



WORDL CLASS UNIVERSITIES AND THE IDEOLOGY OF EXCELLENCE: GLOBAL AND LOCAL TRENDS

UNIVERSIDADES DE CLASSE MUNDIAL E A IDEOLOGIA DA EXCELÊNCIA:
TENDÊNCIAS GLOBAIS E LOCAIS

UNIVERSIDADES DE RANGO MUNDIAL Y LA IDEOLOGÍA DE LA EXCELENCIA:
TENDENCIAS GLOBALES Y LOCALES

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ABSTRACT: This paper, which results from a doctoral study, analyzes the World Class University model, based on the guidelines of international organizations, especially the World Bank and its experts. It examines how this concept has been gaining strength in Brazil and other countries, groups and blocks, encouraging the promotion of programs, policies and projects. The methodology used included document analysis, recognizing that the investigation of the trends and manifestations of the World Class University presupposes an understanding of the historical and social totality. The article concludes that the World Class University model, based on an “Ideology of Excellence”, is a global trend that serves as an archetype to induce international competitiveness. This intensifies the differentiation and hierarchization between and within institutions on different scales, and leads to transformations in the very concept of university.

KEYWORDS: World Class University. Ideology of Excellence. Educational politics. International Organizations. Initiatives of Excellence.

RESUMO: Neste trabalho, que resulta de pesquisa de doutorado, analisa-se o modelo de Universidade de Classe Mundial (UCM), a partir das orientações dos Organismos Internacionais (OI), em especial o Banco Mundial (BM), e seus *experts* e ainda como esta concepção vem ganhando força em vários países, grupos e blocos, incentivando a promoção de programas, políticas e projetos, inclusive, no Brasil. Em termos metodológicos, utilizou-se a análise documental, considerando-se que a investigação sobre as tendências e manifestações da UCM pressupõe a compreensão da totalidade histórica e social. Conclui-se que o modelo de UCM, fundamentado pela Ideologia da Excelência, é uma tendência global que vem sendo utilizada como um arquétipo com o qual se induz à competitividade internacional e eleva-se ao paroxismo a diferenciação/hierarquização entre e intra instituições em diferentes escalas, bem como incita transformações na própria concepção de universidade.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Universidade de Classe Mundial. Ideologia da Excelência. Política Educacional. Organismos Internacionais. Iniciativas de Excelência.

RESUMEN: En este artículo, que resulta de investigación de doctorado, se analiza el modelo de Universidad de Rango Mundial (URM), a partir de las orientaciones de los Organismos Internacionales (OI), en especial el Banco Mundial (BM), y sus expertos y aún como esta concepción viene ganando fuerza en varios países, grupos y bloques, incentivando la promoción de programas, políticas y proyectos, inclusive, en Brasil. En términos metodológicos, se utilizó el análisis documental, considerando que la investigación sobre las tendencias y manifestaciones de la URM presupone la comprensión de la totalidad histórica y social. Se concluye que el modelo de URM, fundamentado por la Ideología de la Excelencia, es una tendencia global que viene siendo

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utilizada como un arquetipo con el que se induce a la competitividad internacional y se eleva al paroxismo la diferenciación / jerarquización entre e intra instituciones en diferentes escalas, así como incita transformaciones en la propia concepción de la universidad.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Universidad de la clase mundial. Ideología de la Excelencia. Política Educativa. Organismos Internacionales. Iniciativas de Excelencia.

INTRODUCTION

The search for academic and scientific “excellence” has been affirming itself in an increasingly significant manner in higher education worldwide. Since the decade of 2000 in particular, international agencies, think tanks and their experts, as well as different strategies, among which stand out university rankings, have supported the effort to make this “excellence” concrete, based on a new model known as the World Class University (UCM), or Universities of Excellenceⁱ

We understand that the emergence and diffusion of this university model is part of a broader reform process underway in higher education in recent decades, whose main characteristics include: the expansion of higher education systems; internationalization based on processes of mobility and cooperation; the deepening of the differentiation and flexibilization of Institutions of Higher Education and the expansion of teaching and research modalities. These transformations are related to the reconfiguration of the role of the state and to transformations accelerated by the worldwide expansion of capital (CHESNAIS, 1996), considering the new finalities demanded of universities in the realm of the regime of financial predominance: the production of “knowledge as a raw material” (SILVA JÚNIOR, 2017).

Based on these considerations, this article will analyze the concept of World Class University based on documents drafted or published by international agencies including: the World Bank; the United Nations Organization for Educational, Science and Culture (UNESCO) and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) since the decade of 2000 and present how this concept has gained strength in Brazil and other countries, groups and blocks, encouraging the promotion of programs and policies based on intensified institutional and educational differentiation. The study methodology included document analysis, considering that the investigation of trends and manifestations of the World Class University presupposes an understanding of the historic and social totality and its structural and conjunctural conditioners, that is, it is inserted in the context of the structural crisis of the current system.

We therefore maintain that analyzing the concept of the World Class University involves not only understanding the constitution of “advanced” universities, but also grasping how this



model propagates an “Ideology of Excellence”, which has been incorporated by governments, institutions, professors and students, re-dimensioning the concept and purposes of universities.

WORLD CLASS UNIVERSITIES: THE POSITION OF INTERNATIONAL AGENCIES

It is first important to consider that by analyzing the group of documents that concern higher education in the 1990s, we perceive that a logic of so-called “diversification” was already included in guidelines from international agencies, emphasizing the distinction between research and teaching universities. However, the World Class University model was defined and came to be explicitly promoted since the decade of 2000. The documents analyzed for this study were: Salmi (2009) and Altbach and Salmi (2011), both published by the World Bank; SADLAK; CAI, 2009, published by UNESCO; and OECD (2014)ⁱⁱ.

Upon reviewing these documents we learn that the model proposed refers to the formation of universities or groups of universities that have a specific proposal, which is to globally represent a nation’s higher education system and its capacity to generate economic development and knowledge in science, technology and innovation. In this sense, the World Class University, in addition to producing studies, must take responsibility for educating scientists and researchers, who it is expected will occupy important work posts in the economy and in processes for generating knowledge, to support national systems of innovation.

In this sense, in the document published by the World Bank (SALMI, 2009), a World Class University is identified by a group of characteristics or (pre)conditions, such as: i) a high concentration of talents (professors and students); ii) abundant resources that allow offering a rich learning environment and conducting advanced research; and iii) characteristics favorable to governance that promotes a strategic vision, innovation and flexibility, allowing the institutions to take decisions and manage resources without being overloaded by bureaucracies.

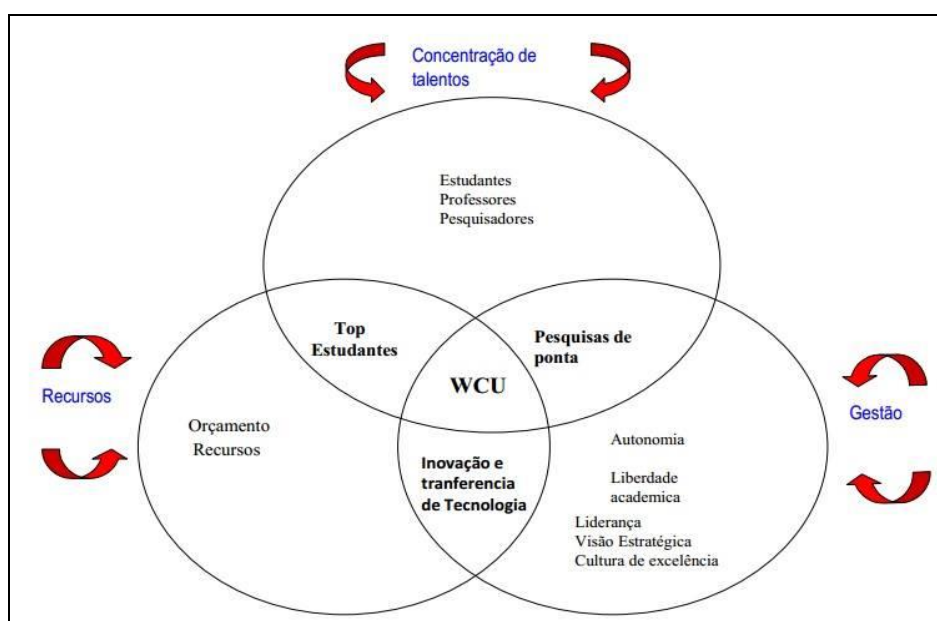


Figure 1. Model of the World Class University

Source: Salmi (2009)

Concentration of talents; Students Professors, Researchers, Top Students, Advanced research, Resources, Budget Resources, Innovation and Technology transfer, Autonomy Academic freedom, Leadership, Strategic Vision, Culture of Excellence; Administration.

According to the document published by UNESCO (SADLAK; CAI, 2009), World Class Universities are part of a new paradigm of higher education. Thus, these institutions establish themselves as “special places where new ideas and discoveries originate investment that is essential to knowledge and people” (SADLAK; CAI, 2009, p. 16), given that with the “current level of mass access to higher education, the need to turn once again to ‘academic excellence’ and ‘distinctive quality’ at a global, national and local level inadvertently becomes more clear than ever” (SADLAK; CAI, 2009, p. 11).

Therefore, “the World Class University is not simply related to a ‘fashionable term’ [...] but has the objective of developing the capacity needed to compete in the global higher education market through the acquisition and creation of advanced knowledge” (SALMI, 2009, p. 17). The strategies presented for constructing this new university model include: a) improving a small number of existing universities that have the potential to stand out; b) encouraging a number of existing universities to unite, to form a new university; c) creating new World Class Universities from scratch (SALMI, 2009).

Each one of these strategies is analyzed in the documents, indicating the “best possibilities” for different governments and institutions. In this context, results are regularly used from rankings and analyses of successful examples that can “inspire” other policy makers. Therefore, all can aspire, with real chances of success, to the status of world class, as suggested by these international agencies.



Specifically in relation to the question raised, we can affirm that there is convergence among the international agencies in the understanding that the distinctions between the degrees of economic and scientific development of the countries “influence” how they should design their strategies to attain world class status, although this positioning appears to a more or less subtle degree, considering the specificity of the production of each document. Thus, we understand that “the horizon” of excellence and the promotion of competitiveness fundamentally compose the “message” implicit in these publications, which can be perceived in the following excerpt:

Academic institutions in small or poor countries cannot compete with the Oxfords or Harvards of the industrialized nations. Even so, most countries can support at least one university that has sufficient quality to participate in international discussions of science and culture and conduct research in one or more fields relevant to national development(SADLAK; CAI, 2009, p. 67).

The documents highlight the finding that a growing number of countries and people are joining the race to construct World Class Universities by establishing special initiatives, such as providing additional funding for selected universities. It is based precisely on this verification that the OECD specifically addressed the issue in the document “Promoting Research Excellence: New Approaches to Funding” (OCDE, 2014). The publication presents new evidence about how governments are steering public research funds to teaching and research institutions, and promoting Research Excellence Initiatives (REI)ⁱⁱⁱ as a new financing instrument for the creation of Centers of Excellence (CoEs), which are entities with research objectives that are different in nature from those of other research institutions.

We thus understand that the Research Excellence Initiatives are aligned to the concept of the World Class University presented by the World Bank (SALMI, 2009; 2011) and UNESCO (SADLAK; CAI, 2009), given that they are guided by the same central characteristics and objectives – science of excellence, attracting talent, differentiated levels of financing and flexible administration. That is, they are expressions of the consensus about academic and scientific excellence contained in the concept of the World Class University.

Another important issue raised by the international agencies and their experts are the international rankings of universities, given that evaluation is an essential component in the construction of a World Class University, considering that the “quality” of the institutions is indicated by whether it meets previously established criteria.

In general, we understand that, despite specific differences between the international agencies (and their experts), the model of the World Class University has been presented and is part of a global political agenda, which indicates that there will be a remodeling of national research systems in the near and mid-term future. The main characteristics of this model, according to the documents mentioned, are analyzed in the following section.



THE MAIN CHARACTERISTICS OF WORLD CLASS UNIVERSITIES

Internationalization and “attracting talent”

Internationalization is presented as one of the main factors in the “search for excellence”, given that it is important for concentrating talent. That is, “a great affluence of foreign students can be essential to improving the academic level of the student population” (SALMI, 2009, p. 46). For this reason, “countries are attracting renowned professors and researchers to produce advanced research results in all the academic fields, and are thus creating world class university departments” (SADLAK; CAI, 2009, p. 15).

According to Altbach et al. (2010), in the countries that concentrate the most dynamic movements of capital, the individual trajectories of teaching careers are reflected in differentiated salaries, which these authors affirm is essential to the future development of a “culture of excellence”. As found in the UNESCO publication analyzed there is growing evidence that economic development increasingly depends on talented and highly qualified workers, particularly those who have the necessary scientific and engineering skills. In this context, research networks, including institutions from different countries and the private sector, are encouraged to present themselves as increasingly useful.

It should be emphasized that the centrality acquired by the concentration of talents for the World Class University model expresses at least two movements that help us to understand the role of this university model in the current system. The first of these is the market created in the realm of international mobility of students and teachers, which according to Altbach et al. (2010), represents a US\$ 45 billion industry, an amount that can triple by the year 2020. Other data that reveal this situation are the rates of academic mobility reported by the International Institute of Education (IIE), which have reached historically high levels (SILVA JÚNIOR, 2017).

The second movement is related to educating people to perform complex work, which should consider, during the strategic fields of each country, in keeping with the process of globalization of capital. According to Sguissardi (2014) and Silva Júnior (2017), this new movement of capitalism is characterized by the decentralization of large companies, whose factories multiply and spread through various regions and countries in search of lower costs and greater advantages in terms of labor power, raw materials and more flexible labor laws, thus requiring universities that can conduct research and prepare a specialized labor force.

It is also necessary to use the English language in the process of establishing Universities of Excellence, given that the main characteristic of this university model is internationalization.



In keeping with this, the need appears for a “new type of educator” who is inserted in a “culture of investigation” in which “scientific productivity” should be high (ALTBACH; SALMI, 2011). Professors “must be aware of their international essence” (ALTBACH; SALMI, 2011, p. 20), and collaborate with colleagues who reside in different countries. The work shifts of these professors should be “modest” so that most of their time can be dedicated to research activities. An availability to travel, to seek better working conditions and more promising careers are also raised as characteristics of this professional profile, and are seen positively.

We thus corroborate Silva Júnior’s (2017) affirmation that the intention is to transform professors into professionals who capture resources and manage projects, reconfiguring the very concept of teaching and research. This position seeks to sell their services with high potential for patenting and licensing and the administration of these services is used to establish distinctions with other institutions.

High financing and flexible management

Considering the characteristics indicated by Salmi (2009), the World Class Universities are recognized for garnering a high and diversified quantity of resources. In principle, these institutions may have four sources of income: 1) those related to their institutional nature; 2) those related to the forms of university administration; 3) endowment funds and 4) those obtained with research financing.

In general, the documents analyzed affirm that World Class Universities can count on resources from public financing agencies and financing for research and development projects. We perceive that the trend to tighten the public-private relationship, in terms of financing, is justified by the need for complementary financing, due to the limited capacity of government, the increase in educational opportunities, the need to create more effective forms of managing public financing and the possibility for increased efficiency and technological innovation.

In this sense, we agree with Sguissardi’s (2009) understanding that the diversification of financing sources and other mechanisms of approximation with the private sector have been making universities increasingly permeable to the influence of outside sectors, which thus attain increased power to define the university agenda.

It should be highlighted that in addition to the imperative need for a diversity of financing, the international agencies and their experts agree about the need for financing from governments, that is, on the concentration of government resources in the selected institutions of higher education.



The model of the World Class University presented requires resources and management that encourage a strategic vision, innovation, flexibility and autonomy, to allow institutions to manage their resources without being impeded by bureaucracy (SALMI, 2009; SADLAK; CAI, 2009). Thus, the bureaucratic model, the equity of salaries, career stability and the lack of institutional administrative freedom are considered to be characteristics that compromise attaining World Class University status. This means that university autonomy is reduced to the management of incomes and expenses. It thus implies corporate management of these social institutions, aimed at meeting goals and indicators imposed by management contracts with market perspectives of social organizations.

According to the UNESCO document (SADLAK; CAI, 2009), governments must prepare and encourage their universities to compete on an international level to attain a series of indicators in which the quality and relevance of university education are commonly evaluated (including factors such as reputation and awards, foreign students and professors and research grants). To facilitate the materialization of this logic, administrative autonomy, meritocracy and interaction with the private sector are elements emphasized by the UNESCO document.

Another essential element for management of World Class Universities considered in the documents is the need for coordinated and trained management teams. They suggest that their leaders should have a strategic view of the goals and values of the university and know how to implement the measures needed to meet the institutional objectives, adjusting the interests of students, educators and other professionals affiliated to the universities (ALTBACH; SALMI, 2011).

As Altbach and Salmi (2011) indicate in a document published by the World Bank, planning at these institutions should be guided not only by strategies for global action, which go beyond actions that support international cooperation programs, but also by competitiveness with other research universities. To do so, in general, the leaders of these institutions must be professionals who have a command of knowledge in the field of corporate administration, university management, innovation, entrepreneurship and international policy.

This means that university deans should be professional administrators and academic administration should be subordinated to economic reasoning. According to the UNESCO document (SADLAK; CAI, 2009), in some cases, university authorities also consider it useful to hire foreign professionals to lead the institution, as has been the case in South Korean, the United Kingdom and Australia, which have practiced this strategy for years.

According to Silva Júnior (2015), who investigated World Class Universities in the United States, the management model in vogue consists in separating the administration of resources and the administration of education of professionals, researchers and research production. In



this sense, according to Silva Júnior “the consequences of this movement are evident in terms of management, the research agenda, the work of professors, the types of undergraduate and graduate courses and the need for publications of global prestige” (SILVA JÚNIOR, 2015, p. 150). As a result, the organizations have been incessantly seeking new management tools, which steer them towards greater competitiveness because of the quality and productivity of their products, processes and services.

Considering this situation, it is found that the changes in the realm of management presented by the international agencies as essential to the model of the World Class University are already being implemented at institutions of higher education in various countries, in a more or less advanced manner, depending on the specificities of each context.

Transfer of technology and innovation

Innovation and technology transfer are also significant issues raised in the guidance from international agencies concerning World Class Universities, especially by the OECD. This discourse is supported by the logic that there are bottlenecks in interactions between universities and the productive sector and innovation is crucial to productivity and economic prosperity.

It should be recognized that the theme of innovation is not exactly a “novelty”. Marx (2012) explained that the main driving force of history is the need society has to develop its productive forces, that is: to increase knowledge about and the command over nature, reduce the time of socially necessary work to produce and reproduce living conditions and improve lifestyles and living standards. We should therefore understand innovation as the result of human intellect and social life, and more than a by-product of capitalism.

Therefore, according to Harvey (2011), in the current stage of development of the capitalist system, innovation increasingly becomes a key element in competitiveness and for businesses. In this sense, Harvey explains that:

Fierce competition [...] therefore tends to produce innovations of a leap of quality, which often leads capitalists to fetishize technological and organizational innovation as a response to all their prayers (...) **This fetishism is fed to the degree that innovation becomes something that seeks to form its own market, convincing each and every one of us that we cannot survive if we do not have command of the most recent gadget** (HARVEY, 2011, p. 81, emphasis ours).

In keeping with this understanding, we perceive in the documents analyzed that “universities, particularly those considered “world class” occupy a special place in the innovation chain”. In this sense, they “increasingly become focal points for specific financing, whose real goal is not to support academic research per se, but to serve as a catalyst for the generation of technical innovations” (SADLAK; CAI, 2009, p. 15).



We thus understand that the arguments sustained by the international agencies are supported by the notion that universities are convoked to respond increasingly quickly to demands from the productive sector, and call for them to do so by financing research in strategic fields, in partnership with the private sector and by creating centers of excellence. Thus, the constant need for innovations to increase the competitiveness of countries is translated into a consensus about the need for excellence and incentives to promote World Class Universities, in detriment to other institutions that do not present a research “vocation”.

THE PROLIFERATION OF INITIATIVES OF EXCELLENCE AND THE SEARCH FOR WORLD CLASS STATUS

In keeping with what has been presented, the World Class University model is used by those who make decisions about social policy as an archetype that induces international competitiveness and heightens differentiation and hierarchization among universities – and between strategic departments within them – on different scales. This race for excellence, in which participate countries, blocks, groups and universities, involves a need for capital to guarantee that work traditionally conducted in the most advanced countries is done in a qualified and flexible manner in countries considered “emergent” as well.

In this context, we perceive that projects and initiatives of excellence were implemented in projects in various countries, such as Germany (the Initiative of Excellence Program), France (Operation Campus), Spain (Campus of International Excellence), United Kingdom (Structure of Excellence in Research), China (Projects 985, 211 and 2011), Russia (Project 5-100) and others. In addition to these countries, the European Union (EU), with the Horizon 2020 Program^{iv} launched in 2014; and more recently the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa), with the “BRICS Network University”^v, launched in 2015, also implemented strategies to promote the “excellence of their universities”, seeking better results in international rankings.

A common characteristic of these projects and initiatives is a concentration of financing and efforts in institutions that are already well evaluated in the rankings and or have potential to attain better positions, which indicates that the logic operationalized by the concept of World Class University has taken hold.

In Brazil, we highlight the launching in 2012 of the “Top 200 Program: Universities of Excellence”. This project indicated federal universities to which efforts and investments would be concentrated, seeking to attain excellence, given that one of the goals was for these universities to occupy outstanding levels in international academic rankings. At first they



selected the Federal Universities at Rio Grande do Sul (UFRGS), Minas Gerais (UFMG), Rio de Janeiro (UFRJ), São Paulo (Unifesp) and Viçosa (UFV).

However, although the initiative has not advanced in its original format, actions and projects in search of “university excellence” have become a marked component of Brazilian government policy. In retrospect, it can be observed that the need for the creation and consolidation of centers of excellence was already raised in the *Livro Branco de Ciência e Tecnologia e Inovação* and in the *Livro Azul da Ciência e Tecnologia e Inovação* [the White Book of Science and Technology and Innovation and the Blue Book of Science and Technology and Innovation]. Advances in the discussions and actions aimed at internationalization of higher education should also be highlighted, especially those since 2010, including the Sciences without Frontiers Program (CsF) and the increase in international relations in graduate studies, with the Doctoral Study Abroad Program (PSDE), although some of these actions are being reorganized or terminated.

We can also identify as programs to induce excellence: the National Institute of Science and Technology (INCT); the Program of Academic Excellence (Proex/Capes) and the National Graduate Study Plans (VI PNPG 2011-2020) and the National Education Plan (PNE 2014-2024)^{vi} To allow a better visualization of this “trend towards excellence”, which refers to one of the poles of the process of expansion and differentiation of higher education, the figure below demonstrates how the elements mentioned above are related:

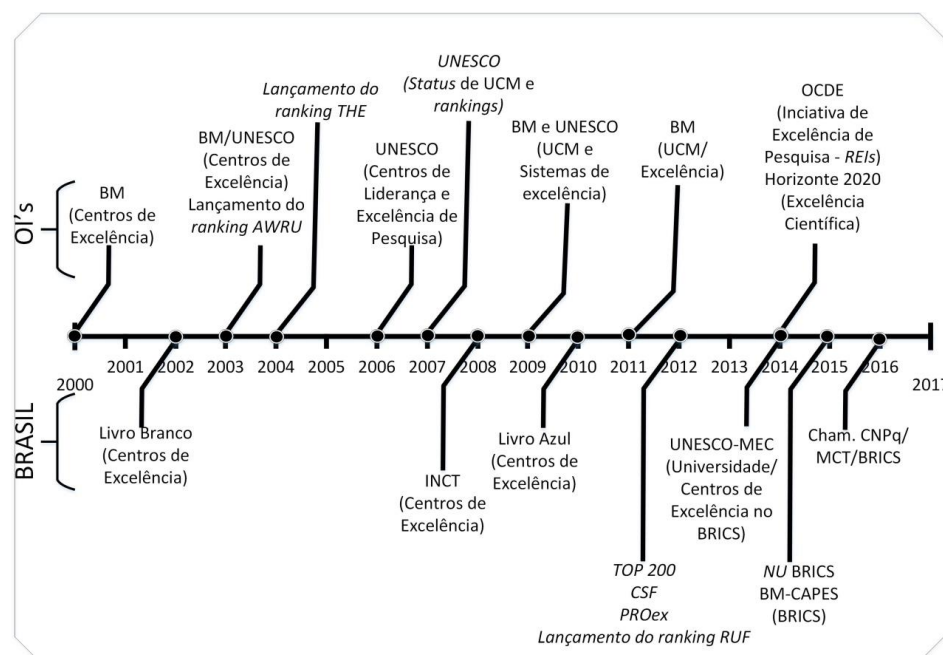


Figure 2. Timeline of ‘excellence’

Source: Thiengo (2018).



International Organizations –World Bank (Centers of Excellence), World Bank UNESCO (Centers of Excellence) Launching the AWRU ranking; UNESCO (Centers of Leadership and Excellence in Research; World Bank and UNESCO (World Class University and Systems of excellence); World Bank (World Class University/Excellence); OECD (Research Excellence Initiative – REIs) Horizon 2020 (Scientific Excellence); BRAZIL - White Book(Centers of Excellence); INCT (Centers of Excellence); Blue Book (Centers of Excellence); UNESCO-Ministry of Education (University/Centers of Excellence in the BRICS); Cham. CNPq/MCT/BRICS; TOP 200 CSF PROex Launching of RUF ranking; NU BRICs World Bank –CAPES (BRICS).

On the institutional plane we can perceive a consensus around excellence in the Institutional Development Plans of some Brazilian institutions of higher education, which present as an objective to become “Universities of Excellence”, “World Class Universities” or attain an “International Level”, with the ambition of becoming ranked among the best universities in Brazil and the world. These include: the University of São Paulo (USP), the Federal University at Rio Grande do Sul (UFGRS), the Federal University at Minas Gerais (UFMG), the Federal University at São Paulo (Unifesp), the Federal University at ABC (UFABC), the State University at Campinas (Unicamp), the University of Brasília (UnB) and the Federal University at Santa Catarina (UFSC). (THIENGO, 2018). Figure 3 and the examples that follow provide some evidence^{vii} about how this discussion appears in the Institutional Development Plans of these schools.

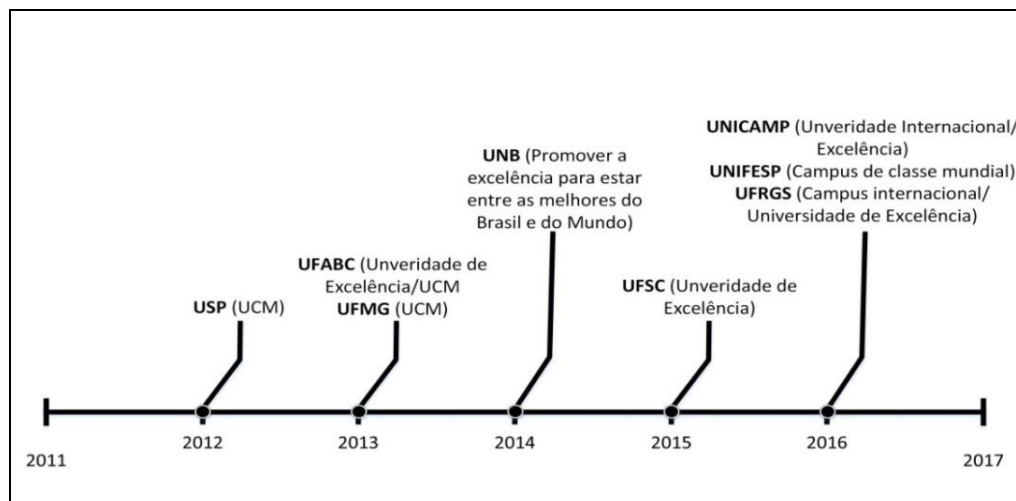


Figure 3. Timeline of excellence in the Institutional Development Plans

Source: Thiengo (2018)

USP (World Class University); UFABC (University of Excellence/World Class University); UFMG (World Class University); UNB (Promote excellence to be ranked among the best in Brazil and the world); UFSC (University of Excellence); UNICAMP (International University/Excellence) UNIFESP (World class campus) UFRGS (International campus/University of Excellence)

The Institutional Development Plan for UFMG has an interesting definition among the explanations that motivate the administrators of this school to establish as an objective the attainment of World Class University Status:



A World Class University is a specific and rare type of institution. There is only a limited and select group in this category throughout the world, which stand out due to the standards applied to their teaching and research activities, and even includes distinguishing themselves from the behavior of other entities in their field, which serves as a catalyzing reference (UFMG, 2013, p. 44).

The differentiated character of these institutions in relation to the others is raised as something natural, positive and essential to the scientific and economic advancement of the country, which ratifies the logic of institutional distinction which is also defended by the international agencies. In a similar manner, the University of São Paulo's institutional plan makes explicit a priority to attaining new standards of excellence, and ways to improve inclusionary programs. Nevertheless, it recognizes that this should occur "without harming academic excellence, given that university activity presupposes unforeseen solutions to known impasses" (USP, 2011, p. 16).

USP's Institutional Development Program indicates that the mission of a World Class University is to contribute to the socioeconomic and sustainable development of the country, which is in keeping with the concept defended by the international agencies; which affirms that some institutions should assume a leadership role in their countries. The same idea is also part of the mission of the universities that call themselves or seek to attain World Class status. The Institutional Development Program at UFRGS affirms that its mission is to: "Develop higher education with excellence and social commitment, by educating individuals, and generating philosophic, scientific, artistic and technological knowledge that is capable of promoting transformations in society" (UFRGS, 2016, p. 12).

In general, the arguments defending the need for World Class Universities in Brazil found in the Institutional Development Programs focus on the need for economic and social development in the country, given that the Brazilian higher education system is seen as being inadequate for meeting the needs of society.

According to the Institutional Development Program of the UFABC (2012-2022), excellence is a relative concept, given that it is effectively only revealed in comparison with peers. Precisely for this reason, "UFABC should accompany and study the wide variety of university rankings, from the periodic evaluations of undergraduate and graduate courses made by the Ministry of Education and Culture and Capes, to the international rankings of world class universities" (UFABC, 2012, p. 20). Thus, "UFABC should not hesitate to compare itself with the best Brazilian and international universities" (UFABC, 2012, p. 19).

We perceive that the international rankings are evoked to grant credibility and strengthen the institutions of higher education, and also to affirm the need for Brazil to have some of its universities ranked among the best in the world. The UFABC document recognizes the large



gap between the position of the universities in the classifications and the economic development of the country.

With this in mind, the universities have organized and implemented strategies to give their scientific work greater international visibility and dialog with the most recent international studies. To do so, all of the Institutional Development Programs include incentives to the publication of works in highly classified periodicals, financing for the translation and editing of texts in English, the academic language of World Class Universities, for courses in English and scientific writing, and efforts to attract “high level” Brazilian and foreign researchers and to stimulate participation in and the constitution of international cooperation programs.

We thus observe intensified transformations in higher education, which have been in progress for at least three decades and now appear, in Brazil, in a new guise that is even more stylish. As Silva Júnior (2017) maintains, the process involves the alignment of a key group of Brazilian universities to the precepts of the World Class University model^{viii}.

CONCLUSION

Although such a complex and continuously changing field allows only a partial analysis, we understand that the World Class University model has come to represent contemporary hegemonic ideals and now serves as an “exemplary” institutional model, a symbol of modernization and development designed to produce and export knowledge, models of conducting science, distributing resources and conducting evaluation.

In this sense, we see that the World Class University model analyzed here implies a deflagration of distinctions in higher education, which reinforces an exclusionary logic that is disguised by a false democratization of access and meritocracy. If, on one hand, expanded access to degree programs is aimed at a portion of the working class, so that it can act in technically less demanding spaces, on the other, certification in graduate studies and research, particularly in applied research, tends to be placed at the service of Brazilian and international business. This dimension is aimed at the best students at the best universities, which sustain class differences caused by differences in access to different types of education, and by the distinct roles that these students will come to occupy in the world of work and in public-private management.

This understanding, however, is shadowed by the discussion of excellence, which, in our view, can be considered an ideology. Based on a Gramscian reference, we recognize that the “Ideology of excellence” is manifest through: a) the construction of symbols of positive identification and the adoption of a reference model with a shared standard (the “seal” of



excellence); b) the use of partial representations as if they were of general interest; c) the recurring use of narratives that seek to ratify the importance of the university of excellence (“the cases of success”); d) the sustenance of relations of domination by means of their denial or obfuscation; e) segmentation of individuals in groups, based on meritocratic arguments (talented and non-talented/productive and unproductive); f) the differentiation of higher education under the guise of diversification; g) a disguising of the socio-historic character of the actions, by intending to have these initiatives, despite their transitory character, be presented as permanent, necessary and a form of “salvation”; h) the understanding of science, and particularly of innovation as sources of solutions for social problems, hiding labor-capital relations.

The analysis undertaken allows recognizing the emergence and promotion of the model of the World Class University, based on an “Ideology of Excellence”, as an expression of the deepening of differentiation of and in higher education and its submission to the market, at levels that were unthinkable until recently. We also recognize that this trend is gaining strength in detriment to the concept of university as *universitas*.

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NOTES

ⁱ We use the expressions as synonyms, since, according to the documentation and the literature consulted, both refer to the same central set of characteristics of this university model/conception.



- ⁱⁱ We emphasize that all translations of excerpts of English and Spanish are the responsibility of the author.
- ⁱⁱⁱ Can be translated as "Initiatives of Excellence in Research".
- ^{iv} Horizon 2020 Program, part of the Europe 2020 strategy, is the largest research funding framework program in the history of the European Union. It is based on three pillars: scientific excellence, industrial leadership and societal challenges. With a budget of approximately 80 billion euros, it finances research and innovation projects in strategic areas with the main objective of producing innovation.
- ^v It is an educational project that aims to develop, preferably in the short term, bilateral / multilateral training and research through joint graduate programs of these universities in various fields of knowledge.
- ^{vi} Other indicators of the discussion include: the publication by the Coordenação de Aperfeiçoamento de Pessoal de Nível Superior (Capes), in partnership with the World Bank, the book *Expansão das Universidades em uma economia global em mudança. Um triunfo dos BRIC?* [Expansion of Universities in a changing global economy: a triumph of the BRIC] (CARNOY *et al.*, 2016) and the publication of the book/document *BRICS. Construir a educação do futuro* [BRICS. Constructing Education of the Future] in partnership with Unesco (UNESCO, 2014).
- ^{vii} Considering the limits of this text, we present only some central issues. Author (2018), analyzes the Institutional Development Programs of these universities with greater rigor and in more detail.
- ^{viii} In November 2017 the Ministry of Education announced a proposal to create a public fund for universities of excellence in Brazil, linked to the Program of Excellence for Universities and Institutes. The essential part of the fund and of the Program of Excellence is an attempt to deepen the internationalization of Brazilian research and integrate it more directly to the country's productive sector.

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