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## Living in the south - looking at the north: The internationalization process of Sao Paulo State University in Brazil

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## Living in the south – looking at the north: the internationalization process of Sao Paulo State University in Brazil<sup>1</sup>

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### Abstract

This paper aims to present some reflections about the importance given to internationalization by Brazilian Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). In Brazil, although being recognized as an important aspect for promoting growth and economic development, the internationalization of HE has been established in a disjointed and uneven way, and perhaps not as a strategic function established through public policies. As a former colony of Portugal, there was no attempt of establishing HE courses in Brazil until the 19th century, and institutional support given by the government began only in the 1930s. Initially there were isolated initiatives to the exchange of teachers, especially those trained in Europe. This process of internationalization, based on knowledge transfer from developed countries to Brazil, continued until 1960. From the 1960s on, Brazilian government began to establish bilateral educational, scientific and technological cooperation agreements with different countries. In the 1970s, the emphasis is given to institutional programs to support graduate qualification abroad, promoting internationalization through exchange of students and development of joint research. Finally, after the 1990s, is given a strategic dimension to the internationalization of higher education, both by government and the own HEIs. In this context, there is a risk to happen a new 'international division of labor' in HE terms - division of the world between countries who send their own students abroad (the so-called 'passive' countries) and other that receive students and conduct the top research ('active' countries) in a new 'geopolitics of knowledge', as stated by Lima; Contel (2011). This paper presents then a case study about the internationalization process occurred in São Paulo State University (Unesp), in Brazil, evaluating both the strategic dimension (establishing agreements with foreigner HEIs and delimitation of internal rules to foster internationalization) and operational (human and material resources to perform it). Unesp is one of the leading universities in Brazil in undergraduate and postgraduate courses as well as in research, consisting of 34 university units, scattered in 24 municipalities of São Paulo. It has solid international academic cooperation agreements with over 388 foreign institutions in 59 countries and is ranked among the 500 'best' universities in the world, according to the Academic Ranking of World Universities – ARWU and Times Higher Education World University Ranking. Collected data suggest that the internalization process that occurred in Unesp reflects the general pattern observed in Brazil: the university lies in the South but looks to (and looks for) the North – to the developed countries.

**Key words:** Internationalization; Higher Education; Economic development.

**JEL Classification:** I23; I25.

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## **Living in the south – looking at the north: the internationalization process of Sao Paulo State University in Brazil**

### **INTRODUCTION**

This paper aims to present some reflections about the importance attributed to the internalization process of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in Brazil, focusing the case study of São Paulo State University.

This paper covers part of a broader research, still in progress, developed and conducted by the author. It presents a synthesis about the internationalization process and the importance attributed to it by United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). Then it discusses the internationalization process that occurred in Latin America focusing on international student mobility and introduces the pattern observed in Brazil, presenting data related to this process. It is provided initial elements to characterize how internationalization - through the mobility of students and / researchers or Professors - has been incorporated as a strategic element of Brazilian universities, including in this process that occurred at Sao Paulo State University (Universidade Estadual Paulista – Unesp). Finally, we present some reflections on behalf of final comments.

### **INTERNATIONALIZATION OF HIGHER EDUCATION**

The importance attributed to education in promoting growth and development is almost a consensus in the economic literature. While a factor of production – human capital – it is emphasized its contribution to the increase of the National Product. It is also stressed the importance of education to economic development, focusing the positive correlations between increases in education and reduction of infant mortality and poverty, and increases of personal income as well as in other social indicators.

In addition to this general benefits, there is an emphasis in the literature about the role of Higher Education (HE), considered essential for the establishment and development of a research department, as well as to promote technical or technological progress, that is responsible for the introduction and assimilation of new ideas and techniques, products or production processes. With this understanding, Higher Education has a strategic potential to promote changes in the nations, in order to produce, disseminate and apply scientific and technical knowledge, which are essential to economic and social advancement of any country.

In addition to economic gains – private or communally obtained, one should also stress the social benefits of Higher Education. After World War II, education is considered a strategic

aspect for the consolidation of international peace and security once it is highlighted the importance of the internationalization of cultures and knowledges in the Charter of the United Nations (UN), in its Article 55:

With a view to the creation of conditions of stability and well-being which are necessary for peaceful and friendly relations among nations based on respect for the principle of equal rights and self-determination of peoples, the United Nations shall promote: [...] b. solutions of international economic, social, health, and related problems; and international cultural and educational cooperation; [...]. (United Nations, 1945).

Specifically to achieve this goal the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) was created, which highlights already in its first Article the contribution and importance of educational, scientific and cultural cooperation, to strengthen the “further universal respect for justice, for the rule of law and for the human rights and fundamental freedoms [...], without distinction of race, sex, language or religion” (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 1946, Article I, 1).

Concerning specifically about Higher Education, two World Conferences on Higher Education were held by UNESCO in 1998 and 2009, with delegates from Member States. These meetings resulted in documents considered syntheses of thoughts and opinions arising from discussions and at the same time, guidelines for understanding and defining public policies with regard to Higher Education. HE is considered by UNESCO as a public good, understood as a human and universal right and “[...] a fundamental pillar of human rights, democracy, sustainable development and peace, and shall therefore become accessible to all throughout life” (UNESCO, 1998). It also emphasizes that “Higher Education as a public good is the responsibility of all stakeholders, especially governments” (UNESCO, 2009).

Regarding the internationalization, the First World Conference on Higher Education (UNESCO, 1998) determined in its 11<sup>th</sup> Article that the international inter-institutional cooperation should be a strategic objective of all higher education institutions (HEIs), aspect explicitly reinforced in a separate chapter of the document originated in the following Conference, named “Internationalisation, regionalisation and globalisation” (UNESCO, 2009).

UNESCO understanding about the HE internationalization contrasts with the opinion of World Trade Organization (WTO). This is because WTO considers Higher Education subject to “export and import” just like any other tradable service abroad and therefore should be submitted to regulation by the market. Understanding the internationalization of Higher Education cannot be far assessed from these two conceptions deeply antagonistic.

Incidentally, it must be remembered that this paper defines the internationalization of Higher Education as a process covered both national and institutional, which integrates “[...]”

the inclusion of an international, intercultural, and/or global dimension into the curriculum and teaching learning process” (Knight, 2004). This internationalization process may have different guises: academic mobility of undergraduate or graduate students and faculty, as well as technical and administrative staff; collaboration or conjoint development of research projects; internationalization of curricula or curricular programs – and in the extreme case the double degree; interinstitutional cooperation and the provision of educational services (establishment of overseas faculties/universities or transnational networks of Higher Education institutions) (Van Damme, 2001).

Obligation or vocation; ideal or belief; the internationalization of Higher Education is part of a society where information and knowledge are already without borders.

In Latin America in general, although it is recognized as an important aspect of promoting growth and economic development, the internationalization of Higher Education has been established in a disjointed and uneven way, and perhaps not as a strategic function established through public policies or in order to achieve the objective laid down by UNESCO of maintaining peace and international security. Also in Brazil, there is no connection between what aims UNESCO, which is held by Brazilian universities and what is designed by public policies, which cannot be recognized in actions, projects and proactive programs for development and financing of international academic cooperation.

In this wide context, there is a high risk of a new ‘international division of university labor’ – division of the world among countries that send their students abroad (the so-called ‘passive’ countries) and other that receive them (‘active’ countries) (Lima & Maranhão, 2011). This is because one can expect an unequal process of internationalization among countries – increasing the distances and differences in access and diffusion of knowledge among countries in a new ‘geopolitics of knowledge’, in the words of Lima & Contel (2011). These authors evaluate different nations, classifying them into ‘active’ and ‘passive nations’, depending on the position adopted by governments across the education internationalization process. With this connotation, the authors conclude that while some countries are considered ‘actives’ – especially countries that combine government resources and efforts, translated into public policy for this purpose and goal – others remain ‘passive’: without a regular action and proactive state and are at the mercy of others countries' interests. ‘Passive’ countries would play the role of welcoming the policies pursued abroad and contribute marginally to the internationalization process. It happens because of the lack of structure, tradition, or resources to attract foreign students, Professors or researchers, as well as for install units or campuses abroad. These countries have a limited supply of educational services with foreign interest.

In the other hand, despite this apprehension about the ‘passivity’ in the geopolitics of knowledge, foreigners HEI have viewed developing countries as attractive markets for the provision of educational services. This is because there is a context considered beneficial to take advantage of these opportunities, given the institutional weakness or lack of regulation on access to Higher Education market by foreigners, lack or limitation in offering courses or *latu sensu* graduate programs or serious doubts about the quality of the educational services provided (Aupetit, 2005).

It is possible to recognize this ‘new geopolitics’ from some factual data regarding the ongoing internationalization process in Latin America and specifically in Brazil.

Although Latin America is represented in several international rankings that rate the ‘best’ universities in the world, the region is still under-represented, given that only four countries – Argentina, Brazil, Chile and Mexico – have HEIs with standards of international excellence, classified according to the Academic Ranking of World Universities Higher Education – ARWU (Lima & Contel, 2011).

Knowing about Brazilian Higher Education internationalization process is important to have access to a contemporary view of the importance attributed to this issue as well as the international relations established between the country and the rest of the world. Thus, this project is interdisciplinary concerning aspects from Education, Economics and International Relations.

## **INTERNATIONALISATION IN LATIN AMERICA**

Despite the high volume of students and Professors sent abroad, Latin America is not the main preference of foreign students and researchers, mainly from outside the region. It configures LA as a ‘passive’ region in the new geopolitics of knowledge. Based on the data disclosed in Figure 1, it can be seen that the region accounts for only 1.9% of the total flow of student mobility, as recorded in 2007.

Figure 1. International mobility of students.

Percentage of mobile students by region of destination and origin in 2007 and the change in percentage points relative to 1999

Origin \ Host	Arab States		Central and Eastern Europe		Central Asia		East Asia and the Pacific		Latin America and the Caribbean		North America		Western Europe		South and West Asia		Sub-Saharan Africa		Total
Arab States	15.9	(+3.7)	5.6	(-2.8)	0.4	(-0.1)	4.7	(+3.5)	0.1	(0)	15.4	(-1.3)	56.9	(-3.1)	1.0	(+0.1)	0.0	(0)	100
Central and Eastern Europe	0.2	(-0.1)	27.7	(+2.9)	3.1	(+0.7)	1.2	(+0.1)	0.0	(0)	12.3	(-2.9)	55.4	(-0.7)	0.0	(0)	0.0	(0)	100
Central Asia	0.3	(+0.1)	44.2	(-16.2)	34.7	(+6.2)	3.2	(+2.4)	0.0	(0)	4.9	(+1.3)	12.5	(+6.4)	0.1	(-0.2)	0.0	(0)	100
East Asia and the Pacific	0.2	(-0.3)	1.3	(-0.4)	0.4	(+0.3)	41.8	(+6.0)	0.2	(+0.1)	33.0	(-10.0)	22.9	(+4.4)	0.2	(-0.1)	0.0	(0)	100
Latin America and the Caribbean	0.1	(0)	0.3	(0)	0.0	(0)	2.5	(+0.9)	22.9	(+12.2)	43.2	(-11.7)	30.9	(-1.4)	0.0	(0)	0.0	(0)	100
North America	0.4	(+0.1)	2.3	(+0.5)	0.1	(0)	15.4	(+6.4)	1.7	(-0.9)	39.1	(-0.6)	40.5	(-5.6)	0.5	(+0.1)	0.0	(0)	100
Western Europe	0.6	(+0.4)	3.9	(-0.6)	0.0	(0)	3.7	(+1.0)	0.2	(+0.1)	14.4	(+0.1)	77.2	(-1.0)	0.0	(0)	0.0	(0)	100
South and West Asia	0.8	(-0.4)	3.2	(-2.3)	1.8	(-0.1)	21.1	(+11.5)	0.0	(0)	45.7	(-5.2)	26.1	(-2.0)	1.3	(-1.4)	0.0	(-0.1)	100
Sub-Saharan Africa	3.0	(-0.5)	0.9	(-0.2)	0.0	(0)	4.3	(+2.4)	0.9	(-0.7)	17.4	(-2.0)	49.8	(-2.3)	0.8	(-1.2)	22.9	(+4.5)	100
WORLD	2.9	(-0.4)	7.1	(-0.1)	1.9	(+0.5)	18.4	(+5.0)	1.9	(+0.7)	23.7	(-3.2)	41.2	(-2.3)	0.4	(-0.1)	2.6	(0)	100

Notes: See the note to Figure 14 for the coverage of data.  
 Mobile students from a given region are expressed as a percentage of total mobile students from that region.  
 Data in parentheses refer to the change in percentage points since 1999.

Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics, Statistical Table 9, 10 and UIS database.

Source: UNESCO, 2009b.

Although the majority of students who gets involved in mobility programs are students from Latin America itself, the region is not considered a priority when people decide to join a student mobility program; North America is the most popular destination, followed by the countries of Western Europe.

In Latin America, the most popular countries are Cuba, which concentrates 59% of the volume of students, followed by Chile, Argentina and Venezuela (UNESCO, 2009b). It is also necessary to point out the low percentage of Latin America students who perform international exchange during the university period – 0.2% of students in Cuba, 0.4% in Argentina and Brazil, 0.7% in Venezuela, 0.9% in Chile and 1% in Mexico.<sup>3</sup>

Latin America is not considered a priority area for the establishment of partnerships and internationalization actions by their own Latin countries. Based on a research conducted members of the International Association of Universities (IAU), Lima & Contel (2011) report that when representatives of these institutions point the three major regions of the world that would be privileged in internationalization agreements by their institutions, HE managers from *all over the world* mentioned several other regions than Latin America. Even the leaders of Latin institutions mentioned they would favor partnerships with North America and Europe institutions. For these, the region is mentioned in 3<sup>rd</sup> place, same level of Asian Universities.

<sup>3</sup> UNESCO (2009b) mentions that the mobility of university students obtains relevant percentage only in some Caribbean islands, such as the British Virgin Islands (where a percentage of 33% of university students study abroad), Trinidad and Tobago (around 30%) and Barbados (13%).

Based on these data, foreign attraction capacity of the Latin American universities is considered the lowest among the various globe macro-regions (UNESCO, 2009b), which can be interpreted as lack of maturity to attract students and researchers or lack of public policies to encourage the active inclusion of the region in the global internationalization process. There is evidence of low competitiveness in Latin America compared to the higher education systems of developed countries, and even in this region, educational systems are disjointed and it is difficult to promote student mobility within the region (Dias Sobrinho, 2005).

This process can lead to a 'dark side' of internationalization. There is great risk of 'brain drain', ie the international displacement of skilled human capital from developing countries to developed countries, where it is possible the study/research activities on more favorable terms or the use of professional potential in a labor market with more beneficial opportunities and remuneration (Miranda, 2008). Despite this drain is not relevant in a populous country like Brazil, Zamberlam et al. (2009), based on data collected by the World Bank in 2005, emphasize that in the previous forty years 1.2 million university educated professionals emigrated from Latin America and the Caribbean to the developed countries (especially the US, Canada and the UK). It represents a daily transfer of 70 people with advanced level of education abroad. Dias Sobrinho (2005b) notes that around 70% of foreign students attending Doctorate in the United States remain in this country and not return to their countries of origin - which is, in practice, the transfer to the US of about 20 years of training and investments in personal and professional skills. Developing countries invest; other countries enjoy the benefits of higher education.

Also Lima & Maranhão (2011) mention as a negative aspect of internationalization the process of transfer of 'thoughts' from hegemonic countries to the countries of Latin America, internationally expanding the network of cultural and political influence to developing countries. Miura (2006) mentioned the risk of 'denationalization' of research themes - loss of focus in the local community, regional and even in national problems, to focus on issues of international interest, with a more prospective chance of publication or funding. In line with these concerns, also Bernheim & Chauí (2003) mention the risk of restricting "their research to problems, issues, themes, methods and techniques defined in the hegemonic central countries", absorbing other people's peculiarities.

Although Lima & Contel (2011) state about the new 'geopolitics of knowledge' concerning countries, Marrara & Rodrigues (2009) use the same terminology to assess the institutional policies of the universities themselves. Authors highlight the existence of 'active' HEI based on institutional measures and actions that aims to attract qualified human resources



from abroad and promote international research - for example, increasing the number of foreign Professors, students and researchers in different activities; increasing the funding; establishing less bureaucratic rules and procedures to facilitate the reception of foreigners, among other measures.

'Passive' institutions, on the other hand, "become international by its members, or rather by the actions of its members in foreign HEIs and the publication of internal scientific production in external dissemination vehicles" (Marrara & Rodrigues, 2009, p.132). The authors conclude: "the strategy which involves the passive internationalization depends much more on foreign HEI than the own national HEI". These activities involve encouraging mobility of professors, students and researchers, as well as participation in events, courses, and internships abroad. Internationalization occur much more facing abroad than inside (at home), which include systematic changes in the attitudes and strategies of national HEI (Garcel-Ávila et alli, 2005). In Latin America, internationalization process has been conducted and organized marginally by the universities, disjointed of other institutional policies - or despite of them - and often in response to the demands of international organizations and institutions.

In Brazil, the pattern observed in Latin America is repeated. The country is not represented as an important foreign destination - even to Latin Americans – despite sending a large numbers of students abroad – mainly to the United States, France, Portugal, Germany and the UK. The reverse process, Europeans and North Americans searching for Brazilian universities, is less intense and in a much smaller scale. In addition to the disproportionate flow of students and Professors to developed countries, Brazilians who perform or complement their studies abroad generally receive more than produce knowledge.

In aggregate terms, Brazil is the destination of a few foreigner students, professors and researchers, mainly out of Latin America itself. The net flow of students is unfavorable to the country: are 15,221 foreign students in Brazil, while almost the double (30,729) of Brazilian went abroad to study or research (UNESCO, 2014).

The preference of Brazilian students is for developed countries of North America and Western Europe. According to data for the year 2012, 28% of the students went to the United States; followed by Portugal (second most popular destination), France (3<sup>rd</sup>), Germany (4), Spain (5) United Kingdom (6) and Italy (7). Also on the list of top 10 destinations are Australia (8<sup>th</sup> place) and Japan (10). Considering the Latin countries, the preference is for Cuba (9<sup>th</sup>), followed by Chile, Argentina and Venezuela. Ten countries concentrate 85% of the academic mobility of higher education students in Brazil (UNESCO, 2014).

On the other hand, most of the students that came to Brazil are from Latin America itself and/or Portuguese speaking countries. Brazil features as prominent academic destination to the other three Mercosur countries - Argentina (3<sup>rd</sup>), Paraguay (4<sup>th</sup>) and Uruguay (9). These three state members of Mercosur, listed among the ten most important countries of origin, have 13% of all university students. From Latin America, one should notice Peruvian students (7) and Bolivian (10). In addition, exchange students came from Portuguese-speaking countries: Angola (first, concentrating 11% of exchange students), Guinea-Bissau (2), Cabo Verde (5) and Portugal (6), totaling 24% of exchange students. One can hypothesize that language is an important factor to limit the access of international students to Brazil. The only developed country, in addition to Portugal, with relevance in this top ten origin countries (which concentrate almost 50% of the flow of foreigners in Brazil) is the United States of America (8<sup>th</sup>) (UNESCO, 2014, based on 2012 data).

Lima & Contel (2011) evaluate the inclusion of Brazil in this context of 'passivity'. Despite this fact, the internationalization of Higher Education in Brazil has suffered successive modifications, as seen also due to changes in the international context. As a former colony of Portugal, there was no attempt of establishing HE courses in Brazil until the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and institutional support given by the government began only in the 1930s. Initially there were isolated initiatives to the exchange of teachers, especially those trained in Europe. This process of internationalization, based on knowledge transfer from developed countries to Brazil, continued until 1960. From the 1960s on, Brazilian government began to establish bilateral educational, scientific and technological cooperation agreements with different countries. In the 1970s, the emphasis is given to institutional programs to support graduate qualification abroad, promoting internationalization through exchange of students and development of joint research. Finally, after the 1990s, is given a strategic dimension to the internationalization of higher education, both by government and the own HEIs. Then, it is important to highlight autonomous attitudes of Universities themselves, and either individual effort of Professors themselves. However, for various reasons, Brazilian HE remains poorly internationalized, compared to neighboring countries (Lima & Contel, 2009).

## **INTERNATIONALIZATION IN UNESP**

The creation of the São Paulo State University (Universidade Estadual Paulista – Unesp) took place at 1976. Since 1968 – when it was enacted the 'University Reform Law' (Law 5540/68) – Federal government reoriented the public policy in educational sector in order to train new professionals for labor market at the same time it tried to expand and rationalize the

resources already applied, especially concerning admission to Higher Education institutions. The measures, among others, predicted the junction of individual Faculties or Schools in Universities; the replacement Chair for Departments; the creation of qualifying entrance exam; and the creation of short-term degrees programs. Following these guidelines, Unesp was created, joining existing isolated institutions in the state of São Paulo, through State Law 952/76 (Universidade Estadual Paulista, 2009).

34 university units, scattered in 24 municipalities of the State, including its capital, currently compose the University. At Unesp study about 37,000 undergraduate and 13,500 graduate students and work around 3,800 teachers, and 6,700 employees. The university offers 155 undergraduate programs as well as 146 graduate programs (Universidade Estadual Paulista, 2016a, according to data from 2015). The University has strong international academic cooperation agreements with over 140 foreign institutions in 28 countries (Universidade Estadual Paulista, 2016b).

Unesp is one of the leading universities in Brazil and is ranked among the 500 'best' universities in the world according to the Academic Ranking of World Universities Higher Education Institute of Shanghai Jiao Tong University, being one of the only ten Brazilian HEIs included in this evaluation.

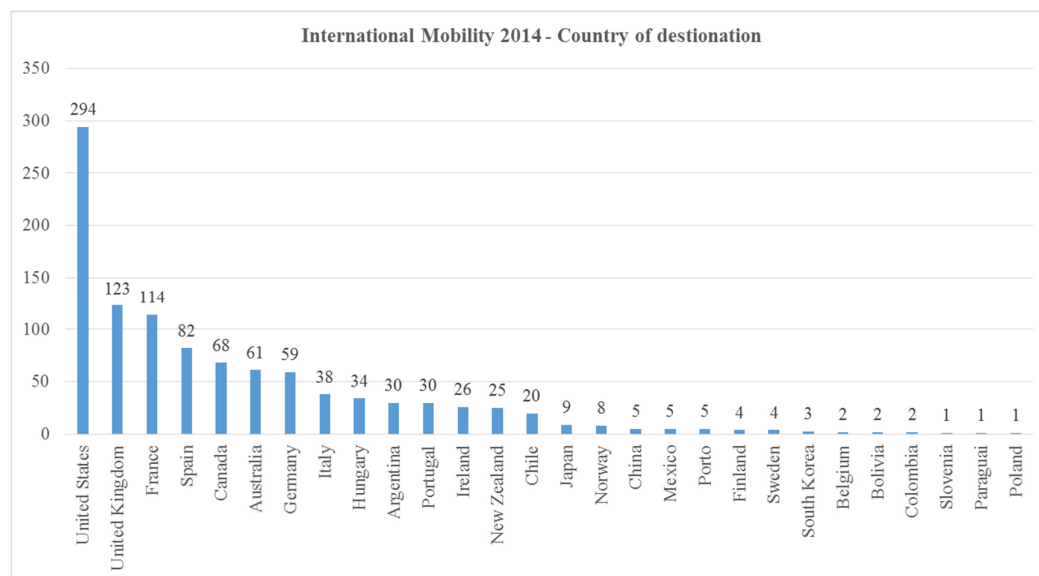
At Unesp, the international mobility of students reflects the same behavior observed nationally.

At first it must be pointed the increase in the number of students who carry out part of their studies abroad. According to data, obtained in an official presentation conducted by the Office of External Relations (Anselmo, 2013), there was a substantial increase in the international academic mobility between 2010 and 2014. In 2010, 286 students studied abroad; in 2011, 466; in 2012, 555; in 2013, 833; and 1078 in 2014. Please notice, however, that these data bring together undergraduate and graduate students.

One possible explanation: the increase in the number of international agreements signed by the University. In 2010 they were signed 64 agreements; in 2011, 67; in 2012, 109 and the following year, 69. Finally, in 2014 there was 121 agreements (Anselmo, 2013). It should be noticed that the simple existence of an agreement does not require or guarantee the effective realization of academic mobility of students. On the other hand, it makes easier the activities of mobility, joint implementation of research, etc. With these details in mind, the expansion in the number of agreements with foreign HEIs give an indication that efforts were made to the internationalization of the University.

Second, it is necessary to point the direction of this academic mobility conducted by the students of Unesp, summarized in Figure 2.

Figure 2. International mobility – students of Unesp. Countries of destination



Source: Anselmo, 2013.

These data reinforces the demand for academic mobility with destination to developed countries. On the other hand, it must be noticed the relative importance of Latin American countries.

Despite of this information, international mobility still is an option for a few students, both in undergraduate and graduate courses, once the numbers involved – 1,100 students in a 50,000 universe – once again reproduces the pattern observed in Brazil as a whole.

## FINAL STATEMENTS

Widely recognized as an important aspect in promoting economic growth and development in Latin America, the internationalization of Higher Education has been established disjointed and uneven way. Although understanding that this process is a main responsibility of States, the internationalization has also become objective and character of HEIs who wish to obtain national or global excellence. This ‘necessity’ of an international dimension, as an evaluative parameter, may have led many institutions to the internationalization process in a precipitous or poorly way. Also in the instance of HEIs, there is a disconnection between the strategic principles governing internationalization and what they actually do for it in operational terms.

Considering the flow of students, both in Brazil as at Sao Paulo State University, they both have the same behavior observed in Latin America countries: people live in the South, but looking at the North, once the most sought destinations for international mobility are the developed countries of North America and Western Europe.

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