



Internationalization of Higher Education: What Underlies the Discourse of UNESCO and OECD*

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ABSTRACT

The internationalization of higher education is an issue and strategy that has become increasingly important in all countries of the world and international organizations linked to higher education. However, the process of internationalization is neither neutral nor are the policies that drive it. The university's traditional mission as a producer and transmitter of knowledge faces challenges linked to the pressure of political and economic power and the orientation of its narratives. The article seeks to reveal what underlies the UNESCO and OECD discourse and how this influences the process of internationalization of higher education and the policies that countries implement in this regard. The conclusion is that, in practice, these discourses are promoting a specific model from university to emulate.

KEYWORDS

Higher education. Internationalization. UNESCO. OECD

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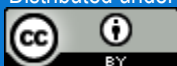
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Internacionalización de la Educación Superior: lo que Subyace en el Discurso de UNESCO y OCDE

RESUMEN

La internacionalización de la educación superior es un tema y una estrategia que ha adquirido creciente importancia en todos los países del mundo y en las organizaciones internacionales vinculadas a la educación superior. Sin embargo, el proceso de internacionalización no es neutro ni las políticas que lo impulsan tampoco lo son, en tanto la misión tradicional de la universidad como productora y transmisora de conocimiento enfrenta retos vinculados a la presión del poder político y económico y a la orientación de sus narrativas. El artículo trata de develar qué subyace en el discurso de UNESCO y de OCDE y como ello influye en el proceso de internacionalización de la educación superior y en las políticas que al respecto implementan los países. La conclusión es que, en la práctica, estos discursos están promoviendo un modelo específico de universidad a emular.

PALABRAS CLAVE

Educación superior. Internacionalización. OCDE. UNESCO.

Internacionalização da Educação Superior: O que Está Subjacente ao Discurso da UNESCO e da OCDE

RESUMO

A internacionalização do ensino superior é um tema e uma estratégia que tem se tornado cada vez mais importante em todos os países do mundo e nas organizações internacionais vinculadas ao ensino superior. No entanto, o processo de internacionalização não é neutro, nem as políticas que o promovem, uma vez que a tradicional missão da universidade como produtora e transmissora de conhecimento enfrenta desafios ligados à pressão do poder político e econômico e à orientação de as narrativas de seus membros. O artigo tenta desvendar o que está subjacente ao discurso da UNESCO e da OCDE e como ele influencia o processo de internacionalização do ensino superior e as políticas que os países implementam a esse respeito. A conclusão é que, na prática, esses discursos estão promovendo um modelo específico de universidade a ser emulado.

PALAVRAS CHAVE

Educação superior. Internacionalização. OCDE. UNESCO.

Introduction

Internationalization of higher education, as an issue and a strategy, has become increasingly important all over the world and in international organizations linked to higher education.

In European Countries, the United States, and Canada, this process has been prompted for decades by institutions of higher education and by governments based on policies deliberately aimed at implementing and supporting internationalization of this sector. Such policies have also been promoted by international organizations such as the European Community, UNESCO, and the International Association of Universities. In Latin America, where recognition of its importance has increased in recent years, the process is being driven by the institutions on their own, as well as by governments, and also promoted by UNESCO IESALC.

However, the process of internationalization is not neutral and neither are the policies that drive it.

The university's traditional mission as producer and transmitter of knowledge faces challenges linked to pressures arising from political and economic power and the orientation of their narratives. This has a significant impact on the fact that the implementation of policies to promote internationalization has been apparently different, because it depends greatly on governments, institutions, and international organizations. Nevertheless, in this essay I seek to reveal the implicit meaning behind the underlying discourse that supports these policies and its influence on higher education internationalization processes implemented by different countries

Academic mobility of students and faculty members is the most relevant internationalization strategy, in the sense that conventions between institutions, cooperation networks, and institutional recognition generally involve the mobility of students and faculty. Taking this into consideration, in the first part, I include a brief description of internationalization of higher education with special reference to academic mobility from the perspective of the different levels involved: the institutional level, the governmental level, and, finally, the level of international organizations.

This is followed by a brief reference to the general guidelines of international organizations such as OECD (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development) and UNESCO. Then, I analyze, firstly, the underlying meanings in the discourse of the 'neoliberal' model for internationalization of higher education, backed mainly by the above organizations and by the World Bank (WB), and, secondly, the opposing view—that can be labelled 'comprehensive'—promoted mainly by some international organizations such as UNESCO IESALC, which is accepted and followed by most of the countries that belong to the United Nations Organization (ONU).

Finally, I draw conclusions involving the university model that is really being promoted in these discourses as a model to be emulated.

Internationalization and Mobility

The international dimension of higher education has always been present, almost since the origins of the university in the eleventh century, and more visibly so since the onset of the thirteenth century. This ‘international’¹ calling was expressed in: the mobility of students and teachers among the different European territories, the licence to teach throughout Christendom –granted by the Pope–, and the production and transmission of knowledge without geographical borders, as its space encompassed the Western Christian world.

Since the last decades of the twentieth century, academic mobility—which could be considered the clearest evidence of internationalization— has become a systemic condition. Its insertion into ‘academic capitalism’ (SLAUGHTER; LESLIE, 1997) and the growing expansion of higher education in the world have turned it into a key element in the international competition for the production of knowledge and technological transfer (KIM, 2017). This has completely overturned the concept of internationalization used in the previous history of universities.

In agreement with the geopolitical dynamics of the world, the predominant tendency that has characterized this process, especially from the last couple of decades of the previous century and the first two of the present one, has been a positive flow for developed European countries and North America, the main ‘recipients’ of academics and foreign students. This does not happen by chance, as they are also the countries that attach the greatest importance to the production and spread of knowledge through research networks and high-impact scientific publications.

At the same time, Southern countries with less favourable conditions for the production of knowledge and with scientific publications of lesser international impact, become ‘expellers’ of their own talents causing the exit of teachers and students, often driven by the search for better conditions of life and professional development.

Nonetheless, this major tendency has changed slightly as South-to-South exchanges grow stronger as a result of regional measures such as MERCOSUR and new poles of attraction rising in emerging countries (GREDIAGA KURI; GÉRARD, 2019). The impact, however, has not been meaningful enough to modify the predominant South-to-North flow in a substantial way.

¹According to García Guadilla (2004) this process could be considered interterritorial rather than international, because it has to do with student exchange between universities from different geographical spaces and not between National States.

The emergence of this relatively new view of internationalization of higher education can be attributed, among other causes, to the impact of globalization on international relations and the participation of nations in globalized economy, driven mainly by the technological development of communications. This globalization process “...has become a technological system...that has articulated the whole planet in a network flow which combines strategically dominant functions and units from all areas of human activity.” (CASTELLS, 2000, p.5). Through time, this has changed from a reactive process to a proactive one as it involves the economical survival of countries in the context of society and the economy of knowledge.

In such context, today’s conception of internationalization of higher education is different and responds to strategies and discourses defined by institutions as well as governments and international entities, although its empirical manifestation is similar, to a certain extent (mobility, exchanges, and cooperation agreements).

Thus, the formulation of policies for internationalization of higher education at any level —institutional, national, or international— relies, whether explicitly or not, in discourses or narratives that assign theoretical content to the definition of policy goals and, at the same time, justify the choice of certain internationalization strategies. This, however, does not imply that the choice of said strategies and objectives is always consistent with what is proposed in the discourses or narratives.

Different Levels of Internacionalization of Higher Education

In the context we have briefly described above, internationalization of higher education can be approached from different levels or dimensions; it can be conceived as: a) a process that takes place in the daily life of institutions as a result of implementation of institutional policies; b) as a policy developed by the State; c) as policy guidelines promoted by international entities, and d) as discourse, open or implicit, in each entity².

From the point of view of university institutions, in actual practice, internationalization of higher education has been considered a strategy with different objectives. On the one hand, as universities participate more in the different mechanisms of international insertion, the institutions add points to the indicators of prestige and will achieve higher positions and visibility in international rankings. The sum of all students and faculty coming from other countries, the creation of networks and agreements with foreign universities, joint research programs, and the spread of new knowledge with the participation of academicians from universities and institutions all over the world, helps in ranking

²Due to the scope of the essay, I limit myself to reviewing the discourse without pretending to make an exhaustive ‘discourse analysis’ from a methodological point of view, bearing in mind that the narrative permeates directly or indirectly other dimensions such as: the internationalization process, institutional and State policies, and policy guidelines established by international organizations.

universities more favourably in the competitive context of academic market. The position the institution is able to achieve in these rankings not only affects the assignment of functioning resources strongly, but also the distribution of internal financing.

On the other hand, any of the above types of internationalization becomes an additional source of income for universities, and a very significant one in certain cases. To a degree, this guarantees their functioning, as the global tendency is to reduce financial resources from the State for higher education programs. In addition, graduate programs are a great incentive for foreign students and in many occasions this incentive relies on the possibility of student financial help. In the end, this becomes a good source of low cost ‘workmanship’ as support personnel for instruction and research activities.

From the point of view of the States, the drive towards internationalization of higher education has two advantages. On the one hand, it fosters the possibility of economical growth, as it promotes potential business near university campuses with the increased number of foreign students and Faculty from other countries, as well as the necessary provision of resources for research³ and even maintenance of infrastructure and equipment; as a result, this dynamic potentially increases job opportunities and commercial exchange. On the other hand, governments support internationalization of higher education as an additional way of promoting their countries, culture, and values, and even their political ideology.

This process is highly recommendable for international organizations⁴ —the main source of promotional discourse for internationalization of higher education— in order to promote solidarity among nations and free exchange of knowledge⁵ (UVALIĆ-TRUMBIC, 2009) or for the promotion of free market and globalization⁶ (AMARAL; NEAVE, 2009).

In both cases the discourse has a manifest impact on the policy guidelines of the States that belong to these organizations, and even for those that, without being members, adhere to their statements on higher education and, particularly, on internationalization of this sector.

The Hegemony of Neoliberal Discourse

For a better perspective of what is implicit in the discourses or narratives from different actors involved in internationalization of higher education as an institutional process and policy, it is of great importance to bear in mind that neoliberal discourse has been the dominant socioeconomic model for the last decades. This paradigm helped to dismantle guidelines and policies generally associated to a Keynesian conception of the State and its

³These resources frequently come from international organizations or institutions in other countries, which financially support research activities.

⁴For the purpose of this paper, I will take UNESCO and OECD as the most representative cases of international organizations with more references to higher education in their documents.

⁵For the UNESCO

⁶For the OCDE

role in the economy, which was the basis for the Welfare State and its policies for income distribution, market regulation, and the function of the State as the provider of health and education, among other matters.

As a counterpart to this Keynesian version, the discourse of ‘neoliberalism’ stresses the idea of globalization as the growth of economical activity without frontiers. Its main manifestation is the constant movement of tangible and intangible goods and services—including property rights— through commerce, investment, and the flow of people through migration (SANTIAGO; TREMBLAY; BASRI; ARNAL, 2008).

This process needs assistance from the State through the promotion and creation of favourable conditions for the free exchange of services and goods. These conditions refer to privileges for private activity, competition between individual and/or collective actors regulated only by the market, and a reduction of the role of the State to that of moderator of tensions that arise from market play. In synthesis, with neoliberalism, the functions of the State are redefined with the promotion of global markets —characteristic of the new economy— through stimulation of privatization, commercialization, deregulation and ‘re-regulation’ (SLAUGHTER; RHOADES, 2004).

From the political perspective, the concept of democracy is replaced by market practices and the concept of citizen by individual consumer and economical actor (‘entrepreneur’). Thus, democracy is defined more and more as “possessive individualism in the context of a (supposedly) free market economy.” (APPLE, 2011, p. 21).

Finally, it is important to point out that underlying neoliberalism there is a view of the world based solely on economy, which subordinates all other aspects of social life to the economical aspect. As a consequence, it favours the establishment of an apolitical technocracy (SCHOLTE, 2005) as a warrant of efficiency, a highly valued element in this conception.

The strengthening of the neoliberal perspective in the world has emphasized the role of the World Trade Organization or the International Monetary Fund, while overshadowing, to some extent, the role of the UNESCO among the organizations of global governance (SCHOLTE, 2005).

Despite this dominant discourse and the actual presence of conditions imposed by globalization, the UNESCO coexists with several forms of State and government, even some that identify themselves as social democrats or socialists. Such is the case of Cuba, where private companies have been allowed to take part in their integration to this globalization process, based on the development of tourism in the island (SCHOLTE, 2005).

Thus, against neoliberal discourse, the UNESCO does not offer a counter-discourse that could be considered and alternative in terms of economics. Their propositions are limited to ‘conventions’ based on “...individual agendas and a combination of *ad hoc* decisions that

result in a relatively unstable, extremely complex, hard, and slow process when many parts are involved in the discussion” (BARBLAN, 2004, p.53). Their proposals, not only those pertaining to higher education, are supposedly based on a humanistic view that values solidarity among nations and peoples over political and economical interests of specific groups or social classes.

The OECD and the General Agreement on Trade in Services

Before analyzing the specific discourse on internationalization of higher education, it is important to refer briefly to the documents issued by international organizations, since they are the original background for the position held by these organizations on the subject.

In this sense, the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) issued by the World Trade Organization (WTO) (WORLD TRADE ORGANIZATION, 1994) to lay down general rules for the liberation of multilateral trade in services, is an important source to support the position held by the OECD pertaining internationalization of higher education⁷. According to this organization, the GATS is undoubtedly one of the most important achievements of multilateral trade diplomacy (OECD, 2002).

The agreement is grounded, among other things, on the fact that in post-industrial world economy, services dominate the economic activity of countries and, therefore, their free exchange benefits national economies directly as it facilitates and promotes innovation, efficiency, and quality of the services offered. At the same time, the agreement assumes that free market yields the best opportunities for the choice of products required by consumers, according to their quality and among a great variety of offers, based on complete information available on the products.

For the realization of free trade in services, the GATS proposed four modes of exchange: trade across the border, consumption abroad, commercial presence, and physical movement of people (CHAN SÁNCHEZ, 2004). The main underlying principles in the Agreement on Trade in Services are: liberalization, efficiency, and competition (OECD, 2002).

Two relevant matters must be emphasized for their implications on higher education: (1) the GATS involves a group of services that are exempt (WORLD TRADE ORGANIZATION, 1994); these are the services provided by governmental authorities, among which State-financed education, because it is neither commercial nor subject to competence with other providers (KNIGHT, 2004); (2) the recognition of the Most Favoured Nation in Article II of the agreement (WORLD TRADE ORGANIZATION, 1994).

⁷ I have chosen this document as the main reference to tackle the OECD position and its promotion of the neoliberal model of Higher Education, because it summarizes the main guidelines that have particularly had an impact on national and international higher education policies.

The Declaration of the UNESCO

Unlike the WTO and the OECD, which are basically of an economic nature, the UNESCO is an organization which scope of action is ‘education, science, and culture’ and its purpose is to achieve peace through international cooperation.

The most important principles of UNESCO, set since its foundation and periodically ratified by member States, define the position and role of this international organization. The principles emphasize that the foundations for peace among nations are generated in the minds of men, and also that peace based solely on political and economical agreement among governments does not imply the unanimous support of the peoples. Therefore, peace must be

...grounded on the intellectual and moral solidarity of humankind... [consequently, the Member States] ... resolve to intensify and develop relations among their peoples, so that they can understand each other better and develop a more precise and true knowledge of their respective lives (UNESCO, 2018)

According to these principles, higher education is one of the main aspects in the objectives of the strategies suggested to governments by the UNESCO. Thus, since its creation, one of the points included in its resolutions has been the importance assigned to the role of international relations, among the activities recommended for the higher education sector, always bearing in mind the principle of international solidarity (UVALIĆ-TRUMBIĆ, 2009).

A Brief Reflection on Internacionalization of Higher Education in the Discourse

On the matter of internationalization of higher education, the two prevailing and most generalized discourses are the ‘neoliberal’ discourse found in the GATS and the guidelines issued by the OECD, and the ‘comprehensive’ discourse found in UNESCO documents.

Before analysing each one separately, it is important to point out that both discourses include categories such as: globalization, mundialization, and integration, but in each one, the meaning and scope depend on the interests or objectives, stated or else, of those who propose it.

Another element in common is an ‘idyllic’ narrative of brotherhood between peoples that generally lacks empirical reference and does not occur in daily practice. Special mention is needed of the fact that, in recent years, this ‘bucolic’ narrative contrasts with manifestations of exaltation of xenophobia and nationalism that have become increasingly frequent and widespread in different world contexts

The Neoliberal Proposal of the OECD

In the discourse of the OECD, it is established that the main goals of higher education that must be guaranteed by the State, as ‘the safeguard of public interest’, aim at the efficient use of public resources on the part of institutions, combining institutional goals with the broader economical and social goals of the country (OECD, 2002).

To achieve this purpose, the institutional goals include several suggestions⁸: develop a strategic and coherent perspective on higher education, establish cost-sharing between the State and the students as a principle for financing higher education, develop a culture of quality and emphasize mechanisms to ensure it, evaluate the origins and extension of equity matters, use higher education to enhance internationalization of research and development (R&D), give autonomy to institutions on the management of human resources, coordinate policies that relate higher education to the labour market, and **develop internationalization of the university campus**⁹ (OECD, 2008). Based on these general objectives of higher education, the implementation of internationalization is feasible through the General Agreement of Commerce in Services (GATS).

For a clearer idea of what is involved in the goal of developing internationalization of the university campus, I go back to some of the key aspects of the agreement and terms where there are clearly evident implications concerning the higher education model proposed and the role that internationalization plays in it.

In the first place, we must point out the incorporation of higher education as a tradable service that is subject to the rules of international market. From this perspective, both the formative process and the production of knowledge are subject, not to the nature of the university as the guarantor of plurality and preservation of scientific and cultural values, but to the rules of the market and the promotion of free competition between institutions and between individuals. The criteria for competition favour quality as a function of efficacy and efficiency in the use of resources for the functioning of institutions, which is evidently linked to the productivity issue. In this sense, quality depends on the measurement of results achieved with the resources available. Briefly stated, this means the number of students that complete the program in the allotted time for a given cohort, in the case of study programs, or the amount or papers published in high-impact international publications and patents generated, in the case of research.

Under such conditions, financing must be shared between the State and the students, who, according to this conception, are considered clients that ‘pay’ for a service they expect to be of good quality¹⁰.

⁸I will only refer to the aspects I consider more relevant for the development of argumentation in the essay.

⁹ Highlight by the author

¹⁰In the case of students/clients, quality is evaluated based on the cost involved for them or their families to culminate their studies in the required time and enter the labour market. In addition, teachers are considered

Thus, students stop being subjects in search of integral formation to become clients who choose the institution based on quality criteria imposed by the competition for control of the academic market, a competition that is stimulated by the State itself with the promotion of market liberalization. This view of the student as a client asks for a redefinition of the educational process and the conditions where it takes place (HUNTER, 2013).

In this context of progressive liberalization of restrictions that already existed, to a higher or lesser degree, before the approval of the agreement, and which has increased later on, privatization of higher education takes place backed by the State as it lets go of its function as a service provider and the role is taken over by private initiative. In this sense, although the GATS states that education is included as an ‘exempt service delivered by governmental authorities’, it opens the door for discussion on the role of higher education financed by the State, but which is also asked to redefine its funding and find alternative sources of income¹¹, under the growing pressure on the part of governments with the progressive reduction of funds to universities. As a result, in so far as education is considered a marketable service and the State loses control over it, to the same extent, exemption from participating in the competition for market control is no longer a condition.

In terms more directly related to internationalization of higher education viewed as a service, the GATS states that it should be marketed according to the four modes of exchange: across the borders (distance education, e-learning, virtual universities), consumption abroad (students that move from one country to another), commercial presence (local branches or satellite campuses, twin institutions, franchise agreements with local institutions), and physical presence of persons (faculty and researchers working abroad) (KNIGHT, 2004).

Strongly linked to the above, another important aspect of the agreement, because of its implications concerning higher education as a tradable service, is the Most Favoured Nation provision (MFN)¹² according to which all commercial partners must be given the same treatment and under the same conditions. In terms of higher education, this means that any provider of educational services can establish a branch or extension of its campus in another country (KNIGHT, 2004).

Finally, although the GATS does not mention directly the implications in terms of labour force, bearing in mind that one of the challenges to face and the advice of the OECD is to give more autonomy to institutions in managing their human resources, there has been a reinterpretation of work conditions in institutions of higher education with the application of these neoliberal measures in the treatment of researchers and faculty members.

service providers and their work is guided by market principles where “the client (student) is always right” (TURK, 2017).

¹¹In this case, it refers not only to the contribution of students and their families, but also to that of companies and other organizations, either through financing research or any other form of participation in the financing of higher education.

¹² The MFN principle is considered an unconditional obligation on the part of member countries.

These actions —which supposedly aim at productivity, efficient use of resources, and quality of higher education— highlight the lack of recognition of the work of people subject to these precarious conditions. Unfavourable conditions of (temporal) contracts have become the general practice mainly in order to cover teaching needs, as has the use of graduate students as research assistants also under very unfavourable hiring conditions, low salaries, and lack of socioeconomic benefits (TURK, 2017).

In summary, according to these statements, the characteristics of the university model in this neoliberal proposal are the following: managerial criteria, intensification of work, evaluation mechanisms, students as consumers/clients/'targets' in the university market, privatization, and reduction in the control and interference from the State.

In addition, 'the ideological construction' of this discourse (AMARAL; NEAVE, 2009) is supported by the formal declaration of the organization on the need to make quality demands and market needs meet, coordinating labour market and higher education policies in order to fulfil the four missions of the university: the formation of human capital through teaching, the construction of knowledge through research and development, the spread and use of knowledge through interaction with users, and the preservation of knowledge between generations (OECD, 2008).

From this perspective, internationalization of higher education is considered another strategy for strengthening the model and also for quality criteria, based on the underlying 'ideological construction' of the dominant neoliberal discourse.

In the proposed convergence between national higher education policies and globalization (AMARAL; NEAVE, 2009), the OECD maintains its pragmatic and economist discourse on the impact of globalization, although it enhances its positive values in the sense that it supports the achievement of a consensus on the goals and objectives of higher education and the building of good relations among the actors involved (government, institutions, students, faculty, private sector, and civil society) with the general purpose of contributing to development.

In terms of internationalization of higher education, specifically, this involves reconciling national strategies in view of the need to adapt the country's specific circumstances and "maximize' the benefits of internationalization in the national context" (OECD, 2008).

The Proposal of the UNESCO

Ever since its creation, the UNESCO has considered higher education among its priorities. In this sense, it includes in the objectives for action: the development of an international organization of universities, the recognition of the role of universities in international relations, and the collaboration between universities and the organization (UVALIĆ-TRUMBIC, 2009).

In 1998, the UNESCO held the World Congress of Higher Education in Paris, which is one of the most relevant events as to the consolidation and development of their proposal for this educational sector. The final document resulting from the event —“World Declaration on Higher Education in the XXI Century: Vision and Action, and Framework for Priority Action for Change and Development of Higher Education” (UNESCO, 1998) — recognizes the sustained increase in the demand for higher education programs from the second decade of the twentieth century, as well as the importance of higher education for socio-cultural and economic development in the new millennium and the challenges involved:

... financing, equality of conditions in access to and during studies, better staff recruitment, formation based on competences, improvement and preservation of teaching quality, research and services, relevance of educational curricula, employment opportunities for graduates, establishment of efficient cooperation agreements, and equality in access to the benefits of international cooperation (UNESCO, 1998).

The answer to these challenges, according to the UNESCO, begins with the recognition that every person has the right to higher education in conditions of equality and on their own merits¹³; that education is the cornerstone for exercising human rights, democracy, and peace, therefore, “the values and ideals of a culture of peace” must prevail; and that international cooperation and exchange are important mechanisms to respond to the challenges of the new millennium (UNESCO, 1998).

Both documents summarize these principles in the following way: the broadening of its scope as a necessary condition for the development of countries; the reform of higher education at the systemic and institutional levels to promote quality, relevance, and efficiency; ensuring public and private funding to provide for the resources needed for adequate functioning of institutions; and, finally, the proposal on which the aforementioned is grounded: to consider **higher education as a public good**¹⁴ on which the State maintains responsibility and function of the first order (UVALIĆ-TRUMBIC, 2009).

In this sense and emphasizing aspects of the declaration directly related to the issue of internationalization, it is important to point out that no special reference is made in the document to the improvement of the teaching staff; therefore, it is necessary to assign more importance to international experience for those who are already part of the staff as well as for aspirants. On the other hand, the presence of the international dimension in higher education is emphasized, and this not only includes academic mobility, but also the exchange of knowledge, the development of interactive systems and international research teams, as well as international research projects (UNESCO, 1998). This must all be based on “the principle of solidarity and a real association among higher education institutions all over the world...” (UNESCO, 1998). Finally, the Declaration also asks to “... put a stop to the ‘brain drain’...[and] address the creation of an environment that attracts and keeps qualified human capital...” (UNESCO, 1998).

¹³ According to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), the Convention against Discrimination in Education (1960), and based on parameters established since the creation of the UNESCO.

¹⁴ Highlight by the author

The Second World Conference on Higher Education held in Paris, 2009, was the culmination of several regional meetings (six preparatory meetings) that shaped the consensus among representatives of member countries of the organization around the final communiqué issued: “The new dynamics of higher education and research for social change and development”, which recognized the relevance of the Declaration of the first World Conference and the main basic principles included in the document that would guide higher education policies, as well as the recommendations for their implementation on the part of countries signing the declaration. In principle, the document ratifies that “higher education as a public good is the responsibility of all the parties concerned, particularly of governments” (UNESCO, 2010). In a similar way, it highlights once more the need to broaden access on the grounds of equity, relevance, and quality, pointing out at the same time the need for systems of evaluation and accreditation of studies in order to guarantee the quality of higher education, as well as the promotion of a culture of quality in the institutions. In terms of internationalization, the Communiqué of the Second World Conference emphasized the importance of international cooperation based on “...the solidarity and mutual respect in the promotion of values, humanism, and intercultural dialogue.” (UNESCO, 2010).

It is necessary to point out that, in contrast with the Declaration of 1998, the Communiqué issued in 2009 recognizes the growing process of cross-border higher education, understood as a subset of internationalization that “...refers to the movement of people, programs, providers, curricula, projects, research, and tertiary (or higher) education across national jurisdictional borders” (OECD; THE WORLD BANK, 2010: 15). The Communiqué stresses its importance “...as long it offers quality teaching, promotes academic values [and] maintains its relevance...” (UNESCO, 2010)¹⁵.

On the other hand, a specific characteristic of this second Conference was the evident confrontation between delegates representing developed countries and those of developing nations or less favoured countries in Latin America and Africa, on the issue of higher education as a public non-tradable good—the position held by the latter—and those who held that education should be declared a service.

Finally, the result of this conflict was that, even if the concept of higher education as a public good was preserved, it was tempered¹⁶ through several other arguments of an ambiguous nature. From this ambiguity we can infer that the proposal of the UNESCO not only does not reject a university model that could be considered ‘neoliberal’, but it also leaves the door open for adopting several of its features, even when the principle of higher education as a public good is professed in the discourse that justifies national and institutional policies.

¹⁵ This poses substantial questions, and their answers depend on the concepts of quality and relevance that guide the existence of such type of programs from other countries.

¹⁶ An important precedent had already taken place at the closure of the World Conference on Higher Education +5—in which an attempt was made to follow-up on the 1998 Conference—where the General Director for Education of the UNESCO stated that “commerce in higher education is not going to wipe out centuries of academic tradition, but academicians must understand its implications.” (UNESCO, 2004: 128).

In Conclusion

The presentation of the main issues that characterize the proposals of the OECD and the UNESCO on the matter of internationalization of higher education, leads to several conclusions that reinforce the idea that both proposals start from the importance this educational level has in facing the challenges of the knowledge society and sustainable development, amidst the undeniable process of globalization. Although we could consider that the objectives of both proposals are different, they share the common purpose of expanding the process of internationalization of higher education to all countries.

Nevertheless, in spite of the declarations and good intentions of the UNESCO, in practice, the process of internationalization of higher education at the different levels involved emphasizes factors related to the proposals of the neoliberal model.

Thus, the mobility of academicians and administrators in order to gain international experience continues to be predominantly South-to-North, and the production of scientific knowledge favours results obtained under the canons of the main trend in science, being that its centers of scientific and technological innovation and production are also located, fundamentally, in the North. On the other hand, English continues to be the universal language of science and its role as the language for scientific and technological communication is undeniable nowadays; it is required even by publications in the Southern hemisphere and it also constitutes an indicator of quality¹⁷ for the registration of said publications and journals in international databases, such as *Scopus*, for example.

The elements described here point to the existence of a university model that, in practice, is oriented towards the market and shows some of its key references: implementation of mechanisms that make cross-border education viable, positioning of institutions in university world rankings, and implementation of institutional evaluation and accreditation processes, preferably international, which are generally established from quantitative results that don't take into account other indicators such as social relevance and equity in access, for example.

In this way, even though both orientations may seem contradictory at first glance, my hypothesis is that at the different decision levels (national and institutional) the tendency is to adopt the discourse of solidarity, especially in Latin America, but in everyday practice, higher education internationalization policies are of a more pragmatic nature. This reveals the existence of a fairly explicit discourse, in which both positions ultimately coincide on a model of university and on the role played by internationalization of higher education, which responds to the hegemonic trend identified as neoliberal.

¹⁷ Although the standards normally established by databases do not necessarily impose that English must be the language of publication, it is understood that, to the extent that the communications are written in that language, the scope and impact of the journal will be much greater.

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