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13. BRAZILIAN POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION IN THE 21ST CENTURY: A CONSERVATIVE MODERNIZATION[1]

EXPANSION AND FAILED DIVERSIFICATION

Brazilian higher education has experienced a rapid expansion since the beginning of this century, from a total enrollment of 2.7 million students at the undergraduate level in 2000 to 8 million in 2015 (INEP 2000, 2015). Despite the efforts by the federal government and some state governments, this expansion didn't introduce significant diversification on the Brazilian higher education landscape. Brazilian higher education is, traditionally, recognized in different institutional formats. However all institutions, both universities and non-universities, have the same right to award bachelors degrees and offering this training is the main focus of all institutions.

While the regulatory framework recognized new degree formats following the 1990s, diversification was resisted both by the institutions, especially the public universities, and by the society as a whole. Families and enterprises continue to devalue diplomas in favor of the traditional bachelor degree. The following text will explore in depth the institutional dynamics that sustained this pattern of conservative expansion experienced by the Brazilian higher education during the last two decades.

THE LEGACY OF THE PAST

The university model is a late addition to the Brazilian postsecondary education institutional fabric. From the beginning of the 19th century, when the first higher education institutions were established, until the beginning of 1930s and the first university law, the only kind of postsecondary education was the isolated professional school. These schools were mostly training institutions. At that time, the most powerful members of the academic profession were the professors holding chairs, to whom academic activities were only a prestigious complement to an active professional life. Full-time commitment to academic life and research were not considered important, since the main purpose of a postsecondary education was to train and certify young people

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from rich and powerful families to enter a profession. The first universities created in 1930s usually merged established professional schools with newly created faculties of philosophy, science, and humanities. Until the beginning of the 1970s, Brazilian universities followed the traditional Latin American model (Bernasconi 2002); they were mostly teaching institutions with few academics on a permanent contract, but none with a full-time commitment to the university. While the faculties of philosophy, science and humanities encouraged some research and intellectual life, this happened on a small scale, with limited external support or recognition.

In 1968 a major reform changed the public sector landscape, forcing the adoption of the departmental model, and the introduction of full-time contracts for academics[2]. These reforms were followed by new mechanisms to support the expansion of graduate education and research inside public universities (Schwartzman 1994). It was then that the public sector evolved towards the more expensive model of comprehensive research universities.

These changes in the public sector were concurrent with the first wave of expansion in access to higher education. At that time, the enlargement of the secondary school sector and new alternatives for adult education brought to public universities many qualified candidates who could not be accommodated. To respond to this pressure, the government relaxed constraints over the private sector. Private institutions then grew, based on the old model of the isolated professional schools, offering a cheap route to a bachelors degree in some traditional professions. They employed instructors with no academic qualifications on hourly contracts.

Since the late 1960s, the private sector has converted itself into a demand-driven sector, absorbing the bulk of the demand for access and protecting the public sector from the most disruptive effects of massification. By the late 1970s, postsecondary education in Brazil was established as a highly diverse and sharply stratified system: a public, tuition-free network of universities at the top and a large, low-quality, tuition-paying private tier of isolated professional schools at the bottom. Even though the latter were not officially universities, they were authorized to award bachelor degrees in every legal sense equal to the ones granted by the universities. Of course, there were exceptions in both sectors: in the private sector, there were some traditional, prestigious universities, most of them denominational ones. Among the public sector, some isolated professional schools also survived.

At that time, postsecondary education was understood as training through bachelor programs. In Brazilian society the bachelors degree was (and still is) a professional degree. Holding a bachelors degree is a key certification that regulates access to certain positions in the labor market. Brazil has a strong tradition of regulating labor market positions as professions. Up to now there are more than 60 different regulated professions and a dozen other ones pending approval in the House of Representatives.

Brazil has also a long tradition of vocational training, offered through different kinds of institutions and in different sectors. The largest system of vocational training and apprenticeship is a network of semi-public training institutions supported by a mandatory contribution from Brazilian enterprises (Rodrigues 2012). Since the 1980s, the federal, state and municipal governments have been also active in this area, creating a number of institutes for technological education (the local term for vocational education). Until the close of the 1990s, these initiatives were mostly limited to the secondary level. While some states created vocational training tracks at post-secondary level, these alternatives were never popular. Vocational training programs were not allowed to award a diploma, which meant that they were a dead-end track, limiting further training opportunities.

It was only in 1996, when the government enacted a new education law (Law 9294-96, Lei de Diretrizes e Bases da Educação) that Brazil fully acknowledged the diversification of postsecondary education by recognizing two different training path, both leading to a diploma: the traditional bachelor degree (programs requiring at least four-years of study) and the technological degree (three-year programs). Nevertheless, as evident below, the diversification proposed by the new law was strongly resisted by Brazilian society and the most well reputed HE institutions, especially universities in the public sector.

THE CONTEMPORARY INSTITUTIONAL LANDSCAPE

The 2015 census of the Brazilian higher education lists a total of 2,364 institutions, of which 195 are universities. Only 12.5% of all tertiary institutions are public. Public institutions represent 55% of all universities and provide the majority of the country's postgraduate education (83% of the enrollment at this level). Nevertheless, public institutions enroll only 24.3% of all undergraduate students. Public universities offer better working conditions for their faculty; 84% of all academics employed at the public sector have full-time contracts, while only 25% have the same kind of contract in the private sector; and public institutions are generally perceived by the Brazilian society as more prestigious than the private ones.

The public sector includes 62 federal universities, a smaller network of 30 federal technological institutes (with the privileges of universities), 119 institutions under the authority of different state governments, of which 38 are large universities, and 76 institutions operated by municipalities, of which 11 are universities. As a main common trait, almost all public universities adopt the multi-campus format with each university composed of a varying number of campuses, located in different cities.

Since the beginning of the 21st century, the public sector has diversified to a certain degree, and the state level governments are now more active, expanding their own systems of universities and vocational colleges. This situation increased challenges for governance at the national level. Besides the private and federal systems, there are now 27 independent state-level systems of higher education. The federal government is responsible for the federal system of universities and technical institutes, and is legally entitled to oversee the private sector. However, it has no legal authority over state systems and only limited mechanisms to coordinate the entire system.

The private sector includes 2,069 institutions. While most of these institutions still hold the traditional format of small, isolated professional schools, this sector has experienced a strong process of consolidation during the last decade with many schools merging into large universities. These new private universities, tend to focus the provision of mass undergraduate education at the lowest feasible unit cost.

CHANGES IN THE POLICY FRAMEWORK FROM THE BEGINNING OF 2000S

Figure 1, shows the pattern of expansion since the 1960s. Since the second half of the 20th century, Brazilian HE experienced two main cycles of expansion: one starting at the end of 1960s up to the beginning of 1980s and the other starting at the end of 1990s.

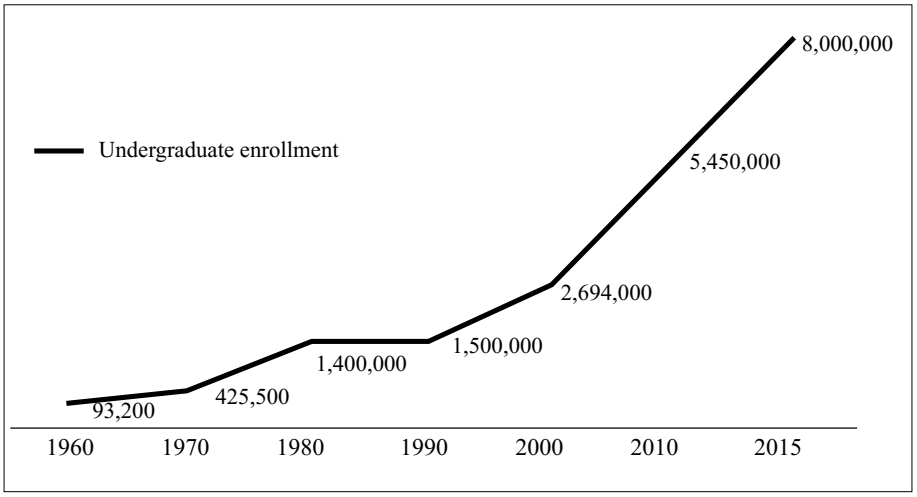

Figure 1: Undergraduate education enrollments in Brazilian Higher Education
Sources: Schwartzman, 1992; INEP, 1990-2015

The last cycle of expansion began in the mid-1990s, as the Brazilian economy recovered from a long economic stagnation during the previous decade. The growth of the system sped up at the beginning of 2000s when the government adopted new policy instruments following the election of Luis Inácio Lula da Silva to the presidency in 2002.

Da Silva's election was supported by a large alliance of parties from left to right, and counted on backing from the country's lower middle class and the more organized unions and social movements. All these constituencies demanded greater access to higher education. In 2004 the new government launched the "University for All" program that provided tax incentives to private universities for offering tuition-free enrollment to low- income students. With the new program, the government could quickly expand access by making more than 100,000 new openings available in the private sector. Nevertheless, tough admissions requirements[3] resulted in many new openings left unfilled. In 2010 the federal government reformed and expanded a program (FIES) for financial assistance to low-income students enrolled in the private sector. (Sampaio 2013, 2015).

The University for All and the FIES programs helped to solve the biggest challenge to increasing access through the private sector, the high cost of tuition. The Brazilian government had always expected that private institutions should be financially self-sufficient. Not only does the Constitution forbid transfers of public money to the private sector, but it also imposes severe restrictions on the kinds of pressures a private educational institution can exert over a student in default of tuition payments[4]. As most of the private sector targets students from low-income families, most of them older with a family and working obligations, there is a limit to the tuition that this market can sustain. At the same time, private institutions need to plan their budgets assuming a high level of tuition default. So, the financial resources resulting from these two national initiatives supported not only growth but also the diversification of the programs offered by the private sector to include more expensive areas where the public sector traditionally dominated.

Thus, a challenge for Brazilian higher education policy is how to manage and oversee the growth of the private sector in order to assure at least minimal quality, while at the same time, preserving access for previously under-represented social sectors.

Since the 2000s, the Ministry of Education has developed a larger apparatus for overseeing and monitoring all higher education but with the primary intent of controlling the private sector. This includes tools for collecting detailed information about each student and each scholar from all institutions that is the basis for the yearly, nation-wide census of all higher education institutions. The Ministry of Education also organized a detailed system of bachelors program recognition, where each of the more than 30,000 different programs offered are individually evaluated according to

uniform parameters. There is also a compulsory national examination designed for each undergraduate program, to be to be taken by all students in the last year of study in every institution offering that program (ENADE). Data from ENADE is used for scoring each program, and institutions with low scores are subject to individual audits carried out by a committee of academics from other institutions who are nominated by the Ministry of Education.

Finally, the government created an elaborated system of institutional accreditation. Despite good intentions, this system had adverse impact on the private sector. This regulatory environment became too tough for the small, non-for profit private institutions. Many of them started to sell out to larger organizations, opening space for big business. As argued by de Magalhães Castro, (2015, p. 282) "Instead of controlling market behavior and making it better, the quality assurance policies provoked the capture of private higher education by investment funds and global groups."

GROWTH AND DIFFERENTIATION IN THE PUBLIC SECTOR

The government also mobilized the public sector to expand access to higher education. In 2003, the government created incentives for federal universities to adopt quota programs targeting minorities and students coming from poor families. In 2012 these initiatives were consolidated into a new law reserving half of the first-year openings at federal universities for candidates coming from public schools and reserving a proportion of the student intake for minorities.

In 2008, the small network of federal centers for technological education was upgraded and allowed to offer vocational programs at the tertiary level. Law 11,892 consolidated close to100 federal vocational schools into 38 federal institutes of professional, scientific, and technological education, almost one in each state. This shift further diversified the federal system that was previously composed primarily of comprehensive universities. These federal institutes added tertiary-level technological programs to their traditional vocational portfolio of programs at the secondary level. Nevertheless, they also experienced a strong academic drift and evolved toward a more traditional tertiary profile, adding bachelors, masters and even doctoral programs in recent years.

In 2007, the government launched a major program for expansion and reform of the federal universities, known as the REUNI program (Programa de Reestruturação e Expansão das Universidades Federais). REUNI, operated from 2007 to 2012, providing new funds for further development of physical and human resource infrastructure to support expanded enrollments. REUNI design adopted what Dietmar Braun (2003) called "delegation by incentives." The program offered incentives in the form of price signals (p. 312) tied to performance indicators, allowing the universities to decide how to reach these indicators. The primary objectives of REUNI were to expand the

number of undergraduate programs offered as evening courses, increasing the participation rate of non-traditional students, and enlarging the proportion of students coming from public schools and minority groups.

PUBLIC AND PRIVATE DYNAMICS

The impact of programs directed towards the public sector, such as the REUNI program, produced mixed effects. While in some cases, new universities, with additional resources from the program, successfully experimented with innovative designs for courses and programs, the program also engendered idiosyncratic responses in established universities. Some institutions opted to create cheaper interdisciplinary programs loosely joining disciplines that were already offered within other programs or to establish new campuses without the most basic infrastructure. What is more important, the federal system has shown a decrease inefficiency at the undergraduate level. In 2006, the percentage of students finishing their studies four years after being accepted to a bachelor program at a federal university was approximately 58% but in 2013 this percentage dropped to 42%.

Public universities have also run into problems when incorporating new constituencies resulting from the quota and other affirmative action programs. Teaching at public universities is usually very traditional, organized around long lectures and overloaded curriculum. This traditional approach worked well enough for young, well-prepared students, but not so well with students handicapped by the scholastic deficiencies resulting from weak public school education.

In the private sector, the environment created by the government's strict regulatory framework and the competition among institutions produced both processes of consolidation and differentiation. In the last decade, the private sector changed from institutions that resembled small family-owned businesses toward a more corporate model, characterized by hierarchical business-like internal governance. Even though the traditional institutional design is still more typical, the latter is the overtaking it as the dominant paradigm in the private sector. In 2015, the 15 largest for-profit educational holdings in Brazil accounted for 36% of private enrollments and 27% of the revenues in the private sector (Sampaio, in print). These large for-profit corporations also diversified their portfolio of programs by also offering technological programs and expanding their geographical coverage by opening new campuses in the inner cities and intensively developing online education.

Another development within the private sector is the rise of a small number of elite institutions, offering education tailored to the demands and qualifications of the upper niches of the labor market. While their number is small, their presence in the Brazilian higher education landscape is significant. Their reputation helps to blur the status divide that traditionally separated public and private sectors in Brazil. These institutions are mainly undergraduate oriented institutions. Nevertheless, they actively

support academics involvement with research and consultancy since the faculty's connections with the corporate world are strong and represent important assets in the market where they operate. These elite institutions tend to be highly innovative and quick to adopt new technologies and problem-oriented teaching strategies. They also profit from their capacity to offer MBAs and other professional masters programs, as well as continuing education.

RESEARCH

Public universities are the main center for research and graduate education. Research and science are subject to policy decisions from the Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation. Since the end of 1990s, these policies have undergone different reforms that created a more competitive environment for research funding and concentrated resources on large programs supporting networks of researchers across different universities. This new framework for research and the more stringent rules for evaluating graduate education reinforced an earlier informal differentiation within the public sector, where some universities were more successful in securing external funds to conduct research and develop graduate programs, especially at the doctoral level, while others remained limited to undergraduate teaching (Balbachevsky 2013). These changes were unintended consequences of the reforms in the science and technology policies. The country's higher education policy does not officially encourage institutional differentiation among public universities.

LIMITED DIFFERENTIATION

Despite changes and new policies, Brazilian higher education remains highly traditional in its design. Most of the undergraduate enrollment is still concentrated in a small number of programs. More than 61% of all undergraduate enrollment in Brazil is concentrated in four areas: business, social sciences, law and education. Another 10% is enrolled in engineering and another 11% in health sciences. These few areas represent 82% of all enrollment, leaving only 18% of the students in other areas.

Brazilian higher education is not only traditional in the competencies and skills it develops, it is also resistant to diversification. In 2015, almost 20 years after the new education law that diversified training paths at postsecondary level, only 20.1% of all degrees granted in the country come from alternative approaches to the traditional bachelor degree. In spite of the diversification of the federal system since 2008, it is the private sector that is responsible for more than 91% of all technological degrees awarded in Brazil. Also, the pace of growth of these programs has been slowing since 2010. Oddly, it seems that the success of the loan program (FIES), following the reform by the government in 2009, was responsible for this result. According to a spokesman from the private sector, access to funding to support a longer period of

study diminished student interest in shorter vocational programs (Capelato 2016). In fact, as a response to the perceived market preferences, the private sector has upgraded some vocational programs to bachelors programs. Some of the new bachelors programs offered by the private sector are fashion design, game design, gastronomy, among others.

State governments have been more successful in achieving diversification at the postsecondary level. Some states have been successful in creating their own network of vocational colleges. The most important experience is in the state of São Paulo, where a booming network of technological schools centrally managed, the Centre Paula Souza, expanded to all the regions within the state, providing an alternative training path that responds to local labor-market demand. So far, the Centre has been successful in avoiding academic drift, staying focused on the vocational path, while the federal institutes were less successful at this. Nevertheless, the Paula Souza model is an exception in the country's experience.

The other significant innovation introduced in Brazilian higher education in the last decade is the use of distance education provided on the Internet. Again, online education is almost entirely a private endeavor: more than 90% of the 1.4 million students enrolled in these programs are in the private sector. The public sector is not only much slower in adopting technology to deliver education, it is also wary of these new technologies, strongly opposing any innovation that could challenge the traditional lecture format with more dynamic modes of learning.

CONCLUSION

This chapter discussed the main changes experienced by Brazilian higher education in recent decades. As indicated at the beginning of this chapter, Brazilian higher education has experienced a major expansion. This expansion is a byproduct of the country's heavy investments in education that have changed the country's demographic profile. While in 1995, 58% of all youth between the ages of 18 and 24 old had not finished primary education, this percentage dropped to 16% in 2014. At the same time, in 1995 only 7% of the age cohort had access to higher education and this percentage has increased to 23% in 2014 (Yahn, in print).

The profile of students attending postsecondary education is also much more diverse today than it was at the beginning of the century; there are more children from poor families, and more women, black and native students (Costa Ribeiro & Schlegel 2015). Nevertheless, as shown above, most of these changes had little impact on the system's structure that has preserved its traditional hierarchies. Brazilian higher education grew while following traditional paths. The bulk of the demand for access to higher education has been met by a massive private sector. Even when the government offered incentives for enlarging and democratizing the public sector, the response was

timid. There were some interesting experiments within new universities created in the last decade, some state institutions were more active in developing alternative training paths, but most of the public sector sustained a more traditional pattern, focused on bachelors programs that concentrate on traditional careers.

NOTES

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[2] From 1973 to 1991, the proportion of academics with full time contracts in the Brazilian Federal universities grew from 19.8% to 82.5% of the academic staff. Accordingly, the federal universities' budget grew than 5-fold in real terms between 1972 and 1986, largely through the implementation of full-time contracts for academic faculty members (Schwartzman 2010)

[3] In order to have access to the University for All scholarships, the student should come from a poor family, have previously attended public schools, and perform well in the national secondary leaving exam. Considering the low quality of education offered by the majority of public primary and secondary schools, qualifying for admission proved to be hard for many candidates. In 2014, 30% of these scholarships were left vacant.

[4] By law, since education is a public good, the private school cannot impose any kind of restriction over the students in default. The private university cannot block the student's participation in any activity and cannot withhold documents or certificates.

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