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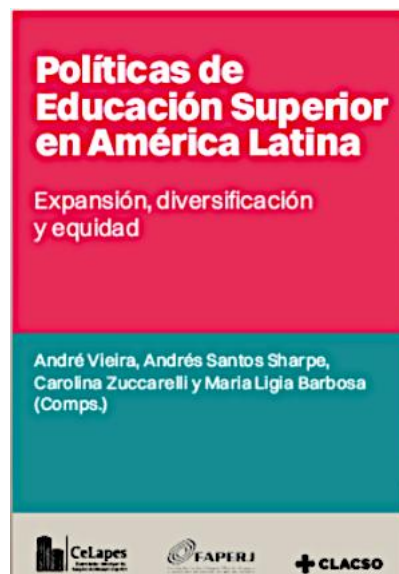
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For decades, Latin America has undergone a sustained expansion of higher education enrollment. However, this massification process displays regional similarities alongside specific national dynamics. Such a complex phenomenon requires diverse analytical perspectives for a precise understanding. In this context, the volume edited by **André Vieira, Andrés Santos Sharpe, Carolina Zuccarelli and María Lúcia Barbosa** offers an approach in that direction.

The book compiles contributions from researchers based in Brazil, Uruguay, Peru, Argentina, and Chile as part of a research project conducted by the Latin American Center for Research in Higher Education (CeLapes, by its Spanish/Portuguese acronym). The volume features an editorial preface and eight chapters divided into three thematic parts: “Foundation and Context”, “Institutional Structure”, and “Operation”.

The first part applies comparative analysis across two distinct chapters. In the first one, “Institutional Diversification, Equity Policies, and Inequalities in Higher Education: A Comparative Analysis in Latin America”, Vieira, Werneck, and Ribeiro Santiago compare and examine institutional models and policies for student access and retention. Their study focuses on five countries that concentrate 70% of regional enrollment: Brazil, Mexico, Argentina, Colombia, and Chile. Using indicators for each of these countries



and focusing on data from the periods 2012–2014 and 2019–2021, the authors analyze and compare enrollment in higher education institutions through various socio-educational variables. The empirical results reveal a predominance of female enrollment and increased access among students from lower-income quintiles, yet who pursue degree programs with low economic returns. This statistically rigorous research contributes to the understanding of how each country's institutional models are linked to different expansion dynamics and, consequently, to internal qualitative inequalities. Ultimately, the authors demonstrate that heterogeneous levels of inequality persist despite expanded educational access.

In Chapter II, Miranda and Gouvêa examine the theoretical and practical framework of comparative education in Latin America. Building on this question, they address and evaluate the advantages and disadvantages of the comparative method in the social sciences, as well as its potential and challenges. Through an overview of national legislation from various countries, the authors identify diverse legal definitions of higher education. They argue that researchers must address this conceptual heterogeneity to conduct accurate comparative studies. Furthermore, based on a literature review on the subject, they establish specific variables for systemic comparison: legislation, funding models (which require longer-term analysis), institutional functioning (i.e., their governance and management models), the historical evolution of the systems, and internationalization. Without ignoring the challenges involved and while acknowledging the structural diversity of continental institutions, the authors point out the relevance of the comparative method to analyze higher education in Latin America. They emphasize the need to strengthen this approach to enhance equity in access and retention across multiple systemic variables.

The second part consists of three chapters that analyze public policies in Brazil, Peru, and Uruguay from an institutional perspective. While all three nations exhibit enrollment growth and institutional expansion, these studies focus on the critical consequences of this process. The analysis centers on the formation of market oligopolies in Brazil, the consequences of the economic liberalization in Peru, and the prolongation of student academic trajectories that strains educational quality in Uruguay. Each chapter combines conceptual clarity with a historical overview and empirical data to address under-researched structural outcomes.

In Chapter III, Zuccarelli, Vieira, Mendonça, and Blanco examine the development of oligopolies in Brazilian higher education. They outline the higher education systemic restructuring and expansion over the past four decades through four key mechanisms. These factors include corporate authorization to trade on the public stock market, institutional mergers and acquisitions, the expansion of public student funding, and the growth of distance learning (as a way to overcome restrictions on student funding), not as a pedagogical strategy but as a means of sustaining profitability and capital accumulation. This chapter articulates these structural shifts and uncovers valuable empirical data. One of the most interesting aspects revealed is that

they demonstrate how specific policies intended to democratize access simultaneously functioned as vectors for capital accumulation by major corporate groups.

Chapter IV, “New Scenarios of the University System in Peru: Expansion and Institutional Weakening” by Rodríguez González and Chávez Irigoyen, assesses the contemporary Peruvian university system. The authors describe a process by which the increase in educational offer, primarily resulting from the creation of private universities in recent years, has not led to its democratization but, on the contrary, to the segmentation of the system. This is particularly relevant because private providers now absorb most of the national student enrollment. Through a historical lens, the chapter reconstructs the legislative, political, institutional, and judicial developments of this process. The text illustrates how state deregulation allowed specific universities to operate under a profit-driven managerial approach, leading to the consequent weakening of public universities. Additionally, the study relies on a detailed review of official documentation regarding the university reforms and counter-reforms driven by various actors in the country's political arena and different state agencies.

Drawing on a historical overview, in Chapter V, “The Higher Education System in Uruguay: Enrollment Changes and New Institutional Formats,” Errandonea outlines the contemporary landscape of tertiary education, which includes public and private universities and university institutes. Although the public sector continues to account for the largest proportion of undergraduate and graduate students, the author highlights the growth of the private sector, noting that its more flexible organizational structures have allowed it to slowly but steadily attract a higher percentage of students. The study evaluates empirical data on access, retention, and graduation rates alongside infrastructure and student support mechanisms. These metrics highlight the structural tensions surrounding the public sector's ability to fulfill its democratizing role (or its failure to do so) and the challenges it faces in the current context. One of Errandonea's central research findings is that public enrollment expansion results primarily from student re-enrollment and the prolongation of academic trajectories.

The third part of the volume explores institutional operations through contributions from Brazilian, Argentine, and Chilean researchers. Chapter VI, “Institutional Types and Equity in Brazilian Higher Education,” by Rodrigues, Vieira, Barbosa, and Pires, evaluates the relationship between institutional organizational formats and equity in access in Brazil. Grounded in extensive literature on systemic stratification, the analysis prioritizes differences across disciplinary fields, types of academic degrees offered by institutions (such as distance education or various class schedules), alluding to the public/private dichotomy. The authors argue that modes of inclusion within an expanding system are closely linked to different institutional models. These mechanisms of stratification remain influenced by the field of knowledge, the institutional type, and the relative prestige of each degree program.

In Chapter VII, Santos Sharpe and Durand examine the public and institutional policies that guide student career choices in Argentina. The unique nature of the Argentine case lies in its unrestricted access model, which operates (with the exceptions noted in the chapter) without entry examinations, quotas, or admission regulations. Grounded in the theoretical and methodological frameworks of comparative education, the study utilizes qualitative interviews with a purposive sample of first-year university students in the Buenos Aires Metropolitan Area. Several contributions of the chapter stand out: first, the analysis retains a focus on the institutional framework, adopting a structural view of the university system as a whole, which allows the authors to contextualize individual trajectories. Second, through the analysis of testimonies, the authors illustrate a diverse array of material and subjective factors that guide institutional and career choices, ranging from academic preferences to geographic proximity. This approach reveals how structural social inequalities operate within initial choices. Notably, the primary finding reveals a widespread lack of awareness among young people regarding public programs and scholarships designed to support their academic transitions.

In the final chapter, Villalobos, Rojas-Murphy, and Quaresma adopt an essay format supported by empirical data to address the transformation of Chilean higher education. They analyze how systemic expansion, privatization, and commercialization alter student experiences at this level. The authors review public policies and institutional shifts from recent decades to provide a comprehensive overview of current organizational forms and access mechanisms following the arrival of non-traditional student populations.

In conclusion, this volume compiles rigorous empirical research on each of the topics covered, offering a comprehensive overview of higher education policies in Latin America while preserving the specific historical and institutional characteristics of each national educational system. Within a regional context where higher education continues its decades-long expansion, these studies highlight the multi-dimensional inequalities that persist across the continent. In this regard, the book stands out for its enduring relevance and findings that open up new questions and analytical frameworks. Ultimately, the inclusion of comparative national studies reveals shared systemic trends across the recent past, present, and future of Latin American higher education.

A publication of the Latin American Council of Social Sciences, Arts and Humanities (CLACSO), this book is freely available for download (in Spanish) at <https://biblioteca-repositorio.clacso.edu.ar/handle/CLACSO/279855>

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