by the press and its members were constantly asked to forecast what could be expected from their work. When the final document came to light in November, 1985, it was already clear that the government was not likely to adopt its recommendations. The official decision was to consider the document as the basis for a broader discussion and therefore to postpone implementation of any of its suggestions.

Opposition to the document came from right and left. For the left, mostly gathered around the teachers' associations, the document was too "elitist", because of the proposals for institutional differentiation, and too authoritarian, since it did not endorse the election of educational authorities by direct suffrage. They did not like the special treatment proposed for research and graduate programs, and did not feel comfortable with the institution of peer review evaluations of their work. They complained against the financial autonomy that the universities were supposed to get, charging that this would make them prey of "multinational corporations", and in any case would give the government an excuse to reduce its financial commitment to full and free education for all.

On the right, opposition emerged from the Federal Council of Education and some groups within the Education ministry, and a few other sectors. The Council resented, of course, the suggestion that it should become extinct or be transformed beyond recognition; and the bureaucracy in the Ministry and in the universities did not like the notion that their power to allocate resources should be replaced or limited by peer review bodies. The granting of financial autonomy did not please other sectors in the Federal government trying to keep the universities, as well as other public institutions, under tight control. Those involved with the 1968 Reform, and who later became involved with the Federal Council, also complained about the notion of institutional differentiation, charging that it was an unwarranted concession to the deterioration of the traditional concept of the University, which should instead be reinforced. A series of articles and editorials in the conservative newspaper *O Estado de São Paulo* charged that the Commission had given in to the demands of the teachers' associations, and that all suggestions in terms of peer review evaluations and academic autonomy would only increase politicization and worsen the quality of education. They

called for more, rather than less, centralized control.

There was, lastly, a pattern of regional opposition which is not easily classified in ideological terms. The higher education establishment in the poorer regions, strongly dependent on federal support and in obvious disadvantage in any competitive environment, feared that the implementation of the Commission's recommendation would concentrate resources further south.

On the other hand, the document was generally well received among the best qualified sectors in the universities i.e. those who felt they could only benefit from a higher degree of autonomy, responsibility and participation in evaluation procedures. Some sectors within the Ministry of Education also thought that the document pointed in the right direction and started to move slowly for the implementation of some of its recommendations. A task group was created within the Ministry to go ahead with consultations with the academic community and the gathering of additional suggestions with the goal of drafting new legislation to be sent for Congressional approval. Some mechanisms for peer evaluation of undergraduate education were announced and started to be implemented on a voluntary basis.

The first proposals from the task group came to light in mid-1986. By then a national election was already looming on the horizon, and the Minister who had started this whole process had already moved to another post. The task group produced two bills. The first changed drastically the composition and authority of the Federal Council of Education, which was to become a purely consultative body; the second provided for a new organizational framework for the country's federal universities, in practice implementing several of the measures for autonomy and accountability suggested by the Commission. This bill also included some mechanisms for making nominations to universities designed to combine community participation with government final authority.

The project that affected the Federal Council of Education was shelved by the Education Minister, and it was announced that the other project would be sent to the Congress for approval. As one could expect, a storm of protests was launched immediately by the teachers' associations and student unions, and, amid threats of a national strike and street demonstrations, the Minister decided to withdraw it "for further study".

8. Aftermath

Was all the effort, then, a useless exercise? Did Brazil lose its opportunity? In many ways, yes. Brazil shares now with other Latin countries – France, Mexico, Spain – the experience that the groups with vested interests in their overextended and ineffective higher education systems are politically much stronger than the eventual commitment of their respective governments to change these

institutions. Many transformations can be done incrementally, by creating new student places, providing new types of incentive, and so forth; but the costs of systemic changes seem to be too high.

The most tangible benefit was probably that the Commission's work made explicit the contradictions and tensions that exist within higher education in Brazil. It has also helped to question some assumptions that are usually taken for granted, like the corporatist system or the research university model as the only possible one. Now it is permissible – even if still a little strange – to think differently. As reality catches up with the limitations of the current system, the new ideas put forward by the Commission may reappear with renewed strength.

In the last analysis, demands for accountability, effective autonomy and quality comes mostly from the more academic groups in higher education institutions, who see that they are gradually losing their chances of working to the best of their potentiality. The problem, however, is that these persons have usually other alternatives, and may not wish to carry their demands too far. This situation is aggravated by the fact that, in an open political system, the pressures for open admissions or quota systems for under-privileged groups in public universities can become irresistible. Given the present limitations in which this system already works, this tendency can lead to the expulsion of those within the universities who still fight for their improvement.

The only sectors completely locked into the public higher education are the so-called "low clergy" and the university bureacrats. Their professional qualifications are usually not good enough to allow them to move easily to comparable jobs in the private sector; they have no way of raising additional resources through research projects; and they are often located in regions with very limited middle-class job opportunities. Their whole professional lives depend on the prestige and support they can get from their peers or the students to which they cater. For the "high clergy", however, those in the best graduate and research departments and richer regions, there are many other alternatives. Scientists have grown used to staying away from the university and educational authorities, and to get their money and prestige from scientific and professional networks. Now there is in Brazil a Ministry of Science and Technology, which does not perceive the problems of higher education as its business; and those so qualified can move from the academic to the business or industrial world, often with substantial monetary gains.

For the government, the best way of dealing with an inefficient educational system is to hold down its costs, grant some benefits when the pressure is too high, and to create other alternatives to attend to its needs. Brazil has already some tradition in creating educational and technical institutions outside the university context and away from the Ministry of Education's supervision, and it is likely that it will continue to try to do the same.

The business community has also a tradition of taking care of its own man-

power needs. Since the 1930s the Brazilian Federation of Industries has administered a highly successful system of professional education at the elementary level, enough for their own needs. The best schools of engineering in the main cities have traditionally provided them with the few university professionals they need. There has been traditionally very little research and development in Brazilian firms and the multinational corporations usually do their research abroad. Some of the large state-owned Brazilian firms who feel the need for research work have decided to develop their own research institutions and training programs.

This scenario points to a progressive "latino-americanization" of Brazilian public universities, with the alienation of its more competent sectors, and the progressive politicization of all its life. If this trend is to continue, the private schools, which have so far absorbed the education and credential demands of less privileged sectors, will probably dump this task on the public institutions and start to cater to the high end of the educational pyramid, while the richest and best qualified students will tend to flee from the public universities. As this transition takes place, the private institutions will be able to achieve two of their most cherished goals: the freedom to charge the tuition fees they feel they need, and increasing access to public subsidy. Such an arrangement can still deliver to the country the scientific, technological and professional elite it needs, but will probably not be able to generate a minimally competent system of mass higher education. The basic question, however, is whether such a competent system is at all possible given the broader social and economic conditions of Brazilian society.

In Brazil as elsewhere, higher education plays many other functions besides the obvious ones of generating and transmitting knowledge. It is a source of employment for the educated, the more significant the less there are other alternatives; it provides a legitimate waiting place for youth, indispensable when the job market is saturated; it imparts a sense of social prestige and esteem; and it grants credentials which at best can guarantee comfortable and life-long employments and at worse can always help to displace the next fellow down the educational ladder. None of these functions depend much on the quality of the education received or on the efficiency by which the educational institutions are run; and many of them can be hurt by improvements in this direction.

As social conditions change, however, there may be trends in other directions. Budgetary restrictions and the political mobilization of other sectors – trade-unions, business associations, professional groups – can place a ceiling on the government's ability to keep on financing an educational system which is obviously inadequate; and this can, in turn, bring to the fore those in higher education who can best deliver what society requires. Changes in the wage structure can reduce the premium on academic degrees, and limit demands for university enrollment; they can also increase the value of a good education, and therefore press educational institutions in this direction.

Above all, Brazil's opportunity resides in the fact that, irrespective of what the federal government legislates, its higher education institutions are already too diversified to be rolled backwards; and piecemeal innovations and changes will continue to take place. Evaluations of undergraduate institutions are starting to take place, and can provide both government and society with information they not only did not have but so far did not feel they needed. Competent systems of continuing and non-conventional education can be put into place, and reduce the pressure on the universities towards open admissions and lower standards. Private, state, community-oriented, research-based and service-driven institutions will continue to emerge and fight for space; and resources are likely to continue to come from different and often contradictory sources. It is this complexity, rather than any well conceived reform, which will keep Brazil's higher education alive and kicking.

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