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Internationalization of higher education in times of regional movements: interview with Marilia Morosini

Internacionalização da educação superior em tempos de movimentos regionais: entrevista com Marilia Morosini


La internacionalización de la educación superior en tiempos de movimientos regionales: entrevista con Marilia Morosini



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Interviewer (Elisabete Monteiro de Aguiar Pereira) introduces the interviewee (Marília Morosini)

Prof. Dr. Marília da Costa Morosini is a highly respected intellectual in Brazil, particularly in the field of education, with a focus on higher education. She has published numerous excellent papers, conducted extensive research projects, supervised postgraduate students, and lectured at numerous national and international events. Her ideas are dynamic, as evidenced in this interview obtained by RIESup.

The author's current works include the Encyclopedia of University Pedagogy, the Glossary of University Pedagogy (700 pages), the International Encyclopedia of Higher Education for Portuguese-speaking Countries (oral), the Enciclopédia Brasileira de Educação Superior (EBES), and the BEHE Brazilian Encyclopedia of Higher Education (EDUCA). She is also the editor of the PRONEX/CNPq/FAPERGS series on Higher Education. Prof. Marília C. Morosini is a CNPq 1A researcher and is ranked among the top 100 most influential researchers in education in Latin America, according to the AD Scientific Index for 2022 and 2023 (H=33; H10=80, 5,156 citations). Additionally, she is one of the 10 most cited authors on the internationalization of higher education in Scopus/Elsevier from 2011-2020.

Prof. Dr. Marília Morosini (Interviewee):

I'm very grateful for the invitation to do this interview. Not only because I consider RIESUP to be the only qualified Brazilian magazine on Higher Education and a pioneer in this field in the country, but above all because of the challenge of the questions Beth posed. And it couldn't have been any different.

The questions were difficult to answer, and both Elisabete Monteiro de Aguiar Pereira and Maria de Lourdes Pinto de Almeida are aware that I received them in September 2023 but only replied in April 2024, approximately 6–7 months later. This delay was not only due to a busy schedule, but also because the scientific field of higher education and internationalization is currently changing. Additionally, this period coincided with a time of socio-economic and political turmoil in Latin America, which was interconnected with global events. This is a time marked by the intensification of nationalism, border closures, increased warfare, the rise of dictators, and a lack of acceptance of mediation and the defense of universal values. However, it is also a time for strengthening regionalism. The World Conference on Higher Education - CMES (Barcelona 22) proposed a roadmap, while the Regional Conference on Higher Education - CRES+5 (Brasília, 2024) builds on the Regional Conference on Higher Education - CRES2018 (Córdoba) to evaluate and propose perspectives for higher education and internationalization.

So I waited for that meeting to answer the questions proposed, and perhaps I wasn't able to answer all the doubts raised. Oh, I've regrouped some questions, Elisabete Monteiro de Aguiar Pereira. But let's go!

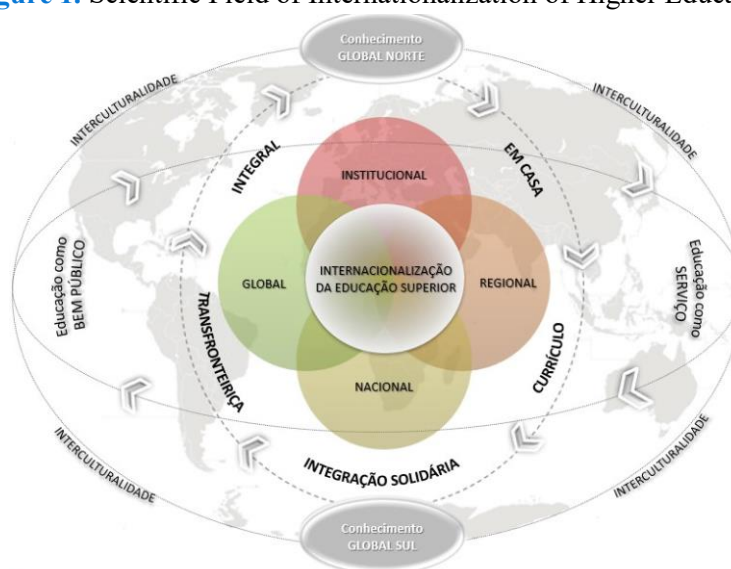
Prof. Dr. Elisabete Pereira, (interviewer):

The impact of 21st-century changes on political geography, economic sectors, the social world, the technological universe, and the educational field. Specifically, the focus is on how higher education reflects these changes in educational policies, with internationalization being a topic of debate. As a specialist in this area, what are your views on internationalization policies in Brazilian and Latin American universities?

Interviewee:

To answer this question, it is important to understand that internationalization cannot be viewed in isolation within a specific territory, such as Latin America. It is shaped by various factors, including global, regional, national, and institutional influences, as well as the actors involved in each of these levels. These factors interact and propose policies based on their respective principles. The field is illustrated in the figure below, which was originally published in the chapter on internationalization in EBES - Enciclopédia de Brasileira de Educação Superior (2021).

Figure 1. Scientific Field of Internationalization of Higher Education



Source: Dallacorte, Morosini. EBES, 2021.

According to Bourdieu's (1983) notion of the scientific field, the conception, and practice of higher education in Latin America, and consequently internationalization, tends to lean towards the left. This means that higher education is generally viewed as a public good.

These concepts are based on propositions reaffirmed at various Regional Conferences on Higher Education in Latin America and the Caribbean (CRESAL&C), which were promoted by IESALC/UNESCO. These concepts were also discussed in preparatory meetings and later presented at the World Conference on Higher Education.

In this trajectory, the university is positioned as the center of knowledge production, with the process of internationalization highlighted as a key component of its relevance in today's society. It is affirmed that more internationalization and contextualization are necessary.

The final declaration of CRES2018 reinforced regionalization.

In the region, it is important to promote internationalization for inter-institutional cooperation based on a supportive relationship between equals. The focus should be on South-South cooperation and regional integration. (...) The aim is to promote intercultural dialogue while respecting the unique characteristics and identities of the participating countries. This can be achieved by fostering inter-university networks and strengthening national capacities through inter-institutional collaboration and interaction with academic peers at regional and international levels. This statement aims to promote the circulation and appropriation of knowledge as a strategic social good, favoring the sustainable development of the region and its countries (IESALC, 2018).

CRES+5 (Brasilia, 2024) sought to evaluate the proposed work plan after CRES2018.

the aim is to create a scenario conducive to significant development as a regional bloc, oriented towards well-being and equity. ...
... we endorse the validity of higher education institutions as a valuable space for building a promising future based on full citizenship, social justice, sustainable development and regional integration.

CRES+5 brought together around 1500 people, including students, researchers, administrative and educational technicians, and associations. It was promoted by the Ministry of Education in a partnership between SESU and CAPES. In this context, after reaffirming the broader scope of his concept of integration as well as the concept of internationalization, he said

Promoting emancipatory regional integration can be achieved through inter-institutional conventions, student mobility and exchange, as well as academic, technical-administrative, and scientific staff exchange programs. Internationalization

strategies within the country and with other regions of the world can also contribute to this goal.

Regarding an overview of the Latin American context from 2018 to the present, CRES+5 classifies internationalization policies as complex and challenging.

A decline in the political, economic, and social spheres is apparent, significantly impacting higher education in the region. Governments have emerged that openly oppose participatory democracy, autonomy in the acquisition of knowledge to achieve full sovereignty in science and technology, the humanities, culture, and the arts, or even deny fundamental aspects for our future.

Examining Figure 1, which displays the scientific field of internationalization at a regional level, it is evident that in Latin America, there is a trend towards seeking regional integration for the purpose of solidarity and, more recently, emancipation. Looking at globalization more broadly, it differs from the internationalization envisioned by Latin America. This is because it has a mercantilist streak, treating internationalization and higher education as services and commodities, utilizing rankings and comparability for the circulation of diplomas and courses.

At the institutional level, I am optimistic. From the first CRES to the current one, we have evolved significantly in terms of the concept of internationalization. There is a growing perspective that internationalization is crucial for quality and should be pursued.

The interconnections between global, regional, national, and institutional perspectives can be discussed. In Brazil, there are both public and private higher education institutions (HEIs). However, unlike many other Latin American countries, Brazil also has public HEIs that are run by federal, state, and municipal governments, as well as private HEIs. Private HEIs in Brazil can be either for-profit, meaning they prioritize profit, or non-profit, such as confessionals and communities, which are considered public under private law. This complexity hinders Latin American integration by excluding community schools, which are strong in the case of Rio Grande do Sul and could contribute to the integration process.

Having said that, what I'd like to say is that today there is a movement to think about internationalization for Latin America, marked by the movement. Until CRES 2018, the proposed integration was solidarity-based. Now, in the 2018 + 5 CRES, proposals are being added that reinforce regionality and determine an emancipatory focus. Thus, the proposal is for emancipatory regional integration.

Regarding the internationalization policies of Brazilian and Latin American universities, it is important to point out that there is a complexity to the analysis, arising from a lack of knowledge of reality. We don't have a scientific view of all Latin American universities.

I have been following CRES and one of the main proposals is the concept of internationalization as integration in solidarity. Evaluating by research, but not enough because Latin America is complex and unknown, we have noticed that numerous actions of solidarity integration are taking place, but they are not made explicit. In other words, a silent internationalization is already taking place that is not restricted to mobility and/or agreements that are often intentions. To make decisions, we need data and information. And this, as a researcher, I can say - the studies that GIEPES has been analyzing exist reliably for LA. But we still require more data; it could be at a national level, but I think the institutional level will provide us with additional information on what other forms are taking place, with a focus on the South-South, and, with these diagnoses, we can start making feasible decisions.

In Brazil, in terms of national internationalization policy, there is a tendency to take regionality into account, in addition to the traditional countries that I recognize have a powerful contribution due to the scientific and technological development that characterizes them. Thus, policies should not be limited to the traditional countries of the global north, such as the United States, Canada, and the European Union, but should go further, through complementarity with the search for Latin American and South-South internationalization.

And it is from this perspective that I defend the concept of internationalization at home (IaH) as a complement to the prospects of mobility, internationalization of the curriculum (IoC), or comprehensive or integral internationalization. If we limit our understanding of internationalization to physical mobility, we will only appeal to a select few. According to GEOCAPES data, Brazilian universities have had limited success in attracting students from the global north and sending students there. Therefore, face-to-face mobility cannot be the sole focus of internationalization for Brazilian and Latin American universities.

Today, I have noticed that internationalization policies at Brazilian and Latin American universities are expanding our perspectives on the need to implement additional policies, recognitions, and forms of internationalization. This will enable my students to access classes, libraries, and other resources at other universities or higher education institutions, even if they are not physically present at their university.

Interviewer:

Are these policies responding to what is expected for the training of a professional with a broad vision and understanding of multiculturalism for a more integrated world?

Interviewee:

Regarding your question of whether this type of policy that exists today is sufficient to form an understanding of multiculturalism, before answering the question directly, it is

necessary to reaffirm that Brazilian legislation provides the basis for this. For instance, the LDB/96 outlines two primary objectives of education: vocational training and comprehensive student development. This education, which emphasizes living well in society, implies critical interculturality. According to Whalsh (2009) and Clemente (2023), there are different levels of interculturality, ranging from awareness of different cultures to respect for them and critical positioning, which proposes a process of structural understanding and revision. This understanding of interculturality provides a blueprint for society as a political, epistemic, and ethical project aimed at structural and socio-historical change based on joint construction. We live in a multicultural world, but emancipatory global/regional integration takes place from a critical intercultural perspective.

Regarding the specific question, the current internationalization policy fails to fully meet any of these objectives.

In some cases, the concept of internationalization may involve intentional and intercultural aspects. The author previously discussed their understanding of this concept in 2017, based on knowledge from various authors and educational associations, primarily IESALC Unesco.

The process of integrating an international and intercultural dimension into higher education is achieved through interactions and sustained by collaborative networks with developed socio-economic blocs and those that value multiple cultures, differences, places, and times. This process aims to strengthen national scientific capacity with the goal of promoting sustainable development (Morosini, 2017).

Based on the previous concept, I'll answer the next question:

Interviewer:

How is the internationalization of higher education aligned with sustainable development?

Interviewee:

For this answer, I return to the perspective of the scientific field. In other words, it depends on which principles underpin the concept of internationalization. And then I can say aligned. Because if we think about Latin America in particular, the goal is emancipatory regional internationalization, and looking at the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and, in particular, SDG4, which says quality, inclusive, equitable, and lifelong education, leave no one behind.

Interviewer:

What are the benefits of internationalizing the curriculum for today's students? How can these benefits impact students' education in the long term?

What would you say are the most common challenges faced by higher education institutions when seeking to internationalize the curriculum?

Interviewee:

Before examining the advantages for students and the institutional challenges, it is important to define some alternative concepts to the traditional notion of face-to-face mobility, such as IoC and IaH. IoC refers to the integration of international, intercultural, and/or global dimensions into the curriculum content, as well as into the learning outcomes, assessment tasks, teaching methods, and support services of a study program (Leask, 2015, p. 27). IaH, on the other hand, refers to the deliberate incorporation of international and intercultural aspects into the formal curriculum, as well as informal learning experiences for all students in their home environments (Beelen & Jones, 2015). In essence, IoC is a subset of IaH when referring to the curriculum, as it encompasses both virtual and face-to-face mobility. However, IaH is a broader concept than IoC when considering all university functions.

Consider the issue of IoH, with a focus on domestic internationalization. This concept has become more prevalent, particularly after the pandemic, which forced us into isolation and increased online communication. Academics and teachers have learned to interact via the cloud, and institutions have been forced to offer support for this. However, even in the global north, the concept of internationalization at home is not yet a priority but rather an alternative concept.

To illustrate, I'll tell you about my experience bringing the IAH concept to Brazil. PUC Rio Grande do Sul and the Center for Studies in Higher Education (CEES), which I coordinate, have an agreement with the University of New Castle (NU), one of the members of the Russell League, which brings together the best universities in the UK. Prof. Robson, from NU, coordinated a project together with two other EU universities, one from Belgium and the other from Italy, before the pandemic, which applied the internationalization structure at home in these three institutions. At the time, I was already studying this concept, but with little bibliography available. And with the support of the British Council, CNPq, FAPERGS and Capes, we managed to establish a network with NU to study IaH, and today, with the inclusion of the virtual Exchange, through Professor Muge Satar.

When I came across the concept, I knew for sure that this was what I wanted to develop for the global south. I was enchanted by the concept, which meant that students, whether they were at home or at their university, could have access to international universities and international cultural centers anywhere in the world. This could take place throughout their course and not just in a mobility experience lasting a maximum of 6 months to 1 year. In this way, IaH could also be a window to the world.

At that time, before the pandemic, we only thought about face-to-face mobility; that was the issue: when we received students, one of the first things the master's and/or doctoral student asked was - professor, when am I going to travel? And that upset me, because I knew that even though I was a researcher in a program of excellence, with relations with universities abroad, few people would have this opportunity.

So, when we started working on this concept, I faced a lot of closed doors, but also a lot of open ones, because the concept of IaH closes with Latin America. If we think about Brazil, no more than 3% of the almost 9 million university students have the chance, by the end of their course, to attend a university in another country, the so-called cross-border internationalization. With complementary forms of internationalization, I have many students who have every chance of attending an international university.

So if internationalization is developed at home, there is that possibility. The concept comes from Jos Beelen and Jones (2015) who I also had the opportunity to meet. IaH relates to both the formal and informal curriculum, and it aims to develop international and intercultural knowledge, skills and attitudes for all students, i.e., there is a strong emphasis (PaShBy and Andreotti, 2015) on the ethical, social, cultural and academic goals of internationalization. IaH offers information and support for specific contexts. This means that it is interculturality that emerges in contact with different races and ethnicities. So you seek this inclusion, and, in the same way, it also enables the development of skills; it also develops adaptability, flexibility, and respect for evidence; and, what's more, it prepares students for life in the world. Although competitiveness is present, if my students have the chance to contact the world, their minds will be different.

Just as these new forms of internationalization have the potential to boost the quality of the course, they also face institutional challenges in their implementation. This is because they must be embraced by the entire institution, from management to administrative staff. Köhler (2024) identifies the following as the main challenges for management: mastering the concepts of internationalization (IoC, IaH, Integral) with their specificities (plurilingual education, interculturality, education for global citizenship) and international competences, as well as their actors, especially continuing teacher training for internationalization.

Thus, one of the most important players in this process is the teacher. And how teachers must believe in and have competences for internationalization.

Interviewer:

It's true that government policies influence the internationalization of higher education. How do you analyze the latest policies in our country to respond to what you have been advocating in relation to a more democratic, inclusive and less elitist internationalization?

Interviewee:

Today, after CRES+5, I maintain a positive view, as previously stated in this interview. This applies not only to regional and national policies. As an example, the field of postgraduate program self-assessment is used in the four-year evaluation process for Capes. This allows us to identify and reflect on evidence from all forms of internationalization, creating an intercultural process based on socio-historical knowledge of ethnic groups and promoting plurilingualism. Aim to create a language that is equitable to all languages, with a focus on planetary citizenship and the survival of living beings. Avoid limiting education to just job training and instead prioritize policies that promote this perspective.

Internationalization should also be considered as a means of expanding our reach to the world. It is important to interact with all cultures, regardless of their location or level of scientific and technological advancement. This includes those that prioritize interculturality, plurilingualism, and education for global citizenship. The process should rely on different types of internationalization in a complementary movement that goes beyond mobility, including IoC, IaH, and virtual exchange. The CRES+5 reinforces this thinking by highlighting the prospect of emancipatory regional integration.

In short, the scientific field of internationalization is in motion! It's up to us, as teachers/researchers, to be the driving force behind emancipatory regional integration.

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