

COOPERATION AND INTERNATIONALIZATION EXPERIENCE WITHIN HIGHER EDUCATION

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Abstract

Education has historically developed parallel to socio-technological changes; at present the innovations in information and communication technologies promote a new educational paradigm, where the search for higher education quality, pertinence and internationalization is remarkable. On these lines, the creation of university networks of postgraduate studies, students and researchers mobility and the cooperation of Spanish American researchers who work outside the region constitute one of the goals which Ibero American countries aim at achieving during the next decade (OEI, 2010). Within this context, the aim of this paper is to describe an experience of cooperation and internationalization with teachers and postgraduate students mobility which took place in the Departamento de Economía de la Universidad Nacional del Sur (Department of Economics of National University of the South). This experience took place from 2008 to 2011 in the context of the Programa de Centros Asociados para el Fortalecimiento de Posgrados, Proyecto CAFP (Program of Associate Centers for the Strengthening of Postgraduate Studies, CAFP Project) and the promoting institution was the Departamento de Desemvolvimento, Agricultura e Sociedade and Instituto de Ciencias Humanas e Sociais (CPDA) of the Universidades Federal Rural do Rio de Janeiro and the receiving institution, the Departamento de Economía of UNS (Department of Economics of the National University of the South). Thus, two postgraduate programs were linked: The Program of Pós Graduação de Ciências Sociais em Desemvolvimento, Agricultura e Sociedades del CPDA and the Magister in Agrarian and Rural Management of UNS. Based on the weaknesses of the latter, the proposed objectives were, among others, improving the graduation rate, revising and updating the Course of Studies, widening the research lines and incorporating interdisciplinary approaches.

Keywords: Cooperation and Internationalization of Education. University networks

Introduction

Education has historically developed parallel to socio-technological changes; at present the innovations in information and communication technologies promote a new educational paradigm, where the search for higher education quality, pertinence and internationalization is remarkable

Internationalization of Higher Education is understood as a process consisting of the design and implementation of policies and programs which have as their goal, on the one side, incorporating the international and intercultural dimensions in the missions, objectives and functions of teaching, investigation and extension of university institutions, and, on the other side, channeling the benefits derived from international cooperation (Knight, 2005). International cooperation at the educational level is thought as a way of educational institutions to relate in view to mutual benefit. Interuniversity cooperation is meant to encourage intellectual collaboration by means of the formation of networks between institutions and teachers with the aim to enable the access, transference and adaptation of knowledge towards the interior of countries as well as across their borders.

These concepts explain not only the growing importance attached to knowledge at the global level but also the increase in communication among the participants of the process of generation and appropriation of knowledge, which gives rise to a “new global geopolitics of knowledge” (García Guadilla, 2010)

The internationalization of higher education is a complex phenomenon, in which varied agents and actors participate -international and regional organisms, national States and institutions of higher education (IHE).each with its own logic (Abba).

Thus, the Ibero American Heads of State and Government gathered for the XV and XVI Ibero American Summit set the bases of a program to encourage the creation of the Ibero American Space of Knowledge, based on the recommendations and mandates which emerged from different spheres of the Ibero American cooperation during the 90s. One of the goals in the “Metas Educativas 2021” (“2021 Educational Goals”) proposal was devoted to stimulate that program.

The main aim of this space is to establish a mechanism of collaboration and interaction among higher education researchers and teachers, since they recognize how important this is for the generation and spreading of scientific and technological knowledge.

The criteria which guide the conformation of this space are “cooperation and solidarity in the attention of asymmetries, respect for diversity, continuous improvement and guarantying higher education quality and pertinence, research and innovation as the bases for sustainable development and conservation of biodiversity in the region, as well as complementarity and agreement among the different actors involved” (SPU-Secretaría de Políticas Universitarias)-(University Policy Department). Its main lines of action are increasing the number of researchers in each country and their mobility, as well as a sustained rise in the investment on research and development, admitting, at the same time, that this knowledge will pass over to primary and secondary levels of education (OEI- IASO, 2010).

In this context the Ministry of Education of Argentina has been encouraging the process of internationalization of Argentine universities for several years by means of the implementation of the Programa de Internacionalización de la Educación Superior y Cooperación Internacional (PIESCI) (Program of Internationalization of Higher Education and International Cooperation) which the Secretaría de Políticas Universitarias (University Policy Department) carries out. The basic purpose of this program is to promote the links and articulation of all actors in the field of higher education in the national, regional and international spheres with the aim of fostering the opportunities that are offered to the institutions of higher education by educational and academic cooperation.

The institutions of higher education, as agents and actors of internationalization, outline their own internationalization project taking into consideration their view and mission. In Universidad Nacional del Sur (National University of the South) particular case the subject is dealt with in one of the chapters of its Strategic Plan, where the university admits that, although an important group of teachers-researchers have been collaborating fluently with akin groups around the world for some time now, it is since the creation of the Subsecretaría de Relaciones Internacionales (International Relations Undersecretariat) in 2007 that the process of internationalization at UNS (Universidad Nacional del Sur-National University of the South) has been furthered. With a view to renewing and improving the quality of higher education, participation of the whole university community in the different modalities of internationalization and cooperation is encouraged by this Undersecretariat. Thus, among other activities designed to reach the proposed aims, the participation of students, teaching and non- teaching staff in mobility programs is managed and facilitated, agreements with institutions of known prestige are signed. Besides, agreements for joint degrees and joint investigations with foreign groups are formalized. (UNS, 2013)

In this context, the aim of this paper is to present an experience of cooperation and internationalization with mobility of teaching staff and

postgraduate students at the Department of Economics of Universidad Nacional del Sur (UNS) (National University of the South). The said experience took place from 2008 to 2011 within the Programa de Centros Asociados para el Fortalecimiento de posgrados (CAFP-BA) (Associated Centres for the Strengthening of Postgraduates Program) The promoting institution was the Departamento de Desenvolvimento, Agricultura e Sociedade and the Instituto de Ciências Humanas e Sociais (CPDA) of the Universidade Federal Rural do Rio de Janeiro (UFRRJ) and the recipient institution the Departamento de Economía of UNS (Department of Economics of National University of the South, Argentina). To this end, the CAFP-BA program will be briefly outlined, then some features of the involved postgraduate programs of studies will be mentioned and lastly, the main achievements of the experience will be presented.

The Associated centers for the strengthening of postgraduate programs. Some features

Within the PIESCI agreements of bilateral cooperation with Brazil, France, Spain, Cuba, Germany and Chile among other countries have been signed. These agreements, in general, are intended to strengthen the formation of human resources by means of courses or research stays at foreign institutions. While others, aim at the implementation of joint degree studies.

Among the agreements entered into with Brazil, the *Programa de Centros Asociados de Posgrados (CAPG-BA) (Associate Centers of Postgraduate Studies)* and the *Programa de Centros Asociados para el Fortalecimiento de Posgrados (CAFP-BA) (Program of Associate Centers for the Strengthening of Postgraduate Studies)* stand out. Both of them involve teachers and students mobility between quality postgraduate studies of both countries, whilst the *Colegio Doctoral Argentino-Brasileño (CDAB) (Argentine-Brazilian Doctoral School)*, consists in *sandwich scholarships* for doctoral students in Engineering, Informatics and Computing Sciences belonging to postgraduate studies of excellence in both countries.

The CAFP-BA, set up in June 2000 by the Fundação Coordenação de Aperfeiçoamento de Pessoal de Nível Superior (CAPES) and the Secretaría de Políticas Universitarias (SPU) (University Policy Department) in Argentina, was conceived under the Protocolo Adicional del Convenio de Cooperación Educativa (Additional Protocol of the Agreement of Educational Cooperation) between Brazil and Argentina on Educational Integration for the Formation of Human Resources at the Postgraduate level.

Since the geographic distribution of postgraduate studies is neither quantitatively nor qualitatively homogeneous, the main aim of the program is to generate mechanisms that enable to reduce these asymmetries by means of

the formation of human resources at the postgraduate level, the improvement of the quality of the courses which are offered, the promotion of teachers exchange programs and the support for research activities in areas showing a shortfall of research and/or complete vacancy.

The projects within this program are based on the principles of cooperation and solidarity, and they consist in the bi-national academic association where a program of postgraduate studies-master or doctorate- of academic excellency (PROMOTOR), strengthens another program of postgraduate studies-doctorate or master- with a relative lower development (RECIPIENT).

Each project lasts 4 (four) years and its continuity is evaluated annually. One public university from the Republic of Argentina and one university from the Federative Republic of Brazil will participate. The promoting programs of postgraduate studies must be evaluated above 5 by the Fundación Coordinación de Perfeccionamiento del Personal de Nivel Superior (CAPES) (Foundation of Higher Level Staff Improvement Coordination), in the case of Brazil, and they should preferably be ranked as A or B by the Comisión Nacional de Evaluación y Acreditación Universitaria (CONEAU) (National Commission of University Evaluation and Accreditation) in the case of Argentina. Whilst the programs of postgraduate studies assessed with 3 or 4 by the CAPES and the doctorates or master programs accredited or with accredited projects by the CONEAU, will be accepted as recipient programs of postgraduate studies.

At the same time, each Project must be concentrated on one disciplinary area and foster, among other aspects, the consolidation and strengthening of research capacities, the formation and improvement of human resources linked to the university system, the formulation of curricular innovation proposals and strategies allowing the mutual use of the complementary features of the involved programs of postgraduate studies. Besides, it must have some kind of impact on the national/regional context in which the Recipient and Promoting Unities are situated.

Work missions and study missions are carried out to attain the proposed objectives. The first ones consist, on the one hand, in specific courses, seminars, workshops, and conferences dictated by teachers belonging to the Promoting Unity at the Recipient Unity. And on the other hand, the teachers of the recipient programs of postgraduate studies may go on two annual missions for the dictation of courses and/ or seminars.

The study missions are unidirectional, from the Recipient Unity towards the Promoting Unity. This mobility model established that teachers and students from the Recipient Unity take courses and participate in workshops linked to their thesis subject matter, and they may even arrange the co-orientation of the thesis.

Thirty-nine of the projects presented in the four calls carried out up to 2011 were accepted. Almost 25% of the public universities participate in the presentation and execution of these projects dealing with different disciplines. In general, there is a predominance of the oldest institutions. The biggest ones- Universidad de Buenos Aires (Buenos Aires University), Universidad de Córdoba (Córdoba University) and Universidad de La Plata (La Plata University) – have presented a greater number of projects during the period considered. (Chart 1)

Chart 1. CAFP-BA- On-going projects

	2007	2008	2009	2011
Projects	13	7	7	12
Institutions	9	7	7	12

Source: Prepared by the authors based on SPU-Ministerio de Educación (Ministry of Education)

CAFP-BA.The Master on Agrarian Economics and Rural Management experience.

Programs of postgraduate studies involved: features

The Project for strengthening the Master in Agrarian Economics and Rural Management was approved in 2008 (Project N° 008/08), when a specific agreement of collaboration between the Departamento de Economía de la UNS (Department of Economics of the National University of the South) and the Program of Pós-graduação de Ciências Sociais em Desenvolvimento, Agricultura e Sociedade (CPDA) of the Universidad Federal Rural de Rio de Janeiro (Rural Federal University of Rio de Janeiro) was signed. A Framework Agreement signed in July 2002 had already formalized the relationship between the UFRRJ and the UNS.

The Master in Agrarian Economics and Rural Management-*Recipient Program of Postgraduate Studies*- started in 1982. It follows the regulations in force at UNS for programs of fourth level and has been accredited as rank C by the CONEAU. It was designed for the postgraduate formation in the field of Economics of professionals from the Agriculture and Livestock and Rural Management sector.

The program is based on two subject areas which offer the participants an integral formation in Economics for the Agriculture and Livestock sector and the Agro Industrial sector as well as in Rural/ Agro Industrial Enterprise Management. Its purpose is to respond to all the concrete and everyday necessities of the professionals in that area, university researchers or agents from the state sector.

As regards the professionals, whereas they work independently or in the context of private enterprises or state entities of the sector, the programs try to satisfy the demand for knowledge and management tools applied in

Agrarian Business, in the optimization of Enterprise Management and in the generation and strengthening of local innovative dynamics. In relation to the requirements of researchers, the programs are intended to integrate the postgraduate studies with the consequent thesis work in the research programs on Agrarian Economy, Rural Management and Territorial Economy which the Departamento de Economía (Department of Economics) and other Departments of the UNS (National University of the South) carry out. In addition, knowledge on social evaluation of projects and sectorial and rural development strategies is transferred.

The Academic Committee and the Academic Coordinator are in charge of the planning, coordination and direction of the program of studies. The Academic Coordinator is a local teacher appointed by the Consejo Departamental del Departamento de Economía (CDE) (Department Council members of the Department of Economics), who are in office for four years. The Academic Committee appointed by the CDE for four years is formed by three local teachers and the Academic Coordinator.

The teachers and tutors are responsible for the academic formation of the student. They promote, activate and stimulate the students learning.

The academic body is formed by 18 permanent members and a variable number of guests, depending on the existing agreements and/or specific contracts. The members of the academic body have been formed and have worked academically and professionally in the disciplines of Economics, Agrarian Economics, Statistics and Management.

The program of studies of the Master in Agrarian Economics and Rural Management is organized with a period of general theoretical-practical formation which takes up 540 hours. It has seven compulsory subjects, each one requiring an attendance of sixty hours; four seminars, each one requiring an attendance of thirty hours; a compulsory exam on foreign language and a final thesis.

In addition, the students must comply with 160 hours as a *pasante* in research projects and 200 hours for writing the final thesis. These activities are carried out during 2 years.

The students must have a minimum attendance of 80% of the theoretical-practical classes offered in the program of studies. The passing mark for the courses, seminars and workshops is 6 (six) out of a maximum mark of 10 (ten), whilst the average mark cannot be below 7 (seven) points at the end of the program.

With the aim of integrating all the topics dealt with in the Master program, as well as stimulating intellectual qualities together with the capacity to solve problems, the handing in of a final thesis paper and the oral presentation of the said work is required by the postgraduate program. The thesis must be written individually.

The CPDA-*Promoting Postgraduate Program*- is a center of excellence on Agrarian Studies and the Brazilian Agro Alimentary System with a strong Latin-American orientation. It is well-known as a research and exchange center of multidisciplinary nature on Social Sciences oriented to the construction of knowledge on development, institutions and social processes related to the Agro Alimentary system and the rural world.

The CPDA-founded as a Program of Master Studies in 1997- is a program of fourth level of interdisciplinary nature in the field of Social Sciences, devoted to the study of subject matters related to the rural environment and its transformations in the contemporary world. The program is intended to develop a perspective which may embrace the complexities and interactions between the local, national and global processes from an economic, social, cultural and political point of view. These processes have redefined the concept of rurality and have posed queries. Since 1995, a program of Doctorate Studies has been also offered, besides the Master Studies. .

The subjects that make up the framework of the CPDA are grouped in three categories:

Compulsory: The aim of these subjects is to consolidate the formation of the students in research methodology.

Basic Disciplinary: they are oriented to the theoretical formation of the students in the areas of interest of the CPDA

Specific Disciplines of Research Lines: the subjects in this group are aimed at strengthening the theoretical, methodological and historical basis for the subject contents of each of the five lines of research⁵⁸ developed in the institution.

Although the current curricula of the involved programs of study in the Strengthening Program show some differences, they also present common areas to be improved in the program proposed by the UNS, as well as subjects that would enhance the preparation of the students. On these lines, the ones corresponding to the compulsory category of the CPDA are especially relevant, as well as Political Theory and Economic Theory- subjects belonging to the group of Basic Disciplinary category. The specific courses of the *Culture and Rural World Studies; Institutions, markets and regulation; Public Policies, State and Social Actors* research lines- offer valuable options for the formation of the graduates.

The proposal of academic collaboration between the Maestría en Economía Agraria y Administración Rural (Master in Agrarian Economics

⁵⁸ The on-going research lines are: Culture and Rural World Studies; Institutions, Markets and Regulation; Social Movements; Nature, Science and Knowledge; and Public Policies, State and Social Actors.

and Rural Management) and the CPDA had as its main aim the creation of institutional support which could encourage the exchange of postgraduate teachers and students to develop and consolidate knowledge in areas of study of the Agro Alimentary System and Latin American Rural World.

Other aims of the project were:

- To develop the exchange of knowledge on the Agro Alimentary System Dynamics
- To promote academic competencies and encouragement for the construction of teaching frameworks capable of forming qualified and responsible professionals.
- To stimulate the exchange of academic experiences with the intention of promoting institutional learning and international insertion for both postgraduate programs.
- To strengthen cooperation between postgraduate centers in the MERCOSUR.
- To encourage students to take up the doctorate studies in the CDPA and other programs in Brazil.
- To achieve a general improvement of the Maestría en Economía Agraria y Administración Rural (Master in Agrarian Economics and Rural Management) from the curricular aspects to the pedagogical ones.
- To increase the thesis production from the part of the students of the Maestría en Economía Agraria y Administración Rural. (Master in Agrarian Economics and Rural Management)
- To generate a wider exchange space which may give some feedback in new mechanisms of scientific and academic cooperation, consolidating institutional links and promoting mechanisms to guarantee the quality of the graduate of the Master in Agrarian Economics and Rural Management.

To attain these aims study missions and work missions were carried out. The former were designed aiming at the incorporation of contents and practices made in the CPDA, with the intention to produce curricular changes. There was also the purpose of improving the qualifications of human resources which form part of the teaching staff of the Maestría en Economía Agraria y Administración Rural (Master in Agrarian Economics and Rural Management), through the definition of research works and the co-direction of thesis, exchange of bibliography, didactic practices, organization of joint teaching lectures and seminars.

On the other hand, the work missions were based on dictating seminars on topics which were not dealt with before or were dealt with different approaches. The approach of the different topics in the CPDA is

wider than the local one and goes beyond the economic perspective; sociological, historical and anthropological visions, among others, are incorporated. As regards thesis workshops and thesis methodological aspects the intervention aimed at improving the graduation rate in the master. Local teachers and teachers from the CPDA have integrated for the dictation of seminars and the possibility of development of new research lines has been achieved.

Experience results

During the four years of development of the project 26 study missions and 13 work missions were carried out (Chart 2).

Chart 2. CAFP-BA. Study and work missions

	2008	2009	2010	2011
Study missions	6	9	6	5
Work missions		6	6	2

Source: prepared by the authors

On the one hand, the study missions carried out during the Project allowed students from the Master as well as students from other postgraduate courses dictated in the Departamento de Economía (Department of Economics) to write their thesis plans or to progress in the preparation of their thesis thanks to the collaboration of teachers from the promoting postgraduate program.

On the other hand, they also allowed the teachers to work on their projects and to incorporate new subject matters and teaching-learning techniques to be applied in the courses of the Master. Similarly, the teachers and students who participated in the CPDA stays carried out several tasks and some of them were oriented to updating the bibliography used in the subjects that they dictated; others, to prepare a new seminar to be dictated jointly and also, to prepare joint publications. Furthermore, several teachers took part in congresses organized in UFRRJ and research workshops as presenters or panel coordinators, which enabled them to get in touch with teachers and researchers from several universities in Brazil, who are developing research lines akin to their own.

The work missions received at UNS consisted in dictating different courses and seminars, which offered the students a wider and more experienced view of the topics dealt with.

There were varied actions derived from the project, among which we can mention as the most standing:

The *formation of the Observatorio de Políticas Públicas para la Agroindustria y el Desarrollo (OPPAD)* (Observatory of Public Policies for the Agro Industry and Development) within the Departamento de Economía of the UNS (Department of Economics of the National University of the

South)-venue of the recipient postgraduate program. The project, which was drawn up and launched with the support of the Observatorio de Políticas Públicas para la Agricultura (OPPA) (Observatory of Public Policies for Agriculture) of the CPDA, was approved by the Consejo Departamental (Department Council) in September 2010.

The OPPAD consists of a group of researchers from UNS historically linked to the area of Agrarian Economics and Public Policies of the Departamento de Economía (Department of Economics) and two members from the Observatory of the OPPA. Among its objectives, the carrying out of joint investigations and the preparation and study of comparative analysis of the public policies and their impact on both countries are especially worth mentioning.

The *modification of the program of studies of the Maestría en Economía Agraria y Administración Rural* (Master in Agrarian Economics and Rural Management) (Res. CDE 75/10) (Department of Economics Council Resolution 75/10). The ideas contributed by the teachers and students who participated in study missions were of great importance for the drawing up of the new program of studies.

The subjects Microeconomics and Macroeconomics were incorporated in the new plan. At the same time, Applied Economic Statistics was substituted for Econometrics and 160 hours of research and tutorship activities were incorporated. Furthermore, the syllabuses of some of the subjects have been modified to include new approaches that have an interdisciplinary analytic perspective. Sociologists, anthropologists, historians and economists participated to outline these modifications. The curricular innovation was directly introduced via seminars dictated by teachers from CPDA.

Copies of the Revista Estudios (CPDA) (Studies Journal) and Estudios Económicos (Departamento de Economía-UNS) (Economic Studies) *started to be exchanged by the respective libraries and the mutual publication of works from both institutions*, respecting the original language pursuant to the Tratado del MERCOSUR (MERCOSUR Agreement), was arranged.

The impact on the University has been really positive, since other academic unities have felt the motivation to present themselves in the subsequent calls. Thus, in 2009, the Departamento de Ciencias de la Administración (Department of Management Sciences) has received the approval of the project to strengthen the Maestría en Administración (Master in Management). And, on the other hand, the coordinators of the Maestría PLIDER (PLIDER Master), dictated by the Departamento de Geografía (Department of Geography) have become interested in incorporating the workshops of teachers from CPDA in the offer of the aforementioned

postgraduate program. It is also worth mentioning that, between 2008 and 2010, nine students ended their studies, after satisfactorily defending their thesis. This means a significant progress, since only nine Master students had graduated since the beginnings of the postgraduate program of studies. In addition, nine new projects for prospective Master degrees were passed.

Moreover, as the result of the exchange of ideas and experiences carried out by a group of teachers of the area of Sociology of the Departamento de Economía (Department of Economics) in Río de Janeiro, the strengthening of the LUDIBUS project was achieved. This project supports formal education in poverty contexts pursuant to the premise that a healthy and educated population is a key element for development.

According to the results pointed out and also according to the opinion of the coordinators of the recipient postgraduate program, it can be stated that the experience has been highly satisfactory. The proposed objectives have been not only achieved but also exceeded. It is specially worth mentioning the flexibility of the program to adapt actions to face unexpected difficulties that may come up during its development. As a weakness, the relatively poor knowledge about the programs dictated in the Brazilian universities is worth mentioning. The project coordinators state that this pioneering experience has settled the bases for future new projects of bilateral cooperation.

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