

RANKINGS IN BRAZILIAN HIGHER EDUCATION: AN APPROACH TO PUBLIC AND PRIVATE RANKINGS

RANKINGS EN LA EDUCACIÓN SUPERIOR BRASILEÑA: UNA APROXIMACIÓN A LOS RANKINGS PÚBLICOS Y PRIVADOS

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ABSTRACT

This article provides a theoretical approach to public and private higher education academic rankings in Brazil aimed towards understanding their complexity and course of development. The paper supports that the changes stemming from the transformation from a Provider State into an Evaluator State model strengthened the trends around assessments through rankings, and it also confirms the incipience of private and state rankings faced with a market scenario where they are ultimately legitimized.

Keywords: university rankings, educational assessment, higher education, universities, academic rankings.

RESUMEN

En el presente artículo, realizamos una aproximación teórica a los rankings académicos, públicos y privados, de la educación superior brasileña, con la tentativa de comprender su complejidad y su trayectoria. Defendemos que los cambios derivados de la transformación del Estado proveedor para un modelo de Estado evaluador reforzaron las tendencias en torno a las calificaciones por medio de rankings, y constatamos la insipiencia de los rankings estatales y privados frente a la existencia de un mercado en el cual acaban ganando legitimidad.

Palabras clave: rankings universitarios, evaluación educacional, educación superior, universidades, rankings académicos.

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INTRODUCTION

In present-day Brazil, the preparation of higher education institution (HEI) rankings is present in or is part of the public policies on assessment, mainly in large-scale assessments, such as the rankings culture started in 1996 with the now-extinct National Course Examination (ENC, per its acronym in Portuguese), better known as Provão, created during the government of President Fernando Henrique Cardoso (FHC) and resumed later with the National Student Performance Test (ENADE, per its acronym in Portuguese), specifically during the second term of President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, when, in 2008, the Preliminary Concept of Courses (CPC) and General Index of Courses (IGC) ratings were created, which made the comparison between institutions clearer and sharper (Polidori, 2009; Barreyro, 2008; Andrade, 2011).

Although these assessment tools have a state origin, with regulatory nuances, rankings, involving comparisons and numerical aspects, do not stem only from public power. In Brazil, alongside public policies such as the ENC, ENADE, IGC and CPC, there are also rankings promoted by the private sector, such as the Student Guide that, although established in 1984, began to reward the best universities since 1988, and is currently in force, and the Ranking Universitário Folha (RUF) of the morning newspaper Folha de São Paulo, created in 2012, which is presented as a promising and fruitful object of study for the evaluators/researchers of higher education.

It is appropriate that we review what happens in Brazil: the pioneer and extinct ranking of the men's magazine *Playboy*, Best Colleges of Brazil, created in 1981 and officially launched in 1982, reigned absolutely for about two decades. Likewise, at the end of the nineties, the ranking of the magazine *Época* was released,

which had a short life and little expression in the university setting.

As we can see, it is quite a diversified scenario at a national level in the field of comparative assessments that will act or currently act in Brazilian higher education. We deal therefore with an environment marked by the presence of private rankings, native of publications related to institutions of a commercial nature that still coexist and will coexist with comparative assessments stemmed from the public power.

Studies performed by Ordorika and Gomez (2010) help us understand the differences between rankings from private sources and from public sources, classifying them in two planes, according to their orientation and purpose. In the foreground, the rankings related to academic criteria developed by governments or universities, and in the background are the rankings of commercial orientation, unofficial publications that are not linked to the policies of governments and that rely on the sales of advertising linked to the disclosure of the ranking.

Regarding the rankings in the foreground, those linked to the official policies of government, we can say that there is a dense and diverse literature (Brito, 2008; Verhine, Dantas & Soares, 2006; Bittencourt, Viali, Rodrigues & Casartelli, 2010; Gomes, 2003; Gouveia, Silva, Silveira, Jacomini & Braz, 2005; Calderon Poltronieri, Borges, 2011; Castro, 2003; Durham, 2003; Durham, 2010; Dias Sobrinho, 2010b; Dias Sobrinho, 2003; Leite, 2008; Real, 2009). The reality of the rankings of the background is different, since they have attracted little research interest by the scientific community. Based on data gathered from the Theses Bank

of the Coordenação de Aperfeiçoamento de Pessoal de Nível Superior (CAPES), the Theses Bank of the University of Sao Paulo (USP), the Theses Bank of the State University of Campinas (UNICAMP) and the virtual library Scientific Electronic Library Online (SCIELO), regarding the research on private rankings such as those from the Student Guide and the Playboy and Época magazines, we note the existence of a small and inexpressive number of scientific articles (Andrade, 2011; Andrade, Moita, Lobo & Silva, 2009; Setton, 2005; Odorika & Gomez, 2010) and the absence of master's or doctoral theses specifically addressing the issue in question.

Facing the scarce scientific production in relation to the issue of private rankings, taking an exploratory bibliographic research as the starting point, this article presents a theoretical approach to public and private higher education rankings in Brazil, aiming to understand its complexity and its path in the light of the changes brought about by the reform of the state and the corresponding transition from a provider State to an overseer State. We defend the thesis that, in Brazil, the institutionalization of the overseer State reinforced the expansion trends of evaluation through rankings, spreading transnational policies that accentuate and enhance the higher education markets, which legitimize the functioning of rankings as a way of institutional differentiation and induction of quality improvement.

Academic rankings in the context of the State reform

The trajectory of education assessment policies and, consequently, the presence of rankings in the assessment of higher education, are usually linked to the changes and reforms in the structures of states and the globalization process.

In social policies such as education, health and social security, or more specifically, in the field of higher education assessment policies and in both the public and private university administration, certain trends emerge, which must be observed from the perspective of the State reform, a phenomenon that took place after the crisis of the seventies which brought the state nearer to the private sector through the assimilation of logic on the economy, the productive system, competition and market dynamics, a portrait of the crisis of Keynesianism and the fiscal crisis of states, culminating in the election of conservative governments in key countries worldwide, examples of consolidated democracy and advanced industrialization, such as England, with Margaret Thatcher, and the United States of America (USA), with Ronald Reagan, both in the eighties (King, 1988; Anderson, 1995; Abrucio, 2005).

Before the reform period that consolidated in the 1980s, social protection structures accompanied the growth of the so-called "Golden Age" of economy that occurred in the 50s and 60s, a period of exaltation of the 'Welfare State' as a social model of the state, of the Keynesianism as an economic model and Weberian bureaucracy as administrative model (Abrucio, 2005).

To this end, in an article contemporary of the governments of Thatcher and Reagan, King (1988) points out the resistance that existed in the advanced industrial states and consolidated democratic regimes in relation to the imminent reduction of their structures of Welfare State through reformist policies. For King (1988), mature welfare states have their structures and benefits intertwined with social structures modeled by themselves by means of which social protection was institutionalized. This is clearly not the case of Brazil or Latin America, with the exception of a few countries that exhibited

satisfactory rates of social protection (Draibe, 1997). Therefore, it is pertinent to emphasize the theses that point to the embryonic nature of social welfare structures in Brazil (Paiva, 1991), which, like many countries in Latin America, have in common, as King says (1988), a marginal character, compared with the structures of the central countries. It is worth highlighting that in the Brazilian case, the consolidation of rights and victories in the sphere of social protection, in legal terms, happened in 1988 with the enactment of the Federal Constitution and the later democratization of the country, at which the fiscal crisis, globalization processes and movements of reform of the state and its bureaucracy, were in place in many European countries and the USA (Anderson, 1995; Paiva, 1991).

The model of welfare state was related to a concept which viewed education in its state-character public dimension (Draibe, 1997). However, this view suffered a change of interpretation that affected the structures of social protection of states, because education started to be seen as a service within an educational market. This way, during the state reform processes, some authors highlighted the emergence and expansion in Europe and the globalized world of an Anglo-American university model, resulting from the reforms of the provider State, imbued with liberal and transnational conceptions (Lima, Azevedo & Catani, 2008).

For Lima, Azevedo and Catani (2008), the transnationalization of the policies intensified strongly at the end of the nineties with the Bologna Declaration, which objectified the establishment of a European space of fully-integrated higher education, in spite of the significant differences between member countries of the European Union, in a logic of

competitiveness within the EU itself and beyond, mainly with American higher education.

The Bologna Process will remain in history as a political process strongly governed and regulated in national terms, in the context of certain countries, and externally determined by transnational agendas. Voluntarily, no national government seems willing to stay out of the process, preferring to adhere, even though the consequences of creating a highly-competitive internationally evaluated European system, course by course, institution by institution, country by country, are likely to produce dramatic results for some of the participating countries as required by the commercial logic of emulation, with the corresponding creation of external and internal markets (Lima, Azevedo & Catani, 2008, p. 13; own translation).

According to Lima, Azevedo and Catani (2008), the Bologna process enabled the existence of a movement of “regulatory convergence” in the common European space, with the aim of creating a system, subject to the same guidelines and rules that would allow internal competition to function according to common and comparable criteria. This is a system of convergence that ultimately creates the basis for a competitive and market scenario, characterized by regulation, the information of services to consumers and continuous quality assessment.

Faced with the advance of the logic of capital, in the 1980s and 1990s, a scenario appeared in which assessment policies objectify the assurance and regulation of quality of the services offered, prompting the emergence of the idea of quasi-market, crystallized in altering the course followed by the educational policies (Souza & Oliveira, 2003).

In this sense, Laval (2004) considers US and England as representatives of the liberal ideal of market, countries where free market ideology found its classic application field before spreading universally. Laval (2004) notes that, e.g., during the electoral program of the Reagan administration in 1980, the following was promised:

Deregulation of public education, the elimination of the federal department of education and suspension of public school bus. Schools should become for-profit companies to the extent that market efficiency would be presumably able to improve access to education and quality of teaching, freeing them from bureaucratic regulations and unions (p. 91; own translation).

In Brazil, the whole process of expansion of liberal principles represented a break in paradigm, to the extent that the free market ideology was reaching increasingly antagonistic spaces such as the university. In addressing the inclusion of Brazilian public universities like the University of São Paulo (USP) and the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro (UFRJ), within the “rationalizing logic of capital”, Paula (2001) presents a critical approach in relation to the modernization of Brazilian public universities and places the University Reform of 1968 as the starting point for the “dilution of the classic role of the university” in the country (p. 15). Under a different perspective, Sampaio (1998) highlights that the University Reform of 1968, despite having been made by the dictatorial government, meant modernization and dynamism, providing the higher education system with the ability to align even with the countless factions of the student movement of that time, such as the abolition of the chairs and the institutionalization of scientific research. In the same perspective, Calderón (2000) refers to the University Reform of 1968 as a

policy of modernization and restructuring of the university system that helped the higher education to abandon one public (state) conception and adopt a more flexible approach linking itself gradually and strongly in the 90s, to the logic of private for profit universities, geared towards the business and market ideal.

The changes regarding the role played by the state before the fiscal crisis that began in the 1970s, which worsened during in the 80s, were operated from processes of managerial reform in the structures of social welfare, which were also visible in the sphere of the universities. Unlike what happened in other countries in South America which massified their public universities, Brazil, in the same way that Chile, chose to maintain an elite public university, geared towards scientific research, fostering at the same time a mass college system composed of private institutions of doubtful quality (Calderón, 2000).

The decades of 1970 and 1980 were still expressing hegemony of public universities in the scenario of Brazilian higher education. However, from the 1990s, with the emergence of a large number of private universities –the result of political choices of the University Reform of 1968, of those resulting from the reform of the state and pressures of multilateral agencies promoting neoliberal policies at a global level, the principle of competition between Brazilian universities became explicit, mainly from the private sector (Calderón, 2000).

Faced with this reality, Dias Sobrinho (2004) highlights that the higher education experiences some kind of paradigm break that interferes with the existing understanding of the assessment at this level:

“...higher education has been considered an institution that

produces knowledge and trains citizens for the social and economic life, for the benefit of building free and developed nations. In a different position, the defense of higher education as a function of the economy and individual and private interests grows and is strengthened today. These ideological differences concerning the social role of higher education interfere heavily with the understanding of the assessment functions” (p. 704).

In this perspective, the social role of higher education is imbued with ideological differences that interfere with understanding and definition of the purpose and role of assessment for the education (Dias Sobrinho, 2004), i.e., there are “those who see the school as a constituent institution of the Republic and want it to build citizens” –and there are too– “those who see school as a company, in a vast training market” (p 704; own translation). As Dias Sobrinho (2004) states, “there is no consensus on assessment in general and there aren’t either many agreements on what is higher education today and, above all, what are its most important functions in society” (p 705;. own translation). It is an unequal dispute which, as Laval (2004) states, education was legitimized as “object of choice in a free market” due to “the political event of neoliberalism in the 80s” (p. 91; own translation).

Along with the new concepts that determine the functions of the State, which went from provider to overseer, the citizen gained the status of client and consumer. The assessment systems and tools, whether from the state or private, are established as indicators of quality of universities in a scenario of competitiveness, proximity to the logic of the market and

interference of transnational policies. All those elements are what provide a space for debate on the types of implementation and the need and importance of the assessment policies (Gouveia, Silva, Silveira, Jacomini & Braz, 2005).

The change from a model of provider state to an overseer state means changing from a model of interventionist state to an overseer state (Gomes, 2002), ultimately reflecting and promoting, around the world and obviously also in Brazil, the development of public or private assessments, numerical and quantitative, focused on the regulatory principle in the case of the State, and also in the principle of the competition, especially in the case of private initiative, although there are examples of state policies addressed for competition and advertising of performance of institutions as inducers of quality improvement, basically configured as public and private rankings.

The appearance and coexistence of public and private academic rankings

During the eighties, pioneering initiatives of higher education assessment appeared in Brazil, such as the University Reform Evaluation Program (PARU, per its acronym in Portuguese) and the Executive Group for the Higher Education Reform (GERES, per its acronym in Portuguese). These initiatives presented different positions and political and ideological trends. According to Barreyro and Rothen (2008), the first, though it was a state initiative, considered necessary the participation of the academic community and favoring an insight process on their own practice by consulting the representative segments of the academic community, through self-assessment mechanisms, in a training and emancipatory perspective. The second, with an emphasis on technicism, proposed the regulation and control of universities not bureaucratically, but through

assessment processes directed to identify institutional performance. The latter proposed also institutional diversification of universities (research institutions and vocational training), the possibility for specialized universities in an exclusive area of knowledge –thus they would not be forced to contemplate the various aspects of knowledge- and linking the funding of universities with institutional performance.

From these initiatives, the initial framework for assessment policies, it is possible to draw a historical-evolutionary path of the trajectory of the higher education assessment in Brazil, which, according to Polidori (2009), is marked by four cycles. The first cycle, from 1983 to 1992, was characterized by the existence of attempts to make a higher education assessment process feasible, which culminated with the introduction of the PARU and the GERES. The second cycle, from 1993 to 1995, was characterized by the production of policies such as the Institutional Evaluation Program of Brazilian Universities (PAIUB, per its acronym in Portuguese) that, according to Barreyro and Rothen (2008), was based on the view that the assessment is a political and voluntary act of the institution aimed at planning its academic and social project based on self-assessment in a formative and emancipatory perspective, not intended to punish or reward. The third cycle, from 1996 to 2003, became a reality during the administration of former President Fernando Henrique Cardoso (FHC), through the creation of the National Course Examination, an innovative tool that manages the state ranking of the courses offered by higher education institutions, prepared from student performance, widely disclosed by the media.

To Polidori (2009), the fourth cycle began in 2004, during the first term of former President Luis Inácio Lula da Silva, with the creation of the

National System of Higher Education Assessment (SINAES, per its acronym in Portuguese), which, despite including an assessment tool of student performance, the National Student Performance Test (ENADE), was based on an educational and emancipatory proposal, trying to eradicate the labeled neoliberal assumptions of FHC's government, which propagated the "hypervalorization of competitiveness between educational institutions and rankings with wide disclosure by the press" (Calderón, Poltronieri and Borges, 2011, p 815; own translation).

In an analysis of the recent history of higher education assessment in Brazil, Molck (2013) complements those cycles systematized by Polidori (2009) stating that the fourth phase locked in 2007 with the creation of the IGC, an index that allowed ranking again, directly promoted by the government, reinstating governmental actions from the times of FHC. Faced with this reality, Molck (2013) considers the beginning of a fifth cycle, characterized by the assessment for regulation, starting in 2007, which involved changes in the legal structure and public governance guidelines through hypervalorization of the result-based assessment, developing policies to strengthen management capacity of the government aiming its functionality towards system-regulating policies.

From the path established based on the five cycles, it should be stressed that during the FHC government, at the third cycle described by Polidori (2009), a comprehensive reform was initiated in public administration in response to the fiscal crisis of the state of the eighties. According to Bresser-Pereira (1996, p.1; own translation) the minister who commanded these reforms, the pressures resulting from globalization and state management crisis were "imposing, worldwide, redefinition of functions

of the state and its bureaucracy.” In the heat of the reforms, the Ministry of Education of FHC’s government, led by Minister Paulo Renato, presented the ENC, popularly known as Provão, to the country, first major official ranking that represented a break with the assessment policy of the PAIUB prevailing at the time and was based on the so-called emancipatory assessment (Gomes, 2003).

Consequently, the evaluation through rankings was gaining ground not only among private universities, which adopted the advertising use of the good results, but also among public universities, who did not hesitate to use their scores obtained on the Provão ranking as advertising speech and academic status (Barreyro, 2008; Tuyama, 2011).

The Provão ranking started a period marked by comparative assessments (benchmarking) between institutions, competitiveness in the educational market and market prestige. This was a period characterized by the marked presence of numerical and mathematical elements in the educational field, within a quantitative logic of the market.

After two terms of FHC’s government, the SINAES was created during the administration of President Lula, and consequently the ENADE, with the attempt to alter the dynamics of assessment policies, leaving aside the classification and ranking. Thus, the ranking created by the government of FHC, the Provão, was terminated. Both the SINAES and the ENADE were acclaimed by large academic sectors who were critical of FHC’s policies labeled as neoliberal, being framed within an emancipatory perspective (Ministério da Educação do Brasil, 2004), distant from the classificatory practices based on competitiveness.

Despite the extinction of the Provão, the search for rankings and the seduction that

their results caused in the media seemed to have no end. After the creation of SINAES, the ENADE was exploited in the press as if it were a ranking, a fact that was quickly rejected by their makers, since the ENADE did not allow the ranking because of how it was structured (Dias Sobrinho, 2010a). In this sense, Fiamini and Calderon (2012), when investigating the ENADE in light of the coverage of the morning newspaper *Folha de São Paulo*, highlighted that the public and the press were impregnated with the culture of comparative assessments (rankings) instituted during the eight years of FHC’s government, through the Provão.

In the second term of Lula’s government, contrary to the actions performed in his first term in 2008, the CPC and IGC were created, both indexes that gave way again to the ranking of higher education institutions, going counter to the principles which guided the SINAES (Andrade, 2011, Polidori, 2009; Barreyro, 2008; Calderón Poltronieri & Borges, 2011).

As we can see, all government actions described represent public (state) assessment initiatives through rankings, being the first one introduced in 1996, through the Provão.

Unlike Anglo-Saxon countries where assessments by private rankings have greater cultural rooting (Ordorika & Gomez, 2010), in the Brazilian case, higher education ranking is still incipient, since it has faced and still faces strong pockets of resistance. Although private rankings exist in Brazil since 1981, when the Ranking of the Best Colleges in Brazil was created, promoted by the men’s magazine *Playboy*, the Brazilian experience can be considered as emerging to the extent that due to the processes of interruptions and continuities of public policy, it was not rooted in Brazilian educational culture.

Prior to the official public policies based

on the ranking of universities that, as we have seen, began in Brazil in 1996, the ranking of Playboy magazine, prepared by a trade publication linked to the publishing market, appeared as a pioneering model in the field of ranking of undergraduate courses in higher education (Universidade Estadual Paulista Júlio de Mesquita Filho, 2000), linked to the background rankings exposed by Ordorika and Gomez (2010). According to Marques (2009), in his article written for the magazine Pesquisa, from the Fundação de Amparo a la Investigación del Estado de San Pablo (FAPESP), one of the most powerful organizations for research funding in Brazil, the popularization of rankings is a recent phenomenon, “in Brazil until the 1990s, the best-known ranking of universities in the country was produced by a men’s magazine, Playboy” (Marques, 2009, p. 1; own translation).

The newspaper article entitled “University is listed first in assessment made by Playboy” (Universidade Estadual Paulista Júlio de Mesquita Filho, 2000; own translation), by addressing the results obtained by Universidade Estadual Paulista Júlio de Mesquita Filho (UNESP) in the ranking of Playboy, specifically at the end of the 90s, highlights that in the Brazilian higher education three rankings co-existed, originally from the private sector, linked to the publishing market –the rankings from Playboy, the magazine Época and the Student Guide. These are three non-state rankings from which the one from Playboy and from the magazine Época are no longer current, surviving currently the ranking produced by the Student Guide and the recently launched Ranking Universitário Folha (RUF), from the morning newspaper Folha de São Paulo.

As Ordorika and Gomez (2010) highlighted, the rankings unrelated to the government, i.e., those that are unofficial and

are produced by the private sector –publishing companies, media, consulting groups- form a movement that is based in the training of a skilled and specialized workforce by stimulating competition among universities, a movement of internationalization of these higher education institutions.

If the extinct ranking of Playboy reigned absolutely in the educational scenario in the 80s, and in the 90s there were the three rankings mentioned above, that of the Student Guide, published by Editora Abril, was the only private one in the first decade of the 21st century, adding over 20 years of experience, and co-existing, since 2012, with the newly created RUF.

While researching on institutional communication and disclosure of the results of the Best Universities Award 2011, prepared by the ranking of the Student Guide which granted a recognition to the best by awarding stars (the more stars, the better the quality), it was verified that both public and private universities used various forms of advertising regarding their good performance (Henrique, 2011; Centro Universitário do Cerrado Patrocínio, 2011; Tuyama, 2011).

The assessment of higher education courses fostered by the Student Guide does not go unnoticed by the various segments of the Brazilian higher education. Some journalistic materials point to a convergence geared towards celebrating and justifying the good results. In this sense, professor Dione Oliveira Moura, from the School of Social Communication, University of Brasilia (UNB), a major state university, said:

“The result of that publication, undoubtedly, is a sign that we are walking in the right direction. The investments we make in teacher training, restoration of laboratories, curricular reforms and strengthening of our journalism laboratory practices are proof of that.

Our students also play an important role in the results obtained, they are critical participants. We have a mature course that we treat as if it were a new course, we never think that it is complete, we are always reinventing it. The five stars we obtained represent that (Universidade de Brasília, 2011, p. 1; own translation).

The discourse of prorector of undergraduate studies at University of São Paulo (USP), the leading Brazilian university, Dr. Telma Maria Zorn, justifies obtaining excellent results stating that to “maintain that excellence we perform ongoing, internal and external evaluations, and establish goals, always trying to surpass them” (Student Guide, 2011, p 1; own translation). In the particular segment of higher education such discourses are also found: Braz Cubas University (UBC) highlights the ranking of the Student Guide as “a publication that recognizes the quality of public and private higher education” (Planeta Universitário, 2011, p. 1; own translation). The University of Northern Paraná (Unopar), self-proclaimed pioneer and leader in the area of distance education, also highlights the performance obtained in the ranking of the Student Guide. For its deputy Rector, Professor Hélio Rodolfo Navarro, “the work being done is bearing fruit. The fact that we have 18 courses in the list of courses with stars show the quality advantage of the courses offered by Unopar” (University of Northern Paraná, 2011, p. 1; own translation).

In the field of religious universities, traditional Catholic University of San Pablo discloses on its website the results of the 2010 ranking, entitled “Proud to be PUC. PUC-SP wins Best Universities Award from the Student Guide” (Catholic University of San Pablo, 2010, p. 1; own translation), highlighting the stars received by 25 courses of this university. Other universities, as is the case of the Methodist

University of São Paulo for the coordinator of the Bilingual Executive Secretary course, Professor Ana Maria Santana Martins, also commemorate the good results obtained: “they represent the love, dedication and commitment that the course’s management, faculty and all the administrative sector of the institution have shown in relation to our course” (Methodist, 2011, p. 1; own translation).

As we can see, these are institutions of different legal nature (state, church and private) expressing similar discourses in the sense that they attribute legitimacy and confidence in the ranking results of the Student Guide without questioning the methodological procedures employed. The presence in the Brazilian national level of the Student Guide ranking and, more recently, of the RUF, represent a phenomenon that has already occurred in Anglo-Saxon countries decades ago, being the paradigmatic example the Times university ranking, Times Higher Education (THES) World University Ranking, formally linked before to the influential British newspaper The Times (Ordorika and Gomez, 2010).

Final Observations

In this article, we propose a theoretical approach to public and private rankings of Brazilian higher education and we seek to establish proximity and understand its complex trajectory in a context marked by the transition from a provider State to a model of an overseer state, a situation that ended up reinforcing trends around the numerical assessments aimed at providing instrumental support that crystallizes in the form of rankings.

Among other conclusions that we could reach, is the finding of an unquestionable reality demonstrated by the facts, in the early

years of this decade, in Brazil: public (state) academic rankings coexist with private ones. This is a scenario in which assessment tools were configured to measure education quality in a qualifying perspective, underpinned by the principle of competition among institutions as an inducer of quality.

It's a scenario that, all throughout recent decades, was built in the midst of political and ideological disputes relating to the need and importance of the Brazilian higher education system assessment. Since the eighties, when the first initiatives for evaluation of universities arose, there was always tension between what Santos (1995) calls pillar of emancipation and pillar of regulation. The existence of the fifth cycle, mentioned by Molck (2013), demonstrates the legitimacy of the assessment for regulation in the government sphere, supported in one of the pillars of the new public administration: the results assessment.

Despite the existence of governments with different political and ideological profiles and of the redemption promises of the Latin American left, made by Lula's government, proclaiming against neoliberal policies, we can say that public policies in the last 30 years, converged in the assessment for regulation as a means of stimulating the higher education market that, in Brazil, according to the Higher Education Census of 2010 (Ministério da Educação do Brasil, 2012), concentrates 74.2% of undergraduate enrollments in private institutions. This means 2100 private institutions, i.e. 88.3% of all higher education institutions serving a total of 4,736,001 students, and 278 public institutions serving 1,643,298 students, which take the government rankings as one of the main quality parameters, as well as the quality stars offered by private rankings, such as the Student Guide.

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