



**NEW CONVERGENCE FORMATS IN HIGHER EDUCATION:  
RESEARCH IN BINATIONAL CITIES OF THE  
SOUTHERN CONE OF LATIN AMERICA**

**NUEVOS FORMATOS DE CONVERGENCIAS DE LA EDUCACIÓN SUPERIOR:  
INVESTIGACIÓN EN CIUDADES BINACIONALES  
DEL CONO SUR DE AMÉRICA LATINA**

**NOVOS FORMATOS DE CONVERGÊNCIAS NA EDUCAÇÃO SUPERIOR:  
PESQUISA EM CIUDADES BINACIONAIS DO CONESUL DA AMÉRICA LATINA**

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**ABSTRACT:** This article presents a study on democratization and internationalization policies for Higher Education (HE) in ‘linked border cities’ of Brazil, Argentina and Uruguay, more specifically, ‘binational cities’ where international and sub-national rationales are shown in the treatment given to problems of access and permanence in Public HE. The article draws upon a piece of research conducted within a Programme of Postdoctoral Studies with the following aims: to describe HE democratization policies in regions bordering the Southern Cone of Latin America; to compare the discourses of national education policies (and bilateral agreements) to the interpretations of local actors in these contexts; and to contribute to the methodological reflection on educational research, internationalization, democratization and citizenship in border contexts. To these ends, official document analysis, interviews and focus groups with actors involved in relevant HE experiences in border cities with access to university level education have been carried out. This paper presents preliminary findings of this investigation.

**KEYWORDS:** Higher Education. Democratization. Internationalization.

**RESUMEN:** Con este artículo, se presenta un estudio sobre políticas de democratización e internacionalización de la Educación Superior en “ciudades fronterizas vinculadas” de Brasil, Argentina y Uruguay; más precisamente “ciudades binacionales” en las que se evidencian lógicas internacionales y sub nacionales en el tratamiento de los problemas acceso y permanencia a la Educación Terciaria Pública. Se trata de una investigación enmarcada dentro de un Programa de Estudios Posdoctorales y tiene por objetivos: describir las políticas de democratización de la ES en regiones de fronteras del cono sur de América Latina, comparar los discursos de las políticas educativas nacionales (y acuerdos bilaterales) con las interpretaciones de los actores locales en estos contextos; y aportar a la reflexión metodológica sobre las investigaciones acerca de educación, internacionalización, democratización y ciudadanía en contextos fronterizos. Para esto se ha utilizado análisis de documentos oficiales, entrevistas y grupos focales con los actores involucrados en algunas experiencias relevantes de Educación Superior en ciudades de frontera con oferta educativa universitaria. En este trabajo se presentan los primeros hallazgos de la investigación.

**PALABRAS CLAVE:** Educación superior. Democratización. Internacionalización.

**RESUMO:** Este artigo apresenta um estudo sobre políticas de democratização e internacionalização do Educação Superior nas cidades fronteiriças vinculadas de Brasil, Argentina e Uruguay; mais precisamente “ciudades binacionais” onde há evidências de lógicas internacionais e subnacionais no tratamento de problemas relacionados ao acesso e desempenho nesse nível. Esta pesquisa é enquadrada num programa de Estudos Posdoctorais, e seus objetivos são: descrever a política de democratização da Educação Superior nas cidades fronteiriças binacionais da América do Sul; comparando discursos de políticas educacionais nacionais (e acordos

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bilaterais) com a interpretação de atores locais em contextos fronteiriços; fornecendo material para a reflexão metodológica sobre pesquisas sobre educação, internacionalização, democratização e cidadania em contextos de fronteira. Para isto, foi utilizada a análise de documentos oficiais, entrevistas e grupos focais com os atores envolvidos em algumas experiências relevantes do Ensino Superior nas cidades fronteiriças com oferta educativa universitária. Neste trabalho são apresentados os primeiros achados da investigação.

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** Educação superior. Democratização. Internacionalização.

## INTRODUCTION

This article presents findings of a piece of research conducted at a Post-Graduate Programme and Center for Studies on Educational Policies focusing on the democratization and internationalization of Higher Education (HE) in ‘linked border cities’ located in the southern cone of Latin America. Some outcomes of this investigation have been orally announced at the 2<sup>nd</sup> *Ibero-American Conference on Comparative Education* in Paraíba, Brazil (2017); a year later, the investigation is ongoing, and a larger data corpus enables further analysis and construction of new theoretical categories on the subject.

In order to frame the problem, previous research has been taken as starting point, in particular, work related to education on Uruguay's borders with Brazil (VIERA-DUARTE, 2005, 2013, 2015), as well as the proposals of Fernández Lamarra (2004, 2010), Fernández Lamarra; Costa de Paula (2011) and Fernández Lamarra; Cópola (2013) on democratization and internationalization of HE in Latin America.

Based on the hypothesis that frontiers can function as natural ‘convergence’ spaces, this research aims to: a) describe democratization policies pertaining to HE in border regions of the Southern Cone of Latin America. b) compare discourses of national educational policies and bilateral agreements to interpretations of local actors in border contexts; and c) contribute to the methodological reflection on educational research, internationalization, democratization and citizenship, to seek new paradigms of HE aimed at training citizens in subnational and supranational contexts.

In the first stage of the study, official documents were analysed and, hence, findings – from this phase – consisted in case mapping, description of open data, and the recognition of difficulties pertaining to the comparative nature of the study, due, essentially, to the asymmetries between the cases. For these reasons, methodological adjustments were made to enable the study of multiple cases of democratization policies for HE in border cities and a comparative study of the accounts of actors involved in these policies.

HE cases have been identified in cities called – in bilateral agreements – ‘linked boundary sites’, assuming that frontiers have remained excluded in modern societies and national states (MAZZEI, 2016) but still constitute spaces of opportunity for thinking about the world and

society from new perspectives. They are sites of sharp divisions and could constitute laboratories of educational policies and processes, as there, naturally, typical globalization phenomena and the crisis of modernity accelerate, forcing the breaking of paradigms.

In this study, case selection is based upon the criterion of existence of tertiary educational offers in these places, with a view to investigating the effects of border policies on the educational trajectories of border students who could fall into the category of ‘new students’ to universities (EZCURRA, 2007; 2011), since they make up a student population that is very different from the traditional university student population.

The theoretical grounding focuses on previous work of the phenomena of internationalization of HE and democratization of access to this educational level. The volume of work found reveals that this theme is present in international and regional academic agendas. This section of the article also presents a brief theoretical and epistemological framework. Subsequently, methodological aspects of the research are discussed, ranging from the presentation of the problem to the final decision of designing a set of data production techniques that could account for the complexity of the problem under consideration.

Preliminary results are shared that, at a first level of analysis, laid the foundations for the comparative study of narratives. At the current stage of the research, interviews with qualified informants related to border educational policies – from Brazil, Argentina and Uruguay – have provided sufficient data for interpreting the processes of educational change beyond bilateral agreements, that is, as ‘binational policies in the field’, in the case of linked cities in Brazil, Uruguay and Argentina. Finally, some findings are presented on public border policies related to the issue of inclusion in HE, its opportunities and its challenges.

Many interesting cases were found for a qualitative study with a narrative approach (RICOER, 1996) applied to Education (BOLÍVAR, 2001, 2002) (BOLÍVAR; DOMINGO, 2006) to understand the particular forms of democratization and internationalization of HE in border regions of Southern Latin America. In the study of these peculiar cases of educational policies there is evidence for the need for changing discourse on comparative and international education (SCRIEWER, 2002), particularly in respect to the approach to the problem of democratization of HE; this is even more evident when we observe that public policies, in general, and educational policies, in particular, require a different understanding in cities located between two countries.

## THEORETICAL GROUNDING

HE policies have been the object of various programmes in the Mercosur Education Sector (SEM), as well as projects, proposals and studies of UNESCO's IESALC, OEI, RIACES, the European Union and various existing university networks, including the Montevideo

University Association (AUGM) and the University Development Center (CINDA), amongst others. In this area, researchers have tackled the phenomenon of internationalization of HE at the level of research programmes offered by universities and societies such as the Societies of Comparative and International Education that participate in the World Council of Comparative Education Societies (WCCES). Undoubtedly, the phenomenon of ‘internationalization of HE’ has been the subject of research and has been approached in many ways. It is well known that the most outstanding case is the creation of the European HE Area (EHEA), which institutionalized experiences of academic networks and student and teacher mobility programmes; in this context, new approaches have emerged in interdisciplinary and flexible modular curriculum designs that enable mobility between careers and universities in different countries through a credit system.

In Latin America also, attention has been paid to the internationalization of HE. Originally, research on this theme – conducted by Latin American academics – consisted basically in comparative studies between the case of the EHEA (the Bologna process) and expressions of interest in the creation of a Latin American Area of Higher Education. However, the current discussion agenda appears to focus on the format which HE policy convergences should take in Latin America and in the Global South as distinct from Europe. According to Fernández Lamarra (2010), there are few initiatives aimed at creating a Latin American Higher Education Area, because convergences are specific, and policy is

produced with isolated forms and focused on niches and very specific areas of higher education and without common regulatory frameworks, it tends to further disaggregate and differentiate national higher education systems in the region and, therefore, make it more difficult to converge with the European and the Ibero-American Area. (FERNÁNDEZ LAMARRA; CÓPPOLA, 2013, p.76).

Regarding studies on the internationalization of public policies linked to ‘border studies’, an initial literature survey pointed to relevant background work both in Uruguay and in Brazil. There are, for example, Mazzei’s publications (2002, 2013, 2016), which report on studies of the Uruguay-Brazil border, as well as the noteworthy contributions of Isabel Clemente and Izabel Mallmann that deal precisely with the issue of border integration from the MERCOSUR perspective (CLEMENTE; MALLMANN, 2016), discussing how the progress of regional integration constitutes a reconfiguration of global reach spaces that also responds to local demands. This study adopts a similar perspective, but a different unit of analysis and other analytical categories: whilst Clemente and Mallmann take as analytical categories identity and local development, this research focuses on the analysis of convergences of educational policies for the democratization of HE in the region. Yet, these authors’ proposal of a transition in state policies towards border territories and the binational cooperation in the New Agenda of Cooperation and Border Development of Brazil and Uruguay remains relevant, as it highlights articulations of public policies – which encompass educational policies – and the appearance of new actors in their design and implementation in the regional

framework of MERCOSUR. Although, according to Dri (2011), in MERCOSUR as an integration process itself, no relevant initiatives have been carried out in the field of cross-border cooperation, these have been developed bilaterally between border cities of member countries.

The Interdisciplinary Centre for Studies of Territorial Development of the University of the Republic of Uruguay offers an interesting contribution to the notion of ‘cross-border region’ in its analysis of how relations between ‘cross-border cities’ can form a ‘cross-border process’ with distinctive characteristics in comparison with other local development processes. This is relevant, since it places border cities within the scope of the ‘local’ and ‘the regional’, which makes them – with empirical and theoretical support – a particular case of study in the area of cross-border integration (MAGRI *et al.*, 2016).

In Brazil there are also studies on border policies; amongst others, a Report to the EC/Brazil by Sandra Sérgio (2015) – at that time responsible for Bilateral Cooperation in Latin America – proposes strategies for strengthening education with the Structured Program of Bilateral Cooperation entitled *Panorama da Educação na Fronteira*. The report presents Brazil’s eleven ‘twin cities’ (using the term MERCOSUR adopts to refer to these types of border cities) in eight states; according to the report, by 2015, 57 meetings had already been held in these cities to discuss the issue of cross-border education with the participation of around 600 people. The study mentions institutions involved in ‘frontier programs’ within the scope of four institutional contexts: State Secretaries of Education (Amapá, Roraima, Rondônia and Rio Grande do Sul); Municipal Secretaries of Education (from Oiapoque/AP, Bonfim/RR, Pacaraima/RR, Tabatinga/AM, Benjamin Constant/AM, Guajará Mirim/RO, Corumbá/MS, Ponta Porã/MS, Foz do Iguaçu/PR, Santana do Livramento/RS and Uruguaiana/RS); Federal Universities (UNIFAP/AP, UFRR/RR, UNIR, UFMS, UNILA, UFFS and UNIPAMPA); and Federal Institutes (Rectory and Campus: IFAP, IFRR, IFAM, IFRO, IFMS, IFPR, IFSul and IF Farroupilha). This report highlights the strong interest of Brazilian institutions in educational policies along the borders that Brazil has with other countries, where there are 45 Federal University Campi, 51 Federais Institutes and 13,641 Municipal and State Schools for Primary Education. Border relations and legislation are examined, and three major problems are highlighted: social vulnerability and infrastructure on the border; border documentation; families on the border (SÉRGIO, 2015). These problems constitute challenges for education in these regions, including the issue of ‘frontier curriculum’ and the interest of the Brazilian State – or, at least, its governments since 2005 – to implement targeted border education policies.

Regarding Argentina and Brazil, according to Dachary and Arnaiz (2012), the area between these countries with the greatest economic drive covers the provinces of Corrientes and Misiones; however, border identity is found along the border expanse. According to a study conducted by Rebelo Porto and Schweitzer (within CLACSO's *Borders, Regionalization and*



*Globalization* Working Group), there is a ‘border condition’ in spaces that are peripheral, strategic and recomposed,

where the territory delimits its space of action through institutional participation, to standardize the use of the territory and business to extend its use beyond public policies; peripheral in the expressions of national public policies; strategic as a result of intentions and actions of capital, adopting its tricks to access the products of existing interests; and recomposed in the use of spatial forms and content from articulations created and constructed from their spatial adjustments to each historical moment. Therefore, their analysis must be multifocal, multiscalar, multitemporal and multirelational. (PORTO, SCHWEITZER, 2017, p. 38).

According to these authors, the creation of border identities is the result of territorial expansionist actions fueled by commercial interests; they are inserted in regional, national and international geopolitical articulations and are, in addition, articulated by international interests but are constructed by national policies.

As for the processes of democratization of HE, the information collected so far begs questions regarding policies in the area. On the one hand, data from research conducted by the *Transition Education* Work Group, Department of Sociology, Faculty of Social Sciences of the University of the Republic of Uruguay, suggests that patterns of access to HE in this country are strongly stratified by age, sex, social class, geographical location and linguistic factors (FERNÁNDEZ, 2010; FERNÁNDEZ, MÁRQUEZ Y RÍOS, 2016). On the other hand, there are known democratization policies that have enabled access to university education by sectors of the population which had not reached this level of education in previous decades. Also, several research programs have shown that there are risks when university access policies are not accompanied by complementary policies; for instance, Ana María Ezcurra's research (2011) suggests that academic difficulties and cultural inequalities lead to evasion and a greater number of students giving up the attempt to democratize access to university levels when traditional formats are not modified. This finding supports what Ezcurra called ‘excluding inclusion’, understandable in its hypothesis that in Latin America – as well as in the United States – the massification of HE generated academic difficulties that affected social segments of disadvantaged status and the associated hypothesis that such difficulties are a determinant of evasion, among other issues.

These antecedents offer enough support to consider that in border contexts there are some convergent population factors that could become exclusionary policies under the umbrella of educational inclusion discourses within ‘national policies of inclusion’. It will be necessary to take this into consideration to examine academic difficulties that affect border populations, characterized by a frontier culture little understood by the dominant culture (BOURDIEU, 1988). At this point, a new question is posed: what new risks of exclusion appear in border educational policies designed and managed by the national policies of each country?

In border cases, exclusion would be associated with factors already mentioned that influence

what Fernández (2006) and Fernández; Ríos (2013) call ‘student academic dispositions’, as well as with events of risk in the transition to HE (RÍOS, 2012), which takes on a new form in the border regions. In this view, some hypotheses can arise that complicate matters:

a) Social and cultural differences that characterise the border constitute a risk factor but also a possibility in respect to access and permanence in HE. This depends on the level of centralization-decentralization of the policies in use in the dominant culture.

b) Another factor in the conditioning of student performance for ‘new students’ consists of actions of the institutions themselves and their commitment to generating opportunities to develop sufficient knowledge and skills to meet academic demands of university life. Rather: social determinants can be neutralized with basis on policies that arise from the institutions themselves (EZCURRA, 2007).

In this study, institutional openness must contemplate the possibility of thinking about the educational offer in terms of ‘binationality’. In border cases, it would be convenient to examine how much autonomy local actors have in comparison with the impact of national actors of each country; it is in this point that the key to real inclusion could be found.

## METHODOLOGY

In this complex scenario, to delimit the focus of research, the question was posed whether widening participation policies for HE have been generated in the peculiar spaces that make up binational cities. If so, the following question should be asked: what are the characteristics of these policies and what forms of democratization and internationalization of HE can be identified in ‘binational border cities’ of the Southern Cone of Latin America? This research also seeks to answer the questions: how are the current educational policies implemented in these particular cases and how are they interpreted by national and local/border actors?

### *The research questions*

As suggested by previous research, the foundations of the problem become relevant if they are located at interstices between national educational policies, local border cultures and transnational education. The complexity of the problem becomes clearer if one takes into account that borders, in general, and particularly ‘conurbated borders’, ‘linked border cities’ or ‘binational urban centers’, bring into play ‘the complexity of the relationships between local cultures and middle managers, who are responsible for the implementation of national policies ‘thought of’ for these territories’ (VIERA-DUARTE, 2014, p. 10). Previous studies have examined ways in which tensions between ‘national’ and ‘local’ generate actions, feedback and conflicts within particular institutional cultures; it has also been investigated how this situation may be an obstacle to educational innovations or, how, on the contrary,

how tensions may become dynamic policy elements through their own mechanisms of resignification and production of local knowledge (VIERA-DUARTE, 2013). In this investigation, when raising the problem, it was assumed that:

The Common Space is built up from interuniversity integration, academic mobility and the education of university leaders. For this reason, with the construction of convergence processes in specific areas and the possible creation of the Latin American Common Area from the identification of asymmetries, consensus and strategies, an authentic convergent articulation can be reached, tending towards the creation of that Common Area of Higher Education. [...] If in the EEC this process has been carried out from top to bottom, in Latin America it should be built with the consensus of all the institutional actors, but with universities and their main actors assigned a fundamental role; in other words, from the bottom up. This theme is central since the traditional autonomy of universities in almost all the countries of the region – characteristic and specific of public higher education in Latin America – advises that the strategy for constructing the necessary convergence stems from university institutions themselves and the various councils and associations of rectors and universities (FERNÁNDEZ LAMARRA; CÓPPOLA, 2013, p.74).

Based on these suggestions, it would be necessary to recognize an opportunity to study each case as a path towards understanding how conditions that generate convergences are manifested within educational experiences in border areas. If such conditions are recognized in these cases, it could be said that it is possible to accept regional and subregional academic exchange programmes and projects, regional postgraduate projects and qualification recognition protocols (DIDOU AUPETIT and FAZIO, 2014), among other possibilities – should they exist – that could be identified as ‘new convergence formats’.

### *Methodological design*

To achieve the research objectives (to describe democratization policies for HE in border regions of the southern cone of Latin America and compare the discourses of national educational policies and bilateral agreements with the interpretations of local actors in border contexts), the original plan designed for the field work is summarised as follows:

a) First phase: exploratory study of democratisation policies for HE in ‘linked cities’ of Brazil with its bordering countries within MERCOSUR; subsequently, comparable study of binational cities in Argentina.

b) Second phase: after identifying the cases that offer university level education, a series of in-depth interviews and focus groups are being conducted, to support a comparative analysis of accounts that are being collected to compare similarities and differences between discourses that appear in the formulation of new policies for HE in border areas and current national policies. Also, in this phase, we seek to identify the contextual, curricular and institutional characteristics that help overcome factors of educational risk or exclusion.



c) As a projection, for a third phase, retrospective longitudinal studies and discourses analysis are being planned to enable reconstruction of the educational and/or professional trajectories of the actors involved locally in these experiences. To support this work, follow-up of graduates of binational experiences found will begin.

Data collection techniques used so far include: (i) documentary survey; (ii) in-depth interviews; (iii) focus groups. Throughout the process the need to incorporate participant observations of some emerging events has also become apparent.

**Table 1.** Techniques

Data collection techniques	Técnicas de análisis
Documentary survey (Official documents from the Educational Sector of Mercosur, Ministries of Education and Foreign Affairs of the pertaining countries, as well as universities and/or institutes relevant to educational policies for borders; press)	Content Analysis
In-depth interviews (Actors involved in the implementation of border policies with managerial roles in the National Educational System of each country)	Discourse Analysis
Focus groups Local border actors in charge of policy implementation in the area (Narrative Approach)	Discourse Analysis

Source: the author

To meet the first research objective, methodological procedures were used to track official documents from the Mercosur Education Sector, the Ministries of Education and Foreign Affairs, as well as universities and/or institutes involved in border policies and the Observatory of Uruguayan Foreign Policy (OPEU) – based at the Faculty of Social Sciences of UdelaR –, which organises the main news on Uruguay's cross-border relationships through press coverage, including the official press of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, newspapers of national circulation and newspapers local to the border region. Data from the Border Observatory of the Regional Training Center (CEFIR) was also taken into account.

From this survey, cases of ‘binational’ educational policies for HE were identified in border cities of Brazil. At a second stage, with a view meeting to the second objective, five in-depth interviews were conducted with actors with managerial roles in the National Educational Systems of the countries involved in the experiences identified in this stage of the study (Uruguay, Argentina and Brazil), in search of data on the process of bilateral agreements and

conventions. Currently, data is being analysed that was collected from accounts of local actors in border areas.

Following the documentary analysis, which enabled the identification of democratization policies for HE in linked border cities, five interviews have been conducted so far with key informants, chosen according to their participation in the ‘Integrated Development Area’ Working Group, which takes place prior to each High-Level Meeting of MERCOSUR. These five informants participated in the preparation of previous documents with proposals to raise to the chancelleries of member countries; two of them participated in the ‘Education and Professional Training’ subgroup, and the others in the ‘Provision of services’ subgroup. From these interviews it was possible to conclude that the cases are asymmetric in that the limits of the research are clearly established, since comparison is only possible in the dimension of discourses; this situation supports the need for a change of paradigm in comparative studies in Education (VIERA-DUARTE, 2017).

Three focus groups were conducted at this stage of the research, including local border authorities (Brazil and Uruguay), officials of the Ministry of Social Development of Uruguay for Border Affairs, as well as directors and coordinators of HE Institutions located in Uruguayan and Brazilian border cities together with Uruguayan, Argentinian and Brazilian border researchers. The focus groups took place in the form of successive Thematic Tables on ‘Comparative and International Education and Border Studies’ within the scope of the IV, V and VI *Binational Education Conferences* in the city of Rivera-Livramento in 2015, 2016 (VIERA-DUARTE, 2016) and September 2017. The groups yielded sufficient data to support decisions on the topics that will guide future in-depth interviews to be conducted in 2018, focused on new dimensions to allow comparison between discourses.

In a synchronic way – throughout the whole process – the methodological challenges have been tackled with consideration of the undeniable complexity and hybridization of the object of study. Reality, as expressed by Scriewer (2002), is marked by the superposition of national contexts, the emergence of international cooperation networks and the intersections in the world system. If border cities are seen as embodying this hybridization in everyday experience, frontier studies must necessarily overcome the limitations of linear scientific thinking. To account for this phenomenon, it is necessary to adopt theoretical frameworks and conceptual systems that include non-reductionist analytical perspectives and methodologies that approach the object of knowledge from a more systemic perspective (SCRIEWER apud VIERA-DUARTE, 2014).

### *Preliminary Findings*

Based upon the discussion so far, we can claim that, in border populations, generally, individuals have different attributes that could be defined from their own identity and different construction of citizenship; however, the characteristics of border cities differ a lot amongst cities and,

therefore, identity is not constructed in the same way in ‘co-urbanized dry borders’ as it is in ‘border cities linked by a bridge’. Borders are different from each other because they have a different history. In the case of language, findings by Elizaincín, Behares and Barrios (1987) have been confirmed regarding speakers of a Portuguese dialect who live in border regions of Uruguay with Brazil as well as in other borders of the Southern cone (BARRIOS Y BEHARES, 2006); however, in the interviews with the inhabitants of the border of Brazil with Argentina – through the Uruguay River – comments emerged that would suggest perceptions of a certain ‘linguistic barrier’ (between the Spanish and Portuguese spoken in that region) that complicates educational interaction at the undergraduate level, at least.

Therefore, to address the problem of the democratization of HE in these regions, it is essential to acknowledge particularities of ‘academic dispositions’ – of each border group – in relation to their linguistic or cultural attributes, with a view to enhancing their performance. In some of these cities we can identify – in the last ten years – actions pointing to the creation of new university formats that try not to reproduce the dominant culture, which has been traditionally standardising of a nation state rationale. Border students fall into the category of ‘new students’, and if differentiated educational policies are not implemented, these students may find themselves in an ‘educational risk’ situation, as Ríos (2012) discussed; but in this case, educational risk would be strongly determined by factors of geographical origin, linguistic difference and other identity-related factors.

In the search for cases of border educational policies in Argentina and Uruguay, no different convergence experiences were found in border cities, except for some attempts at double certification in some careers, such as Public Accounting (shared between the University of the Republic (Uruguay) and the National University of Entre Ríos (Argentina). As of 2013, the new Technological University of Uruguay (UTEC) has developed, and its Regional Technical Institute (ITR) of the Southwest, in Fray Bentos (border with Gualeguachú) employs Argentine teachers.

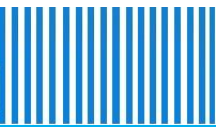
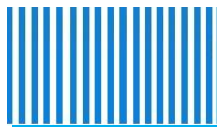
Although convergences were identified in educational policies for HE in several border regions, findings suggest that the highest level of convergence is found in Brazil with its bordering countries, especially Uruguay. In the project of expanding the ‘Binational Technological Campus’ of the Federal Institutes of Education, Science, and Technology, noteworthy are the levels of convergence reached by the Federal Institute of Education, Science and Technology of Rio Grande do Sul (IFSul) Santana do Campus Livramento, on the border of Brazil and Uruguay; in this case, binational courses work by agreement between IFSul and the Council of Technical-Vocational Education (CETP-UTU) of Uruguay. These courses provide a binational diploma recognized by both countries and already have several cohorts of graduates, so it is to be noted that, so far, it represents the main finding in terms of democratization policies of HE that coincides with an experience of internationalization in the implementation of the first binational tertiary careers.

Regarding this case, documentary analysis of data obtained from the report prepared by López (2010) – responsible for the UTU Agreements and Technical Cooperation Sector – suggests that the draft agreement between Brazil and Uruguay for the creation of binational technical courses is based on several antecedents of a legal normative scope. When it became a project between two countries, different regulations consituted, at least initially, one of the main obstacles to progress in the direction of implementing transnational policies. According to López (2010, p.6), the main antecedents that led to the creation of these binational courses are the following:

- Basic Agreement on Scientific and Technical Cooperation between the Government of the Federative Republic of Brazil and the Government of the Eastern Republic of Uruguay, page 6 of 8, signed in the City of Rivera on June 12, 1975.
- The Legal Statute of the Border between Brazil and Uruguay signed on December 20, 1933; a Supplementary Agreement signed on May 6, 1997, as well as the Agreement on Residency, Study and Work Permits for Uruguayan and Brazilian Border Nationals signed on August 21, 2002.
- By Law No. 18,158 of 07/30/07, Uruguay approved the Agreement between the Government of the Federative Republic of Brazil and the Government of the Eastern Republic of Uruguay for the Creation of Schools and / or Binational Professional/Technical Border Institutes and for the Accreditation of Border Binational Technical Courses, signed in Brasilia on April 1, 2005.
- On 04/12/2008 the Ministry of Foreign Affairs-Directorate of Treaties informs the Brazilian Diplomatic Mission about the approval by the Eastern Republic of Uruguay by Law N° 18.158 of 07/10/07 of the pertinent Agreement.
- On 05/11/2008 the Embassy of Brazil acknowledges receipt of Uruguay's approval of the Brazil-Uruguay Agreement for the Creation of Binational Schools and / or Binational Professional and/or Technical Institutes approved by the Uruguayan Parliament by Law No. 18,158 of 07/30/07.
- On June 9 and 10, 2009, the VI High-Level Meeting of the New Agenda for Border Cooperation and Development Brazil-Uruguay was held in Porto Alegre, where a Working Group was formed to develop different Border Cooperation Areas and an analysis was conducted of the processing of the Agreement for the Creation of Binational and / or Technical Binational Schools and / or Technical Institutes and for the Enabling of Binational Technical Courses, highlighting the need for a diagnosis of legal issues for the implementation of Binational Projects in the Education Area.

These documents were content analysed. However, the most complex data was collected in 2016 and 2017, in interviews with national actors. Based on this new data, we intend to reconstruct the stories around border educational policies from the accounts that portray the creation of binational courses as ‘a long-standing process’, illustrated with the excerpt below:

*There is a long history with this thing of agreements. Long before the 1990s ... But they were joint activities in the border region that actually took place around the edges, without many bureaucratic procedures: local issues, cooperation agreements between neighbors, between UTU and the old CEFETs and even SENAI. For example, mobile, rural courses ... There were mobile courses that crossed the frontier without problems, as far as Santa Maria... Santiago... Border actions were*



*characterized by informality and imagination... These integrations require engineering to create will from the border. (Interview 1)*

This ‘will from the border’ is typical of border identity, and it would seem that border subjects do not remain waiting for the initiative of the State, as suggested in the following account:

*In the 1990s, the Ministries of Foreign Affairs began to look at the border as something particular, with its specificity; but in the legislation there were gaps: the border requires specific policies. In the absence of norms, UTU carried out joint actions with CEFET of Pelotas; for example, mobile units were implemented, with courses from both countries; in the rural dry border the equipment passed from one country to another naturally. From Brazil, SENAI equipment was included for courses in Uruguayan territory. (Interview 2)*

The same interviewee comments on how, as an initiative of ILO-CINTERFOR, the national authorities of technological institutes of Uruguay and Brazil began to meet. The head of the Directorate of International Cooperation of UTU (CETP), Luis López Álvarez (CETP Counselor) participated in the first meeting of CETP-UTU / Uruguay with the Ministry of Labor and Vocational Training of Brazil and the Brazilian Cooperation Agency (ABC) with a view to the development of a joint project. Convergences were strengthened with the UTU-BID project and the creation of the Mixed MERCOSUR Commission; thus, exchange projects between CEFET-Pelotas and UTU for teacher training began, funded by ABC of Brazil, for UTU teachers in Uruguay. In these courses, a network of CINTERFOR experts participated, who, in their meetings, built the idea of a joint project.

When Federal Institutes were created in Brazil (in the Ministry presided over by Fernando Haddad), in the State of Rio Grande do Sul the IFSul (of the CEFET de Pelotas) and other Federal Institutes such as IF Farroupilha were opened; educational coverage in the technological area of that State was expanded. One aspect of the identity of this region of Brazil is that it has approximately 1,000 km of dry border with Uruguay, a point of consideration by the IFs of Rio Grande do Sul. According to the interviews and documents, there was traditionally a ‘legal vacuum’ for border policies, but this constituted an opportunity that enabled creative thinking about new policies. From the first meetings of actors linked to CINTERFOR's shared courses, exchanges emerged and, later, agreements were reached in Minutes of Understanding that led to a Program Proposal for future Binational Courses.

These accounts point to a milestone: the signing of the Uruguay-Brazil Bilateral Agreement with UEPRO. In the focal groups, Brazilian participants suggested that the agreements with Uruguay were celebrated with more short-term objectives – in contrast with other bordering countries – and binational courses were opened without waiting for the project for Binational Schools that was being developed for all of Brazil. This is how ‘the ideal of integration starts



to become a daily reality'. For example, in 2007, joint activities began involving CEFET Pelotas and UTU (Antonio Carlos Barum Brod, then Rector of IFSul, and, on behalf of CETP/Uruguay, its General Director, Wilson Netto). Meetings also took place, including the meeting of the Directors of UTU and CEFET with the Brazilian Ambassador in Uruguay, at the time, José Felício. But the strongest momentum was provided, before the implementation of the envisaged 'Binational School', by the creation of the so-called 'Binational Courses'.

As mentioned by an interviewee, it must be recognized that:

*for the Uruguayan government it is unthinkable to construct buildings in a shared way with another territory that is not national but we, border people said: we started with Binational Courses that work with Brazilian and Uruguayan students, but, physically they are offered in different schools, physically separated in Rivera-Uruguay or in Santana do Livramento-Brazil. However, they were binational; thus, the first courses arose. (Interview 1)*

On the other hand, anecdotes shared in focus groups suggest a type of coexistence within the classroom space whereby each student or teacher 'speaks in their language and everyone understands'. There are also instances of reflection on international events such as the *Binational Forums of Border Technical Education*, which discuss some integration challenges. At the 1st Forum of March 2010, the following topics were on the agenda: environment, labour rights, immigration, residence in the MERCOSUR countries and linguistic reality. The Memorandum of Understanding between IFSul and the CETP, signed in the city of Rivera on October 20, 2010, is important, as the parties expressed satisfaction with the progress made and agreed on actions that configured new challenges; amongst these, the dissemination of the idea of creating a Management Committee of Binational Courses and another 'Pedagogical Committee'. The agreements also include more specific actions, such as offering half of the available seats to students from each country.

In the process of data analysis, asymmetries between Uruguay and Brazil became obvious; interviewees mentioned, for example, that in Uruguay there is no entrance exam to HE, whilst in Brazil there is (the *vestibular* examination, and now the ENEM, is mandatory). Nevertheless, progress has been achieved through agreements of understanding, correcting differences and achieving integration without forgetting the norms of each country, a rather complex task but full of challenges rather than obstacles.

It is noteworthy that, at the border, inter-institutional networks have functioned as promoters of these interactions. This has been recognized as such by studies conducted at the University of the Republic. For example, in the document published in 2011 (IFSul-CETP, 2011) in the framework for the presentation of the Binational Courses, entitled 'Integration: a reality. Technical Education in the Border', the authors indicate how 'integration begins between the towns with their inhabitants and families', which is then reinforced by the project 'Schools of Professional Education in the Border'. The document mentions that the first experience of a

project designed for all Brazil began to take shape in 2006 from an initiative of the IFSul and the CETP-UTU in the border of the city of Rivera and Santana do Livramento. The document also qualifies this project as a ‘pioneer in Latin America’, since it allows Brazilian and Uruguayan students ‘much more than sharing a class [...]; guarantees them the right [...] to receive a binational certificate that is valid in both countries’ (IFSul-CETP, 2011, p.2).

The first ‘pilot courses’ within the scope of the Binational Schools Project were two technical courses: *Computers for Internet* (in Brazil) and *Environmental Control* (in Uruguay); both already have graduates. Subsequently, new binational careers were opened, including *Logistics Technician*. In 2017 the 10-year anniversary of the Binational Courses was celebrated with several events and two publications. By 2018, an agreement with the recently created Technological University of Uruguay (UTEC) was designed for a bachelor’s degree in Logistics and another in Mechatronics, but they are facing obstacles that must be overcome. It is interesting to note that Binational Courses were implemented with knowledge they would face difficulties highlighted in available studies; yet, progress has been made with the strong support of national actors from both countries – mainly local actors with a leading role in the territory – responding to the initiative of a macro policy of the Brazilian Ministry of Education for the development of Federal Technical Teaching in border territories. The story of this experience of Binational Courses is published by its own protagonists in an eBook compiled by Pereira Dinis and Moura De Mello (2015); the publication includes a contribution by Asconavieta Da Silva and Souza Lima, who provide a geopolitical presentation of the experience highlighting that the city ‘Rivera-Santana do Livramento’ is equidistant, by about 600 kilometers, from three economic centers in the South of the continent – Porto Alegre, Montevideo, Buenos Aires – where young people traditionally migrated in search of opportunities to access university studies. This border area is a strategic center of this MERCOSUR region, very appropriate for piloting experiences of regional integration. Laws have been promulgated by the respective parliaments (of Uruguay, in Montevideo, and of Brazil, in Brasilia) that declared these cities as ‘symbolic [...] of the integration of MERCOSUR’; however, this information is not public knowledge, or at least has not had much impact on any area of the Uruguayan government in comparison with the repercussions and announcements in the press from the Brazilian government.

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

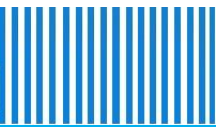
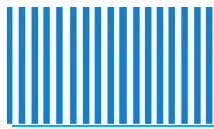
Although several documents pertaining to bilateral agreements have been located – including the ‘**Agreement on linked border localities of Argentina, Brazil and Uruguay**’, experiences in the field have revealed different levels of convergence in the HE sector. The first stage of the study delivers a map of cases, a description of open data and an acknowledgment of difficulties involved in the comparative study due, more than anything, to the asymmetries of the cases. For these reasons, methodological adjustments had to be made

to deliver a study of multiple cases of democratization policies of HE in border cities. Also, a comparative study of accounts of the actors involved in these policies has been started.

At the time of writing, interviews are being conducted with key informants of border policies of the Federal University of Pampa (Unipampa), Jaguarão campus (linked to Río Branco / Uruguay); Santana do Livramento (linked to Rivera / Uruguay); Uruguaina (linked to Paso de los Libres / Argentina); Itaquí (linked to Alvear / Argentina) and São Borja (linked to Santo Tomé / Argentina). The aims of these interviews are to investigate the effects of institutional establishments on the educational trajectories of new-entry students and to study the trajectories of groups of individuals with border identity. With this set of studies, we expect to obtain bases for formulating ‘binationality’ as a new concept that differs from international or transnational in the fields of Law, Public Administration, Politics and International Relations.

It is not without reason that most significant progress in convergences has been achieved in Brazil, since it is the country of the MERCOSUR bloc that has exercised leadership in recent decades. Therefore, it is consistent that Brazil is the country that has paid special attention to frontier issues within its political agenda. The experiences of cross-border cooperation between Brazil and Uruguay preceed the creation of blocks, as this study has found that binational cooperation goes beyond the institutionalization of MERCOSUR. In any case, they were strengthened with the approval in 2002 of the **New Agenda for Cooperation and Cross-Border Development**; in the interviews conducted, it has become clear that the highest degree of progress in this policy has been at the Brazil/Uruguay border and that growing participation of local actors in cross-border negotiations is recurrent. According to interviewee accounts, there are also coincidences regarding how this may be due to new participation spaces created since 2002. In these spaces, different categories of border administrators – together with other local actors – participate to discuss and convey proposals to the Ministers of Foreign Affairs and Education, who, in turn, participate in the RAN. In almost all of the interviews, there is a perception that since 2004 **local participation in border policies** was enabled with the creation of meetings of border committees prior to the meetings of the RAN.

Currently, new challenges present themselves. Some local and national interviewees from Uruguay and Brazil envisaged new problems. They are currently concerned with the recognition of binational degrees that allows professional practice in Brazilian territory. A threat is posed by professional associations in Brazil, since permission to practice requires a process that progresses at a very slow pace, demonstrating a new problem of study: the coexistence of bilaterally agreed public policies (backed by multilateral agreements) with private interests of corporations. It is interesting to note that difficulties impinging on professional practice in other countries had already been pointed out in the 1990s – by experts in comparative studies on HE in Latin America –, when it was suggested that different situations and mechanisms existed in the region regarding professional practice, with the



operation of professional councils, albeit with different structures, in Argentina and Brazil but no equivalent in Paraguay and in Uruguay.

Along the borders, in general – and, particularly, in the co-urbanized borders – historically homogenous national public policies have prevailed that place these communities in a difficult situation, hindering potential social advances with bureaucratic obstacles of a growingly exacerbated nationalism. Pointing to progress in constructing public education policies for border regions helps to motivate changes in attitudes and decision-making by governments regarding the opportunities of citizens in transnational contexts.

In the cases studied, border policies for the democratization of access to HE coincide with what we've called 'new convergence formats'. Historically, in linked borders cities – in which two States are present/absent – national and nationalist educational policies have prevented thinking about internationalization as an alternative; hence, frontier inhabitants constituted a sector of the population traditionally invisible and excluded by national States in that homogeneous public policies for the entire population of a country constantly reproduced the *status quo*.

In this context, actions of democratization of HE are also actions of internationalization that must occur in a differentiated way from the already studied student and teacher mobilities – conceived by university authorities that were based in the countries' respective capitals – or based upon projects proposed by multilateral organisms made up of countries with strong nationalist rationale. Without a change of paradigm, it would have been impossible to understand the reality of border inhabitants.

Until this century, opportunities to democratize access to tertiary education in regions far from the capitals of each of the countries had not been envisaged, among other reasons, due to the concern with maintaining the quality of educational offers at this level as well as the shortage of human resources willing to move away from the center to the periphery. Already in the current century, we find innovative movements and local actors that manage to plan tertiary courses with teachers and students of both nationalities. Looking beyond borders allowed opening access to HE for 'border students' based in binational cities.

Undoubtedly, there have been efforts of multilateral organizations throughout the last decades to recognize titles, double certifications, mobility of teachers and students, etc .; but the reality of 'border students' requires specific policies that complement top-down policies with a bottom-up approach, allowing non-conventional experiences of internationalization to take place as agreements between universities and binational careers, with the support of bilateral agreements that enable, for example, scholarships to be granted to 'border students' to pursue studies in the other country without the need for migration procedures.

We must also recognize initiatives of universities and the will to integrate local actors in border cities. Even so, it is well known that these convergence initiatives were enabled by pre-existing bilateral agreements. This is the case of Unipampa/RS/Brazil – which was founded with the mission to serve the border of the Campna region in the South of Rio Grande do Sul. This university offers quotas for Argentines and Uruguayans in linked cities. Actions like this can be identified in other Brazilian universities that were created since 2005, which shows the special attention that Brazil pays to the borders of all its states with other countries. However, different strategies and levels of commitment are evidenced amongst local initiatives at each border.

From the comparative analysis of the accounts, a great distinction is being brought to light between meanings given by the national actors of each country and those shared by ‘local / border’ actors involved and committed to this experience. It would seem that two parallel levels of negotiation and dialogue have been maintained in these policies: on the one hand, national authorities of institutions in cooperation; and, on the other hand, actors based on campuses or local headquarters.

By way of conclusion at this stage of the study, we would be in a position to claim that, in places where local actors have been proactive, greater levels of convergence are observed; the paradigmatic case has been the implementation and consolidation of the Binational Technical Courses that were opened at the Federal Institutes across Brazilian borders. However, the project has been more fruitful on the border with Uruguay (UTU/IFSul Convention), so further investigation is needed to understand this phenomenon and to analyse the absence of regulatory frameworks common to the countries involved in the project, as much an obstacle as an opportunity, according to the views local actors hold of these absences.

There seems to be a tension between the limits of university autonomy and decentralization. Differentiated policies for border campi are not always understood by other institutional actors of each university. On the other hand, border university campi maintain relations – to a greater or lesser degree in each case – with other local institutions. It would be necessary to study the levels of acceptance and public recognition of transnational degrees and their real impact in the processes of democratization and internationalization of HE.

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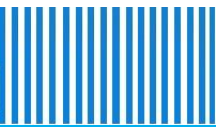
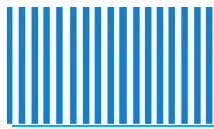
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