

2020

36th IARIW General Conference

Paper Prepared for the 36th IARIW General Conference, Oslo, Norway, August 24-28, 2020

Social Segmentation in the Higher Education System and Its Role in Reproducing the Social Class Structure of Contemporary Brazil

Thais Martins
Jamile Sandes
Mauricio Ernica
Ana Maria de Almeida

This research aims to investigate the role of the education system in the reproduction of the social class structure of contemporary Brazil. More particularly, he is interested in studying the contemporary configuration of the social segmentation of the Higher Education system and the dynamics that maintain it, examining the effects of the expansion of this system and the adoption of affirmative action policies of different kinds in recent decades. The research is organized around two axes. One of them brings together three bibliographical studies that will analyze: i) the literature on education and class structure in Brazil produced from the mid-1960s within the scope of social class sociology and the economics of education; the intergenerational mobility; ii) the literature on the expansion of demand, the expansion of enrollment and the segmentation of the system since its expansion after the 1968 Reform; and iii) the literature on the segmentation in Basic Education and the school trajectories defined by it until Higher Education. The second axis brings together a set of empirical studies whose interest is to examine how the segmentation pattern of contemporary higher education materializes in a selected group of institutions and identify the dynamics that underpin it. From the problematization of the transformations that occurred in two public universities of São Paulo (UNIFESP and Unicamp), a Bahian university (Federal University of Recôncavo Baiano) and a mining university (Federal University of São João Del Rei) as a result of enrollment expansion initiatives and inclusion of students from traditionally underrepresented groups in higher education, it is asked about the particular design of the inclusion mechanisms adopted, the characteristics of the students after the implementation of the inclusion processes, their distribution among the different courses and the experiences of approaching them, and the legitimate culture they have been experiencing.

This research aims to investigate the role of the education system in reproducing the social class structure of contemporary Brazil. More particularly, he is interested in the study of the social segmentation of the Higher Education system produced from the recent expansion of this system

and the affirmative action policies implemented in the last two decades, and its role in the reproduction of our class structure.

This recent expansion is the result of over fifty years of clashes over access to higher education, strongly informed by changes in the productive structure, accelerated urbanization and the expansion of basic schooling, which gave the higher education diploma another meaning. Thus, if until the first decades of the twentieth century this diploma was associated with the reproduction of the groups that occupied leading positions in the structure of the state, with the industrialization of the country, it also gave access to the positions created by economic modernization.

Not surprisingly, therefore, the demand for access to this level of education has grown exponentially, accompanying these transformations. For most of the period, demand grew at rates greater than supply, fueling not negligible social tension. As Martins (2009, p. 18) shows, enrollment growth over the 1950s and 1960s was very high. In 1945 there were 21,000 enrollments in higher education and in 1965, 182,000. However, despite this expansion of the offer, 29,000 students did not get places in institutions for which they had been approved in 1960; In 1969, the number of students who passed the entrance exams and did not find vacancies in higher education was 162 thousand (MARTINS, 2009, p. 19). At the end of that decade, the issue of “surpluses” was the trigger for mobilization demanding university reform (BRAGHINI, 2014).

The 1968 Reform offered an answer to this question, providing a large expansion of enrollment, as well as a profound reorganization of the Brazilian university system, with the extinction of the chairs, the creation of a teaching career, the reorganization of the courses and, finally, with important modifications in the way students were considered fit to be admitted.

The expansion of the demand for Higher Education would continue to occur in the following years, since from the 1970s, a period marked by strong economic growth in its early years, the Higher Education diploma began to occupy a privileged place in the social reproduction strategies of the families of the middle and upper classes (GRUN, 2002). According to Neves (2012, p. 7), there were 93,000 enrolled in higher education in 1960 and 425,478 in 1970, already under the effect of the 1968 reform. With the great expansion of the 1970s, in 1980 there were 1,377,286 enrollments (Cf Table 2 , below, down, beneath, underneath, downwards, downhill).

One of the solutions to this growth in demand has been to reduce obstacles to private sector expansion and, in particular, to facilitate the access of this sector to public resources (Martins, 2009; SAMPAIO, 2000)

In the private sector, institutions focused primarily on education, dedicated to the training of professionals, charged monthly fees. In the public sector, composed in this period, mostly by federal universities whose teaching was offered free of charge, the association between teaching

and research was more clearly structured as the dominant model of institution organization. A more qualified faculty was recruited and offered a stable career with the right to stability and full retirement.

The rapid expansion of the private sector corresponded to a smaller expansion of the public sector. This difference in the number of places available, associated with the free public universities and the better career conditions of their teachers, kept the dispute for places in this sector of higher education high. The result was the high selectivity situation of the public universities we witnessed today and which was described by Martins (2009) in the following terms.

At the social level, their vacancies would be occupied by a restricted group of students with a reasonable volume of economic and / or cultural capital; At the academic level, the aim was to achieve a high standard of academic quality, based on the association between teaching and research, which postgraduate studies would play a central role.