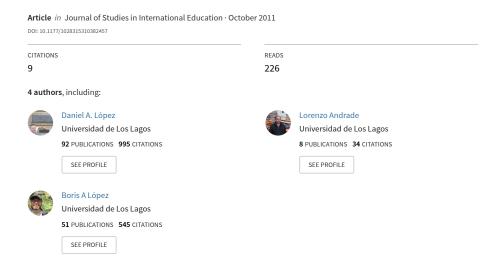
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Functional Patterns in International Organizations for University Cooperation in Latin America and the Caribbean



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Abstract

This study analyzes the coverage, organizational patterns, problems and trends of international organizations for university cooperation in Latin America and the Caribbean. More than 30 international organizations for cooperation currently operating in Latin America and the Caribbean were identified. Two groups of institutions with more than 60% similitude were established by the Bray-Curtis index, according to the countries of origin of member universities. Multivariate discriminant analysis revealed that variables measuring levels of affiliation are more effective in accounting for integration into a given group than those variables associated with coverage or past experience. These organizations show highly redundant and territorial concentration. The most recurrent management problems, evaluated by analyzing the content of documents and interviews, are related to: budgets, information and university culture. In spite of favorable conditions for internationalization, performance observed in international organizations for university cooperation reveal limited impact on higher education and academic development in Latin America and the Caribbean.

Keywords

Internationalization, Latin America, interuniversity cooperation

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Introduction

The far reaching changes on the international relations scenario, as well as the dimension and effects of globalization, have been reflected in the organization and functioning of universities on a world scale (Knight, 2004; Sadlak, 2001), including Latin America (Rama, 2006). Protocols or political and economic agreements have incorporated academic counterparts to a much greater extent than before, benefiting higher education entities (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2004). For this reason, the functional structure of universities in Latin America has incorporated departments specializing in international relations (Gacel-Avila, 1999; Rudzki, 1995), and suprauniversity organizations have multiplied (Rahman & Kopp, 1992; Sebastian, 2004).

Internationalization of university activities is relatively recent, however, in the present context; conditions favor a diversified institutionality, supported by existing norms and cooperative programs with wide coverage (Beerkens & Derwende, 2007; Teichler, 2009; Vaira, 2004; Van der Wende, 2001). Expansion of transborder higher education initiatives and research in Latin America has been based on the need for improved quality, as a result of incorporating an international and intercultural dimension (Brunner, 2001; De Wit, Jaramillo, Gacel-Avila, & Knight, 2005); externalities, generated by commercial relations between countries, have also influenced university activities. (Didou, 2006; López, Castro, & Kiss, 2000). The benefits of international cooperation in Latin America have been multiple, and cover different areas, such as, increased mobility of lecturers and students, joint research projects, publications, thematic workshops and meetings, among other activities (Gacel-Avila, 2007; Sebastian, 2004). Research into higher education has broached a wide variety of subjects (Kehm & Teichler, 2007); however, to date, scarce mention is made of the role of organizations promoting international university cooperation.

The aim of this study is to establish and analyze the coverage, problems and trends associated with the functioning of international organizations for university cooperation in Latin America and the Caribbean.

Method

The number, profile and activities of international organizations for university cooperation in Latin America and the Caribbean were analyzed. To compile an up-to-date catalogue of these entities, the following criteria were applied: a Web page that has been updated at least once over the period 2006 to 2008; evidence of some sort of activity over the last 3 years, such as: general assemblies, seminars, congresses, courses or other promotion activities; member universities from at least two Latin American or Caribbean countries; a minimum of one of the members should be a higher education institution with headquarters located in Latin America or the Caribbean; meet criteria established in the definition of an international organization

for university cooperation. Cooperation agencies or organizations dedicated principally to financing cooperative activities that do not include university collectives, are not considered.

Once the number of active organizations was established, they were classified into the following categories:

General: organizations with multiple academic and integration aims;

Specific: organizations with a mission that concentrates on a given aim and a well defined area of university cooperation;

Territorial: organizations defined by the geographic location of the member institutions;

Confessional: organizations defined by the religious character of the member universities;

Size: organizations defined by the number of students in their member universities; *Idiomatic:* organizations defined according to the language of the member universities;

Alternative: organizations that are not strictly interuniversity, but which have similar objectives and where university entities participate regularly.

The number of organizations pertaining to each category was established. Similarly, the following variables were determined: number of university and nonuniversity institutions affiliated; number of countries of origin of universities and date founded. A census of activities was also undertaken based on information contained in relevant Web pages and official documents. In addition, 30 open interviews were carried out with the authorities of international organizations for university cooperation in Latin America and the Caribbean, to aid formulation of a diagnosis. Based on content analysis (Krippendorf, 2004) of official documents and information gathered from interviews, functional patterns were established for the entire group of organizations, and the principle difficulties and trends with regard to how they function were determined.

A presence/absence matrix was constructed for the countries of origin of member universities, for each of the 31 international organizations for university cooperation. To verify degree of dissimilarity with respect to the territorial coverage of international organizations, expressed as Latin American and Caribbean countries with universities participating in their activities, a cluster analysis was undertaken using the matrix data based on the Bray-Curtis index (Manly, 2005). Thus, groups of organizations were established according to territorial affinity. To establish the relative importance of variables that explain inclusion in each group of international organizations, three variables associated with levels of affiliation (number of countries; total number of organizations and number of universities affiliated) and two variables of coverage or past experience (number of students in member universities; date of creation) were used for each of the organizations; a multivariate discriminant analysis was then applied using Statistica 7.0 (Statsoft, 2004) software.

Results

At present, there are more than 30 active international organizations for university cooperation in Latin America and the Caribbean, most of which are general (34.5%), although specific (22%) and territorial (22%) organizations have also been created. The most common concept used as a defining term in the name of organizations is "Association," although over the last few years, the number of Networks has increased; most of the institutions were founded between 10 and 30 years ago (43.3%). Organizations founded less than 50 years ago constitute 76.6% of the total, and those with less than 10-year existence, 10%. Coverage of countries is wide, but heterogeneous. Of a total of 30 international organizations for university cooperation in Latin America and the Caribbean, where member institutions could be reliably determined, countries with the highest number of affiliations were Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Argentina, Chile, and Mexico. On the other hand, 13 Caribbean countries had no affiliations to international organizations for university cooperation. The 13 South American countries have 190 affiliations, the 7 non-Caribbean Central American countries (80); Mexico—the only Latin American country that is part of North America (20), although the 20 Caribbean countries register 47 affiliations. The Caribbean covers a total of 47 countries and, if the countries included in Latin America are excluded, they only register seven affiliations. The number of member universities per cooperation organization fluctuated between 5 and 339.

Cluster analysis revealed two groups of international organizations with similitude indexes of 60% or more. The first group included 12 institutions and the second 7. Similitudes of the remaining institutions were below 50% (Figure 1). Similarities in territorial coverage were observed in more than two thirds of the international organizations analyzed, evaluated in terms of countries of origin of member universities. Discriminant analysis applied to these groups revealed that variables determining inclusion of international organizations in each group were more associated to those measuring levels of affiliation, than to those related to coverage or years of experience. The affiliation variables, such as number of countries and total number of institutions affiliated, permitted groups of international organizations to be separated. On the contrary, years of experience and number of students per international organization, were not relevant differentiating factors (Table 1).

The principle management problems experienced by international organizations for university cooperation in Latin America and the Caribbean, as identified in interviews and documents, were as follows:

Limited commitment of member universities to materialize agreements, together with the fact that the majority of the universities do not plan international activities globally, with the exception of student exchange programs. Furthermore, although universities usually create departments specializing in international relations, internal links with other departments of the institution

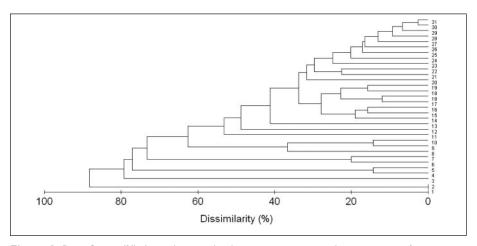


Figure 1. Bray-Curtis (%) dissimilarity index between international organizations for university cooperation in Latin America and the Caribbean, according to the countries of the member universities of each institution

Note: Number corresponds to the following institutions:

- 1. Associação das Universidades de Língua Portuguesa (AULP)
- 2. Grupo de Tordesillas (TORDESILLAS)
- 3. Asociación de Universidades e Instituciones de Investigación del Caribe (UNICA)
- 4. Consejo Superior Universitario Centroamericano (CSUCA)
- 5. Asociación de Universidades Privadas de Centroamérica y Panamá (AUPRICA)
- 6. Asociación de Universidades del Sur de Ecuador y Norte del Perú (AUSENP)
- 7. Red de Universidades del Pacifico Sur (RUPSUR)
- 8. Asociación de Universidades Grupo de Montevideo (GRUPO MONTEVIDEO)
- Consejo de Rectores por la Integración de la Subregión Centro Oeste de Sudamérica (CRISCOS).
- 10. Universidad para la Sociedad del Conocimiento (RED UNISIC)
- II. Asociación de Universidades Amazónicas (UNAMAZ)
- 12. Red Talloires (TALLOIRES)
- 13. Red de Educación Continua de Latinoamérica y Europa (RECLA)
- Programa de Cooperación Universitaria entre Instituciones de Educación Superior Europeas y Latinoamericanas (COLUMBUS)
- 15. Red de Universidades Regionales Latinoamericanas (UREL)
- 16. Red de Administradores de Universidades Iberoamericanas (RAUI)
- 17. Centro Interuniversitario de Desarrollo (CINDA)
- 18. Asociación de Universidades de América Latina y del Caribe para la Integración (AUALCPI)
- 19. Red de Universidades y ONGs Latinoamericanas, del Caribe y Europa (ASOCIACIÓN ORIÓN)
- 20. Red Latinoamericana de Cooperación Universitaria (RLCU)
- 21. Consorcio-Red de Educación a Distancia (CREAD)
- 22. Global University Network for Innovation (GUNI)
- 23. Asociación Internacional de Universidades (IAU)
- 24. Federación Internacional de Universidades Católicas (FIUC)
- 25. Grupo de Universidades Iberoamericanas La Rábida
- 26. Asociación de Universidades confiadas a la Compañía de Jesús en América Latina (AUSJAL)
- 27. Organización Universitaria Interamericana (OUI)
- 28. Asociación de Universidades Interamericanas de Postgrado (AUIP)
- 29. Consejo Universitario Iberoamericano (CUIB)
- 30. Unión de Universidades de América Latina (UDUAL)
- 31. Red de Macrouniversidades de América Latina y el Caribe (REDMACRO)

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Variables	Discriminant function I	Discriminant function 2
Years of experience	0.283	-0.733
Total number of countries	-3.447^{a}	1.199
Total number of institutions	3.196 ^a	−I.607
Number of Latin American and Caribbean universities	-1.553	1.080
Number of students	-0.711	-0.422
Eigenvalue	2.362	0.026
Explained variance (%)	98.8	2.2

Table 1. Standardized Coefficients of Each Variable, Eigenvalues and Percentage of Explained Variance of the Discriminant Functions of the Three Groups of Organizations for International University Cooperation in Latin America and the Caribbean

are weak and academic participation is limited. Consequently, difficulties are encountered in identifying suitable interlocutors within each member university to develop the activities programmed by the international organization.

Relations between each university and the international organizations tend to be personalized, and limited solely to authorities. Thus, information flow, at all academic levels, is deficient.

Representation of each member university at management level of the international organizations, is often merely formal, with limited use of authority and empowerment of those who hold these positions.

The fact that few people hold technical and executive positions in international organizations, often means they have numerous responsibilities, resulting in low levels of professionalism and activity planning. Furthermore, there is a lack of performance-based organizational culture.

Numerous conferences and meetings, the main type of activity undertaken by international organizations, tend not to generate concrete academic activities. Also, marked asymmetry is generated with regard to the benefits obtained by member universities.

There is a culture of informality in universities, in terms of fulfillment of academic and economic commitments. An evaluation of how the higher education market operates in Latin America and the Caribbean reveals a tendency toward competition rather than cooperation and a short-term vision concentrating on obtaining immediate benefits from relationships with other entities. Thus, taking advantage of sporadic opportunities is favored over developing properly planned activities; context-related situations also limit how these organizations function, such as heterogeneity of

a. Statistically significant coefficients

the norm regulating teaching activities between countries and even within the same country.

There is also a lack of effective leadership of local actors, with implementation of educational and cultural aspects of the political and economic agreements being based on superstructural and bureaucratized decisions; finally, chronic difficulties exist in ensuring opportune access to information. Management is also limited, mainly because of economic problems, such as

budgets based on variable incomes;

fixed incomes originating from quotas that are increasingly less predictable and for lower amounts;

high competition for less funding;

strong competition for funds available in international agencies that tend to prioritize African and Eastern European countries;

restrictions to counterpart contributions;

emphasis on short-term benefits, principally monetary, as the basis of the relationship between universities and international organizations for university cooperation.

To deal with these problems, the most frequent measures adopted by Latin American and Caribbean international organizations are

presentation of programs and projects to compete for the growing funding opportunities available for specific ends;

functioning as networks;

clear definition of institutional profiles, courses of action, and comparative advantages;

creation of internal mechanisms to improve competitiveness;

management professionalization;

integration into international agencies and economic agreements promoting collaborative programs;

privileging bilateral relations, because of difficulties experienced with the integration of various partners;

development of programs for promoting activities through ICT's to improve generation and flow of information.

Discussion and Conclusions

In spite of favorable conditions for internationalization (Altbach & Teichler, 2001; Knight, 2006; Sebastian, 2002), coverage and impact of the Latin American and Caribbean international organizations for university cooperation are still limited. Although more than half of the international organizations currently in force were created over the last 30 years, representativity with respect to total number of potential

university members is very low. Considering that in Latin America alone there are approximately 2,000 universities (Fernández Lamarra, 2007), member universities of these organizations do not exceed 15%. Furthermore, an important fraction of these universities are passive members, given that, although they belong to an international organization, they do not participate in any of the activities. As a result, universities with formal international cooperation programs represent an even lower percentage. Similarly, there are marked differences in representativity between the Latin American universities and the Caribbean universities. Representation of Latin American countries is much greater than that of Caribbean countries, where higher education development in a considerable fraction of countries, is still poor (Didou, 2006).

Results show that the territorial variable is important in the constitution of international organizations. Groups of international institutions could be established on the basis of countries of origin of member universities. The variables "number of countries" and "number of institutions," were also significant factors accounting for variance in discriminant functions within these three groups. On the other hand, the variables, "past experience" and "coverage," in addition to "years of experience" and "number of students," were not significant. Thus, a degree of redundancy with regard to territories and universities represented, can be verified.

On the other hand, a study of problems affecting management of international organizations reveals a lack of concordance between commitment and the internal organizational structure of the universities and their participation in internationalization processes. Similarly, lack of concrete academic initiatives tends to discourage cooperative and integration activities (López & López, 2009). It has been suggested that the processes related to international university cooperation generate tensions at a political level affecting both international organizations and member universities; between institutional visions and systemic and subsystemic visions; between the procedures associated with global planning and those related to ad hoc activities; between instruments that are fundamentally academic and those derived from political-economic agreements; between organizations operating professionally and those taking advantage of sporadic opportunities; between the bi and multilateral agreements and between processes that include formal evaluation processes and those that are not evaluated (López & Díaz, 2001).

Such tensions have not always been resolved satisfactorily by international organizations for university cooperation in Latin America and the Caribbean (López Segrera & Maldonado, 2002). The existence of cultural aspects in the universities, even on a world level, also condition the internationalization processes (Bartnell, 2003; Stier, 2004; Teichler, 2004). Although results indicate common patterns of change in these organizations that, while recognizing difficulties, aim to significantly improve their performance (López & López, 2009), trends related to management changes are mainly oriented toward improving economic resources and connectivity between member universities.

In synthesis, both the extent of coverage and impact of Latin American and Caribbean international organizations are determined principally by the considerable differences in the countries' development levels and by the institutional culture of member universities. In comparative terms, with regard to other regions of the world, common aspects and particularities can be observed. The effect of national context on university internationalization was broached by Knight (2004). From this perspective, national differences in university internationalization reflect inequalities in the economic and social development of the countries. In spite of differences in this respect between the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean and those of Europe or North America, this pattern has also been observed in developed countries (Agasisti & Pérez-Esparrels, 2010). The same criteria can be applied to the financing of international university organizations and to the public sector role (Van Vught, Van der Wende, & Westerheijden, 2002; Horta, 2009). The relative importance of international, national and institutional contexts has even generated different models of university internationalization (Chan & Dimmock, 2008). In European and Southeast interuniversity organizations—denominated consortia, according to Beerkens' (2002) terminology—it has been verified that their performance depends on the degree of complementarity and compatibility of member universities and on the coping mechanism (Beerkens & Derwende, 2007). In Latin American and Caribbean international organizations, differences exist not only between the countries of member universities, but also between the universities themselves. Thus, levels of complementarity are limited because both recruitment and the relationship of each member university with the international organization, operate principally in terms of personal and affective connections, as opposed to institutional requirements. Although internationalization tends to generate convergence of interests between universities (Stromquist, 2004), Latin American and Caribbean international organizations lack the necessary links and stimulants for integration that exist in European (Huisman & Van der Wende, 2005; Van der Wende, 2001) and Asian (Mok, 2007; Shin & Harman, 2009) universities. Degree of compatibility in international organizations is related to the institutional context. Organizational culture is an important factor affecting internationalization and university integration in terms of globalization (Burnett & Huisman, 2010). Knight's (2004) bottom-up approach enables us to conclude that the limitations of Latin American and Caribbean international organizations originate from factors that characterize their member universities, such as organizational and planning problems. Although internationalization, even in highly prestigious universities, has both planned and opportunist components (Edwards, 2007), the Latin American and Caribbean international organizations considered in this study operate with very low levels of planning, functioning principally on the basis of short-term and opportunistic interests.

Levels of internationalization of Latin American and Caribbean universities and the performance of international organizations for university cooperation are still well below those required to meet existing needs and context conditions.

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