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# Posgrado y internacionalización en la Argentina

## Pós-graduação e internacionalização na Argentina

## Postgraduate and internationalization in Argentina

Sonia Marcela Araujo

Universidad Nacional del Centro de la Provincia de Buenos Aires, Argentina

[saraujo@fch.unicen.edu.ar](mailto:saraujo@fch.unicen.edu.ar)

**Resumen:** Este artículo está vinculado al proyecto de extensión organizado por el Programa de Posgrado en Educación - PPGE/FE/UFG titulado 'Educación en tiempos de pandemia: los desafíos de la internacionalización', que contó con disertantes de Mozambique, México, Canadá, Portugal, Argentina y España. El evento fue coordinado por los profesores Dr. Wilson Alves de Paiva, Dra. Marilza Vanessa Rosa Suanno y Prof. Maria Margarida Machado y está disponible en el Canal de YouTube UFG -Graduación e internacionalización en Argentina.

**Palabras clave:** Extensión. Internacionalización. Posgraduación.

**Resumo:** O presente artigo vincula-se ao projeto de extensão organizado pelo Programa de Pós-Graduação em Educação - PPGE/FE/UFG intitulado 'Educação em tempos de pandemia: os desafios da internacionalização' que contou com palestrantes de Mocambique, México, Canadá, Portugal, Argentina e Espanha. O evento foi coordenado

pelos professores Dr. Wilson Alves de Paiva, Dra. Marilza Vanessa Rosa Suanno e Profa. Maria Margarida Machado e encontra-se disponível no YouTube Canal UFG. Esse artigo apresenta em específico a exposição sobre a pós-graduação e a internacionalização na Argentina.

**Palavras-chave:** Extensão. Internacionalização. Pós-Graduação.

**Abstract:** This article is linked to the extension project organized by the Graduate Program in Education - PPGE/FE/UFG entitled 'Education in times of pandemic: the challenges of internationalization', which had speakers from Mozambique, Mexico, Canada, Portugal, Argentina, and Spain. The event was coordinated by professors Dr. Wilson Alves de Paiva, Dr. Marilza Vanessa Rosa Suanno, and Prof. Maria Margarida Machado and is available on YouTube Channel UFG. -graduation and internationalization in Argentina.

**Keywords:** Extension. Internationalization. Postgraduate studies.

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## Introduction

The promotion of internationalization in higher education is a relatively recent phenomenon. Closely linked to the 20th-century transformations, particularly in its final decades, internationalization impacted all educational institutions worldwide. Alongside quality and evaluation, the concept has emerged from the higher education domain, stimulating global, national, regional, and institutional policies and activities. The promotion of internationalization occurred in the 1980s, with a heightened emphasis in the 1990s - the implementation had different rhythms depending on the national states and institutions. The particularity of this phenomenon is its imprecise diffusion - an ambiguous concept often mistaken for globalization.

Academic research now recognizes its polysemic nature, assuming multiple political meanings and applications in different areas and activities. Indeed, the connections between institutions and their associates aspire to other purposes, encompassing various facets of universities, such as curriculum, research, and academic mobility. Thus, the first step for postgraduation internationalization is to evaluate multiple perspectives around the concept, aiming to establish political alternatives and initiatives. The second step is to contextualize it through specific postgraduate education literature.

The first part of this paper organizes ideas about internationalization to outline issues and tensions from a

Latin-American perspective. Afterward, it approaches postgraduate courses in the Argentine context, taking into account international programs and initiatives related to postgraduate education in Argentina, networking experiences for internationalization, foreign postgraduate students in the country, outbound mobility characteristics during the pandemic context, and the link between financial aid, postgraduate accreditation, and internationalization. However, the discussion maintains a problem-oriented approach, recognizing that intentional policies and initiatives have desired and undesired effects. The paper also raises inquiries and hypotheses regarding the impact of the 2020 health crisis on current and future international policies.

## **Internationalization and the University: In Search of Meaning**

Universities share particular features derived from an international standpoint. The concept of what a university should be, including its social role and organizational structure, has evolved historically across multiple continents, particularly those that have inspired the Western models, such as French, English, Italian, German, and, later, North American.

According to Brunner (1990), the development of modern national systems in higher education varies across continents and over time. In the Latin American context, the

author discusses the international transfer of ideas, procedures, and organizational experiences. Initially, Spanish colonies adhered to the imported model from Spain, and later, the French standard influenced the American nations. Whether colonial imposition or influenced by cultural exchange, "Latin-American higher education is actively involved in the process of importing and acquiring ideas, procedures, and academic organizational practices" (Brunner, 1990, p. 64, our translation)<sup>1</sup>. Brunner emphasizes that this international transfer process uncovers an "original copy" since universities possess specific features based on their country's distinct conditions.

Understanding Latin-American universities, therefore, requires considering their construction from other institutions and the movement of people and ideas throughout history. This perspective views internationalization as a constitutive element of the systems and institutions' structure. Thus, for certain institutions, internationalization is an expected characteristic of education, research, and promotion, involving the exchange of academics, students, and artists from other countries (Alcántara Santuario, 2011).

However, the international dimension is a recent phenomenon for other institutions, emerging from the late nineteenth century to the present time. It is part of the

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<sup>1</sup> **Original citation, in Spanish:** "la educación superior latinoamericana ha estado activamente involucrada en procesos de importación y recepción de ideas, modelos y prácticas de organización universitaria" (Brunner, 1990, p. 64).

higher education restructuring promoted by international financial agencies and technical and cultural cooperation within political, economic, and cultural globalization. Including internationalization on the national agenda aims to guide the institutions' courses toward a global and unified perspective.

According to Perrotta (2019), "Internationalization emerged in the 1990s as part of the reconfiguration of global capitalism attached to the outlines of the economy and knowledge society" (p. 13, our translation)<sup>2</sup>. For the author, internationalization became a transversal trend to reciprocal and complementary processes: education commodification and privatization of knowledge.

As such, the features of internationalization encompass the development of a shared and global academic system; an international educational market driven by a knowledge-based economy; the adoption of the English language for research communication, scientific knowledge dissemination, and teaching; the rise of distance education and use of the internet for education and research due to an increase of information and communication technologies; the trend of partnerships between academic institutions of different countries, the establishment of campuses outside the home country, and the franchising of degrees and educational programs; and, finally, the unification of

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<sup>2</sup> **Original citation, in Spanish:** "la internacionalización emergió en los años noventa como parte del fenómeno de reconfiguración del capitalismo global, vinculado a lo que se esbozaba en términos de economía y sociedad del conocimiento" (Perrotta, 2019, p. 13).

degrees, courses, and credits, as well as the evaluation procedures and academic progress mediation.

Previously, Perrotta (2016) discussed the "Phoenician" internationalization model. The author highlights that higher education is considered a commodity - market-oriented - and its research agenda is restricted by prominent standards, prioritizing North-South relationships. Thus, this asymmetric relationship is hierarchical, and the partner with higher power takes over decision-making, with the academic curriculum following international guidelines.

Knight (n.d.) delimited a definition frequently used in literature: internationalization "is a process in which the international, intercultural and global dimension incorporates to the goals, functions, and 'delivery' (sic) of higher education" (p. 4, our translation).<sup>3</sup> The author argues that the process is adapted considering the features of each institution, and there is no standardization. In that sense, it recognizes the priorities, policies, and national/regional practices, parting from them to "complement, harmonize and amplify the local dimension rather than dominate it, preventing the creation of a homogenous or hegemonic agent" (p. 4, our translation).<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> **Original citation, in Spanish:** "es un proceso por el cual se integra una dimensión internacional, intercultural y global en las metas, funciones y "entrega" (sic) de educación superior" (Knight, p. 4).

<sup>4</sup> **Original citation, in Spanish:** "es un proceso por el cual se integra una dimensión internacional, intercultural y global en las metas, funciones y "entrega" (sic) de educación superior" (Knight, p. 4)

Subsequently, it is crucial to discuss the connection between internationalization and globalization. For some, the first encompasses policies and programs to respond to globalization, understood as

a reality assembled by a continuously more integrated global economy, with new information and communication technologies, the emergence of an international knowledge network, the role of the English language e other features that are beyond the control of academic institutions. (Altbach, Reisberg, Rumbley, 2009, p. 7 *apud* de Wit, 2011, p. 80, our translation)<sup>5</sup>

Others associate internationalization with the tradition of international cooperation, mobility, and essential values of quality and excellence. At the same time, globalization relates to competition and higher education as a commercial product, challenging its role as a common good (de Wit, 2011).

From this perspective, internationalization is often regarded as "good" while globalization is seen as "bad," overlooking that international actions also perceive higher education as a commercial product. Taking this into account, Altbach and Knight (2006) shed light on the intricate relationship between both phenomena when analyzing, deciphering, and developing policies: "While globalization is an inevitable feature of the knowledge society,

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<sup>5</sup> **Original citation, in Spanish:** "una realidad formada por una economía mundial cada vez más integrada, las nuevas tecnologías de la información y la comunicación, la aparición de una red de conocimiento internacional, el papel de la lengua inglesa y otras fuerzas más allá del control de las instituciones académicas" (Altbach, Reisberg y Rumbley, 2009, p. 7, en de Wit, 2011, p. 80).

internationalization implies multiple possibilities of choice" (p. 15, our translation).<sup>6</sup> Thus, it is possible to identify projects that expose a lack of neutrality in international policies and actions - enabled by the aegis of internationalization.

## Internationalization and Post-graduation in Argentina

Since the beginning, postgraduate programs' internationalization has aligned with knowledge production within academic communities across various disciplines. These programs facilitate the exchange of research topics and perspectives beyond geographical boundaries. In Latin American countries, the expansion of advanced degrees and internationalization policies coincided with the advancing privatization and commodification of higher education.

In this regard, promoting programs and actions aims to increase integration through various strategies, including postgraduate training or short-term stays abroad, foreign agencies gaining legitimacy through accreditation to attract students, networks for knowledge production, double degrees, and others. However, these strategies face obstacles due to different starting points - the development phase of higher education and the reality of each country,

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<sup>6</sup> **Original citation, in Spanish:** "mientras la globalización es un elemento insoslayable de la sociedad del conocimiento, la internacionalización implica muchas posibilidades de elección" (Altbach; Knight, 2006, p. 15).

marked by profound socioeconomic and cultural inequalities.

In Argentina, the *Programa de Internacionalización de la Educación Superior y Cooperación Internacional* [Program for the Internationalization of Higher Education and International Cooperation] (PIESCI), supported by the Secretary of University Policies (SPU) and Ministry of Education<sup>7</sup>, promotes internationalization activities. PIESCI emerged in 2003 "to systematize pre-existing international university cooperation initiatives, articulate spaces for bilateral and multilateral negotiations, and implement new internationalization policies" (Perrotta; Sharp, 2020, p. 8, our translation).<sup>8</sup>

In 2006, the *Programa de Promoción de la Universidad Argentina* [Program for the Promotion of Argentine Universities] (PPUA) arose to strengthen universities' international visibility, consequently attracting students and creating and consolidating internationalization management in academic institutions. Thus, PIESCI and PPUA were public policy tools used to stimulate the creation of institutional spaces to manage internationalization, collaborating with its institutionalization, hierarchization, and professionalization (PERROTTA, SHARP, 2020).

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<sup>7</sup> Secretaria de Políticas Universitarias (SPU). Ministerio de Educación. Argentina.

<sup>8</sup> **Original citation, in Spanish:** "para sistematizar las iniciativas de cooperación internacional universitaria preexistentes, articular los diferentes espacios de negociación bilateral y multilateral y poner en marcha nuevas políticas de internacionalización" (Perrotta; Sharp, 2020, p. 8).

Currently, PIESCI<sup>9</sup> focuses on promoting "the internationalization of Argentine universities for integral strengthening" and developing initiatives in three dimensions: international cooperation, advertising Argentine universities globally, and articulating the demands and necessities of the Argentine university system within higher education internationalization. Concerning International Cooperation, the MERCOSUR<sup>10</sup> Educational Space coordinates the educational policies of its members and associated nations, while PIESCI produces various activities for the university system.

In line with this theme, we shed light on the "*Sistema Integral de Fomento para la Calidad de los Posgrados del Mercosur*" [Comprehensive System for the Promotion of Quality in Postgraduate Studies in MERCOSUR, our translation], which enables academic alliances between MERCOSUR postgraduate programs, facilitating the exchange of students, professors, and researchers, and the *Núcleo de Estudios e Investigaciones en Educación Superior del MERCOSUR* [Center for Studies and Research in Higher Education of MERCOSUR] (NEIES), which promotes reflection

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<sup>9</sup> **Recovered from:** <https://www.argentina.gob.ar/educacion/universidades/programa-de-internacionalizacion-de-la-educacion-superior-y-cooperacion-internacional-piesci>. **Access on:** 16 Jun. 2022.

<sup>10</sup> The Southern Common Market, also known as MERCOSUR, consists of Brazil, Argentina, Paraguay, and Uruguay as official members. Venezuela has been suspended from all activities since 2016, and Bolivia is currently in the process of accession. According to the official MERCOSUR website, the organization is "an open and dynamic process. Since its creation, its main objective has been to promote a common space that generates business and investment opportunities through the competitive integration of national economies in the international market." **Recovered from:** <https://www.mercosur.int/pt-br/> **Access on:** July, 2023.

and knowledge production on higher education and its relationship with regional integration. Considering this, we will discuss how NEIES stimulates knowledge production in multiple areas, including postgraduate studies in MERCOSUR countries, encouraging comparative studies to facilitate management and regional integration.

During the 2019 public health emergency, the training and updating cycle "*Desafíos de la internacionalización universitaria*"<sup>11</sup> [Challenges of University Internationalization] responded to the need to debate the management of university internationalization in a context of higher education transformation and global insecurity. The organization of the cycle happened in collaboration with the National Inter-University Council (CIN)<sup>12</sup> and the *Consejo de Rectores de Universidades Privadas* [Private University Rectors Council] (CRUP).

In Argentina, the State and national institutions' policies to promote internationalization encountered obstacles. Lamfri and Salto (2016) highlight the national approach to sending graduate students abroad and their subsequent professional integration to consolidate research, the

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<sup>11</sup> The Training and Updating Cycle consists of eight webinars with the following topics: How internationalized are Argentine universities?, Evaluation of university internationalization: Best practices in Europe and the Americas, Internationalization of the curriculum: Experiences of Argentine universities, Internationalization of the curriculum: Experiences of Argentine universities (part 2), Virtual student mobility in the context of pandemics, Internationalization of research, innovation, and technology transfer, and Language policy and internationalization in Argentine university institutions. In: <https://www.argentina.gob.ar/educacion/universidades/internacionalizacion-universitaria/capacitacion>. Access on: June 17, 2022.

<sup>12</sup> Consejo Interuniversitario Nacional. Argentina.

emergence of post-graduate carriers, and the training of human resources in research. In addition, the authors point out the signing of bilateral agreements between countries that implemented scholarship programs, such as Campus France (France), British Council (United Kingdom), Fulbright (United States of America), DAAD (Germany), and AECI (Spain).

Certain Argentine institutions and graduate programs have benefited from participation in bilateral and multilateral programs to strengthen post-graduation in MERCOSUR. The bilateral cooperation with Brazil was prominent from 2003 to 2015: from one side, the *Program of Associated Centers CAPB-BA* sought association with doctoral programs of academic excellence in Brazil and Argentina; from the other, the *Program of Associated Centers for the Strengthening of Graduate Studies CAPG-BA*, which promoted the association of postgraduate studies with different development levels. The *Colégio Doutoral Argentino-Brasileiro* [Argentine-Brazilian Doctoral College] sought to reinforce the fields of Engineering and Engineering, Computer Science, and Informatics through split-site Ph.D. individual scholarships.

It is important to note that academic mobility in France and Spain contributes to the partnership between the institutions' professors and students and graduate and postgraduate programs. The *Spanish Agency for International Development Cooperation* (AECI) e *Fundación Carolina*

[Carolina Foundation] also promoted initiatives related to different education programs. Finally, the *Centro Universitario Argentino-Alemán* [Argentine-German University Center] (CUAA-DAHZ) promoted academic cooperation with Germany by creating binational postgraduate studies (Perrota; Sharp, 2020).

According to the data by Lamfri and Salto (2016), the Secretary of University Policies (SPU) and the Coordination for the Improvement of Higher Education Personnel (CAPES)<sup>13</sup> in Brazil took part in financing 81 projects of the *Program of Associated Centers CAPB-BA* until 2015 and, from 2008 until 2014, 60 fortifying projects between Argentine and Brazilian universities, of the *Program of Associated Centers for the Strengthening of Graduate Studies CAFB-BA* - in the latter, a consolidated postgraduate program strengthens a less developed program aiming at reducing regional disparities.

For multilateral programs, Lamfri and Salto indicate the *Program of Joint Research Projects (PPCP)*, the *Association for the Strengthening of Postgraduate Studies Program*, the *Human Resources Training Program*, the already mentioned *Argentine-Brazilian Doctoral Program*, *Pablo Neruda Programme for Academic and Postgraduate Mobility*, and the

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<sup>13</sup> CAPES is a Foundation within the Ministry of Education in Brazil whose central purpose is to coordinate efforts to improve the quality of Brazil's faculty and staff in higher education through grant programs. CAPES is particularly concerned with the training of Doctoral candidates, Pre-doctoral short-term researchers, and Postdoctoral scholars. (Source: Institute of International Education - IIE)

*Graduate Student Exchange Program of the Montevideo Group University Association.*<sup>14</sup>

In 1999, the International Cooperation Network of National Universities (RedCIUN) originated from the National Inter-University Council (CIN). According to a recent publication (CIN, 2022), two programs are at the forefront of the internationalization efforts promoted by CIN: the *Latin American Academic Exchange Program* (PILA) and the *Consortium for Spanish as a Second or Foreign Language*. PILA originated from bilateral student exchange programs from CIN, the *National Association of Universities and Higher Education Institutions* (ANUIES) of Mexico, and the *Association of Colombian Universities* (ASCUN).<sup>15</sup> The three organizations made a strategic alliance in October 2017, which became active in the second semester of 2018 with the first mobility.

PILA aimed to stimulate the exchange experiences of graduate and postgraduate students, academic, research, and administration personnel from participant universities and higher education institutions. The purpose was to enhance educational and professional training and

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<sup>14</sup> **Translated for readability purposes.** Original designations: Programa de Centros Asociados de Fortalecimiento da Pós-Graduação CAFP-BA. Programa de Proyectos Conjuntos de Investigación (PPCP), Programa de Asociación para el Fortalecimiento de Posgrados, Programa de Formación de Recursos Humanos, el ya mencionado Programa Doctoral Argentino-Brasileño, Programa de Movilidad de Posgrados Pablo Neruda y Programa Escala Estudiantil de Posgrado de la Asociación de Universidades del Grupo Montevideo.

<sup>15</sup> **Translated for readability purposes.** Original designations: Red de Cooperación Internacional de las Universidades Nacionales. Programa de Intercambio Académico Latinoamericano. Consorcio Español como Lengua Segunda y Extranjera. Asociación Nacional de Universidades e Instituciones de Educación Superior. Asociación Colombiana de Universidades.

comprehensive education, promote higher education internationalization, and strengthen cooperation bonds. In August 2020, a new program, *PILA Virtual*, opened to incorporate virtual exchange between the universities.

Moreover, the virtual initiative expanded in March 2021, adding associations and university councils from Chile, Cuba, Nicaragua, Brazil, and Uruguay. This program is a consortium of associations between eight Latin American and Caribbean countries, reuniting 222 educational institutions. The *Consortium for Spanish as a Second or Foreign Language (ELSE)*, comprising two-thirds of Argentine public universities, aims to contribute with regional linguistic and educational policies that foster diversity appreciation and acknowledge intercultural markers through teaching, evaluation, and certification of Spanish as a second or foreign language.

Similarly, since 2013, PIESCI has financed research projects and sector studies carried out by networks of universities from *MERCOSUR Educacional's* countries - with the support of NEIES.<sup>16</sup> These networks promote

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<sup>16</sup> The Commission of Higher Education (CAES) of MERCOSUR's Educational Sector (SEM) has launched two calls for biennial research project submissions. Forty-one projects were submitted for the first call, and forty-seven for the second, with twelve and sixteen projects selected, respectively. Among the latter, four are renewals of projects approved in the first call. The topics addressed by the Networks are as follows: Internationalization of higher education, academic mobility, and regional integration networks; Evaluation of university quality: institutional impact; Diversification and differentiation of higher education: new institutional models; University-industry linkages; University extension: policies and practices; Incorporation of distance education and distance learning in undergraduate and graduate programs: impact on teaching quality; Recognition of titles and academic stages: initiatives, challenges, and trends; Democratization of higher education: policies, actors, and institutions; Environmentally sustainable socio-economic development: the role of

internationalization by building work groups from universities in multiple countries and sponsoring mobility between them. Thus, it is a policy that indirectly strengthens graduate and postgraduate training by promoting research.

Among all the projects and sector studies financed for the call-up of Network proposals [*trabajo en Red*], one project and one sector study focus on postgraduate studies. The research project of the network "*Dilemas de nuevas culturas de producción de conocimientos. Los posgrados en Argentina, Brasil y Paraguay en el contexto de la evaluación de la calidad de la educación superior* [Dilemmas of new knowledge production cultures. Postgraduation in Argentina, Brazil, and Paraguay in the context of higher education quality evaluation, our translation] initially approaches postgraduate studies of the Networks' countries with a comparative framework.

Additionally, it focuses on the comparative analysis between two areas of knowledge: Mathematics and Computer Science Doctoral degrees. It considered the integrated universities in each country (National University of Córdoba - national coordinator - and the Center of the Province of Buenos Aires in Argentina; State University of

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higher education; Comparative education; University professors; Monitoring of postgraduate education; Scientific production of universities; University students: academic trajectories, expectations, and new profiles; Contributions of human, social, and art sciences to social development. Since the second semester of 2018, the corresponding research projects selected within the Call for Sectoral Studies on Higher Education in MERCOSUR have been underway. There are six Sectoral Studies on different themes. For more details, visit [https://nemocosur.siu.edu.ar/webnucleo/pag\\_nucleo\\_redesde\\_investigacion.html](https://nemocosur.siu.edu.ar/webnucleo/pag_nucleo_redesde_investigacion.html). Access on June 10, 2022.

Campinas in Brazil; and National University of Asunción in Paraguay). The following aspects were considered for the comparative analysis, considering both the systemic and disciplinary dimensions: origin and development of the postgraduate studies; regulatory guidelines; evaluation and accreditation; funding; and internationalization.

In the sector study, the Oriental Republic of Uruguay joined Argentina, Brazil, and Paraguay. In that sense, the study *“Dilemas de nuevas culturas de producción del conocimiento. Los posgrados a distancia en el MERCOSUR: Formatos, regulaciones y acreditación”* [Dilemmas of new knowledge production cultures. Distance postgraduation in MERCOSUR: Arrangements, regulations, and accreditation] investigates distance postgraduate programs in these countries with a comparative framework. It considers the dimensions of origin and development; regulatory guidelines and attributions; mapping of their situation; evaluation and accreditation; and institutional structure and its current models (technological, pedagogical, and organizational) through a case study - public and private institutions investigated by the work groups from each country of the Network.

The data collected in this research enabled the comprehension of the particularities of postgraduate courses in MERCOSUR countries. Although part of the same region, the arrangement of higher education and

postgraduate studies in these countries have differences and parallels.<sup>17</sup>

## Networks, Postgraduation, and Internationalization

As previously mentioned, since 2013, PIESCI has financed research projects and sector studies produced by networks of universities from *MERCOSUR Educacional's* countries. These networks promote internationalization by building work groups from universities in multiple countries and sponsoring mobility between them.

In that sense, joint work indirectly strengthens university activities and postgraduate studies. Accordingly, a paper reconstructs the work group's experience, conceptualizing the tensions, challenges, and contributions in this context (Araujo, Lamfri, 2018). From a general perspective, and independently of the research subjects, the networks contribute to regional integration, strengthening of internationalization policies of higher education institutions, and cultural comprehension of the involved countries.

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<sup>17</sup> The following productions related to the research are pertinent: Lamfri, N. (Coord.) (2016). *Estudos de pós-graduação na Argentina, no Brasil e no Paraguai. Aproximaciones comparadas en contextos de evaluación de la calidad de la Educación Superior*. Córdoba: Bruges. Lamfri, N., Araujo, S., Aguilar, L. (orgs.) (2021). *Dilemas de novas culturas de produção de conhecimento. Estudos de pós-graduação na Argentina, Brasil e Paraguai no contexto da avaliação da qualidade do ensino superior. Doutorados em matemática e ciência da computação. Histórias de pesquisa*. São Carlos: Pedro & João Editores. Lanfri, N. (Coord.) (2020) *Dilemas de novas culturas de produção de conhecimento. Los posgrados a distancia en el MERCOSUR: Formatos, regulaciones y acreditación. Estudio Sectorial 1933/18*. Córdoba: NEIES. Araujo, S. (Org.) (2020). *Educação de pós-graduação no Mercosul. Los posgrados a distancia*. Tandil: UNICEN.

In particular, the possibility of understanding the institutional culture of universities stands out, as well as the knowledge production cultures in different contexts. Such understanding enables recognizing and compensating faults in knowledge accessibility, professional skills, and techniques that approach research issues (Araujo; Lamfri, 2018). It is a solidary perspective of internationalization in which, as stated by Regional Conferences of Higher Education, networks receive support from intercultural dialogue, respect for the countries' specificities and identities, and strengthening of national capabilities through inter-institutional collaboration and interaction with academic counterparts in the regional and international level (CRES, 2018).

## **Postgraduation and foreign students in Argentina**

The depth of internationalization activities in Argentina started in the last 20 years. Universities progressively created offices to manage activities related to international cooperation. From the start, two issues arose: the lack of registers for students, professors, and researchers' mobility, which developed with great intensity for thirty years, and the lack of standardized procedures for residence registration of foreigners studying in Argentina.

Recent national statistics about universities and foreign students in Argentina provided an overview of who they are

considering fundamental variables. The following table exposes data from 2015 to 2020, where the number of students, particularly foreigners, increased rapidly - the number doubled in 2017. However, data also reveals that mobility at the undergraduate/graduate level remains superior to postgraduate education.

**Table 1: Foreign students in Argentina. 2015-2020.**

Year	Undergraduate/ Graduate Level	Postgraduation	Total
2015	53.101 (92.9%)	4.852 (7.1%)	57.953 (100%)
2016	55.402 (92.8%)	4.304 (7.2%)	59.706 (100%)
2017	63.140 (85.3%)	10.873 (14.7%)	74.013 (100%)
2018	75.332 (83.7%)	14.642 (16.3%)	89.974 (100%)
2019	87.122 (86.8%)	13.260 (13.2%)	100.382 (100%)
2020	93.304 (86.2%)	14.876 (13.8%)	108.180 (100%)

**Source:** Argentina. Ministry of Education. Secretary of University Policies (SPU) Síntese de informações universitárias. 2015-2021. This table of contents is a translation of the original. Available in:

<https://www.argentina.gob.ar/educacion/universidades/informacion/publicaciones/sintesis>.

According to *Síntesis de Información. Estadísticas Universitarias 2019-2020* [Information Synthesis - University Statistics 2019-2020], 108.180 foreign students were enrolled in Argentine universities in 2020, comprising public and private institutions - representing 4,4% of 2.476.945 student population. From this total, 93.304 are at the undergraduate or graduate level, while 14.876 are at the postgraduate level, comprising 4.0% of the total number of students at the higher education level (2.318.255) and 9,4%

of postgraduate students (158.690). There are 133 institutions, 112 universities, and other 21 higher education institutions.

Regarding management, foreigners comprise 4.2% of state-managed and 4.8% of private institutions' students. Concerning their origin, 95.61% are from American countries, 3.14% are from European countries, and the remaining 1.25% are from Asia (1%), Africa (0.2%), and Oceania (0.05%).

The postgraduate students predominantly come from Colombia, Ecuador, Brazil, Uruguay, Peru, Chile, and Venezuela, comprising 500 students. Foreigners from American countries of undergraduate and graduate levels also come from them. However, approximately 5.700 come from the United States, with Peru and Brazil leading the count with 12.000 students in the public sector and Brazil with 6.500 students in the private sector.

In 2019, 12,132 students engaged in some academic activity,<sup>18</sup> in state-managed and private universities. In 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic profoundly impacted people's lives worldwide, particularly in educational institutions. Preventative and mandatory social isolation, followed by social distancing, implemented to contain contamination, directly affected traditional academic mobility. Therefore, the outcomes of the health crisis have evolved and require

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<sup>18</sup> The academic activities mentioned may or may not be in a degree program's curriculum, as they do not encompass the completion of an entire program.

further investigation in the higher education field, especially concerning postgraduate studies, prompting inquiries about international mobility.

According to Pedró (2020), the president of the UNESCO International Institute for Higher Education in Latin America and the Caribbean (IESALC - UNESCO), the COVID-19 pandemic crisis would have significant impacts on the global economy, leading to inequality and limited resources for those without access to state financing for mobility. Also forewarned that “international academic mobility will decrease although it is hard to estimate how much” (p.7, our translation)<sup>19</sup>.

In 2020 and 2021, during the sanitary emergency, teaching activities happened through technological tools in virtual teaching-learning platforms. The method reached postgraduate studies and facilitated access to an international degree without physical mobility. Accordingly, two inquiries go beyond the national context to define guidelines for distance education from different perspectives. First, what is the impact of virtualizing postgraduate programs during this period in creating distance education or adapting the in-person model? After, to what extent this model modification will - or not - increase the number of foreign students coursing the postgraduate level in a different country?

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<sup>19</sup> Original citation: “la movilidad académica internacional se va a reducir, pero es mucho más difícil estimar cuánto” (Pedró, p. 7)

In this context, creating postgraduate programs of dubious quality is a risk - particularly when postgraduate programs highly depend on student fees and tuition. It affects postgraduation in Argentina, where there is no state financial support to promote training initiatives. Thus, evaluation and accreditation have a fundamental role in regulating such procedures.

In Argentina, the number of distance postgraduate programs is lower compared to in-person programs. In 2019, before the health crisis, 5.7% of the total courses at the undergraduate and graduate levels and 3.5% of the postgraduate level were in the distance education model. In distance undergraduate and graduate programs, the participation rate is 4.3% for state-managed institutions and 8.5% for the private sector. However, the total number of academic proposals for distance undergraduate and graduate programs has an almost homogeneous distribution concerning management type - 51.4% in the public sector and 48.6% in the private sector - the distribution of students in distance courses is 36.4% in the state-managed institutions and 63.6% in the private sector. Concerning postgraduate programs, the public sector also has a lower percentage, although the difference is declining.

Among the new enrollments at the undergraduate and graduate levels, 36,7% are from the public sector and 63.3% from the private sector. Accordingly, 17,9% of former students are from the distance programs of state-managed

institutions, while 82.1% come from private. Thus, the distribution percentage of the academic programs indicates the opposite behavior to the in-person model, where state-managed institutions have higher participation. In 2020, there is an increase in distance postgraduate programs though the data does not register the impact of virtualization during the health emergency.

**Table 2: Quantity of undergraduate, graduate, and postgraduate programs according to educational model and management. 2019-2020.**

Management	Undergraduate and Graduate Programs				Postgraduate Programs			
	Distance education		In-person Education		Distance education		In-person Education	
	2019	2020	2019	2020	2019	2020	2019	2020
<b>Total</b>	381	381	6272	6191	112	125	3054	3026
<b>State-managed</b>	185	178	4162	4171	58	61	2326	2304
<b>Private</b>	196	203	2110	2020	54	64	728	722

**Source:** Argentina. Ministry of Education. Secretary of University Policies (SPU). Síntese de Informações Estatísticas Universitárias. 2019-2020/2020- 2021. This table of contents is a translation of the original.

It is noteworthy that, until the pandemic, distance postgraduate courses included specialization and master studies because there is no register of doctoral studies in the model. Thus, in the Argentine context, as mentioned by researchers cited in this paper, the research field opens to determine the impact of virtualization in creating and restructuring existing distance courses and the characteristics of students concerning their origin country.

Alternatively, before the pandemic, Latin-American foreign students would travel from their origin countries to fulfill the requirements of in-person postgraduation courses. These tend to be shorter than graduate courses and offer a more flexible curriculum. Some institutions signed partnerships, allowing students from other countries to complete postgraduate studies in Argentina through a special structure with intensive classes that do not require permanent residence.<sup>20</sup> There are signs that the virtualization of education benefited studies due to the exemption of dislocating to the country where the activities ensue. The situation also helped Argentine university professors who relocated to enroll in programs conducted in provinces or cities different from their residences.

The trend of recovering the benefits of digital technologies and the experiences of the pandemic came to reality right after institutions closed (IESALC, UNESCO, 2020). In Argentina, in May of 2021, the Secretary of University Policies launched the summon *"Apoyo al Desarrollo de Estrategias Virtuales para la Internacionalización Integral"* [Support for the Development of Virtual Strategies for Comprehensive Internationalization, our translation] through PIESCI, intending to advance in comprehensive projects for virtual exchange, curriculum internationalization, and academic recognition. The purpose was to revamp internationalization during the pandemic

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<sup>20</sup> Such cases require careful examination of the limitations postgraduate studies face in their origin countries, considering quotas and high tuition fees that explain the proposition.

seeing as the suspension of international mobility demanded a new approach to internationalization strategies. It implicated integrating virtual tools to complement and amplify traditional in-person procedures. At the time, Marina Larrea (2021), PIESCI coordinator, stated: "With this initiative, we construct a new strategy for internationalization. We do not want to replace traditional mobilities but rather provide an additional possibility that democratizes access to these opportunities within universities."

During the two years of higher education virtualization, virtual mobility and other internationalization experiences for the curriculum began. Although the strategies have value due to their contributions to continuing university initiatives, there is an inquiry on how exchange programs carried out strictly in the virtual domain could affect the main purpose of internationalization. Virtual mobility and research development through virtual exchange could be restricted experiences.

In that sense, and recognizing the value of the TCIs (Technologies of Communication and Information) to international cooperation, it is crucial to envision initiatives that involve in-person participation and exchange, aligning with the internationalization goals of the Higher Education Regional Conferences. The purposes stand in contrast to market-driven internationalization, which favors the hegemonic and de-nationalized interests of globalization.

Involves inter-institutional cooperation based on solidarity among equals, focusing on South-South and regional integration, comprising an essential tool to transform higher education, strengthen the community, and promote quality and relevance to teaching, research, and extension. Finally, it seeks to form citizens and professionals engaged in cultural diversity, intercultural comprehension, the culture of peace, and the capability of living in a local and global community.

## The pandemic and internationalization: Outbound mobility

In Argentina, for the first time due to the pandemic, it was possible to access information about outbound international mobility from the Argentine university and scientific system. The report organized by PIESCI “*Análisis de movilidad saliente Argentina 2020*” [Analysis of Outbound Mobility Argentina 2020] records information on 1,914 cases collected during the research period (May-June, 2020). The compiled data follows.<sup>21</sup>

Firstly, the percentage of people in mobility comprises 58,9% of women and 41,1% of men. These numbers correspond almost directly to the enrollment in

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<sup>21</sup> Flores, E., Isasmendi, G., Lepore, E., Mérega, M., Pazos, N., Puppo, C., Reyes, S. (2020). *Análisis de movilidad saliente Argentina 2020*. Relatório técnico. Argentina. Ministério da Educação. Secretaria de Políticas Universitárias. PIESCI. Buenos Aires. Access in: [https://drive.google.com/file/d/1uGt7GG46x4x66yJ2QPqvfsBVJe5WD\\_bf/view](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1uGt7GG46x4x66yJ2QPqvfsBVJe5WD_bf/view)

the Argentine university system - 58,1% of women and 41,9% of men.

Secondly, the data on age reveals that more than half (53%) correspond to the “25 years old or less” category. The ranking is followed by the sort “26 to 30 years old” at 28%. The third category, “31 to 35 years old”, corresponds to 9%. Thus, considering age, the data indicates that the majority corresponds to young people who will relocate to graduate and conclude their post-graduate studies abroad.

Furthermore, 93% of the cases are from universities, highlighted by a concentration in a few institutions and a high dispersion in the others. Concerning the universities analyzed, 132 at the time, 86 (65%) registered international mobility. When separated by management (state-managed or private), the representation is still substantial: 75% of public universities (50 institutions) and 55% of the private ones (36 institutions) register mobility. However, there is also a high concentration of cases in a few institutions and a wide distribution in others. The first group comprises *Universidad de Buenos Aires*, *Universidad Nacional del Litoral*, *Universidad Nacional de Córdoba*, *Universidad Nacional de Cuyo*, and one private institution, *Universidad Torcuato di Tella*. These universities centralize almost half of the total registers (44%).

The distribution of mobility by the destination country is unequal, divided into 43 countries, with Spain leading at 25.5%, France at 11.9%, and the United States at

10.9%. When grouping the mobility by destination region, they majorly have European countries at 62.5%. The second region encompasses Latin American countries and the Caribbean at 22.9%. North America comes in third place at 11.8% of mobilities and, lastly, Oceania (1.7%), Asia (0.8%), and Africa (0.3%) with low significance percentages.

Finally, considering the official idiom of destination countries for mobility, 56.2% occur in countries with only one foreign language, while 43.8% occur in Spanish-speaking countries. After Spanish, six other languages are predominantly used, with English as the most spoken language (15,2%) and Dutch at the other extreme as the least spoken (1.7%). The other languages are French and German at similar percentages (12.7% and 10.3%, respectively) and Portuguese and Italian (6.5% and 5.4%, respectively). The percentage of 56.2% may suggest the existence of specific second language training actions promoted by the home institutions or the possession of an initial linguistic capital acquired during primary or later education. The report notes that the low incidence of Portuguese among outbound mobility (6.5%) is unexpected, considering Brazil is a strategic integration partner.

To sum up, the scope is far from universal concerning support networks, indicating disparities depending on the support: health support is at 89%, emotional support at 12%, and institutional support at 55%, which highlights the significance of self-financing for mobility and the necessity

to develop public and institutional policies if they aim to change the matter.

The collected data opens the inquiry about how mobility will be affected and how the numbers will vary regarding alternatives developed to promote exchange and international cooperation. The question is relevant because traditional mobility, considering postgraduate mobility, has been majorly supported by personal funding, and, therefore, a small elite is in the condition to pursue it. The same question applies to academic personnel because international, national, and institutional programs usually involve reduced academic body participation from the engaged institutions.

## **Postgraduation, Evaluation, Accreditation, and Internationalization**

The 1990s are the decade of evaluation. It is certainly a period where the creation of quality evaluation and accreditation agencies for postgraduate institutions or courses became generalized.

Evaluation and accreditation policies and other instruments became essential to guide higher education transformations. The literature recognizes evaluation as a tool for improvement. However, it can negatively affect education, research, extension, and exchange in the activities carried out by institutions and university members.

Research on the impact of evaluation in certain conditions, particularly regarding financial rewards, exposes simulation practices, fraud, and information distortion when encountering pressure to adequate quality criteria and standards.

The creation of university ranking has developed an important role in university management. The development started in the United States and Anglo-Saxon countries and almost exclusively to distinguish the best business schools (Pérez Esparrels; López, 2009). Thus, although there is a consensus about the effectiveness of evaluating the quality of university activities, the rankings still significantly impact institutional reputation and the choices made by students, professors, researchers, entrepreneurs, and other relevant actors.

The criteria guiding the ranking grades are various. However, the research and publication criteria carry a substantial weight, which leads to strong criticism due to the downgrading of students' activities, the extension, and dissemination of culture and actions related to social compromise, both at the graduate and postgraduate levels.

The ARWU ranking, for example, considers students and professors who received a Nobel Prize, the most cited researchers in 21 categories, articles published in **Nature and Science**, articles published in the **Science Citation Index and Social Citation Index** standards, and academic performance concerning the institution's length. The **QS**

**World University Ranking** (THES) considers specialists' opinions about the 30 main universities worldwide, employers' thoughts, student/professor relationships, and the proportion of foreign students and professors.

From one perspective, such aspects directly impact postgraduate programs because the training aims to give access to recent and highly specialized information and authentic scientific and technological knowledge production. Thus, while evaluation and accreditation assess criteria that emphasize professors' academic productivity, postgraduate propositions of a professional nature are at a disadvantage when evaluated under the same metric of master's and doctorate programs.

Considering this, evaluation and accreditation are recognized while incorporating specific criteria and standards aligned with the goals of such training. This is the case for professional master's programs recognized in Argentina and Brazil and for the professional doctorate program in Paraguay. On the other hand, according to the weight of classification in national evaluation models, compelling foreign students and professors is a significant motivation for improvement at the international level (Martinez Rizo, 2011; Albornoz, 2018).

In Argentina, postgraduation studies developed slowly and late but intensely increased in the 1990s ((Barsky, 1997; Fernández, 2009; Krotsch, 2009; de la Fare y Lenz, 2012; Barsky y Dávila, 2004, 2012). During this period, the most

important regulations for creation, evaluation, and the organ responsible for accreditation, the Comisión Nacional de Evaluación y Acreditación Universitaria [National Commission for University Evaluation and Accreditation] (CONEAU). However, the scarce postgraduation activities until that moment did not overlook the difficulties of Argentine universities in implementing and consolidating scientific and technological activities.

The decade's professionalization tradition - in a context of modernization - resulted in postgraduate courses focused on professional development, like specialization and master's studies, and not much on doctorate programs related to authentic productions. According to the data, there will be a significant increase in the number of programs by the year 2021. Specifically, the expected growth for doctoral programs is at 15.1% (an increase of 576), specialization programs at 49.6% (an increase of 1892), and master's programs at 35.3% (an increase of 1349).<sup>22</sup>

The growth of postgraduate studies in the late years of the previous century brought up certain tensions. From one perspective, the scarce local postgraduate educators lead to hiring foreigners to fulfill curriculum requirements for training and thesis supervision. However, in the context of self-financing, where enrollment and student fees make the

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<sup>22</sup> Argentina. Ministério da Educação. Secretaria de Políticas Universitárias. Síntesis de Información. Estadísticas Universitarias 2020-2021. Available in: [https://www.argentina.gob.ar/sites/default/files/sintesis\\_2020-2021\\_sistema\\_universitario\\_argentino.pdf](https://www.argentina.gob.ar/sites/default/files/sintesis_2020-2021_sistema_universitario_argentino.pdf). Access on: 19 jun. 2022.

primary contribution to raising such costs is problematic. It could lead to student dropouts due to financial limitations and, therefore, the unsustainability of the postgraduate program.

From another perspective, national guidelines establish that at least half of the teaching staff in accreditation processes should belong to the university implementing it, to articulate research, develop knowledge, and postgraduate teaching. Aligned with this, Resolution n° 160/11 states that:

In institutional programs, the faculty responsible for teaching and evaluating courses, seminars, workshops, or other activities shall be composed of at least fifty percent (50%) of faculty members with institutional experience and who are part of the university staff of the institution offering the program. The remaining fifty percent (50%) may include invited faculty members who occasionally undertake part or all of the academic activities of the program. (Resolution n°160/11)

Faculty members who are part of the university staff are deemed stable, “especially in academic master’s and doctoral programs, where there will be a gradual effort to have an appropriate percentage of stable faculty members with exclusive or semi-exclusive dedication or equivalent” (Resolution n° 160/11, item 11.2).

As an acknowledgment of the mentioned reality, the research conducted on the internet, titled *Dilemas de nuevas culturas de producción de conocimientos. Los posgrados en Argentina, Brasil y Paraguay en el contexto de la evaluación de*

*la calidad de la Educación Superior* [Dilemmas of New Knowledge Production Cultures: Postgraduate Studies in Argentina, Brazil, and Paraguay in the Context of Higher Education Quality Evaluation]" aimed to analyze the development of postgraduate programs in three countries within the MERCOSUR region from a political and comparative perspective. The investigation explored intersections and divergences among eight doctoral programs offered by MERCOSUR universities within the Network.

The evaluated doctorate programs are Mathematics and Computer Sciences from the National University of Córdoba and the Center of the Province of Buenos Aires in Argentina, the State University of Campinas in Brazil, and the National University of Asunción in Paraguay. The Computer Sciences doctorate program of UNICEN started before accreditation due to the developing institutionalization of CONEAU at the time of its creation in 1997.<sup>23</sup> The situation also resulted in the lack of institutional guidelines to establish the accreditation process as a significant condition for the commencement of postgraduation courses. In its first accreditation, in 1999, the course qualified as "C" (Good), while suggestions made included "expanding the teaching staff" and "consolidating the faculty with researchers from the Computer Sciences field" (Resolution 790/99). During the 1990s, amidst the

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<sup>23</sup> UNICEN: Decree N° 2163/97 about the creation of the Master's program of System Engineering and Doctoral Program of Computer Sciences.

absence of postgraduate students in the country, the evaluation agency consolidated undergraduate programs with faculty members from within the institutions. This approach was likely aimed at enabling autonomy and encouraging independent research, which prevents dependence on programs from other well-established research and training centers.

Additionally, accreditation contrasts with another particularity of higher education internationalization, especially in research and scientific production: the significance of the English language. Due to the features and requirements of the Mathematics and Computer Sciences fields, most of these publications, if not all, are in English. At the National University of Córdoba, especially in Computer Sciences, the situation leads supervisors to recommend writing the thesis in English. Even though there is no central regulation of the university or faculty's idiom, the Ministry of Education determines that the writing and oral defense of the postgraduation theses should be in Spanish or Portuguese (Resolution nº 2385/15).

The obligation of writing the thesis in Spanish elicited opposing opinions in the postgraduation programs. Thus, some research groups advocate both thesis publications and doctorate theses should be in English. This recommendation aims to amplify the public and enable the examination by specialists recognized in the scientific field in other countries. As a way to adapt, the candidates and

supervisors who opt for writing in English fulfill the regulations by sending a shorter version in Spanish.

At the beginning of the doctoral program in Computer Sciences, the thesis of the National University of the Center of the Province of Buenos Aires was presented in English to avoid unnecessary efforts. Intervention from the institution's authorities modified the situation, which diverged from current guidelines. Later on, the doctorate in Computational and Industrial Mathematics manifested the same interest in submitting the thesis in English, considering the publications' particularities. Consequently, students are required to draft both the English and Castilian versions, as the latter must be included in the institution's repository.

Therefore, the relationship between the English language and thesis writing stirred an intense debate in the examined Argentine universities, leading to non-institutional self-regulation. They are situations negotiated between regulatory requirements (thesis writing in Spanish or Portuguese) and the academic and professional interests and demands of the members of these fields, which are highly internationalized (Araujo S. et al)<sup>24</sup>

Another facet of internationalization when associated with a high-quality level is the signature of a partnership between institutions to boost international visibility. However, the number of international partnerships (DE WIT,

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<sup>24</sup> This is another way of incorporating English in postgraduate studies in comparison to the non-critical approach discussed by de Wit (2011), to whom there is an erroneous conception of "internationalization being similar to English teaching" (our translation).

2011; KNIGHT, n.d.) is not responsible for internationalization because they frequently don't go beyond cooperation intentions - that don't materialize in specific initiatives.

Ultimately, international accreditation of postgraduate programs stands out. The accreditation happens through specific agencies in prominent countries to give more visibility to higher education institutions and postgraduate program prompts. Thus, in a competitive context, the purpose is to attract students and professors based on credentials offered by such agencies.

## Final considerations

The path of internationalization promoted at the end of the last century developed gradually through a series of initiatives promoted by the government or educational institutions themselves. The pandemic that affected physical mobility in 2020 and 2021 was a turning point<sup>25</sup> for endeavors related to internationalization. From one perspective, it affected the physical mobility of students and professors to a diversity of regions and institutions. From another perspective, other strategies quickly developed to compensate for physical dislocation, incorporating the role of TCIs in communication and pedagogical mediation.

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<sup>25</sup> Original: "*bisagra*" moment.

In a highly heterogeneous context, there is pressure in the higher education sector to cover education, research, and extension, and multiple inquiries about the two years of the pandemic will impact advanced education and internationalization experiences. Certainly, the reliance on information and communication technologies will be the vehicle to promote it. The question remains on what political-pedagogical and institutional projects will integrate to establish the dimensions and restrictions of this experience.

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