

Research Paper

The Race for University Rankings: why Argentina should not compete in this World Class University Rankings Race?

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Internationalization of Higher Education (HE) represents one aspect of economic globalization having affected also the educative realm; the effects and consequences on HE are diverse and differentiated between regions and countries, and also within these. The benefits that can be obtained from globalization are destined only to a few, while in education it happened the same: not every country that plays the game of internationalization can obtain gains from it. What is true is that internationalization is an irreversible process and everyone should deal with its consequences searching for varied strategies. We are going to present internationalization as a game with a global board and several characteristics taken from indicators of internationalization from University rankings: QS, THE, and ARWU. This will let us see which are the countries that obtain absolute gains or relative gains from internationalization and understanding that their strategy is competition (for soft power, reputation, and economic incentives); while for the others (the "losers" from internationalization game) we are going to offer an alternative in order to get relative gains, which refers to a different strategy of cooperation and regionalization of their HE. Here we are going to locate Argentina and explain why they should not play in the general board of internationalization, and not compete in university rankings, but on the regional board to obtain relative gains. We are going to demonstrate how rankings indicators, are showing results of some countries, while can not be applicable to all realities, so this means that they are not explicative of Argentinean current HE system. This can be extrapolate to South America (SA) in general, because due to their HE systems characteristics they are going to be positioned in the board of cooperation and regionalization, not in the one of internationalization and competition. The failure of rankings explaining Argentinean reality, is going to be criticized from two sides, one intrinsic of rankings that are the weak points they have in understanding HE and imply unequal treatment of different realities, and the second one; based in four indicators showing how they cannot cope with Argentinean facts to end up opting in favour of regionalization.

Keywords: Globalization, internationalization, South American Higher Education systems, Higher Education Rankings, University Rankings, Argentina, Regionalization.

INTRODUCTION

Different acceptations for the same concept of internationalization

In the present work we are going to understand internationalization as a direct consequence of globalization. It has different manifestations, from international mobility of students and teachers, to international academic programs and research initiatives, branch campuses or franchises or trading of higher education (Knight, 2004). Globalization meant economical, cultural and political changes, neoliberal states replaced welfare states, and meanwhile, universities were obliged to give up with their social missions, academic priorities, and organizational structures whereas the importance is put in efficiency, excellence, expenditures and rates of return. With neoliberalism,

universities are sources of innovation, especially in scientific and technological areas, while the masses were expected to be the cheap labor force in those high tech industries. Massification occurred in universities all around the world and competition deepens, the winners are less and the ones determined to lose are more; the World Bank played a very prominent role in educational policy making imposing their conditions, financing research in education and justifying the need for commercialize HE. The main responsible for the failure were the institutional inefficiency, poor planning, bad location of resources and investments, and the governments and universities had to lead the change into a competent scenario, how this could be done? Public money was reduced and universities had to fight for funding and students, evaluation systems were imposed, and a large number of private institutions were created, endowment was promoted and private funding was for sciences, technology and engineering in detriment of arts, humanities and social sciences; salaries at universities were reduced, creating part time consultants; infrastructure also deteriorated.

The mission of education can be conceived as social right or a tradable good; in its economic sense, is related to what the WTO proposed, to treat education as a service that can be regulated by GATTs¹ and states should not interfere in the activity, this explained the solution for Latin American problems for massification of HE, the privatizing of the HEIs so the state reduces its role of guaranteeing the provision of this social good and was transformed into a profitable service. International HE is a commodity to be freely traded as a private good, not as a public responsibility (Altbach, Knight. 2007); but should public institutions -the ones that receive funding from the government and are to supply the needs of its own population- act internationally and commercialize this social national good? When the benefits that can be obtained from the commercialization of the HE are low, then it lacks purport to invest in positioning in rankings, this is the case of Argentina. HE (tertiary and bachelor degree) are free of charge, and impose a very low rate for Latin American students, as there is no big moneymaking from the provision of public education, then it is inconvenient to invest in positioning in rankings. We are going to see later that Argentina should play in the regional board instead than in the international one. Understanding education in its social sense means that education should be a public good where states should provide it, citizens have the right and the privilege to use their own HEIs as a national right, accessible and destined to its own citizens aiming to provide access to education.

Not everyone was negative influenced by internationalization of their HE; there are winners and losers. In the present work we are going to divide internationalization into two boards with different actors, strategies, benefits and characteristics, one is for the ones that take absolute or relative gains from internationalization, and for those who do not on the other side, offering an alternative strategy for them in order to get some relative gains from internationalization. For the internationalization board, where the strategy is competition to get the benefits we are going to see that they are looking for obtaining reputation, soft power or economic returns. Rankings emerge by the beginning of the XXI century as an indicator on where to allocate funding, determining which universities are the good ones, and telling students where they should study if they pretend to be competitive in this new era, they are the ones that help the winners to play the game of internationalization and obtain gains from it.

The second board refers to the negative impact of internationalization, for example in those emergent economies of SA². In the South Cone of the American Continent, universities have to cope with severe problems originated in their own institutional weakness and deal with the national policy conditions (Van Der Bor and Shute, 1991), before turning international, they have to solve diverse and enrooted problems, for the consequences of internationalization are more negative than positive ones; in economical terms, the quantitative expansion due to the amplification in access to the market, the privatizations showing the rule of neoliberalism, the imposition of fees to former free degrees and less public funding because of the reduced in the role of the state, this meant politics should not interfere in the market; inadequate governmental policies; creation of partnerships with other universities and other expressions of business in academic life (Lopez Segre, 2008, p. 268). For their HEI's it meant privatizations, from the 1950s to the 1990s, the private shares in total enrollment grew from 7% to almost 40%, this growth brought along with him unequal opportunities in access, there were several difficulties for the less favorable sectors. One of these main changes, happened mainly because of massification, but while the amount of students increased, public

¹ We can understand this idea in Javier Pablo Hermo in "Servicios Educativos y sociales. Una vision sobre su regulacion posible" (2016) where he argue, as part of a paper written for the WTO: the fact, as education is a social good, according to UNESCO definition widely accepted in most of WTO member countries, States are to guarantee access to public goods, they have a primary responsibility in the offer and equitable access to this public good that is education. For that, even when they admit the existence of private sector in this offer, the States participation cannot be qualified as a barrier or distortive subsidy of the commercial activity, but on the contrary they should guarantee the availability of the educative offer accessible to its society. Available at: www.wto.org/spanish/tratop_s/serv_s/workshop_march04_s/sess4_hermo2_s.doc - 38k - 2004-05-18

² When referring to Emergent economies of South America I mean the ones that are being part of the Educative Sector of MERCOSUR (ESM): Brazil, Argentina, Paraguay, Uruguay, Bolivia and Venezuela and those who agreed on following the ESM sector: Chile, Colombia, Ecuador and Peru. And within UNASUR and its Educative Council, there are some smaller countries that can be added because they follow the ESM on its general aspects, they are: Guyana and Suriname, while Mexico and Panama are observers.

resources for education in general did not (Psacharopoulos, 1991, pp.3) and in political terms, they lose the autonomy and autarchy that Universities gained with the Córdoba Reform in 1918 (Torres and Schugurensky, 2002).³ It also meant the dismantling of the Welfare State and the implementation of neoliberal measures (Gertel, 1991) imposed by the Washington Consensus, social services were to be privatized. The different countries adopted different "solutions", in Argentina happened that they put more students in the same spaces, reducing the cost per student sacrificing quality, private HEI's do proliferate too, but public education remained free of charge (Fernandez Lamarra, 2009, pp. 487).

Globalization and therefore internationalization of HE has become since the 90's a synonymous of a commercial activity, where education is a commercial good far away from the idea of education as a social right. Hence, rankings show this aspect of education, the race is to appear in them in order to retain international students and professors and get economic benefits, soft power and reputation, but we are going to understand that not everyone has the capabilities of playing in the internationalization board, so for our case of Argentina we are going to demonstrate that they should not compete but cooperate, should not internationalize but regionalize.

Three main rankings and their indicators

The comparison among universities from different countries, with different resources is not fair but unequal; the indicators from internationalization from these world-class universities are incapable of explaining all realities, and should everyone tend to obtain the same indicators of university performance in the rankings? Are rankings capable enough to explain the situation of the HE systems and to contemplate the differences? Should all universities in the world play the game of internationalization? Because it seems there is a need for turning international, this mean that there should be programs written and delivered in English, in order to cope with a bigger amount of students that mobilize around the world and want to receive a better education, and Universities should offer this programs in English to standardize knowledge and communication. The same happens with professors, now research, in English, is extremely important and professors should do research in the best institutions in the world (Altbach and Knight, 2007). Our argument is that a university should turn international or regional if that gives them benefits; internationalization is not a "must do" that everyone should tend to become.

When defining HE since the 90's, we refer more to an economic tradable good rather than a social one, we are going to situate the emergence of Rankings as a tool for capitalize the profits, reflecting the competition among countries and universities to hoard up the benefits of internationalization. Here, a brief explanation of the three main rankings ARWU (Academic Ranking of World Universities or Shanghai Ranking)⁴, The QS World University Ranking (Quacquarelli Symonds Ltd)⁵ and the THE (Times Higher Education World University Rankings)⁶ will let us select some indicators. Afterwards, these definitions will help us create our board on the game for internationalization defining actors, characteristics, and benefits and determining their best strategy to play the game.

For several countries –like UK, stated in their report on HE- and some international organizations the stimulus for internationalization of HE is thus, economical, universities and countries are part of a global race to become the best ones, they are worried on which position they can reach, whether their aim can be turn out to be a "World Class University" (WCU) in the global rank, or get a continental good position, or even a regional one. Rankings show who is the good one, and instruct where the rest of Universities should aim to arrive. They are a consequence of market forces, of massification of HE, (Altbach, P. 2012), they came to life to select which are the best Universities and define which one has reputation and prestige, in consequence leaving outside from the race those universities that do not appear in the list of WCU's. Many universities will spend money in marketing and branding campaigns to be recognized and then increase their rates of enrollment (Altbach, Knight, 2007), so we are going to understand the **gains from internationalization as economic profit, reputation and soft power**. In accordance to this idea, Ben Sowter, director of research of QS, in the communication of the 2016/17 ranking argued that *"The 13th edition of the QS World University Rankings indicates that investment in higher education – either public or private–is a key differentiating factor between this year's risers (South Korea, Russia, the United States, and China) and fallers*

³ In Chile with the military government of Pinochet in 1981 and its reform, the characteristics of their progressive HE system changed forever, universities were not free anymore, and nor independent as they used to be, and public funding were drastically reduced and not guaranteed anymore, private institutions grew fast and they were the ones that absorb massification, while they were established with few controls and requirements, all universities were supposed to compete for public and private funding. The consequences were serious: they impose a national system of admission with disastrous consequences in equity in access for its citizens (Brunner, 1988).

⁴ Official Website: <http://www.shanghairanking.com>

⁵ Official Website: <http://www.topuniversities.com>

⁶ Official Website: <https://www.timeshighereducation.com/world-university-rankings>

(*Western and Southern Europe, South Africa, and Latin America*)⁷. Investments in improving ranking's indicators define winners and losers.

Rankings fails to be explicative in terms of quality, access conditions, contextualizing the HE systems, understanding the differences of opportunities and the base inequalities, therefore it will be a useful instrument for those who are interested in the economic side of internationalization and show how investing money in "lax indicators" (we will refer to the easily manipulated indicators) means great progress in positioning in rankings. Rankings are a zero sum game, when some countries spent a huge budget in research –like Altbach mentioned China, Korea, Taiwan, Singapore, and Hong Kong and Japan some decades before- only 100 Universities will remain in the top 100 (Altbach, 2012, pp. 28). This indicator does not mean that the HE systems of those countries improved, it show that they spent money in improving some indicator. These "lax indicators" are the easy ones, provided that they have the economic capability to do it so, like international students, international faculties, and publications, as we said before rankings show economic capabilities; Sowter referred to this when he said: *"This year's rankings imply that levels of investment are determining who progresses and who regresses. Institutions in countries that provide high levels of targeted funding, whether from endowments or from the public purse, are rising. On the other hand, some Western European nations making or proposing cuts to public research spending are losing ground to their US and Asian counterparts."*⁸ Rankings try to harmonize criteria's among very different countries, without taking into account the different sizes, political and historical characteristics, economic capabilities, HE systems, and different starting points. All in all, this is the intrinsic failure of rankings; they only show one tendency of internationalization, the more negative one, the economical interest, while HE should have another aim.

Three are the most popular rankings on HE. Of course each of them takes into consideration different indicators to show which is the best University, exposing different methodologies. We are going to refer overall to: ARWU, THE and QS, in general all of them overrate research, this happens because is easier to count publications and compare the amount of them on each University, none of them specify characteristics of HE systems, and differentiated systems with completely different histories, budgets, characteristics, interest and objectives.

What happens when analyzing the **ARWU -or Shanghai ranking-**? It measures mainly publications and citations, this is the reason why the top Universities are Americans, and British, followed by Europeans. Because they do have a tradition on research, they dominate the language skill of publishing in their mother tongue's language, and they are developing research since decades now – University of Tokyo appearing in position 20 as the first Asian University, having been the first country in the region to invest in research-. Their indicators are mainly based on academic development, including Nobel Laureates, fields medalist, highly cited researchers or papers published in nature or science, they are the only ones that measure their variables precisely. Their indicators have different weight and pretend to measure quality of education counting the alumni of an institution winning Noble prizes and Field Medals; quality of Faculty with staff winning this prices mentioned before and those highly cited researchers; research outputs considering papers published and papers indexed in nature and science; and finally per capita performance of an institution. All the information obtained is available on line, analyzing data from different sources and counting citations and indexed publications.

QS ranking counts six indicators with different weight, four of them use hard data and other two are based on surveys. Hard data ones are: student to faculty ratio, citations per faculty, international faculty ratio and international student ratio, while academic reputation and employer reputation are the subjective ones. Analyzing four areas: research, teaching, employability and internationalization. Of course the surveys on reputation are of dubious effectiveness in measuring something and are a very weak point in QS ranking.

THE ranking is the one that gave more importance to teaching, considering some indicators on counting PhDs per faculties; include reputational questions about teaching and teacher - student ratios. But they do not say anything on teaching skills, if they meant an improvement in learning or quality. This ranking addresses thirteen indicators in different fields with differentiated weights also: teaching with a reputation survey, staff to student ratio, doctorate to bachelor's ratio, doctorates awarded to academic staff ratio and institutional income; research with a reputation survey, a measurement of research income and research productivity; citations that means counting the times a paper is cited; international outlook with three indicators: international to domestic student ratio, international to domestic staff ratio and international collaboration; finally the indicator on industry income means the university's ability to help industry with innovations.

University rankings are mainly centered in research and on indicators easily measured, while for SAN

⁷ Ben Sowter. "Investment in higher education pays in QS World University Rankings 2016/2017". QS official communication of 2016/17 results:

<http://www.topuniversities.com/student-info/university-news/qs-world-university-rankings-20162017-global-press-release>

⁸ Ben Sowter. "Investment in higher education pays in QS World University Rankings 2016/2017". QS official communication of 2016/17 results:

<http://www.topuniversities.com/student-info/university-news/qs-world-university-rankings-20162017-global-press-release>

countries the poor attention paid historically to research in related to matters of budget, universities don't have good estimates for this activity, consequently researchers and teachers are badly paid, and are not being encourage to do research and most of the times –notably in Argentina- they can not live from their researcher activities and have to take diverse works. Research and papers publications should not be a matter of just count for rankings while in rankings, research gives a lot of prestige to Universities and the most respected ones are research intensive (Altbach, 2012, pp. 29).

Rankings are not inclusive, as appreciated, they just take into account the indicators they want to emphasize and finally reproduce inequalities that already exist in HE showing only the top 100 and the best option. As seen, they are not trying to understand the national HE systems due to the fact that they rank Universities and not educative systems (Millot, 2014) so they are not considering peculiarities of each country and system, either they are not making a distinction between public and private universities. This is very important because in most of the countries public institutions follow policies decided by governments, and it refers also to the mission HE has for that country: economic or social. Rankings forget to include indicators that can measure accountability, or governance, or quality, neither teaching capacities or students satisfaction, acquired knowledge, access to HEIs, and political and historical situation of the HE, they fail to contextualize Universities in their environment. For these reasons it is futile for emergent economies in SA and particularly Argentina, to try to achieve ranking goals, by the contrary accepting being part of the race means to be culturally colonized by the structures that the hegemonic countries want to impose.

Reputational surveys used by the rankings are not an accurate instrument to measure, experts, mainly from USA or Europe give points to Universities based on their prices or publications, they do not know what is going on in the rest of the Universities, and they end up favoring Anglophone universities, this is not a valid variable. And overall, universities with the most international students and scholars – and with large numbers of postdocs- are likely to be the most visible, mainly located in English speaking countries (Altbach, 2012). Being English the means of instruction for SA is a big obstacle because they all speak Spanish or Portuguese (Brazil's case); the movement of students in SA is within Spanish speaking countries. There is a bias, rankings create centers and peripheries (Altbach, P. 2012). When rankings pursue to analyze the publications, citations, etc. they analyze international journals, specialized magazines that are majority written in English. This is because historically English has dominated the academy, and most important producers of academic knowledge are English-speaking nations. The priority's balance bends on the English speaking countries as it is the main language for teaching and research, so they dominate rankings easily. Rankings obviously favor universities that have a good position, or excellent progress, but as Altbach said, students and parents cannot rely on rankings to decide whether an institution is good quality or not (Altbach, P. 2012).

For SAn countries in general, and for Argentina in particular the race for appearing in university rankings is futile, unfair and non-representative; we are going to see that in these countries the strategy is not to internationalize, but to regionalize.

THE GAME OF INTERNATIONALIZATION OR REGIONALIZATION

Here we believe that internationalization is the best strategy for some, those who obtain absolute or relative gains, while for the others, the best strategy is regionalization, not playing the race for appearing in rankings. First we need to understand some basic concepts from international relations and international politics. Then we will define our boards, actors, strategies and gains for finally explain four aspects in which we can observe the futility of rankings for SAn countries (the ones in the second board): students, funding, policy making and soft power⁹.

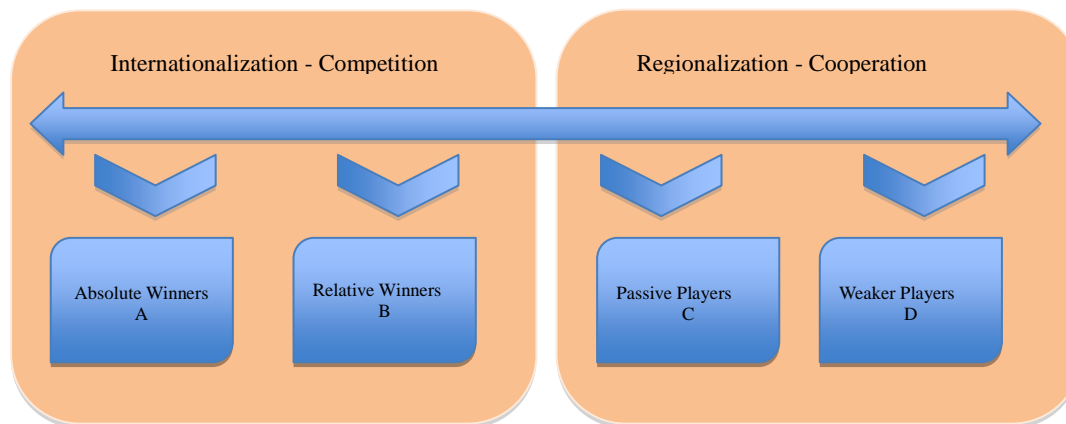
Our ideas are located in the realist theory of international relations that will tell as a premise that states do not cooperate, because they fear that the other one could remain in a distinctive position and will use it against him in the future, but we will understand how cooperation is possible in this anarchic world. There is the possibility of getting relative gains (Grieco, J., 1988) from acting together in binding institutions, if both parts are going to get some benefit, at least relative, then is positive to cooperate among institutions because they allow actors to state clear rules of behavior, and will encourage states (main actors) to act together despite the anarchy of the international scenario (because of the lack of central/supra government). So we present two boards on internationalization, one where states compete for obtaining the benefits of internationalization (economic profit, soft power, and reputation) and where the

9 This concept refers to the one given by Joseph Nye. Soft Power means the ability a state has not to use coercion and to pursue others to do something, by using hard power you are obliging, by using soft power you can influence the behaviour of others. For realist theory of International Relations, states maximize in terms of power (military strength) and should be used in preventive cases also. Persuasion is different from dissuasion and Joseph Nye understood that some policies can be established in order to get something is a soft way in the future without using military capacities (or hard power).

Nye, Joseph. (2006) Soft Power, Hard Power and Leadership. Harvard Seminar. Available at: https://www.hks.harvard.edu/netgov/files/talks/docs/11_06_06_seminar_Nye_HP_SP_Leadership.pdf

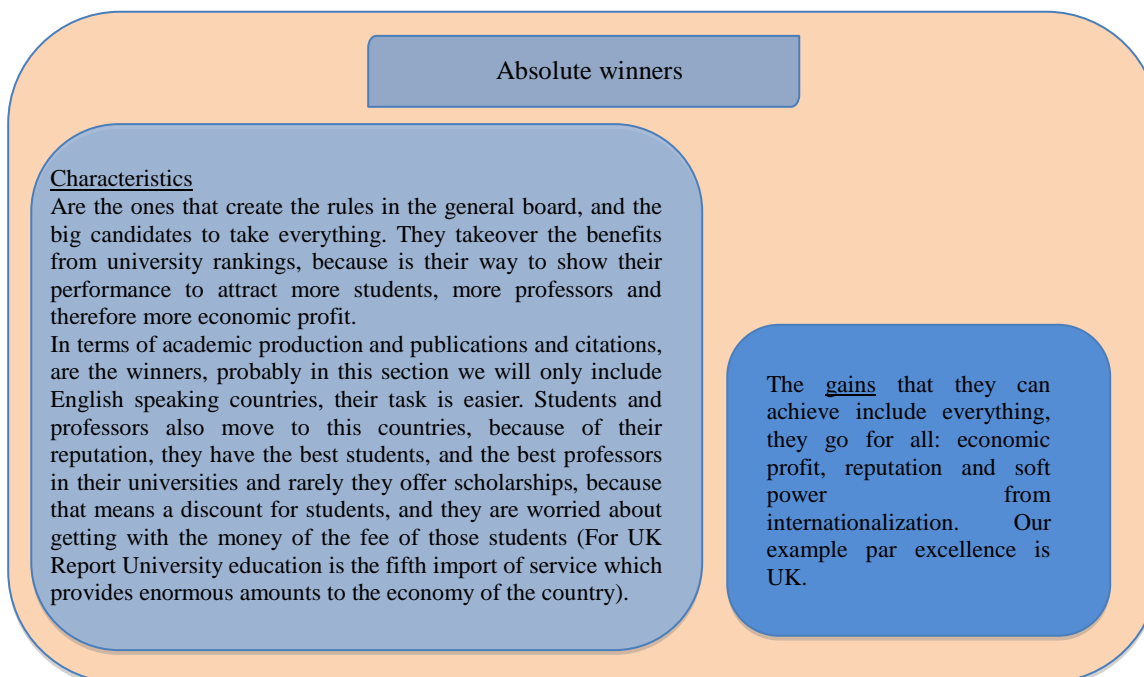
big ones should play, while the other is for the weak ones (like South American countries) where states do cooperate among institutions and should tend to regionalize to obtain benefits, because playing the internationalization board means that they do not gain neither absolute nor relative benefits. This continuum goes from different gains obtained in the internationalization process, which defines the strategies:

Graphic 1: The game of Internationalization

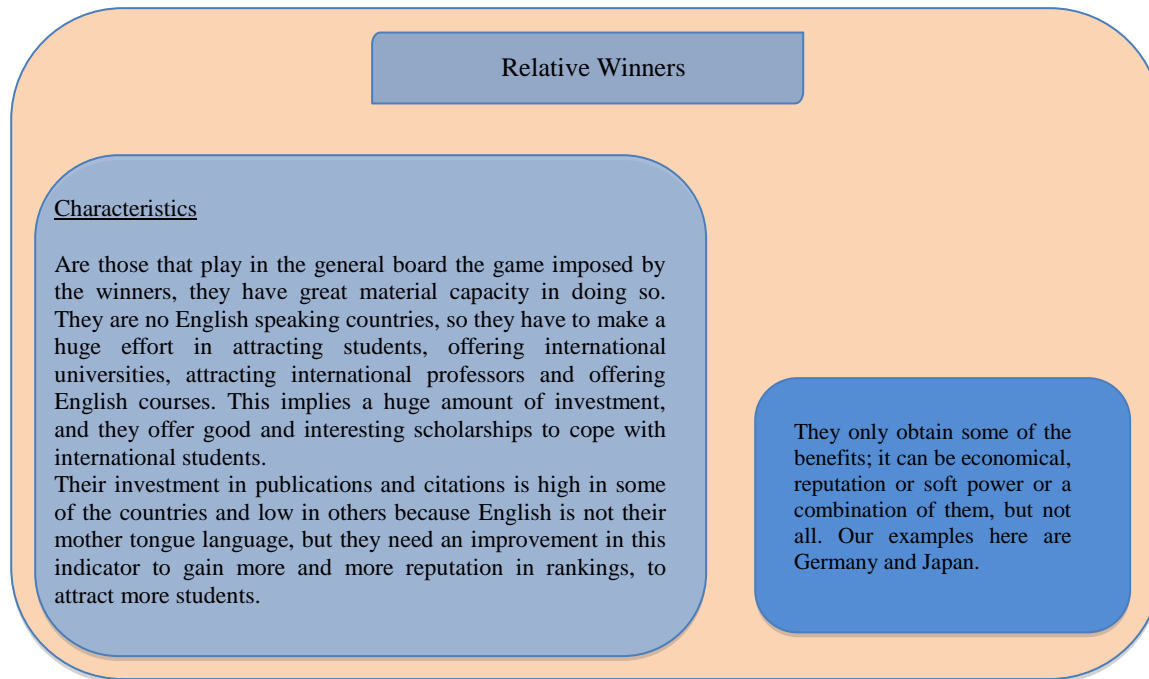


Our board is going to be defined based on indicators taken from internationalization features and from the classic definition of the concept, characteristics of the performance of internationalization in the SAn region for explaining the regional board and indicators from university rankings defined before. Our boards explain the possibility of getting gains, divided into four different categories that represent four different players –states–.

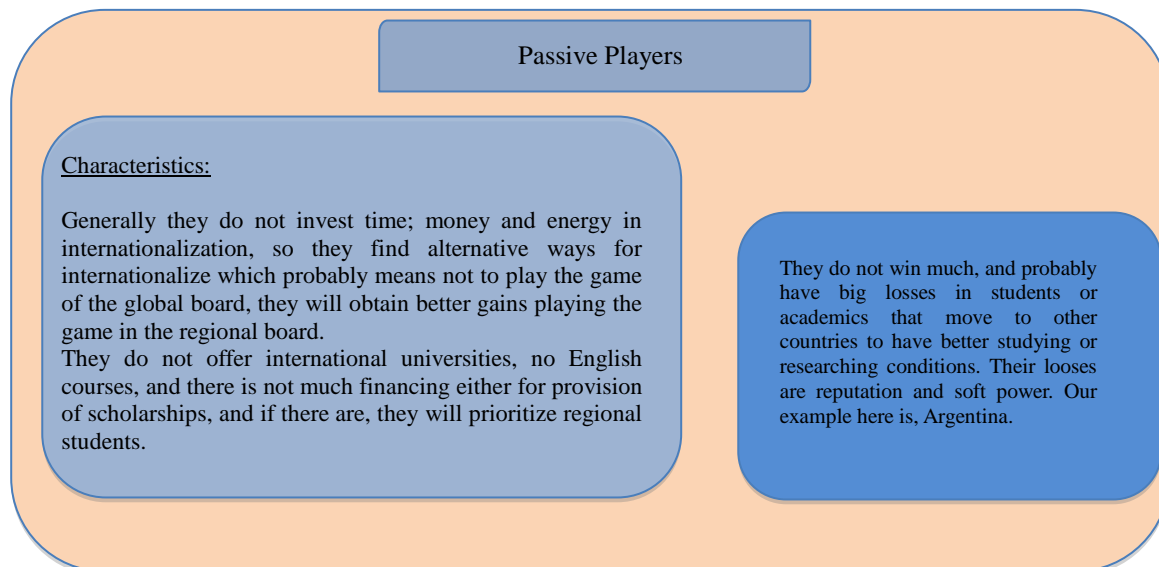
Graphic 2: Player A: Absolute Winners

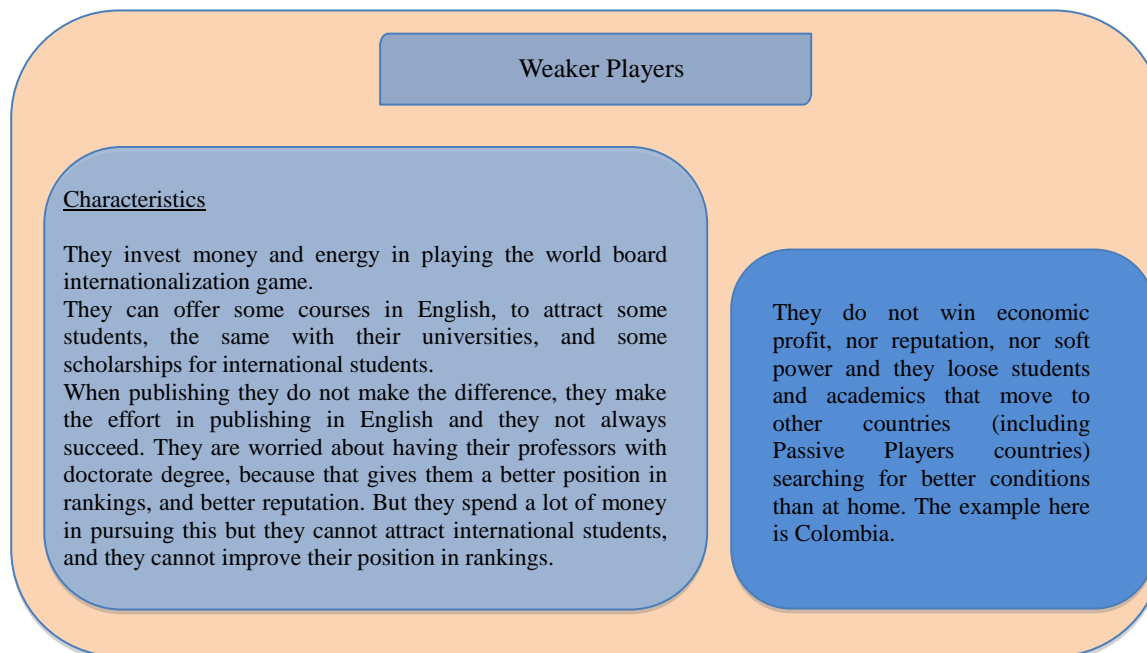


Graphic 3: Player B: Relative Winners



Graphic 4: Player C: Passive Players



Graphic 5: Player D: Weaker Player

For the A and B players there is no cooperation, and if a country wants to play in the general board, then there is going to be competition among countries, while for C and D, as in the general board there are no possibilities for winning something, they should play in a reduced board, a regional one, here they are going to cooperate in the search for relative gains, situation that is going to go beyond not cooperating, cooperation is the best response for C and D than not cooperating. We described here the benefits of cooperating, which of course do not deny that even when states cooperate, they are competing. Cooperation is a proper environment for less developed countries to get benefits from acting altogether, rather than competition face to face with big countries in the general board. Oregioni, S. (2012 and 2015) define this cooperation among less powerful states as Endogenous – solidary internationalization¹⁰. The configuration of powerful or big states and small and less powerful states is changing constantly and it has to do with the capabilities they have to position themselves as player A, B, C or D.

Internationalization in SA is going to be understood through regional cooperation with SAn characteristics, reason for understanding that there are six on-going regional process on HE: Pacific Alliance (AP in Spanish), Andean Community of States (CAN in Spanish), UNASUR (South American Union of Nations), CELAC (Latin American and Caribbean Community of States) and EM (Educativo MERCOSUR), all of them were born following neoliberal and openness to globalization ideals and actually are trying to find ways for obtaining benefits for their HE systems through cooperation.

We can analyze the performance of these four actors by comparison with the lessons we can learn from rankings, first of all, understanding who uses rankings and for what (Altbach, P. 2012). Mainly used by potential international students and their families -more than 3 million in 2012- for making decisions on where to study, searching for the best university to spend their money in –while Universities are not only looking for the best students but also staff-, here we can understand that they will tend mainly to the “absolute winners” (player A) universities. This understood in the SAn context have different meaning and not necessarily this universities are looking forward to attract international students, while several public universities are free, allocating in these category the “passive” (player C) and the “weaker players” (player D); private institutions, do have their own policy on attracting international students, the government do not interfere, as it is a private business, the contrary happens in most of universities included as player A, where there is no free HE and the government decides policies towards attracting more students and professors (gaining more soft power, more reputation and better financial resources).

Secondly, governments and HE systems will allocate resources according to the rankings, the case for player A and B. So in most of the occasions governments will spend more money in their best HEIs than in the ones that

¹⁰ Oregioni, M. S. (2012, 2013, 3014) Defined regionalization as an imposed internationalization but not in a competitive way, but in a solidary way where states cooperate.

really need governmental aid. This is another big issue with rankings because they promote inside the countries a competition for funding and they finally discourage the growth of those HEIs that are in disadvantage –those small, bad quality and less favored Institutions-, which also occur in universities fitting to type B. In SA the interpretation made is completely opposite to this ideal that rankings promote: education should be a social right for its own citizens, and due to reduced budgets in education, they can barely accomplish this goal to turn internationals, so internationalization is the bad strategy for “passive and weaker” players (C and D).

Thirdly, and regarding policymaking, it has various manifestations. Sometimes, government agencies in charge of education are asked to position Universities in World or regional rankings, and they administer a budget for that purpose, in those cases, is not because you inject money into HEIs that things are going to improve magically, the clear situation of “weaker players” (Player D). That a university appear in good positions in rankings from one year to another does not mean that they solve all their problems in their HE systems, extended to all the players in the board, position in ranking does not mean good quality education and most of the times the positioning has to do with huge investments in “lax indicators” (Player B).

Some countries, like UK¹¹, US and China use their internationalization policies of HE as a matter of soft power, they can obtain this gain playing the internationalization game like “absolute and relative winners” do. While this is not something that “passive and weaker players” are looking for, or at least they can work for it in the regional board rather than in the general one. For some countries, soft power is the main reason to mobilize the increase in international students, the use of big amounts of money that finance internationalization and participation in rankings, and of course is a matter of policy making because they need this power to become important actors in the international scenario, player B are the ones interested and investing in obtaining this kind of gain, while for the player A is something that results from being “absolute winners”.

So this race that ranking foster, for students, funding, attention from decision makers and search of soft power is not promoting any progress of HEIs overall, in the contrary is a race where we can determine the winners before starting, where for those less developed countries like SAn's is a sum cero race, its worthless participating and instead of internationalize, it positive to regionalize. As Kenneth King paraphrasing Ngugi wa Thiong'o taught us once, we – the losers from neoliberalism- should be thinking about "**decolonizing our minds**" in educative terms also. Emergent SAN economies should be thinking on different ways and solutions to minimize the impact of globalization at home.

The case study of Argentina will show that rankings are not good at explaining reality, but we shouldn't be blind, and beware of some lessons that can be learnt from rankings. In some big countries, rankings are used as a measure, and a goal to look forward. Several aspects should be taken into account: infrastructure, administration of the higher education, focus on research for policy making which are essential tools for the development of a country itself.

CURRENT SITUATION OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN ARGENTINA AND ITS POSITIONING IN RANKINGS

We are going to analyze in general the situation of Argentina's HE, but in particular Buenos Aires University (UBA)¹² as our case study. It is a public university founded in 1821 -Argentina got the independence from the Spanish crown in 1816-. In 1880 it become the first national university of the territory, and in 1918 it embraced the benefits that the Cordoba Reform brought to all the HEIs in Latin America: autonomy and autarchy. The last census from 2011 indicates that there where 28.232 teachers at university (23,1% professors and the rest auxiliary professors) in its 14th faculties, and a total of 262.932¹³ students (Economics with 36.377, then architecture, design and urbanism with 25.748, and medicine with 24.198) while 96% of the students have the argentine nationality and 60,9% are women¹⁴,

¹¹ HM Government. International Education: Global Growth and Prosperity (2013). Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/340600/bis-13-1081-international-education-global-growth-and-prosperity-revised.pdf

In this report the UK has a section explainig how to build the UK Brand and seizing opportunities where they state that internationalization is important for their soft power and international students in the UK are a fundamental piece “ International students in the UK bring diversity to the education sector, helping to provide an international dimension that bene ts all students. Engagement in international education, both in the UK and via TNE, enhances the reputation and brand recognition of UK institutions and helps project the UK's soft power. The experience of students in UK education helps to create good relations that will enable successful engagement with the next generation of global leaders. TNE also plays a role in promoting the UK as a destination for study” UK Report. 2013. Pp. 23.

¹² Official website: <http://www.uba.ar>

¹³ Censo de estudiantes UBA. 2011. Report Available at: <http://www.uba.ar/institucional/censos/Estudiantes2011/estudiantes2011.pdf>

¹⁴ University of Buenos Aires (UBA) have their own statistics centre for students. Information available at their official website: <http://www.uba.ar>

the Argentine population is more than 40 million people, more than 12 millions live only in the capital city and its surroundings in Gran Buenos Aires. UBA is public, this means that is accessible for every Argentine citizen, bachelor degree is free of charge, while master's degree and PhD's are charged with a very low and symbolic rate that puts their offered degrees as the cheapest a student can afford. A one-year course is compulsory for bachelor degrees for all diplomas, there is no entrance examination and students can give exams as much as they need to pass the needed mark. Argentinean HE system is composed by 47 National Universities (and 7 institutes of HE), while there are other 46 private Universities (and 12 institutes) that do not receive funding from the government and impose a fee to their students.

When analyzing Argentinean system of HE there are several challenges and severe problems that need to be solved, like **quality assurance issues, equity access, infrastructure of higher education buildings, resources available, teaching capacity, expertise and extension** (Fernandez Lamarra, N. 2002) and one big issue is that despite the high rates of enrollment, there are incredible high rates of **desertion**¹⁵.

Argentina has no mechanisms of **quality assurance** during time, only when degrees are created (CONEAU – Comisión Nacional de Evaluación y Acreditación Universitaria)¹⁶, this is a direct consequence of liberalization in education, due to the privatization and the multiplication of the existing Universities and programs (Fernandez Lamarra, N. 2009, pp. 491) and following the World Bank directives, there is not other quality assurance process in the country rather than the initial one. On the other hand, **equitable access** does not mean that because HE is for free, everyone can attend Universities, there should be some kind of financial help (scholarships or loans) for those that want to go to University, despite its gratuitous, students have to work instead to gain for a living.

In terms of **infrastructure**, there are no campuses because that mean an enormous budget for the government that already pay for the maintenance of all the public Universities, while the amount of students that attend the most popular public institutions are quite a lot. As universities are –sometimes- overcrowded the buildings are not prepared to receive them and the resources are never enough. One interesting trend since the last decade or more in Argentina is that as education is free, **enrollment** is high (80%), but **graduate rates** are very low (6%), this shows the inefficacy of the expenditure in HE, because probably for several years the state will pay for those students right to attend University but they will not end up reaching their degree. In 2011 data published in an Argentine Newspaper says that only 6 students graduate from 100 enrolled. This explains the inequality in access of students in HE also, because as there is no extra help for those less favorable families, desertion is bigger in students from poor backgrounds. From those 6% of students that graduate (in 5 years), only 16,5% are from sectors with lower incomes, and 47,1% from those sectors with higher incomes (Diario Clarin 26/08/2011), this shows also that the basic education (particularly secondary) is determinant to graduate from University. Those students that received a poor basic education, cannot cope with the high standards of University later, so most of the times, they just quit studying. This poor level of basic education is usually delivered in the public institutions – which also explained the poor results of Argentina in PISA test- it is more feasible that the ones that can afford a good secondary private school then have more possibilities to graduate from University. Argentina is well known for its huge middle class, and in education the ones that receive the benefit from free higher education are the middle classes, while the less favorable are the ones that can not afford to pay for their basic education and later on they could hardly succeed at University. The differences between quality in the level of basic public education, and tertiary public education are dramatic, explaining why lower income students can start with their tertiary degrees and do not graduate. When instead of taking 5 years we count 7 or 8 years for graduation, then the number of graduates increase a bit, being less than 10% of the enrolled (Diario La Nación. 24/02/2011), this shows another trend in Argentine's HE, that as the bachelor degree is free of charge, most of the students take more than 7 years to achieve their diploma, the rest either continue with only one course per semester or failing for indeterminate time, or just quit (there is no need to dismiss formally). As an example for 2008, there were 1,276.885 students in Public institutions and only 55.581 graduate, while from private institutions the enrollment was 317.040 students, and graduate 9%, that is 29.328 students (Diario La Nación 24/02/2011), this also indicates that graduates from private institutions are more in percentage, less in amount, attributable to the more close tutoring to the students, and because is easier in approvable terms that public institutions.

From 2003 to 2015, with left wing governments in Argentina (Nestor Kirchner and Cristina Kirchner) the **budget in HE** grew notably, establishing the minimum of 6% of the GNP –in 2009-, while 9 new Universities were created in the poorest sectors of Buenos Aires province and in those provinces that still did not have National University, while in 2013 former president Kirchner said (Telam, 19/05/2013) that due to the increase of high study houses, there is a new generation of -poor- students that is the first generation in their family to attend Universities¹⁷,

¹⁵ Diario Clarin. polemica por la cantidad de graduados en Universidades?26/08/2011. Available at http://www.clarin.com/educacion/Polemica-cantidad-graduados-universidades_0_542945804.html

¹⁶ National Commission for University assessment and Accreditation. Official Website: <http://www.coneau.gov.ar/CONEAU/>

¹⁷ Telam News Agency, 19/05/2013 *Cristina: en estos 10 años el egreso de las Universidades Argentinas ha crecido en un 68%*. Available at:

favored by financial help coming from the government to study (like “Progres AR” plan that mean progress).

As regards the **teaching expertise**, teachers are not full time professors and researchers -in most of the cases-, their salary is not enough for a living so they generally have another job that pays their bills. It carries several problems, no full dedication means that they generally can not be devoted to research, sometimes they deliver worst classes, they are not updated, and also they won't promote doing research to their students -of course professors that despite the fact that have several jobs, can be excellent teachers-.

The Argentine Constitution defines in its 14th article that education is a right; everyone Argentine citizen should enjoy the right to teach and learn. The law N° 26.206 of National Education¹⁸ establishes that education and knowledge are a public good and a personal and social right guaranteed by the State (Art. N° 2) and that education is a national priority and is part of the State policy to build a fair society, reinforce the sovereignty and identity, deepen the exercise of the democratic citizenship, respect for human rights and fundamental liberties and tend to economic and social development of the Nation (Art. N°3).

According to UNESCO reports¹⁹, Argentina have an **equitable education system** because they do not treat education as a good, instead the government is in charge of affording the cost of education for primary, secondary, tertiary and higher education -bachelor degrees- trying to guarantee equitable access for everyone. When analyzing information of the World Bank²⁰ it supports this idea, but it does not make it the only way possible. For data for 2013, showing the gross enrollment ratio in HE, Argentina reached 80% (for Uruguay, Paraguay and Peru there is no data from the WB). Chile is an exceptional case not only for the region²¹, but also for the rest of the world, despite the fact that they impose high fees to their students in all public and private institutions for the same year, 2013, their rate of enrollment was 84%, the biggest for SA, while Brazil reproduces its own societal inequalities in providing a very low access to public Universities, while the overall enrollment to tertiary education in Brazil is only 46,5%²². Brazilian higher education system has a very small public sector, that only the best prepared can access, and not curiously the rich people are the ones that receive public and free education. In Latin America, Mexico has a similar public system of education like Argentina, but the enrollment rate is very low, only 29% of their population in the age of attending University. While United Kingdom, the most internationalized and one of the countries that own the best-positioned universities at the world ranking, only 57% of their population enroll or have access to their HEIs. United States is another interesting case to study; despite the fact that they treat education as an economic good and charge large fees to their students, their enrollment rate for 2013 was 89% (World Bank, 2013).

Historically, we can understand also why Argentina has this system of HE. The country holds a large tradition of tertiary education, and also some other interesting history of populist governments that decided that education is not an economical good, but a right, that should be delivered in the same terms to all the Argentinians, and as our constitution established, including all of them that want to inhabit the national territory.

Lopez Segrera and others (López Segrera, 2007, pp. 271; Altbach, 2006; Ordorika, 2008) state that the debate around the need for world class Universities is important, but for developed countries. The main problems, pointed before, of Argentina's HE system cannot be addressed by rankings, nor they propose a solution. Due to the configuration of its HE system historically, and the way it is presented by the constitution –as a social right- the HE system requires big amounts of financial resources to work, and on the other hand, the GNP of the country is not high enough to supply the basic needs to HE, despite the fact that 6% is destined every year to education (which is not happening since the new left wing president Mauricio Macri arrived to presidency in December 2015). So the way HE is conceived and had developed in Argentina as seen before, does not allow the worry to participate in rankings, needs are others and more urgent inside to be participating in futile races for appearing in rankings.

Having this historical characteristics of the Argentinean HE system in mind we are going to evaluate the performance of UBA in ARWU, QS and THE, and try to verify if rankings can address to explain Argentinean case.

At the Shanghai Ranking, UBA is positioned N° 151-200 (the first Latin American is Sao Paulo between 101

<http://www.telam.com.ar/notas/201305/18166-cristina-en-estos-10-anos-el-egreso-de-las-universidades-ha-crecido-en-un-68.html>

¹⁸ National Law of Education N° 26.206 available at the official website of the Ministry of Education of the Argentine Nation http://www.me.gov.ar/doc_pdf/ley_de_educ_nac.pdf

¹⁹ *World Data on Education. Argentina.* Ed 2010/2011. UNESCO. Available at: http://www.ibe.unesco.org/fileadmin/user_upload/Publications/WDE/2010/pdf-versions/Argentina.pdf

²⁰ *Gross enrollment Ratio, tertiary, both sexes.* (2013) World Bank. Available at: <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SE.TER.ENRR>

²¹ Despite the fact that they have a very unequal educative sector, enrollment in Higher Education is the highest in Latin America.

Mu 駟 z, V.(2012) *El Derecho a la Educaci 髗: una mirada comparativa. Argentina, Uruguay, Chile y Finlandia.* Available at <http://portal.unesco.org/geography/en/files/15017/13548014291Estudio-comparativo-UNESCO-vernor-munoz-espanol.pdf/Estudio-comparativo-UNESCO-vernor-munoz-espanol.pdf>

²² *Education: Gross enrollment ratio by level of education.* UNESCO (2013). Available at: <http://data.uis.unesco.org/?queryid=142>

and 150, while in the ratio 151-200 first appear the National Autonomous University of Mexico), there is not extra information provided by the ranking because they just get the information on line on how many publications cited were. The lack of information does not allow us to analyze how they measure the indicators, understanding that is a waste of time trying to analyze why UBA is ranked in ARWU, because there is no way of analyzing the variables and the performance.²³ Also one important data source for ARWU are the Nobel Laureates -and prizes in general- and UBA has won 4 Nobel Prizes already but that is not telling us anything about the quality, teaching expertise or research capacities.

When referring to QS ranking, in the report of 2016/17 results they say: "Latin America struggles, but sees an institution in the top 100 for the first time. Universidad de Buenos Aires (85th) occupies the highest rank ever achieved by a university from the region"²⁴ When analyzing the six indicators presented the numbers are: Overall score 65.8; Academic reputation 92.8; employer reputation 98.9; faculty student 65.2; international faculty 46.4; international students 58.4. The indicators regardless to reputation we said before are of dubious validity and are the ones that the university best performed. While the ones that indicates if UBA is or not an international university do not say anything about quality, value of education or prestige of the university, they are just showing what we already know: there are not programs in English, and there are a few international professors and students, because it is not a developed international institution. So the indicators show that they are explaining nothing, it just specify that in size is a very big university, it has more than 100 years, is public, its status on research is high and is a comprehensive university²⁵. The dean of UBA, Alberto Barbieri, said regardless the recent report "Independently from the objections we can make for this type of rankings, the results are prominent (...) rankings do not reflect the production of a university. (...) This is a message to the authorities. Education in general should be a priority for Argentines, regardless of the government. We are improving in rankings, which show that successful policies are being implemented. We should continue with them and avoid deteriorating salaries of researchers and teachers"²⁶ Rankings show that there have been interesting policies in Argentina, rankings just evidence this, but policies are not decided for rankings.

Finally, in July 2016 THE published its results and in Argentina a debate happened because UBA was not even between the best Universities in Latin America, and the responsible of international relations explained that the University does not have a special office for dealing with these issues, that the good rankings ask for information. Argentina, none of their Universities, where selected to be part of the publication, they did not ask for information, the conclusion is: Argentina does not have good Universities. This shows also the lack of budget; human resources and policies at the University or governmental level towards being part of these rankings²⁷, and a complete lack of interest in accomplish ranking requirements. For THE there are no universities in Argentina that have minimum levels of quality, neither publications, the country do not receive international students. Omission for rankings is sign of a low quality educational system; we all know that they have not even asked for information.

As seen we explained the main characteristics of the Argentinean HE system, and rankings are not capable of explaining none of its main features. The only thing that is clear is that investing money in lax indicators might help to improve their position for some countries, but due to the limited budget in Argentina that is not possible and we have seen there are several problems to address locally that need for governmental help.

When analyzing the four categories mentioned before we can understand widely why rankings are not useful for Argentina.

a) Attracting international **students**: in Argentina what happens –and particularly at UBA- is that most of the students are Latin Americans, the mean of instruction is Spanish and the fee they charge to students is symbolic because education is a social right delivered to everyone that wants to live in the Argentine territory (as our constitution states). UBA do not get much economical profit from having international students and by the contrary they occupy space and resources destined for Argentine students at a very low price.

In 2009 at UBA there were 6.698 international students, representing the 27,9% of the total of international students in the country²⁸, while in 2012 the international students grew to 25.000 in all the Universities, most of them

²³ Direct link to UBA profile:

<http://www.shanghairanking.com/World-University-Rankings/University-of-Buenos-Aires.html>

²⁴ Report on 2016/17 QS ranking Available at: <http://www.topuniversities.com/university-rankings/world-university-rankings/2016>

²⁵ To see complete file of UBA at QS: <http://www.topuniversities.com/universities/universidad-de-buenos-aires-uba#wur>

²⁶ La UBA es la mejor universidad de America Latina segun el ranking QS. Diario La Nacion. 05/09/2016

<http://www.lanacion.com.ar/1934895-la-uba-es-la-mejor-universidad-de-america-latina-segun-el-ranking-qs>

²⁷ Diario La Nacion. "Es imposible que no haya universidades argentinas si el ranking es serio", dicen desde la UBA. 13/07/2016. Available at:

<http://www.lanacion.com.ar/1918076-repercusiones-ranking-universidades>

²⁸ In the official website of Buenos Aires University, in the international report of 2009 it states that: 943 students come from USA and Canada, 581 from Europe, from Latin America 1760: 432 from adjacent countries, 967 the rest of South America and 361 from central America and Mexico. From the rest of the world -Asia, Africa and the Oceania- only 38.

being Latin American students (principally from Colombia) doing their bachelor and master degree, attracted by the academic level, the living style in the capital city and the cheapness of the education²⁹, and the language. More than 61% of the students do it in private institutions, where they have to pay a fee and the government does not intervene economically and of course does not get economic profit from this students coming to the country. For Latin American students access and quality is determinant, and Spanish language make the difference for students to choose Argentina rather than Brazil where the official language is Portuguese. Most of the movement of SAn students are to study in SAn universities, because is closer, easier, and with the same language and sometimes with a very good level and low cost.

b) Secondly, as said before some interesting lessons can be learned from rankings. One of the main issues in Argentina refer to the reduced **budget** the UBA receive, and of course the other public universities. In terms of infrastructure there is not one unified building, the conditions in which students take classes are not good, the libraries are small and there are no places where students can study everyday. Teachers most of the times do not receive a salary for their work as a teacher, the budget for research is reduced and not all the professors can do research and should take other part time jobs to manage to live. This reality is not seen in rankings, while they just can afford to measure the amount of publications or Nobel prizes, they are not taking into account the differences in budget. Despite the fact Argentina have a very equitable system, most of the low-income students have to work to live and cannot concentrate in their studies. Despite the high rates of enrolment, desertion is very high, evidences of inefficiency of the public expenditures. With the results of QS, the Dean of UBA outlined that the university is public, free and massive with lower budgets than the neighbor ones "for example Sao Paulo University receives annually 4000 million dollars, with 10 times less students, the Autonomous University of Mexico 3000 millions, and UBA's budget is only 700 million dollars per year" (La Nacion. 06/09/2916). Since 2009, 6% of the GNP should be destined to Education, the growth of the country, and the reality of the country do not allow allocating funding in indicators in order to improve their position, there is no significant economic return in getting a better position in rankings for Argentina.

c) Thirdly, political decisions and budget are not being destined to position any of the Argentineans public universities in rankings. As Gabriel Capitelli, the Secretary of International Relations from UBA, said when they interviewed him because of the inexistence of Argentinean universities in THE ranking he says that "if the ranking were serious there is not way for not appearing in it (...) THE only works with universities that gives them information, and we don't provide that information (...) Serious rankings obtain data from the website of the Ministry of education and then call to verify that information (...) we don't have a specific office to look after the consultants" (Diario La Nacion. 13/07/2016). There is no political decision towards positioning in rankings in Argentina.

d) Finally, the country in terms of international position is not powerful, economic and social pressure obliged the different governments to attend domestically issues. To be strong outside it is necessary to have a strong economic position, the reach for **soft power** for Argentina only plays in the regional aspect while we are not economical or politically strong enough to encourage a process internationalization of HE.

The capacity of rankings of measuring Argentina's reality failed completely. They do not explain the real context nor they help improving any indicator. Rankings only show the level of internationalization of a university and the benefits of being international are not clear enough, not even for those who win, so the matter should not be turn internationals but to move forward better conditions and opportunities for HE. We propose instead of internationalize the HE systems, it is better strategy to regionalize, it allow states to obtain relative gains.

Regionalization: MERCOSUR

As said before, internationalization is the best strategy for players A and B, they obtain gains from competing in the international scenario and from positioning in rankings, while for the players C and D in the international board there are no gains, so they should integrate the best they can their HE systems in order to cooperate and get benefits from it. Regionalization is one of the possibilities for emerging economies, at least the ones in SA. Instead of making enormous efforts (we mean economic one) in trying to be an important actor in the international scenario of the HE, we should be worrying about the already existing and poorly developing process of regionalization in MERCOSUR in its Educative Sector of MERCOSUR (ESM in English, SEM in Spanish).

As said before there are six on going processes of regionalization of HE in South America, which explain the interest put in this kind of strategy rather than in internationalization. We centre our attention in EM that was created directly related to the neo liberal globalization in 1991, to prepare the human resources and the labor force for the desires of the liberalization of the regional economies and to locate the region in a better position for negotiating. The

UBA Internacional (2009). http://www.uba.ar/download/internacionales/uba_internacional.pdf

²⁹ Ya son mas de 2500 los estudiantes extranjeros en Argentina. 08/05/2012. <http://www.lanacion.com.ar/1471448-ya-son-mas-de-25000-los-estudiantes-extranjeros-en-la-argentina>

importance is that due to the work done within EM, there were significant improvements not only for the powerful countries that are part of EM (Argentina, Brasil, Uruguay), but also for the small ones – Bolivia, Paraguay, etc.-. EM has clear general aims, they pretend by coordinating their policies to integrate education to the need for social, economical and political development of the people and the national societies. We are going to consider in this aspect, the following features of EM as gains for all the country members.

a) Mobility of Students: It started in 2004, and two years later 58 students participated, in 2008 it increased to 150. There is a regional effort to promote mobility of graduates and postgraduates to travel among the region, not only students but also professors, to increase the mutual knowledge and promote inter institutional cooperation bringing academic institutions closer. It allows the different cultures and students to be in touch, as contact between countries increase, the knowledge of the others increase too, and the better it works the regionalization. And at the same time, the universities start regionalizing and internationalize their policies, thinking that their students and professors can be from a vast region, bigger than that of their own country.

b) Accreditation Mechanism (and titles recognition): Finally the setup of ARCU SUR allows the equivalence of some courses, programs and degrees to facilitate academic exchange within the members. This system of accreditation of University degrees for the regional recognition of the academic quality - ARCU-SUR- was elaborated in 2008 based on the experience of the Experimental Mechanism of Accreditation (MEXA), up today this is the principal feature developed by EM, thanks to this, more countries from SA decided to be part of the educative integration, it creates a structure where there are established norms and procedures that the different actors can trust, it allow and promote states to cooperate.

c) Language learning experiences: One of the main points in favor for the region is that almost every country speaks Spanish, unless Brazil, so the difficulty arise when trying to promote Spanish learning in Brazil, and Portuguese learning in the rest of the countries. English is not being even considered by EM as a teaching and learning language in the region for the language experiences are exclusively related to Portuguese and Spanish.

d) Promotion of Significant Disciplines for MERCOSUR: This means that the attention is in making educational profiles related to producing human resources according to the needs of MERCOSUR and the development of the economic capacities of the region.

e) Research Joint Program: Based in the need for improving the basis of integration process, and due to the reason that the benefits that can be obtained are more evident if the cooperation and integration is deep, they developed NUCLEO. This is a Core of Studies and research regarding regionalization in HE, financing projects that propose new courses of action, new ideas that can be expressed in the region, and thought within the region (avoiding the direct application of outside ideas and ideals).

f) Institutionalization: The degree up to which the precedent decisions are implemented has to do with the power the Institution –EM- has. Several decisions were finally expressed in terms of institutionalization, for example the need for creation of a MERCOSUR Educative Financing Fund.

g) Region Global Relations: Of course EM has gone beyond its own existence, and acting as a region has already related to several other countries or regions. The most advance and profitable is with the UE, engagement that started in 1992, signed three years later the "International Framework Cooperation Agreement". And this shows also the interest on the regional process is to resituate themselves within a global competitiveness, economical, but also political, cultural and educational.

This experience on cooperation among EM is a good example on how states in SA instead of fighting and spending enormous budgets in getting international, they can bet on the region to obtain gains, that for sure they are not obtaining in the general board, which is represented by the positions in rankings.

CONCLUSIONS

Rankings encourage everyone "must participate", imposed by the globalization to consider HE all around the world, homogenizing cultures, histories, governments, policies, budgets under the same indicators. They show that everyone should pursue indicators of World Class Universities. In the present work we argued that those who get benefits are the ones to invest money in positioning their Universities as WCUs. So there is a category of actor that should invest money and should try to internationalize their universities, while there are others that are not gaining anything from rankings appearance. As globalization defined winners and losers all around the world, we see that in SA it produces more fails than benefits. SA have several reasons for not participating in this rankings, and in particular we showed the reasons for Argentina not to even considerate the possibility of investing money in rankings, and that they should bet in EM instead, this policy of inaction towards rankings has been the trend for Argentina´s behavior in internationalization, and along the years we can track diverse and different strategies towards regionalization. On the other hand, there are lessons also to be learn and we expose several of them: pay more attention to research as a source for policy making and development in every dimension for each country, salaries of teachers and exclusivity in

teaching, expertise of professors is very important too, infrastructure is an imperative one also.

Rankings are not of any help in teaching how to improve indicators domestically, they don't study the history, politics, culture, context, budget, access, quality, teaching, of a particular HE system, it decontextualize variables. They are useless -even for the ones that get benefit- for addressing important structural characteristics of the systems of HE around the world. If the purpose of rankings is to cope with students and professors, charge them a fee and keep them in the country, then the ones to participate should be the ones that get benefit from it. Some countries and Argentina in particular do not receive anything in return for participating in the rankings race and obtaining better positions, reason enough for not agreeing with them.

From the main rankings, ARWU, QS and THE we have learnt that they are indicators of superfluous and economic aspects of the HE. On the other hand, their determinant variables are easy to manipulate investing a lot of money on them so they end up being empty tools of measure, what are they showing? Does this mean an improvement in the HE system, or just an outstanding economical capacity or an investment to get higher return rates? So positioning in ranking does not say anything about the quality of a degree, or the amount of international students do not make a university comparable to Oxford, Cambridge or Harvard. The same happens when analyzing UBA case; they did not say anything at all, just that the ones that spend money are near to achieve top positions in rankings.

We understood in general terms the two conceptions of the aims of HE, as an economical good or as a social right, we define that the ones that participate in rankings are looking for soft power, economic returns or reputation, while internationalization, as globalization did some years before, outlines winners and losers. We define internationalization is a winner's strategy, while the loser's one is not to play in the international board, and regionalize as a way for seeking other relative gains. We define in the case of Argentina in particular, and in Educative MERCOSUR in general which are the regional gains that can be obtained by cooperation among binding institutions. The reason for acting altogether among EM's institutions is because they are in a distinctive position, and they can obtain gains, which they are not able to obtain acting on their own. This benefits from regionalization are the reason why states in SA should not play in the general board, but in the reduced one, we define they go from gains in mobility, to creating institutionalization which promotes further cooperation like ARCU SUR, or the MERCOSUR Educative Financing Fund and more important of all, cooperation in HE goes beyond it's own limits, because it seeks to develop a regional know how (NUCLEO) to understand in their own language which are the failures and which are the problems to surpass and how; it helps develop in educational and cultural terms the region itself, but also in economical terms seeking to promote significant disciplines for the region, and finally it allows all the states, the small ones and the big ones in the region to stand in a distinctive position in the general board, strengthening their individual positions to became part of a bigger and stronger region with more capacity of negotiation, and why not with the ability to seek for soft power, reputation or financial returns in a future.

We analyzed with four categories, why rankings are not suitable for Argentina's case in general and applying to UBA case: soft power, political decisions, students and budget issues; and explain the reasons why they should play the regional board instead of the international. This characteristics allow us to extend the Argentinean situation -of uselessness of competing in the rankings race- to all SAn countries, and also, as we defined the characteristics of actors C and D, probably all SAn countries belong to one or other type of player, which in all explains that there are actually 6 on going processes on cooperation for regional improvement of the HE.

Regarding students, for SAn countries language of instruction and monetary reasons seems to be a determinant when analyzing the flow of them, students moving within SAn universities are SAn students. According to the second aspect, budget, we saw in the Argentinean situation there is no political interest, neither economic capacity to invest in improving ranking indicators, probably this has to do with the incapacity to assure minimum conditions to their own citizens, in terms of infrastructure, loans or financial help for the less favorable groups, good salaries to professors, possibility of providing research capacities to their own professors and researchers, equity in access, while desertion shows the inefficient use of the public funding; budget for HE is limited. As said before what happened in Argentina can be generalized for SAn countries, which are not looking to take steps towards policy making based on ranking results, according to our graphic for actor D, where we can place several SAn countries, the expenditure in improving rankings indicators is completely a waste of time, money, and energy. So whether a country is player C or D, it makes no sense to invest in improving rankings indicators, as seen before, because they are still the weaker players, and their effort will be inefficient, instead we proposed for all of SAn countries to cooperate regionally. Despite the fact that there are players D in SA, priorities should be rethink, and that should not be a state policy; instead regionalization should be of central interest from the political point of view. On the other hand, there are no issues on soft power when several capacities are missing. Soft Power is something that powerful countries can pursue, and in SA no one is searching for gaining Soft Power from internationalization of their HE, yes states can obtain regional soft power, one more reason to regionalize rather than internationalize.

One main issue here is to take the useful lessons that university rankings expose, they can be used as a measure tool and as a lesson for some countries on several points they should **improve: research interest, funding and infrastructure issues**. This is something that SAn countries can work altogether, among their existing

institutions ,to improve, but it also refers to a national rethinking on the place HE has for development of their own country and the region itself. Herein resides the importance of having a prosperous HE system, it defines the vision of the country, and it allows understanding the way development in general should adopt, because this is the main objective of education, to tend to development of their own country.

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