

THE EU EXERTING AN IDEATIONAL POWER BEYOND ITS FRONTIERS? LATIN AMERICAN UNIVERSITIES AND EUROPEAN MODEL AS A GOOD EXAMPLE OF THE TRANSMISSION OF EUROPE OF KNOWLEDGE: THE CASE OF CHILE AND MEXICO

Francis Espinoza Figueroa

The Catholic University of the North, Chile

0610 Angamos Ave.

Antofagasta II Region, Chile

E-mail: frespi@ucn.cl

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The EU as an ideational actor has a significant impact upon non-European countries. It is impacting on its periphery and the world. This paper studies the implications and lessons learnt of the European experience for other countries and regions. The EU seen as a 'global teacher' (Adelman 2009, 170), therefore, refers to a notion of the Union spreading and exporting its models beyond the geographical boundaries of Europe. It presents a powerful image of the EU as an international actor, endorsed it with a special capability, a force that manifests a pedagogic potential for establishing its (external) relationships. Therefore, its power is not 'deposited' in its material capabilities for exerting physical strength, but rather it is to be found in its ability to structure/organise, (to shape) knowledge.

The main purpose of this paper is to examine the growth of European ideas circulating throughout the field of Latin American Higher Education (HE), as part of the Bologna Process. The objectives are focused on observing the fact that the Union is exerting an ideational power which can observe through the manifestation of a set of procedures, methods and tools that have contributed to the transformation of Chilean and Mexican HE. Europe is considered as a 'model-maker' or 'model-offerer' impacting on Latin American Higher Education (HE) from the 'birth' of universities and study centres here, whilst Latin America has been seen as a traditional 'model-taker'. This phenomenon requires a rigorous analysis of European ideational factors present within Normative Power Europe (NPE), not only through a cluster of ideas, norms, principles and values but also through analysing language. Therefore I analyse such claims, focusing on Chile and Mexico, and argues that the impact of European influences upon received countries is mediated by domestic circumstances.

The article makes a contribution to both existing understanding of the European Union's influence over Latin America and Latin American HE, and also seeks to advance upon existing debates around the notion of Normative Power Europe in particular; by illustrating how the NPE literature would benefit from a deeper consideration of the use of language and considering translation processes of receiver countries.

With an inductive approach for this research, i.e. from particular to general observations, the problem is described firstly through what was observed early in the case studies. However, it is fundamental to note here that this research goes beyond a simple case study, because this did not involve an in-depth, longitudinal (over a long period of time) examination of a single instance or event, i.e. of a case. Furthermore this investigation does not 'rest' only upon the analysis of cases considered as part of concrete data, but it also makes a theoretical contribution, opening up the debate on the EU as an ideational power rather than as a material force and, after all, on the processes of the receptiveness of this powers by non-European actors. This aspect is readily acknowledged because the area of research chosen, namely Higher Education (HE), deserves analysis within the 'battlefield' of ideas.

Keywords: *Ideational Power, Europe of Knowledge, Bologna Process, Tuning Project, Latin American Higher Education.*

Introduction

As we shall observe throughout the article, this approach does not belong specifically to European studies and their corresponding focal issues such as European foreign policy, on the processes of enlargement and integration. Certainly the field of HE has not been studied in depth by scholars who refer to the EU as an influential actor/power beyond the limits of Europe.

I realised throughout the investigation that there was a need for re-thinking the research about the EU as an ideational power, considering: (a) leaving behind analyses of the transmitter (the EU) in order to focus on the recipients

of European influences; (b) the study of European influences as part of a wider phenomenon. For example, we must take into account the presence of limited, even mediated effects (Lazarsfeld and Katz, 1950)¹ rather than direct effects; and (c) the point that domestic policies of non-European countries play a fundamental role in mediating European ideational influences.

From the 2000s until the present day, the development of certain rapid changes has been observable in a significant number of Latin American Higher Education (HE)

¹ <ftp://intranet.dei.polimi.it/users/Carlo.Piccardi/VarieDsc/Wa07.pdf>.

institutions as the result of an intervenient variable within the process, – a sort of external influence. This phenomenon can be described as *the manifestation of new ideas circulating throughout the field of Latin American Higher Education (HE), especially in Chile and Mexico*. At the outset it can be seen that these ideas have transmuted into a set of procedures, methods and tools applicable for transforming Chilean and Mexican HE. Such ideas were not coming, as they usually did, from the US: instead they were arriving from the EU as part of a more significant phenomenon occurring in Europe, in the form of the Bologna Process and its executive instrument, the Tuning Project. The following preliminary question shows certain gaps within the ‘state of the art’ of phenomena that justify the existence of this presentation.

Is the EU an influential actor in the field of Higher Education (HE)? This question is extremely relevant because any influential actor in the area of HE could constitute a hegemonic power or superpower on the two fronts of material and ideational sources. In terms of material factors, nowadays the field of HE embodies the most important aspect of training human resources, the power of human capital (Ridderstrale & Nordström 2000). Therefore, a superpower could exert supremacy within the core of productive processes and determine the course of future ‘economic waves’. Considering ideational aspects, Europe could exert an intellectual hegemony (Robertson 2009) based on a pedagogic force which offers models of teaching and learning (as seen in the Bologna Process) within the area of HE. The only literature analysing European influences in HE upon overseas countries is fairly recent.

The EU seen as a ‘global teacher’ (Adelman 2009, 170) refers to a notion of the Union spreading and exporting its model beyond the geographical boundaries of Europe. This idea presents serious connotations when analysing European influences reaching beyond Europe. It presents a powerful image of the EU as an international actor, endorsed it with a special capability, a force that manifests a pedagogic potential for establishing its (external) relationships. Therefore, its power is not ‘deposited’ in its material capabilities for exerting physical strength, but rather it is to be found in its ability to structure/organise, (to shape) knowledge.

Therefore, the historical relationships literature shows Europe as a ‘model-maker’ or ‘model-offerer’ impacting on Latin American HE from the ‘birth’ of universities and study centres there. By contrast, Latin America is seen as a ‘model-taker’, which transplants foreign patterns into its HE in order to reach a certain degree of global influence, in the line with the trends of superpowers.

As a starting point, this paper claims that European influences upon non-European countries might be studied considering the EU as an ‘influential actor’. An influential actor produces long- term effects which can be observed within complex and intersubjective spheres of ideatic² structures or systems.

Firstly, it is necessary to characterise the ‘actor’ in order to understand its dynamics and range of influence. It is argued here that the Union is distinguished by exerting a ‘special

power’, or at least a different from traditional powers. Its power depends on its constitutive nature and its ways for establishing its internal and external relationships. *Secondly*, having characterised the influential actor, it is important to analyse and understand the nature of the EU’s influences. Certainly some scholars rescue the idea that the Union exerts material or ideational sways, even both. Owing to the fact that the empirical experience and data were observed on abstract fields of language and ideas, it is fundamental to argue here that an influential actor exerts an ideational power rather than a material force. *Thirdly*, even though there are no perceivable studies of impact of European influences, the ‘dissenting side’ of Normative Power Europe constitutes the first attempt to fill the gap of this aspect. These narratives show real discourses of perception of others about European performance and actions. This is the case of the publication *Normative Power Europe: introductory observations on a controversial notion* (2009) edited by André Gerrits.

The impact of the Bologna Process and the Tuning Project upon Chilean and Mexican Higher Education (HE)

The Bologna Process and the Tuning Project are considered the most significant intergovernmental agreements to reforming the European higher education system. According to Ruth Keeling both processes have contributed to stabilising and establishing “an emergent policy framework for the EU in higher education” (2006: 203). Though for the rest of the world, the restructuring of European HE means nothing without what Bologna experts call the external dimension of this phenomenon. This dimension is based on exportation of a European model and ideational practices that characterise a ‘Bologna Language’.

In practical terms, the effects of the Bologna Process on Chilean and Mexican HE can be observed in the process of strengthening of the role of state and HE institutions. Specifically, this is seen in the design of public policies and the planning of institutional policies through formal mechanisms such as the development of specific policies and the execution of institutional adjustments.

When one claims that a certain phenomenon is influential, the concept of influence signifies the impact or effects of someone or something over someone or something. Therefore, there are *actors* involved in the phenomenon and a *timing process (time frame)*, during which the effects are seen. In this research three general actors could be examined, namely, the EU, Chile and Mexico. The role of the EU was seen as impacting on domestic policies (university/institutional and public policies), i.e. it should be seen as the ‘persuader’ or influential power. The role of Chile and Mexico might be to implement the Bologna Process in their own internal policies; in this case both were actors who represent the other side of the coin, the ‘persuaded’ or influenced actor.

Taking into account the *timing process* of effects on both fronts, institutional/university and governmental, different changes have occurred quite independently. For example, whilst universities have worked on the ways of teaching and learning and the structuring of curricula, the design of public policies has focused on diffusing and implementing the Bologna Process through the ALFA Tuning Latin America Project. Besides this, new actors within Higher Education

² This concept, coming from literature and media studies, makes reference to ideologies, epistemologies, social constructs, social norms and laws.

institutions and governments, such as the Council of Rectors (Vice-Chancellors) of Chilean Universities (CRUCH) and the Consortium of Mexican Universities (CUMEX) in Mexico, have played a significant role in diffusing and managing European influences

Concretely this phenomenon was characterised by the presence of significant changes specifically in three fields of HE: a) the execution of institutional adjustments within the planning of institutional policies, b) the development of specific public policies and c) the use of ‘Bologna Language’ in institutional and official documents, in speeches and in expressing the opinions of experts and academic authorities.

In terms of the need for adjustments to be made at both levels of HE, public and institutional/university, in Chile the main actors were the Ministry of Education, the National Accreditation Commission (CNA) and the Council of Rectors of Chilean Universities (CRUCH). These actors have played the roles of manager and controller of the development of Chilean domestic policies, following the European model, working hard to consolidate policies, funding programmes and regulatory frameworks to bring the ‘Bologna-isation’ processes to the ‘home’ front.

The traditional universities (25 universities belonged to CRUCH) have allied solely with the model offered by Europe and they have implemented strategies to sort out these adaptation processes successfully. These Chilean universities have changed their undergraduate and postgraduate programmes in order to align themselves with the Bologna Process. Through this change, these influences have affected the upper levels of Chilean higher education, such as the alignment of its academic and administrative structures, the systems of university government, and currently the ways of teaching and learning and the structuring of curricula.

In terms of Chilean *public policies*, European ideas have had a significant impact on three main aspects: a) the mechanism of allocating public financial resources (MECESUP) b) a new culture of planning and assessing projects for HE and c) in an indirect way, the National Accreditation System which has come under European influence. Taking into account *university policies*, European ideas have had a strong impact on the design of curricular architecture and the processes of curricular re-engineering in the 25 Chilean traditional universities. In addition, the impact is visible in the construction of a National Academic Credit System (STC – Chile) and processes of internationalisation of HE institutions.

In the case of Mexico, the main actors were the Secretariat of State Education (SEP), the Consortium of Mexican Universities (CUMEX), and the National Association of Universities and Institutions of Higher Education (ANUIES). Considering the design of public policies, the main actor, the Secretariat of State Education has played the role of a simple diffuser of the Bologna Process and the Tuning Project. Its instruments for circulating information have also been the EULAC/ALCUE and the Tuning Latin America Project. CUMEX’s universities and technological institutions have been direct ‘recipients’ of the process. In parallel, the ANUIES has coordinated workshops and conferences, disseminating amongst Mexican institutions the ‘state of the art’ of process and its activities of adapting and implementing it by different universities and technological institutes. The Consortium of

Mexican Universities (CUMEX) has performed as the head of the process, leading not only campaigns to promote of Bologna, but also suggesting ‘loudly’ its implementation amongst its HE institutions.

Taking into account the design and implementation of *public policies*, one of the effects of European ‘guidance’ was notable in the development of a new culture of planning and assessing projects for HE. Another *public policy* implemented as a result of the impact of European ideas, was the placing of the National Tuning Centre firmly within the Secretariat of State Education. Furthermore, it was possible to discern an indirect impact on the accreditation and evaluation process of HE through the National Centre for the Evaluation of Higher Education (CENEVAL). European ideas have had an impact on three significant *university policies*: the internationalisation process of Mexican HE institutions; the design of curricular architecture and the implementation of the Tuning Methodology.

Actors in both countries have played the roles of diffusers and coordinators of the Bologna Process within each country involved. However, Bologna has impacted on Chile more strongly on both fronts, public as well as university policies. In contrast, Mexico was affected only in the planning of institutional/university policies. Chile has followed domestic policies determined by the Ministry of Education and the Council of Rectors (CRUCH) to implement its changes in higher education, while Mexico has preferred to concentrate on international policies and has joined large agreements such as EULAC/ALCUE, using the Latin America Tuning Project as an umbrella to make changes. Mexican technological institutes and some public and private universities, taking into account welcome suggestions from the OECD, have made some sporadic efforts to follow the Bologna Process and the Tuning Project³.

At this point, we have to recognise that in both Chile and Mexico, the Tuning Latin America Project was simply the vehicle of diffusion, the diffuser of the Bologna Process, because, as some Mexican authorities argue, Mexican universities are implementing the Tuning Project but ‘à l’Européenne’. In the case of Chile, the universities began the process of ‘negotiating’ with their European partners before Tuning Latin America was fully articulated. Actually, if, like some Mexican academics, one assumes the death of Tuning Latin America, no major effects of European influences could possibly be observed. However, the main argument of this thesis was that one of the weightiest tools of the process of formally instituting a political dialogue has been the Bologna Process with its intrinsic Tuning Project.

The EU as an ideational power

The European Union, as one of the significant participants in the decision-making processes in the global sphere, produces effects upon other actors through what it can do and does well, i.e. playing an international role as an actor, – as a ‘distinctive agent’ (Smith 2003, 104). At the moment, the existing literature has been focused on answering the following two questions:

(i) *Is the EU an influential actor in the international arena?* In general terms, one can argue that there is a

³ Interview with Ruth Vargas, expert in the Tuning Latin America Project, Antofagasta, Chile, April 20th 2008.

significant amount of literature supporting the view that Europe represents an influential actor that exerts power in the global sphere through its material and ideational capabilities. However, the Union is mainly seen as a force which does not exert any coercive power (Laïdi 2008, 5). Certainly, Europe is seen as a different kind of actor, exerting neither hard power nor soft force. The EU constitutes a ‘hybrid’ entity (Manners & Whitman 2003, 388; cf. Wiessala 2006, 19) posing/exercising a ‘sui generis’ nature/presence (Whitman 1998, 2/15) through a mosaic of capabilities and tools. One may recognise that the EU offers very attractive models by which it establishes its external relations exerting power in a different and ‘gentle’ way. It is observable, then, that the ‘European’ literature is mainly focused on the role of the EU within the international arena: *the EU as a global* (Bretherton & Vogler 2006) *or an international actor* (Smith 2001, 289). This argument that the EU plays a role as an influential actor in the international arena contributes to identifying, within the existing literature, different aspects of the power of exertion as a phenomenon of influence and compliance (Cialdini 2007).

(ii) *Is the EU an ideational power in the global arena?* European approaches supporting the idea that the Union constitutes a power exerting ‘magnetism’ and producing non-critical ‘complaisance’, institute the notion of what Whitman et al. consider as Europe behaving as an ‘ideational actor’ (2011). Hence, Europe as an influential actor is necessarily an actor that exerts power ideationally, a crucial aspect which justifies the existence of this paper. These ‘leitmotifs’ are connected by a common denominator: the implicit idea that Europe produces effects upon others operating in different fields of activity and co-ordinating its external relationships based on value-driven external policy (Youngs 2004, 415). What kind of ideational power does the EU exert? It is a difficult task to answer this question, owing to the fact that historically Europe has exerted different kinds of power. On the one hand, the EU as an ideational power is a notion originally presented, within the existing literature, through two significant claims: the introduction of the socio-cognitive dimension for studying Europe (Hyde-Price 2004; Tonra 2010) through a Constructivist ‘lens’, and the third dimension of power, which supports the idea of ‘shaping normality’ (Berenskoetter 2007).

A formal interest for studying the EU ideational factors emerges with Constructivist scholars. A good example of this is the book *The Social Construction of Europe* (2001) edited by Thomas Christiansen, Knud Erik Jørgensen and Antje Wiener. In this tome, ideational elements of the Union are observed in three main areas: the constitution of ‘social ontologies’ and ‘social institutions’ on the permanent processes of integration and enlargement, the transformative impact of Europe, and phenomena of identity formation.

With regard to the third dimension of power, although this argument concentrates all the previous aspects of power, it is certainly more complex to define. In the first instance, it reminds us of Foucault’s conception of non-visible methods of exerting ‘institutionalised’ power. Thus power is not something material or tangible, it is not “something that is (or can be) centrally controlled by an Orwellian Ministry of Information, but something that works through diffuse ‘capillaries’ contained in seemingly neutral practices of

people working in institutions such as hospitals or prisons” (Berenskoetter 2007, 10). This power can establish parameters of ‘normality’ amidst a social construction of reality. So whoever claims to shape the discourse on what constitutes the normal, imposes a normative character through a discursive power that determines canons of ‘normativeness’.

Even though a constructivist notion of normative aspects of power necessarily implies an implicit analysis of ideas, it is difficult to find scholars studying a continuity of European ideas circulating outside Europe. Ian Manners argues that “the diffusion of ideas in a normatively sustainable way works like water on stone, not like napalm in the morning” (Manners 2008b, 80). Certainly the study of cartographies of ideas is a complex issue in social sciences, because ideas do not constitute ‘material factors’ which provide empirical evidence of impact, influence or even of hegemony of a superpower. Ideas constitute ideological factors imposing a non-material superstructure according to a Marxist perspective.

Conclusions

I summarise my paper as a significant effort towards demonstrating European influences upon non-European countries. The field of this research, Higher Education (HE), constitutes one of the contemporary interests for the EU and other superpowers to exert an intellectual hegemony (Robertson, 2009). The main theses of the present research could be concluded as following:

1. European ideational factors, observed on a series of discursive practices, materialize through significant events namely declarations, meetings, policies and the use of a European ‘language’. Within the preliminary analyses, European ideas belonging to the Bologna Process were observed as part of the core of Chilean and Mexican events. Norms are analysed taking into account how Chilean HE made use of them. EU principles and processes of transmission of norms and ways of exerting NPE followed European patterns of analysis.

2. European effects upon Chilean and Mexican HE are seen as part of an influential process characterised by the presence of non-concrete and ‘volatile’ aspects of discursive practices. Therefore this premise sought to understand it as an ideational phenomenon encapsulated in a series of European notions about harmonising HE.

3. I argued that *an influential actor, such as the EU, exerts a kind of power based on its own conceptions (ideas, values, beliefs, norms) about reality which produces ideational, cognitive and learning effects*. Changes of opinion, attitude and behaviour observed as a result of an influential agent could be described as part of more complex processes of compliance and adoption of new patterns of understanding and action.

4. Therefore, as a result of the substantial incidence of the Union upon Chilean and Mexican HE specifically through the Tuning Latin America Project, the EU has been called ‘a global teacher’ (Adelman, 2009). This concept has profound implications that have not been addressed by the existing literature mainly because the field of Higher Education has not been considered as part of field of studies of European influences upon non-European countries. However the idea of the Union as a global teacher presents serious

connotations when analysing European influences beyond Europe. It concentrates a strong content defining the EU as an international actor and empowering it with a special power, a force that manifests a pedagogic potential for establishing its (external) relationships. Therefore, its power is not ‘deposited’ in its material capabilities to exert physical strength, but it is placed in its conditions of structuring/organising (shaping) knowledge, giving lessons, being a tutor and ruling states of the ‘classroom’ of the world politics. The EU’s ‘pupils’ relates to it through learning affairs, following its patterns, models and guidelines.

5. Therefore this paper argues that as a result of the arrival of European ideas and language in Chilean and Mexican HE, their influence has been observable both in spoken and written conversations. European influences ‘coloured’ and ‘informed’ the criteria to evaluate and design institutional/university projects and public policies. In addition, it was possible to observe the development of a new culture for planning and assessing HE projects.

It is important to note here that all these analyses were worked with Latin American documents and people. So the perspective of ‘receiver’ countries (Chile and Mexico) was always present and it contributed to the observation of true receptiveness process, i.e. how these countries socialised, did own (internalise), adhered and criticized the normative presence of the EU through the Bologna Process and the Tuning Project.

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