

## **Regional integration through higher education: the case of the Federal University of Latin America Integration (Unila)**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This paper provides an overview of the developments in the research regarding the role of higher education in promoting regional integration in Latin America. By using a systematic literature review, this study aims to develop the concept of «integration through education» and uncover relevant variables. Moreover, this article aims to demonstrate how the Federal University of Latin America Integration (Unila) has been promoting regional integration through higher education in the given geographical area.

**Keywords:** Higher education, regional integration, integrative consciousness, Latin America, Unila.

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## **Integración regional a través de la educación: el caso de la Universidad Federal de Integración Latinoamericana (UNILA)**

### **RESUMEN**

El presente trabajo comprende una revisión de la literatura sobre el papel de la educación superior en la promoción de la integración regional en América Latina. Utilizando una metodología de búsqueda sistemática, este estudio persigue delimitar el concepto de «integración a través de la educación» y sus variables pertinentes. Asimismo, este artículo tiene por objetivo demostrar cómo la Universidad Federal de Integración Latinoamericana (UNILA) promueve la integración regional a través de la educación superior.

**Palabras claves:** Educación superior, integración regional, consciencia integracionista, UNILA, América Latina.

### **Introduction**

While the research has focused on the economic trade aspects of the integration process in Latin America, the role of the higher education has been central to the contemporary debates<sup>2</sup>. Initially, however, education, as well as human rights, environment, and labor, were not the core topics in the discussions of regional integration<sup>3</sup>. Given the premise that regional integration is socially constructed as it unfolds, the role of education, and consequently the role of the universities, in this process of regional integration seems crucial<sup>4</sup>. Educational institutions are controlled environments promoting ideas and shaping identities<sup>5</sup>. Dewey define education as «a process of

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<sup>2</sup> Perrotta, Daniela. *La internacionalización de la Universidad. Debates globales, acciones regionales*, Buenos Aires, Ediciones UNGS, 2016.

<sup>3</sup> Ricobom, Gisele. *A integração Latino-Americana e o diálogo intercultural: novas perspectivas a partir da universidade*, Anais do XIX Encontro Nacional do CONPEDI, Fortaleza, Brasil, 2010a.

<sup>4</sup> Krotsch, Pedro. «La Universidad en el proceso de integración regional: El caso del Mercosur», *Perfiles Educativos*, vol.19, no. 76-77, 1997, pp. 116-137.

<sup>5</sup> Dewey, John. *Democracy and education. An introduction to the philosophy of education*, New York, Macmillan, 2000 [orig.: 1916].

sharing experience till it becomes a common possession». The European literature has indicated the tendency of reshaping the integration processes in light of the construction of a regional identity<sup>6</sup>. Nevertheless, in Latin America, the role of the higher education in the promotion of regional identity has also been superficially studied.

The creation of the Educational Sector of Mercosur (SEM) motivated conceptual changes in the strategic perception of education for the Mercosur integration. It seems clear that the SEM strived towards «integration through education». Here, education is seen as a promoter of integrative consciousness through the creation of common regional teaching and research environments. One of the first projects discussed was the creation of the University of Mercosul. Proposed by the Ministry of Education of Brazil, the project was not approved by all partners. Later on, in January 2010, President Lula da Silva sanctioned the Law No. 12.189/10 creating the Unila– Federal University of the Latin America Integration<sup>7</sup>.

Unila was formed as avenue for critical reflection on Latin American societies. As an institution of integrationist inclination, it seeks to innovate all processes, including the methods of student admission, the procedure of hiring professors, student social assistance, and academic mobility programs. The mission of Unila is to contribute to Latin American integration with an emphasis on Mercosur countries through humanistic, scientific and technological knowledge, as well as through partnerships between universities, governments and international organizations. Among Unila's various features, the student selection process has highlighted by the research. Some 50% of the available vacancies are reserved for foreign students. The same applies to selection of the professors. Moreover, the classes are taught in Spanish and Portuguese. The courses offered by the university aim to match the interest areas of the Latin American students, particularly from the countries that are Mercosur members<sup>8</sup>.

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<sup>6</sup> Paasi, Anssi. «Region and place: regional identity in question», *Progress in Human Geography*, vol. 27, no. 4, 2003, pp. 475-485; Slocum, Nikki y Van Langenhove, Luk. «Identity and regional integration», en:Farrel, Mary; Björn Hettne y, Luk Van Langenhove (eds.). *Global politics of regionalism: Theory and practice*, London, Pluto Books, 2005.

<sup>7</sup> Almeida de, Larissa Rosevics. *O Mercosul Educacional e a criação da Unila no início do século: por uma integração regional via educação*, Tese (Doutorado) – Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro, Instituto de Economia, Programa de PósGraduação em Economia Política Internacional, 2015; Brackmann, Maria M. *Internacionalização da educação superior e política externa brasileira: estudo da criação da Universidade Federal da Integração Latino-Americana (Unila)*, Porto Alegre, 2010.

<sup>8</sup> Brackman, M.M., *op. cit.*

The objective of the current contribution is to discuss the available literature to understand the ways in which higher education promotes regional integration but also to understand how Unila can help to promote this integration. The paper is divided into five sections. The first section provides a brief description of the methodological path used to identify the main works on the subject, focusing on Latin America. In the second section, the conclusions found in the literature concerning integration through education will be discussed. In the third section, we propose an updated framework of analysis based on the earlier research. The fourth section tests the new framework analyzing the reasons behind Unila promoting regional integration. The concluding section provides a brief summary of the main results of our work and identifies questions for future research.

## 1. Methodological path

I explored the academic literature on the «integration through education» concepts in the Latin American policy circles. In order to get an overview of the studies, an exploratory analysis was carried out in the period between January 2018 and April 2018. A systematic review of the literature on *Google Scholar* was developed in an attempt to identify the most relevant studies in the past two decades. The selected timeline coincides with the implementation of the first Mercosur regional educational program, as well as the formation and implementation of Unila (2008-2010), our case of study.

In this selection, articles were included from the academic peer-reviewed journals, final undergraduate theses, master theses and doctoral theses. Policy reports, magazines, and newspaper articles were excluded. The intention was to analyze the academic production on the topic exclusively while avoiding biased political opinion pieces and journalistic articles.

First, I selected several combinations of words and sentences, aiming to identify the most common expressions used to define the process of «regional integration through higher education» (Table no. 1). Kehm and Teichler<sup>9</sup> suggest that the majority of the studies on Latin American higher education are not available in English. Therefore, this study includes searches in English, Spanish and Portuguese.

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<sup>9</sup> Kehm, Bárbara M. and Teichler, Ulrich «Research on internationalisation in higher education», *Journal of Studies in International Education*, no. 11, 2007, pp.260-273.

**Table 1**  
**Results from Google Scholar and key words researched**

Language	Concepts	Results
English	"Integration through education"	688
	"Regional integration through education"	5
	"Regional integration through higher education"	8
Spanish	"Integración a través de la educación"	84
	"Integración regional a través de la educación"	2
Portuguese	"Integração via educação"	14
	"Integração regional via educação"	10
	Educação como vetor de integração	40

Source: Elaborated by author.

This method is appropriate to identify the precise uses of the studied concept. Nevertheless, it could also restrain the access to important contributions related to the topic that do not include the specific expression. To overcome this issue, I also analyzed the bibliographic references from the most relevant articles. Additionally, I investigated a specialized journal, the «*Revista de Estudos Integração y Conocimiento*» from the Center for Studies and Research in Higher Education of MERCOSUR.

After reviewing these articles, I classified these studies in two broad areas— Education and International Relations. Additionally, I selected the authors and the variables analyzed and, the most common arguments developed. The few articles in English I discovered focused on analyzing the European cases. Nevertheless, the European cases and other regional projects were not part of the scope of this analysis.

Subsequently, using the same method, I explored the previous studies focusing on the role of Unila in the promotion of regional integration. Likewise, we analyzed RIUNILA - the Unila' sinstitutional repository of theses, researches and final papers. The relevant research from the Latin American Institute of Economics, Society and Politics (ILAESP – *Instituto Latino-Americano de Economia, Sociedade e Política*) was filtered. Being a research university, it is important to understand what types of knowledge have been constructed inside the institution.

## 2. Regional integration through Higher Education

Research into how education promotes regional integration in Latin American roughly be divided into two large groups: Regionalism within International Relations studies and Education Science. The studies on the role of education in the regional integration processes in a region originated from the area of education through the studies of Simon Schwartzman (1993), Pedro Krotsh (1997), Luciane Stallivieri (2002), and Mario Luiz Neves de Azevedo (2008, 2009).

Within these areas, the internationalization of higher education (IoHE) and the regionalization of higher education (RoHE) have provided the guidelines to understand the role of the higher education in the regional integration process. The IoHE is the

...process of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions and delivery of post-secondary education, in order to enhance the quality of education and research for all students and staff, and to make a meaningful contribution to society<sup>10</sup>.

The many programs and activities have been related to IoHE: academic mobility for students, professors and staff; international projects, partnerships and links; new academic programs and research initiatives; expanding educational practices to other countries through branch campuses or franchises, using a variety of distance and, in class techniques<sup>11</sup>. The RoHE, in turn, is an internationalization movement with an increased focus on the higher education collaborations and exchange *within* a region<sup>12</sup>.

Marília C. Morosini<sup>13</sup>, Daniela Perrotta<sup>14</sup> and Larissa Rosevics de Almeida<sup>15</sup> combined the two major areas formulating the first papers

<sup>10</sup> Knight, Jane. «Internationalization remodeled: Definition, approaches, and rationales», *Journal of Studies in International Education*, vol. 8, no.1, 2004, p.11

<sup>11</sup> Knight, J., *op. cit.*; Rodríguez-Bulnes, María Guadalupe; Vences-Esparza, Angélica, y Flores-Alanís, Irma María. «La internacionalización de la Educación Superior. Caso UANL», *Opción*, vol. 32, no.13, 2016, pp. 560-582.

<sup>12</sup> Robertson, Susan. «Globalisation, rescaling national education systems and citizenship regimes», in: Roth, Klas y Nicholas Burbules (eds.). *Changing notions of citizenship education in contemporary nation-states*, Rotterdam, Sense Publishers, 2003, pp. 444-447; Knight, J., *op. cit.*

<sup>13</sup> Morosini, Marília Costa. «Estado do conhecimento sobre internacionalização da educação superior – conceitos e práticas», *Educar Curitiba*, no. 28, 2006, pp. 107-124; Morosini, Marília Costa. «Internacionalização» na produção de conhecimento em IES Brasileiras: Cooperação internacional tradicional e cooperação internacional horizontal», *Educ. rev.*, vol. 27, no. 1, abril 2011, pp. 93-112.

<sup>14</sup> Perrotta, Daniela. «Regionalism and Higher Education in South America: A comparative analysis for understanding internationalization», *Journal of Supranational Policies of*

on the role of the Mercosur in the promotion of regional integration in its country members, also characterized as the process of regionalization of higher education. We extracted the first concept of «regional integration through education» from the last author's work, saying:

While the integration of education occupies a secondary and complementary role within the regional integration process, where the economy is considered the central objective, in the integration process in which the political and socio-cultural objectives became central, 'integration through education' is prioritized, based on the need to build an integrating regional social consciousness<sup>16</sup>.

Latin American regionalism has a long history, both as an expression of autonomy or as a means of resistance against the interventions of the greater powers<sup>17</sup>. In the literature, the post-hegemonic/post-liberal approach to Regionalism explains the new dynamic which results from the vacuum created by Washington's isolation, forming a fertile soil for the emergence of new relationships among neighboring countries<sup>18</sup>. Ricobom<sup>19</sup> recognizes the post-hegemonic moment as an 'authentic Latin American integration'. According to Ricobom, this political moment in South America (from 2002 until 2014) was profound, aiming to broaden the regional relations not only between governments, but also between neighboring societies. Domestically, under the guidance of the progressive governments elected in consolidated democracies, foreign policy has promoted other political forms of organization beyond the US-led neoliberal

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*Education*, 2012, no.4, pp. 54-81; Perrotta, Daniela. *Mercosur Brand: regionalism and higher education*, 2013, disponible en: <http://www.academia.edu> (consulta: 21 de septiembre de 2017).

<sup>15</sup> Almeida de, L. R., *op. cit.*

<sup>16</sup> Almeida de, L. R., *op. cit.*, p. 23.

<sup>17</sup> Vitarelli Batista, Marcela. *Integration through education in Latin America: the role of the internationalization of Higher Education in the South of Brazil. Findings and impressions of the first visit*, IAPSS, April 4-8, 2017, Budapest, Hungary, 2017.

<sup>18</sup> Riggiozzi, Pia and Tussie, Diana (eds.). *The rise of post-hegemonic Regionalism*, Bruges, United Nation University Series on Regionalism-Springer, 2012; Sanahuja, José Antonio. «Post-liberal regionalism in South America: the case of Unasur», *EUI working papers*, Firenze, European University Institute, 2012; Sarti, Ingrid. *Theoretical and developmental challenges to contemporary South American integration*, 2015, disponible en: [http://brasilnomundo.org.br/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/052\\_Theoretical.and\\_.developmental.challenges.to\\_.contemporary.south\\_.american.integration\\_Ingrid.Sarti\\_.pdf](http://brasilnomundo.org.br/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/052_Theoretical.and_.developmental.challenges.to_.contemporary.south_.american.integration_Ingrid.Sarti_.pdf). (consulta: 16 de febrero de 2015).

<sup>19</sup> Ricobom, G., *op.cit.*

governances. New agendas, including south-south cooperation, social and education topics, endorsed a new political panorama of internationalization and regionalization of higher education in Latin America.

The authors also point out the influence of the internal changes in Brazil in this period. Lula da Silva's government, in an attempt to promote social inclusion, developed several educational projects and structural changes in the national education system. The REUNI<sup>20</sup> - Support Program for Restructuring and Expansion Plans of Federal Universities- was one of the most important programs implemented. This program was the financial basis of the construction of new universities. Aligned with the foreign policy, the Ministry of Education of Brazil proposed the creation of the University of Mercosur. According to Almeida<sup>21</sup>, the idea of the University of Mercosur was initially conceived as a multinational institution with campuses located in the border. The University of Mercosur's educational project would have focused on regional integration with a campus open to professors and students from all country members of the bloc. It is important to mention that the Educational Mercosur, an individual sector dedicated to educational policies at Mercosur, made the emergence of the idea of Mercosur University possible. Presented by the Ministry of Brazil, the creation of the university was not approved by all the partners.

The study of the role of the Educational Mercosur (*SEM- Sector Educativo del Mercosur*) in the promotion of the regional education through education is widely cited in the literature. The SEM was created eight months after the signing of the Treaty of Asunción – the foundation stone of Mercosur (13<sup>th</sup> December 1991). Since then, the SEM has been implemented successfully, developing several «Action Plans» over the last three decades. However, in 2001, the first regional program on education started to be implemented: the recognition of academic qualifications and the implementation of the first regional policy, which involved the experimental mechanism for the accreditation of undergraduate university degrees in Mercosur, Bolivia and Chile (MEXA)<sup>22</sup> were introduced. The goal was to establish the Regional Area of the Mercosur Higher Education (ERES) through policies on

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<sup>20</sup> The REUNI was established at the beginning of the second mandate of the President Lula da Silva, by Decree No. 6,096, of April 24, 2007. See [http://portal.mec.gov.br/index.php?option=com\\_docman&view=download&alias=2069-reuni-relatorio-pdf&category\\_slug=dezembro-2009-pdf&Itemid=30192](http://portal.mec.gov.br/index.php?option=com_docman&view=download&alias=2069-reuni-relatorio-pdf&category_slug=dezembro-2009-pdf&Itemid=30192) (accessed on April 2018).

<sup>21</sup> Almeida de, L.R., *op. cit.*, 2015.

<sup>22</sup> Perrotta, D., *op. cit.*, 2013; Vitarelli Batista, Marcela. «Higher education regionalization in South America, under review», *Higher Education Policy*, 2018, pp.1-25.

harmonization of higher education systems in Mercosul countries. Later on, through a joint effort of the Meetings of National Agencies of Accreditation (RANA), the System of Accreditation of the university degrees for regional recognition of academic quality within Mercosur and Associated States- ARCU-SUL- was created<sup>23</sup>.

The SEM plays a fundamental role in the process of regionalization of higher education (RoHE) in the region. On one hand, the SEM promotes initiatives aiming at the elimination of bureaucratic barriers which jeopardize the circulation of academics<sup>24</sup>. On the other hand, the SEM also promotes the mobility of students, professors and researchers. The MARCA Program is a mobility program funded by Mercosur that has mobilized more than 448 students between 2006 and 2014<sup>25</sup>. According to Ricobom<sup>26</sup> (2010), the search for regional integration necessarily involves the recognition of differences between various cultures. In turn, the academic mobility programs promote the exchange of knowledge among the diverse actors involved in the higher education development. Thus, the SEM has stimulated the socialization among the Mercosur's citizens.

The literature also highlights the prominent role of the universities and the university networks in promoting the IoHE and RoHE in Latin America. According to Ricobom<sup>27</sup> «...the University is the best place for meeting of minds and sharing of various cultural values of the region – two important ingredients required for regional integration». The Montevideo Group Universities Association (AUGM) was pioneer and remains the most active university network in this process<sup>28</sup>. This horizontal cooperative network has disseminated a new concept of autonomy and self-regulation among the universities in the region (Krotsch, 1997 in Perrotta<sup>29</sup>). Likewise, the Network of Studies on the

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<sup>23</sup> Papatsiba, Vassiliki. «Making higher education more European through student mobility? Revisiting EU initiatives in the context of the Bologna Process», *Comparative Education*, vol. 42, no. 1, 2006, pp. 93-111; Solanas, Facundo. «El impacto del MERCOSUR en la educación superior: un análisis desde la 'Mercosurización' de las políticas públicas», *Arquivos Analíticos de Políticas Educativas*, vol.17, no. 20, 2009, pp. 1-18; Silveira, Zuleide. S. «Setor educacional do MERCOSUL: convergência e integração regional da educação superior brasileira», *Revista da Avaliação da Educação Superior*, vol. 21, no. 3, agosto- noviembre 2006, pp. 901-927.

<sup>24</sup> Almeida de, L. R., *op. cit.*

<sup>25</sup> Vitarelli Batista, M., *op. cit.*, 2018.

<sup>26</sup> Ricobom, G., *op. cit.*

<sup>27</sup> Ricobom, Gisele. «UNILA – A contribuição do ensino para a integração da América Latina», *Revista Ideação*, vol. 12, no. 1, 2010b.

<sup>28</sup> Bigas I. *et al.* «Las redes en la integración regional», *Integración y Conocimiento*, vol. 2, no. 5, 2016, pp. 82-89.

<sup>29</sup> Perrotta, D., *op. cit.*, 2012.

Internationalization of Higher Education in Latin America (RIESAL) arises from the Mercosur's Center for Research in Higher Education (NEMES) in an attempt to promote suggestions to guide management actions in the higher education field.

In the last two decades, due to the ongoing process of globalization, the universities have become central players in cultural and social exchange. On one hand, universities are both sources and producers of new knowledge and technology. On the other hand, they provide an auspicious environment for intercultural dialogue<sup>30</sup>. Ricobom's thesis proposes that integration would strive from a truly Latin American consciousness. The critic suggests that the most authentic integration process is constructed through an intercultural dialogue between citizens. Ricobom also believes that it is a useful instrument for understanding the 'other'. She suggests that this dialogue is the only correct way of promoting integration without imposing other values<sup>31</sup>.

Another important contribution to the research, Waltenberg's study suggests that education strengthens the integrative process to ensure irreversibility. According to the author, education over comes regional asymmetries and inequities through solidarity education. This method solidifies the bonds of cooperation through solidarity and is essential for the feeling of shared values with the neighboring countries. Subsequently, it would facilitate future strategic agreements<sup>32</sup>.

### **3. New framework to study regional integration and education in South America**

After compiling the diverse contributions, we propose a new analytical framework to understand the role of higher education in the promotion of regional integration. We propose to describe the process as the figure no.1.

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<sup>30</sup> Ricobom, G., *op. cit.*, 2010b.

<sup>31</sup> Ricobom, G., *op. cit.*, 2010a.

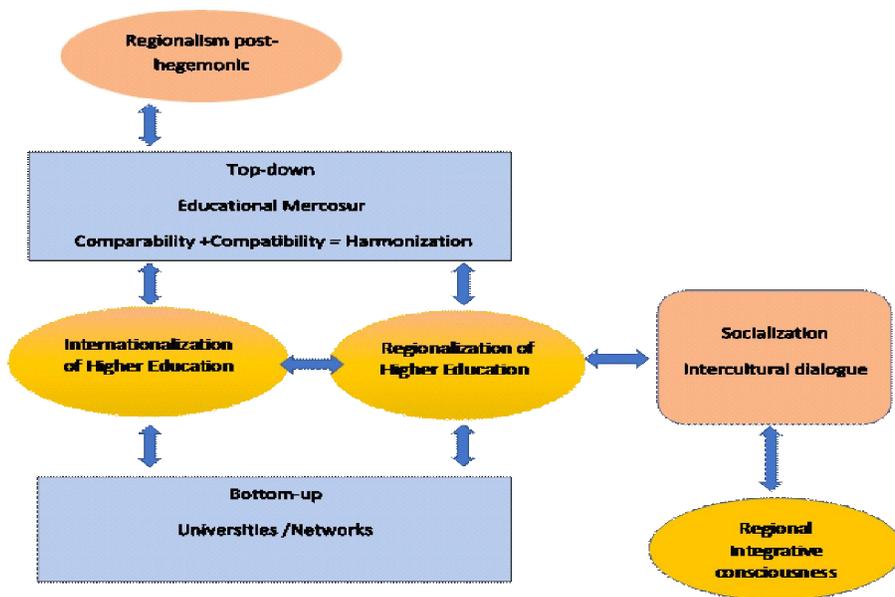
<sup>32</sup> Waltenberg, L. M. *A internacionalização da educação superior: um olhar sobre as estratégias de cooperação sul-sul da política externa brasileira*, Universidade Federal do Estado do Rio de Janeiro, Centro de Ciências Jurídicas e Políticas Departamento de Estudos Políticos Faculdade de Ciência Política, Brasil, 2013.

**Table 2**  
**Summary of the literature findings**

Domain	Authors	Sub-domains
International Relations	Layla M. Waltenberg	Internationalization of Higher Education
Educational Studies	José M. de Souza Junior Luciene Stallivieri	
International Relations	Larissa Rosevics de Almeida	Role Higher Education in Regional Integration process
	Maria M. Brackmam	
	Larissa R. de Almeida	
	Gisele Ricobom	
Educational Studies	Souza and Giselle C. M. Real	Higher Education in Mercosur/ Regionalization of Higher Education
	Zuleide S. Silveira	
International Relations	Marília C. Morosini	Unila and Regional Integration
	Daniela Perrotta	
	Antônio Diniz Júnior	
	Tiago Reisdorfer	
International Relations	José Ricardo Martins	Regional Integration Networks
International Relations	Ivan Bigas	Regional Integration Networks

Source: Elaborated by author.

**Figure 1**  
**New framework to study the role of education in the promotion of regional integration**



Source: Elaborated by author.

From the International Relations studies, we can understand the political scenario on the regional and international levels which enabled structural changes in South America, especially in the Mercosur countries. The post-hegemonic theories have been largely used to explain this context. The process of regionalization of higher education sponsored by educational Mercosur and supported by the networks of universities seems to be a trend in the region<sup>33</sup>. The internationalization of higher education brings the «how to» tools to the analysis – programs, projects, etc., in the promotion of socialization among actors allowing the intercultural dialogue.

We can suggest that the regional Integration through higher education is possible in a favorable political and economic climate and is characterized by regional educational policies and programs that pursue the harmonization of higher education through comparability and compatibility of diplomas and titles on a macro level, and, promote a common *integrative consciousness* via intercultural dialogue and socialization of students, professors and staff on a micro level. In the long term, such regional *integrative consciousness* could generate a shared feeling of belonging. Consequently, a common regional identity should straighten the integration and ensure the irreversibility of the process.

#### **4. How far is Brazil from the rest of Latin America?**

Why is the location of Unila so important? Why is this debate so important for Brazil and the future of Latin America Integration?

Brazil presents an interesting case because of many reasons. The country belongs to the BRICS, one of the most significant groups composed of non-developed countries. Moreover, Brazil has the highest GDP, the largest population and territory in Latin America. These elements may suggest Brazil's leading role in the region. Nonetheless, the country has one of the highest degrees of inequality in the region.

In addition to the obvious differences in the territorial size and language, the historical political formation of Brazil has been different since its independence from Portugal. The etymological discussions regarding the concept of «Latin America» and whether Brazil should be included or not lasted until the beginning of the 20th century. The inclusion of Brazil in the list of the «Iberoamerican» countries was first suggested by Enrique Rodó in 1900<sup>34</sup>. Nevertheless, it was during the

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<sup>33</sup> Vitarelli Batista, M., *op. cit.*, 2018.

<sup>34</sup> Monteiro, Pedro Meira. «As raízes do Brasil no espelho de próspero», *Novos Estudos*, CEBRAP, no. 83, 2006, pp. 159-182.

decades 1930 and 1940 that Brazil was clearly considered a part of Latin America, as the critic recalls «when the United States, and by extension Europe and the rest of the world, included Brazil in the Latin American region»<sup>35</sup>.

The so-called «path of separation» (Jaguaribe, 1981 in Briceño-Ruiz and Puntigliano<sup>36</sup>,) explains the possible identity distance between Brazil and the rest of Latin America. The cleavage between this country and the rest of the region is produced by the difference in linguistic culture, political institutions (the most significant differences), geography, history (confrontations between Spain and Portugal colonialism), economy and society (based on plantation and slavery). In the construction of Brazilian identity after the independence, Hispanic America had been described as the «other». The monarchy in Brazil guaranteed the political stability in contrast with the political turbulence controlled by the caudillos in the new republican regimes in other parts of the region. The self-image of superiority explained by the connection with the European monarchies placed Brazil in a position of «us» (the monarchy and stable Brazil) versus «them» (the republican and chaotic Hispanic American States).

The Brazilian foreign policy in that period promoted few diplomatic relations with neighboring countries. The suspicious against the slavery politics monarchic imperial Brazil led, Simón Bolívar, the most important symbol of the Latin America ideal of integration, towards a no invitation of Brasil to the not-so-successful, but historical Congress of Panamá in 1826<sup>37</sup>.

In those decades, the second important «we» versus «others» moment is described by Feres Jr.'s seminal work «A história do conceito de Latin America nos Estados Unidos». According to Feres Jr., the first use of the term «Latin American» in English was in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century designating an asymmetrical opposition with the term North America. Feres Jr. found the pejorative association of the term «Latin America» with all aspects considered negative for the North American people: Catholicism, non-white race, sexism, traditionalism of political social institutions and a lack of hard work. This comparison could be described by «we, Latin Americans» versus «other, the North Americans» and vice-versa.

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<sup>35</sup> Bethell, Leslie. «O Brasil e a ideia de «América Latina» em perspectiva histórica», *Est. Hist.*, Rio de Janeiro, vol. 22, no. 44, julho-dezembro 2009, pp. 289-321.

<sup>36</sup> Briceño Ruiz, José and Puntigliano, Andrés. *Brazil and Latin America between the separation and integration paths*, Lexington Books, 2017.

<sup>7</sup> Bethell, L., *op. cit.*

During the military periods in the Southern Cone (1960s, 1970s until 1985), the distance between this group and the rest of the important countries in Latin America that remained attached to the democracy, expanded considerably. However, during the same period, the exchange among Brazilian intellectuals in exile in other Latin American countries brought together the final consolidation of the inclusion of Brazil as part of Latin America<sup>38</sup>. The Jaguaribe's «path of integration» started to be defined by the first regional treaty outside of the River Plata region. Although the project failed, the Treaty of Amazonian Cooperation, 1977, introduced the idea of Latin American integration to the agenda.

Later in the re-democratization period, the creation of Mercosul changed the dynamic in the region. In the Mercosur, Brazil found a mechanism to deal with the global and regional uncertain scenario<sup>39</sup>. Likewise, the absence of the superpower in the region promoted other political forms of organization and economic management of regional common goods<sup>40</sup>.

The recent decades characterized by the *Bolivarianism* period accelerated the regionalization process and denominated the post-hegemonic regionalism in South America in 2002-2016<sup>41</sup>. In Brazil, since the rise of the Luis Inácio Lula da Silva government (2002- 2011) and Dilma Rousseff (2010-2016)<sup>42</sup>, foreign policy has prioritized diversification in the international agreements and south-south cooperation<sup>43</sup>. However, the Brazilian citizens seem to live far from these governmental movements and to ignore such advances and projects. The last transnational study, «The Americas and the World 2010-2011, Public Opinion and Foreign Policy in Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, Mexico, and Peru» pointed out that on average 43% of all respondents identified themselves as Latin American in the first place, while only 4% of Brazilians identified this way. With this result, it is possible to ask the following question: can a country be seeking regional integration without its citizens identifying themselves as belonging

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<sup>38</sup> *Ibidem*; Briceño Ruiz, J. and Rivarola Puntigliano, A., *op. cit.*

<sup>1</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>2</sup> Riggiozzi, P. and Tussie, D., *op. cit.*

<sup>3</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>4</sup> Dilma Rousseff was impeached by the Brazilian Senate on 31th of August 2016. Rousseff was accused of manipulating the government budget in a controversy trial. Many authors classified this political maneuver as a *coup d'état* orchestrated by the Congress.

<sup>5</sup> Vigevani, Tullo y Cepaluni, Gabriel. «A política externa de Lula da Silva: A estratégia da autonomia pela diversificação», *Contexto Internacional*, vol. 29, no. 2, Julho/Dezembro 2007, pp.273-335.

to that region? Could the European Union exist if the Germans and the French did not identify themselves as Europeans?<sup>44</sup>.

Therefore, we can conclude that the Brazilian exceptionalism might provoke a high need for integration and international expansion. The fact that Brazil is closed to itself more than we would expect is crucial when it comes to this discussion.

Our suggestion for answering the questions above is that the initiatives, like Unila, could be an interesting way of mitigating the effects of the «path of separation» between Brazil and Latin America. There are no comparable institutions in other countries in Latin America. In addition, as an educational institution, Unila could be a sub-optimal environment to test programs and put into practice for the formation of students to become citizens who promote integrative Latin American consciousness.

## 5. Let's test Unila

Unila was an inspiration for several authors, especially when it was created in 2010. Among them, I point out Gisele Ricobom (2010), professor of the institution, Ingrid P.A. Sarti (2010), José Ricardo Martins (2010), Gentil Corazza (2010, 2013), Larissa Rosevics de Almeida (2015), and Paulino Motter (2016).

The majority of the literature supports the Unila project and believes in the potential of this institution for promoting regional education. However, there is some criticism which suggests issues that need to be addressed. Further more, there is a lack of empirical research on the real achievements of Unila. In this section, I indicate the reasons found in the literature as to why the Unila project could be a source of means to promote regional integration. Additionally, we also describe arguments of criticism towards the Unila project.

### 5.1. Why is Unila promoting integrative consciousness?

First, Unila was conceived with a notice able purpose of promoting integration. The promotion of regional integration as an objective is explicit in its name and in the foundation documents of the university. The Inter-ministerial motives exhibition No. 00331/2007 of the Ministry

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<sup>6</sup> Onuki, Janina; Mouron, Fernando y, Urdinez, Francisco. «Latin American perceptions of regional identity and leadership in comparative perspective», *Contexto Internacional*, vol. 38, no. 1, January/April 2016, 2016, pp. 433-465.

of Planning and the Ministry of Education (MEC)<sup>45</sup> says: «In a context of regional integration in Latin America, universities are called to interact in the national and transnational terms, sharing - jointly and with mutual respect - knowledge and technology with other Latin American countries». After being presented and approved by the National Congress and later by the Federal Senate, the Law No. 12,189 was sanctioned by the President Lula da Silva on January 12, 2010, founding Unila. The goal of Unila is to become a university which mission is to contribute to the Latin American integration with an emphasis on Mercosur through humanistic, scientific and technological knowledge and partnership between universities, government and international organizations<sup>46</sup>.

Second, the history of Unila's creation<sup>47</sup> can be seen as a Brazilian contribution to the educational regional space of Mercosul<sup>48</sup>. The idea of Unila was announced at the Mercosur's Ministries Meeting before it was even formally presented to the Presidency of the Republic<sup>49</sup>. Therefore, Unila and Mercosur are closely related and serve to reinforce each other. Although Unila proposes a broader integration in the context of all Latin American countries, Unila was created from the idea proposed by a University of Mercosur.

Third, the integrative character can be seen in the international consultation as part of the university creation carried out in the past. The project involved 46 scholars who accepted the invitation to develop texts guided by seven broad questions regarding pedagogical structure, internationalization projects based on equality, and cultural integrative identity<sup>50</sup>. The initiative resulted in a book titled «UNILA -

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<sup>45</sup> Source:[http://www.planalto.gov.br/ccivil\\_03/projetos/EXPMOTIV/EMI/2007/331%20-%20MP%20MEC.htm](http://www.planalto.gov.br/ccivil_03/projetos/EXPMOTIV/EMI/2007/331%20-%20MP%20MEC.htm) . (Accessed 19/ 04/2018).

<sup>46</sup> Vitarelli Batista, M., *op. cit.*, 2017.

<sup>47</sup> The Brazilian government, with logistical support from Itaipu Binacional, decided to create the Mercosul Institute of Advanced Studies (IMEA) in May 2007. This Brazilian institute was dedicated to the expansion of the exchange between the Mercosul countries' higher education institutions. After successful negotiation with Itaipu Binacional, the Ministry of Education developed the Inter-ministerial motives exhibition no. 00331/2007, which established the creation of a Brazilian federal university geared towards integration, called the Federal University of Latin American Integration (Unila).

<sup>48</sup> Instituto Mercosul de Estudos Avançados (IMEA). *UNILA – Consulta Internacional: contribuições à concepção, organização e proposta político-pedagógica da Unila*, Foz do Iguaçu, Publicações IMEA 2, 2009.

<sup>49</sup> Almeida de, L. R., *op. cit.*

<sup>50</sup> 7 questions: How to articulate Unila's mission with the globalization context increasing dialogue between cultures; regarding Latin American integration, different approaches and considerations under different angles are mentioned, what should be the most important axes of this proposal in the context of a Brazilian public university; what would be the most important subjects on the courses and research programs, composing the academic-

International Consultation, contributions to the design, organization and political-pedagogical proposal»<sup>51</sup>. According to Correia Lima *et al.*<sup>52</sup> the majority of the scholars' contributions were present in the original project of Unila's creation. Although considered relevant *per se*, the consultation legitimized what was already defined by the Brazilian Ministry of Education in the proposal of Unila's creation.

Fourth, it is important to consider Unila's differentiated pedagogical and academic structure. The courses given at Unila are in the areas of mutual interest of countries in Latin America, especially the member countries of Mercosul. The courses have an emphasis on the themes involving exploitation of natural resources and cross-frontier biodiversity, regional social and linguistic studies, international relations, and other areas considered strategic for the regional development and integration. The most distinctive feature of Unila pedagogic project is the common cycle of studies. It is a group of compulsory courses which all students of Unila take in their first year. The disciplines include foundations of Latin America; introduction to scientific thought; and, Portuguese (for non-Brazilians) and Spanish courses. The program aims to encourage critical thinking, bilingualism and a basic knowledge of the region. In 1960, the Brazilian anthropologist Darcy Ribeiro criticized the Latin American higher institutions model, claiming it was too distant from the region's problems. Unila aims to mitigate this distance, focusing on solving local necessities and demands.

Fifth, Unila proposes interculturality as an instrument of integration. According to Ricobom<sup>53</sup>, since the first generations of students entered Unila, and the university started functioning in 2010, the challenge of the interculturality implementation into the operational space began, «where intercultural practice manifests itself in a process of oral interrelation, verbal or written, emotional and affective, from the reflection

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scientific plan of Unila; due to inter- and transdisciplinary trend, and, in view of the complexity of the knowledge, what are the implications for the structure of the pedagogical project in the fields of science and/or humanities; the recruitment of teachers and students from of several Latin American countries is one of the main differentials of Unila, these innovations could be adopted in teaching activities, research and extension?; What would be the best way to select future students ensuring equal opportunities among candidates from different countries of Latin America; with a university focused on the challenges of Latin America, how to harmonize local, regional and the universal (IMEA, *op. cit.*).

<sup>51</sup> MEA, *op. cit.*

<sup>52</sup> Correia Lima, Manolita ; Dos Santos Silva, Claudia; Prolo, Ivor y, Martins Torini, Danilo. «As contribuições da consulta pública para o projeto de criação da Unila», *Interfaces Brasil/Canadá, Revista Brasileira de Estudos Canadenses*, Canoas, vol. 16, no.1, 2016.

<sup>53</sup> Ricobom, G., *op. cit.*, 2010a.

on the recognition and respect to the 'other'.» Cultural diversity allows a collective learning process that presupposes a mutual knowledge and the consequent breakdown of stereotypes. Thus, the critic recognizes Unila as the operational space where intercultural relations of recognition and respect to the other, and where the dialogue and communication take place. In addition, such a multicultural space prepares the student to deal with conflict situations stemming from cultural diversity. Unila addresses interculturality in a declarative space from the start, which is expressed in the discourse surrounding the institution, as well as its legal frameworks and agreements.

Unila creates an «open-air laboratory» to promote multiculturalism as well as coexistence and exchange of experiences between the students from different Latin American countries. To illustrate the diversity of nationalities, in 2016 students from nineteen different countries were registered at Unila's students' selection process (map no. 1).

**Map 1**  
**UNILA's application students by country**



Source: Batista, 2017

Sixth, Unila does not fit into the internationalization of higher education mold as a simple service<sup>54</sup>, but goes far beyond. Correia Lima *et al*<sup>55</sup> point out to the «(...) the more traditional programs of mobility, with the exchange of students and teachers, and with international programs of cooperation in higher education», but also acknowledges the exchange of coexistence and everyday interrelations in a common space during the entire length of education.

Seventh, Unila is a singular frontier space in which it is possible to construct the collective knowledge independent from the dominant global power structure. Unila seeks to oppose this perspective by promoting dialogue between countries and respecting Latin American demands. Thus, non-hegemonic epistemologies are being promoted at Unila<sup>56</sup>. This perspective of integration transcends the conception of transnationalization of higher education that has an exclusively materialistic logic<sup>57</sup>. In 2013, out of 92 projects available on the site of the university, nearly 40% generated issues related to the integration of Latin American people<sup>58</sup>. Nowadays, there are 36 interdisciplinary research groups. The idea is to encourage interdisciplinary collaboration, create Latin American wealth and diversity, increase interaction between the areas of knowledge, as well as research and extension activities. The graphic no. 1 shows the themes researched by the students from the International Relations programs in their undergraduate thesis. The trend of choosing themes related to Latin America and Regional integration affairs is evident.

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<sup>54</sup> Peixoto, Maria do Carmo de Lacerda. «Educação como bem público, internacionalização e as perspectivas para a educação superior brasileira», in: Oliveira, J. F. d.; Catani, A.M.; Silva Júnior, J. d. R. E. (eds.). Educação superior no Brasil: tempos de internacionalização, São Paulo, Xamã, 2010, pp. 29-36.

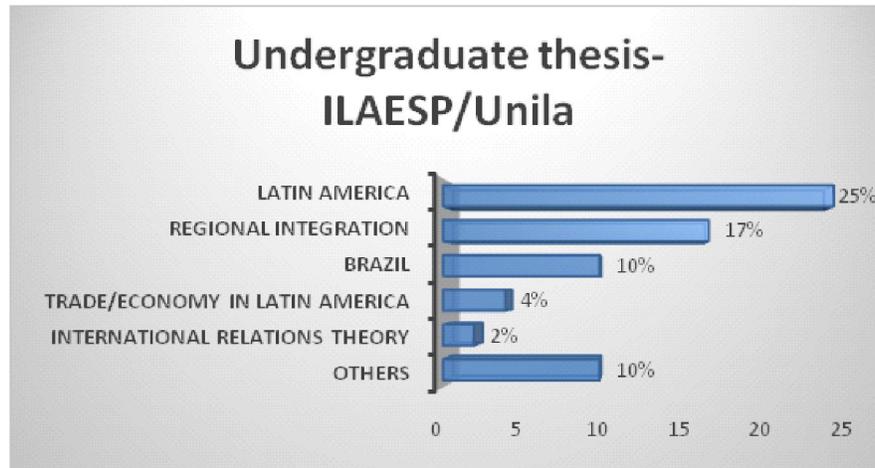
<sup>55</sup> Correia Lima, M.; Dos Santos Silva, C.; Prolo, I. y, Martins Torini, D., *op. cit.*

<sup>56</sup> Sarti, I., *op. cit.*

<sup>57</sup> Santos, Eduardo. «Internacionalização da educação superior nos marcos da integração regional da América Latina – o caso da Universidade Federal da Integração Latino-americana», *EccoS Revista Científica*, no. 42, enero-abril 2017, pp. 57-84.

<sup>58</sup> Waltenberg, L. M., *op.cit.*

**Graphic 1**  
**Themes researched at Unila**



**Source:** Elaborated by author (2018)<sup>59</sup>.

Eighth, the *campus* location and its strategic geography plays an additional role in the South American integration process. According to Waltenberg<sup>60</sup>, Unila's integration through education is presented in the location of the institution. Unila was set in Foz do Iguaçu city, on the triple border shared by Brazil, Argentina and Paraguay. The border suggests the university is a space of fluidity, movement and commercial and cultural exchange, since Guaraní, Spanish and Portuguese are constantly interacting on various levels. According to Corazza<sup>61</sup> the architectural conception of Unila's campus was created in harmony with the pedagogical conception and the idea of integration itself, promoting a space of «spontaneous integration».

The *campus* library, called *Darcy Ribeiro*, specializes in the Latin American affairs. Not all of its buildings have been completed. Some members of the staff attribute the delay to the effects of the latest

<sup>59</sup> RIUNILA is the UNILA's institutional repository built to save, share, and search digital research materials including an increasing number of conference papers, images, peer-reviewed scholarly articles, preprints, technical reports, theses, working papers. See <https://dspace.unila.edu.br/>

<sup>60</sup> Waltenberg, L. M., *op. cit.*

<sup>61</sup> Corazza, Gentil. «UNILA e a integração latino-americana», *IPEA Boletim de Economia e Política Internacional*, no.3, Julho 2010, pp. 79-88, 2010.

Brazilian political and economic crisis. However, the good quality of the installations and the symbolism concerning Latin America and its integration all over the campus is noticeable<sup>62</sup>.

### *5.2. Why is Unila not promoting integrative consciousness in the region?*

First, the norm of equality among the Brazilian and non-Brazilian students and professors has not been respected. According to Motter and Gandin<sup>63</sup> the limitation is inherent in the highly regulated and centralized Brazilian education system. The creation of Unila's law clashes with the general norms of Brazilian legislation that prevents contracting non-Brazilians for public service. Waltenberg<sup>64</sup> cites the difficulty of preserving the professors already hired and, according to the author, Unila «is not yet an attractive reference educational pole».

Similarly, the recruitment and maintenance of non-Brazilian students is also difficult. Previously, the Brazilian government offered foreign students the necessary assist an ceby providing them with housing, food, transportation, and health services. From 2012 on wards, same as in all public universities, the financial aid had been limited<sup>65</sup>. This complicated the attraction of the new foreign students, especially since the selection of those students was based on social economic scarcity, resulting in Unila's social profile being that of low-income, indigenous students from rural areas<sup>66</sup>.

Second, endogeno us contradictions lie within the execution of the project. According to Motter and Gandin:

On one hand, the contradictions and failures of the execution of the project; on the other, the prevalence of an academic culture that is recalcitrant in embracing change. Unila has not remained immune to these factors. (...) the policy of recruitment, through public competition, as a Brazilian law requires. Has not guaranteed the selection of staff committed to building an innovative and differentiated university project<sup>67</sup>.

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<sup>62</sup> Vitarelli Batista, M., *op. cit.*, 2017.

<sup>66</sup> Motter, Paulino and Gandin, Luis Armando. *Higher Education in Latin America: the Unila project*, 2016, pp. 272-288.

<sup>64</sup> Waltenberg, L.M., *op. cit.*

<sup>65</sup> Motter, P. and Gandin, L.A., *op. cit.*

<sup>66</sup> Vitarelli Batista, M., *op. cit.*, 2017.

<sup>67</sup> Motter, P. and Gandin, L.A., *op. cit.*, p. 284.

Third, Unila is a «microclimate». Batista<sup>68</sup> points out that Unila is a possible source of regional integration but still limited. Some authors recognize the importance of the *spillover* challenge of Unila: «the greatest challenge of the university is to make the knowledge produced in the academic environment transcend, overflow, surpass the scientific environment and make a difference in the life of the population»<sup>69</sup>. Schlogel suggests that Unila will have to develop evaluation tools that can measure the real influence of themselves in the Latin American reality<sup>70</sup>.

### Final considerations

The Educational Studies and the International Relations studies provide different elements for the analysis of the possibilities in which higher education can promote regional integration. Processes of internationalization of higher education inside the universities and regionalization promoted by Mercosur can become crucial elements to measuring this phenomenon. Our contribution to the research is the development of a new framework of analysis using the insights provided by these disciplines. Subsequently, I tested Unila as our case of study.

Unila appears to be an alternative proposal in the idea of creation and promotion of Latin American identity through the formation of an integrative consciousness. Likewise, Unila has proven its solidarity by also being a higher education offer of quality. As a Brazilian institution, Unila promotes socialization and intercultural dialogue among Brazilian students helping to shrink the gap – «path of separation» – imposed by geography, language and history. Integration, when understood as growing economic and trade achievements, only obscures the progress made in other areas. Furthermore, in a region where economic and political cycles are detrimental to the continuity of the integration projects, an educational institution with constitution guarantees may prevent political regression. The goal beyond the understanding of the possible Latin American integration aligned with a broad personal experiences should be the formation of agents that would promote this integration and social transformation outside of the university.

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<sup>68</sup> Vitarelli Batista, M., *op. cit.*, 2017.

<sup>69</sup> Schlogel, Daniela Andreia. «O projeto da Universidade Federal da Integração Latino-Americana (UNILA)», *Revista Congreso Universidad*, vol. 2, no. 3, 2013.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibidem*.

Despite the supporting literature, there remains a lack of empirical research regarding the definite achievements of Unila. One reason for this is, on one hand, the institution is very young: eight years of existence may not be enough time to demonstrate the results. The impacts of education through integration are perceived in local/regional dynamics, not only in the academic field but also in the revitalization of the areas where they were established, through the stimulation of migration, tourism and trade in these localities<sup>71</sup>. However, it is necessary to concretize the networks created, to understand the consonance of the institutions involved, the consistency of the cooperation links, as well as the approval and legitimacy of the civil society. With the majority of the young institutions, improvements and adjustments are necessary. Likewise, further research could analyze these factors in greater depth by looking at other departments and areas, as well as the academic production at Unila regarding how related it is to Latin America and Regional Integration issues.

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<sup>71</sup> Waltenberg, L. M., *op. cit.*

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