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## **The Social Condition of Higher Education: Globalisation and (beyond) Regionalisation in Latin America**

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## 1. Introduction

This paper aims to discuss the relationship between higher education, globalisation and regionalism projects focusing on higher education in Latin America<sup>1</sup> and Brazil. It attempts to engage in a non-linear look at processes, agencies, structures and relations of power surrounding this intriguing, complex subject, drawing on a relational, critical theory approach. The main concern is to show that higher education has predominantly taken the diverse and concerted routes of neo-liberal globalization and, by doing so, been profoundly transformed.

Some socio-historical phenomena and the causes behind them are explored in order to analyse the issue of higher education in a global world. In singling out certain phenomena, this paper hopes to demonstrate that they are all connected in such a way that constitutes an excellent vantage-point for theory-forming. Firstly the Common Market of the South (MERCOSUR) will be discussed, along with the processes and mechanisms put into place to settle MERCOSUR's Educative Sector. It is argued that despite the political relevance of this regional project, its major developments are still harbouring important but preliminary preparations for future regional positioning and empowerment, particularly when compared with other dimensions of globalisation in the region. At this stage, and perhaps for years ahead, the economy will be the main battle field in MERCOSUR, with education existing as a subordinated force.

Secondly, some aspects of the process of globalisation of higher education are explored. It is argued that the commodification, privatisation and 'marketisation' of higher education, having occupied the centre stage in determined strategic nations of the world, have become the founding conditions of a global market in higher education. Thirdly, the Brazilian higher education policies are examined in order to develop an argument about the decisive role played by national government in promoting, adjusting and facilitating the process of globalisation and the regionalism project for higher education. In addition to these three socio-historical phenomena which are developed in a more systematic manner, the regional and global governance of higher education are transversally analysed. The paper mentions the Bologna Process, the European Higher

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<sup>1</sup> Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) consist of three main sub-regions: the Caribbean with 24 countries, Central America with 8 and South America with 14 nations (United Nations Population Division, 2008). These 46 countries are different in many respects in terms of economy, culture, politics, social conditions and education provision. Economically speaking, the region is marked by evident contradictions. On average, it is the richest in the developing world, with 50% of wealth concentrated in the hands of 10%, and has registered unacceptable levels of inequality and poverty. See Helwege and Birch (2007) for a critical view on poverty estimate by international organisations.

Education Area and the ‘experiment’ of Tuning Programme for Latin America as well as international organisations, such as the World Bank (WB), the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and UNESCO, amongst others. The contemporary, social condition of globalising higher education cannot be properly understood without a thorough exploration of these five socio-historical phenomena.

## **2. Theoretical assumptions: globalisation as relational phenomena**

Ontologically speaking, the socio-historical phenomena briefly outlined above enable us to realise that the “real is relational” (Bourdieu, 1991). They might not be seen as isolated, single-run happenings, capable of being explained by their own endogenous movements and forces. Our affiliation to a relational, critical mode of knowledge production would encourage us to explore the constitution of a global field<sup>2</sup> of higher education, given the plausibility of this thesis in relation to many publications, data and (lessons of) experiences<sup>3</sup>. Our understanding is that a relational, critical approach ought to rely upon the assumption that the world *is* and has become *even more* relational, which means, from an epistemological point of view, that the real is not out there as given data or a group of facts to be taken for granted by the social researcher. Concretely, the real is a re-construction (Apple, Au and Gandin, 2009; Roberston and Dale, 2009; Dale, 2005; Simon, Olssen and Peters, 2009). Therefore the socio-historical phenomena are interrelated, interdependent and intertwined processes, each one conditions and is conditioned by the others, each one facilitates and is facilitated by the others. The process of reconstruction can take different epistemological and methodological routes. We regard, however, that their reconstruction as a discursive practice highlights the multiple, complex and contradictory routes through which globalisation processes and regional projects take place, thereby impacting and transforming higher education worldwide. To put it in other words, as a discursive

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<sup>2</sup> Field is taken in Bourdieu’s terms (1994, 1990, 1983). See Lahire (2002) for an excellent overview of the theory of field.

<sup>3</sup> Perhaps the most striking yet famous ‘lessons of experiences’ are those drawn from higher education reforms in Chile under Pinochet’s dictatorial government (1973-1990) (Fried and Abuhadba, 1991; Brunner and Briones, 1992). The World Bank’s (1994) lessons were directed towards “developing countries” not only in Latin America, but everywhere. The report sets out the hegemonic discourse of policy borrowing and set a long-term higher education agenda whose effects are flourishing worldwide, i.e., “greater differentiation of higher education institutions, including the development of private institutions; diversification of funding sources for public higher education; a redefinition of the role of the state in higher education, with greater emphasis on institutional autonomy and accountability; and an emphasis on the importance of policies explicitly designed to give priority to quality and equity objectives” (p. VIII). Anderson (1995) brilliantly shows how Chile was a social laboratory for neoliberal policies forming during the 1970s and how they are related to Thatcher’s administration in UK.

formation, dispersed in time, varied in forms of statements and spread across a global surface of differentiated geo-political contexts, the five socio-historical phenomena might be investigated by “the analysis of their coexistence, their succession, their mutual functioning, their reciprocal determination, and their independent or correlative transformation” (Foucault, 1978, p.29).

Indeed, the contemporary, disputed processes of globalisation (Connell, 2007; Santos, 2002; Dale, 1999; Cerny, 1997) and regionalisation<sup>4</sup>, as well as the active role played by national governments, have produced a *sui generis*<sup>5</sup> ‘global reality’, grasped by Robertson and Dale (2008, p. 20) as “a more fragmented, multi-scalar and multi-sectoral distribution of activity that now involves new players, new ways of thinking about knowledge production and distribution...”. This theoretical input is important as it enables us to refute “unified, unilinear and monological” views of globalisation (Clark, 2004, p. 29). Its relevance to this debate is central because it relates to what Guba and Lincoln (1994) named as “ontological question”, leading to problematise hegemonic conceptions of globalisation that have been constructed over the years.

In the first place, a ‘more fragmented’ global reality is not an indication of a relativist-leaning towards the world, but it stands as a social condition against a pre-ordered, (post-)positivist, system definition of the world. ‘More fragmented’ is a fundamental pillar of the relational constitution of today’s social reality. Secondly, the “multiple scalar” condition of reality suggests a break with dichotomist accounts of globalisation, such as global-local and global-national. ‘Scalar’ means something that has size, but no direction. In this sense, when relations take place in scalar dimension, the scale size is at least global, with the globe not as an agglomeration of national societies or of regions, but as a scalar field, with relations of force, movement, dimensions, intensity, time, speed, depth and multi-level interpenetrations. However abstract the formulation, scalar dimensions signify, within the globe, the global, supranational and international, as well as regional, sub-regional, national, local, institutional and individual subjects. All these components of the scalar chain are relevant because they produce and propagate happenings. ‘Global reality’ is a dispersed

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<sup>4</sup> Regionalisation is taken here as “complex processes of forming regions” (Hettne, 2005, p. 545), i.e. it refers to social, political, economic and cultural processes that can lead to the construction of an imaginary political region.

<sup>5</sup> Using the Latin expression *sui generis*, which means of its own kind or in a class of its own, we want to avoid employing the word ‘new’ above all to talk of a ‘new world’, a ‘new reality’. In fact, we neither deny the existence of new artefacts, processes and commodities that the technological revolution has produced nor the social, economic and cultural conditions created by it that have conditioned human actions. However, core social problems (like poverty and inequality) remain firm and challenging.

set of social processes and relations<sup>6</sup> that operate through and in-between agency and structure; therefore, it is essentially relations of power. Power, on the other hand, is a constitutive condition of the globalisation. When power relations ‘come in’, the scalar chain becomes hierarchically privileged and dominant forces can be identified.

Furthermore, the “multi-sectoral” (Robertson and Dale, 2008) dimension illuminates transformation of the traditional sectors in which national societies and their states have taken responsibility for the provision of comprehensive (and universal) welfare for their citizens. The ‘sectoralisation’ of welfare provision implied spiral upwards and downwards sectoring of professions (teachers, doctors, nurses, lawyers, polices, social workers, etc.), site of provision (schools, universities, hospitals, etc.), government bodies (Secretary for Education, Health, Court of Justice, Social Care, etc.) and policy forming and implementation. On these sectors’ *modus operandi*, the impact of globalisation and regionalist projects were particularly felt. The former was mediated, if not imposed, by neoliberal economic and state reforms in most part of Latin America, whilst closely watched by the WB and IMF, and the latter by the creation of supranational regional bodies or regional arrangements, as the European Union and MERCOSUR exemplify.

An important element to retain, however, is that “globalization... does create broadly similar patterns of challenge for states that shape their possible responses in similar ways. Absolutely central to arguments about the effect of globalization on public services like education is that those effects are largely indirect; that is to say, they are mediated through the effect of globalization on the discretion and direction of nation states” (Dale, 1999, p.2). In line with that, reforms of higher education public sectors have occurred in very similar patterns worldwide.

The *sui generis* ‘global reality’ is resultant of social, political, economic and cultural actions and processes taking place at a scalar dimension which impact unevenly on multi-sector social tiers, and transform in fundamental ways the states, the scope of public policy and its formation and implementation, public and private realms, higher education institutions and civil society today. It is a *sui generis* socio-global reality of its own kind, unique in its characteristics and *modus operandi*, in the sense that it is a social world produced by qualitative and quantitative changes whose contemporary thought has best represented it by the trans-disciplinary, disputed, and controversial

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<sup>6</sup> We have taken this elaboration to Santos’s (2002, p. 12) definition; “globalisation consists of sets of social relations; as these sets of social relations change, so does globalization”.

concept of globalisation. Regardless of the political or ideological connotation behind it, globalisation is taken in this work as a dispersed set of social processes and relations making *things* take place worldly, intensively and extensively, having worldwide impact and gaining social, political, economic or cultural substance whose signification and space anchorage cannot and should not only be taken as local or national happenings. Global, on the other hand, is a sociological, cultural, political or economic condition reached by phenomena that left behind their local, national or regional conditions. Hence, the university or the idea of the university or higher education institution has reached the condition of a global happening in the sense that its structure of “rational, systematic, and specialized pursuit of science, with trained and specialized personnel” (Weber, 1971, p. 15-16) is no longer a Western phenomenon, but one of global scale. Thus it is possible to say that the idea of university – or by extension of any higher education institution – has been globalised in so far as it has carried out the very social processes that characterise teaching and knowledge production. From a critical perspective, it is crucial to problematise *how* something has been globalised; by whom, under what circumstances, by what interests, through what relations and to determine who the beneficiaries are<sup>7</sup>. Addressing these questions may shed light on the process of globalisation, allowing one to fundamentally inquire into what kind of globalisation has been hegemonic. None of us would doubt that neoliberal globalisation “as one *strategy* that aims to conform the world to its grand plan” (Clarke, 2004, p. 29. *Italic* in original) has dominated the contemporary global scenario, even under criticism and resistance, and despite the fact that “neo-liberalism generated a succession of major crises” (TUSSIE, 2009, p. 174), which signals to its disputed contemporary arrangement. Therefore, as neo-liberal globalisation discursive practice has been the dominant force in the making of the socio-global phenomenon, the consequence is that multi-sectoral institutions, policies and forms of knowledge production have been profoundly shaped by it.

Harvey (1992) is perhaps the greatest social theorist of this qualitative transformation, claiming that our historical human condition has witnessed the assumption of a more flexible mode of capital accumulation, a new experience of time-space compression and the rise of postmodernist cultural forms. This phenomenon of such spectacular magnitude, trans-bordering, reordering and connecting today’s national

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<sup>7</sup> See Robertson and Dale (2008) regarding a “set of education questions”.

societies and nation states embodies, in Sennett's (2005) words, "the cultural force of new capitalism", whose consequences have been, amongst others, the fluidity in the work place and consumerism, the restructuring of universities, the rise and dominance of privatisation of the means of knowledge production and socialization, and the oriented presence of global players such as the European Union (Soderbaum and van Longenhove, 2006), the WB, IMF and the Organization for Economic and Cooperative Development (OECD), setting social and public policy agendas under the condition and discourse of innovation, employability, knowledge based-economy<sup>8</sup> and (higher) education as a private and marketable asset. During the 1980s and 1990s, the culture of new capitalism paved by neo-liberal globalisation, with its 'philosophy' of mass consumption, has unlimitedly supplanted political and ideological resistances and has conquered almost all 'hostile' national societies and identities in order to forge a global market.

The causes of such a deep societal transformation are, of course, manifold. In general terms, they are political economic causes. Unfortunately, but not intentionally, the social causes have been altogether absent or solely addressed as a disguise of political manipulation. However, it is important to remember that social, political and economic reasons for a deep societal transformation exist. To put it briefly, let us use the expression "social question" as brilliantly formulated in Arendt's (2006, p. 49-105) analysis of the French and American revolutions. This "social question" stands for the poverty, misery and social inequality that still subsist in some European countries and devastate most Latin American, Asian, and nearly all African countries. A relational, critical social approach might not ignore and, above all, not underestimate the place of economic discourse in the social reproduction of global order.

It is worth considering Arendt's (2006, p. 12) remark that "the insight that forms of government are interconnected to distribution of wealth" raises "the suspicion that political power may simply follow economic power, and, finally, the conclusion that interest may be the moving force in all political strife."<sup>9</sup> It seems undeniable that relational, critical theory constitutes a relevant heuristic program to deal with matters of

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<sup>8</sup> Regarding this matter see Jessop (2004), Robertson (2009a) and Dale (2005).

<sup>9</sup> This idea is particularly relevant because it allows underlying the mix of interest cast by the political strife that led to the global transformation, implying the termination of Soviet Union, the 'end' of the Cold War as experienced in the years following 1945, the fall of the Berlin Wall, as well as the emergence of new regional political and economic settlements, all of which have contributed to the rise of supranational and international organisations *vis-à-vis* the reconfiguration of the nation states. This has occurred within, but also beyond, the Western European contours; in Asia, Latin America, North America and Africa.

such magnitude, complexity and interdependence. The rationale is apparently simple, however complex the happenings; where economic factors are perceived as predominant moving forces behind social relations, processes and transformations, they cannot be materialised without being both mediated by and indeed profoundly shaped by political discourse. This is particularly clear in the socio-historical phenomena analysed below, as they hold consistence and relevance in relation to the analysis of globalisation and regionalisation processes. Three instances are briefly discussed in order to illustrate the argument.

Dedman (1996, p. 8) argues that “the institutional arrangements for European economic integration in the 1950s were part of the solution to the big question facing Western Europe – how to live safely with Germany and the USSR.” The institutional arrangement politically constructed and then embodied in the 1951 Treaty of Paris was the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC), an economic strategic enterprise for responding to the political situation of regional (in)security and (in)stability. However, we should ask why this solution came in the form of an economic manoeuvre instead of a Peace treaty.

The Bologna Process is a case which exemplifies how the political art of tailoring an imaginary European Higher Education Area (EHEA) has been driven by the discourse of ‘global knowledge economy’ based on regionalism competitiveness. Robertson (2009b, p. 409) notes that “the imperative to advance Europe as a political and economic project more generally and a knowledge-based economy more specifically, is linked to the USA and Europe’s declining share of good’s production globally. For this reason” – she continues – “both the USA and the EU share a common interest in expanding the global services economy – including the higher education as a market, as an engine for innovation, and a key sector in developing new forms of intellectual property”. Thus, again, we question why a discursive formation made up of economic statements constitutes the European political project towards higher education. Last, but equally illustrative, is MERCOSUR, a sub-regional economic project, originally built up under the blessing of neoliberal ‘open’ globalisation (Phillips, 2003) and organised interest groups. These three cases might well demonstrate the primacy of a political economic project as part of a discursive formation of regional and global amplitude.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Hay and Rosamond’s (2002) discussion on the discursive construction of globalisation economic imperatives is enlightening on this aspect.



Bearing in mind the contemporary processes of globalization and regional projects and their overt and covert impact on higher education, one question has to be asked anew: how can the renewed ‘function’ of higher education be defined? Mainstream thought (a normative institutional discourse) has advocated that it is to “educate highly qualified graduates and responsible citizens” and to “advance, create and disseminate knowledge through research and provide, as part of its service to the community, relevant expertise to assist societies...” (UNESCO, 1998, p. 1 and 21). This highly formalized and standardised ‘definition’ might be found at any statute of almost any university on the planet. It has evidently played an important role in the discursive formation of the function of higher education worldwide. However, as Robertson and Dale (2008) elaborate, it is the “mandate for (higher) education” that, discursively constructed, defines its ‘function’. In today’s global society, the mandate “has increasingly privileged global economic competitiveness, lifelong learning, education for a knowledge based economy and education as an export industry” (p. 21). The functions of higher education are defined by the discursive and extra-discursive materiality (Jessop, 2004) of the new international division of labour and knowledge hegemonically driven by the neo-liberal globalisation of capitalism, and within this, by the unequal roles played by regional blocs, national states and higher education institutions. In other words, classical sociological thought – spanning from Marx to Weber to Durkheim – has established a sociological truth that has to be taken in consideration by the relational, critical analysis of higher education. Bourdieu (1991, p. 169), taking on the classical sociological thought, argues that (higher) education is a “subordinated power”<sup>11</sup>, which means that higher education “is a transformed form... of the fundamental principles of the division of labour”. This is the social condition of higher education which is related to, on the one hand, the differentiated, stratified, multi-scalar global capitalism and, on the other, the governance of higher education (that is, the way public policy is formulated, funded, delivered and assessed). Higher education is a subordinated power in relation to both economic and political powers.

Regarding the socio-historical phenomena take in consideration in this work, all convey dimensions of this social condition of higher education, which is argued below.

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<sup>11</sup> This sociological understanding is presented in the work of many intellectuals linked to critical sociology of education, despite the variety of formulation, emphasis and conflicting perspective. Amongst others, see Freire (1987), Bowles and Gintis (1976), Dale (1989), Bowe and Ball (1992) and Young (1971).

### **3. Higher Education: global and regional dimensions**

Some socio-historical phenomena of globalisation and the regionalisation of higher education in Latin America are examined below. The key assumption is that they do not follow a ‘one way road’. Being relational, they are taken as happening concomitantly, vertically and horizontally, intensively and extensively, and having uneven, determined and fragmentary social, economic, political and cultural implications for the institutional, national, regional and global governance of higher education.

#### **3.1 – The Common Market of the South and Higher Education**

It is unnecessary to say that the Common Market of the South (MERCOSUR) did not emerge either in a political or economic vacuum. It is essentially a political regional project that has responded to multi-scalar processes which were involved in courses of action at national, sub-regional, regional and global levels. According to Almeida (2002), MERCOSUR is a resultant of the evolution of bilateral political and economic relations between Argentina and Brazil over many years which, by the late 1980s, had advanced to a privileged momentum and then “modified in a relevant way the strategic scenario in South America” (p.4). On the other hand, the 1986 European Union’s Single Act to establish a Single Market by December 1992 added on by the creation of the Free Trade Agreement between the United States and Canada (1989) with the possibility of its extension to include other countries of the Americas was crucial in the decision to form MERCOSUR. Having said that, it is important to bear in mind that the regionalisation process in Latin America was profoundly embedded in the open regionalism (PHILLIPS, 2003; TUSSIE, 2009), particularly from the mid-1980s and during the 1990s, when structural adjustment, shock therapy and major programs of privatisation were in the process of being implemented in the region. Hence, MERCOSUR’s aim to achieve an “appropriate international insertion of the Member States and to advance the Latin America integration...” (MERCOSUL, 1991a) might not be interpreted as a regional endogenous movement, but as a relational action of multiple-scale signification.

The 1991 Treaty of Asunción formally marked the creation of MERCOSUR by Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay and Uruguay. It is an economic arrangement encompassing 1) free circulation of goods, services and factors of production, 2) elimination of

customs duties and non-tariff restrictions, 3) establishment of a common external tariff, 4) adoption of a common trade policy in relation to third states or group of states, 5) coordination of positions in economic and commercial regional and international forums, 6) coordination of macroeconomic and sector policies between the Member States, and 7) commitment to harmonize Member States legislation in relevant areas in order to strengthen the process of regional integration (MERCOSUL, 1991a).

This group of statements draws the economic and political lines for MERCOSUR's regional project, which has to be done with the active participation of four national governments. The first three components set up the economic conditions for the development of a common market, despite the fact that the notion of market gains a specific meaning particularly in the field of higher education. The last four components are openly concerned with the regional political economy governance. In order to explore them, let us first notice that MERCOSUR is, as defined by the Treaty of Asunción (MERCOSUR, 1991a) and ratified by the Protocol of Ouro Preto (MERCOSUR, 1994), an agency of intergovernmental governance, through which decision-making process is based on consensus-building among all Member States. This is relevant insofar as the inter-regional project, differing from the European Union's supranational governance structure, ensures the nation states' autonomy and sovereignty remain untouchable. The Common Market Council (CMC), chief agency of decision-making, is composed of ministers of foreign affairs and economy, having the Common Market Group (CMG) as executive body<sup>12</sup>.

It is not meaningless that this sub-regional project of Latin America integration became known as *Market* or *the Market of the South*. It only reveals that the *market* and all practices associated with it (trade, commerce, business, privatisation, and so on) has been its nodal point. This has to do with the way globalisation hit South America in the 1990s, under the logic of neoliberal (open) regionalism and the hegemony of the US. As a consequence, there exists a Council of Market and for the Market, instead of a Council of Ministers. In fact, as an economic, regional market project, there are imaginary lines to circumscribe the 'limits' of MERCOSUR and differentiate it from other regional blocs or countries.

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<sup>12</sup> MERCOSUR administrative structure also includes the Trade Commission (to assist the CMG towards the application of instruments of commercial policy), the Jointing Parliamentary Commission, the Economic-Social Consultative Forum and MERCOSUR's Administrative Secretary.

In the light of MERCOSUR's economic arrangement, the Ministers of Education from Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay and Uruguay met in Brasilia, in December 1991, to sign a Protocol of Intention (MERCOSUL, 1991b), stating "that, in order to facilitate the achievement of MERCOSUR's objectives, the development of education programmes are crucial" in order to, amongst other aims, 1) "form the... favourable citizen... committed to the process of integration", 2) "qualify the human resources to contribute to (economic) development" and 3) "harmonise the education systems" (MERCOSUL, 1991b).

In relation to what is named 'human resources', Ministers of Education agreed to a) "reformulate the curricula at all levels of education on topics related to work, employment, production and scientific-technological innovations", b) "promote... actions of vocational and technical training, of governmental and non-governmental organizations, which meet market needs", c) "provide the curriculum... the necessary flexibility in order to allow quicker and efficient responses to the requirements of socio-economic sectors", and d) "bring education institutions closer to the problems of work and production in the region, promoting research and training of human resources required by MERCOSUR" (1991b). The pervasive language of economics shows how public education has been thought of as a means for promoting regional integration. These four lines of action (from a total of six concerned with 'human resources') left no doubts about the role education should play in the Market of the South. It is clear that education is essentially deployed to meet the regional economic requirements.

There are plans to develop the harmonisation of education systems; these aim to a) overcome "the legal and administrative (national) barriers to enable people's mobility and exchange of goods in scientific, technical and cultural areas", b) "typify the profiles of technical and professional trainings in order to lead to equivalence of courses, programmes and degrees, which would facilitate professional exchange experience within the Member States", and 3) make "compatible the educational profiles for human resources at higher level (tertiary and university), especially the contents of fundamental disciplines in the areas and interests of MERCOSUR in order to enable the implementation of mechanisms that facilitate the circulation of students, academic staff and professionals in the region" (MERCOSUL, 1991b). Broadly speaking, harmonisation of education systems seems to imply a process for building up regional compatibilities. At this level, the process does not mean the set up of a supra-regional common framework, but the effort by member States to make internal arrangements in

order to meet student's and staff's mobility, equivalence of courses and degrees and curriculum compatibilities<sup>13</sup>. In other words, harmonisation set the conditions for the development of MERCOSUR's education space and it was thought of as indispensable to the market and economic purposes of regional integration.

The *Setor Educativo* of MERCOSUR was established in 1992, following the Protocol of Intention. MERCOSUR's Educative Sector has operated through the following agencies: Meetings of Education Ministers, the Regional Coordinating Committee and three Regional Coordinating Commissions in the areas of Basic Education, Technical Education and Higher Education (MERCOSUL, 2005)<sup>14</sup>. This institutional arrangement is an intergovernmental body, and the Meeting of Education Ministers holds the decisive say in all matters concerning education. The Plan for MERCOSUR's Educative Sector (2006-2010)<sup>15</sup> states that it "constitutes an instance of political coordination to integrate education to the necessary social, economic and political processes for the development of the people and national societies. It designs and executes policies to promote an education of quality for all, contributing thus to MERCOSUR's objectives" (MERCOSUL, 2005, p. 9).

This Educative Sector might be seen as an 'embryonic' or 'experimental' space or area of education. It is the main regional strategic instance of decision-making process in the area of education and its political role is to develop strategies and form policies in order to gradually build up a regional education settlement to meet MERCOSUR's economic goals. In light of this, the Accreditation Experimental Mechanism (MEXA) and the Regional Academic Mobility Programs (MARCA) are the pillars of MERCOSUR's education space, including Chile and Bolivia.

MEXA (Mecanismo Experimental de Avaliação) for undergraduate courses has operated in an 'experimental' base since 2003, although its Memorandum of Understanding (MERCOSUL, 1999) had been agreed 4 years earlier. It aims to promote

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<sup>13</sup> Note that MERCOSUR's Education Minister's decision to harmonise the education system in 1991 practically set the principle of what years later the ALFA Tuning Latin America Project targeted, seeking "to 'fine tune' the educational structures that exist in Latin America... to develop excellence, effectiveness, and transparency. It is an independent project, promoted and co-ordinated by universities in many different countries, both Latin American and European" (TUNING Latin America, 2010). Of course there is no such a thing as an "independent project", as the Tuning Latin America Project is an attempt to emulate Latin American universities and "fine tune" and keep pace with the project of a competitive Europe in higher education.

<sup>14</sup> For an overview of MERCOSUR's Educative Sector, see Figure 1 in the Appendices.

<sup>15</sup> Four plans have been formulated for and by the MERCOSUR's Educative Sector. The first appeared to cover the period from 1992 to 1997; the second was called Triennial Plan 1998-2000 (MERCOSUL, 1998), the third is the Strategic Plan 2001-2005 (MERCOSUL, 2000), and the last one is the "Plan del Sector Educativo del MERCOSUR 2006-2010" (MERCOSUL, 2005).

the reciprocal accreditation of university degrees for academic-ends only, which means that, at its current stage, it is not applicable or valid for professional-ends. However, it cannot be denied that the labour market is the prospective scenario for the accreditation of university degrees as, in practical terms, the accredited courses have awarded an Accreditation Brand within MERCOSUR. The MEXA has become the central condition for regional mobility, as it articulates the process of evaluation arguably to increase the quality of higher education and favours comparability of undergraduate education. Assessed courses so far have been Medicine, Engineering and Agronomy; Architecture, Nursery, Veterinary Medicine and Dentistry have since been added to the accreditation process which started in 2008 and is to be completed in the near future.

MARCA (Programa de Mobilidade Acadêmica Regional para Cursos Credenciados) was approved by the Ministers of Education in 2004. Its aim is to promote the mobility of students, scholars, researchers and managers of higher education institutions. In 2006, 58 students from 17 higher education institutions of the Member States and Associate States (Chile and Bolivia) participated in MARCA; in 2008 there were more than 150 students from 44 HEIs, including Medical and Engineering students. This mobility programme is closely related to MEXA as solely students and scholars from accredited courses can be involved in the regional mobility programme.

MEXA and MARCA are the pillars of a regional education space that has been gradually flourishing. The latter seems to be assuming the features, aims and dimensions within MERCOSUR of the European Erasmus Mobility Programme. Its 'experimental' strand tends to be expanded gradually over a great number of HE institutions and academic areas and will occupy in a decisive role in the dynamic of regional higher education in the near future, whereby the language of gradual and soft implementation ('experimental') will have acquired permanent roots.

There are other important initiatives taking place in MERCOSUR, which reveal its internal and external dynamic. Internally, MERCOSUR's Centre for Teaching and Research in Meteorology was created and functions at the *Universidade Republica* in Uruguay (MERCOSUL, 2000; MERCOSUL/Projeto, 2009). The Centre is seen as strategic for economic and social development, as food production is one of the top export industries of the region. It aims also to offer undergraduate and graduate courses for the students of the region, which will have an impact on regional student mobility.

A structural measure taken by the Common Market Council in 2004 was the establishment of the Educative Sector's Financing Fund in order to fund education policies and programmes for regional integration (MERCOSUL, 2004). Member state's annual contribution is of minimal value of US\$ 30.000 plus US\$ 2.200 per million of inhabitants aged between 5 and 24 years old (MECORSUL, 2008)<sup>16</sup>. It is in operation and has guaranteed the medium-term continuity of education policies and programmes, which coupled with political economic stability and growth have facilitated to sustain the prospective phase inaugurated by the Strategic Plan 2001-2005 (MERCOSUL, 2000).<sup>17</sup>

MERCOSUR has also embarked on Region-to-Region relations, starting in 1992 with the first European Union (EU) and MERCOSUR's interregional agreement. In 1995 the regional blocs signed the "International Framework Cooperation Agreement". However, the main document which gave an important view on EU-MERCOSUR is the 2007-2013 Latin America Regional Programming Document (European Union, 2007).

In closing this section, we would like to briefly reflect on three aspects mentioned in the former part. First of all, in relation to the scalar issue, MERCOSUR is located as a regional political economic project, but we cannot freeze it as a regional happening; it is *de facto* a global relational phenomenon. The politics of regionalisation, in the case of MERCOSUR, is itself multi-scalar driven insofar as regional market, trade and economic coordination are strengthened, the bloc has matured the economic and political conditions to resituate the region in relation to global competitiveness. This is particularly evident by initiatives towards a higher level of institutionalisation. At the national level, the member countries are better off together than by themselves in order to face the competitive global environment.

At the sector level, the pillars of MERCOSUR's higher education space have been built gradually. There are relevant similarities in relation to the European Higher

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<sup>16</sup> This second criterion replaced the "a value based on school enrolment per country" (MERCOSUL, 2004).

<sup>17</sup> It is misleading to attribute the "difficulties for MERCOSUR in developing an institutional character" to the lack of "effective dispute mechanism", "of a regional body that coordinate policies in a more effective manner", and "of commitment of some members" (Verges and Herms, 2010, p. 112). Although these functional "difficulties" might be important, they are of secondary importance as the countries, during the 1990s, struggled to deal with economic crises that hit the countries (hyperinflation, currency devaluation, economic instability, high levels of unemployment, among others), domestic problems and regional political project. Only when they entered into a cycle of internal political and economic stability, constituting a prospective political-regional momentum, MERCOSUR could be thought more systematically and decisions were taken to consolidate its institutional base. This coincided to the re-launch of the MERCOSUR in 2000 and its Strategic Plan 2001-2005 (MERCOSUL, 2000).

Education Area (EHEA), particularly between the Erasmus Programme and MARCA. The Erasmus Programme was introduced in 1987, and has become one of the constitutive mechanisms of the EHEA. MARCA seems to be situated to play a rather similar role in MERCOSUR. One condition for that is, of course, the setting up of a regional qualifications framework and degree recognition, which has been in development since the creation of the Accreditation Regional System for Universities Degrees (ARCUSUL) by Education Ministers (MERCOSUL, 2008b). This is operated by the Accreditation National Agencies Network (RANA).

The last question concerns the new mandate for higher education “in the region”. In short, the mandate is not of regional identity, but of regional and global competitiveness. This has been pushed up by the global context, particularly the current higher education order led by the European Bologna Process on the one hand, and the US higher education on the other. Bearing this in mind, MERCOSUR higher education seems to have no other option than to find its way to engage in a knowledge-based economy. However, region means something else, as is shown below.

### **3.2 – Borderless Higher Education: when Regions mean something else...**

One of the main websites circulating information on higher education in Latin America claimed, in December 2005, that Laureate Education, Inc. had bought a share of 51% of the *Universidade Anhembi Morumbi* (situated in the State of São Paulo, Brazil) per US\$ 69 million. At that time the University had 25 thousand students. According to Cris Symanoskye, Director for Corporative Communication, “the Laureate Group enters to a new country per year, normally by means of acquisition. Latin America, Asia and some European countries have the highest demand for higher education” (UNIVERSIA, 2005). The expression “means of acquisition” plays an important enunciative function in this particular discursive formation of the globalisation of higher education. “Acquisition” means that two firms join together with one company taking over the other. Hence Laureate Education, Inc. is becoming global due to its economic power. Until today, Laureate International Universities is presented in 21 countries in four region of the globe (See Table 01) and its ‘acquisitions’ have amounted to 59 Higher Education Institutions; Brazil (10), Chile (6), Spain (5), United States (5) – where the network matrix is – and China and Peru (4 each) are the countries where Laureate has most expanded in terms of HEI.



**Table 1 – Laureate International Universities - 2010**

Laureate International Universities	Latin America	Europe	Asia Pacific	North America	
Brazil	10	Cyprus	1	United States	5
Chile	6	France	3	China	4
Costa Rica	2	Germany	1	Malaysia	1
Ecuador	1	Italy	2		
Honduras	2	Spain	5		
Mexico	3	Switzerland	3		
Panama	2	Netherland/UK	1		
Peru	4	Turkey	1		
<b>Total</b>	<b>59</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>5</b>

Source: Table designed by the author based on data from <http://www.laureate.net/OurNetwork.aspx>. Site accessed in September 2010.

By the same token, Apollo Group was planning to buy the *Universidade Estácio de Sá*, the largest Brazilian private university, with 120 thousand students (VEJA, 2006). The American Group DeVry, based in Chicago, USA, bought 70% of the *Faculdade do Nordeste* (FANOR) which has five campuses in the Brazilian states of Ceará and Bahia. The investment was around US\$ 31 million in a higher education institution with 10.000 students (EXAME, 2009). However, such economic activities have been taking place in a more consistent and extensive fashion<sup>18</sup>, as the social condition of higher education has entered definitively into an exchange value era, already transformed in commodity and now saleable on the Stock Exchange.

In the United Kingdom, Robertson (2010, p. 200) gives a telling account that “in July 2009, BPP was sold to Apollo Global on the London Stock Exchange” which “has stimulated a flurry of interest amongst global firms such as Bridgepoint Education and Kaplan Higher Education International in entering the UK higher education sector and applying for degree awarding powers”. It is noticeable that such movements have happened after the 2007 UK Privy Council’s decision to grant degree awarding powers to BPP College of Professional Studies.

Like Laureate International Universities, Apollo Global Network is a corporation in the process of expanding globally. “Today, the Apollo Global network includes BPP, a leading provider of education and training to professionals in the legal and finance industries in the United Kingdom and Europe; UNIACC, a leading arts and communications university in Chile; ULA, a renowned communications, business, and medical university in Mexico and Western International University (WIU), a U.S. accredited university specializing in business and technology education with online

<sup>18</sup> Altbach and Knight (2007) explore this issue elsewhere..

delivery worldwide” (APOLLO GLOBAL, 2010). Apollo Global is in fact developing activities in all regions of the globe, from North to South America, from the Middle East to Africa, from North to South Asia and in Europe. It can be said that – like Laureate and similar corporations – Apollo is shaping up a global market of higher education (GMOHE) and yet at the same time is becoming global.

Its motivation in the GMOHE is earning money and its interest in higher education is strategically driven. In relation to the Latin America ‘region’, Apollo Global states that “the three markets of greatest interest are Chile, with an annual growth rate in enrollment at well over 30 percent; Mexico with 2.5 million enrolled and participation rates in private education outpacing the public sector; and Brazil where education accounts for 9 percent of GDP and 71 percent of all post secondary students in private institutions” (APOLLO GLOBAL, 2010). In Pacific Asia, China is the golden-eyed girl, seen as “the largest enrollment in the world, at 23 million, educates just 21% of the age group. University and enrollment growth have been staggering... Seeing this as a key high-growth region, Apollo Global’s regional headquarters are located in Beijing” (APOLLO GLOBAL, 2010). “A key strategic region... India with over 16 million enrolled is the third-largest postsecondary market and home to more than 18,000 post secondary institutions – half of the world’s total number of institutions. Yet most are small and inadequately equipped and the system as a whole only serves 13 percent of India’s age group” (APOLLO GLOBAL, 2010).

Not only these cases, but also others can be explored in order to reveal the true dimension and dynamic of how higher education has been made a global-scale phenomenon in such a new fashion when compared with previous processes of making Western institutions (such as University, Courts, Parliaments, Democracy and the State) into phenomena with worldwide presence. One should be reminded that Weber’s ‘The Protestant Ethic’ key insight was that in “Western civilization, and in Western civilization only, cultural phenomena have appeared which lie in a line of development having *universal* significance and value”, by which he meant those institutions did not exist outside of the Western world, or when they existed they lacked the rational calculation. However, although it sounds naive to acknowledge that previous phases of globalisation were institutional-founding, guided and/or surrounded by national senses and sensibilities, the actual process of globalisation is rootless, the core value is the culture of market-supply environment and for profit-making. Therefore, rigorously speaking, higher education has been brought gradually into a borderless geo-global zone

geared by the circulation of capital and, as Marx (2009, p. 99) once put it, “the circulation of capital has therefore no limits”. This strategically for-profit global orientation represents the turning point towards a major transformation in the social condition of higher education. What is common to all these statements and practices? They do not only unfold the ‘strategic’ potential for investment and money-making from higher education, but the global scale of the commodification of higher education. These corporations are involved in producing and promoting globalisation in higher education as neoliberal globalisation does or did open (neoliberal) regionalism. Latin America, Asia, Africa and Europe are seen as regions only because they are perceived as ‘regional’ markets. The aim is to build a global supply chain of for-profit higher education.

Indeed, it is not only the case that capitalism is now a global happening encompassing all ‘traditional’ branches of industry, goods production, distribution and circulation and services, but it has reached, penetrated and materialised in the field of education, breaking down the borders in sectors which, for so long and until a few years ago, were held on welfare state protection. The politics of the taming and conversion of a higher education field into a subordinated field to economic interests has been well documented in several countries and regions, and its contemporary causes are met in the neo-liberal reforms of the 1980s and 1990s. Policies of deregulation, liberalisation, privatisation and labour market flexibility are the socio-historical causes that defined the pace and depth of the global transformation of higher education.

From these several ongoing happenings, one might draw relevant conclusions. Firstly, there is a different type of higher education institution; global corporation trading with higher education; secondly, the chain of firms or corporations creates a global supply chain of higher or post-secondary education degrees; thirdly, as the chain of higher education institutions grow globally stronger, they might have an important impact on policy formation and implementation at the national level; fourthly, the balance of power within the fields of higher education at national level will be shaken and significantly altered years ahead. However, analysing certain aspects of Brazilian higher education helps us to understand how national policies are pivotal ingredients in the making of the GMoHE.

### **3.3– National Higher Education policies matters: Brazilian’s ‘contribution’ to a global market**

If a higher level of privatisation is evidence of globalisation forces, Brazil is there; 75% of all higher education students are in the private sector. If a higher level of liberalisation is evidence of globalisation forces, Brazil is there; all areas of economy have been liberalised, including for-profit higher education institutions. If a diversified and modern market is evidence of globalisation forces, Brazil is also there; market mechanisms such as performance indicators and rankings set the pace and condition for higher education competitiveness. However, all these would not have happened without the active role played by national government. This reaffirms the general assumption that national government policies are not coadjutant actors in the making of (any kind of) globalisation. The role of national government is a powerful tool and a prominent channel to facilitate, adjust to, signify or resist the globalisation process or regionalism projects, either at discursive-ideological or at material levels.

It can be understood is that national higher education policies not only respond to the specific demands and problems of 'domestic' and international contexts; they do so because they appear as objective problems. But they also actively construct the problems and provide a discursive package in order to make them logical, sensible, and to build a social understanding and political and social legitimacy (Dale, 1989; Offe, 1984, p. 33-64). They do so in ways that reveal, on the one hand, the strategic national discourse and positioning in relation to the global and regional governance of higher education and, on the other hand, how they are shaped by and shape the process of globalisation and regionalist projects. Higher education policies in Brazil are relevant and can be taken into consideration in this respect.

Over the last two decades, higher education in Brazil has experienced significant transformations (Dourado, Catani & Oliveira, 2003). The sources of these changes are manifold; government policies, institutional initiatives, economic stability and economic growth, the role played by international agencies such as World Bank, UNESCO, IMF, and the diverse and uneven impact of economic globalisation and state reforms, amongst others. In terms of government policies, two main political parties have dominated the national scenario and coordinated the processes of higher education reforms from within; the Brazilian Social Democratic Party (PSDB), leading a neo-liberal-conservative alliance, during the presidential mandates of Fernando Henrique Cardoso between 1995 and 2002, and the Worker Party (PT), leading a centre-left

alliance with fractions of centre and conservatives parties, under Lula's presidential leadership, between 2003-2010.

In order to understand higher education policies in Brazil, it is crucial to bear in mind that the federal government is the main agency of policy formation, coordination, regulation and evaluation concerning public and private higher education sectors, and it is also the main funding agency for Federal Public Universities and for Research and Development. Public institutions, either federal or state universities, are free of charge, while in the private sector institutions, enrolment and higher education fees are the norm. The value of fees follows the 'laws' of supply-demand, referring to demand as the amount of higher education knowledge, services and value-added diploma that people are both willing and able to buy.

It is important to highlight the main higher education policies and programs in Brazil. In doing so, a comparative perspective between policies set by the two governments over the last two decades is briefly described in order to emphasise both continuities and discontinuities and provide the motto for discussion of how Brazil has engaged with the processes of globalization and regionalisation in higher education.

Over the last two decades, Brazil has pursued the development of a mass education system (Squissardi, 2008; Gomes, 2002) as the National Plan for Education's target (Brasil, 2001) is to increase higher education provision to, at least, 30% for the 18-24 year old age group. This goal has developed into policies of privatisation, massification and marketisation, ending up in the construction of the modern market of higher education in Brazil (Gomes, 2003, 2008). The data below give us some grounds for sustaining this assumption.

Table 2 shows that the rate of growth of 20.6%, from 1980 to 1994 (an average annual growth of 1.4%), was significantly low. The population growth of 16.5% followed closely behind the gross enrolment rate. However, from 1995 to 2002, during the term of Cardoso's government, the pace of growth was consistently high, an annual average of 12.2%, totalling a growth rate of 97.7% over the period. This rate was nearly five times the cohort population (18-24 year olds) growth between 1995 and 2002. The speed of enrolment growth has also been high during Lula's government, an annual average of 5.1%, which meant 30.7% between 2003 and 2008. On the other hand, this period registered a negative growth in the student population. Over the period of 1995 and 2008, the overall enrolment growth was 188%, an annual average of 13.5%, which was 7.8 times higher than the increase in student population.

**Table 2 – Higher education, Age Group Population and Gross Enrolment, Brazil 1980-2008**

<b>Years</b>	<b>Age Group population 18 to 24 years (A)</b>	<b>Gross Enrolment<sup>(1)</sup> (B)</b>	<b>A/B (%)</b>
1980	16.000.000 <sup>(2)</sup>	1.377.286	8,6
1990	18.680.776	1.540.080	8,2
1994	18.648.675 <sup>(2)</sup>	1.661.034	8,9
Growth Rate 80/94	16,5%	20,6%	
Annual average growth	1,1%	1,4%	
1995	18.737.006	1.759.703	9,3
2002	23.098.462	3.479.913	15,1
Growth Rate 95/02	23,3%	97,7%	
Annual average growth	2,9%	12,2%	
2003	23.371.702	3.887.022	16,6
2008	23.242.000	5.080.056	21,8
Growth Rate 02/08	-0,5%	30,7%	
Annual average growth	-0,08%	5,1%	
Growth Rate 95/08	24%	188,7%	
Annual average growth	1,7%	13,5%	

Sources: IBGE; INEP. Table designed by the author from IBGE and INEP's database. Notes: 1) All student population enrolled on undergraduate courses regardless of age; 2) Author's estimate.

The relation between the relevant age group (18 to 24 year olds) and gross enrolment in higher education was 8.6% in 1980; it shifted to 9.3% in 1995 and then climbed steeply to 15.1% in 2002, reaching 21.8% in 2008. The data shows the outcome of a higher education policy of massification pursued over the last two decades. Reading these data through Trow's (1973, 2005) model of higher education transition, we can conclude that Brazil has transited from an elite to a mass higher education<sup>19</sup>.

Despite the verification of fast growth and despite the mechanisms applied to achieve a mass higher education system – via privatisation – Brazilian society and the state have the enormous challenge of further expanding the system by heightening the academic standard quality, because the relevant age group (18-24 year olds) enrolled represents only 13.9% of the 23.242.000. These figures have been the object of vested interests and great speculation by the market capital. A bill of BR\$ 28 billion (the equivalent of US \$16 billion) has been estimated for 2012, compared to BR\$ 20.5

<sup>19</sup> The idea of massification used in this paper and Trow's mass higher education system are not the same. Trow classified the evolution or transition of higher education in elite system with up to 15% of the 18-24 year old age group enrolment, mass system between 16 and 50% and the universal system over 50%. Massification, on the other hand, is a process, a policy process, that reveals particular ideological and market interests and has been achieved by the privatisation and marketisation of higher education. In general terms, it implies an "overall lowering of academic standards" and "the number of part-time academics has also increased in many countries - notably in Latin America, where up to 80% of the professoriate is employed part time" (Dale, 2010, p. 5).

billion in 2008. These data are self-explanatory of the foreign capital interest towards Brazilian higher education.

However, the process of massification goes in Brazil, as elsewhere, hand in hand with the privatisation of higher education provision. In general terms, while massification means to bring more students into the higher education system, regardless of its impact on academic standards and values, privatisation is the main medium through which it has been accomplished. Privatisation of higher education provision implies, on the one hand, further and further expansion of the private sector of higher education by converting education into commodity-capital. On the other hand, it impacts by diminishing the relative participation of the public sector in the overall higher education provision. Table 3 shows this dynamic in Brazilian higher education.

In 1995, the public sector held a share of 39.8% of enrolment, whereas the private sector had about 60.2%. By the end of Cardoso's government in 2002, the private sector share had gone up to nearly 70%, while the public sector had decreased to about 30%. The rate of growth of private sector enrolment was 129.3% between 1995 and 2002 (an annual average of 16.1%), well ahead of the general growth rate that was 97.7%. This policy has continued under Lula's government; the private sector enrolment share has reached nearly 75%, whereas the public sector has shrunk to 25%. The private sector growth rate has also been remarkably high; 38.4% from 2003 to 2008, an annual average of 6.4%.

**Table 3 – Gross Enrolment Rates in Higher Education, Public and Private Sectors, Brazil, 1995-2008**

<b>Years</b>	<b>Public</b>	<b>Private</b>	<b>Total</b>
1995	700.540 (39,8%)	1.059.163 (60,2%)	1.759.703 (100%)
2002	1.051.655 (30,2%)	2.428.258 (69,8%)	3.479.913 (100%)
Growth Rate 1995/2002	50,1%	129,3%	97,7%
Annual average growth	6,3%	16,1%	12,2%
2003	1.136.370	2.750.652	3.887.022
2008	1.273.965 (25,1%)	3.806.091 (74,9%)	5.080.056 (100%)
Growth Rate 2002/2008	12,1%	38,4%	30,7%
Annual average growth	2,0%	6,4%	5,1%
Growth Rate 1995/2008	81,8%	259,3%	188,7%
Annual average growth	5,8%	18,5%	13,5%

Sources: INEP. Table designed by the author from INEB's database. Notes: 1) All student population enrolled on undergraduate courses regardless of age.

To sum up, between 1995 and 2008, the growth rate of private sector enrolment was 259.3%, while public sector growth was around 81%. The former was more than three times higher than the latter. This leads us to remark that the privatisation of higher education is evidence of the pervasive impact of neoliberal globalisation on Brazil (privatisation, deregulation, liberalisation, the opening up of economy) during 1990, but whose effects are still having deployment and moving further to new phases, as is shown below. Furthermore this trend has made roots elsewhere in Latin America, Europe, Asia and Asia.

Despite the clear line of continuity between Cardoso and Lula's governments in relation to policies of massification and privatisation, there has been one important difference in terms of policy content and social justice. Cardoso's government promoted the state and higher education reforms in order to boost the privatisation and massification via market mechanisms and private sector supply. The outcome of liberalisation is clearly captured by the explosion of higher education institutions in the private sector. There were around 633 higher education institutions in 1994, jumping up to 1.442 in 2002 and reaching more than 2.000 in 2008. It is a telling account of the growth of private institutions and it has been accompanied by a considerable reduction in the public universities share.

**Table 4 – Higher Education Institutions, Brazil, 1994-2008**

<b>Year</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Public</b>		<b>Private</b>	
1994	851	218	34.4%	633	65.6%
2002	1.637	195	13,5%	1.442	86.5%
2006	2.270	248	12.3%	2.022	87.7%
2008	2.252	236	11.7%	2.016	88.3%

Source: INEP, Sinopse Estatística de Educação Superior.

The overall result of privatisation and massification has been the establishment of a modern market of higher education in Brazil. Hence it is not by chance that international or global corporations are 'acquiring' higher education institutions in Brazil as elsewhere in India, China, Mexico, Spain and UK. What marked the first phase of this market in higher education, fed by rankings produced by the National Examination of Courses (in execution between 1995 and 2003, replaced by a new system of evaluation) was competition amongst HEIs for students and competition



amongst students for the best rated undergraduate courses and institutions<sup>20</sup>. Liberalisation and massification has produced the ‘optimum’ conditions for the globalisation of the higher education market. There has been an intensification of the presence of ‘international’ (mostly American-based<sup>21</sup>) higher education institutions and players in all parts of Brazil and consequently the higher education market has gradually been denationalised as it enters the ‘age of open capital’.

By 2008, at least four higher education groups had already opened their capital in the São Paulo Stock Exchange (BM&F Bovespa<sup>22</sup>): Estácio de Sá, Anhanguera, Anhembí Morumbi and Kroton Educational. In Kroton Educational 2010 Earnings Release’s report (Kroton Educational, 2010), telling details can be found about higher education in the Stock Exchange. It notes that “with the IUNI acquisition, the Company doubles the size of its post-secondary segment, expanding these operations to 28 cities and 40 campuses and gaining access to the best practices of IUNI, which is one of the sector’s most profitable institutions” (p. 1). It is worth noting that Kroton Educational is a Brazilian corporation dedicated to the business of education at the primary, secondary and “post-secondary” levels, the latter being referred to as “post-secondary segment”. This ‘segment’ now consists of 24 Pitágoras Campuses and 16 IUNI Campuses. Together they enrol more than 88 thousand students.

To offer a view on how this process is related to a broader context, Standard & Poor’s observes that “Brazil is the largest education market in Latin America and fifth in global terms, with about 70 million students – 93% enrolled in basic education, and 7% in undergraduate and graduate schools, according to a U.S. Department of Commerce report”. It also points out that “the government has neither the resources nor the intention of playing a bigger role in higher education, so the private sector will remain dominant...” (Standard & Poor’s, 2010). While it seems to be true that the state does not have the resources available to universalise the public sector, it does not appear to be the case that it does not have the intention of playing a bigger role in higher education. This issue would have to be looked at historically, which it is not possible in this paper. However, in contrast to the previous, Lula’s government has made

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<sup>20</sup> This argument is relevant only to private sector institutions. Students try first to get a place in the public universities in Brazil not only because they are rated as best quality institutions, but also because they are free of charge.

<sup>21</sup> Perhaps the concept of globalisation only partially meets the relational components of the ‘reality’ taking place in Brazil as a considerable part of ongoing process can be attributed to American corporations or agents. But it is not entirely appropriate to call it ‘Americanization’. Further information/data is necessary in order to fully clarify the meaning of these events.

<sup>22</sup> See <http://www.bmfbovespa.com.br/portugues/>.

considerable efforts, has recomposed (and increased) the federal public sector budget and created 14 new public universities, more than 50 campuses linked to existing federal universities and 78 new Federal Colleges of Professional and Technical Education. Besides this, it established the University for All Program – Programa Universidade para Todos in 2005.

Despite being a Program destined to expand the access and places of students within private institutions, it has been elaborated under a discursive formation that brought the principles of social justice, social cohesion and democratic opportunity into light. The reasons are the criteria applied to funding these students: 1) they have to come from public schools (private school students are excluded) and 2) gross household earnings have to be three minimal wages (around USD 891) for full-grant and six minimal wages (USD 1.800) for half-grant. Since 2005, the University for All Program has incorporated 894.852 (Brasil, 2010) students into private higher education institutions. These students already represent 23.5% of the total of enrolled students in private institutions (3.806.091).

In concluding this part, it is argued that neoliberal policies implemented in Brazil during the 1990s have become a nodal point to accommodate and further ignite the neoliberal globalisation of higher education. Indisputable to this has been the formula liberalisation, massification, privatisation and marketisation, whose condition of possibility demanded the full conversion of higher education into commodity. The maturing of privatisation and marketisation led to high degrees of development in Brazil; they have been gradually incorporated and transformed into a global market of higher education, in which financialisation has played a major role. The process of ‘acquisition’ of higher education institutions in Brazil tends to be further advanced not only because there are millions of students forming a preference demand for higher education, but also because the economic growth has gained sustainable pace impacting upon the social structure and promoting social mobility. For all this has to have occurred, the role played by the national government policies over the last two decades has been central.

#### **4. Final Remarks**

MERCOSUR, the global commodification of higher education, the role of national government as well as the processes of global governance and regional

governance embodied in the European Union's Higher Education Area and its Bologna Process, the World Bank, OECD and UNESCO global players' role in higher education all show how multi-scalar socio-historical phenomena are relational and interdependent. Operating in time-scale compression, they are functional to the current stage of global capitalism development. The major transformation of higher education is represented by the actualisation of its social condition of subordinated power in relation to global economy and political powers. The core vehicle in charge of this global change is the commodification of higher education, which testified the penetration of capitalistic practices in all dimensions of institutional and social life. In the case of higher education, it seems incontestable that the growth of private higher education, initially perceived only as a national idiosyncratic feature, has reached a defining position, making the conditions possible for the global market of higher education.

We would like to remark that there are not contradictions amongst these socio-historical happenings; MERCOSUR is neither rivalling with the commodification of higher education nor is it contradictory to the national government policy for higher education. On the contrary, their non-contradictory relational dimension is evidence that they have been governed in multiple scales and sectors in order to facilitate and adjust the overall process of global capitalism. Such remarks cannot be understood as though MERCOSUR has not changed over the years. It has changed in order to give member states leverage in relation to other regional blocs and in relation to their positioning in the global economy, reflecting the current political configuration of Latin America.

The construction of MERCOSUR's higher education space is a process in course of implementation that tends to be reinforced at multiple-scalar level – namely global, regional, national, institutional and individual subjects – the process of globalisation of higher education. However, it tends to do this under a discursive formation of regional integration and regional economic development. For instance, once student and academic mobility increases in the MERCOSUR and associate countries, this might have some impact on student mobility in relation to other regions. In this case, the European Union has acted preventively as the *Erasmus Mundus* testifies.

The paper raises a number of issues that deserve to be viewed under a relational, critical analysis of higher education. One of these issues is the EU-MERCOSUR relationship. This will be done by looking closely at the EU Programming 2007-2013 for Latin America and the Alfa Tuning Project for Latin America. This can shed light on some important questions related to global and regional collaboration and

competitiveness. Another issue which needs to be further analysed is the global market of higher education, in order to explore in depth its current configuration, identify the main players and debate its impact on the de-nationalisation of higher education and the weakening of public higher education. This would require gathering data, at a cross-national base, on the cost of enrolment and tuition fees in the private sector, the intensification of HE institutions' acquisition and the Stock Exchange housing the dynamic of the global market of higher education. This would help us to be more conclusive towards the transformation of higher education's social condition.

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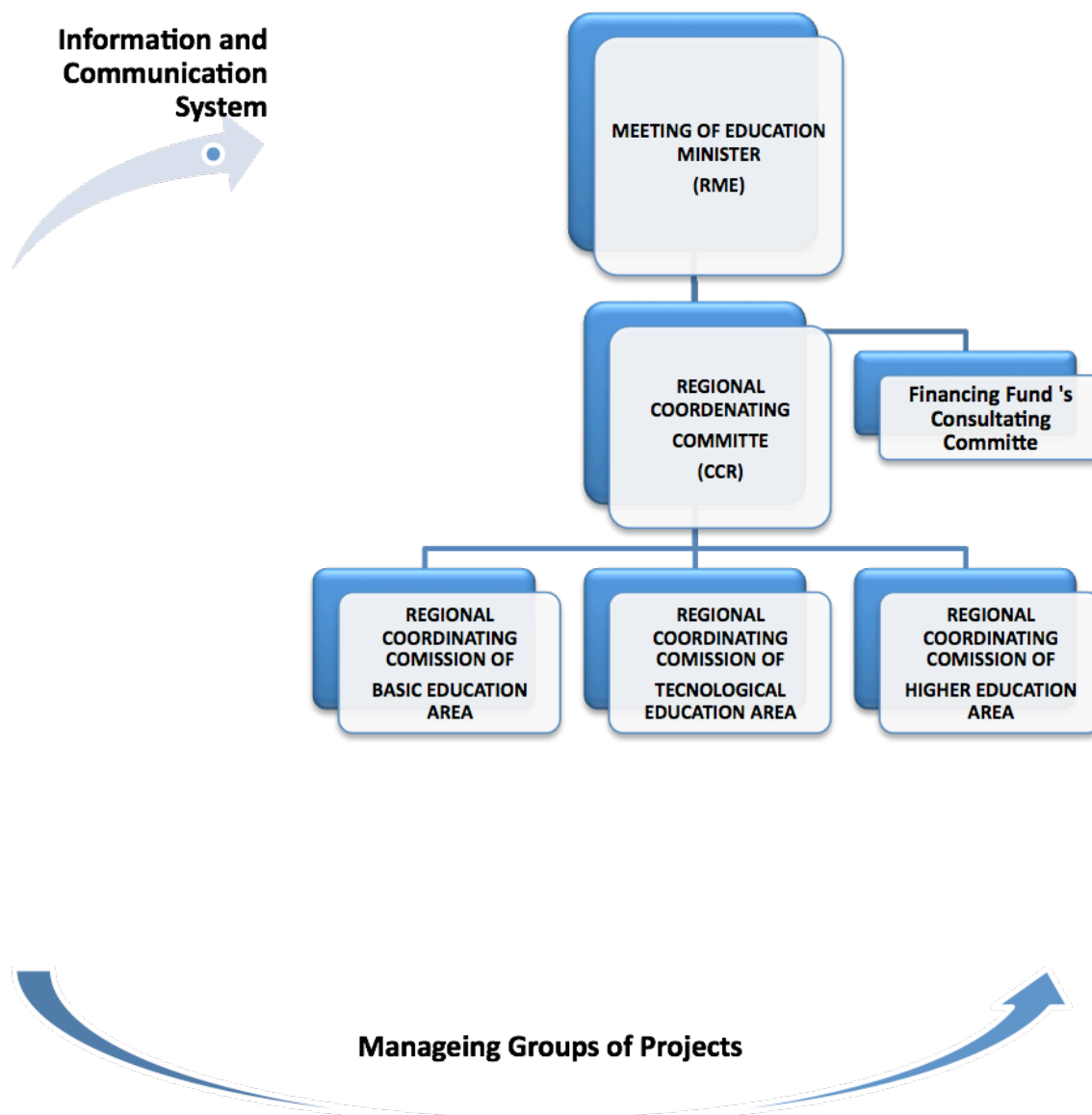
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**Figure 1: MERCOSUR's Educative Sector**



This structure of MERCOSUR's Educative Sector was agreed in the XXI Meeting of Education Minister in Punta del Este, Uruguay, in September 2001, and approved by the Common Market Council (MERCOSUL/CMC/Decisão N°. 15/2001). The Financing Fund's Committee Assessor became part of the Educative Sector in 2008 (MERCOSUL/ CMC/ Decisão N° 24/ 2008). Managing Groups of Projects are working groups designated by the CCR to develop the projects.